

An Intelligence Monograph

“IT IS TIME THEY STOPPED

INVENTING NEW PLANS

ON HOW TO UNLEASH A

NUCLEAR WAR.”

YURI ANDROPOV

“THEY ARE THE FOCUS

OF EVIL IN THE MODERN

WORLD.”

RONALD REAGAN

A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare

by *Ben B. Fischer*



CSI 97-10002
September 1997

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Summary

Soviet intelligence services went on alert in 1981 to watch for US preparations for launching a surprise nuclear attack against the USSR and its allies. This alert was accompanied by a new Soviet intelligence collection program, known by the acronym RYAN, to monitor indications and provide early warning of US intentions. Two years later a major war scare erupted in the USSR. This study traces the origins and scope of Operation RYAN and its relationship to the war scare.

Some observers dismissed the alert and the war scare as Soviet disinformation and scare tactics, while others viewed them as reflecting genuine fears. The latter view seems to have been closer to the truth. The KGB in the early 1980s saw the international situation—in Soviet terminology, the “correlation of world forces”—as turning against the USSR and increasing its vulnerability. These developments, along with the new US administration’s tough stance toward the USSR, prompted Soviet officials and much of the populace to voice concern over the prospect of a US nuclear attack.

New information suggests that Moscow also was reacting to US-led naval and air operations, including psychological warfare missions conducted close to the Soviet Union. These operations employed sophisticated concealment and deception measures to thwart Soviet early warning systems and to offset the Soviets’ ability—greatly bolstered by US spy John Walker—to read US naval communications.

In addition, this study shows how:

- The war scare affected Soviet responses to the Reagan administration’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), the administration’s condemnation of the Soviet Union following the 1983 shootdown of a South Korean airliner, and a NATO nuclear-release exercise late that same year.
- British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sought to use the Soviet alert/war scare to influence President Reagan’s thinking about the USSR.

-
- Moscow's threat perceptions and Operation RYAN were influenced by memories of Hitler's 1941 surprise attack on the USSR (Operation BARBAROSSA).
 - The Kremlin exploited the war scare for domestic political purposes, aggravating fears among the Soviet people.
 - The KGB abandoned caution and eschewed proper tradecraft in collecting indications-and-warning intelligence and relied heavily on East German foreign and military intelligence to meet RYAN requirements.

This monograph is Unclassified in its entirety.

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A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare

Never, perhaps, in the postwar decades was the situation in the world as explosive and hence, more difficult and unfavorable, as in the first half of the 1980s.

—Mikhail Gorbachev
February 1986

Introduction

US-Soviet relations had come full circle by 1983—from confrontation in the early postwar decades, to detente in the late 1960s and 1970s, and back to confrontation in the early 1980s. Europeans were declaring the outbreak of “Cold War II.” French President Francois Mitterrand compared the situation that year to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and the 1948 face-off over Berlin. On this side of the Atlantic, the doyen of Soviet-watchers, George Kennan, exclaimed that the new superpower imbroglio had the “familiar characteristics, the unfailing characteristics, of a march toward war—that and nothing else.”¹

Such fears were exaggerated. Even at this time of heightened tension, nowhere in the world were the superpowers squared off in a crisis likely to escalate into full-scale nuclear war. But a modern-day Rip van Winkle waking up in 1983 would have noted little if any improvement in the international political climate; he would not have realized that a substantial period of detente had come and gone while he slept.²

The post-detente “second Cold War” was essentially a war of words—strong and at times inflammatory words. In March 1983, President Reagan denounced the Soviet

Union as the “focus of evil in the world” and as an “evil empire.”³ Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov responded by calling the US President insane and a liar.⁴ Then things got nasty.⁵

Following Andropov’s lead—and presumably his orders—the Soviet propaganda machine let loose a barrage of harsh verbal assaults on the United States reminiscent of the early days of the Cold War.⁶ Moscow repeatedly accused

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³ The “evil empire” speech is often regarded as a major foreign policy address or even a defining moment in US-Soviet relations, although the venue in which it was delivered—an evangelical ministers’ convention in Florida—suggests that it may not have been intended as such. The media seized on the speech primarily for its sound-bite quality and its tie-in with the popular film *Star Wars*, a futuristic morality play about Good versus Evil in outer space. Former Soviet ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin has written that the speech “was not intended to be a history-making event in foreign policy, and according to [Secretary of State George] Shultz, no one outside the White House, including him, had a chance to review the text in advance, but the phrase quickly spread throughout the world.” Dobrynin does not say how he portrayed the speech to Moscow. See Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books/Random House, 1995), p. 502.

⁴ This was the first personal attack by a top Soviet leader on a US president in many years. Andropov’s allegation was in response to President Reagan’s assertion that the USSR had violated a self-imposed moratorium on deployment of SS-20 intermediate-range missiles facing Western Europe. The President’s statement was technically incorrect, the Soviet moratorium had been cleverly worded to give the impression that all deployments would cease immediately, but the fine print showed that the Soviets did not include SS-20 launchers under construction but not completed.

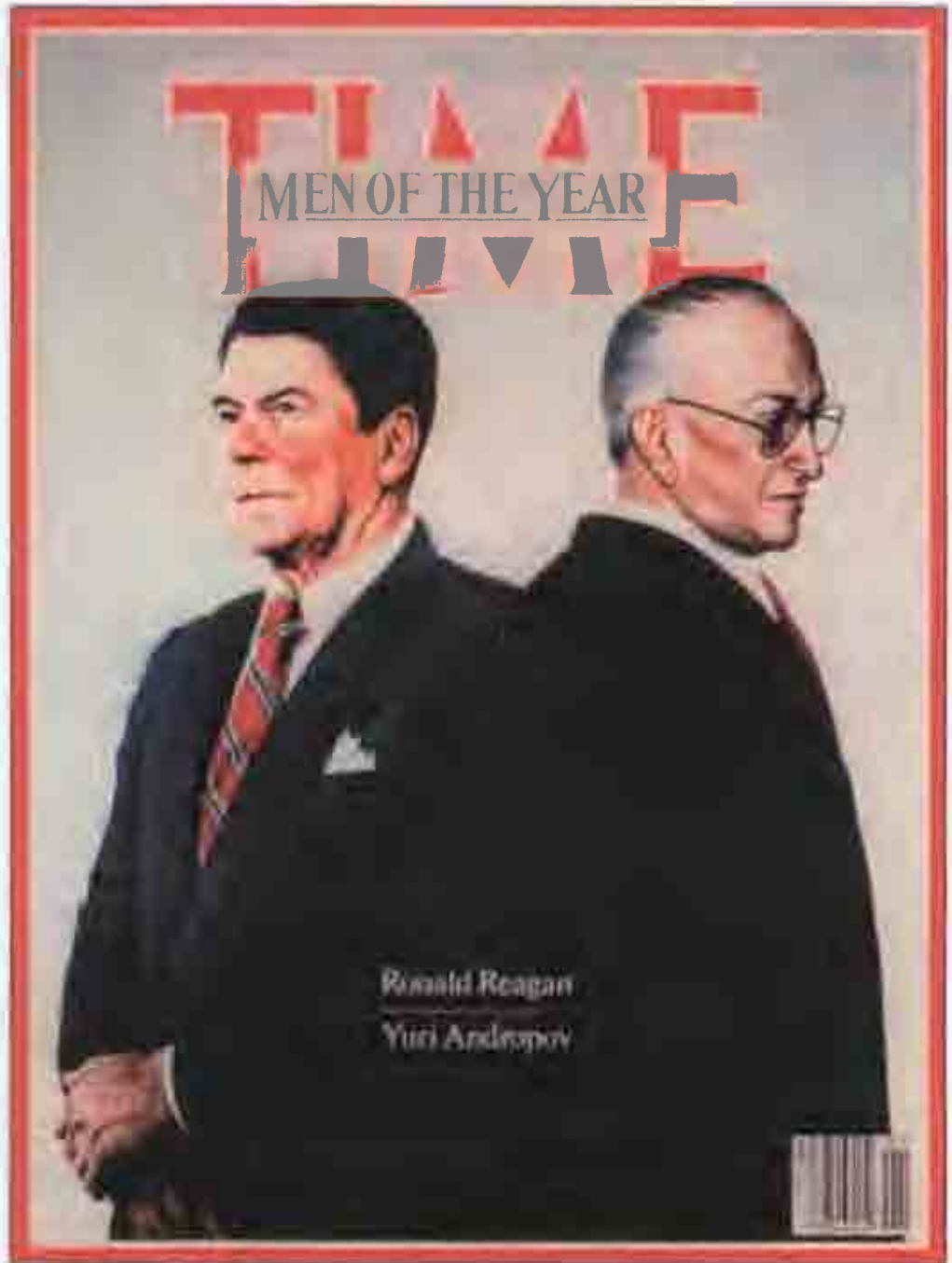
⁵ In a private conversation in Moscow with Vice President Bush, Secretary of State Shultz, and US Ambassador Arthur Hartman in November 1982 after Leonid Brezhnev’s funeral, Andropov said “Periodically excesses of rhetoric will appear in our relationship, but it is best to pay attention to the business at hand.” George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1993), p. 126. Andropov did not heed his own advice and soften his own attacks on the United States even after President Reagan moderated his statements on the Soviet Union.

⁶ As Harry Gelman put it: “The [Soviet] oligarchy deployed a degree and volume of propaganda vituperation not seen since the 1950s, and far surpassing Mr. Reagan in rhetorical extravagance.” See *The Rise and Fall of Detente: Causes and Consequences*, Occasional Paper OPS-002 (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1985), p. 25.

¹ See George F. Kennan, “The State of U.S.-Soviet Relations (1983),” in *At A Century’s Ending: Reflections 1982-1995* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 82.

² *Time* magazine’s “Man of the Year” issue for 1984 provides a good summary of the issues and atmospherics in US-Soviet relations during 1983. *Time* chose Ronald Reagan and Yuri Andropov as co-honorees. See “Men of the Year, Reagan and Andropov,” *Time*, January 2, 1984, pp. 16-25.

Time chose President Reagan and General Secretary Andropov as "Men of the Year" for 1984, saying that "US-Soviet rivalry colored, when it did not dominate" nearly all the "seemingly disconnected events" of the previous crisis year.



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[By 1981,] the "correlation of world forces" between the US and the USSR was seen [by the KGB] as turning inexorably against the [Soviets].

President Reagan of fanning the flames of war and compared him to Hitler—an image even more menacing than that of Andropov as the evil empire's Darth Vader. Such hyperbole was more a consequence than a cause of tension, but it masked real fears.

Context: Soviet Cold War Setbacks

The Hitler comparison was more than a rhetorical excess; war was very much on the minds of Soviet leaders. Moscow was in the midst of a war scare that had two distinct phases—a largely concealed one starting in 1981 and a more visible one two years later.

In early 1981 the KGB's foreign intelligence directorate, using a computer program developed several years earlier, prepared an estimate of world trends that concluded the USSR in effect was losing—and the US was winning—the Cold War.⁷ Expressed in Soviet terms, the "correlation of world forces" between the US and the USSR was seen as turning inexorably against the latter.⁸

⁷ William T. Lee, "The nuclear brink that wasn't — and the one that was," *Washington Times*, February 7, 1995, p. A19

⁸ See Vernon V. Aspartunan, "Soviet Global Power and the Correlation of Forces," *Problems of Communism*, vol. 29 (May-June 1990), pp. 1-18, for a discussion of the rise and fall of Soviet expectations of supplanting the United States as the primary international power. Aspartunan (pp. 10-11) defines "correlation of forces" as follows:

[The] Soviet concept of the "correlation of forces" differs fundamentally from the concept [of] "balance of power." While the balance of power can be the product of deliberate policy, the "correlation of forces" represents "balance determined by social and historical processes" in which policy of states is only a component. As developed by Soviet writers, the "correlation of forces" constitutes the basic substructures upon which the interstate system rests. Thus, the "correlation of forces" can be affected only marginally by state policy, but in general, state policies are shaped by the changing "correlation of forces." Even today, this Soviet concept is barely understood in the West, hence the muddle over "assessments" and "military balances."

This assessment was profoundly different from that of 10 years earlier, when Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had asserted that: "Today there is no question of any significance that can be decided without the Soviet Union or in opposition to it."⁹ The Soviet ambassador to France, for example, had proclaimed that the USSR "would not permit another Chile," implying that Moscow was prepared to counter the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America and the Carter Doctrine in the Persian Gulf with the Brezhnev Doctrine, which the Soviets invoked to justify the use of military power to keep pro-Soviet regimes in power and "repel . . . the threat of counterrevolution or foreign intervention."¹⁰ Such rhetoric reflected Marxist theoreticians' conviction in the 1970s that the correlation of forces was scientifically based and historically ordained and would endure.

But the Politburo faced a new set of realities in the early 1980s. The United States, late in the Carter administration and continuing in the first

⁹ As cited in *Ibid.*, p. 1. In retrospect it is difficult to imagine that this was the Soviet perception of the international situation on the eve of Communism's collapse. But it was. Analysis of voluminous writings by Soviet experts on the West shows that:

By the mid-1970s Soviet leaders were convinced that they were gaining the upper hand. During the brief period of detente, America was acknowledged to be the dominant force in the world, but its relative strength appeared to be in decline. Richard Nixon's pursuit of detente was interpreted as evidence of a weakened America's need for peace, markets, and new sources of energy. When Nixon traveled to Moscow in 1972, Soviet specialists on American affairs enthusiastically proclaimed that the USSR was emerging as the victor in the global struggle that had begun a quarter of a century earlier. See Richard B. Day, *Cold War Capitalism: The View from Moscow 1945-1975* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. xi and xvi-xvii.

¹⁰ As cited in Aspartunan, "Soviet Global Power and the Correlation of Forces," p. 17. Ambassador S. V. Chervonenko made this statement in an April 1980 speech. He was implicitly referring to the US effort to destabilize the Marxist regime of Salvador Allende in the early 1970s. The immediate purpose of the speech was to signal the United States that Moscow was determined to keep a Marxist regime in power in Afghanistan, but the speech was widely interpreted as meaning that the USSR was prepared to apply the Brezhnev Doctrine, formulated to justify the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, outside the Soviet bloc and anywhere in the world.

Andropov asserted bluntly that the United States was making preparations for a surprise nuclear attack on the USSR.

years of the Reagan administration, had started playing catch-up. To many observers it began to seem that Marxist gains in the 1970s in such places as Indochina, Angola, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua had owed more to US divisions, diversions, and defeats than to Soviet power and influence.¹¹ Now it appeared that Moscow had not really gained very much from its foreign adventures. For example:

- In Afghanistan, the Soviet Army was caught in its own version of America's Vietnam quagmire.
- Cuba, Moscow's foothold in the Western Hemisphere, was foundering economically and draining Soviet funds.
- The pro-Soviet regime in Angola was struggling to contain a potent, sometimes US-backed insurgency.
- Nicaragua's Marxist government faced a growing challenge from US-supported opposition forces.

In an even more fundamental reversal for the Soviet Union, US public opinion, disillusioned with detente and arms control, was now supporting the largest peacetime defense buildup in the nation's history.

These trends for the most part began under President Carter and accelerated under President Reagan. The Carter administration, moreover, began revitalizing CIA covert action against the USSR. President Reagan, in addition to accelerating the US military buildup, expanded programs launched under his predecessor to support human rights

¹¹ "By the early 1970s it was widely believed that the USSR could profit from America's problems. Evidence of American decline, both at home and abroad, seemed overwhelming." Day, *Cold War Capitalism*, p. 260

activists in the USSR and Poland and the mujahedin in Afghanistan.¹² In Western Europe, where the Kremlin had spent a decade trying to win friends and influence people—especially on the left—with its peace-and-detente policies, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany favored installing new US missiles to counter Soviet SS-20s aimed at his country and other NATO allies.

In sum, the wheel of history appeared to have stopped in its tracks in the 1980s and seemed to be turning in the opposite direction—in the West's favor. What a difference a decade makes!

The Soviet Intelligence Alert and Operation RYAN

The 1981 KGB assessment was more of a long-range forecast than a storm warning, but the Politburo issued what amounted to a full-scale hurricane alert. Andropov and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev made a joint appearance in May 1981 before a closed session of KGB officers.¹³ Brezhnev took the podium first and briefed the assembled

¹² Robert M. Gates makes a major contribution by setting the record straight on this issue in *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 89-96, 135-169.

¹³ The briefing is recounted in Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), p. 583, and also in Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, eds., *Instructions from the Center: Top Secret Files on KGB Foreign Operations 1975-1985* (London: Stodder & Houghton, 1991), p. 67. Former KGB officer Oleg Kalugin, who was stationed in Leningrad at the time, notes that "in 1981, we received what I can only describe as a paranoid cable from Andropov warning of the growing threat of a nuclear apocalypse." See Oleg Kalugin with Fen Montaigne, *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 302.

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intelligence officers on his concerns about US policy under the new administration in Washington. Andropov then asserted bluntly that the United States was making preparations for a surprise nuclear attack on the USSR. The KGB and the GRU, he declared, would join forces to mount a new intelligence collection effort codenamed RYAN.¹⁴ Its purpose: to monitor indications and provide early warning of US war preparations.

According to later revelations by ex-KGB officer Oleg Gordievsky, KGB *rezidenturas* (field stations) in the United States, Western Europe, Japan, and selected Third World countries received the first set of RYAN requirements in November 1981. (GRU *rezidenturas* presumably received theirs simultaneously.) The KGB Center (headquarters in Moscow) transmitted additional guidance in January 1982, directing those *rezidenturas* that were on alert to place a high priority on RYAN in their annual work plans. In March 1982, the senior KGB officer in charge of coordinating requirements at the Center was assigned to Washington to oversee collection of indications-and-warning intelligence.

In discussing the heightened emphasis on RYAN, Yuri Shvets, a former KGB officer in the Washington *rezidentura*, observed in his 1994 book that information cabled to Moscow from the RYAN collection program was used in daily briefing books for the Politburo. He also noted that the program required an inordinate amount of time.¹⁵

¹⁴ RYAN is the acronym for *raketno-yadernoye napadenie*, or nuclear-missile attack. Another ex-KGB officer who was involved with RYAN uses the term VRYAN, the additional letter stood for *vnezapnoe* or surprise. See Yuri B. Shvets, *Washington Station: My Life as a KGB Spy in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 74. Kalugin, in *The First Directorate*, p. 302, refers to a "brand-new program (the English-language acronym was RYAN)" that "was created to gather information on a potential American first nuclear strike."

¹⁵ Shvets, *Washington Station*, p. 75.

RYAN Tasking for Warsaw Pact Military Intelligence Services

Operation RYAN was the main topic on the agenda of the 1983 annual conference of Warsaw Pact military intelligence chiefs. A top secret protocol stated that "in view of the increasing danger of war unleashed by the US and NATO," the chiefs of services would assign the highest priority to collecting information on:

- Key US/NATO political and strategic decisions vis-a-vis the Warsaw Pact.
- Early warning of US/NATO preparations for launching a surprise nuclear attack.
- New US/NATO weapons systems intended for use in a surprise nuclear attack.¹⁶

Why an Intelligence Alert?

Several former KGB officers, among them Oleg Gordievsky, Oleg Kalugin, and Yuri Shvets, have confirmed the existence of the Soviet intelligence alert, but its origins are unclear. Gordievsky disclaims any firsthand knowledge of what prompted the Politburo to implement Operation RYAN. His own view is that it was both a reaction to "Reaganite rhetoric" and a reflection of "Soviet paranoia." Andropov and Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov, both of whom harbored more alarmist views on

¹⁶ German military authorities found this document in the files of the former East German army and gave it to the media. See Markus Lesch, "Wie die Phantasie der SED NATO-Divisionen zuhauf gebar," *Die Welt*, February 2, 1992, p. 3.

RYAN may have been a response to the first in a series of US psychological warfare operations.

US intentions than other Politburo members, may have urged the alert on Brezhnev, although Gordievsky has not documented this. Former Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin mentions RYAN in his memoirs but adds little to Gordievsky's account.¹⁷

In short, something is missing in this picture. Exactly what precipitated the alert and Operation RYAN? The decision to order an intelligence alert was highly unusual. Moreover, in terms of its mission, scope, and consumption of operational resources—not to mention cooperation between Soviet civilian and military services—RYAN was unprecedented.¹⁸ The threat perception on which it was based was new as well; as Dobrynin notes in his memoirs, Andropov was the first Soviet top leader since Stalin who seemed to believe that the United States might launch a surprise attack on the USSR.¹⁹

RYAN must be viewed in its temporal context. It began just a few months into the Reagan administration—that is, well before the new US administration's policies had been fully formulated, much less implemented—and almost two years before the Soviet war scare erupted publicly in late 1983. As of early 1981, the Politburo was cautiously optimistic that President Reagan's rhetoric was more a

campaign plank than a policy framework. The Soviet leadership was hoping that, as in the past, a more "realistic" attitude would take hold in Washington once diplomacy got down to business.²⁰ Nonetheless, in international relations as in other spheres of human activity, actions generally speak louder than words, and the well-known proverb about sticks and stones applies as much to diplomacy as to the playground. Clearly, the Politburo was responding to something more than verbal taunts. Was it reacting to taunts of another kind?

Spooking the Soviets

PSYOP

RYAN may have been a response to the first in a series of US psychological warfare operations (PSYOPs in military jargon) initiated in the early months of the Reagan administration.²¹ These operations consisted mainly of air and naval probes near Soviet borders. The activity was virtually invisible except to a small circle of White House and Pentagon officials—and, of course, to the Kremlin. "It was very sensitive," recalls former

¹⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 523. Dobrynin claims he was not officially informed of the alert because it was an intelligence matter, but learned about it from the KGB *rezident* (chief of station) in Washington. He mistakenly states that RYAN (misspelled Ryon in his book) began in 1983.

¹⁸ Two former East German intelligence officers say that before the early 1980s the collection of indications-and-warning intelligence had been assigned exclusively to military intelligence in the Warsaw Pact. Peter Richter and Klaus Rosler, *Wolfs West-Spione: Ein Insider Report* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1992), p. 72. The Czechoslovak *rezident* in London told Gordievsky that, before RYAN, his service had never been tasked to collect military intelligence. Christopher and Gordievsky, *KGB*, p. 588.

¹⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 522-523.

²⁰ The first major assessment of Reagan policies was a joint memorandum submitted to the Politburo by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Defense Minister Ustinov, and the KGB's Andropov on May 12, 1981 in response to the new President's foreign policy address several days earlier. The Soviet assessment was pessimistic. The Politburo accepted it as the official view of US policy, but in communications with Washington the Soviets continued to seek a dialogue and a summit meeting. See Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 502-503.

²¹ The initial probes were aimed at deterring Moscow from using military force to suppress the Solidarity movement in Poland. During 1980-81 Soviet ground forces were exercising on both sides of the USSR-Poland border, both to intimidate the political opposition and to rehearse for an intervention that was called off when the Polish regime declared martial law on December 12/13, 1981.

undersecretary of defense Fred Ikle. 'Nothing was written down about it, so there would be no paper trail.'²²

The purpose of this program was not so much to signal US intentions to the Soviets as to keep them guessing what might come next. The program also probed for gaps and vulnerabilities in the USSR's early warning intelligence system:

"Sometimes we would send bombers over the North Pole and their radars would click on," recalls Gen. Jack Chain, [a] former Strategic Air Command commander.

"Other times fighter-bombers would probe their Asian or European periphery."

During peak times, the operation would include several maneuvers in a week.

They would come at irregular intervals to make the effect all the more unsettling.

Then, as quickly as the unannounced flights began, they would stop, only to begin again a few weeks later.²³

Another former US official with access to the PSYOP program offered this assessment:

"It really got to them," recalls Dr. William Schneider, [former] undersecretary of state for military assistance and technology, who saw classified "after-action reports" that indicated U.S. flight activity. "They didn't know what it all meant. A squadron would fly straight at Soviet airspace, and other radars would light up and units would go on alert. Then at the last minute the squadron would peel off and return home."²⁴

Naval Muscle-Flexing. According to published accounts, the US Navy played a key role in the PSYOP program after President Reagan authorized it in March 1981 to operate and exercise near maritime approaches to the USSR, in places where US warships had never gone before.²⁵ Fleet exercises conducted in 1981 and 1983 near the far northern and far eastern regions of the Soviet Union demonstrated US ability to deploy aircraft-carrier battle groups close to sensitive military and industrial sites, apparently without being detected or challenged early on.²⁶ These

²⁵ As reported in Seymour Hersh, *The Target is Destroyed: What Really Happened to Flight 007 and What America Knew About It* (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 17. Hugh Farnngdon notes that the Navy "was the arm of service that benefited most from the Reagan administration, and it is the one that gives the clearest evidence of the ways the Americans thought at the time." A new US maritime strategy envisioned a three-stage process of nonnuclear "horizontal escalation" in wartime: (1) aggressive forward movement of antisubmarine forces, submarines, and maritime patrol aircraft, aimed at forcing the Soviets to retreat into defensive "bastions" in order to protect their nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, (2) destroying Soviet naval forces and pushing the fighting toward Soviet home waters, and (3) complete destruction of Soviet naval forces by US aircraft carriers with airstrikes against the Soviet interior and the northern and/or central NATO-Warsaw Pact fronts. See Farnngdon's *Strategic Geography: NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and the Superpowers*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 144.

²⁶ A declassified US National Intelligence Estimate issued in 1983 summarized the Soviets' assessment of the role of aircraft carriers in American naval strategy as follows:

They regard the aircraft carriers not only as the backbone of American general purpose naval forces, but also an important nuclear reserve force that could play a significant role in determining the outcome of the final phases of hostilities. Writings and exercise activity indicate that the Soviets expect US carrier battle groups to undertake vigorous offensive actions in the maritime approaches to the USSR. They believe that carrier battle groups would attempt to use the Norwegian, the North, and the eastern Mediterranean Seas and the northwestern Pacific Ocean to attack Warsaw Pact territory, deployed naval forces, including SSBNs [nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines] and their supporting forces, and Pact ground force operations. Destruction of the aircraft carriers, then, is a critical element of several Soviet naval tasks. (See Director of Central Intelligence, "Soviet Naval Strategy and Programs," National Intelligence Estimate NIE 11-15/82D, March 1983, pp. 18-19.)

²² Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994), p. 8. This book first revealed the existence of the PSYOP program. While the book's main thesis—that a Reagan administration "secret offensive on economic, geostrategic, and psychological fronts" was the key factor in the Soviet Union's downfall—is controversial, there has been little, if any, challenge to the author's descriptions of the PSYOP program.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

The projection of naval and air power exposed gaping holes in Soviet ocean surveillance and early warning systems.

exercises reportedly included secret operations that simulated surprise naval air attacks on Soviet targets.

In the August-September 1981 exercise, an armada of 83 US, British, Canadian, and Norwegian ships led by the carrier Eisenhower managed to transit the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap undetected, using a variety of carefully crafted and previously rehearsed concealment and deception measures.²⁷ A combination of passive measures (maintaining radio silence and operating under emissions control conditions) and active measures (radar-jamming and transmission of false radar signals) turned the allied force into something resembling a stealth fleet, which even managed to elude a Soviet low-orbit, active-radar satellite launched to locate it.²⁸ As the warships came within operating areas of Soviet long-range reconnaissance planes, the

Soviets were initially able to identify but not track them. Meanwhile, Navy fighters conducted an unprecedented simulated attack on the Soviet planes as they refueled in-flight, flying at low levels to avoid detection by Soviet shore-based radar sites.²⁹

In the second phase of this exercise, a cruiser and three other ships left the carrier battle group and sailed north through the Norwegian Sea and then east around Norway's Cape North and into the Barents Sea. They then sailed near the militarily important Kola Peninsula and remained there for nine days before rejoining the main group.

In April-May 1983, the US Pacific Fleet held its largest exercises to date in the northwest Pacific.³⁰ Forty ships, including three aircraft carrier battle groups, participated along with AWACS-equipped B-52s. At one point the fleet sailed within 720 kilometers (450 miles) of the Kamchatka Peninsula and Petropavlovsk, the only Soviet naval base with direct access to open seas. US attack submarines and antisubmarine aircraft conducted operations in protected areas ("bastions") where the Soviet Navy had stationed a large number of its nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). US Navy aircraft from the carriers Midway and Enterprise carried out a simulated bombing run over a military installation on the small Soviet-occupied island of Zelenny in the Kuril Island chain.³¹

²⁷ This account is based on Gregory L. Vistica, *Fall from Glory: The Men Who Sank the U.S. Navy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 105-108, 116-118, and 129-135. The author's version of the 1981 exercise appears to be accurate and based on sources who had firsthand knowledge. He errs, however, by saying that US naval operations occurred in "Soviet waters" or "Soviet territorial waters" when they actually took place in international waters.

The GIUK Gap is an imaginary line stretching from North America through Greenland and Iceland to Scotland and Norway. In wartime the Soviet Northern Fleet would have had to transit it to reach the north Atlantic, while NATO forces would have deployed naval and air power there to bottle up Soviet naval forces.

²⁸ The Navy was testing more than its capabilities for defeating Soviet surveillance systems; it also was testing the hypothesis held by some senior admirals that Soviet intelligence was intercepting and reading US military communications. These admirals were vindicated in 1985 when the FBI arrested ex-sailor John Walker and members of his espionage ring, who had been giving the KGB cipher material, among other things, since 1967. For a Soviet assessment of Walker's information, see Pete Earley, "Interview with the Spymaster," *Washington Post Magazine*, April 23, 1995, pp. 20-22. The spymaster is Gen. Boris Solomatn, who was KGB resident in Washington when Walker began spying. According to the ex-KGB man (p. 21): "For more than 17 years, Walker enabled your enemies to read your most sensitive military secrets. We knew everything! There has never been a breach of this magnitude and length in the history of espionage."

²⁹ The fighters "attacked" from 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) away. Until then, conventional wisdom held that the normal operating range of carrier-based aircraft was about half that distance. See Vistica, *Fall from Glory*, pp. 131-132.

³⁰ Details of the 1983 exercise are recounted in Hersh, *The Target is Destroyed*, chap. 2 ("A Fleet Exercise"). Vistica does not discuss the 1983 exercise or cite Hersh's account but does give details of an even larger and more complex US-Japanese exercise in the Sea of Okhotsk and Japan and in the Bering Sea in August-September 1986. See Vistica, *Fall from Glory*, pp. 212, 214-218.

³¹ For accounts of this incident, see Hersh, *The Target is Destroyed*, p. 18, and James Oberg, "The Truth About KAL 007," *Air Force Magazine*, November 1991, p. 66. Oberg fixed the date of the overflight as April 6, 1983.

Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap



Note: Names and international boundaries are shown as they appeared in 1983.

Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.

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RYAN, it appears, was designed to test a worst case interpretation of US actions and to compensate for technical deficiencies in Soviet strategic and tactical warning capabilities.

In addition to these exercises, according to published accounts, the Navy applied a full-court press against the Soviets in various forward areas. Warships began operating in the Baltic and Black Seas and routinely sailed past Cape North and into the Barents Sea. Intelligence ships were positioned off the Crimean coast. Aircraft carriers with submarine escorts were anchored in Norwegian fjords. US attack submarines practiced assaults on Soviet SSBNs stationed beneath the polar ice cap.

These US demonstrations of military might were aimed at deterring the Soviets from provocative actions and at displaying US determination to respond in kind to Soviet regional and global exercises that had become larger, more sophisticated, and more menacing in preceding years. The projection of naval and naval air power exposed gaping holes in Soviet ocean surveillance and early warning systems. For example, in a Congressional briefing on the 1983 Pacific exercise, the chief of naval operations noted that the Soviets "are as naked as a jaybird there [on the Kamchatka Peninsula], and they know it."³² His comment applied equally to the far northern maritime area and the Kola Peninsula. In short, the Navy had demonstrated that it could:

- Elude the USSR's large and complex ocean surveillance systems.³³
- Defeat Soviet tactical warning systems.
- Penetrate air defense systems.

³² Hersh, "The Target is Destroyed," p 18

³³ According to Director of Central Intelligence, "Soviet Naval Strategy and Programs," p 35

These systems—which are designed to locate, identify, and track the movement of foreign naval forces posing a threat to the Soviet homeland and military forces—include land-based signals intelligence (SIGINT) stations, space-based electronic intelligence (ELINT) and radar satellites, intelligence-collection ships (AGIs), and reconnaissance aircraft

RYAN and PSYOP—A Link? Was there a connection between PSYOP and RYAN? There clearly was a temporal correlation. The first PSYOP probes began in mid-February 1981; in May, Andropov directed the KGB to work with the GRU to launch the RYAN program (see earlier section entitled "The Soviet Intelligence Alert and Operation RYAN"), and the KGB Center informed *rezidenturas* about the program's existence.

When Reagan administration officials first learned of RYAN, they reportedly drew a connection between the US-led military probes and the Soviet alert, noting that the Soviets were increasingly frightened.³⁴ While Moscow presumably took account of the tit-for-tat nature of the US military operations and did not draw hard-and-fast conclusions as to what these operations might portend about US intentions, it could not ignore either their implications for a surprise attack scenario or the gaps they exposed in the USSR's technical early warning systems.

In addition, the ability of Soviet intelligence to monitor US naval operations by reading encrypted communications had been reduced, if not neutralized. Moscow did not know what the US *would* do. Even so, it had learned a disturbing lesson about what Washington *could* do in a wartime situation or other crisis. RYAN, it appears, was designed to test a worst case interpretation of US actions and to compensate for technical deficiencies in Soviet strategic and tactical warning capabilities by augmenting them with human intelligence operations.

While a narrow circle of US officials may have gained an appreciation of the PSYOP-RYAN cause-and-effect relationship suggested above, this apparently was not true of the US

³⁴ Schweizer, *Victory*, p 190

**Moscow . . .
was going
considerably
further [than
before] by
charging that
[US/NATO
exercises and
reconnaissance
operations]
were
preparations
for a surprise
nuclear attack.**

Intelligence Community as a whole. A declassified 1984 Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE), commissioned to assess indications of an "abnormal Soviet fear of conflict with the United States," was a case in point.³⁵

The SNIE did not refer specifically to RYAN, although allusions to war-scare statements suggest some knowledge of the alert. In the absence of other information, the SNIE attributed Soviet statements to US foreign and defense policy "challenges"; it attributed recent Soviet military exercises to force development and training requirements. The SNIE played down the significance of Soviet assertions about US preparations for a surprise nuclear attack, arguing that the "absence of forcible combat readiness and other war preparations in the USSR" apparently meant that the Kremlin did not believe war was imminent or inevitable.³⁶ The "war scare" was more propaganda than threat perception, according to this assessment.³⁷

³⁵ Director of Central Intelligence, "Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities," SNIE 11-10-84/JX, 18 May 1984 (CIA declassified this estimate in early 1996 and released it to the National Archives and Records Administration)

³⁶ RAND Corporation expert Jeremy Azrael also downplayed the significance of the Soviet intelligence alert because it was not accompanied by a military alert or other military actions. He offers two explanations. Either Soviet leaders believed that the threat of war was higher than their public statements indicated, or they had ordered the alert to discredit Cassandras in the high command—including First Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Ogarkov—by showing that even a massive indications-and-warning effort could not yield evidence of US war preparations. Azrael leans toward the former explanation without spelling out his reasons for doing so—that is, he does not clarify what, if anything, Soviet leaders may have found troubling in US actions. Jeremy R. Azrael, *The Soviet Civilian Leadership and the Military High Command, 1976-1986*, R-3521-AF (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1986), p. 20, n. 32

³⁷ Azrael shares this view, arguing that the war scare was a "carefully prearranged and closely coordinated diplomatic script" whose "nice-guy, tough-guy counterpoint" between top Soviet civilian and military leaders was intended for Western consumption—specifically, to support the then-current Soviet "peace offensive" aimed at forestalling US intermediate-range missile deployments in West Germany. *Ibid.*, pp. v, 30-31

Nonetheless, the SNIE drafters evidently sensed that there might be more to the story and raised the possibility that "recent US/NATO military exercises and reconnaissance operations" might have been factors in Soviet behavior. The main clue was the difference between past and present Soviet characterizations of such exercises and operations. In the past, Moscow had routinely criticized such activities as indications of Western hostile intentions, but now it was going considerably further by charging that they were preparations for a surprise nuclear attack. In the final analysis, however, the SNIE's authors were unable to make a specific connection between the Soviet alert and Western military moves, noting that a "detailed examination of simultaneous 'red' and 'blue' actions had not been accomplished."³⁸

While the US probes caught the Kremlin by surprise, they were not unprecedented; there was a Cold War antecedent. During the 1950s and 1960s, the US Strategic Air Command and the Navy had conducted similar operations—intelligence-gathering missions, including

³⁸ The US Intelligence Community remained skeptical about the strategic warning role of the KGB-GRU alert well after Gordievsky had defected and been debriefed. For example, Gordievsky recalls meeting a senior US expert on Soviet affairs in Washington who appeared quite knowledgeable about the alert but "cast doubt on all my information about Operation RYAN. His theory was that the whole thing had been no more than a deception exercise by the Soviet leadership." See Oleg Gordievsky, *Next Stop Execution: The Autobiography of Oleg Gordievsky* (New York: Macmillan, 1995), p. 377. A US diplomatic correspondent notes that such skepticism was rather widespread.

Many senior administration officials scoff now, as they did then, at the suggestion that the Soviet Union was genuinely alarmed by US military moves or public statements, or that Moscow had any justification for feeling vulnerable. The 'war scare' in the Soviet Union in 1982-1983 was deliberately engineered for propaganda purposes, these officials maintain—a pretext to create siege mentality in the Soviet Union, and to frighten the outside world about US intentions. (Murray Marder, "Defector Told of Soviet Alert, KGB Station Reportedly Warned U.S. Would Attack," *Washington Post*, August 8, 1986, p. A1.)

On February 17, 1983, the [KGB] Center notified . . . rezidenturas . . . that RYAN had "acquired an especial degree of urgency" and was "now of particularly grave importance."

"ferret" operations aimed at detecting locations of, reactions by, and gaps in Soviet radar and air defense installations—along the USSR's Eurasian periphery in preparation for possible nuclear war.³⁹

RYAN, Phase II: A New Sense of Urgency

Operation RYAN was assigned a high but not overriding priority in 1982. Then, on February 17, 1983, the Center notified all *rezidenturas* on alert that RYAN had "acquired an especial degree of urgency" and was "now of particularly grave importance."⁴⁰ *Rezidents* (station chiefs) received new orders marked "strictly personal," instructing them to organize a "continual watch" using their entire operational staff.⁴¹ They also were ordered to redirect existing agents who might have had

³⁹ In 1970 the United States abandoned the practice of flying into foreign airspace to provoke reactions by air defense and radar installations—so-called ferret missions—after a Navy EC-121 reconnaissance plane was shot down off the coast of North Korea. A Defense Department study concluded that the risk of such flights outweighed the gain. The same study recommended that regular reconnaissance missions be closely monitored. See Hersh, "The Target is Destroyed," p. 221n. For recently declassified information on the US overflight program, see "Secrets of the Cold War," *U S News & World Report*, March 15, 1993, pp. 30-50.

Official documents show that in the pre-satellite era the US launched some 10,000—and perhaps as many as 20,000—reconnaissance missions along Soviet and Chinese borders. The United States portrayed these missions as "electromagnetic research" and "photographic mapping" operations, but they actually were ferret flights aimed at determining the precise location and capabilities of air defense and radar systems along approaches to both countries. Most missions targeted against the Soviet Union were flown along the periphery of its borders, but others deliberately penetrated Soviet airspace. One major finding: Until the early 1960s the USSR had no early warning radars along its northern borders.

President Truman authorized the first ferret missions in late 1950, and President Eisenhower made overflights a national policy in 1954 with the beginning of the U-2 program. At least 30 Air Force and Navy aircraft were lost, most of them along Soviet borders.

⁴⁰ Andrew and Gordievsky, *Instructions from the Center*, pp. 74, 75.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

KGB Center Pushes Operation RYAN, February 1983 (excerpt)

No. 373/PR/52
17.02.83

Top Secret
Copy No 1

London
Com[ade] Yermakov
[A. V. Guk]
(strictly personal)

Permanent Operational Assignment to Uncover NATO Preparations for a Nuclear Missile Attack on the USSR

In view of the growing urgency of the task of discovering promptly any preparations by the adversary for a nuclear missile attack (RYAN) on the USSR, we are sending you a permanently operative assignment (POA) and briefing on this question.

The objective of the assignment is to see that the *rezidentura* works systematically to uncover any plans in preparation by the main adversary [the United States] for RYAN and to organize a continual watch to be kept for indications of a decision being taken to use nuclear weapons against the USSR or immediate preparations being made for a nuclear missile attack.

access to RYAN-related information; to recruit new agents; and to have operations officers put selected targets under surveillance.

The new orders assumed that a preliminary US decision to launch a nuclear missile attack, even if made in secret, would require a variety of consultations and implementing actions that

Moscow's new sense of urgency was explicitly linked to the impending deployment of US Pershing II IRBMs in West Germany.

could be detected through a combination of overt and clandestine scrutiny. According to the KGB Center:

One of the chief directions for the activity of the KGB's foreign service is to organize detection and assessment of signs of preparation for RYAN in all possible areas, i.e., political, economic and military sectors, civil defense and the activity of the special services.

Our military neighbors [the GRU] are actively engaged in similar work in relation to the activity of the adversary's armed forces.⁴²

Three categories of targets were identified for priority collection. The first included US and NATO government, military, intelligence, and civil-defense installations that could be penetrated by agents or visually observed by Soviet intelligence officers. Service and technical personnel at such installations were assigned a high priority for recruitment. The second target category consisted of bilateral and multilateral consultations among the US and other NATO members. The third included US and NATO civilian and military "communications networks and systems."

Rezidenturas were instructed to focus on changes in the operations of US/NATO communications networks and in staffing levels. They also were ordered to obtain information on "the organization, location, and functioning mechanism of all forms of communications which are allocated by the adversary for controlling the process of preparing and waging a nuclear war"—that is, information on command-and-control networks.⁴³

Moscow's new sense of urgency was explicitly linked to the impending deployment of US Pershing II intermediate-range ballistic missiles

(IRBMs) in West Germany. The Soviets as well as some Western military experts saw the Pershings as a new destabilizing element in the nuclear balance for two reasons. First, these highly accurate IRBMs were capable of destroying Soviet hard targets, including command-and-control bunkers and missile silos.⁴⁴ Second, their flight time from Germany to European Russia was calculated to be only four to six minutes, giving the missiles a "super-sudden first strike" capability.⁴⁵ In a crisis, the Soviets could be attacked with little or no warning, and therefore would have to consider striking at the Pershing launchsites before being struck by the US missiles.⁴⁶

The new instructions from Moscow also indicated, without being specific, that the alert was linked to revisions in Soviet military planning, noting that RYAN "now lies at the core of [Soviet] military strategy."⁴⁷ The alert was designed to give Moscow a "period of anticipation essential . . . to take retaliatory measures. Otherwise, reprisal time would be extremely limited."⁴⁸

But the repeated emphasis on providing warning of a US attack "at a very early stage" and "without delay" suggests that the Soviets were planning to preempt, not retaliate. If they acquired what they considered to be reliable information about an impending US attack, it

⁴⁴ See the discussion in John Newhouse, *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. 356.

⁴⁵ The phrase "super-sudden first strike" was coined by McGeorge Bundy and cited in *Ibid.*, p. 328. Andrew and Gordievsky in *Instructions from the Center*, p. 74, mistakenly assert that the KGB message was wrong in claiming a four- to six-minute flight time for the Pershing IIs. Western estimates used the same numbers.

⁴⁶ Of course, Soviet missiles could reach West Germany in the same short time, but this fact did not receive much attention in Western debates over the deployment of US intermediate-range missiles.

⁴⁷ Andrew and Gordievsky in *Instructions from the Center*, p. 74.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

The Soviet high command probably intended to target the Pershings for preemptive destruction if RYAN indicated plans for a US attack.

would not have made sense for them to wait for the attack to begin before responding; it would have made sense to try to destroy the US missiles before they were launched. Hence the reference to military strategy probably meant that the Soviet high command intended to target the Pershings for preemptive destruction if RYAN indicated plans for a US attack.⁴⁹

RYAN and East German Intelligence

The KGB's declining effectiveness by the 1980s (see Appendix A) led the Kremlin to turn to its liaison services in Eastern Europe for help with RYAN. It assigned a major role to East Germany's Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung (HVA), a civilian agency headed by legendary spymaster Markus Wolf that was probably the best foreign intelligence service in the Warsaw Pact—"even better than the KGB," according to Gordievsky.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The West valued the Pershings more for their presence than their capabilities, viewing them primarily as a symbol of US commitment to defend Western Europe in the event of a Warsaw Pact attack. The Soviets, however, could not ignore the military implications of the new missiles as a factor in their strategy. The Pershings were sited in an exposed position vulnerable to capture in the event of a massive attack by conventional forces, so that, despite NATO's doctrine of no-early-use of nuclear weapons, the United States would have been forced to use or lose the Pershings sooner rather than later. Thus, the "threat posed by the missiles was so great that they [sic] compelled the Russians to plan on preempting their use early in a war. And it was argued that the Russians could be confident about preempting only by nuclear means." See Dana Allin, *Cold War Illusions: America, Europe and Soviet Power, 1969-1989* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 91.

⁵⁰ Andrew and Gordievsky, *More Instructions from the Center*, p. 37. Gordievsky and Kalugin both give East German intelligence high marks. According to Kalugin (see Kalugin, *The First Directorate*, p. 171).

The East German Foreign Intelligence Agency, headed by the brilliant Markus Wolf, had so deeply penetrated the West German government, military, and secret services that about all we had to do was lay back [sic] and stay out of Wolf's way. KGB intelligence naturally had ties with the secret services of all of the 'fraternal countries' of Eastern Europe, though none would be as fruitful as our relationship with East Germany and Wolf.

RYAN: Retaliatory or Preemptive Strike? February 1983 (excerpt from KGB cable translated by Oleg Gordievsky)

No 373/PR/52

Top Secret
Copy No 1
Attachment 2

The Problem of Discovering Preparation for a Nuclear Missile Attack on the USSR

Uncovering the process of preparation by the adversary to take the decision for a nuclear attack and the subsequent measures to prepare the country for a nuclear war would enable us to increase the so-called period of anticipation essential for the Soviet Union to take retaliatory measures. Otherwise, reprisal time would be extremely limited. For instance, noting the launching of strategic missiles from the continental part of the USA and taking into account the time required for determining the direction of their flight in fact leaves roughly 20 minutes' reaction time. This period will be considerably curtailed after deployment of the 'Pershing-2' missile in the FRG, for which the flying time to reach long-range targets in the Soviet Union is calculated at 4-6 minutes.

The KGB viewed West Germany as its "door to the West" and to NATO, and the HVA had the key to that door.⁵¹ As a result, the KGB *rezidentura* in East Berlin was the largest in the world and produced as much intelligence as a single directorate at the KGB Center in

⁵¹ Andrew and Gordievsky, *More Instructions from the Center*, p. 38.

Wolf created a special staff and . . . a situation center . . . dedicated to monitoring . . . indicators of an impending US attack [on the USSR] . . . [He also] put his extensive West German agent network at Moscow's disposal.

Moscow.⁵² Indeed, German counterintelligence officials believe that the HVA by itself may have obtained up to 80 percent of all Warsaw Pact intelligence on NATO.⁵³

The demise of East Germany, the survival of some HVA files, and Wolf's recently published autobiography have all contributed in some measure to documenting the Soviet war scare and how it affected Soviet bloc intelligence operations. Wolf gives some insight into the war scare's origins in a revealing conversation he had with Yuri Andropov in February 1980, when Andropov was still head of the KGB:

We began discussing the East-West conflict. I had never before seen Andropov so somber and dejected. He described a gloomy scenario in which a nuclear war might be a real threat. His sober analysis came to the conclusion that the US government was striving with all means available to establish nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union. He cited statements of President Carter, his adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and of Pentagon spokesmen, all of which included the assertion that under certain circumstances a nuclear first-strike against the Soviet Union and its allies would be justified. . . .

Carter's presidency had created great concern in the Kremlin, because he had presented a defense budget of more than \$157 billion, which he invested in the MX and Trident missiles and nuclear submarines. *One of the top Soviet nuclear strategists confided to me that*

*the resources of our alliance were not sufficient to match this.*⁵⁴ [emphasis added]

By the early 1980s, Wolf goes on to say, "our Soviet partners had become obsessed with the danger of a nuclear missile attack."⁵⁵ He claims: "Like most intelligent people, I found these war games a burdensome waste of time, but these orders were no more open to discussion than other orders from above."⁵⁶ Wolf created a special staff and built a round-the-clock situation center with a "special communications link" to Moscow dedicated to monitoring a "catalogue" of political and military indicators of an impending US attack. The East German leadership even ordered construction of dispersed command bunkers for top political, military, and intelligence officials.

Wolf put his extensive West German agent network at Moscow's disposal. Priority number one was surveillance of Pershing II and cruise missile sites, which HVA sources had already located and reported to Moscow.⁵⁷ The HVA ordered agents in West German ministries, agencies, and defense firms to be on the lookout for technical breakthroughs in weapons research.⁵⁸ These agents were

⁵⁴ Markus Wolf, *Spionage Chef im geheimen Krieg: Erinnerungen* (Dusseldorf and Munich: List Verlag, 1997), pp. 326, 330-331. These passages appear in the US edition of Wolf's memoir, but in slightly edited form that omits the reference to Andropov's concern over a nuclear attack. In fact, the German edition contains an entire chapter on the "war scare" as it affected the USSR and the two Germanys in the early 1980s that does not appear in the US edition.

⁵⁵ See Markus Wolf with Anne McElvoy, *Man Without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster* (New York: Times Books/Random House, 1997), p. 222.

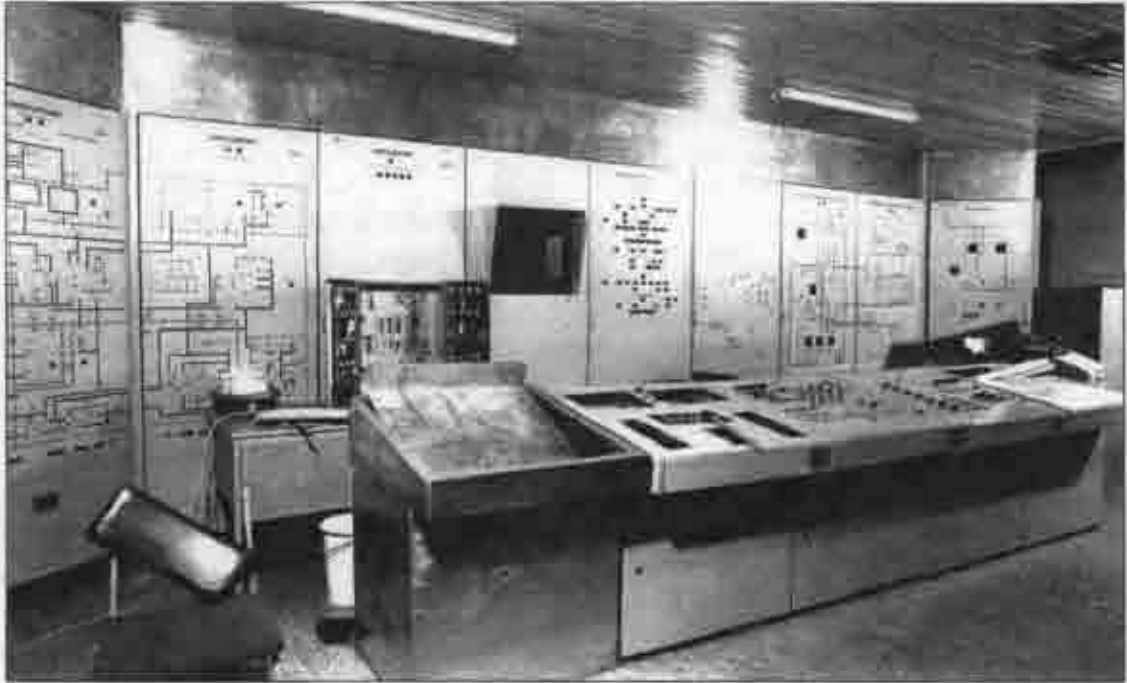
⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Wolf, *Spionage Chef im geheimen Krieg*, p. 331.

⁵⁸ Peter Siebenmorgen, *"Staatssicherheit" der DDR: Der Westen im Fadenkreuz der Stasi* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1993), pp. 197-198. This effort was probably focused on technologies being developed for the US SDI program and its European counterpart EUREKA, which were top priority targets.

⁵² Estimates of KGB officers stationed in East Germany range from 450 to 1,200. The GRU residency, given the presence of the Soviet Group of Western Forces, was probably larger.

⁵³ See "Observation of Extreme Rightists To Be Improved," *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, December 14-15, 1991, p. 5. Translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service's *Daily Report West Europe*, FBIS-WEU-91-242, December 14, 1991, p. 15.



The control room of an underground bunker built for the East German foreign intelligence service (HVA). This was one of five dispersed command centers constructed by the East Germans in 1983 in response to the Soviet war scare.

D. Konnerth/
Lichtblick Fotografie

instructed to report any new information immediately, without waiting for regularly scheduled meetings with their couriers from East Berlin.⁵⁹ The most important requirement was for sensitive data on the Pershing ballistic missile and the Tomahawk cruise missile. This data eluded the East Germans, but they were able to obtain information on the construction, transportation, assembly, and stationing of these missiles.⁶⁰

The HVA and the VA (the military intelligence service) launched an agent-recruiting drive linked to Operation RYAN. According to one news report, the HVA went after "dozens" of US servicemen, businessmen, and students in

West Germany and West Berlin.⁶¹ The West German armed services were also a top-priority target for recruitment; German counterintelligence authorities documented at least 1,500 attempted recruitments of West German officers and NCOs by East German intelligence between 1983 and 1989. Most of those pitched were asked to report on weapons developments, troop strengths, mobilization plans, and/or alert procedures.⁶²

⁵⁹ Until the war scare, the HVA had rarely felt a sense of urgency in scheduling agent meetings.

⁶⁰ Peter Siebenmorgen, "Staatssicherheit" der DDR, p. 198.

⁶¹ Jamie Dettmer, "Stasi lured Americans to spy for E. Germany; moles may be serving Moscow now," *Washington Times*, November 14, 1994, pp. A1, A14. This article refers to a senior civilian employee of the US Army, a retired US Army colonel, an unidentified US citizen, and an employee of a US firm in West Germany as having been "in agent contact" with the HVA. This means that agents had targeted but not necessarily recruited these US citizens. In most if not all of these cases, the HVA was probably using West German citizens working for it to elicit information from US contacts on an unwitting basis.

⁶² Friedrich W. Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe: Noch sind sie unter uns, die Helfer der Stasi im Westen* (Munich: Universitas Verlag, 1993), p. 23.

RYAN and East German Intelligence

The war scare had a major impact on East German intelligence and the way it conducted business. At Soviet insistence, State Security Minister Erich Mielke made RYAN the overriding operational mission of the Ministry for State Security (MfS), the HVA's parent organization, issuing a ministerial order that outlined the entire Soviet collection program.⁶³ The East Germans also followed—or were ordered to follow—the Soviet example of merging civilian and military intelligence operations. Mielke signed a memorandum of agreement with his counterpart in the Ministry of National Defense and the chief of military intelligence (Verwaltung Aufklärung or VA) that called for across-the-board cooperation in running joint operations, sharing tradecraft, and developing agent communications equipment.⁶⁴ During the early 1980s the chief of military intelligence became such a frequent visitor of Mielke's (and Wolf's) that he was given his own entry permit to MfS headquarters.⁶⁵

The War Scare Goes Public

Despite their private concerns, Soviet leaders maintained a public posture of relative calm during 1981-82. Even President Reagan's first

Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, later gave Moscow credit for doing so. "The Soviets stayed very, very moderate, very, very responsible during the first three years of this administration. I was mind-boggled with their patience."⁶⁶ But that patience wore thin in 1983.

"Star Wars"

The overt phase of the war scare erupted barely a month into the second phase of RYAN. On March 23, 1983, President Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), quickly dubbed "Star Wars" by the media. SDI was a plan for a ground- and space-based, laser-armed antiballistic missile system that, if deployed, would create a shield for US land-based missiles. Four days after the President's announcement—and in direct response—Andropov lashed out. He accused the United States of preparing a first-strike attack on the Soviet Union and asserted that President Reagan was "inventing new plans on how to unleash a nuclear war in the best way, with the hope of winning it."⁶⁷

Andropov's remarks were unprecedented.⁶⁸ He violated a longstanding taboo by citing numbers and capabilities of US nuclear weapons in the mass media. He also referred to Soviet weapons with highly unusual specificity. And for the first time since 1953, the top Soviet leader was telling his nation that the world was on the verge of a nuclear holocaust. If candor is a sign of sincerity, then Moscow was worried.

In direct response [to the US's SDI announcement], Andropov lashed out. He accused the United States of preparing a first-strike attack on the Soviet Union.

⁶³ The full title of the document is Order of Minister Mielke 1/85, "On the Early Detection of Acute Aggressive Intentions and Surprise Military Activities of the Imperialist States and their Alliance, in particular the Prevention of a Surprise Nuclear-Rocket Attack on the Countries of the Socialist Community, GVS-000," 13/85 See Rita Selitrenny and Thilo Weichert, *Das unheimliche Erbe Die Spionage-abteilung der Stasi* (Leipzig Forum Verlag, 1991), p 33, n 33

⁶⁴ See "Start in ein besseres Leben," *Der Spiegel*, August 10, 1992, p 54

⁶⁵ Siebenmorgen, "Staatssicherheit" der DDR, p 155

⁶⁶ Roy Guttman, "Bad Tidings The World According to Haig," *Newsday Magazine*, August 12, 1984, p 18, as cited in Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington The Brookings Institution, 1994), p 131

⁶⁷ "Replies of Yu V Andropov to questions from a *Pravda* correspondent," *Pravda*, March 27, 1983

⁶⁸ This analysis of Andropov's remarks is based on Vladimir E Shlapentokh, "Moscow's War Propaganda and Soviet Public Opinion," *Problems of Communism*, vol 33 (September-October 1983), p 92

SDI had a profound psychological impact [on the Soviets].

The SDI announcement came out of the blue for the Kremlin—and for most of the Reagan Cabinet.⁶⁹ Andropov's advisers urged him not to overreact, but he ignored their advice, accusing President Reagan of "deliberately lying" about Soviet military power to justify SDI. He denounced the missile shield as a "bid to disarm the Soviet Union in the face of the US nuclear threat." Space-based defense, he added:

would open the floodgates of a runaway race of all types of strategic arms, both offensive and defensive. Such is the real significance, the seamy side, so to say, of Washington's "defensive conception." . . . The Soviet Union will never be caught defenseless by any threat. . . . Engaging in this is not just irresponsible, it is insane. . . . Washington's actions are putting the entire world in jeopardy.⁷⁰

SDI had touched a sensitive nerve. The Soviets treated it as an extremely serious development for two reasons. First, despite their boasting in the 1970s, Soviet leaders—and perhaps Andropov most of all—had great respect for US technological capabilities.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The speech was not coordinated within the government. Secretary of State Shultz, for example, was not told about it until a few hours before it was delivered. See Schweizer, *Victory*, p. xix.

⁷⁰ See note 67.

⁷¹ Andropov had an unusual fascination with things American and marveled at US human and material potential, especially in military matters. According to a former KGB officer who served on his personal staff, this was not the case with most other Soviet leaders. See Wjatcheslaw Keworkow, *Der geheime Kanal Moskau, der KGB und die Bonner Ostpolitik* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1995), p. 155. Former Soviet ambassador Dobrynin noted that Andropov, more than any other Politburo member, had a broad grasp of Soviet foreign, defense, and domestic policy, thanks to his long tenure as KGB chief. His knowledge of military affairs was especially impressive, and he could hold his own with professional military officers. See Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 512-513. Ex-KGB officer Kalugin recounts an incident in which Andropov, while still head of the KGB, exploded when he realized that Soviet labs were incapable of producing spy gear comparable to a small transmitter the counterintelligence service had taken from a US agent. Kalugin, *The First Directorate*, pp. 260-261.

Second, SDI had a profound psychological impact that reinforced the trend already anticipated in the new Soviet assessment of the "correlation of forces." In a remarkable tete-a-tete with a US journalist and former arms control official, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, First Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of the General Staff, interpreted the real meaning of SDI:

We cannot equal the quality of U.S. arms for a generation or two. Modern military power is based on technology, and technology is based on computers. In the US, small children play with computers. . . . Here, we don't even have computers in every office of the Defense Ministry. And for reasons you know well, we cannot make computers widely available in our society. We will never be able to catch up with you in modern arms until we have an economic revolution. And the question is whether we can have an economic revolution without a political revolution.⁷²

This private rumination was all the more remarkable because Ogarkov's public statements showed him to be a hawk's hawk who compared the United States to Nazi Germany and argued repeatedly for more resources to continue the arms competition. The dichotomy between his public statements and his confidential remarks to the US journalist was striking; it indicated that he understood better than most political and other military leaders the challenge posed by American military technology.

⁷² See Leslie H. Gelb, "Foreign Affairs: Who Won the Cold War?," *New York Times*, August 20, 1992, p. 27. Gelb held this conversation with Ogarkov just days after Reagan's SDI announcement, but he did not report it until 1992.

KAL 007

At 3:26 a.m. Tokyo time on September 1, 1983, a Soviet Su-15 interceptor fired two air-to-air missiles at a Korean Airlines Boeing 747 airliner, Flight 007, destroying the aircraft and killing all 269 crewmembers and passengers. Soviet air defense units had been tracking the aircraft for more than an hour while it entered and left Soviet airspace over the Kamchatka Peninsula. The order to shoot down the airliner was given as it was about to leave Soviet airspace for the second time after flying over Sakhalin Island. It was probably downed in international airspace.

From US and Japanese communications intercepts, the White House learned about the shootdown within a few hours, and, with Secretary Shultz taking the lead, denounced the Soviet act as deliberate mass murder. President Reagan called it "an act of barbarism, born of a society which wantonly disregards individual rights and the value of human life and seeks constantly to expand and dominate other nations."⁷³

Air Force intelligence dissented from the rush to judgment at the time, and eventually US intelligence reached a consensus that the Soviets probably did not know they were attacking a civilian airliner.⁷⁴ The charge probably should have been something akin to criminally negligent manslaughter, not premeditated murder. But the official US position never deviated from the initial assessment. The incident was used to start a

vociferous campaign in the United Nations and to spur worldwide efforts to punish the USSR through commercial boycotts, lawsuits, and denial of landing rights for Aeroflot. These efforts focused on indicting the Soviet system and the top leadership as being ultimately responsible.⁷⁵

Moscow did not even acknowledge the incident until September 6, and it delayed an official explanation for three more days. On September 9, Marshal Ogarkov held a live press conference that ran for two hours.⁷⁶ The five-star spin doctor's goal was to prove that—269 innocent victims notwithstanding—the Soviet Union had acted rationally. Ogarkov asserted that the regional air defense unit had identified the aircraft as a US intelligence platform, an RC-135 of the type that routinely performed intelligence operations along a similar flight path. In any event, regardless of whether it was an RC-135 or a 747, he argued, the plane was unquestionably on a US or joint US-Japanese intelligence mission, and the local air defense commander had made the

⁷³ Hersh, *The Target Is Destroyed*, p 161

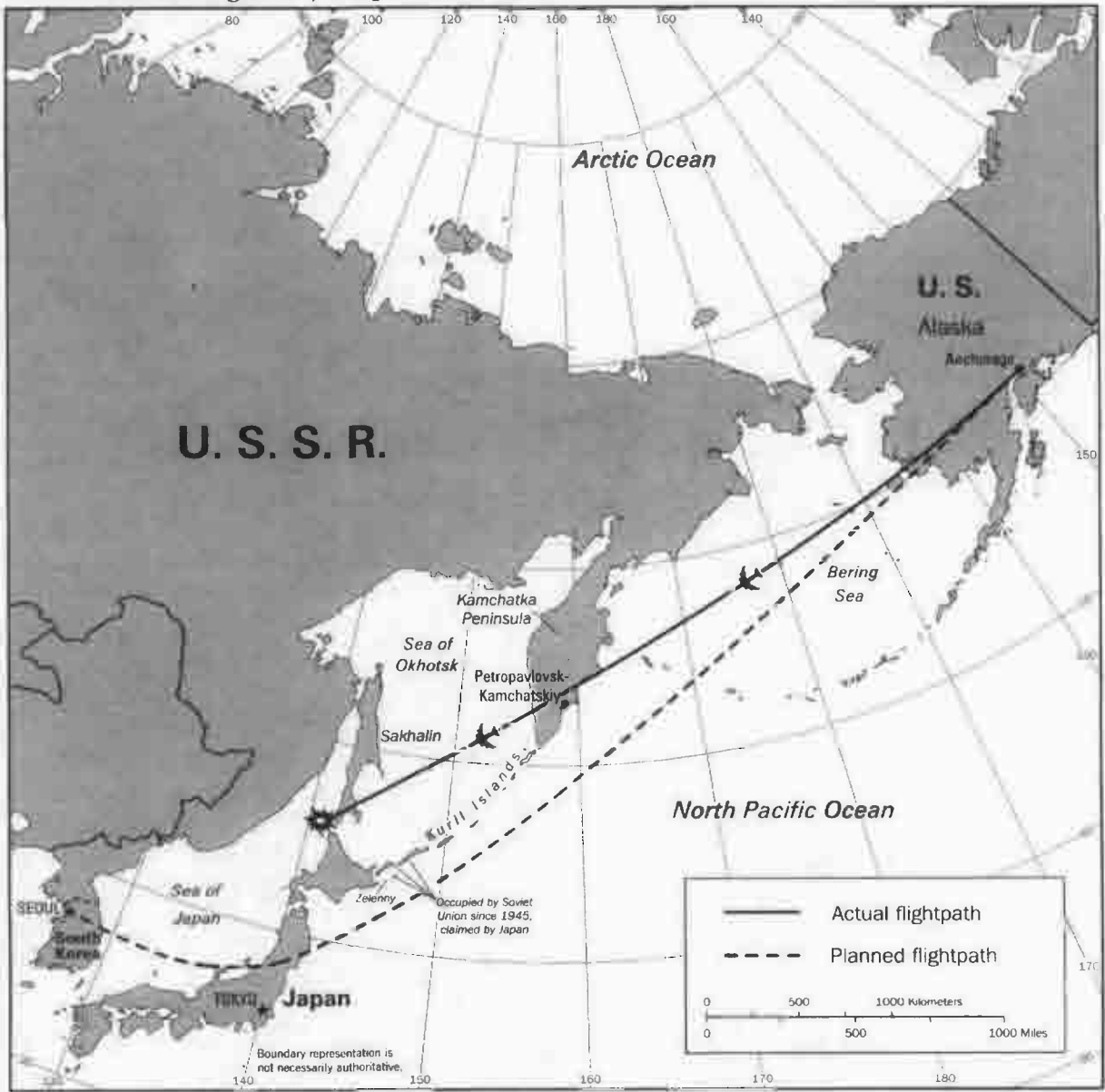
⁷⁴ By the day after the shootdown, CIA and NSA had concluded that the Soviets probably did not know that the intruder was a civilian aircraft and may have thought that it was on an intelligence mission. See Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p 363, as cited in Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p 199, n. 107. The US Intelligence Community briefed this assessment to Congress in early 1988. See Tim Ahern, "Assessment Says Soviet Probably Didn't Know Plane Was Civilian Airliner," Associated Press report, January 1988.

⁷⁵ In a presentation to the UN General Assembly, US Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick said

The fact is that violence and lies are regular instruments of Soviet policy. Soviet officials regularly behave as though truth were only a function of force and will—as if truth were only what they say it is, as if violence were an instrument of first resort in foreign affairs. Whichever the case—whether the destruction of KAL Flight 007 and its passengers reflects only utter indifference to human life or whether it was designed to intimidate—we are dealing here not with pilot errors but with decisions and priorities characteristic of a system. (Hersh, *The Target Is Destroyed*, pp 164-166)

⁷⁶ In the meantime, the KGB's disinformation unit was preparing guidance for "active measures" in the West to pin the blame for the tragedy on the United States. See Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, pp 594-596.

Korean Airlines Flight 007, 1 September 1983



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Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov during his September 9, 1983 press conference on the shootdown of KAL 007. Ogarkov gave a good performance, but his remarks were a coverup from beginning to end.

correct decision. The real blame for the tragedy, he insisted, lay with the United States, not the USSR.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The press conference was a coverup from beginning to end. Ogarkov claimed, among other things, that Soviet pilot Maj. Gennady Osipovich had tried to make radio contact; that he had fired visible warning shots using tracer ammunition; and that the jumbo jet did not have its navigation lights on. In 1991 Osipovich admitted that these assertions were false and that Soviet military authorities had ordered him to lie. The Soviets went to considerable lengths to protect themselves. They recovered three "black boxes," using a phony oil-drilling rig and "fishing trawlers" to conceal their diving operation, but denied having done so until 1991. They also planted a bogus flight-data recorder at some distance from the crash site that the US Navy recovered. See Oberg, "The Truth about KAL 007," p. 66, and Michael Dobbs, "Soviet Journalists Attack KAL Story; Reports Shed New Light On '83 Downing of Airliner," *Washington Post*, May 26, 1991, p. A1.

A classified memorandum submitted to the Politburo by the Defense Ministry and the KGB shows that the Soviet leadership held much the same view in private. Released in 1992, the memorandum concluded:

We are dealing with a major, dual-purpose political provocation carefully organized by the US special services. The first purpose was to use the incursion of the intruder aircraft into Soviet airspace to create a favorable situation for the gathering of defense data on our air defense system in the Far East, involving the most diverse systems

**Once again,
Andropov took
the lead in
bashing the
United States.**

including the Ferret satellite. Second, they envisaged, if this flight were terminated by us, [the US would use] that fact to mount a global anti-Soviet campaign to discredit the Soviet Union.⁷⁸

Soviet *angst* was reflected in the harsh propaganda reaction that followed. Once again Andropov took the lead in bashing the United States. Asserting that an "outrageous military psychosis" had overtaken the US, he declared that "the Reagan administration, in its imperial ambitions, goes so far that one begins to doubt whether Washington has any brakes at all preventing it from crossing the point at which any sober-minded person must stop."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The memorandum was written in December 1983 and published in *Izvestiya* on October 16, 1992. Cited in Christopher Andrew, "KGB Foreign Intelligence from Brezhnev to the Coup," *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 8, no. 3 (July 1993), p. 60. The same memorandum warned the Politburo that the Soviet Union should not admit it had the flight voice and data recorders, because the tapes tended to support the US position more than the Soviet one and the KGB and military intelligence had not been able to prove the plane was on an intelligence mission.

For whatever reason, the Soviets seemed convinced that there was more to the KAL 007 story than pilot error. When American investigative reporter Seymour Hersh visited Moscow to conduct interviews for a book on the incident, Marshal Ogarkov said "I'm sure that the day will come when we know the reasons why this mission was arranged." Hersh, *The Target Is Destroyed*, p. 191. Five years later, Defense Minister Gen. Dmitri Yazov asked visiting Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci "Tell me, why did you Americans use that Korean airliner as a spy plane?" Carlucci could not convince the Soviet general that his suspicions were unfounded. Somewhat later Ogarkov's replacement, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, adamantly insisted to American journalist Don Oberdorfer that KAL 007 was on a secret mission. See Don Oberdorfer, *The Turn From the Cold War To A New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union 1983-1990* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), p. 55. This could have been a high-level "deception" effort, but it seems more likely that top leaders either believed the United States was behind the intrusion or were captives of their own contrived interpretation.

⁷⁹ "Declaration by Yu. V. Andropov, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet," *Pravda and Izvestiya*, September 29, 1983, p. 1. Publication of the declaration in both of the leading newspapers underscored its importance and the leadership's full endorsement.

Yuri Andropov on KAL-007

The sophisticated provocation, organized by the US special services and using a South Korean airplane, is an example of extreme adventurism in policy. We have given the factual aspect of this action a detailed and authentic elucidation. The guilt of its organizers—no matter how they twist and turn or how many false stories they put out—have been proved.

The Soviet leadership has expressed regret in connection with the loss of human lives that was the result of this unprecedented act of criminal sabotage. It is on the conscience of those who would like to arrogate to themselves the right to disregard the sovereignty of states and the inviolability of their borders, who conceived of and carried out this provocation, who literally the next day hurried to push through Congress colossal military appropriations and now are rubbing their hands in satisfaction.

As reported in
Pravda and Izvestiya,
September 29, 1983

The local Soviet air defense commander appears to have made a serious but honest mistake. The situation in the region was not normal; his forces had been on high alert and in a state of anxiety following incursions by US aircraft during the spring 1983 Pacific Fleet exercise recounted above. A Soviet demarche contended that US planes had flown some 32 kilometers (20 miles) into Soviet airspace and remained there for up to 20 minutes during

For Moscow, the [KAL 007] episode seemed to encapsulate and reinforce the Soviets' worst case assumptions about US policy.

several overflights.⁸⁰ As a result, the Soviet air defense command was put on alert for the rest of the spring and summer—and possibly longer—and some senior officers were transferred, reprimanded, or dismissed.⁸¹

The KAL 007 incident was not only a tragedy; it also touched off a dangerous episode in US-Soviet relations, which already had been

exacerbated by the war scare. As Dobrynin put it, both sides “went slightly crazy.” For Washington, the incident seemed to express all that was wrong with the Soviet system and to vindicate the administration’s critique of the Soviet system. For Moscow, the episode seemed to encapsulate and reinforce the Soviets’ worst case assumptions about US policy for several reasons:

⁸⁰ Hersh, “*The Target is Destroyed*,” p 18, says the Navy “never publicly acknowledged either the overflight or its error, it also chose to say nothing further inside the government.”

The Soviets perceived both political and military machinations in these overflights, which occurred over part of the Kuni Island chain, seized by the USSR and occupied along with the southern part of Sakhalin island in August 1945. Japan refers to the occupied Kuni Islands as the Northern Territories and has refused to sign a peace accord with the USSR until they are returned. The United States has long supported Japan’s claim to the Northern Territories.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p 19. According to Oberg, Soviet interceptors based closest to where the Pacific Fleet overflights occurred were fogged in, and those located elsewhere in the vicinity lacked drop-tanks and therefore sufficient fuel to pursue the US planes. Drop-tanks had been removed in 1976 to prevent Soviet pilots from defecting after a pilot flew a MiG-25 equipped with a drop-tank to Japan.

Several accounts add that local air defense commanders failed to detect KAL 007 as it flew over Kamchatka and then panicked later when it flew over Sakhalin because key tracking radars were not working properly. Gordievsky says he was told that eight of 11 radars on Kamchatka and Sakhalin were out of commission. See Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, p 594. A former Soviet pilot who defected in 1991 said that Arctic gales had damaged the radar sites. Oberg, who closely studied the incident, discounts the radar failure explanation, claiming that the local air defense commander at Sokol Air Base on Sakhalin was “trigger-happy” after the US intrusion into Soviet airspace on April 6, 1983 and “was just itching to get back at the next intruder.” See “Faulty radar blamed in KAL attack,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 2, 1993, p 16.

This implies that the commander ignored Soviet rules of engagement, but there is still another twist to the story. A Soviet investigative reporter who wrote a series of articles on KAL 007 said in 1991 that, after the US air intrusion during the Pacific Fleet exercise, the Supreme Soviet passed a national law declaring USSR borders “sacred”—an expression Foreign Minister Gromyko used in an official statement after the shootdown—and authorizing local air defense commanders to destroy any intruding aircraft. See Dobbs, “Soviet Journalists Attack KAL Story.” If this account is accurate, then the shootdown was due more to calculation and less to confusion, panic, and frayed nerves, and the Soviet leadership bears more responsibility than is generally acknowledged in Russia or in the West.

- President Reagan was quick to seize on the shootdown to broadly indict the Soviet system and its leaders. Andropov, notwithstanding whatever he actually may have believed about Soviet responsibility, was forced onto the defensive and evidently felt compelled to justify the USSR’s actions at all costs.
- The US follow-on campaign at the UN and in other channels to embarrass and isolate the USSR in the international community undoubtedly contributed to Moscow’s penchant to see an anti-Soviet plot.⁸² In the Soviet view, a campaign of this scope and magnitude that just happened to dovetail with the Reagan administration’s moral critique of the USSR must have been more than simply a chance opportunity seized by Washington in the heat of the moment.⁸³
- President Reagan’s decision to use the KAL 007 shootdown to persuade Congress to support his requests for increased defense

⁸² On 5 September 1983, President Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 102 on “U S Response to the Soviet Destruction of KAL 007 Airliner.” This directive ordered a “major public diplomatic effort to keep international and domestic attention focused on this Soviet action.” As cited in Jeffrey T. Richelson, *A Century of Spies: Intelligence in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p 385.

⁸³ Gordievsky notes that the US response to KAL 007 “strengthened belief at both the Center and in the Kremlin in a far-reaching anti-Soviet plot by the Reagan Administration.” Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, p 597.

The net effect of the [007] crisis was to close off whatever debate was still going on within the Soviet leadership over US intentions.

spending and the new MX missile pointed in the same direction, in Moscow's view. Given the Soviets' predilection for conspiracy theorizing, it was not farfetched that they would see a US design behind the combination of circumstances.

The net effect of the crisis was to close off whatever debate was still going on within the Soviet leadership over US intentions. On September 29, Andropov issued an unusual "declaration" on US-Soviet relations that brought the war scare into sharper public focus:

The Soviet leadership deems it necessary to inform the Soviet people, other peoples, and all who are responsible for determining the policy of states, of its assessment of the course pursued in international affairs by the current US administration. In brief, it is a militarist course that represents a serious threat to peace. . . . *If anyone had any illusion about the possibility of an evolution for the better in the policy of the present American administration, recent events have dispelled them completely.*⁸⁴ [emphasis added]

Dobrynin says the last phrase was the key one; the word "completely" was carefully chosen to express the Politburo's consensus that the USSR could not reach any agreement with the Reagan administration.⁸⁵ In sum, the aftermath of the downing of KAL 007 heightened Soviet anxiety. Within weeks Soviet intelligence and the Soviet military, almost certainly with the KAL 007 episode in mind, would overreact to a US/NATO military exercise.

ABLE ARCHER 83

Another notable incident in 1983 occurred during an annual NATO command post exercise codenamed ABLE ARCHER 83. The

Soviets were familiar with this exercise from previous years, but the 1983 version included two important changes:

- In the original scenario (which was later modified), the 1983 exercise was to involve high-level officials, including the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in major roles, with cameo appearances by the President and the Vice President. Such high-level participation would have meant greater publicity and visibility than was the case during past runnings of this exercise.
- ABLE ARCHER 83 included a practice drill that took NATO forces through a full-scale simulated release of nuclear weapons.

According to Gordievsky, on the night of November 8 or 9—he was not sure which—the KGB Center sent a flash cable to West European residencies advising them, incorrectly, that US forces in Europe had gone on alert and that troops at some bases were being mobilized. The cable speculated that the (nonexistent) alert might have been ordered in response to the then-recent bomb attack on the US Marine barracks in Lebanon, or was related to impending US Army maneuvers, or was the beginning of a countdown to a surprise nuclear attack. Recipients were asked to confirm the US alert and evaluate these hypotheses.

Gordievsky described the reaction in stark terms:

In the tense atmosphere generated by the crises and rhetoric of the past few months, the KGB concluded that American forces had been placed on alert—and might even have begun the countdown to war. . . . The world did not quite reach the edge of the nuclear abyss

⁸⁴ See note 79

⁸⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 540

during Operation RYAN. But during ABLE ARCHER 83 it had, without realizing it, come frighteningly close—*certainly closer than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.*⁸⁶ [emphasis added]

The ABLE ARCHER story has been told and retold by journalists with inside contacts in the White House and Whitehall.⁸⁷ Three themes run through the various versions: The US and USSR came close to war as a result of Soviet overreaction; only Gordievsky's timely warning to the West kept things from getting out of hand; and Gordievsky's information was an epiphany for President Reagan, convincing him that the Kremlin indeed was fearful of a US surprise nuclear attack:

Within a few weeks after . . . ABLE ARCHER 83, the London CIA station reported, presumably on the basis of information obtained by the British from Gordievsky, that the Soviets had been alarmed about the real possibility that the United States was preparing a nuclear

attack against them. [National Security Adviser Robert] McFarlane, who received the reports at the White House, initially discounted them as Soviet scare tactics rather than evidence of real concern about American intentions, and told Reagan of his view in presenting them to the President. But a more extensive survey of Soviet attitudes sent to the White House early in 1984 by CIA director William Casey, based in part on reports from the double agent Gordievsky, had a more sobering effect. Reagan seemed uncharacteristically grave after reading the report and asked McFarlane, "Do you suppose they really believe that? . . . I don't see how they could believe that—but it's something to think about." . . . In a meeting the same day, Reagan spoke about the biblical prophecy of Armageddon, a final world-ending battle between good and evil, a topic that fascinated the President. McFarlane thought it was not accidental that Armageddon was on Reagan's mind.⁸⁸

Is Gordievsky's stark description credible? According to a US foreign affairs correspondent, the "volume and urgency" of Warsaw Pact communications increased during the exercise.⁸⁹ In addition, US sources reported that Soviet fighter aircraft with nuclear weapons at bases in East Germany and Poland were placed on alert.⁹⁰ But a US expert who queried a number of senior Soviet political and military officials reports that none had heard of ABLE ARCHER, and all denied that it had come to the attention of the Politburo or even the upper levels of the Defense Ministry.⁹¹ Moreover, Dobrynin, who argues

⁸⁶ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, p 605 See pp 583-560 for the full story, which is repeated in Andrew and Gordievsky, *Instructions from the Center*, pp 87-88 See also Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York HarperCollinsPublishers, 1995), pp 471-478, for an account of ABLE ARCHER and Gordievsky's 1985 post-defection briefing of President Reagan

⁸⁷ For British accounts of ABLE ARCHER, see Gordon Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Birds The Dramatic Stories of the Top Soviet Spies Who Have Defected Since World War II* (New York Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), pp 329-330, Geoffrey Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher* (New York W W Norton & Company, 1991), pp 122-123, and Nicholas Bethell, *Spies and Other Secrets Memoirs from the Second Cold War* (New York Viking, 1994), p 191 Brook-Shepherd writes (p 330) "What it [the West] was totally unaware of at the time was how far it had really passed through a war danger zone This was not a surge of Soviet aggression, but a spasm of Soviet panic" Bethell writes on the same incident (p 191) "The Soviets did apparently fear that the West might be about to launch a nuclear strike upon them This was the most dramatic and the most conclusive confirmation there has been of the Soviet need for reassurance"

⁸⁸ Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p 67

⁸⁹ *Ibid*

⁹⁰ *Ibid* See also Director of Central Intelligence, "Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities," p 4

⁹¹ Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p 139, n 160

**The information
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[among some
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planning a
nuclear strike . . ."
—Christopher
Andrew**

that the top leadership took the war threat seriously and devotes several pages in his memoirs to the KAL 007 tragedy, makes no mention of ABLE ARCHER.

An important piece of evidence—the Center's flash message referred to above—is missing from the RYAN cables that Gordievsky published in 1991. ABLE ARCHER 83, it seems, made more of an impression in the White House than in the Kremlin.⁹² In any event, it was not comparable to the Cuban crisis, when the superpowers were on a collision course, US nuclear forces were on full alert, and—as recently revealed—the USSR had deployed nuclear weapons in Cuba.

The "Iron Lady" and the "Great Communicator"

Did Gordievsky's reporting bring home the message that the war scare in the Kremlin was serious and that it posed a potential danger of Soviet overreaction? Gordievsky and British co-author Christopher Andrew have said so repeatedly. The information Gordievsky provided to the British "was of enormous importance in providing warning of the almost paranoid fear within some sections of the Soviet leadership that President Reagan was planning a nuclear strike against the Soviet Union," according to Andrew.⁹³

Prime Minister Thatcher herself apparently delivered the chilling message to President Reagan, hoping to convince him to moderate his rhetoric and actions. She evidently believed that US policy toward the USSR had become risky and counterproductive by

⁹² An intelligence assessment concluded that, while the Soviet reaction was "greater than usual, by confining heightened readiness to selected units Moscow clearly revealed that it did not in fact think that there was a possibility at this time of a NATO attack." Director of Central Intelligence, "Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities," p. 4

⁹³ Christopher Andrew, "We Will Always Need Spies," *Times* (London), March 3, 1994, Features, p. 1

threatening to undermine NATO's consensus on deployment of US intermediate-range missiles. Thatcher also was mindful of the growing strength of the peace movement in Europe and especially in West Germany.

Thatcher publicly urged a shift in policy on September 29 in an address at the annual dinner for the Churchill Foundation Award in Washington, where she knew her remarks would attract media—and White House—attention. Her theme—"we live on the same planet and must go [on] sharing it"—was a plea for a more accommodating Alliance policy that she spelled out in subsequent speeches. She did not, according to a chronicler of the Thatcher-Reagan partnership, pick up the phone or approach Reagan directly, because:

The essence of the partnership at this stage was that the two governments were basing their decisions on much the same evidence and on shared assessments at professional level. In particular, both governments would have had the same intelligence. A critical contribution in this field was made over a period of years by Oleg Gordievsky . . .⁹⁴

A US journalist who interviewed British intelligence sources believes Gordievsky's reporting had a significant impact on the White House.⁹⁵ He adds an interesting twist to the story. The British claimed the KGB was exploiting, and perhaps manipulating, "bluster in Washington" to hype the US threat to Soviet leaders for the KGB's own bureaucratic purposes and interests. London's message to Washington was: stop helping the hawks and start supporting the doves. Whether the British were acting as analysts or spin doctors is open to question.

⁹⁴ Smith, *Thatcher and Reagan*, p. 122

⁹⁵ Newhouse, *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age*, p. 338

Interviews with Soviet citizens traveling abroad suggested that much of the Soviet public was genuinely alarmed.

President Reagan says in his memoirs—without reference to British intelligence reports or ABLE ARCHER—that in late 1983 he was surprised to learn that “many people at the top of the Soviet hierarchy were genuinely afraid of America and Americans,” and “many Soviet officials feared us not only as adversaries but as potential aggressors who might hurl nuclear weapons at them in a first strike.”⁹⁶

In the broad scheme of things, election-year politics and polls showing that the President’s anti-Soviet rhetoric was his highest “negative” with US public opinion probably played the main role in the more conciliatory tone he adopted in early 1984. But the President himself said the war scare was “something to think about.” The British intelligence reports appear to have influenced President Reagan—as they were no doubt intended to do—more than they influenced senior White House policy aides, who remained skeptical of the Soviet war scare during 1981-83 and even after Gordievsky had defected and publicly surfaced in 1985.⁹⁷

War Scare Frenzy in the USSR

In the months following the September 1983 KAL incident, a full-scale war scare unfolded in the USSR. Soviet authorities clearly instigated this through a variety of agitprop activities. Even so, the scare took on a life of its own and threatened to get out of hand before the Kremlin took steps in early 1984 to calm public fears.⁹⁸

Soviet attacks on President Reagan reached a fever pitch. Moscow compared him to Hitler and alleged that he had ties to the Mafia. The Soviet media hammered home that the danger of nuclear war was higher than at any time since World War II.

Radio Liberty interviews with Soviet citizens traveling abroad suggested that much of the Soviet public was genuinely alarmed. A series of officially sponsored activities at home fed the frenzy. Moscow organized mass “peace” rallies; sponsored “peace” classes in schools and universities; arranged closed briefings on the “war danger” for party activists and military personnel; designated a “civil defense” month; broadcast excerpts from Stalin’s famous 1941 speech to troops parading through Red Square on their way to defend Moscow from the approaching German army; and televised a heavyhanded Defense Ministry film that depicted a warmongering America bent on world domination. The Politburo also considered, but rejected, proposals to shift to a six-day industrial workweek and to create a special “defense fund” to raise money for the military.

What were the Soviet leadership’s motives? Some observers who have studied the war scare have written it off as political theater—as an elaborate orchestration to release tensions over KAL 007 at home and promote the ongoing Soviet “peace offensive” abroad.⁹⁹ But it clearly was more than that. The leadership would not have invoked the memory of World War II—which is emotionally charged and had an almost sacred significance for the Soviet people—solely for propaganda purposes. It

⁹⁶ The quotation from Reagan’s memoirs is cited in Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 67.

⁹⁷ See note 38.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Shlapentokh, “Moscow’s War Propaganda and Soviet Public Opinion,” p. 88. The author explicitly refused to speculate on the origins and intended audience of the public war scare. For another example of a carefully documented account that does not offer much in the way of explanation, see Elizabeth Teague, “War Scare in the USSR,” in Vojtech Mastny, ed., *Soviet/East European Survey, 1983-1984. Selected Research and Analysis from Radio Free Europe/Radio Free Liberty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), pp. 71-76.

⁹⁹ One example, among others that could be cited, is John W. Parker, *Kremlin in Transition: From Brezhnev to Chernenko, 1978 to 1985*, vol. 1 (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991), p. 295.

The connection between ignored warnings [in 1941] and surprise attack has never been forgotten in Moscow.

War Scare in the USSR

We have been hearing a lot of rumors about the possibility of war in the near future. At political information meetings they are saying that the United States is getting ready to attack the Soviet Union, and that we should be prepared for an attack at any moment. From what I could see, those who believed these warnings significantly outnumbered those who didn't. The simple people are very frightened of war.

Soviet citizen interviewed by
Radio Liberty (Munich)
November 1983

would not have fueled popular fears about nuclear extinction just to boost morale and influence public opinion abroad.

The regime appears to have aggravated popular fears of war for a specific purpose: to prepare the population for the possibility that repeated promises to raise living standards might have to be abandoned in order to increase defense spending in the face of a growing danger of a US military strike on the USSR.¹⁰⁰ The Kremlin, it seems, had decided that the only way to make new sacrifices palatable was to play to the public's fears.¹⁰¹ The ploy was a risky one, not only because the Soviet people had come to expect improvements in their living standards, but

¹⁰⁰ Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, pp 64-65, argues that the Kremlin was preparing the Soviet people for a crisis in US-Soviet relations. This view seems exaggerated.

¹⁰¹ One response cited in the Soviet press that may or may not have been typical was that of a World War II veteran who said he was willing to go without food if the Soviet Army needed more rockets to defend the country. Whether apocryphal or not, this was the kind of sentiment Soviet domestic propaganda was trying to evoke.

also because developments in Poland at that time were underscoring how popular unrest could develop into revolt against a Communist regime.

With the improvement in US-Soviet relations after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the domestic war scare subsided as quickly as it had emerged. Before it did, however, the leadership apparently felt compelled to allay the public's fears with assurances that the USSR was in a position to deter war and, if necessary, to defend itself. This was further evidence that the war scare was genuinely felt among the populace.

The Enduring Trauma of BARBAROSSA

The Soviet Union and the United States both entered World War II in 1941 as victims of surprise attacks, but the impact of Operation BARBAROSSA—the German codename for Hitler's June 1941 attack on the USSR—was even more of an enduring national trauma than Pearl Harbor was for the United States. The German invasion was the worst military disaster in Russian history.¹⁰² It should have been anticipated and could have been countered by the Soviets but was not, mainly because of a failure to interpret indications and warnings accurately.

The connection between ignored warnings and surprise attack has never been forgotten in Moscow. For decades after the war, Soviet

¹⁰² "The defeat inflicted on the Red Army by the Axis in 1941 beggars description: far more calamitous than the Napoleonic invasion, far more terrible even than the disasters of 1914-17." Chns Ward, *Stalin's Russia* (London: Edward Arnold, 1993), p. 168.

leaders seemed obsessed with the lessons of 1941, which were as much visceral as intellectual in Soviet thinking about war and peace.¹⁰³

The 1941 analogy clearly had an impact on the way RYAN requirements were formulated and implemented. The historical example of Operation BARBAROSSA, moreover, may explain the sense of urgency that KGB officers such as Gordievsky and Shvets attributed to the Kremlin even while these officers themselves discounted the threat. The gap in perceptions may have reflected a gap in generations. Members of the Brezhnev-Andropov generation had experienced the German war firsthand as the formative experience of their political lives. But for the younger generation born just before, during, or after the war, BARBAROSSA was history rather than living memory.

¹⁰³ The 1941 analogy appears to have influenced both Soviet intelligence and the high command. Even as late as 1991, for example, when the deputy chief of KGB foreign intelligence was trying to make his case to Gorbachev for countering an alleged US "plot" to dismember the USSR, he wrote a memorandum saying (Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 525)

The KGB has been informing the leadership about this in time and detail. We would not want a tragic repetition of the situation before the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany, when Soviet intelligence warned about the imminent attack of Nazi Germany but Stalin rejected this information as wrong and even provocative. You know what that mistake cost us. (As cited in Andrew, "KGB Foreign Intelligence from Brezhnev to the Coup," p. 63.) During a visit to Moscow, Dobrynin asked Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, Ogarkov's successor as Chief of the General Staff, for a briefing on Soviet military planning for war. "Soviet military doctrine can be summed up as follows: 1941 shall not be repeated," the marshal asserted.

Soviet officials may have used the "1941 shall not be repeated" theme for manipulative purposes, but they would not have done so had they not known that it would strike a responsive chord with the political leadership.

The Soviets' intelligence "failure" of 1941 was a failure of analysis, not collection.¹⁰⁴ Stalin received multiple, detailed, and timely warnings of the impending invasion from a variety of open and clandestine sources. But he chose to interpret intelligence data with a best case or not-so-bad-case hypothesis, assuming—incorrectly—that Hitler would not attack without issuing an ultimatum or fight a two-front war. Stalin erred in part because he deceived himself and in part because German counterintelligence misled him with an elaborate deception plan.¹⁰⁵ Possibly because of this precedent, Stalin's heirs may have decided that it was better to look through a glass darkly than through rose-colored lenses. This, it appears, is why Operation RYAN used an explicit worst case methodology to search for indications and warning of a US surprise attack.

RYAN also seems to have incorporated—or in some instances misapplied—other lessons from 1941. Despite the prowess of his intelligence services, Stalin distrusted clandestinely acquired intelligence, including agent reporting and even communications and signals intercepts.¹⁰⁶ He did so because he was convinced that such sources could be

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of the wealth of accurate information that was available to Stalin, see John Costello and Oleg Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions: The KGB Dossier Reveals Stalin's Master Spy* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), pp. 85-90. The authors had access to intelligence reports in the KGB archives. See also Barton Whaley, *Codeword BARBAROSSA* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973), which lists more than 80 indications and warnings of the German attack.

¹⁰⁵ The German counterintelligence falsely portrayed the military buildup in eastern Germany and occupied Poland as preparation—at a safe distance from RAF bombers and reconnaissance planes—for an invasion of Britain.

¹⁰⁶ Whaley, *Operation BARBAROSSA*, p. 97, quotes Stalin as saying on June 14, 1941: "You can't believe everything you read in intelligence reports." He does not, however, give a citation for the quotation, which may be apocryphal. See note 110, below, for an example of Stalin's rejection of an explicit warning of the German attack.

The fears that prompted Operation RYAN seemed genuine, even if exaggerated.

controlled by the enemy and corrupted by disinformation—a belief that led him to reject accurate as well as inaccurate information. He insisted that Soviet intelligence look instead for indirect indicators of war planning that could not be concealed or manipulated. He went along, for example, with a proposal by his chief of military intelligence for surveying mutton prices in Nazi-occupied Europe; the intelligence official thought the Germans would need sheepskin coats for winter military campaigning in Russia and, by buying up existing livestock supplies, would flood the market with cheap mutton.¹⁰⁷ This deceptively simple indicator turned out to be simply deceptive; Hitler, believing he could defeat the Red Army by the fall of 1941, did not prepare for wintertime operations.

RYAN requirements reveal the same kind of unorthodox thinking. For example, the KGB residency in London was instructed to monitor prices paid for blood at urban donor banks.¹⁰⁸ The KGB Center assumed that prices would rise on the eve of war as blood banks scurried to stockpile supplies. But there was a problem with this assumption: British donor banks do not pay for blood—contributions are voluntary. In another such example of RYAN requirements, the KGB residency in London was told to visit meatpacking plants, looking for signs of “mass slaughter of cattle and putting of meat into long cold storage.”¹⁰⁹ The parallel with Soviet intelligence requirements of 1939-41 is close enough to suggest that the KGB was digging them out of old NKVD (the KGB’s predecessor) and GRU files.

Finally, there was another plausible—although unprovable—link between 1941 and 1981. The 1941 disaster was Stalin’s fault, but he blamed Soviet intelligence. This left an indelible stain

on the Soviet services, and the subject was so sensitive that it could not be discussed openly until the advent of glasnost.¹¹⁰ One motive behind Andropov’s decision to launch Operation RYAN in 1981 may have been a determination not to let history repeat itself. Soviet intelligence certainly had a vested interest in promoting a dire threat assessment of US intentions, but professional pride and a wish to avoid being a scapegoat may have been involved as well.

Conclusion: The War Scare Was for Real

The fears that prompted Operation RYAN seemed genuine, even if exaggerated. Ex-Ambassador Dobrynin implied as much to a skeptical US television interviewer in 1995. When the interviewer asked whether Andropov “had really believed” that the Reagan administration might order a first strike, Dobrynin replied: “Make your conclusions from what he [Andropov] said in telegrams to his *rezidents*.”¹¹¹

The alert was a crash program to create a strategic warning system in response to new challenges the Soviets saw looming on the horizon. That response was panicky but not paranoid. One historian, rejecting the paranoia thesis that has often been used to explain Russian reaction to technologically superior

¹¹⁰ There is an interesting confirmation of this in the KGB museum in Moscow, which is now open to the public. On a wall hangs a copy of the message sent to Stalin by a member of the “Red Orchestra” spy ring in Germany, giving him a week’s notice of Hitler’s intention to invade the Soviet Union. Stalin annotated the text with a string of obscenities, dismissing both the intelligence and the source. See “Another Country,” *The Economist*, February 24–March 1, 1996, p. 58.

¹¹¹ This was Dobrynin’s response to a question about the war scare during an interview by Steve Kroft on the CBS television newsmagazine *60 Minutes*, which aired on October 1, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ Viktor Suvorov, *Icebreaker: Who Started World War II?* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990), pp. 320-321.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew and Gordievsky, *Instructions from the Center*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

More Than Just a Scare Tactic

The following remarks were made by former Soviet Foreign Ministry official Sergei Tarasenko at a 1993 conference of former US and Soviet officials:

Around this time [late 1983], [First Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi] Kornienko summoned me and showed me a top-secret KGB paper. It was under Andropov. Kornienko said to me, "You haven't seen this paper. Forget about it." . . . In the paper the KGB reported that they had information that the United States had prepared everything for a first strike; that they might resort to a surgical strike against command centers in the Soviet Union; and that they had the capability to destroy the system by incapacitating the command center. We were given the task of preparing a paper for the Politburo and putting forward some suggestions on how to counter this threat not physically but politically. So we prepared a paper [suggesting] that we should leak some information that we know about these capabilities and contingency plans, and that that we are not afraid of these plans because we have taken the necessary measures.¹¹²

Tarasenko was a senior adviser to Kornienko. He was one of the few officials outside the Soviet intelligence community who had seen the abovementioned KGB paper. His remarks confirm that the Soviet leadership genuinely believed the risk of a US attack had risen appreciably.

Western military power, captured the point when he wrote: "At various times Russian strategists were acutely fearful. But those fears, although at times extreme, were scarcely insane."¹¹³

Dobrynin has noted that post-Stalin leaders believed the "existing political and social structure of the United States was the best guarantee against an unprovoked first strike against us"¹¹⁴ He claims, however, that in the early 1980s some Soviet leaders, including Andropov, changed their minds. Why? Dobrynin's reply, quoting Andropov, was that President Reagan was "unpredictable." That answer seems too simplistic—and too "un-Soviet" in that it attaches so much weight to personalities—although it is vintage Dobrynin, who seems to view the Cold War largely as an interpersonal interplay among Soviet and American leaders he knew.

To reduce the war scare to Andropovian paranoia and "Reaganite rhetoric" is too facile. Otherwise RYAN would not have outlasted both leaders, the KGB, and the changes in US-Soviet relations that led to the end of the Cold War.¹¹⁵ The Kremlin's thinking was shaped by adverse trends, not just adversarial personalities—that is, by its pessimistic assessment of the "correlation of forces" and the ever-widening gap in the USSR's technological lag behind the West. Soviet leaders knew that their nation was no longer even running in place on the treadmill of history; it was beginning to fall back. In this

¹¹³ William Fuller, Jr., *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 12

¹¹⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 523

¹¹⁵ The Soviets did not cancel RYAN until November 1991. The chief of foreign intelligence noted that even by that late date the alert still "involved huge material and human resources" and required biweekly reports from KGB residences. See Bill Gertz, "KGB halts lookout for U.S. nuclear attack," *Washington Times*, November 28, 1991, p. A9

¹¹² William C. Wohlforth, ed., *Witnesses to the End of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), p. 71

In this atmosphere [of declining Soviet influence], Soviet officials and much of the populace felt vulnerable to the prospect of a US attack.

atmosphere, Soviet officials and much of the populace felt vulnerable to the prospect of a US attack.

Many Western observers dismissed the intelligence alert and the subsequent war scare because they considered its worst case scenario—surprise nuclear attack—as out of touch with reality or just plain irrational. They based their view more on their certainty that there was no objective threat of a US attack—Reagan was not Hitler, and America does not do Pearl Harbors—than on their uncertain understanding about how the Soviets saw things. While Western observers were half-right in questioning whether the Soviet war scare was “objective” or “rational,” they were half-wrong in writing it off as scare tactics. Even fear based on a false threat can create real dangers.

Paradoxically, viewing the Soviet war scare as nothing more than a scare tactic may have led the West to underestimate another threat—a

Soviet preemptive strike, either as a result of miscalculation or by design to reverse the adverse “correlation of forces.” Was this really a possibility? Some observers think so.¹¹⁶ For example, Gyula Horn, Hungary’s last Communist foreign minister (and current prime minister), claims that Soviet marshals, fortified with a little vodka, openly advocated an attack on the West “before the imperialists gain superiority in every sphere.”¹¹⁷ The evidence is anecdotal but plausible. Whether this threat was real is likely to remain one of the Cold War’s conundrums until or unless still classified documents someday provide an answer

¹¹⁶ See Lee, “The nuclear bnk that wasn’t – and the one that was,” for the “by design” view

¹¹⁷ Horn says he first heard this from a Soviet central committee official, he adds that his own experiences in Moscow convinced him it was true. See “Frühe Zweifel,” *Der Spiegel*, September 2, 1991, pp 110-111

Appendix A: RYAN and the Decline of the KGB

The much-vaunted KGB had become largely unable to recruit well-placed agents . . . Western and some Third World countries were expelling KGB officers in record numbers.

Operation RYAN revealed much about the KGB in the twilight years of Soviet intelligence. The picture that emerges from Oleg Gordievsky's writings as well as firsthand accounts by other ex-KGB officers is mixed. By the early 1980s the KGB was corrupt and ineffective. But it appears to have been less so than many other Soviet organizations.¹¹⁸ It was still regarded by Soviet leaders and other observers as an important arm of Soviet foreign policy.

Before being posted to London in June 1982, Gordievsky received a briefing on Operation RYAN from a KGB expert on NATO.¹¹⁹ The briefer paid lip service to the need to recruit "well-placed agents," but he emphasized that the principal method to be employed in RYAN was visual observation of "tell-tale indicators" such as lights burning in government offices and military installations late at night, VIP movements, and high-level committee meetings.

The message was clear, even if implicit: the much-vaunted KGB had become largely unable to recruit well-placed agents. Having KGB staff officers serving under official cover do their own spying, rather than recruiting agents to do it, violated basic rules of tradecraft. Lurking around well-guarded official installations during the night seemed almost certain to attract the attention of host-country security services.¹²⁰ The KGB's willingness to risk exposure of its officers in this way reflected the urgency of its search for ways to implement Operation RYAN.

Gordievsky and another ex-KGB officer, Yuri Shvets, note that the KGB in the 1980s was having particular difficulty acquiring agents in the United Kingdom and the United States.¹²¹ The spy organization's halcyon days of recruiting ideologically motivated agents worldwide were long gone.¹²² In the meantime, Western services were recruiting sizable numbers of KGB officers and receiving defectors who in turn identified other KGB officers and operations.¹²³ Western and some Third World countries were expelling KGB officers in record numbers; the peak year was 1983, when 147 intelligence officers, including 41 in France alone, were ousted for spying.¹²⁴

Some observers argue that the increased expulsions resulted from the high risks the KGB was taking to collect RYAN-related information. There may be something to this, but most of the expulsions in the early 1980s were part of a coordinated crackdown on Soviet intelligence operations designed to collect strategically important Western scientific information and technology.

Inability to recruit well-placed agents compelled the KGB to try to exploit its remaining advantages, such as the relative

¹¹⁸ In a review of Gordievsky's memoirs, Alasdair Palmer writes that the "most startling insight to emerge is not how effective the KGB was, but how bungling, incompetent, and idiotic." *Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 1995, p. A16.

¹¹⁹ Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, p. 584.

¹²⁰ Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *More Instructions from the Center: Top Secret Files on KGB Global Operations 1975-1985* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1991), p. 99.

¹²¹ Shvets claims that by the time he joined the KGB in the late 1970s, one could become a general without "ever having set eyes on a live agent." The main advantage of Soviet intelligence service resides in its newly acquired ability to exist with undercover agents," ran an old-timers' bitter joke. Shvets, *Washington Station*, p. 25.

¹²² Andrew and Gordievsky, *More Instructions from the Center*, p. 99.

¹²³ See Nigel West, *Games of Intelligence: The Classified Conflict of International Espionage* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), pp. 100-101, 145-146, and 195-196. Kalugin notes that, under the tutelage of Vladimir Kryuchkov, KGB foreign intelligence was more interested in palace intrigue than operational efficiency with the result that "in the late 1970s and into the 1980s, we became less aggressive in our battle with the CIA, while at the same time the number of KGB defectors soared." Kalugin, *The First Directorate*, p. 248.

¹²⁴ See Sallie Wise, "1983: A Bad Year for Soviet Diplomats," *Radio Liberty Research* RL 467/83 (December 9, 1990), pp. 1-4.

openness of Western nations and the still-large KGB staffs stationed in many of those countries. Operation RYAN was launched on the assumption that, if the United States did decide to attack the USSR, it would reveal that decision more or less openly—that is, through a variety of actions it could not conceal. The

troubles enumerated above also prompted the KGB to look at another advantage it still possessed: it could draw heavily on East Germany's formidable intelligence capabilities for help in implementing RYAN.

Appendix B: The Gordievsky File

Gordievsky was the primary—and for a long time the only—source of Western intelligence on RYAN.

Veteran KGB officer Oleg Gordievsky began spying for British intelligence in 1974 while stationed in Denmark. He was the primary—and for a long time the only—source of Western intelligence on RYAN. Two of his fellow ex-KGB officers, Oleg Kalugin and Yuri Shvets, later provided corroborating information.

Gordievsky went to London in June 1982 as deputy *rezident*. In early 1985 he was appointed *rezident*. Soon thereafter, based on information from American spy Aldrich Ames, Soviet counterintelligence recalled Gordievsky to Moscow on a pretext, put him under surveillance, and began interrogating him. In late July 1985, using a prearranged signal to British intelligence, he triggered a plan to exfiltrate himself from the USSR. He returned to London in September 1985. By this time he was the highest ranking Western penetration of Soviet intelligence.

The British soon acknowledged publicly that Gordievsky had been working for them, and he came under their protection. He became an informal adviser to Prime Minister Thatcher and President Reagan and played an important role in persuading them to take Mikhail Gorbachev seriously as a reform-oriented leader.

Despite Gordievsky's efforts to convince the West that the Soviet war scare and Gorbachev were both for real, some skeptics, who believed that he was peddling KGB disinformation aimed at influencing Western policy, question his trustworthiness. In addition, neither Gordievsky nor the British have ever offered a convincing explanation of his motives for betraying the KGB or the circumstances of his recruitment, and this too has prompted some observers to suspect his credibility and even his bona fides.¹²⁵ These

¹²⁵ In his various books and articles, Gordievsky repeatedly claims that his decision to spy was a reaction to the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. He does not explain, however, why it took him six years to make up his mind to approach British intelligence.

two issues—bona fides and credibility—are related but not identical. There were cases during the Cold War when a Soviet intelligence defector proved bona fide (that is, he was who he claimed to be and had access to the information he gave to Western intelligence), but also lied, fabricated, and exaggerated to please benefactors, ingratiate himself, inflate his value, protect himself, or protect his family if he had left one behind as Gordievsky did.

Many US analysts (including the author of this monograph) do not doubt Gordievsky's bona fides, and for the most part his credibility appears solid as well (see exceptions noted below). British intelligence debriefed him 150 times over a period of several months, taking 6,000 pages of notes that were reviewed by analysts.¹²⁶ Everything checked out, and no significant inaccuracies or inconsistencies were uncovered. Gordievsky's information before and after he defected led to the identification and expulsion of KGB officers, including 31 who were expelled from the United Kingdom after he was exfiltrated from Moscow.¹²⁷ In various books, articles, and interviews, moreover, he did inestimable damage to the KGB by revealing its officers, secrets, and operations and by damaging its reputation.

Gordievsky's track record, although good, is not entirely unblemished. In 1984, he told British intelligence about an alleged spy working at a British signals intercept site on Cyprus.¹²⁸ The authorities arrested eight

¹²⁶ David Leppard, "The man who panics the left," *Sunday Times* (London), February 26, 1995, p. 1.

¹²⁷ John Lee and Nicholas Daniloff, "Never Ending Spy Story Keeps Unfolding," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 30, 1985, p. 32.

¹²⁸ James Rusbridger, *The Intelligence Game: The Illusions and Delusions of International Espionage* (New York: New Amsterdam Press, 1989), pp. 102-104. Rusbridger believes that Gordievsky gave the British a KGB cover story designed to protect another source, either human or technical, at the Cyprus installation. He speculates that Gordievsky may have had doubts about the information, but wanted to please MI6.

President Reagan with ex-KGB officer Oleg Gordievsky. Gordievsky was the West's sole source of information on the Soviet war scare during the early 1980s.



British servicemen—five in the RAF and three in the army—and detained them for a year. Their four-month trial did not begin until after Gordievsky defected and arrived in London in 1985. The Crown's case then collapsed when Gordievsky's information proved wrong.

In several cases Gordievsky has displayed a tendency to shoot from the hip, making accusations about alleged Soviet agents that

Despite the somewhat mixed picture of Gordievsky that emerges from all this, his information on RYAN and the war scare seems accurate and objective.

were later amended or retracted.¹²⁹ In some instances these accusations served to help promote his publications. He became embroiled in a legal battle on the eve of the publication of his memoirs in 1995 when he erroneously charged that a UK Labour Party MP and a British publisher were Soviet agents. Because most of the people Gordievsky identified as Soviet agents were Labour Party leaders and/or leftists, he was accused of seeking to serve the interests of benefactors in the Conservative Party and conservative sympathizers in the intelligence and security services. Some Labour officials called for termination of his British pension.¹³⁰

British intelligence has used Gordievsky to reinforce its reputation at home and abroad. Some observers have said the British spy scandals of the 1950s and 1960s did lasting damage to confidence among Western intelligence and security services in their British counterparts. Gordievsky was welcome as living, breathing proof that MI6 was not penetrated and could run a long-term agent

safely and securely. A knowledgeable Conservative MP, Lord Bethell, has commented that the decision to exfiltrate Gordievsky from under the KGB's nose was motivated in part by a desire to demonstrate what British intelligence could do:

A successful operation would do wonders for MI6's credibility in the intelligence world and would leave Britain with a valuable "property," a storehouse of priceless information which even the CIA would find useful. It would impress the Americans, and this is something that British intelligence always likes to do.¹³¹

Despite the somewhat mixed picture of Gordievsky that emerges from all this, his information on RYAN and the war scare seems accurate and objective. His 1991 publication of RYAN cables with commentary underscored the credibility of the bulk of his debriefings. To date no one, either in the West or in the former Soviet Union, has challenged the authenticity of the cables and Gordievsky's account of Operation RYAN. Gordievsky may have exaggerated the gravity of the Soviet reaction to ABLE ARCHER 83 by comparing it to the Cuban missile crisis, but that was a matter of interpretation—intended no doubt to enhance the importance of his own role—rather than a question of fact.

¹²⁹ For example, Gordievsky asserted that President Franklin Roosevelt's close friend and adviser, Harry Hopkins, was a Soviet agent. The allegation was used to promote the US edition of his book on the KGB and a large excerpt from the book that appeared in *Time*, which featured the Hopkins story in a textbox. See *Time*, October 22, 1990, pp 72-82, the textbox is on p 72. Gordievsky later withdrew the allegation, saying that Hopkins was an "unwitting" asset, not a recruited agent, and that his original statement was "probably a simplification." See *Larry King Live*, Transcript # 160, October 30, 1990. Hopkins' son Robert and Pamela Harrman (later US Ambassador to France) rebutted Gordievsky in letters to *Time*. See *Time*, November 12, 1990, p 12. Author Verne W. Newton charged Gordievsky with using McCarthyite tactics to smear Hopkins and to promote his book. See "A Soviet Agent? Harry Hopkins?," *New York Times*, October 28, 1990, p 19.

¹³⁰ Leppard, "The man who panics the left."

¹³¹ Bethell, *Spies and Other Secrets*, p 188.

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