

# **American Perceptions of the Soviet Union as a Nuclear Adversary**

**From Kennedy to Bush**

**Erik Beukel**

*Associate Professor of  
Odense University*



**Pinter Publishers, London and New York**  
*in association with John Spiers*

# Contents

1. Introduction	1
1. The Soviet Union as nuclear adversary, 1949-61	3
1. The Soviet bomb	3
2. NSC-68	4
3. Massive retaliation	7
4. Two gaps and a delicate balance of terror	9
2. Studies of American images and perceptions	12
1. Images of the Soviet Union	12
2. Images of the Soviet Union as nuclear power	17
3. Perceptions: Definitions and Uses	19
1. The study of perceptions	19
2. The methodical relevance of perceptions	21
3. Perceptions and the nuclear issue	24
4. Approaching American perceptions	25
4. Issues and questions	27
2. Images, 1961-74	31
Two ideal types	32
A. Ideal type A: Nuclear essentialism	33
1. Convergent vs. divergent interests	33
2. Deterrence	33
3. The political significance of nuclear forces	34
4. Negotiations	34
5. The Soviet view	34
B. Ideal type B: Soviet essentialism	35
1. Convergent vs. divergent interests	35
2. Deterrence	35
3. The political significance of nuclear forces	35
4. Negotiations	36
5. The Soviet view	36
1. The Kennedy administration, 1961-3	37
1. Convergent vs. divergent interests	37
2. Deterrence	40
3. The political significance of nuclear forces	41
4. Negotiations	43
5. The Soviet view	46
2. The Johnson administration, 1963-9	48
1. Convergent vs. divergent interests	48
2. Deterrence	51
3. The political significance of nuclear forces	54

4.	Negotiations	56
5.	The Soviet view	58
3.	The Nixon administration, 1969–74	60
1.	Convergent vs. divergent interests	61
2.	Deterrence	62
3.	The political significance of nuclear forces	66
4.	Negotiations	68
5.	The Soviet view	71
3.	Images, 1974–89	74
1.	The Ford administration, 1974–7	74
1.	Convergent vs. divergent interests	74
2.	Deterrence	76
3.	The political significance of nuclear forces	78
4.	Negotiations	79
5.	The Soviet view	82
2.	The Carter administration, 1977–81	84
1.	Convergent vs. divergent interests	84
2.	Deterrence	87
3.	The political significance of nuclear forces	92
4.	Negotiations	94
5.	The Soviet view	100
3.	The Reagan administration, 1981–9	105
1.	Convergent vs. divergent interests	105
2.	Deterrence	109
3.	The political significance of nuclear forces	113
4.	Negotiations	115
5.	The Soviet view	120
4.	Synthesis: fixtures, trends and swings, 1961–89	124
1.	Fixtures	124
2.	Trends	126
3.	Swings	130
5.	The process of perception: the domestic setting	132
1.	Analyzing processes of perception	132
2.	The expressive function	134
A.	The American tradition	134
<i>The idea of an American mission</i>	135	
<i>The religious bias</i>	136	
<i>Cooperation with the antagonist?</i>	137	
<i>The belief in America's omnipotence</i>	138	
<i>War and peace between nations</i>	138	
<i>The belief in legal procedures and the</i>	139	
<i>Idealism–Realism contradiction</i>		

B.	Impact	141
	<i>Fixtures</i>	141
	<i>Trends</i>	144
3.	The instrumental function	148
A.	The executive in American politics	148
B.	Issues	152
a.	1961-74	152
	Nuclear build-up and counterforce	153
	LTBT	154
	Assured destruction	155
	ABM	156
	MIRV	159
	SALT I	161
	Concluding observations	163
b.	1974-89	164
	Counterforce questioned and reaffirmed	165
	The 1976 presidential campaign	167
	SALT II	168
	Rearmament and assertive moods	171
	Changing moods: a nuclear freeze?	173
	SDI	175
	Concluding observations	177
4.	Conclusions	178
6.	The object of perception. The Soviet Union as a superpower	181
1.	Analyzing the Soviet Union as a superpower	182
2.	Nuclear deployments	185
1.	Offensive weapons	185
2.	Defensive weapons	191
3.	Negotiating behavior	192
1.	LTBT	192
2.	SALT I	194
3.	SALT II	197
4.	START	199
5.	INF	200
4.	Military doctrine	202
5.	Leadership statements	206
1.	1960s	208
2.	1970s	210
3.	1980s	213
6.	Various manifestations	215
1.	1960s	217
2.	1970s	218
3.	1980s	221
7.	Risk-taking and the use of armed forces	224

---

7.	Comparing images and operational environments	230
1.	On evaluating images	230
2.	Fixtures	233
1.	The political impact of nuclear strength	234
2.	Negotiating from strength	243
3.	Trends	248
1.	The Soviet view	249
2.	Deterrence	257
4.	American perceptions and the fundamental attribution error	265
1.	Dispositional variables	267
1.	Russian and Soviet history	267
2.	Marxism–Leninism	270
2.	Situational variables	276
1.	American nuclear policies	276
2.	East–West tension and détente	279
3.	Concluding observations	281
8.	Conclusions	285
1.	Political dynamics of the nuclear issue	287
2.	Reflections on Western policies	291
3.	Looking to the future	297
	Notes	300
	Bibliography	360
	Index	402