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Trends. Political Psychology in Space: Diagnostic Issues

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What's wrong with Vasily Tsibliyev? Mr. Tsibilyev is the commander of the Mir space station and variously has been described as having cardiac arrhythmias, "stress", "fatigue", low self-confidence, lowered task orientation, and a belief that repairs on the space station can better wait the arrival of a new group of cosmonauts in early August.

What nomenclature, standards, and criteria are most optimal to evaluate the commander? Those of psychiatry? Human factors? Industrial-organizational psychology? Personality theory? Environmental or ecological psychology? And even if a decision can be made about these Issues, will the chosen concepts and yardsticks be employed reliably and validly in the Mir environment that features many unique features and an extremely unusual population sample?

And politics further complicates the diagnostic task. Can space psychology data bases--at least at one time highly classified sources of superpower rivals--be shared and openly discussed? Does the high visibility and prestige of space missions contaminate the collection and analysis of relevant information, as well as its dissemination to the mass media and interested information consumers? And what are the best procedures to optimize transmission of accurate analysis to mission decision makers and to personnel exhibiting problems? As with the medical diagnosis and treatment of political VIPs, the result often can be less than optimum--even substandard--performance. More research on the political psychological nexus of space medicine and behavioral science needs to be accomplished. (See Broad, W. J. (July 16, 1997.) On edge in outer space? It has happened before. *The New York Times*. (<http://www.nytimes.com>); Getting good help these days. (May 16, 1997.) *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*, 27, 6-8; Kucharski, A. (1984.) On being sick and famous. *Political Psychology*, 5, 69-82; Post, J. M., & Robins, R. (1990.) The captive king and his captive court: The psychopolitics of the disabled leader and his inner circle. *Political Psychology*, 11, 331-352.)