

The underlying strategic trend of the last twenty years has been the steady erosion of the military balance between East and West, a balance which has been a major factor in the maintenance of peace. Across most dimensions of military capability, the Soviet bloc has now equalled or surpassed the NATO alliance, and the trend toward increasing Soviet military power shows little sign of being reversed. As noted in Competitiveness and Security, in the nuclear sphere the Soviets at the very least have now attained a position of rough parity with the West in strategic forces, and enjoy a clear superiority in theatre nuclear forces in Europe. It is widely recognized that the conventional forces of the Soviet bloc are considerably stronger than those of NATO. The Soviet Union has also developed a very impressive capability to project its growing military power worldwide. In the area of naval forces, the massive increase in Soviet strength in recent decades is particularly striking in view of the Soviet Union's comparatively minor dependence on the oceans for commerce.³ This military build-up has been accomplished at high cost to the Soviet economy, with an estimated 12-14% of its Gross National Product (GNP) being devoted to defence.⁴ The priority attached by Soviet leaders to defence and security has resulted in the development of an offensively postured and equipped military force, particularly in the area of conventional and theatre nuclear forces in Europe.⁵

The evidence of vastly strengthened Soviet bloc military capability is clear. What is less transparent, however, are Soviet intentions. In international relations it is not possible to determine the intentions of other countries with absolute certainty. Of necessity one must infer policy motivations from observable facts. The history of East-West relations indicates that military power has been the principal mechanism of Soviet expansion and the key to the consolidation of its external power. The Soviet Union's role and influence in world affairs are inextricably linked to its steadily increasing military power. Indeed, it is primarily in the military