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## Biases in the Perception and Cognition of the Actions of Enemies

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*Several studies have demonstrated that once people perceive an individual or group as hostile or threatening, i.e., as an "enemy," biases enter their processing of information in regard to the actions of that individual or group. These biases may affect any phase of social information processing, including attention, encoding, memory, assessment of credibility, evaluation of hostility, expectation of future action, and attribution. In this paper, we use data from published reports as well as previously unpublished studies to demonstrate that such biases affect how individual citizens of the United States and the U.S. media process information regarding the actions of the Soviet Union. This bias reinforces and exaggerates the U.S. enemy image of the Soviet Union.*

In 1947, Allport and Postman published a classic study in which they had white college students play an experimental game of telephone—one student describing what he or she had seen to the next, who passed on the description to the next, and so on—using as the message a picture of a white man threatening a black man with a razor. In the course of passing on the message, over half of the chains of students who participated in the study transferred the razor from the white man to the black man in their reports. If we assume the subjects in this study did not intentionally lie to each other, we may hypothesize that the distrust and fear felt by some of the white students for black people influenced their perceptions and communications strongly enough to lead the majority of groups

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to form an enemy image, transforming the potential victim in a dangerous situation into the aggressor.

Enemy images can distort our perceptions and evaluations not only of the actions of members of other racial and ethnic groups, but also of actions of individuals and nations that we distrust and fear. In the 1950s and early 1960s, psychologists (including Bronfenbrenner, Deutsch, Smith, and White) theorized about the means by which people come to view other nations as "the enemy." Much of this work can be found in the early issues of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, and is also cited in Kelman (1965), Frank (1967), and White (1984). Recent research in social cognition, in combination with earlier work on such topics as prejudice, stereotyping, halo effects, and set, helps us understand the process by which an enemy image, once developed, distorts perceptions of the actions of other people and nations.

In this paper we attempt to derive a simple theory of this process based on the results of previously published research, and to use a combination of published and original studies to apply the theory to U.S. images of the Soviet Union. (At the present time we lack data as to the extent of, and the forms taken by, Soviet enemy images of the United States. Such data are needed if we are to test our assumption that Soviet images can also be understood in terms of our theory.)

Most of what Americans learn about the actions of the Soviet Union comes from governmental leaders and the media. Therefore, in our work on American images of the Soviet Union, we have relied not only on studies of individual perceptual and cognitive processes, but also on content analyses of statements made by politicians and the media. We include these content analyses simply to demonstrate the forms taken by the images of the Soviet Union to which the American public is exposed. Whether or not these statements result from enemy images held by individual politicians and reporters (in the absence of further evidence, we cannot be sure), they are likely to have some effect on the images of the Soviet Union held by the public.

### Description of the Theory

An enemy may be defined as a person or group of persons conceived as feeling hostility toward, or as representing a threat to do harm to, the perceiver. (See the article by Holt in this issue for other definitions of enemy.) In order to create the expectation of such threat in the laboratory, researchers have used instructions to subjects regarding the target individual, his/her personality (e.g., "The other subject in this study has been found to be very hostile"), or intentions (e.g., "The people in the videotape you are about to see have gone to the room of a friend in order to steal something"). Or in some cases, investigators have relied upon preexisting national, ethnic, or racial prejudice.

### Bias in Information Processing About Enemies

An image of an enemy develops from incoming information: sometimes from perceptions of the enemy's actions or statements, but more frequently from perception of reports of the enemy's actions or statements. A person responding to such actions or reports may (implicitly or explicitly) ask a series of questions regarding the actions, the perpetrator of the actions, the targets of the actions, and the sources communicating the reports. These questions include the following: What actions are being reported? Can I trust the report? How friendly or hostile were the actions? Who performed them? Why did they perform them? To whom were they directed? What future actions might I expect? The answers to each of these questions may vary in ambiguity. The basic process whereby established enemy images affect subsequent perception and cognition is quite simple: Whenever there is ambiguity, assume the worst about the enemy. This assumption can play a role in any phase of the process of social information processing, including attention, encoding, memory, assessment of credibility, evaluation of hostility, expectation of future action, and attribution. The theory offered here posits the following:

1. When perceiving enemies, people are likely to attend to, encode, and remember threatening actions more readily than when perceiving nonenemies.
2. Accusations against enemies will be more influential and more memorable than statements (made either by the enemies or by third parties) that deny enemy wrongdoing. In other words, the standards used in judging the credibility of statements attacking enemies will be less rigorous than those used in judging statements defending enemies.
3. Actions of enemies that are attended to and remembered will be evaluated as more hostile than will similar actions performed by nonenemies.
4. People will predict future hostile actions from enemies.
5. The role played by situational pressures in motivating the hostile actions of enemies will be minimized.
6. The role played by situational pressures in motivating friendly actions by enemies will be emphasized. As a result, benign acts will not be seen as evidence that the enemy is conciliatory, while aggressive acts will be seen as evidence that the enemy is hostile.
7. Apparently friendly actions of enemies may also be attributed to hostile motivations, such as the desire to deceive or manipulate others.

### Attention—Encoding—Memory

These topics are combined because most of the studies cited here do not include the control groups needed to differentiate among attention, encoding, and memory. A laboratory demonstration of the attention/encoding/memory

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process was given by Zadney and Gerard (1974). They showed subjects a videotape of two people talking in a room. Some subjects had been told that the people were planning a theft, while others had been told that the people were trying to do a favor for the person who lived there by getting rid of drugs before a raid. The subjects who were expecting a theft remembered more theft-related articles and comments than did the other subjects. Sensitized to the possibility of a threat, they focused upon and/or remembered more of the threatening actions.

This tendency works to reinforce stereotypes when the focus of attention is a group to which the subjects do not belong. For example, Dutta, Kanungo, and Freiberg (1972) found that when English-Canadian subjects chosen for their unfavorable attitudes toward French Canadians were asked to recall a series of pleasant and unpleasant adjectives, they remembered more pleasant adjectives than unpleasant adjectives that had been used to describe English Canadians, but more of the unpleasant than the pleasant adjectives that had been used to describe French Canadians. Results for French-Canadian subjects were reversed. Alper and Korchein (1952) obtained similar results when they asked male and female subjects to recall a passage that included both animate and inanimate items. (See also the classic study of differential perceptions of a football game by Hastorf and Cantril, 1954.)

If Americans who read about the actions of the Soviet Union tend to recall the hostile actions, then their perceptions of the Soviets as hostile will be strengthened, leading to an exaggerated enemy image. Levine and Murphy (1943) studied the role of memory in this process. They gave students five weekly 15-minute periods to learn each of two short written selections—one favorable to the Soviet Union and one unfavorable. Half of the subjects were procommunist while the other half were anticomunist. Unfortunately, the subjects were assigned to groups "based on their reputation" and there was no neutral control group. By the end of a five-week forgetting period, the anticomunist subjects remembered significantly more of the anti-Soviet selection and significantly less of the pro-Soviet selection than did the procommunist subjects.

Flamenbaum and Silverstein (1987) had subjects read a selection dealing with international events that contained descriptions of hostile and peaceful actions ascribed to a target nation. Half of the subjects read a selection that supposedly dealt with recent relations between the Soviet Union and China. The other subjects read a selection that was identical except for the substitution of Australia for the Soviet Union. Australia was chosen because it is near enough to China to fit the events described in the selection, and because pretests had found that students were neutral to moderately positive about Australia but knew little enough about it that the information included in the selection was plausible. Differences were measured between the two groups in the actions that were recalled 15 minutes after reading the selection. The items included in the selection were designed to represent the types of information that people might read

about a foreign nation, including reports of active aggression, nonmilitary aggression such as propaganda, attempts at peacemaking, and positive acts unrelated to military competition. The number of peaceful actions described in the selection was less than the number of aggressive actions in order to avoid arousing the subjects' suspicion.

Flamenbaum and Silverstein's results indicated significant differences between the groups on three items. Compared to the subjects who read the selection dealing with Australia, those who read the selection dealing with the Soviet Union were more likely to recall that the target nation sent submarines into Chinese waters, provided military assistance to nations bordering on China, and established military bases close to the Chinese mainland. All of these items described actions in which military force was projected. None of the other items, hostile or peaceful, were differentially recalled by the two groups of subjects. Thus, differential recall, at least after 15 minutes, particularly affected the items dealing with acts of active military aggression. However, it is important to note that the act with the most severe consequences, the sinking of a Chinese ship, was not differentially recalled by the two groups. This finding should warn against the assumption that negative attitudes toward a nation bias memory for information about it in any simple way.

#### Media Content Analyses

The media may also exhibit some biases in the attention given to enemies. Kriesberg (1946) sampled the news items dealing with the Soviet Union that appeared in the *New York Times* between 1917 and 1946. He rated each item as either favorable or unfavorable to the Soviet Union. (Although he used clearly defined criteria to make the ratings, only one rater was used, so there was no way of testing the ratings' reliability.) Kriesberg calculated only means and proportions on his data, but in a table he presented the total attention scores, the anti-Soviet attention scores, and the percentage of total attention that was anti-Soviet for 45 weeks sampled in 1917, 1918, and 1935. Using the table, we calculated that the correlation between the total amount of attention given by the *New York Times* to the Soviet Union in each week and the proportion of the attention that week that was anti-Soviet was .52 ( $p < .01$ ). That is, over the course of those 45 weeks, the more negative the news about the Soviet Union, the more attention it was given.

In a further investigation of the attention paid by the media to the negative actions of enemies, we performed another, more carefully controlled, content analysis of the *New York Times*. On December 13, 1981, martial law, a clearly undesirable state to Americans, was declared in Poland. Three years earlier, on December 26, 1978, martial law was declared in Turkey. Both Poland and Turkey are relatively populous nations located strategically on the Soviet border.

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But while Turkey is an ally of the United States, Poland, being a Soviet satellite, is often treated as an enemy. Our theory predicts that more attention would be paid in the U.S. media to a negative action such as the declaration of martial law when it is done by a supposed enemy nation than when it is done by a nonenemy. We used the *New York Times* index, which lists all of its articles. By counting the articles cited for January through June 1982, under the heading "Poland" and under the heading "Martial law," subheading "Poland," we were able to count the days on which articles about Poland did not appear, the days on which articles on Poland appeared, and the days on which articles mentioning martial law in Poland appeared. The same method was applied to articles on Turkey cited in the index for January through June 1979.

On 35% of the days in January through June 1979, there were articles on Turkey in the *Times*; in the first half of 1982, articles about Poland appeared on 87% of the days ( $\chi^2 = 102.65, p < .001$ ). On only 9.5% of the 1979 days on which articles about Turkey appeared was martial law mentioned, compared to 54% of the 1982 days on which articles about Poland appeared ( $\chi^2 = 34.64, p < .001$ ). To judge by this case, when a nation is doing something Americans view as bad, we are more likely to read about it in the *New York Times* if the nation is communist than if it is not.

Herman (1982) tallied the coverage given by the *New York Times* to dissidents in various nations between January 1975 and July 1981. Soviet dissidents Alexander Ginzburg, Anatoly Sharansky, and Andrei Sakharov were mentioned 68, 138, and 223 times, respectively, whereas Archbishop Camara, a church leader from Brazil, Jose Luis Massara, a noted mathematician from Uruguay, and Heri Akhmadi, a student leader in Indonesia, all of whom are major dissident figures in nations allied with the United States, were mentioned 4, 5, and 0 times, respectively. One labor leader, Lech Walesa of Poland, was mentioned 81 times, whereas another important leader of a labor movement, Luis Silva of Brazil, was mentioned 3 times. These differences may result from biases on the part of the reporters or editors of the *Times*, or from their belief that the American public has no interest in Brazilian or Indonesian dissidents. (Since interest on the part of the public often results from media attention, however, the process may be circular.) In either case, Americans are often exposed to messages from people who are criticizing the Soviet Union.

#### Assessment of Credibility

Such communications not only receive much exposure, they are judged believable. As demonstrated by Hovland and Weiss (1951), the credibility accorded to communications affects their ability to influence people, and a number of studies demonstrate that more credibility is accorded to statements attacking enemies than to those defending enemies.

Zanna, Klossen, and Darley (1976) showed subjects, who were either pro- or pro-police, newscasts in which either students or police were blamed for initiating a violent confrontation. Compared to the subjects for whom the conclusion of the newscast was consistent with their beliefs, those for whom the newscast was counterattitudinal rated the newscast as less objective, rated the newscaster as less credible and more intending to persuade, and attributed to the newscaster and newscaster more extreme political positions consistent with the newscast's conclusion. Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) reported similar results in their study of the responses of students who were either pro-Israel or pro-Arab to a newscast describing the 1982 Beirut massacre.

In the memory study described above, Flamenbaum and Silverstein (1987) included two items alleging that the target nation may have performed an aggressive act: "The Soviet Union [or Australia] has been accused of testing nuclear weapons in the area in breach of the 1982 Pacific nuclear testing pact" and "More recently, the Soviet Union [or Australia] has provided assistance and training, perhaps some of it military, to nations bordering on China." They measured the number of students who recalled these items but did not mention the modifiers (italicized above, but not in the selections read by the subjects)—i.e., they counted the people who reported that the target nation had definitely tested nuclear weapons or supplied military assistance to China's neighbors, not that the target nation might have performed these acts. For both items, the proportion of students who recalled uncertain information regarding aggressive acts as veridical was greater for the group reading the Soviet selection than for the group reading the Australian selection. For the item describing weapons tests, the difference (Soviet group 22%, Australia group 17%) was not significant, but for the item describing military assistance it was significant (Soviet group 30%, Australia group 7%; Fisher exact test  $p = .029$ ). It is clear that such reports may sometimes be granted more credibility if they concern an enemy nation.

Based upon their official statements, several U.S. government officials appear willing to accord credibility to charges against the Soviet Union that are based upon little evidence. For example, on January 30, 1981, Secretary of State Alexander Haig received front page coverage in the *New York Times* with his accusation that the Soviet Union was responsible for promoting international terrorism. On February 9 of that year, the *Times* reported that U.S. intelligence had little evidence to back Haig's accusations. On March 19, Secretary of State Haig again received front page coverage for the same accusation. On April 25, the *Times* reported on its front page yet another speech by the secretary accusing the Soviet Union of promoting international terrorism. On April 27, the *Times* reported that the director of the FBI said that he had no evidence linking the Soviet Union with terrorism, and two days later the CIA reported that it had insufficient evidence to substantiate the accusations. Yet such accusations made

by American leaders based upon little evidence have continued, including a speech by Secretary Haig's successor, George Shultz. On June 25, 1984 (p. 1), the *New York Times* reported that Secretary Shultz "said the Soviet Union and its allies provided 'financial, logistic, and training support for terrorists worldwide.' The Russians, he said, 'use terrorist groups for their own purposes, and their goal is always the same: to weaken liberal democracy and undermine world stability.'"

More recently, at the time of the Beirut hostage crisis, President Ronald Reagan said, in a speech to the American Bar Association reported in the *Times* on July 9, 1985 (p. 12), "Now the question of the Soviet Union's close relationship with almost all of the terrorist states I have mentioned and the implications of these Soviet ties on bilateral relations with the United States and other democratic nations must be recognized." And on January 23, 1986, William Casey, Director of the CIA, presented no new evidence but continued the accusations in a speech in which he charged, "these causes [of terrorism] are to be found . . . in the activities of those states that find it in their interest to support international terrorism—the Soviet Union, . . ." (*New York Times*, p. 1).

An oft-recurring example of according credibility to accusations against enemies that are based upon little evidence is the media description of reform and revolutionary movements in nearby nations as being sponsored by the enemy. For example, in June of 1952, the legislature of Guatemala passed an agrarian reform law that empowered it to expropriate the uncultivated portions of large plantations. A U.S. Library of Congress study had found land reform to be necessary to improve the Guatemalan standard of living, and only giant plantations were affected by the law; but the plantation owners, including the powerful United Fruit Company, were understandably angered. They, along with many representatives of the government and media of the United States, appear to have interpreted passage of the law as a sign of "communism" and with it a Soviet threat. As a result, the CIA sponsored a successful coup against the elected government of President Jacobo Arbenz. (For details of the coup derived from documents that eventually became declassified, see Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1982.)

Communists did have some influence in Guatemala. They were the smallest part of the ruling four-party coalition. They held 4 of the 51 posts of deputies in Congress and none of the cabinet posts. Guatemala had no diplomatic or military links to the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe, except for Czechoslovakia, from which the Guatemalan government purchased one shipment of arms after the United States instituted an arms embargo (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1982). But without further evidence, the media fixed upon these slim connections with communism and very indirectly with the Soviet Union as demonstrating a Soviet or communist takeover of Guatemala. The *New York Herald Tribune* covered the Guatemala story in a series of front-page articles entitled "Communism in the

Caribbean," based primarily on conversations with United Fruit officials. *Life* magazine said that "If the Arbenz forces are successful the Kremlin will gain a de facto foothold in the Western Hemisphere." And when people throughout Latin America responded to the coup by demonstrating, *Life* said "world communism was efficiently using the Guatemalan show to strike a blow at the U.S." (all citations from Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1982, pp. 84, 188).

About a year before the coup, on July 6, 1953, *Newsweek* ran an article on President Arbenz in which no evidence of actual communist influence was given, but the word *red* appeared three times and the word *communist* appeared 13 times. On July 5, 1954 (p. 46), *Newsweek* referred to "the Communist-infilitrated government of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman." In an article written after the coup, on December 6, 1954 (p. 59), *Newsweek* stated: "The little Central American republic of Guatemala is the only country in the world that has been snatched from the clutches of Communism and restored to the free world." Similarly, in a March 17, 1986, speech on Nicaragua, President Reagan, without presenting any evidence of Soviet control in Nicaragua, used the word *Moscow* once, the word *Russian* twice, the word *communist* 22 times, and the word *Soviet* 17 times.

It is consistent with our theory that one aspect of an enemy image may be the tendency to blame the enemy for any events considered very negative. In the case of American images of the Soviet Union and its allies, these occurrences include terrorism, revolutions, drug smuggling, and most criticisms directed by nations throughout the world at the United States. This tendency may help explain the accusations based upon little evidence discussed above. However, we have found no studies that conclusively demonstrate such a tendency, so we are not yet including it within our theory. In any case, from the point of view of the American public, the aspect of enemy images most relevant to these examples is the acceptance of accusations without evidence.

An item in the Flamentbaum and Silverstein (1987) recall study extended the analysis of credibility to include a statement attributed to the non-Chinese nation: "The Soviet Union [or Australia], on the other hand, denies the Chinese countercharges concerning the beaming of radio broadcasts into China." Of the subjects in the Soviet group, 26% recalled this item as saying that the Soviet Union did beam radio broadcasts into China, compared to 7% of the students in the Australia group (Fisher exact probability = .057). Thus, over one-quarter of the subjects treated an accusation against a putative enemy as a fact while ignoring that country's denial of wrongdoing. (Along this line, it is interesting to note that in the United States, Soviet credibility has been so low that in the original study of the effects of credibility, Hovland and Weiss (1951) used as one of their low-credibility sources the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*.)

A real-world analogue of this study occurred after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in the Soviet Union in 1986, when claims of a high death toll resulting

from the accident were made by sources ranging from U.S. Secretary of State Shultz to the *New York Post* and a major American press service (whose wild overestimate of 2000 deaths appeared in many newspapers and newscasts). The Soviet Union denied these accusations, and as of this date the Soviet estimate is the one accepted by most authorities. In a questionnaire dealing with Soviet-American relations, we asked undergraduates at a state university to estimate the number of deaths resulting from the accident during the first week. The generally accepted estimate of the correct answer to the question is less than 10. Of the 171 students in the introductory psychology subject pool surveyed in the fall of 1986, however, only 31% answered 25 or less compared to 42% who answered 500 or greater; 10% actually estimated that the number of deaths was greater than 50,000. The majority of students either were not exposed to, did not recall, or ignored the Soviet statements regarding the fatalities.

The credibility problem is so bad that, in the words of Marshall Shulman (1980, p. 12), former Special Advisor to the Secretary of State on Soviet Affairs, "There is a risk even in talking about the Soviet perspective. I have found, particularly in Washington, that to do so raises questions about whether one is serving as an apologist for the Soviet Union."

This tendency to accord little credibility to statements that deny enemy wrongdoing or that take the point of view of the enemy prevents the social input into the perception of the Soviet Union from serving its self-correcting function. That is, although some of the most famous social psychological studies (e.g., Asch, 1956) have been interpreted as indicating that social pressures tend to bias individual perceptions, in most cases input from others increases the accuracy of an individual's reported information. But if the others share a bias with the perceiver, or if certain inputs are, by definition, accorded less credibility, the information derived from others may not increase, and may even decrease, the accuracy of individual cognitions.

#### Knowledge

Many Americans are quite ignorant regarding the Soviet Union, probably as a partial result of the effect of enemy images on the processes of attention, memory, encoding, and credibility, both on the individual level and in the media. In a 1985 survey made by the *New York Times*, 28% of the respondents reported they believed during World War II the Soviet Union fought against, not with, the United States. In our survey of introductory psychology students discussed above, we found that 26% of the respondents believed fewer than 20,000 Soviets died during World War II (compared with the generally accepted figure of about 20 million Soviet deaths). In another survey of 378 students at three colleges (one on suburban Long Island, one in rural upstate New York, and one in inner-city Newark), 55% of the respondents thought the Soviets (rather than

the United States, the correct answer) invented cruise missiles, 60% incorrectly thought the Soviets invented multiple warheads, and an incredible 24% thought the Soviets first invented the atomic bomb (Hunter, Flamentbaum, Yalani, & Silverstein, 1985). We will consider the role of such ignorance further when we discuss attributional processes below.

#### Evaluation of Hostility

In the evaluation process, the level of hostility of those enemy actions that are attended to is exaggerated compared to similar actions performed by non-enemies. This was demonstrated by Duncan (1976), who showed white undergraduates a videotape depicting either a black or a white person ambiguously shoving another person. The shove was labeled as more violent when it was shown as given by a black person than by a white person. (One methodological issue in the Duncan study is that different tapes had to be used to depict black and white actors. Although independent raters evaluated the different tapes as equivalent, it is possible that Duncan's findings may have resulted from some subtle difference in the enacted shove.)

Oakamp (1965, 1968; Oakamp & Harry, 1968; see also Mickolus, 1980) conducted several studies demonstrating that this process affects American evaluations of Soviet actions. He made up a list of actions, both belligerent and conciliatory, that had been taken by both the United States and the Soviet Union. The actions were described without reference to specific places, dates, or details so that they covered both countries' actions. He then made two versions of the list: one with the name of the United States in all items and the other with the name of the Soviet Union in all items. For example, one item read, "The head of the [U.S. or U.S.S.R.] has publicly denied any intentions to conquer the territories of other nations." Another read, "The [U.S. or U.S.S.R.] has established rocket bases close to the borders of [the other nation]." Students were asked to read one of the lists and indicate how favorably they viewed each of the actions. As you might expect, students were much less favorable to the actions of the Soviet Union, either belligerent or conciliatory, than to the very same actions when they were ascribed to the United States.

An historical analogue of this study occurred in 1955, when the Soviets submitted a disarmament proposal to the subcommittee of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. The proposal was strikingly similar to one submitted earlier by the British and French. Instead of appreciating that the Soviets were willing to go along with a Western proposal, James J. Wadsworth, the head of the U.S. delegation (as reported in the *New York Times* on May 21, p. 2), "conceded that some parts of the Soviet proposal were reproduced in the identical language previously used by the West, but declared that 'sometimes words mean different things' to the Soviet Union and to the Western powers."

The methods used by the United States to evaluate the level of threat

inherent in Soviet actions sometimes have biases built into them. For example, periodically the U.S. government releases figures on Soviet military expenditures. Whether or not these figures are so labeled, they are always estimates made by U.S. intelligence agencies. In the most frequently used method of arriving at these estimates, described in the October 23, 1975, *New York Times* (p. 8): "the intelligence community takes all the Soviet weapons, forces, and research and attempts to determine how much it would cost the United States to finance a comparable program." But according to the economists on the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress who are cited in the same article, this approach exaggerates Soviet military costs. The exaggeration derives from the higher cost in the United States than in the Soviet Union of items in the Soviet military budget. For example, U.S. soldiers receive more training and higher pay than do Soviet soldiers. Furthermore, this estimation method will inevitably exaggerate the military costs of another country since the armed forces of a country are likely to use the materials that are cheapest in that country, but not necessarily cheapest in the United States, in building and equipping its military. Sivard (1987, pp. 54-55) also criticized CIA estimates of Soviet and Warsaw Pact military expenditures, and provided an alternative approach that seems more accurate.

As a result of the inaccuracies of this estimation process, the figures fluctuate widely over time. On October 23, 1975, for example, readers of the *New York Times* learned that the CIA estimated that the Soviets spent 6-10% of their gross national product (GNP) on defense. Three months later, on February 23, 1976, *New York Times* readers discovered that the CIA estimated that the Soviets spent 10-15% of their GNP on defense. About a week after that, on March 1, *Newsweek* (p. 38) reported that "the Soviet Union allocated 15 per cent or more of its Gross National Product to the military." And two months after that, on May 8, the *New York Times* stated that the Defense Intelligence Agency estimated that the Soviets spent "about 20%" of their GNP on the military. So in just over a six-month period, official estimates of Soviet military spending ranged from 6% to 20% of GNP—more than a threefold increase. If the Soviet Union were not treated as an enemy, it is unlikely that a procedure leading to inflated estimates would continue to be used and that such fluctuating estimates would be accorded any credibility.

#### Prediction of Hostility

Enemy images also lead people to predict hostile behavior from the enemy and sometimes to act hostilely toward the enemy based solely upon this prediction. This process was demonstrated in a laboratory experiment by Snyder and Swann (1978), who set up a competition in which participants could use bursts of uncomfortable noise to punish opponents. Subjects who were told that their

opponent was hostile used more loud bursts than other subjects, even before the opponent had had any opportunity to demonstrate hostility by using the noise machine.

To our knowledge, no laboratory studies have been done on predictions of hostile Soviet actions, but many examples of such predictions are found in the media. Lippmann and Merz (1920) made a study of news about the Soviet Union that appeared in the *New York Times* following the Russian Revolution. They found that despite the extreme weakness of the Soviet Union during its early years, which rendered it barely able to continue to function—it had fairly recently suffered more casualties in World War I than any other nation, undergone two revolutions, and was the scene of a major civil war—the *Times* continued to predict hostile actions directed by the Soviet Union against other nations. These predictions, described in such headlines as "Fear that Bolsheviks Will Now Invade Japanese Territory" (2/11/20), "Reds Raising Army to Attack India" (2/7/20), and "Reds Seek War with America" (12/30/19), were eventually found quite inaccurate.

In 1956, General Curtis Lemay, at that time the chief of the U.S. Strategic Air Command, was reported in the May 27 *New York Times* as predicting that by 1959 the Russians would have twice as many long-range bombers as the United States. In fact, the United States has never fallen behind the Soviet Union in its number of long-range bombers and has even maintained a lead as large as 5 to 1. It is likely that the United States built up its bomber fleet based largely upon the prediction that the Soviet Union would do the same (as in the Snyder and Swann study).

On February 23, 1959, *Time* magazine reported that U.S. Secretary of Defense McElroy predicted that by the early 1960s the United States would be behind the Soviets in intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) by 3 to 1. Seventeen years later, on March 8, 1976, the same magazine reported that in 1965 the Soviet Union had 224 ICBMs compared to 854 for the United States. (It is ironic that this information appeared in another article containing predictions of threatening Soviet actions, entitled "That Alarming Soviet Buildup.") Again, despite past errors, new predictions of threat continue to be made, as witness the recent use of hypothetical "gaps" in chemical weapons, biological weapons, and satellite weapons to justify the U.S. buildup of these weapons.

Sometimes predictions of hostility take a form appropriately called "fantasies." On August 3, 1948 (pp. 21-27), Americans were treated to this view of Soviet "plans" in a *Look* magazine article entitled "Could the Reds Seize Detroit?":

Detroit . . . is the industrial heartland of America. Today a sickle is being sharpened to plunge into that heart. . . . America that Russia declared war upon the United States; not in the obsolete fashion of serving formal notice but in a sneak offensive—an all-out initial

blow in the best blitzkrieg style. . . . Rabble-rousers using sound trucks would roll into those sections of the city where years of preparation had conditioned the people to Communist leadership. Now, caught in the madness of the moment, emboldened by the darkness, incited by an unbridled license to kill, loot and destroy, mobs would swarm the streets.

The role that predictions such as these played in precipitating the Joseph McCarthy witch-hunts in order to thwart the predicted threat is unknown, but fantasy predictions of this kind continue to constitute the plots of several movies such as the 1987 television series *Amerika*, and of a whole genre of American novels that depict the Soviets as planning sneak attacks on the United States (e.g., Davis, 1983; Drury, 1984; Terman, 1978).

#### Attributions About Enemies

In deciding what motivates enemy actions, "assuming the worst" entails underestimating the importance of the situation when attributing hostile actions and emphasizing the importance of the situation when attributing friendly actions. That is, an enemy that acts aggressively is seen as simply demonstrating its hostile nature, while an enemy that acts peacefully is viewed as forced to do so by the situation it is in. Among the interpersonal studies of this phenomenon, Taylor and Jaggi (1974) gave short descriptions to Hindu office clerks in southern India of either a Moslem or a Hindu behaving in friendly or unfriendly ways in various situations, and they asked the subjects to choose the major reason that the person in the description behaved as he or she did. The Hindu subjects in the study ascribed the friendly behaviors of the Hindu characters in the story to their personalities and the unfriendly behaviors to circumstances, whereas for the Moslem characters the results were reversed. When Duncan (1976) showed white undergraduates a videotape depicting either a black or a white person ambiguously shoving another person, the subjects tended to attribute the shove to personal, dispositional causes when the shover was black, but to situational causes when the shover was white.

In 1915, when the Germans sank the British liner *Lusitania*, resulting in the loss of some American lives, the United States treated the event as proof of German inhumanity. It ignored the fact that the *Lusitania* was listed as part of the British navy, that Germany had warned it would destroy British ships in the war zone just as the British were preventing ships from reaching Germany, and most important of all, that much of the cargo of the *Lusitania* was munitions (Zinn, 1980). Thus, the situation faced by the German U-boat commander—sighting an enemy ship carrying ammunition to Britain to be used to kill Germans—was downplayed, and U.S. sentiment to enter World War I against Germany was magnified.

Similarly, when the Soviet Union acts in ways that appear hostile, little

attention is paid by the American leadership, press, or public to the situation experienced by the Soviets at the time of the action. Although the United States engages in many military activities, we do not think of ourselves as aggressive empire builders. Our logic seems to be that Soviet military actions are motivated by aggressive desires for power while U.S. military actions are defensive (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1961). This double standard occurs despite the descriptions of the Soviet leadership made by experts such as our foremost Sovietologist George Kennan (1983, p. 101) as "more defensive than aggressive."

One example of Americans minimizing the importance of the situational pressures experienced by the Soviets occurred in 1962, when the Soviet Union placed nuclear missiles in Cuba. President John F. Kennedy took a militant stand against the action and demanded that the missiles be withdrawn. In order to avoid a war, the Soviets backed down and removed the missiles. From October 23 to October 25, the *New York Times* ran 21 articles about the Cuban missile crisis, and the *Washington Post* ran 37 articles. While the articles mentioned the threat posed by the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba, fewer than one-quarter of the articles in either newspaper reported that the United States already had nuclear missiles in Turkey, which lies directly on the Soviet border. The placement of this information, when it did appear, further downplayed its importance. Of the 140 front-page paragraphs in *New York Times* articles that mentioned the Soviet weapons in Cuba during that three-day period, only 3 made any mention of the American missiles. All 3 of these paragraphs appeared in a single article on the bottom of the column. People who read only the first few paragraphs of articles, and those who read only the front page and happened to overlook that one article, did not learn that the Soviets had a reason to feel that U.S. actions had created circumstances that might justify a reaction including the placement of missiles near the U.S. border.

During the Cuban missile crisis, many of the articles that did note the United States had threatened the Soviet Union with nearby missiles before the Soviets returned the threat did so just to minimize the U.S. threat. For example, the *Washington Post*, on October 24 (p. 14), reported that

it was the Soviet threat to Western Europe that led to our arming the Turks and Italians with certain nuclear weapons. . . . Cuba is obviously not under the threat of . . . any attack at all by this country. The missiles in Turkey and Italy are defensive . . . whereas the Soviet weapons in Cuba have altered the status quo between the world's two major power blocs.

What makes this statement so interesting is not just that it obviously applies a double standard to U.S. and Soviet actions, but that Cuban expatriates organized by the American CIA had attempted (albeit unsuccessfully) an invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs just 18 months previously.

A closer parallel to the sinking of the *Lusitania* was the Soviet downing of the Korean airliner (KAL) in 1983. While American leaders and the American

press treated the event as evidence of Soviet barbarism, they paid little attention to several facts that eventually surfaced: At the outset of World War II, the Nazis destroyed nearly half of the Soviet air force on the ground, in part because of earlier reconnaissance they had made from the air (White, 1984). The United States had a history of using spy planes for reconnaissance over the Soviet Union. A U.S. RC-135 spy plane had been spotted in the area earlier that day and, contrary to early U.S. allegations, pilots have concluded that it is quite possible to mistake an airliner like the KAL for an RC-135. The Soviet pilot shot down the plane only after following a recognized international procedure in trying to warn the plane to land.

These facts do not justify the downing of the airliner nor the placement of missiles in Cuba, but they are important aspects of the situational pressures experienced by the Soviets when deciding about these actions. Ignoring such pressures or underestimating their importance may originate from an enemy image and probably helps reinforce that image.

The U.S. response to these incidents points out the relationship between the processes discussed earlier in this paper and the attribution process. If processes of perception and communication lead people to be ignorant of many of the positive actions taken by enemies and of the hardships experienced by enemies, attributions of apparently hostile enemy actions to feelings of defensiveness or reactions to situational pressures will be unlikely. Ignorance of the munitions carried by the *Lusitania*, of the U.S. missiles placed in Turkey prior to the Cuban missile crisis, of the large number of casualties suffered by the Soviet Union as a result of invasions by other nations, or of the attempts made by the Soviet pilots who shot down the KAL plane to contact what they thought was a U.S. spy plane will greatly reduce the probability of perceiving apparently hostile actions as responses to situational pressures.

In our survey of introductory psychology students at a state university, we asked the respondents their opinion of why the Soviet Union had placed missiles in Cuba. Despite the occurrence of the Bay of Pigs invasion not long before the crisis, only 15% of the responses referred to the defense of Cuba or a request by Cuba as possible motivations. Fewer than 5% of the responses mentioned that the Soviets might be responding to the missiles placed on their border by the United States. All other responses gave nonsituational causes: the Soviets wanted missiles strategically placed near the United States, contemplated attacking the United States, were attempting to spread communism, or were being aggressive.

When asked whether the Soviets had attempted to communicate with the KAL plane before downing it, only 52% of our introductory psychology respondents correctly answered "Yes." When asked why the Soviets shot down a civilian airliner, just over 28% of the respondents stated the Soviets mistook the plane for a spy plane, and 15% said it was because the airliner had flown over sensitive territory and/or failed to respond to communications. Thus, less than

44% of the responses recognized some level of situational pressures felt by the Soviets. But 48% of the responses stated the Soviets shot down a civilian airliner simply because it intruded over Soviet territory, and 9% said they shot it down because the Soviet Union is a hostile or barbaric nation.

In their study of Hindus, Taylor and Jaggi (1974) demonstrated that friendly actions of enemies are often attributed to situational pressures on the enemies rather than to their desire to be friendly. The process of attributing the peaceful actions of the Soviet Union to situational pressures that result from weakness was demonstrated in a study performed by Holsti reported in Finlay, Holsti, and Fagen (1967). He analyzed all of the public statements dealing with the Soviet Union made by the influential U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, between 1953 and 1959. Holsti divided these statements into 3584 assertions and coded them into one of four categories: (1) assessments of the friendship or hostility exemplified by Soviet actions, (2) evaluations of the Soviet Union on a good-bad dimension, (3) assessments of the strength or weakness of Soviet capabilities, and (4) assessments of the success or failure of Soviet foreign policy. He divided the data into 12 six-month periods. The correlations he found between the assessments of the friendship exemplified by Soviet actions and the evaluations of the Soviet Union were low and nonsignificant ( $r = .11$ ), whereas the correlations between these assessments of the friendship exemplified by Soviet actions and the assessments of Soviet weakness ( $r = .76$ ,  $p = .01$ ) and failure ( $r = .70$ ,  $p = .01$ ) were strong. That is, during those periods when Dulles perceived Soviet actions as not very hostile, he did not change his overall evaluation of the Soviet Union, but he did perceive the Soviet Union as weaker and less successful.

The *New York Times* has often printed statements attributing peaceful Soviet actions to situational pressures. When Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov agreed, in 1948, to discuss peace with the United States, noted American newspaper columnist Drew Middleton wrote the following in the May 12 *New York Times* (p. 1):

Weakness in the Soviet Union's economy and the necessity of consolidating newly won territory and integrating its industry in the Russian economic structure lie behind Soviet willingness, as expressed in Foreign Minister Molotov's note, to enter into discussions with the United States, a reliable source declared today.

More recently, on September 27, 1982, the *Times* (p. 6) quoted the analysis of recent Soviet international activity made by a "State Department expert," as follows:

There's a lot of talk here that the Soviets won't stand in the way of getting the Cubans out of Angola. They could have been much more obstreperous in Lebanon. They've shown restraint in their arms shipments to Central America. They could have done more in Poland. And they haven't escalated in Afghanistan, and Afghanistan no longer looks like the first step in a grand strategic drive.

In analyzing the cause of such behavior, the article did not mention the possibility that the Soviet Union might have been trying to be peaceful. Instead, the newspaper attributed the apparently pacific behavior of the Soviet Union to "a kind of creeping paralysis in Soviet decision-making that has led to an essentially passive world posture."

In our survey of introductory psychology students, we asked the respondents why they thought the Soviet Union had instituted a unilateral nuclear test ban. Here are the reasons they gave—the test ban was:

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| An attempt to be peaceful or to reduce the risk of nuclear war | 34% |
| An attempt to limit the U.S. advantage in technology           | 34% |
| An attempt to maintain or develop a Soviet advantage           | 15% |
| A trick or a propaganda ploy                                   | 17% |

These last two categories demonstrate another frequent response made to the apparently peaceful actions of enemies: attribution of these actions to hostile motivations such as the desire to trick or manipulate others. Nadler, Fisher, and Streufert (1974) demonstrated this process by using a simulation technique. In this study, teams of undergraduate males played the roles of national decision makers with responsibility for military, intelligence, economic, and negotiation functions for a country engaged in a limited war. The teams were told they were competing against a team representing another nation involved in the conflict. Some of the teams were told the other nation was an enemy of the country they represented, while others were told the other nation was friendly. In reality, the moves made by the other team were selected by the experimenters. In the sixth half-hour period, the subjects in the study were informed that a dangerous disease had broken out among the people of their country and that there was not enough vaccine available in the nation to treat everyone. The experimenters then sent a message to the subjects, supposedly from the other nation, offering some vaccine to stem the outbreak of the disease. Subjects offered help by an enemy were more likely than subjects offered exactly the same help by an ally to ascribe ulterior motives to the offer and to believe the other nation would eventually try to take advantage of the donation for self-gain.

Examples of this bias abound in the history of U.S.-Soviet relations. On March 14, 1920, for example, when the Soviet government agreed to discuss peace with the Western nations, the *New York Times* (p. E3) reported,

There has been no doubt at any time in Washington official circles that the Soviet "peace" drive represented nothing more than a scrap of paper policy of the Soviet leaders, a mere tactical move, and that what they really sought was a breathing spell in which to concentrate their energies for a renewed drive toward world-wide revolution.

On May 1, 1955, the *Times* (p. C3) reported in an article entitled "Communists Pressing Diplomatic Offensive."

For the first time since the People's Republic won out in China, the free world is now faced with a coordinated Communist "peace" offensive. The Soviet Union's apparent willingness at long last to sign a treaty with Austria, together with Communist China's offer to negotiate with the United States on "a reduction of tension" in the Formosa area, confronts the American people with the most intricate foreign problems they have had to face since the start of the "cold war."

In the early days of the nuclear arms race, the Soviet Union proposed complete nuclear disarmament. One of the reasons given for the U.S. rejection of this proposal was that the Soviet Union had a larger army than the United States. In response to arguments like this, the Soviet Union offered to follow a plan suggested by the British and French and limit its troops to 1,500,000 if the United States would do the same. This Soviet offer of March 28, 1956, to cut its troops would appear to have been a move toward peace. But the response made by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, as it appeared in the *Times* (p. 1) on May 16, was "Mr. Dulles went on, however, to point out that by releasing uniformed soldiers and airmen into industry and agriculture the Soviet Union might increase its war-making power." When asked if he would have preferred that the Soviets keep the men in the armed forces, Dulles replied, "Well, it's a fair conclusion that I would rather have them standing around doing guard duty than making atomic bombs."

Similarly, on April 8, 1985, when Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev announced a six-month unilateral freeze of the deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe, the *Times* (p. 1) reported that the proposal "seemed to officials here designed to cause disension in NATO and undercut American interests in Europe."

While further experimental research is needed on attributions of enemy actions (see the articles by Burn & Oskamp, and by Sande, Goethals, Ferrari, & Worth, both in this issue), it appears that, at least in some cases, peaceful actions of enemies are attributed to situational pressures or to hostile motivations, while the situational pressures leading to apparently hostile actions are not mentioned or are rationalized away.

#### Discussion

The applicability of the work presented here is limited in two respects. First, these studies are investigations of the perceptual/cognitive effects of enemy images. They focus upon the processes that perpetuate and reinforce enemy images, not upon those that lead particular people, groups, or nations to be labeled as enemies in the first place. Second, Jervis (1976) has noted the difficulties in applying the results of studies performed on naive, untrained subjects, who do not have great incentives for being accurate, to the decisions made by government officials, who are usually well trained, and highly motivated to be

accurate in their perceptions of international events. While we do believe many government officials fall prey to the effects of enemy images, and we have cited some evidence to support this belief, most of the studies described here were performed on the typical subjects of psychological research. At this time, therefore, our theory can be most fairly applied to the images of the Soviet Union held by U.S. college students who are not trained in foreign policy decision making.

More research is needed on all of the aspects of processing information about enemies—attention, encoding, memory, credibility, knowledge, prediction, and attribution—before we can conclude that we understand the process. Many additional questions must also be investigated. Where do Americans obtain their information about the Soviet Union? What is the role of interpersonal communication between friends and colleagues? Of television? Of schooling? What effect would increasing the knowledge of Americans about the Soviet Union have on their perceptual processes and on their attitudes? What is the relationship between the process of individual perception and that of perception through the mass media (including a wider sampling of the media than we were able to make for this paper)?

This last question has many forms. If media presentations about the Soviet Union were to lose their bias, would individual biases eventually disappear? How do biases enter the media? In this paper we have simply presented individual biases along with parallel biases that have appeared in the media (most frequently the *New York Times* because it is the most respected source of news in the United States). But while the process by which an item appears in a newspaper may resemble aspects of the process by which that item appears in the recall of an individual, the two are not identical. The appearance of information in the media involves decisions by, and communication between, many individuals, and it is subject to the effects of such social processes as conformity, deceit, bureaucratic delays, laziness, and fear. These processes may work differently, if at all, within individuals than between individuals.

Demonstrating that the processing of information about enemies is often biased does not, of course, imply that such processing is completely inaccurate or that it is unaffected by reality. There is always a danger of overfocusing upon the conservative nature of perception, of overemphasizing assimilation and neglecting change and accommodation. It is possible to overcome biases. New information does enter and may result in changed attitudes, which come to affect future perceptions. Along this line, perhaps we should add that American perceptions of the Soviet Union have not been completely inaccurate. Providing evidence that Americans tend to exaggerate the hostility of the Soviet Union is not equivalent to concluding that the Soviet Union is never in competition with the United States, or that the Soviet Union never acts aggressively or is always justified when it does.

But an individual with perceptual biases will behave more efficiently and

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with more safety if those biases are at least recognized and taken into account, if not eradicated. The Montagues and the Capulets, the Hatfields and the McCoys, Iran and Iraq, and many paranoid schizophrenics have paid dearly for their exaggerated enemy images. If the American people are exaggerating the hostility of the Soviets, then we could eliminate or at least reduce the costs we pay for adhering to an enemy image—for instance, aid to such dictatorial anticommunist regimes as South Africa and Chile, intervention in such third-world nations as Guatemala and Nicaragua, massive amounts of scarce resources expended on unproductive armaments that might otherwise be spent on social programs and on strengthening the U.S. economy, the hopelessness and anxiety that result from living under the threat of nuclear holocaust, and most of all, the increasing probability of an accidental nuclear war resulting from a combination of paranoia and technological malfunctions. Psychology should have an important role to play in this effort.

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