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HEADLINE: PENTAGON IS SAID TO FOCUS ON ESP FOR WARTIME USE

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BODY:

THE Pentagon has spent millions of dollars, according to three new reports, on secret projects to investigate extrasensory phenomena and to see if the sheer power of the human mind can be harnessed to perform various acts of espionage and war - penetrating secret files, for example, locating submarines or blowing up guided missiles in midflight.

Further, one of the reports says concern about a psychic arms gap has reached as high as the White House in at least one instance. In 1977, by this account, President Carter ordered the Central Intelligence Agency to conduct a high-level review of psychic research behind the Iron Curtain in an attempt to assess a possible Soviet threat.

The Pentagon denies that it is spending money on psychic research. The assertions to the contrary appear in a trio of new books, one just published and two scheduled to be released this spring, and in a series of interviews in which past Pentagon officials and scientists who study the paranormal have discussed what they contend is the military's decades-long psychic quest.

What emerges is a picture of both superpowers trying to master such esoteric arts as ESP (extrasensory perception), telepathy (thought transfer), clairvoyance (seeing things that are out of sight), and psychokinesis (mental influence over objects or events) - all in the name of the national defense.

For more than a century scientists have clashed over what is now called parapsychology. Some praise it as a legitimate study led by bold visionaries, while others decry it as a pseudoscience rife with charlatans and naive researchers mired in self-deception. The assertion that the Pentagon, with its sober mandate of maintaining the nation's security, is a leading patron of psychic research in the United States has brought the controversy to a boil.

Advocates such as Representative Charlie Rose, a North Carolina Democrat on the House Select Committee on Intelligence, say the possibility of psychic warfare is all too real, and might one day call for a crash program of development similar to the Manhattan Project that built the first atom bomb.

But skeptics say psychic power is so much hocus-pocus, and that scientific verification for it has been impossible to obtain. "You can't get it in the open laboratory," said Dr. Paul Kurtz, a philosopher at the State University of New York at Buffalo who is chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. "What makes the military think they'll get it behind closed doors?"

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Despite their doubts, Dr. Kurtz and other skeptics reluctantly endorse such research if only so the military can keep ahead of the remote possibility of enemy breakthroughs.

'The Defense Department would be derelict in its duty if it didn't pay attention to the long shots,' said Dr. Marcello Truzzi of the Michigan-based Center for Scientific Anomalies Research. 'But it's paradoxical, since the fact that they're looking into it doesn't make it real.'

A Pentagon spokesman went so far as to deny that the Department of Defense today 'spent a nickel' on psychic research, but he also suggested that he could not acknowledge the existence of highly classified projects.

The most detailed study of an actual set of psychic experiments comes from 'The Mind Race,' by Russell Targ and Keith Harary, to be published this spring by Villard Books, a division of Random House.

Dr. Targ, a physicist with expertise in lasers, optics and microwaves, worked for a decade at SRI International on what he calls a 'multimillion-dollar' program of psychic research financed by the Defense Department and intelligence agencies.

The key experiments had to do with what Mr. Targ calls 'remote viewing,' in which gifted individuals were said to be able to describe distant locations, events and objects. In 1976, for instance, a 'viewer' in California tried to pick up sensations Mr. Targ was experiencing thousands of miles away in New York City. The site was chosen only minutes before the test.

On a computer tied into the network of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the viewer in California typed an impression. 'The first image I got was of a cement depression - as if a dry fountain - with a cement post in the middle or inside. There seemed to be pigeons off to the right flying around the surface of the depression.' Indeed, writes Mr. Targ, the test site - the central fountain in Washington Square Park - was dry, had a post in the middle from which water could be sprayed, and was surrounded by pigeons.

In 'Mind Wars,' to be published this spring by St. Martin's Press, Ronald M. McRae contends that psychic research was used to evaluate the MX missile 'shell-game' mode, a \$40 billion or so basing scheme in which each MX missile would be secretly shifted among a bevy of concrete bunkers so that Soviet planners would never know which shelter to aim at in a first strike.

Quoting a former White House aide as his source, Mr. McRae says the Pentagon set up experiments in which psychics guessed the position of targets, and that results were positive enough to suggest increased MX vulnerability. The former aide, Barbara Honegger, who holds a degree in parapsychology and left the Reagan Administration this fall, confirmed in a telephone interview that the experiments had been done. But she said she did not know whether the psychic findings had any bearing on the Reagan Administration's decision to scrap the shell-game mode.

Such episodes, according to Mr. McRae, are part of a '30-year record of psychic research in the C.I.A., the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, NASA, and the Defense Intelligence Agency.' Mr. McRae, a former reporter for Jack Anderson, the columnist, says his research indicates that the Pentagon has

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spent about \$6 million annually on psychic research in recent years, including studies of whether the human mind can send and receive radio waves of extremely low frequency.

Lieut. Gen. Daniel O. Graham of the Army, retired, former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said in an interview that the \$6 million figure sounded too high, but he acknowledged that the military had spent considerable sums on psychic research. "There's enough suggestive evidence around so that you want to keep your eyes open," he said.

Whatever the amount of money, Mr. McRae says tracking it is difficult because of Government secrecy. The Central Intelligence Agency conveys some money for psychic research though private institutions, according to Mr. McRae, who cites one agency memorandum warning that the funds should "carry no identification and raise no questions." In the Pentagon's reports, it avoids the word "psychic" and relies instead on euphemisms such as "novel biological information transfer systems," according to Mr. McRae.

In one recent case, he says, a Navy official with a briefcase handcuffed to his wrist repeatedly visited a professional psychic over the course of 11 months. Showing the woman top-secret photographs and charts, he had her try to predict the position of Soviet submarines off the East Coast. And she was not alone. Mr. McRae said that the Navy has employed at least 34 psychics, an assertion that the Navy denies. Mr. McRae says he based his information on Government documents and interviews.

All of those who say that the military is engaged in psychic research contend it stems largely from fear that Soviet psychic breakthroughs might mean the American armed forces could be quietly put out of commission. Specialists from the Central Intelligence Agency are said to have recently visited one of the nation's top parapsychologists to elicit information on whether psychics could jam computers.

Jimmy Carter was worried about the Soviet threat in 1976 before he was inaugurated President, according to Mr. McRae, and had a private audience with Uri Geller. The Israeli mentalist told him that the Soviet Union screened all children for paranormal powers. In 1977, Mr. McRae says, Mr. Carter ordered a high-level review of Soviet psychic research. The secret report, completed in 1978, found no evidence of a massive "psycho-warfare" project such as Mr. Geller had warned of, but it did find definite Soviet interest. White House officials in office during the Carter Administration say either that they had no knowledge of such Presidential concern or that they can neither confirm nor deny that it existed.

The Russian side of the parapsychology story is emphasized in "Psychic Warfare," by Martin Ebon, published this fall by McGraw-Hill. Mr. Ebon says the Soviet Union was goaded into action in 1960 by false reports that the United States Navy conducted telepathy experiments to try to keep in touch with the Nautilus, the world's first nuclear-powered submarine, as it cruised under the Arctic icecap.

Those reports touched off a flurry of Soviet projects, according to Mr. Ebon. He notes a 1972 analysis by the American Defense Intelligence Agency, which states that "the major impetus behind the Soviet drive to harness the possible capabilities of telepathic communication, telekinetics and bionics are said to

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come from the Soviet military and the K.G.B.''

Mr. Ebon devotes a chapter to the knotty problem of how Soviet materialism can accommodate itself to a belief in parapsychology, which in the eyes of some Western analysts is but a short step to the anathema of Karl Marx - the supernatural. ''In the Soviet Union itself,'' he writes, ''bureaucratic and academic pragmatists are at odds with dogmatic ideologues. Within the Soviet bloc, positions range from the determinedly experimental in Czechoslovakia to the disdainfully hostile in East Germany.''

Are the superpowers, in fact, on the verge of a psychic arms race? Reputable researchers have doubts. ''Most parapsychologists are skeptical of any alleged military or strategic uses of psychic phenomena because the available evidence is that these effects are subtle, weak and highly unpredictable,'' said Dr. Stanley Krippner, a former president of the Parapsychological Association.

Further, some skeptics say there is a temptation for a government to fake psychic results in an attempt to mislead its enemies. ''Some cynics believe all U.S. Government involvement with psychic research is simply disinformation, misleading propaganda to make the Communists waste resources on such projects of their own,'' said Dr. Truzzi of the Center for Scientific Anomalies Research.

But not all Government interest is disinformation, if a recent private gathering sponsored by Kaman Tempo, an industrial research organization in Alexandria, Va., is any indication. In December the company invited dozens of Government officials to a private conference with the vague title ''Application of Anomalous Phenomena.'' Among the 11 speakers at the two-day conference were some of the top psychic researchers in the United States, including Dr. Robert Jahn, dean of engineering at Princeton University, Dr. Harold Puthoff of SRI International, and Dr. Robert Morris of Syracuse University. According to Mr. Targ, who was one of the speakers, the conference was attended by a Senator, many Congressional aides and ''people from all branches of Government, including plenty from the military.''

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