

An Intelligence Monograph

IT IS TIME THEY STOPPED

INVENTING NEW PLANS

ON HOW TO UNLEASH

NUCLEAR WAR

YURI ANDERSON

THEY ARE THE FOCUS

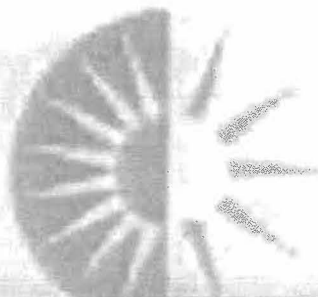
OF SWINDLING HIS MODERN

WORLD

KONSTANTIN PALAMIN

# A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare

by Ben B. Fischer



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*by Ben B. Fischer*

The views expressed in this study are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Central Intelligence Agency or any other government entity.



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- [REDACTED]
- 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.*

## 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 unflinching characteristics, of a march toward war—that and nothing else.”<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.”<sup>3</sup> Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov responded by calling the US President insane and a liar.<sup>4</sup> Then things got nasty.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> Moscow repeatedly accused

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *Time* magazine’s “Man of the Year” issue for 1984 provides a good summary of the issues and atmospheres 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.

[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.<sup>7</sup> Expressed in Soviet terms, the "correlation of world forces" between the US and the USSR was seen as turning inexorably against the latter.<sup>8</sup>

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

<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>10</sup> 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

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> RYAN is the acronym for *raketno-yademoye 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."

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

#### **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

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

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November 1981**

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

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.<sup>23</sup>

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."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

**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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> These

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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.)

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**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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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.<sup>35</sup>

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 forcewide combat readiness and other war preparations in the USSR" apparently meant that the Kremlin did not believe war was imminent or inevitable.<sup>36</sup> The "war scare" was more propaganda than threat perception, according to this assessment.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> 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.)

<sup>36</sup> 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.

<sup>37</sup> 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."<sup>38</sup>

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

<sup>38</sup> 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.)

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

**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.<sup>42</sup>

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.<sup>43</sup>

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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

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."<sup>47</sup> The alert was designed to give Moscow a "period of anticipation essential . . . to take retaliatory measures. Otherwise, reprisal time would be extremely limited."<sup>48</sup>

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

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

<sup>45</sup> 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 II's. Western estimates used the same numbers.

<sup>46</sup> 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.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew and Gordievsky in *Instructions from the Center*, p. 74.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

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

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*

<sup>52</sup> 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.

<sup>53</sup> See "Observation of Extreme Rightists To Be Improved," *Süddeutsche 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 resources of our alliance were not sufficient to match this.*<sup>54</sup> [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."<sup>55</sup> 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."<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> The HVA ordered agents in West German ministries, agencies, and defense firms to be on the lookout for technical breakthroughs in weapons research.<sup>58</sup> These agents were

<sup>54</sup> 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.

<sup>55</sup> 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.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Wolf, *Spionage Chef im geheimen Krieg*, p. 331.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Siebenmorgen, "Staatsicherheit" 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.

**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.**

**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.**

### **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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup>

### **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."<sup>66</sup> 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."<sup>67</sup>

Andropov's remarks were unprecedented.<sup>68</sup> 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 worned.

<sup>63</sup> 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.

<sup>64</sup> See "Start in ein besseres Leben," *Der Spiegel*, August 10, 1992, p. 54.

<sup>65</sup> Siebenmorgen, "Staatssicherheit" der DDR, p. 155.

<sup>66</sup> 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.

<sup>67</sup> "Replies of Yu. V. Andropov to questions from a Pravda correspondent," *Pravda*, March 27, 1983.

<sup>68</sup> 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.

### 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."<sup>73</sup>

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.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup>

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.<sup>76</sup> 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

<sup>73</sup> Hersh, "The Target is Destroyed," p. 161

<sup>74</sup> 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.

<sup>75</sup> 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.)

<sup>76</sup> 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.



*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.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> 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

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

several overflights.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup>

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:

<sup>80</sup> 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.

<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup>

- President Reagan's decision to use the KAL 007 shootdown to persuade Congress to support his requests for increased defense

<sup>82</sup> 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.

<sup>83</sup> 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.

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.*<sup>86</sup> [emphasis added]

The ABLE ARCHER story has been told and retold by journalists with inside contacts in the White House and Whitehall.<sup>87</sup> 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.<sup>88</sup>

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.<sup>89</sup> In addition, US sources reported that Soviet fighter aircraft with nuclear weapons at bases in East Germany and Poland were placed on alert.<sup>90</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, Dobrynin, who argues

<sup>86</sup> 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: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), pp. 471-478, for an account of ABLE ARCHER and Gordievsky's 1985 post-defection briefing of President Reagan.

<sup>87</sup> 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."

<sup>88</sup> Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, p. 67.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>91</sup> Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 139, n. 160.



**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.”<sup>96</sup>

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.<sup>97</sup>

### 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.<sup>98</sup>

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

<sup>97</sup> See note 38.

<sup>98</sup> 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.

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.<sup>99</sup> 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

<sup>99</sup> 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.

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

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.

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<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup> He did so because he was convinced that such sources could be

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<sup>104</sup> 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.

<sup>105</sup> 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.

<sup>106</sup> 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.

### More Than Just a Scare Tactic

The following remarks were made by former Soviet Foreign Ministry official Sergeï 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.<sup>112</sup>*

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."<sup>113</sup>

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"<sup>114</sup> 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.<sup>115</sup> 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

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

<sup>114</sup> Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 523

<sup>115</sup> 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 residencies. See Bill Gertz, "KGB halts lookout for U.S. nuclear attack," *Washington Times*, November 28, 1991, p. A9

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

## Appendix A: RYAN and the Decline of the KGB

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.<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup> The briefer paid lipservice 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.<sup>120</sup> 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.

<sup>118</sup> 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.

<sup>119</sup> Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, p. 584.

<sup>120</sup> 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.

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.<sup>121</sup> The spy organization's halcyon days of recruiting ideologically motivated agents worldwide were long gone.<sup>122</sup> In the meantime, Western services were recruiting sizable numbers of KGB officers and receiving defectors who in turn identified other KGB officers and operations.<sup>123</sup> 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.<sup>124</sup>

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

<sup>121</sup> 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.

<sup>122</sup> Andrew and Gordievsky, *More Instructions from the Center*, p. 99.

<sup>123</sup> 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.

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

*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.*

## Appendix B: The Gordievsky File

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.<sup>125</sup> These

<sup>125</sup> 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.<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup> 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.<sup>128</sup> The authorities arrested eight

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

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

<sup>128</sup> 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.

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were later amended or retracted.<sup>129</sup> 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.<sup>130</sup>

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

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<sup>129</sup> 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 Harriman (later US Ambassador to France) rebutted Gordievsky in letters to *Time*. See *Time*, November 12, 1990, p 12. Author Verna 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.

<sup>130</sup> Leppard, "The man who panics the left."

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.<sup>131</sup>

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.

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<sup>131</sup> Bethell, *Spies and Other Secrets*, p 188

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