

Editorial

Political misperceptions must end

Perception, the view a nation has of itself and other nations of the world, is a necessary facet in political life. Misperception, and total reliance on it, are the seeds of poisonous fruit.

1983 finds world superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, entangled in a power struggle bonded by misperceptions, which has reached a near-fatal edge. Their mutual lack of communication, unwillingness to compromise and continued reinforcement of preconceived, adulterated perceptions of each other obstruct any hope for peaceful relations.

Both the Americans and the Soviets find it hard to comprehend what they look like "from the other side."

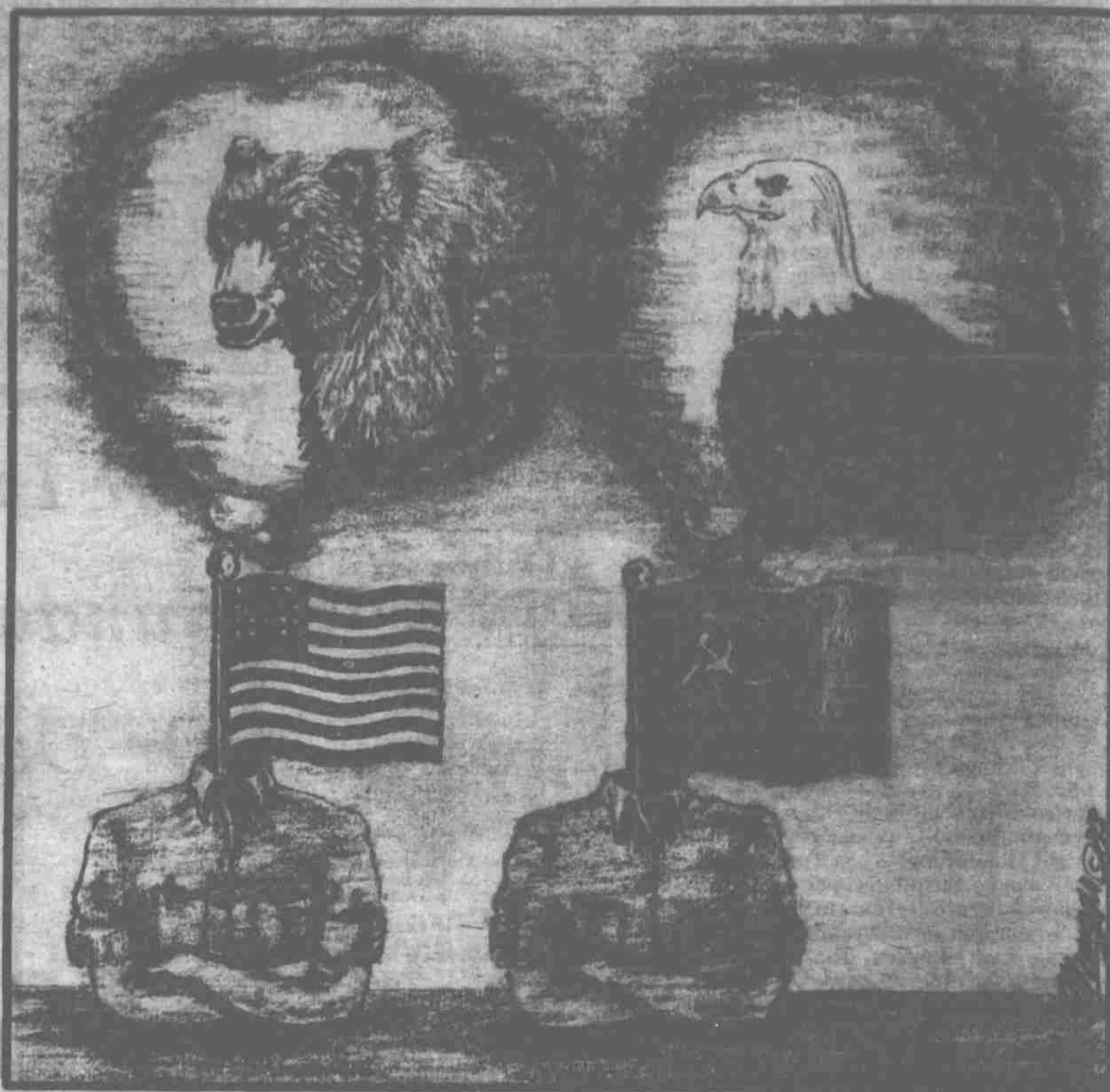
According to Walter S. Jones and Steven J. Rosen, co-authors of "The Logic of International Relations," "The Soviet Union sees the world divided into two innately hostile camps of capitalist and socialist states, itself the progenitor and protector of the socialist camp and the United States the world headquarters of antirevolutionary reaction and imperialism. The United States sees Soviet Communism as an inherently expansionist totalitarian ideology threatening to engulf weaker nations of the Free World, which are protected only by the umbrella of American power...."

These perceptions most likely are based on various data, historical analyses, psychology through cognitive dissonance and propaganda. Throughout history, the two superpowers have supported only that information about their adversary that has confirmed and strengthened their misperceptions.

Soviet dissident and author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said in his 1980 article, "Misconceptions About Russia are a Threat to America," that American readers get their ideas and information about the Soviet Union chiefly from American scholars, American diplomats, American correspondents in Moscow and U.S.S.R. emigres, all who have a preconceived idea, conscious or otherwise, of the information they are willing to relay. These hardened perceptions are an obstacle to progress and peace.

Misconceptions leading to a perceived power imbalance between the United States and the Soviet Union, encourage belief that the world only has room enough for one. The other must "yield or be destroyed." The United States thus, continues to increase spending toward a technologically advanced American military that can compete with an alleged superior Soviet "strength of numbers," which many military officials have rendered inefficient and obsolete.

Today, threat of power imbalance equals threat of wars and cultivates irrationality and political paranoia. This paranoia, intensified and reconfirmed by



the Sept. 1 Korean Air Line tragedy, in which the Soviets shot down a commercial airliner because they believed it was a spy plane, is the real threat to us all. The Western press jumped on the KAL bandwagon before it was exactly clear what happened because it helped to justify and secure their perception of the Soviet Aggressors.

Fundamental change being a long-term process, it must be initiated now. In "Nations in Darkness," John G. Stoessinger professes history shows, unfortunate as it may be, that crisis is catalyst to change. Will we wait for the "ultimate crisis" before we are

willing to alter our perceptions, end the arms race and build a friendly world atmosphere?

One answer to misperception is empathy. Stoessinger resolves that, "Today, it is no longer enough for nations to understand each other with their minds; they must now learn to feel each other with their souls."

Certainly we have had enough of drawing on a past abundant with misperceptions and living in a present teeter-tottering on the brink of annihilation. The time has come for us to believe in tomorrow. —Michela Thuman

Campus Quotes

Do you think ASUN is effective?



Chris Ganser
senior
social work
"They have a good idea behind them, but I don't think they have a real way to get that message. The message isn't really heard by them anyway. ASUN is the student body of the school, but the students think they have a part to play in it."



Sharon Bellows
assistant
UNL Center for Healthy
Lifestyles
"Somewhere, I think there must be an effectiveness that I've never been able to see or feel. But I was always a part of the traditional student population. Maybe the traditional student population feels differently."



Tom Hersh
senior
business
"I think it can be effective but the administration doesn't want them to get too much power. They're trying to do the right thing but they don't seem to be too well known."



Cheryl Hildebrand
junior
business
"I do think they're effective. I think it's really good that we have a representative from every college. Yeah, it's really hard, but they're effective for what they get done. I just know that they work really hard and they're not getting paid anything either."



Tom Rains
freshman
Arts and Letters
"I'm because of a lot of programs they have. Like book clubs. That's the biggest thing I've seen of them."

Staff photos by Jack Larson