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Military agents with "Extra-Sensory Perception" (ESP) are put to work reading the minds of enemy generals 5,000 miles away and visualizing secret war plans locked in safes.

Government agents with another bizarre mental power -- the ability to move physical objects without touching them and to affect the pulse rates of human beings -- use their skill to sabotage weapons and cause heart attacks in enemy leaders.

Scientists use a machine to extract a mysterious form of energy from the brain and use it as a death beam.

These cases from a hypothetical mind-war are the stuff of science fiction -- but a U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report expresses fear that a major Soviet "psychotronic" research effort may be developing just such mental powers.

"Soviet and Czech psychotronic research ... has powerful potential for use as an effective weapon against groups of men and leaders," according to the report, a copy of which was provided to Reuters by a private source.

Some skeptics have dismissed reports about Soviet psychic experiments as "disinformation" aimed at confusing the West. Many mainstream scientists reject psychic research.

Even so, Washington is backing its own research into psychic phenomena and this year doubled annual funding to \$1 million, scientists who have worked on U.S. psychic projects say.

Sources close to the U.S. experiments say the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) once funded tests in which psychics, sitting in a laboratory and given map coordinates of military bases and nuclear plants in the Soviet Union, described those sites in detail that was consistent with CIA data.

A CIA spokesman would not comment on whether or not such tests had been conducted.

The Pentagon denies funding psychic studies and a CIA spokesman told Reuters: "We have no ongoing program for psychic research."

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But a 1983 congressional report confirms the U.S. government has funded psychic research.

Scientists Russell Targ and Keith Harary say the center for U.S.-funded psychic research is SRI International, a private institute in Menlo Park, Calif. They describe what they say were their government experiments for SRI in a recent book, "The Mind Race."

An SRI spokesman declined to comment on funding sources.

Targ and Harary state that for 13 years SRI has been carrying out a multi-million dollar series of U.S. government experiments in so-called "remote viewing", which they describe as "the perception of events, objects or people which are hidden from the five senses."

In these experiments, they say, a psychologist would sit with a "psychic" subject in a laboratory, while another scientist would stand at an unknown site, sometimes thousands of miles away. The subject would attempt to describe the site, of which he had no prior knowledge.

In many cases, the scientists said, these descriptions -- of objects as large as clock towers and as small as pins -- were remarkably accurate, the evident result of some telepathic mental process not yet understood.

Targ told Reuters Soviet scientists have shown great interest in their research, have met with them in the United States and invited them to the Soviet Union for talks. The Soviets were especially interested in whether a way could be found to screen off secrets from psychic intrusion.

The DIA report, "Soviet and Czechoslovakian Parapsychology Research", is based largely on Soviet scientific literature and describes a large-scale Kremlin program including mind-over-matter experiments, a field known as psychokinesis.

It said in one set of experiments a Soviet psychic named Nina Kulagina stood in a laboratory beside the heart of a frog, which had been surgically removed and placed in a glass but was kept beating artificially.

"As she concentrated on controlling its beat, ... the rate of contraction increased or decreased at her command (and) five minutes after the experiment began she stopped its beat entirely," the report said.

Kulagina's ability "might be used against human targets," the report said. It said Soviet scientists had reported extensively on experiments in which psychics moved or levitated objects through mind-power, a skill that could be used to "deactivate power supplies or to steal military documents."

Larissa Vilenskaya, a scientist who says she participated in Soviet psychic studies for 10 years before emigrating to the United States, wrote in a recent book that Kulagina managed to affect human heartbeats in a number of experiments.

The report said in other experiments reported by Soviet scientists, including Vilenskaya, psychics hypnotized people hundreds of miles away telepathically. It said some western experts are concerned that such hypnosis could be used

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against "U.S. or allied personnel in (nuclear) missile silos."

Much of the Soviet research described in the report deals with a theory that psychic abilities stem from a form of brain energy that can be identified and studied.

Soviet scientists have developed a machine which they say can extract energy from the brain, and report that when flies were exposed to a beam of such energy they "died instantly."

"If (such) devices can kill insects at present, their potential ... after refinement and enlargement may well be for killing men," the report said.

The 1983 congressional report summarized this way the objections of mainstream scientists to psychic research:

"Poorly conceived methods, including inadequate controls, faulty equipment ... experimental bias, selective treatment of data, and general experimental and theoretical incompetence."

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