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ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 21COMMENTARY
JULY 1982

Disinformation: Or, Why the Verify an Arms-Control

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WHEN Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger revealed last April that the Soviet Union had achieved superiority over the United States in intercontinental missiles, he provoked a furor in Congress over the status of the nuclear balance. Weinberger's revelation also pointed to an intelligence failure of unprecedented proportions that extended back over two decades, and that cast a great shadow of doubt over the capacity of the United States to keep accurate track of the Soviet military arsenal and therefore to verify any arms-control agreement with the Soviet Union in the future.

In 1961, the Soviet Union, despite all its bluff and bluster, had deployed only four cumbersome and unreliable intercontinental missiles. U.S. intelligence had confidently asserted that there was no way the Soviet Union could ever deploy the number of missiles necessary to threaten the rapidly expanding American missile force without providing years of advance warning.

Such confidence then seemed fully warranted, as U.S. intelligence had through its technical wizardry found means of intercepting virtually all the Soviet missile-testing data, or telemetry, and of determining the accuracy of the missiles. It was on the basis of this powerful array of intelligence about Soviet activity that American leaders made crucial decisions throughout the 1960's concerning the number, location, and defense of America's missiles.

Yet in the event, these intelligence assumptions proved to be seriously flawed. Even though its missile testing was being relentlessly monitored by America's electronic sentinels in space and on land, the Soviet Union, *without* alerting U.S. intelligence, managed to develop—and deploy—missiles with multiple warheads accurate enough to attack the most hardened missile silos in the United States.

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At first, explanations for this incredible intelligence failure tended to focus on the errors of the American analysts. The inability to see improved Soviet missile accuracy was attributed either to the prevailing disposition grossly to underestimate Soviet technical competence, or to incorrect assumptions about the method by which Soviet scientists tested missile accuracy. The fault, in other words, lay in self-deception.

However, when the data taken from the Soviet missiles were studied in retrospect, with the help of new and better methods of analysis, it appeared that considerably more was involved in the intelligence failure than American mistakes and self-deception. This reanalysis suggested that the Soviet Union had deliberately and systematically misled American intelligence by manipulating and "biasing," as it is called, the missile transmissions that were being intercepted. In other words, by channeling doctored data into our most sophisticated scientific spying devices, Soviet intelligence had duped the satellites and antennas on which American intelligence had come to depend. The Soviets had thereby effected a decisive change in the delicate balance of strategic missiles.

After nearly a decade of bitter debate within the secret world of intelligence, the deception issue still remains unresolved. Recently a plan was drawn up by the National Security Council staff to place technical as well as human spies under the scrutiny of a centralized counterintelligence authority. The proponents of this reorganization argue that without such an "all-source" unit, able to piece together information from secret agents, surveillance cameras, and the interception of coded messages and telemetry, the various intelligence-gathering services could again be easily deceived. The opponents of this plan in the American intelligence agencies doubt that the Soviets ever in fact orchestrated a massive deception of our highly sophisticated monitoring devices, and reject the proposed centraliza-