

~~SECRET~~ UMBRA GAMMA
WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON



The Soviet "War Scare"

President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board

February 15, 1990

DECLASSIFIED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE
INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL,
E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)

ISCAP APPEAL NO. 2013-015, document no. 1
DECLASSIFICATION DATE: October 14, 2015

Classified by Multiple Sources
Declassify OADR

PFIAB Control # 1-90
Copy # 5

DECLASSIFIED IN PART
PER E.O. 13526

2012-0238-MR
SCS 10/14/15

WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON
~~TOP SECRET~~ UMBRA GAMMA

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA GAMMA~~
WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON

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

Mikhail Gorbachev
February 1986

WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON
~~TOP SECRET UMBRA GAMMA~~

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

PART I: U.S. Handling of the "War Scare": The Estimative
Process

Early Perceptions of the Soviet War Scare

British Assessment

U.S. Perceptions Entrenched

An Alternative Opinion

The Rebuttal

New Information

Perceptions Evolve. . .

But Doubts Remain

The Last Word

The Record Muddied

Conclusions: The Estimative Process

And Unfinished Business. . .

PART II: The Soviet "War Scare"

Introduction

Origins of the Scare

Vulnerability of Soviet Nuclear Forces to a US
Surprise Attack

Soviet Analysis of the US-USSR Strategic Balance

The "War Scare"

Late 1970's: Changing Soviet Perceptions of US
Intentions

1980: Heightened Concern

1981: Reducing Vulnerabilities

1982: Strategic Preparations

1983: Nearing the Precipice

Growing Pessimism, Additional
Precautions

Mounting Tensions

~~TOP SECRET~~ UMBRA GAMMA
WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON

Able Archer 83

1983-1984: Winter of Crisis

Summer 1984: Preparations for War

Autumn 1984: Reason Restored

The Legacy

Implications for Today

This document is classified ~~TOP SECRET/UMBRA/GAMMA/WNINTEL/~~
~~NOFORN/NOCONTRACT/ORCON~~ in its entirety.

WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON
~~TOP SECRET~~ UMBRA GAMMA

Executive Summary

From the late 1970's to the mid-1980's, the military forces and intelligence services of the Soviet Union were redirected in ways that suggested that the Soviet leadership was seriously concerned about the possibility of a sudden strike launched by the United States and its NATO allies. These changes were accompanied by leadership statements -- some public, but many made in secret meetings -- arguing that the US was seeking strategic superiority in order to be able to launch a nuclear first strike. These actions and statements are often referred to as the period of the "war scare."

The changes in Soviet military and intelligence arrangements included: improvements of Warsaw Pact combat readiness (by recalling reservists, lengthening service times, increasing draft ages, and abolishing many draft deferments), an unprecedented emphasis on civil defense exercises, an end of military support for gathering the harvest (last seen prior to the 1968 Czech invasion), the forward deployment of unusual numbers of SPETSNAZ forces, increased readiness of Soviet ballistic missile submarines and forward deployed nuclear capable aircraft, massive military exercises that for the first time emphasized surviving and responding to a sudden enemy strike, a new agreement among Warsaw Pact countries that gave Soviet leaders authority in the event of an attack to unilaterally commit Pact forces, creation within the GRU of a new directorate to run networks of illegal agents abroad, an urgent KGB (and some satellite services') requirement that gave the highest priority the gathering of politico-military indicators of US/NATO preparations for a sudden nuclear attack, establishment of a special warning condition to alert Soviet forces that a surprise enemy strike using weapons of mass destruction was in progress, and the creation of a special KGB unit to manage a

computer program (the VRYAN model) that would objectively measure the correlation of forces and warn when Soviet relative strength had declined to the point that a preemptive Soviet attack might be justified.

During the November 1983 NATO "Able Archer" nuclear release exercise, the Soviets implemented military and intelligence activities that previously were seen only during actual crises. These included: placing Soviet air forces in Germany and Poland on heightened alert,

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

The meaning of these events obviously was of crucial importance to American and NATO policymakers. If they were simply parts of a Soviet propaganda campaign designed to intimidate the US, deter it from deploying improved weapons, and arouse US domestic opposition to foreign policy initiatives, then they would not be of crucial significance. If they reflected an internal Soviet power struggle -- for example, a contest between conservatives and pragmatists, or an effort to avoid blame for Soviet economic failures by pointing to (exaggerated) military threats -- then they could not be ignored, but they would not imply a fundamental change in Soviet strategy. But if these events were expressions of a genuine belief on the part of Soviet leaders that the US was planning a nuclear first strike, causing the Soviet military to prepare for such an eventuality -- by, for example, readying itself for a preemptive strike of its own -- then the "war scare" was a cause for real concern.

During the past year, the President's Foreign Intelligence

Advisory Board has carefully reviewed the events of that period to learn what we (the U.S. intelligence community) knew, when we knew it, and how we interpreted it. The Board has read hundreds of documents, conducted more than 75 interviews with American and British officials, and studied the series of National Intelligence Estimates (NIE's) and other intelligence assessments that have attempted over the last six years to interpret the war scare data. Additionally, we have offered our own interpretation of the war scare events.

We believe that the Soviets perceived that the correlation of forces had turned against the USSR, that the US was seeking military superiority, and that the chances of the US launching a nuclear first strike -- perhaps under cover of a routine training exercise -- were growing. We also believe that the US intelligence community did not at the time, and for several years afterwards, attach sufficient weight to the possibility that the war scare was real. As a result, the President was given assessments of Soviet attitudes and actions that understated the risks to the United States. Moreover, these assessments did not lead us to reevaluate our own military and intelligence actions that might be perceived by the Soviets as signaling war preparations.

In two separate Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIE's) in May and August of 1984, the intelligence community said: "We believe strongly that Soviet actions are not inspired by, and Soviet leaders do not perceive, a genuine danger of imminent conflict or confrontation with the United States." Soviet statements to the contrary were judged to be "propaganda."

The Board believes that the evidence then did not, and certainly does not now, support such categorical conclusions. Even without the benefit of subsequent reporting and looking at the 1984 analysis of then available information, the tone of the intelligence judgments was not adequate to the needs of the President.

A strongly stated interpretation was defended by explaining away facts inconsistent with it and by failing to subject that interpretation to a comparative risk assessment. In time, analysts' views changed. In an annex to a February 1988 NIE, analysts declared: "During the late 1970's and early 1980's there were increasing Soviet concerns about the drift in superpower relations, which some in the Soviet leadership felt indicated an increased threat of war and increased likelihood of the use of nuclear weapons. These concerns were shaped in part by a Soviet perception that the correlation of forces was shifting against the Soviet Union and that the United States was taking steps to achieve military superiority." The Soviets' VRYAN program was evaluated as part of an effort to collect data and subject it to computer analysis in a way that would warn the USSR when the US had achieved decisive military superiority.

Reporting from a variety of 25X1, E.O.13526 sources, including Oleg Gordiyevskiy (a senior KGB officer who once served as second in command in the London Residency and who has since defected to Great Britain), taken as a whole, strongly indicates that there was in fact a genuine belief among key members of the Soviet leadership that the United States had embarked on a program of achieving decisive military superiority that might prompt a sudden nuclear missile attack on the USSR.

Although some details of that belief became known only recently, there was at the time evidence -- from secret directives and speeches by Soviet authorities -- that a major change in Soviet political and strategic thinking had probably occurred. For example, we knew by 1984 at the latest that a Soviet general had interpreted President Carter's PD-59 as preparing US strategic forces for a preemptive strike, that the Head of the KGB's First Chief Directorate, General Kryuchkov had told key subordinates that the KGB must work to prevent the US from launching a surprise attack, that KGB and Czechoslovak intelligence Residencies had been

tasked to gather information on US preparations for war, and that missile submarines had been placed on shortened readiness times.

Many of these facts were summarized in a memorandum from the National Intelligence Officer for Warning (NIO/W) to DCI William Casey in June 1984, a memo that Casey then forwarded to the President.

25X1, E.O.13526

Neither the NIO/W nor the [redacted] altered the official position of the intelligence community as expressed in the May 1984 SNIE and as reasserted, in almost identical language, in the August 1984 SNIE.

Analysts will always have legitimate disagreements over the meaning of inevitably incomplete and uncertain intelligence reports. Moreover, part of the confidence that PFIAB has in its own assessment of the war scare derives from information not known at the time. Our purpose in presenting this report is not so much to criticize the conclusions of the 1984 SNIE's as to raise questions about the ways these estimates were made and subsequently reassessed.

In cases of great importance to the survival of our nation, and especially where there is important contradictory evidence, the Board believes that intelligence estimates must be cast in terms of alternative scenarios that are subjected to comparative risk assessments. This is the critical defect in the war scare episode. By "alternative scenarios," we mean a full statement of each major, possible interpretation of a set of intelligence indicators. In this case, these scenarios might have included the following:

1. Soviet leaders had not changed their strategic thinking but were attempting by means of propoganda and intelligence deceptions to slow the US military build-up, prevent the deployment of

new weapons, and isolate the US from its allies.

2. Soviet leaders may or may not have changed their strategic thinking, but a power struggle among Kremlin factions and the need to deflect blame for poor economic conditions made it useful to exaggerate the military intentions and capabilities of the US.

3. Soviet leaders had changed their strategic thinking and, in fact, believed that the US was attempting to gain decisive strategic superiority in order, possibly, to launch a nuclear first strike.

By "comparative risk assessment," we mean assigning two kinds of weights to each scenario: one that estimates the probability that the scenario is correct and another that assesses the risk to the United States if it wrongly rejects a scenario that is, in fact, correct.

In 1984, one might reasonably have given the highest probability of being correct to the first or second scenario (even though, as we argue in this report, we believe that would have been an error). But having done this, it would surely have been clear even then that if the third scenario was in fact correct and we acted as if it were wrong, the risks to the United States would have been very great -- greater than if we had rejected a correct first or second scenario. As it happened, the military officers in charge of the Able Archer exercise minimized this risk by doing nothing in the face of evidence that parts of the Soviet armed forces were moving to an unusual level of alert. But these officers acted correctly out of instinct, not informed guidance, for in the years leading up to Able Archer they had received no guidance as to the possible significance of apparent changes in Soviet military and political thinking.

By urging that some major estimates be based on a comparative

assessment of fully developed alternative scenarios, we are not arguing for "competitive analyses" or greater use of dissenting opinions. An intelligence estimate is not the product of a governmental debating society in which institutional rivals try to outdo one another in their display of advocacy skills. We are arguing instead for adopting the view that since it is very hard to understand the present, much less predict the future, it is a mistake to act as if we can. On the most important issues, it is difficult if not impossible to say with confidence that we know what is happening or will happen. We can, however, say that there are a small number of possibilities, each of which has a (rough) probability and each of which presents to the policymaker likely risks and opportunities.

When analysts attempt to arrive at a single strong conclusion, they not only run the risk of being wrong, they run two additional and perhaps more worrisome risks. They are likely to underestimate the possibility of change (the safest prediction is always that tomorrow will be like today) and they are likely to rely on mirror-imaging (our adversaries think the way we do). In this era of unprecedented, breakneck change, the first error grows in importance. And since we cannot know what individuals will next hold power in the USSR or when, it is an especially grave error to assume that since we know the US is not going to start World War III, the next leaders of the Kremlin will also believe that -- and act on that belief.

In short, our criticism of the 1984 SNIE's, though in part substantive, is in larger part procedural. We do not think there is any simple organizational change that will correct that procedure. If strategic intelligence estimates are to give policymakers a better sense of risks and opportunities, it will only happen if policymakers insist that that is what they want and refuse to accept anything less.

This review of the war scare period also suggests another lesson. It is quite clear to the Board that during the critical years when the Kremlin was reassessing US intentions, the US intelligence community did not react quickly to or think deeply about the early signs of that change. The war scare indicators began appearing in the early 1980's; the first estimate to address this was not written until 1984. At the time it was written, the US knew very little about Kremlin decisionmaking.

25X1, E.O.13526

the SNIE authors wrote confidently about "Soviet leadership intentions."

We recommend that the National Security Council oversee a reassessment of the intelligence community's understanding of Soviet military and political decisionmaking, both in general terms and in light of the judgments made in the 1984 estimates. Our own leadership needs far better intelligence reporting on and assessments of the mindset of the Soviet leadership -- its ideological/political instincts and perceptions. As part of this reassessment, it should exploit the current opening in the Iron Curtain to interview past and present East Bloc and Soviet officials about the sources and consequences of the war scare in order to obtain a better understanding of the perceptions and inner conflicts of Soviet decisionmakers.

Finally, we suggest that the US review the way in which it manages military exercises, its own intelligence collection efforts,

25X1, E.O.13526

to insure that these are carried out in a way that is responsive to indications and warning for war.

In 1983 we may have inadvertently placed our relations with the Soviet Union on a hair trigger. Though the current thaw in US-Soviet relations suggests that neither side is likely in the near

term to reach for that trigger, events are moving so fast that it would be unwise to assume that Soviet leaders will not in the future act, from misunderstanding or malevolence, in ways that puts the peace in jeopardy.

PART I US HANDLING OF THE "WAR SCARE": THE
ESTIMATIVE PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

The Board has divided its presentation into two parts. The first (Part One) deals with a review of what the US (and the British) thought about the war scare both at the time and subsequently. It also summarizes some of the key characteristics of the estimative process and offers our conclusions for improvement. The second half (Part Two) summarizes the evidence that leads to the conclusion that the Soviet leadership genuinely developed a "war scare" in the early 1980's. We believe this to be a plausible version of events based upon new information as well as a reconsideration of evidence known then. Inevitably, there is some duplication between the two parts, but this is necessary in order to tell the story in an orderly way.

Part One, then, is a summation of what we knew, when we knew it, and how we interpreted it. It is not a competitive estimate. Rather than catalog the actual events in detail, we chose to summarize them and to focus instead on how the intelligence community reacted, as manifested in its analysis. Our conclusions mirror our profound dismay at what we believe to be the intelligence community's single largest failing -- the failure to provide policymakers with an adequate understanding of the risks and consequences associated with alternate scenarios involving uncertain events of grave import.

There were many other directions that we, given unlimited time, would have liked to embark. Intelligence issues that impacted upon our review of the war scare are identified in the

final section of Part One. We regret that these important issues received short shrift; we encourage a complete review of them so that US indications and warning might be improved as we enter into the evermore complex, polycentric, and uncertain 1990's.

EARLY PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOVIET "WAR SCARE"

As the Carter years wound to a close, America's bilateral relationship with the USSR was on the downswing from the earlier detente. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan brought bitter NATO condemnation, and SALT II languished unratified. As the new Republican Administration took up the reins, President Reagan announced in his State of the Union speech a major peacetime military buildup. By May 1981, the "era of self-doubt," personified by the failed Iran hostage rescue attempt, had ended. United States foreign policy took on a new assertiveness: President Reagan declared that arms control treaties were no substitute for military preparedness and characterized the Soviet Union as an "evil force," the antithesis of the US. Soviet meddling in Afghanistan, Poland, Central America, and elsewhere increasingly proved a constant irritant to the new Administration, and seemed only to reinforce its "get tough" posture.

Recriminations flew between Moscow and Washington, and relations continued to slide. As the Administration settled into its first term, an intense "war scare" theme began to emerge in the Soviet media and in private fora, accompanied by anomalous and often provocative USSR behavior.

At first, such activity was easily dismissed as predictable Soviet responses to US efforts to deploy INF missiles in Europe in order to counter Soviet SS-20's and to modernize its strategic and conventional forces. United States officials understandably were suspicious of Soviet motivations as Washington struggled to gain public support in Western Europe and in the US for these force

improvements.¹

In 1983, Soviet rhetoric had sharpened. Moscow had accused President Reagan and his advisors of "madness," "extremism," and "criminality" in the conduct of relations with the USSR. The United States was portrayed as a nation singularly pursuing a first-strike nuclear capability as a prelude to eradicating communism. Westerners, including some well-known experts on the Soviet Union, reported alarming conversations with Soviet citizens and officials that indicated a large portion of the Soviet population believed nuclear war was dangerously close. As diplomatic relations ebbed to near a postwar low, US analysts attributed Soviet anxieties and belligerence to a number of factors: initiation of INF deployments; a strong US posture in the START talks; US action in Grenada; deployment of Marines in Lebanon; US aid to insurgencies against Soviet client regimes; the Reagan Administration's perceived political "exploitation" of the KAL shutdown; and the Administration's perceived unwillingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Soviet regime or to treat the Kremlin with the "superpower" deference it desired.²

Moreover, US analysts concluded that certain developments could have heightened Moscow's uncertainties about its long-term geostrategic position:

- o A possible adverse shift in the overall strategic balance, precipitated by resolute US moves to significantly bolster its strategic posture as well as its conventional capabilities.

¹US officials detected a vigorous Soviet "active measures" campaign intended to thwart US strategic objectives.

²Grey Hodnett's memorandum of Dec. 22, 1983, entitled "Soviet Thinking on the Possibility of Armed Confrontation with the United States," Foreign Policy Issues Branch, Policy Analysis Division, Office of Soviet Analysis, Central Intelligence Agency.

o The perceived lower priority accorded by the Reagan Administration to arms control negotiations, as "evidenced" by its unwillingness to accommodate Soviet interests and its apparent intention to proceed with weapons programs Moscow may have thought were on hold.

o The end of the "Vietnam syndrome" and readiness of Washington to use force once again in the Third World, either by supporting insurgencies against Soviet client regimes, as in Nicaragua, or acting directly, as in Lebanon and Grenada.³

Although US analysts aptly identified signs of emotional and paranoid Soviet behavior and offered an analysis of the potential causes, they reasoned that Moscow was fundamentally concerned not about any hypothetical near-term US nuclear attack, but about possible shifts in the strategic balance five-to-ten years hence. It was easy to distrust the USSR, they reasoned, because Soviet leaders had many plausible motives for trying to cleverly manipulate Western perceptions:

o To foster the "peace movement" in Western Europe so as to derail INF deployments and encourage neutrality within NATO.

o To portray President Reagan as an incompetent warmonger so as to deepen cleavages among nations in the West.

o To increase public pressure in the United States for providing a more conciliatory posture toward the USSR via lower defense spending, arms control concessions, and less "interventionist" policies.

Analysts also estimated that, for the Soviets, the Reagan Administration was the "least loved of any US Administration since

³Ibid.

that of President Truman." It would be just like them to try to "undercut the President's reelection prospects."⁴ Thus, the abnormal, emotional Soviet behavior could be, and was, viewed essentially in political terms in minor analytical products.

At the same time, US analysts often tended to characterize Soviet leadership decisionmaking as rational, even omnipotent. United States intelligence clearly did not have sufficient sources to derive a precise picture of the Kremlin's decisionmaking process, nor did it have a thorough understanding of the aging leadership's strengths and weaknesses. United States analysts, nevertheless, described Soviet policy as "driven by prudent calculation of interests and dogged pursuit of long-term objectives, even in the face of great adversity, rather than by sudden swells of fear or anger." Furthermore, analysts concluded that, "However disturbed Soviet policymakers might be by the Reagan Administration, they also have a sense of the USSR's strengths and of [US] vulnerabilities . . . the perception from the Kremlin is by no means one of unrelieved gloom." Moscow's economic problems, while described as "taut," were judged not likely to deter them from accelerating the pace of military spending to challenge the US.⁵

Undeterred by what was termed the "Soviet propaganda campaign" and very concerned about the threat posed by the large numbers of SS-20 deployments, America continued to firm up her defenses by, for example, deploying cruise missiles and Pershings in Europe, adopting a forward-based military strategy, embarking on a path of force modernization and improved readiness, and invigorating a strong "continuity in government" strategy designed to protect US leadership during a nuclear exchange.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

As the second Reagan/Bush campaign swung into high gear, US intelligence analysts began to compile solid evidence from within the Soviet bureaucracy of growing concern about nuclear war:

o In a briefing to Soviet and East European officials in the fall of 1983, a Soviet diplomat warned that the world was on the brink of war.

o Immediately following Brezhnev's death, KGB and GRU Residencies in Soviet missions abroad received orders to monitor US installations for indications of US military mobilization.

o Shortly after the second inauguration, Moscow enjoined KGB Residencies worldwide to work to detect any sign that the United States and its allies were about to unleash a first strike on the USSR. Already in mid-1981, reporting on possible US preparations to launch a first strike had been added to KGB collection requirements worldwide. In early 1983, Moscow warned KGB residencies that the United States was positioning itself for war.

o In early 1983, Soviet military intelligence, the GRU, created a new directorate to organize and manage "illegal" agent networks worldwide. The urgency of this move reportedly reflected perceptions of an increased threat of war. [redacted]

[redacted] working-level officers treated the subject of wartime confrontation seriously, because they believed war could break out at any moment. [redacted]

[redacted] while preparedness for war was not a new notion, it had taken on a sense of urgency not seen in the past. Directives from GRU Headquarters constantly reminded field elements to prepare for war. As a result, all Residency operations were geared to work under both peacetime and wartime conditions.

o

[redacted] 25X1, E.O.13526 [redacted]

[25X1, E.O.13526] had been tasked with obtaining information on a major NATO exercise (believed to be Able Archer 83). This order reportedly followed from a high-priority requirement [25X1, E.O.13526] by Moscow a year before to look for any indication of US preparations for a nuclear first strike. Warsaw Pact leaders reportedly were convinced that the Reagan Administration was actively preparing for nuclear war and was capable of launching such an attack.

[25X1, E.O.13526]

By the fall of 1983, the beat of Soviet "war scare" drums was almost lost in the cacophony of the international thunderstorm. Massive demonstrations erupted in Germany and other NATO countries to protest the INF deployments. The Soviets shot down KAL-007; the Marine barracks in Beirut was bombed; and the US invaded Grenada.

Against this backdrop, NATO held its annual command post exercise to practice nuclear release procedures in early November, 1983. This recurring exercise, known as Able Archer, included NATO forces from Turkey to England. Although past Able Archer exercises were monitored by Soviet intelligence, the reaction by Warsaw Pact military forces and intelligence services to the 1983 exercise was unprecedented. Air armies in East Germany and Poland were placed on alert.

[25X3, E.O.13526] Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

At the same time, the Soviets conducted significantly more reconnaissance flights than in previous years, and sent special intelligence requirements to KGB

and GRU Residencies in western countries to report any unusual military activity that might signal an impending NATO surprise attack.

This abnormal Soviet behavior to the annual, announced Able Archer 83 exercise sounded no alarm bells in the US Indications and Warning system. United States commanders on the scene were not aware of any pronounced superpower tension, and the Soviet activities were not seen in their totality until long after the exercise was over. For example, while the US detected a "heightened readiness" among some Soviet air force divisions, the extent of the alert as well [redacted] 25X3, E.O.13526 [redacted]

[redacted] was not known until two weeks had passed after the completion of the exercise. The Soviet air force standdown had been in effect for nearly a week before fully armed MIG-23 aircraft were noted on air defense alert in East Germany.

Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

There were plenty of reasons why the Soviet military response to Able Archer was missed; there was no context by which to judge the behavior. First, Moscow's "war scare" activity was not yet the focus of intelligence or policy attention. Additionally, Soviet intelligence requirements against the exercise, [redacted]

25X1, E.O.13526

[redacted] were not learned until long [redacted] Moreover, the air standdown was not at first perceived abnormally because it occurred during the Soviet Revolution holiday; about midway through the exercise, [redacted]

Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

25X3, E.O.13526

[redacted] Despite the late-developing information, the intelligence community evaluated the Soviet response as unusual but not militarily significant. Analysts reasoned that more indicators should have been detected if the Soviets were seriously concerned about a NATO

attack.⁶

But beyond the puzzling Soviet reaction to the Able Archer 83 exercise, US analysts, by spring of 1984, had also detected a clear trend: Soviet forces, over the past decade, had "made an effort to respond more rapidly to the threat of war and to develop the capability to manage all aspects of a nuclear war."⁷ In fact, Soviet exercise activity in 1983 highlighted "the continued testing of concepts necessary for avoiding surprise attack" Common to all these exercises were the themes of continued concern over force readiness and vulnerability to attack; ensuring that dispersal and launch orders were complied with; and testing what previously had been paper or small-scale wartime concepts under actual operational conditions using larger numbers of forces. Analysts estimated that the attainment of the above objectives could increase the Soviet military's capability to respond quickly to an enemy surprise attack or launch an attack of their own.

BRITISH ASSESSMENT

By March, 1984, the issue of the war scare broke into Allied relationships.

25X1, E.O.13526

⁶In fact, a potentially dangerous analytic assumption was also apparently at work. Despite indications of increased readiness with some units, other units upon which no positive intelligence existed regarding readiness were assumed to have not increased readiness.

⁷SNIE 11-10-84 "Implications of Recent Military-Political Activities."

25X1, E.O.13526

Despite -- or perhaps because of -- its disturbing message,

25X1, E.O.13526

the [] report was not well received in the US intelligence community []

[] Additionally, some officials in the British Ministry of Defense were also skeptical.

The British Foreign Ministry, however, was sure that something was amiss. The British Ambassador to the US paid a visit to the State Department's Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Lawrence Eagleburger, to discuss the issue. But according to the responsible briefing official from State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), INR's position at the time (and thus State's position) was that the Soviets were pursuing a massive propaganda campaign. The INR officer presented to Eagleburger a skeptical version of events, designed, in his words, to "discourage the British." The British case apparently was not helped by the Ambassador's presentation; he was not entirely clear about events, and his intelligence aide most familiar with the war scare was out of country. There was even suspicion in some American quarters that the Foreign Office was simply capitalizing on a good political occasion to force President Reagan to tone down his rhetoric and delay deployments of the INF missiles. Thus, the Foreign Office's expressions of worry fell on deaf ears.

US PERCEPTIONS ENTRENCHED

In May 1984, US intelligence addressed for the first time in a national estimate the possibility that the Soviets were fearful of a preemptive first US nuclear strike -- a full six months after the Able Archer NATO exercise. Despite the evidence of secret directives and speeches by Soviet authorities to prepare for sudden nuclear attack and of unique Soviet military activities,

25X1, E.O.13526

the issue was not treated as an evolutionary process. In fact, several intelligence officers told the Board that the estimate was undertaken essentially to explain a series of short-term abnormal events, rather than to examine the accumulated long-term reporting on the war scare. In the estimate's "Key Judgments," the intelligence community noted, "During the past several months, a number of coincident Soviet activities have created concern that they reflect abnormal Soviet fear of conflict with the United States, belligerent intent that might risk conflict, or some other underlying Soviet purpose." The "coincident" activities consisted of:

- o Large-scale military exercises -- including a major naval exercise in the Norwegian Sea, unprecedented SS-20 launch activity, and large-scale SSBN dispersal;
- o Preparations for air operations against Afghanistan;
- o Attempts to change the air corridor regime in Berlin;
- o New military measures described as responsive to NATO INF deployments; and
- o Shrill propaganda attributing a heightened danger of war to US behavior.

United States analysts categorically concluded: "We believe strongly that Soviet actions are not inspired by, and Soviet leaders do not perceive, a genuine danger of imminent conflict or confrontation with the United States. This judgment is based on the absence of force-wide combat readiness or other war preparation moves in the USSR, and the absence of a tone of fear or belligerence

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

(Underlining added.)⁹ The estimate boldly declared that "Recent Soviet war scare propaganda . . . is aimed primarily at discrediting US policies and mobilizing 'peace' pressures among various audiences abroad." In a more piecemeal fashion, it was judged that "Each Soviet action has its own military or political purpose sufficient to explain it." The accelerated tempo of Soviet live exercise activity was explained simply as a reflection of "long-term Soviet military objectives."

The Soviet reaction to Able Archer 83 was dismissed as a "counterexercise," but analysts acknowledged that the "elaborate Soviet reaction" was "somewhat greater than usual." [redacted]

[redacted] 25X1, E.O.13526

[redacted] the Warsaw Pact intelligence services, especially the KGB, were admonished "to look for any indication that the United States was about to launch a first nuclear strike," analysts concluded that "by confining heightened readiness to selected air units, Moscow clearly revealed that it did not, in fact, think there was a possibility at this time of a NATO attack." The assessment, however, was not specific about what type of defensive or precautionary Soviet activity might be expected -- and detected -- were they preparing for an offensive NATO move. (Some intelligence officials have since told us that the West could very well have been witnessing a careful, deliberate Soviet defensive posturing designed to achieve improved readiness for attack, while not simultaneously escalating tensions.)

As for leadership instability, again analysts rejected the hypothesis that weak central leadership could account for Soviet actions. While acknowledging that either a Soviet military or

⁹The commentary did note that [redacted] [redacted] but neglected to explain that we had not seen a "force-wide" Soviet alert since World War II.

hard-line foreign policy faction could possibly exert more influence on a weak Chernenko, the experts concluded that this was not, in fact, happening. It is unclear what evidence for this conclusion was used, since the estimate admitted that there was inadequate information on "the current mind-set of the Soviet political leadership" and on "the ways in which military operations and foreign policy tactics may be influenced by political differences and the policy process in the Kremlin."

25X1, E.O.13526

Finally, analysts dismissed [redacted] [redacted] on the war scare, including the KGB's formal tasking to its Residencies. "This war scare propoganda has reverberated in Soviet security bureaucracies and emanated through other channels [redacted] We do not believe it reflects authentic leadership fears of imminent conflict." Instead, analysts viewed the Soviet talk about increased likelihood of nuclear war, as well as military actions, as designed to speak "with a louder voice" and show "firmness through a controlled display of muscle." Such judgments were made even though the analysis was tempered "by some uncertainty as to current Soviet leadership perceptions of the United States, by continued uncertainty about the Politburo decisionmaking processes, and by our inability at this point to conduct a detailed examination of how the Soviets might have assessed recent US/NATO military exercises and reconnaissance operations" -- which, of course, included the previous Able Archer exercise. In other words, US analysts were unsure of what the Kremlin leadership thought or how it made decisions, nor had they adequately assessed the Soviet reaction to Able Archer 83. This notwithstanding, the estimate concluded: "We are confident that, as of now, the Soviets see not an imminent military clash but a costly and -- to some extent -- more perilous strategic and political struggle over the rest of the decade."

But these bets were hedged. Deep in the body of the assess-

ment, analysts conceded: "It is conceivable that the stridency of Soviet 'war scare' propaganda reflects a genuine Soviet worry about a near-future attack on them. This concern could be inspired by Soviet views about the depth of anti-Soviet intentions in Washington combined with elements of their own military doctrine projected onto the United States, such as the virtues of surprise, striking first, and masking hostile initiatives in exercises. Some political and military leaders have stressed the danger of war more forcefully than others, suggesting that there may have been differences on this score -- or at least how to talk about the issue -- over the past half year."

AN ALTERNATIVE OPINION

One month later, in June 1984, DCI Casey sent to the President a memorandum with a differing view of events. Uncertain whether the Soviets were preparing for a crisis or merely trying to influence events in the United States, Casey attached "a rather stunning array of indicators" of an "increasing aggressiveness in Soviet policy and activities." Prepared by the DCI's National Warning Staff, the events studied were described as "longer term" than those considered in the May NIE. In the Warning Staff's view, "the Soviets have concluded that the danger of war is greater and will grow with additional INF emplacements and that the reduced warning time inherent in Pershing II has lowered Soviet confidence in their ability to warn of sudden attack. These perceptions, perhaps driven by a building US defense budget, new initiatives in continental defense, improvements in force readiness, and a potentially massive space defense program may be propelling the USSR to take national readiness measures at a deliberate pace."

The indicators of abnormal Soviet behavior ranged in scope from domestic to international. They included:

- o Preparing Soviet citizens for war through civil defense activities and media broadcasts;

- o Tightening of security procedures against Westerners, such as increased travel restrictions and isolation from the Bloc populace;

- o Conducting political harassment;

- o Improving military logistic systems;

- o Shifting the economy more toward a wartime footing, such as terminating military support to the harvest, converting farm tractor plants to tank production, and reducing commercial aircraft production in favor of military transports;

- o Conducting out-of-the-ordinary military activities, such as delaying troop rotations, increasing deployments of SPETSNAZ forces, and expanding reservist call-ups, as well as extending active duty tours; and

- o Promulgating extraordinary intelligence directives for the purpose of warning.

Casey advised: "It is important to distinguish in this category those acts which are political blustering and those which may be, but also carry large costs . . . The military behaviors we have observed involve high military costs in terms of vulnerability of resources for the sake of improved national military power, or enhanced readiness at the price of consumer discontent, or enhanced readiness at the price of troop dissatisfaction. None of these are trivial costs, adding thereby a dimension of genuineness to the Soviet expressions of concern that is often not reflected in intelligence issuances."

According to former National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, President Reagan expressed surprise upon reading the Casey memorandum and described the events as "really scary." However, McFarlane himself was less convinced. He questioned Soviet motivations and wondered if their actions were part of an effort to drive a wedge in Europe to counter the Administration's SDI objectives. He also found it difficult to believe that the Soviets could actually fear a nuclear strike from the US, since he knew how preposterous that was. McFarlane wondered, if the war scare was real, why had the Soviets not raised it through diplomatic channels in Washington? (Yet, even the President's own personal emissary dispatched to Moscow months earlier with a message for Chernenko was frozen out of the Kremlin.)

On the other hand, McFarlane was "concerned" about reporting he had received from US citizens returning from the Soviet Union during the early 1980's. Many of them told of extreme Soviet paranoia over US intentions. In fact, one close friend who had visited Moscow said that the Soviets spoke of "going to general quarters" during the 1983 to 1984 time frame. McFarlane expressed surprise to us about the November 1983 Able Archer exercise; he could remember hearing nothing about it, including the Soviet [redacted] during his tenure at the National Security Council. (No President's Daily Brief during this period mentioned it either.)

In a memorandum to Director Casey in June 1984, McFarlane called for a new intelligence estimate that would develop hypotheses to "anticipate potential Soviet political or military challenges during the coming six months." Clearly, the Administration viewed the indicators of unusual Soviet activity in the context of "the utility to the Soviets of interfering in various geographic trouble spots." One month later, the Casey memorandum of indicators was leaked to the Washington Times. It was fully reported as "Russia at high level of battle readiness."

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1950,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

The following day, the Washington Times reported on a controversial split of opinion within military and intelligence circles over the significance of the Soviet behavior, saying CIA officials tended to downplay it.

THE REBUTTAL

Some officials on the National Intelligence Council were upset over the Casey memorandum. After all, they had just addressed the war scare in May through a fully coordinated SNIE that determined it was purely "propaganda." The Casey memorandum was not coordinated, refuted the SNIE, and yet had received Presidential attention.

By August 1984, the estimate called for by McFarlane was completed. Entitled "Soviet Policy Toward the United States in 1984," it was far more comprehensive than he initially requested. A "central concern" of the estimate was "the possibility of major Soviet initiatives to influence the November election," since "the motivation for Soviet policy . . . lies in the perception that the . . . current [US] Administration is a more consistently hostile opponent of the USSR's interests and aspirations than it has faced in many years." Thus, the Soviets could be expected to "combat and, if possible, deflect US policies, and create a more permissive environment in which Soviet relative military power and world influence can continue to grow."

The war scare, characterized in the SNIE as "hostile propaganda, which blames the United States for an increased danger of war and for diplomatic rigidity . . . is used to put the US Administration on the defensive where possible and to excite opposition to Washington's policies." In fact, such hostility toward the West was judged to serve Soviet leaders conveniently for "exhorting greater discipline, sacrifice, and vigilance on the Soviet home front" Analysts were, again, categorical in

their conclusion: "We strongly believe that Soviet actions are not inspired by, and Soviet leaders do not perceive, a genuine danger of imminent conflict or confrontation with the United States. Also, we do not believe that Soviet war talk and other actions 'mask' Soviet preparations for an imminent move toward confrontation on the part of the USSR." (Underlining added.)

While acknowledging that "there may be debates among Soviet leaders about tactics toward the United States," analysts asserted that "current Soviet policy . . . is based on consensus in the Politburo." In fact, there was "indirect evidence of Soviet leadership debate over future policy direction, largely in the form of varying lines on the danger of war. . . ." The estimate admonished that such debates should not be taken to indicate sharp controversy in the Politburo because "showdown situations" were avoided in order to protect the Kremlin's hold on power. Gorbachev was lumped with Romanov, Ogarkov, and Ligachev as differing "from their elders only in the belief that they can pursue traditional Soviet aims more skillfully and successfully at home and abroad."

Analysts readily acknowledged that the previous six months had seen extraordinary, unprecedented Soviet activities. Large scale military exercises, "anomalous behavior" during the troop rotation, withdrawn military support for the harvest (last seen prior to the 1968 Czech invasion), new, deployed weapons systems (termed "in response to INF deployments"), and heightened internal vigilance and security activities were noted. These events, however, were judged to be "in line with long-evolving plans and patterns, rather than with sharp acceleration of preparations for a major war."

The NIE authors professed high confidence in the intelligence community's ability to detect widespread logistics, supply, and defense-economic preparations obligated by Soviet war doctrine and

operational requirements. Such indicators, they insisted, were noteworthy by their absence. In seeming contradiction, however, the authors pointed out that US strategic warning indicators and methodologies are oriented toward providing "warning of war within a short period of time; at most, one to two months." But, "because we give less emphasis to defense-economic and other home front measures that might provide strategic warning . . . and because a pattern of such activities is inherently difficult to detect in their early stages . . . we have less confidence in longer range warning based on military and defense-related activities alone." Nonetheless, the authors asserted that, even without the capability to detect such indicators, the developments in Soviet foreign and domestic affairs made it "very unlikely" that they were preparing for a war. Both NSA and National Warning Staff officials confirmed to us recently that US technical systems in particular were not, in fact, tuned to long-range military, economic, and defense-related activities at the time.

The estimate concluded with a list of indicators detected at the time that strongly suggested unusual Pact military activity. Nearly all of them were dismissed as explainable for ordinary reasons. The Board did not conduct a retrospective of each indicator but we believe that such a review would prove useful to the continued validation of the assessment. We believe that some of the explanations given at the time will be found to be mistaken. For example, the estimate explained the appearance of high-level Warsaw Pact command posts in 1984 as part of a one-time exercise. The command posts remained in operation, however, long after the estimate was published and the exercise was completed.

In reviewing both estimates, the Board was struck by how categorical and unqualified were the judgments made about the likelihood of the war scare, particularly given the extremely important consequences of those assessments. In fact, the NIO for Warning in 1984 made the same point in his commentary on the draft

August estimate. Although unable procedurally to comment in the estimate itself, he sent a memorandum to the NIE drafter arguing:

25X1, E.O.13526

This episode highlights a latent conflict between Soviet analysts and warning specialists. Most intelligence officers involved in the warning process are not necessarily trained Soviet experts; indeed, the staff tends to come from a military pool for a two-year rotational assignment. Within the intelligence community, an assignment to the Warning Staff has not always been viewed as career-enhancing. Disputes with geographic or other "substantive" analysts are often not resolved in favor of the warning officers. We have been told by senior intelligence officials that the problem of establishing credibility for warning experts, particularly in the Soviet affairs arena, is one that is

recognized but not solved easily.¹⁰ Conversely, Sovietologists are not often likely to have a deep grounding in warning issues.

NEW INFORMATION

The Board found that after the 1984 assessments were issued, the intelligence community did not again address the war scare until after the defection to Great Britain of KGB Colonel Oleg Gordiyevskiy in July, 1985. Gordiyevskiy had achieved the rank of Acting Resident in the United Kingdom, but he fell under suspicion as a Western agent. Recalled to the Soviet Union, he was placed under house arrest and intensely interrogated. Able to flee his watchers, Gordiyevskiy was exfiltrated from Moscow by the British Secret Intelligence Service.

During lengthy debriefing sessions that followed, Gordiyevskiy supplied a fuller report on the Soviet war hysteria. This report, complete with documentation from KGB Headquarters and entitled "KGB Response to Soviet Leadership Concern over US Nuclear Attack," was first disseminated in a restricted manner within the US intelligence community in October, 1985. Gordiyevskiy described the extraordinary KGB collection plan, initiated in 1981, to look for signs that the US would conduct a surprise nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. He identified and reviewed the factors driving leadership fears. Based on the perception that the US was achieving a strategic advantage, those in the Kremlin were said to believe that the US was likely to resort to nuclear weapons much earlier in a crisis than previously expected. They also were concerned that the US might seek to exploit its first-strike capability outside the

¹⁰We note that the National Warning Staff does tend to view events with a long-range perspective. Clearly, we believe this to be an asset in evaluating the Soviet war scare.

context of a crisis, probably during a military exercise. He described the leadership's worries of a "decapitating" strike from the Pershing II's, and its belief that the US could mobilize for a surprise attack in a mere seven to ten days. He explained how the London Residency responded to the requirements, and the effects that reporting had back at Moscow Center in reinforcing Soviet fears. He described conversations he had held with colleagues from Center and from the GRU. The next month, President Reagan held his first summit with Mikhail Gorbachev and relations began to thaw.

PERCEPTIONS EVOLVE

Some in the intelligence community have argued that the war scare was a massive Soviet propaganda and deception campaign that not only included attempts to manipulate public opinions but intelligence community perceptions as well. Central to this theory is that the Soviets intended for secret intelligence directives -- like the taskings sent from Moscow Center to London Residency -- to become known to the US. In July 1985, a National Intelligence Estimate entitled "Denial and Deception in Soviet Strategic Military Programs: Implications for US Security" (NIE 11-11-85), however, dashed cold water on this assumption. Analysts judged: "We strongly doubt that the Soviets intended for official documents to reach intelligence sources." Further, Soviet reliance on verbal disclosures of secret communications was also judged unlikely: "The uncertainty of the potential for such disclosures . . . combined with the lack of control over timing and content probably would have led the Soviets to conclude that such a device represents an unreliable means of communicating with the West." The estimate concluded that, "The intelligence directives probably represent efforts by the Soviet intelligence services to respond to concerns of Soviet leaders that since at least 1980 worsening relations with the United States increased the danger of war."

Although Gordiyevskiy's reporting remained closely held, by June 1986, assessments giving more credence to the legitimacy of the war scare began to surface in intelligence products.¹¹ By August, the Washington Post broke Gordiyevskiy's story to the American public.¹² The article quoted informed sources as saying that many high-level officials with extensive experience in East-West relations were still unaware of Gordiyevskiy's information. It maintained that many Western specialists, some with access to the Gordiyevskiy material, attributed Soviet anxieties in the early 1980's to genuine apprehension about Reagan Administration policies and to a tactical decision to exploit that concern through propaganda channels. The CIA then downgraded and re-released the Gordiyevskiy material. Despite the public disclosure and the broader circulation of Gordiyevskiy's material within government channels, the issue remained strangely dormant as a national intelligence topic.

Other [redacted] sources supported Gordiyevskiy's reporting. Perhaps the most important [redacted] [redacted] information on the war scare became available in the spring of 1987. [redacted] a KGB computer model called VRYAN (meaning Sudden Nuclear Missile Attack), and how it was used as a tool to predict US strategic intentions in the early 1980's. At the same time, [redacted] the accompanying Pact-wide emphasis on collecting strategic intelligence against the US, including efforts to enhance illegal agent operations to detect US plans for a surprise nuclear attack. [redacted] the seemingly improbable, but apparently widespread, Soviet belief that the US leadership would attack first to a deeply-seated Soviet fear of foreign invasion.

¹¹Warsaw Pact Military Perceptions of NATO Nuclear Initiation, CIA Intelligence Assessment.

¹²Defector told of Soviet Alert, Aug 6, by Murrey Marder.

25X1, E.O.13526

CIA's

Science and Weapons Daily Review in which analysts declared: "We believe that the existence of the VRYAN model is likely and that it may have contributed to a 'war scare' in the Soviet Government from 1981 until about 1985."

BUT DOUBTS REMAIN . . .

Conflicting opinions on the validity of the war scare continued to rage within the intelligence community. Analysts stated in the NIE entitled "Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the Late 1990's" (11/3-8) issued in December, 1987: "Taking all the evidence into consideration, we judge that some leaders may have become more concerned in the early 1980's that the United States had lowered the threshold somewhat for nuclear escalation, but that the top leaders on the whole did not believe a surprise nuclear attack on the West in peacetime had become a serious prospect." The authors made clear their views of the war scare: ". . . the attempted manipulation . . . is highly disturbing as an indication of the potential for irresponsible behavior by some prominent Soviet leaders in dealing with the grave issue of nuclear war." (Underlining added.) Moreover, the authors repeated phrases from their earlier estimates, including one in 1984. They said that the Soviets were confident that the open nature of US society made "unlikely" a successful US surprise strike. Analysts' assessments then of Soviet leaders belief on the survivability of their strategic forces differs markedly from recent analysis of the same period (see Part Two, page 46). In fact, analysts at the time assessed that the Soviets had confidence that their forces would be capable of mounting massive retaliatory strikes after a US surprise attack -- an interpretation now viewed to have been probably erroneous.

THE LAST WORD

By 1988, the intelligence community had received reporting -- in some detail -- on Soviet fears of a surprise US strike during the early 1980's from

25X1, E.O.13526

A new assessment was evident in a NIE (Soviet Intelligence Capabilities [NIE 11-21-88]) that clearly accepted the validity of the reporting on VRYAN. While acknowledging that available information was incomplete, the community said, "We consider the information we have to be reliable" and "consistent." In providing a comprehensive analysis of the VRYAN program, the estimate made explicit its view of leadership involvement in the war scare and of the Kremlin-KGB relationship: "It is essential to note . . . that the VRYAN collection requirement resulted from high-level political concern, and was not solely an intelligence initiative."

As for the VRYAN computer model, the authors said: "KGB analysts working on VRYAN operated under the premise that the United States, when it had decisive overall superiority, might be inclined to launch an attack on the Soviet Union. In light of this assumption and because the program was supposed to determine, in a quantifiable way, when such a situation might be approaching, they believed it could provide strategic warning when the USSR was in a critically weak position relative to the United States, and conditions therefore were potentially conducive to a US attack. These views reflected a widespread Soviet belief that definitive US superiority over the Soviet Union was inherently unstable." The authors also believed that ". . . it is possible that the results of this analysis [from the VRYAN computer model] themselves were a factor in the air of immediacy surrounding KGB Headquarters' concern over the possibility of a US surprise nuclear strike."

However, this estimate received extremely limited dissemina-

tion. Access to the publication was strictly need to know: this was the first estimate of its kind, and US assessments of Soviet intelligence capabilities would be of keen interest to the KGB. Moreover, the discussion of the VRYAN program was contained in an annex that was even more tightly controlled than the estimate itself.

The more widely disseminated and most recent edition of NIE 11/3-8 ("Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the Late 1990's," issued in December of 1988) failed to reflect the presumably changed community position. While this edition acknowledged that Soviet intelligence services had been tasked to look for indications of US preparations for a surprise nuclear attack, it nonetheless echoed doubts expressed in earlier publications: "Soviet leaders failed in any event to take certain precautionary measures that would appear to have been an appropriate response to such a situation." It did note, however, under the section entitled "Soviet Concern Over a US Surprise Attack From a Peacetime Posture," that "in a mid-1980's Soviet classified military discussion," Soviet expectations of a crisis stage were "described as potentially being as short as a few hours." This marked a change in normal expectation stages from several days to months.

THE RECORD MUDDIED

The last, most definitive intelligence community word on the Soviet war scare seemed destined to languish in an annex to a National Intelligence Estimate on Soviet intelligence capabilities that was unintended for policymakers' eyes. However, in January 1989, former DIA Director, Lieutenant General Leonard Perroots, sent -- as his parting shot before retirement -- a letter outlining his disquiet over the inadequate treatment of the Soviet war scare to, among others, the DCI and this Board. General Perroots personally experienced the war scare as Assistant Chief

of Staff for Intelligence, US Air Forces Europe, during the 1983 Able Archer exercise. Following the detection of the Soviet Air Forces' increased alert status, it was his recommendation, made in ignorance, not to raise US readiness in response -- a fortuitous, if ill-informed, decision given the changed political environment at the time.

The Board was puzzled by the intelligence community's response to the Perroots letter. In March, 1989, the National Intelligence Council (NIC) sent a memorandum to the DCI that seemed to reflect unresolved opinions. In the covering note, the Chairman of the NIC acknowledged that the 1984 SNIE on the war scare concluded "while Moscow was very unhappy with Ronald Reagan's policies, it was not gearing up for a military confrontation." Expressing his personal view, he said: "the failing here was not grave." However, the "thoroughly researched" commentary that followed portrayed the judgments of the May and August 1984 SNIE's -- which downplayed the war scare -- as synonymous ("reached the same broad conclusions") with the judgment of the 1988 National Intelligence Estimate (Soviet Intelligence Capabilities) that said the war scare was real. In fact, it was noted that the 1984 estimates "judged that the Soviets displayed a heightened sense of concern . . . because . . . of the leadership instability in the USSR from the successive deaths of three general secretaries between 1981 and 1985" -- an impossibility since Chernenko did not die until seven months after the last 1984 SNIE was issued. It was noted that the Perroots letter "neither raises new issues nor contains new data that change the strategic judgments already written." But in a reversal from previous, coordinated judgments written about the significance of USSR military developments during the war scare, and in refutation of the covering NIC note itself, the commentary included: "The Soviets had concern that the West might decide to attack the USSR without warning during a time of vulnerability -- such as when military transport was used to support the harvest -

- thus compelling the Soviets to consider a preemptive strike at the first sign of US preparations for a nuclear strike." Moreover, it noted: "From Brezhnev's death in 1982 through late 1984, the Soviets ordered a number of unusual [military and civil defense] measures not previously detected except during periods of crisis with the West . . .", and "The cumulative effect of these . . . was to reduce the Soviet and Warsaw Pact vulnerability to a surprise attack."

CONCLUSIONS: THE ESTIMATIVE PROCESS

In (ironically) December 1983, the DCI's Senior Review Panel (SRP) issued a prescient study of intelligence judgments preceding significant historical estimative failures. We believe key parts of that report merit reiteration:

In the estimates that failed, there were a number of recurrent common factors which, in retrospect, seem critical to the quality of the analysis . . . each involved historical discontinuity and, in the early stages, apparently unlikely outcomes.

The Board is deeply disturbed by the US handling of the war scare, both at the time and since. In the early stages of the war scare period, when evidence was thin, little effort was made to examine the various possible Soviet motivations behind some very anomalous events. Later, when enough intelligence existed on the abnormal Soviet behavior to create conflicting views within the community, no national intelligence assessments were prepared until after tensions began to subside. When written, the 1984 SNIE's were overconfident, particularly in the judgments pertaining to Soviet leadership intentions -- since little intelligence, human or technical, existed to support them. In its review of previous estimates, the SRP was equally troubled by this very same "process"

~~TOP SECRET~~~~TOP SECRET UMBRA GAMMA~~
WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON

shortcoming:

The basic problem in each was to recognize qualitative change and to deal with situations in which trend continuity and precedent were of marginal, if not counterproductive value. Analysts . . . clearly lacked a doctrine or a model for coping with improbable outcomes . . . and [were] unchallenged by a requirement to analyze or clarify subordinate and lesser probabilities. Too many of the analyses were incident-oriented and episodic; too few addressed the processes that produced the incidents or speculated about underlying forces and trends . . . addiction to single-outcome forecasting defied both estimative odds and much recorded history. It reinforced some of the worst analytical hazards -- status quo bias and a prejudice towards continuity of previous trends, 'playing it safe,' mirror-imaging, and predispositions towards consensus intelligence.

Reasonable people can disagree about the conclusions of the 1984 SNIE's. The PFIAB does disagree with many of them. More worrisome to us, however, is the process by which the estimates were made and subsequently reassessed. Although both estimates were reportedly reviewed by outside readers -- and both, but particularly the first, contained alternative scenarios -- strongly worded interpretations were defended by explaining away facts inconsistent with them. Consequently, both estimates contained, in essence, single outcome forecasting based in large part on near-term anomalous behavior. Moreover, neither alerted the reader to the risks of erroneously rejecting the correct scenario.

WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA GAMMA~~

30

~~TOP SECRET~~

We understand that analysts will always have legitimate disagreements over the meaning of inevitably incomplete and uncertain events. This is as it should be. But we believe that when analysts attempt to arrive at a single strong conclusion, they not only run the risk of being wrong, they run two additional and perhaps more worrisome risks. They are likely to underestimate the possibility of change (the safest prediction is always that tomorrow will be like today) and they are likely to rely on mirror-imaging (our adversaries think the way we do). In this era of increasing instability in the USSR, we cannot know who may long retain or quickly assume the mantle of Soviet leadership. Will he understand that US leaders are not going to start World War III and behave as if he understands? Again, from the SRP report:

The world will stay a chancy and changeable place and the only rule is perhaps that there is an inevitability of uncertainty which we ignore at our peril. Information at best will always be in some part fragmentary, obsolete, and ambiguous.

The Board believes that in cases of grave importance to US survival, intelligence estimates must be cast in terms of alternative scenarios that are in turn subjected to comparative risk assessments. This is the most critical flaw in the war scare episode. By "alternative scenarios," we mean a full statement of each major possible interpretation of a set of intelligence indicators. In this case, these scenarios might have included (but not limited to) the following:

1. Soviet leaders had not changed their strategic thinking but were attempting by means of propaganda and deception to slow the US military build-up, prevent the deployment of new weapons, and isolate the US from its allies.

2. Soviet leaders may or may not have changed their strategic thinking, but a power struggle among Kremlin factions and the need to deflect blame for poor economic conditions made it useful to exaggerate the military intentions and capabilities of the US.

3. Soviet leaders had changed their strategic thinking and in fact believed that the US was attempting to gain decisive strategic superiority in order, possibly, to launch a nuclear first strike.

By "comparative risk assessment," we mean assigning two kinds of weights to each scenario: one that estimates (in rough approximation, like "slightly better than even" or "two to one") the probability that the scenario is correct; and a second that assesses the risk to the United States if we wrongly reject the correct scenario. While any of the three scenarios, or a portion thereof, could have been true to some degree, a risk assessment could have helped focus subsequent US actions. If Soviet leaders did not believe a US attack was possible, and we erroneously imputed that view to them, then it is unlikely we would have taken actions that would have increased the risk of war. If Soviet leaders did have that belief, and we wrongly denied that they had it, then we could have materially but inadvertently increased the risk of war by (for example) conducting provocative military exercises or redeploying forces in ways that would trigger the Soviet indications and warning system.

We emphasize that we are not arguing for "competitive analysis," greater use of dissenting opinions, or policy guidance from the intelligence community. Rather, in special cases like the Soviet "war scare," it is less important to arrive at a single consensus than it is to identify a small number of possibilities associated with rough probabilities that allows policymakers to understand the risks and opportunities.

We also want to emphasize that by comparative risk analysis, we do not wish to encourage the formulation of watered-down, bland assessments whereby the reader is unable to determine what conclusions the authors have drawn. Instead we urge that when information is inadequate to allow reasonable people to draw conclusions relating to our adversary's intentions, analysts should withstand the pressure to arrive at a single judgment and thereby avoid turning an acknowledged collection deficiency into an analytic problem.

The SRP report recommended that estimates incorporate what we view as an extremely vital "road-map" perspective for policymakers:

A list of future indicators should invariably be included. Its aim should be to underline those contingent developments, decision points, and future policy crossroads which could affect the durability of the analysis, alter its major judgments, or influence the odds on outcomes.

Other than vague references to a full-force mobilization and more strident [redacted] the SNIE analyses of the war scare, unfortunately, did not offer such signposts. Moreover, the Soviet response to Able Archer 83 was dismissed as an exercise, despite an acknowledged inability to conduct a thorough examination of the events. Again, the SRP report:

It [the problem] was compounded by what the British call 'perseveration' (a tendency for judgments made in the early stages of a developing situation to be allowed to affect later appraisals and an unreadiness to alter earlier views even when evidence requiring them to be revised becomes available) which

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

narrowed collection requirements and froze their priorities to overtaken analytical frameworks. The practice invited failure.

After 1984, and as new evidence started emerging that began clarifying anomalous Soviet behavior, succeeding intelligence analyses seesawed between giving credence to the war scare and completely dismissing it. Despite the conflicting views, no comprehensive intelligence collection requirements were levied that might have revealed even more information.

When the intelligence community did offer a revised community position in 1988, it was buried in an annex of a tightly-held assessment not authored for policymakers. Narrow in scope, it did not include a comprehensive review of the political, military, and economic factors impacting the Soviet Union at the time, nor did it attempt to match US activities with anomalous Soviet behavior. Thus it is incomplete. Despite laudable individual efforts to address VRYAN -- and the importance of a "real" war scare to our understanding of the Soviet Union today -- it has never become the subject of a national intelligence assessment since the earlier 1984 judgments.¹³

A recent piece of reporting on dangerous Soviet thinking during the Andropov period maintains that many Soviet officials were discussing the possibility of a USSR preemptive, desperation strike to "level the playing field." The Chairman of the National Intelligence Council was right to point out to us that "the leak of this material would occasion politically very unfortunate charges that the Administration is either fabricating or concealing frightening perceptions of the USSR." We understand the political sensitivities associated with this study. At the same time, we

¹³See Special Program Intelligence Exploitation Study "Sudden Nuclear Missile Attack" authored by [redacted]

believe the implications of the war scare period -- chiefly that Soviet leaders, despite our open society, might be capable of a fundamental misunderstanding of US strategic motives and increase the likelihood of nuclear war -- need to be brought to the attention of senior US policymakers. Honest intellectual discourse must take place, using all available data, about the pivotal and dangerous period of US-USSR relations in the early to mid-1980's. Lessons learned from these events cannot be truly understood nor course corrections made until such analysis takes place, including a possible dialogue with the Soviets.

AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS . . .

During the course of our study, we identified a number of related intelligence issues that, in our judgment, could withstand closer scrutiny.

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

Had we not obtained this piece of intelligence, the Able Archer exercise likely would have been viewed in even more benign ways than it was. We believe this calls into question the kinds of signals we are likely to get from national technical means when, in times of internal Soviet crisis, the USSR military behaves in a defensive, reactive manner, particularly to US or NATO maneuvers.

We noticed a tendency for most to describe the annual Able Archer exercise simply as "a command and control" exercise, and thus, clearly nonthreatening to the Warsaw Pact. Not only was Able Archer 83 unique in some significant ways from earlier ones, it also incorporated live mobilization exercises from some US military forces in Europe. For example, we are told that some US aircraft practiced the nuclear warhead handling procedures, including taxiing out of hangars carrying realistic-looking dummy warheads.

We are concerned about the human intelligence collection effort regarding the Soviet war scare, particularly the lack of coordinated intelligence community strategy in the exploitation of double agents. For example, we found evidence that while the Warsaw Pact intelligence services changed their targeting and collection in significant ways in response to Soviet leadership fears, this information derived from double agent operations was not linked to the national warning system's key indicators list. Moreover, the FBI noted: "In some double agent operations, US-controlling agencies have supplied materials that bear on current or proposed military programs or strategies that could be interpreted to imply US capabilities and intentions to initiate a preemptive attack."

We now know that KGB Headquarters tasked the Residency in the US with extensive requirements to find evidence of an imminent US attack, which in turn necessitated the creation of a large VRYAN unit within the Residency. While the FBI did not detect the establishment of the new unit, it did note an increase in Soviet targeting and collection of US military plans beginning in 1982. Domestically, it also was aware of a marked and aggressive increase in Czechoslovak intelligence efforts to obtain indications and warning data, particularly during 1983 and 1984. However, this information did not find its way into community analysis.

Similarly, many US officials have described an inability to equate US secret or "blue force" activity with Soviet activity that might be in response. United States military commanders had a great deal of autonomy to exercise their forces in ways they saw best -- some more aggressively than others, we are told. The Board did not specifically match "blue force/red force" activity or probe US strategic deception programs underway at the time. We did, however, learn enough about them to realize such a review would be highly helpful to the study of the Soviet war scare.

PART II: THE SOVIET "WAR SCARE"

INTRODUCTION

Over the last year, as PFIAB endeavored to come to a better understanding of events surrounding the war scare episode, it examined intelligence available at the time as well as considerable subsequent reporting of direct relevance. While some of the anomalous Soviet behavior that remains unclarified by subsequent reporting can be explained in singularly unthreatening ways, we chose not to assume them as individual events. Rather, we see these "anomalies" as a pattern, which, taken in totality, strongly indicates that the war scare was real, at least in the minds of some Soviet leaders.

The following discussion, therefore, is what we view as a plausible interpretation of events based upon a sizable, but incomplete, body of evidence. It tries to put into context and draw parallels among developments inside the Soviet political hierarchy, the intelligence apparatus, and the military establishment that, to us, strongly point to genuine Soviet concern and preparations for hostile US action. We also try to show that Soviet media pronouncements of the danger of war with the US -- dismissed by US analysts at the time as "propaganda" -- probably did, in fact, mirror private and secret communications by senior Soviet officials.

The Board does not intend this discussion to constitute the "final word" on the war scare. Instead, we hope it prompts renewed interest, vigorous dialogue, and rigorous reanalysis of the events.

ORIGINS OF THE SCARE

Vulnerability of Soviet Nuclear Forces to a US Surprise Attack

Although the Soviet strategic nuclear force in the late 1970's was powerful and versatile (over 7,000 strategic nuclear weapons), it was nonetheless highly vulnerable to a US surprise attack -- a so-called bolt from the blue. Deficiencies in the early warning network, an inadequate, highly centralized command and control system, and a strategic force that was never at full readiness left sizable chinks in the USSR's strategic armor. Until the latter half of the 1970's, the Soviets did not appear to be overly concerned about this shortfall, probably in part because they did not see a US surprise attack as a likely scenario for the outbreak of hostilities.

The USSR may have felt confident that the open nature of US society and Soviet intelligence capabilities made any prospect of the US achieving complete surprise quite remote. Whatever the underlying reasons, Soviet military doctrine at the time generally posited that a strategic nuclear war would probably occur in escalating stages: from a major political crisis, to conventional conflict, to theater nuclear war, to intercontinental exchange. The Soviets' early warning system, command and control network, and strategic forces were geared accordingly: complete wartime readiness could be achieved only after several days of preparation. Nevertheless, as prudent planners, they hedged; part of their strategic forces, particularly silo-based ICBM's, were always held at a high-level of readiness.¹⁴

¹⁴For a complete listing of reference documents, see originator.

Strategic Warning System

Before the early 1980's, the Soviet early warning system probably could not provide its leaders with much advance warning of a surprise US nuclear attack outside the context of a political crisis. Ballistic missile early warning (BMEW) radars, located along the periphery of the Soviet Union, were probably able to give about 13 minutes of warning against US ICBM's and about 5 to 15 minutes against SLBM's.

The Soviets apparently came to recognize that they would need much more time to initiate a response. They began several improvement programs in the late 1970's, including the addition of several new BMEW radars -- to extend coverage to nearly all threat corridors -- as well as the development of two over-the-horizon (OTH) radars and launch-detection satellites.

The completion of the OTH radars in 1981 and the comprehensive coverage of US ICBM fields by launch-detection satellites in 1983 significantly increased warning time -- about 30 minutes for US ICBM's and a little over 15 minutes for SLBM's attacking Moscow. However, the introduction by NATO of Pershing II missiles into Europe in late 1983 by Soviet calculations probably reduced their warning of a US first strike on Moscow to about 8 minutes -- less time than they had before their improvement program began.¹⁵

¹⁵The Pershing II missile 1800 km range would not have reached Moscow from planned deployment sites in West Germany. Warsaw Pact sources, however, attributed to this system a range of 2500 km, an accuracy of 30 meters, and an earth-penetrating warhead. With a range of 2500 km the Soviets feared it would have been able to strike command and control targets in the Moscow area with little or no warning.

Command and Control

25X1, E.O.13526

Once warning of an intercontinental nuclear strike is received, Moscow's ability to initiate a response depends on how quickly the leadership can authorize a retaliation and communicate the orders. [redacted] the Soviet nuclear release process, [redacted] it hinges directly on the survival and, indeed, performance of the top leadership. Probably no more than three political leaders can authorize the use of nuclear weapons. Under severe time constraints -- such as a short-warning preemptive strike or a "launch on tactical warning" -- that authority probably resides with only the General Secretary and the Minister of Defense. When response time is extremely limited, the General Secretary alone may order a launch. There is no evidence that nuclear release authority has devolved to the General Staff or the nuclear force commanders. This strict centralization (along with a nuclear warfighting strategy) undoubtedly was a prime reason for the elaborate measures the Soviets have taken over the last 30 years to ensure leadership survival -- particularly the construction of numerous hardened underground command posts in and around Moscow.

In responding to a surprise US attack, the Soviet decision-making process would be extremely compressed. After confirmation of an incoming attack, the Soviet leadership in most circumstances may have no more than ten minutes to decide on the appropriate response. In that time, they would need to confer, come to an agreement, and issue commands to the General Staff. While this process was under way, if near the Kremlin, they would probably be moving to one of the nearby underground command posts.

If the leadership failed to initiate the appropriate authorization procedures, the USSR's strategic arsenal would probably sit by, helpless. With regard to strategic missiles,

only the top leadership can release special "unlocking" codes that permit launch. Similar procedures are in place for the other Soviet strategic nuclear forces.

Once a decision to launch is made, however, orders to the operating forces would be transmitted quickly and accurately. The Soviets introduced several automated communication networks to ensure rapid and reliable command dissemination at the same time they were upgrading their early warning system. All nuclear-capable elements of the Soviet armed forces would receive launching orders: land-based missiles under the control of the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF); ballistic and cruise missile submarines in the Navy; and bombers of the Strategic Air Force (SAF). Theater nuclear forces would also receive strike commands to counter the anticipated NATO offensive in Europe.

We believe the evidence, therefore, strongly indicates that Soviet nuclear release authority during the war scare period (1980-1984) was held captive to the tumultuous series of leadership successions at the very top. The post of party General Secretary changed hands three times in three years.¹⁶ The only "constant" in the line of authority was Defense Minister Ustinov, who also died in late 1984.

Some high-ranking Soviet military leaders at the time apparently doubted whether the political leadership was up to the task. Marshal Ogarkov, chief of the General Staff in the early 1980,s, seemed to question whether the aged and ill Soviet leadership would be willing or able to meet its strategic decisionmaking responsibilities in times of crisis. He surfaced this issue publicly on three occasions: during the waning months of Brezhnev's rule; during Andropov's short tenure; and following

¹⁶Brezhnev died 10 November, 1982; Andropov died 9 February 1984; Chernenko died 10 March 1985.

Chernenko's accession. Through these conspicuous articles, Ogarkov may have been arguing in a veiled way for some pre-delegation of nuclear release authority to the general staff.

Force Readiness

During the late 1970's and early 1980's, Soviet forces best able to respond to a surprise attack were the silo-based ICBM's. The US estimates that 95 percent of this force (approximately 4,500 weapons then) was ready to launch within several minutes' notice. In strategic war exercises during this time, some Soviet silo-based missiles were launched within three minutes of receipt of the order. In most simulations of a US first strike, without surprise, the force was usually able to leave its silos before notional US warheads struck. These quick reaction times, however, occurred during exercises when missile crews anticipated orders. They could be much slower in a real-life situation wherein a US surprise missile strike was already inbound.

We believe the high readiness of the silo-based missiles was compensation for the high vulnerability of the other parts of the Soviet strategic arsenal:

- o Soviet long-range bombers were extremely vulnerable to a US surprise attack. They were (and are still) kept at a low state of readiness -- none were on strip alert. Many hours, perhaps days, probably would have been needed to prepare a large number of bombers for a wartime footing. The Soviets may well have assumed that their entire force would be destroyed in a surprise strike.

- o The Soviets probably believed that their ballistic submarines would not fare much better. Normally most of the force were in port; only about 15-18 percent were on combat patrol or in transit to operating areas. During this period, several days may

have been required to bring the in-port force to full readiness. Moreover, the Soviets probably had grave concerns about the survivability of their submarines on patrol -- they were able to learn much about US successes at tracking their submarine movements through the Walker-Whitworth espionage ring.

o The Soviet theater nuclear forces were similarly vulnerable. Dispersing missile and artillery units from garrison and supplying them with nuclear weapons would have entailed considerable logistic support. For example, [redacted] [redacted] it would have taken six hours to deploy all of the missiles and warheads stored at a tactical missile base.

Soviet Analysis of the US-USSR Strategic Balance

A major factor influencing Soviet leaders' perceptions about a US surprise attack probably was their reliance on one peculiar mode of intelligence analysis. [redacted]

[redacted] during the war scare they were highly dependent on a computer model. [redacted]

the KGB developed the model in the mid-1970's to measure perceived changes in the "correlation of forces." Put on-line in 1979, the model's foremost function was identifying inherently unstable political situations in which a deterioration of Soviet power might tempt a US first strike.

[redacted] the model became for the KGB an increasingly important analytic tool. Western scientific and technological advances, as well as the growing complexity of US-USSR relations, were evidently making accurate assessments of the US-USSR strategic balance increasingly more difficult. The KGB reportedly advised the Politburo in the late 1970's that without such a model it would be unable to provide such evaluations. The

Politburo subsequently approved the computer concept.

The computer model program was called VRYAN, an acronym for "Surprise Nuclear Missile Attack." KGB analysts responsible for assessing American strategic intentions operated under the premise that if the US ever obtained decisive, overall superiority, it might be inclined to launch a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. Because the program was supposed to determine quantitatively when such a situation might be approaching, analysts believed it would accurately provide strategic warning.

The KGB computer model was reportedly developed by military and economic specialists. Consisting of a data base of 40,000 weighted elements, its core was a complex software program that processed and continually reevaluated the data. Although we are not privy to the individual data elements, they reportedly were based on those military, political, and economic factors that the Soviets assessed as decisive during World War II.

VRYAN clearly had a high priority far beyond the corridors of the KGB. A special component of the KGB, consisting of about 200 employees, was responsible for inserting fresh data. Prominent economists and military experts from other elements of the Soviet government assisted. In addition, the State Planning Committee submitted classified data on the Soviet economy, such as details on the state budget, the labor pool, Soviet natural resources, and currency reserves. The cost of building and maintaining such a computer was presumably very high, particularly given the state of Soviet computer technology in those years.

The model reportedly assigned a fixed value of 100 to the combined economic-military-political power of the United States. On this scale, the program experts believed that the USSR would be safe against a US first strike at a value of 60 (i.e., 60 percent of overall US power), though they felt that a level of 70 would

provide a desirable margin. The data base was constantly updated, and force correlations could be assessed at any time. Reports derived from VRYAN reportedly were sent to the Politburo once a month.

Before long, VRYAN began spewing very unwelcome news -- which brought dire predictions. Initially, there was some optimism within the KGB that, with technological progress, the Soviet Union would gradually improve its position vis-a-vis the US. However, by 1984 VRYAN calculated that Soviet power had actually declined to 45 percent of that of the United States. Forty percent was viewed as a critical threshold. Below this level, the Soviet Union would be considered dangerously inferior to the United States. [redacted] if the Soviet rating fell below 40 percent, the KGB and the military leadership would inform the political leadership that the security of the USSR could not be guaranteed. [redacted]

[redacted] the USSR would launch a preemptive attack within a few weeks of falling below the 40-percent mark.

The extent to which VRYAN was driving Politburo thinking is not clear. The computer model apparently was not tied to any military operational plans, nor is there evidence that the Politburo ever established any contingency plans based on its assessments. Nevertheless, [redacted] Politburo deliberations on security issues during this time involved only a few members. [redacted]

We believe that if VRYAN accurately depicted the strategic balance of the time, it would have shown the USSR highly vulnerable to a US surprise attack. Recent US intelligence

25X1, E.O.13526

25X1, E.O.13526

computer simulations approximating the VRYAN model suggest that the Soviets would have expected only a fraction of their strategic nuclear forces to survive a coordinated US attack. Figure 1, for example, shows how Soviet military planners may have viewed the status of their forces if caught by surprise and forced to ride out a massive attack. We believe the VRYAN model would have shown that after such an attack, Soviet strategic forces could have delivered only about a quarter of the 6,100 warheads necessary to achieve wartime military objectives.

Although it may seem absurd to some that the Soviets would put much stock in a computer model to assess something as complex as the strategic balance, we suspect this approach may have been especially appealing to top Soviet leaders at the time. Almost all were formally trained as engineers. A computer model which purported to be scientifically based and capable of quantifying the seemingly confusing strategic balance may therefore have had a high degree of credibility, particularly during a period in which the Soviet leadership seemed genuinely and increasingly wary of a US surprise attack.

We believe Soviet strategic doctrine also played a key role in how the leadership reacted to VRYAN assessments. Soviet military writings consistently assert that overwhelming advantage lies with the side that launches massed nuclear strikes first. In their exercises and classified writings, the Soviets regularly depict the transition from conventional to nuclear war in Europe occurring when Soviet forces preempt an imminent NATO large-scale nuclear strike. The inherent danger of this doctrine of preemption is that in a period like the war scare, strong misperceptions could easily precipitate a strong, ill-founded reaction.

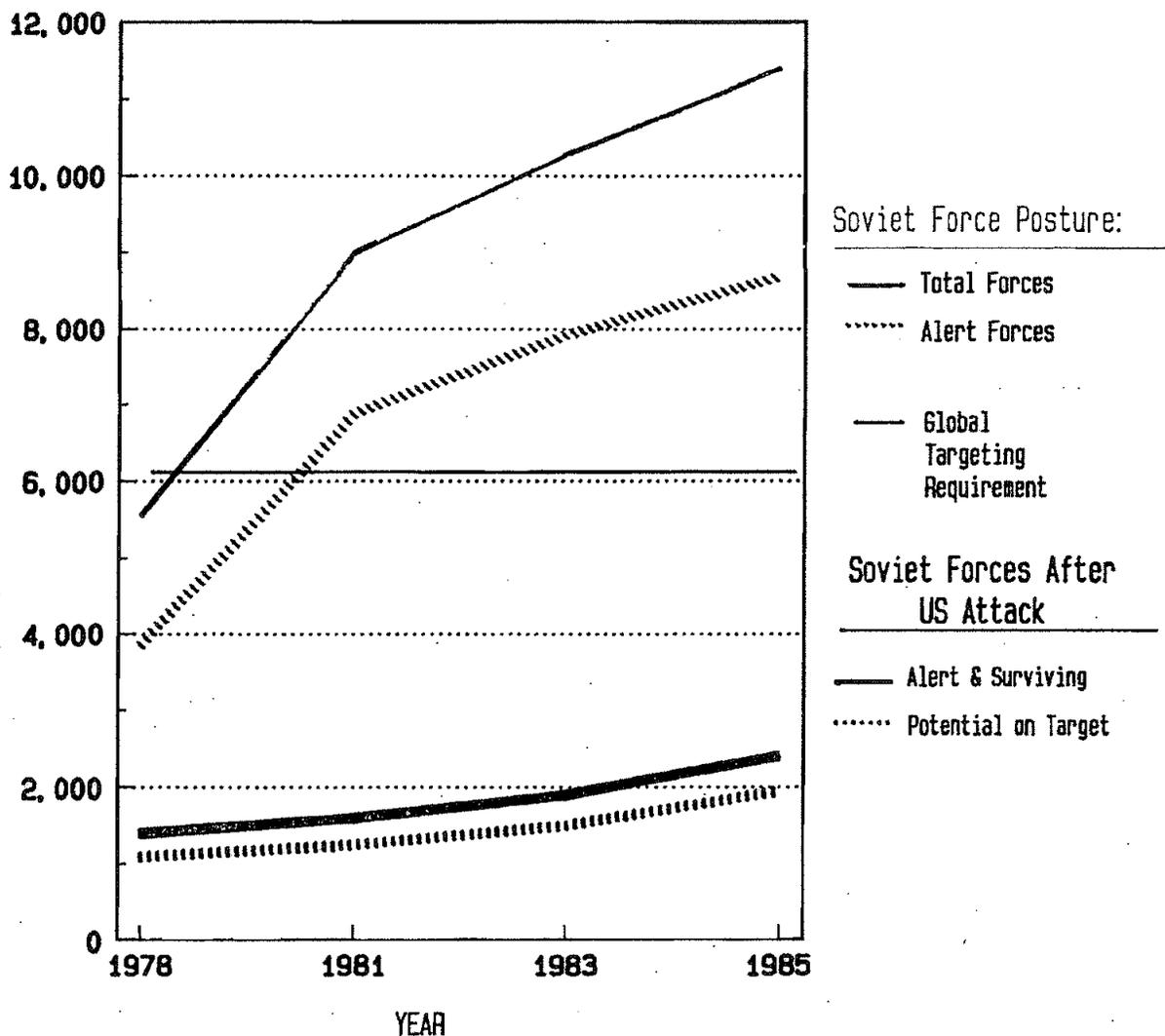
"THE WAR SCARE"

Late 1970's: Changing Soviet Perceptions of US Intentions

Figure 1

Soviet Strategic Retaliatory Capabilities Given a US "Bolt from the Blue"

Number of Soviet Strategic Warheads



Although Soviet leadership anxieties about US military intentions reached a crescendo in 1983-1984, concern may have been manifest by the late 1970's, when detente began to unravel. Long before the invasion of Afghanistan, Soviet political leaders publicly charged that US policy seemed aimed at "applying the brakes" to detente and increasing the level of competition with the Soviet Union. This shift, they argued, began during the mid-1970's and intensified during the last few years of the decade.

25X1, E.O.13526

The Soviets' public response to US punitive measures following the Afghanistan invasion seemed to highlight a growing concern and confusion about the direction of US-Soviet relations.¹⁷ [redacted] reports indicate that they were genuinely surprised at the intensity of the US reaction to Afghanistan -- they apparently thought that Washington would recognize their security concerns as legitimate. [redacted] reporting also suggests that the Soviet leadership was becoming seriously perplexed by the perceived shift in US policy: was it a continuation of the tougher tactics they had been witnessing for some time, or did it reflect a calculated turn away from detente and toward increased confrontation?

United States nuclear force modernization plans may have been particularly vexing to Moscow. In the late 1970's, the US made public its plans to field new generations of ICBM's (MX), SLBM's (D-5), and intercontinental bombers (stealth). The Soviets apparently viewed these new systems as highly lethal against their silos and most other hardened targets, providing the US with more strategic nuclear power than was necessary for its long-held strategy of mutually assured destruction. Evidence from sensitive reporting suggests Soviet analysts calculated that the US intended

[redacted]

25X1, E.O.13526

them as a means for developing a first-strike force. In addition, the Soviets perhaps calculated that NATO's decision to field 600 Pershing II's and cruise missiles was not to counter their SS-20 force, but yet another step toward a first-strike capability.

Party Secretary Suslov and Defense Minister Ustinov, the senior guardians of Soviet ideology and national security, were among the first to express these apparent misgivings. In an address before the Polish party congress in February 1980, Suslov asserted that there was a "profound interconnection" to recent US-inspired actions: the "aggression" by China against Vietnam, the NATO decisions "aimed at a new arms race," the deployment of "enormous numbers" of US armed forces around Iran, and the "training and sending of armed terrorist groups" into Afghanistan. Several days later, Ustinov condemned alleged US and Chinese interference in Afghanistan, US delay in ratification of the SALT II treaty, the NATO theater nuclear force decision, and the buildup of US naval forces in the Persian Gulf as "interconnected elements of an aggressive US policy."

Not long after, Premier Kosygin, a more moderate member of the top leadership, echoed the same misgivings. He charged that US policy had become a "fully defined political policy calculated to undermine detente and provoke conflict situations. We cannot but draw the necessary conclusions from this for our practical activities." As a CIA analyst has pointed out, Kosygin's remarks may have mirrored the uncertainty underlying many Politburo members' perceptions of US intentions and behavior in the post-Afghanistan period. On the one hand, he seemed to be joining Suslov in suggesting that "reactionary forces" had gained the upper hand in US policymaking and were determined to force a confrontation. On the other hand, he seemed to be fervently reassuring domestic and East European audiences that this was not necessarily the case and that US policy could moderate:

It must be said that realistic representatives of the ruling circles in the West, not to mention broad sections of the population, are concerned with the consequences of the present course of the US Administration Clearly it would be wrong to assume that in the United States there are no soberminded politicians who are aware of the significance of detente.¹⁸

1980: Heightened Concern

By the summer of 1980, Soviet public pronouncements on the future of US-USSR relations had soured markedly. A 23 June Central Committee resolution referred to "adventuristic actions of the United States," which it asserted led to a "heightening of the danger of war." Claiming the United States was undermining detente, attempting to form an anti-Soviet alliance with China, and refusing to acknowledge legitimate Soviet security interests, the resolution called for "constant vigilance and all-round strengthening of defense."

Public and private statements by top Soviet leaders suggested that many did not expect any near-term improvements in US-Soviet relations. In June, Politburo member Andrei Kirilenko alluded to the need for "augmenting the country's economic and defense potential," because "imperialist circles, primarily those in the United States, are causing considerable complications in the international situation." In a private meeting with visiting Indian communists in July, Kirilenko and other officials reportedly described the world situation as "grim," and accused the US

25X1, E.O.13526

Administration of creating a "war psychosis" by trying to "isolate" and "encircle" the Soviet Union. In a June address to the heads of government of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, Kosygin seemed to be preparing his audience for the possibility that NATO-Warsaw Pact tensions might require greater Bloc expenditures for military programs. He charged that the United States has already embarked on "a course hostile to the cause of detente, a course of cranking up the arms race, leading to the intensification of the war danger in the world." Brezhnev seemed to be alone in expressing limited optimism. In August, for example, he noted that "sooner or later" the US would conclude that "sabre rattling" would fail.

After the US Presidential election, the Soviet leadership sent out feelers to determine if the tough speeches delivered during the campaign indeed indicated the future course of Reagan Administration foreign policy. In a 17 November, 1980, speech, Brezhnev said that he would not dwell on statements made by the President-elect during "the heat of the election struggle" and would welcome any "constructive steps" on ways to improve US-Soviet relations. This opening was repeated privately by Soviet diplomats, officials, and foreign policy analysts, who stressed to their US contacts that Moscow was interested in bilateral exchanges and a good start in "businesslike" relations. United States-Soviet relations were dealt a blow in December, however, with the death of the usually moderate Premier Kosygin.¹⁹

* * *

Behind the scenes, the Soviet intelligence services were giving equally dour assessments on the future of US-Soviet relations. A secret Soviet intelligence document prepared in

25X1, E.O.13526

October for General Ivashutin, Chief of Soviet military intelligence, the GRU, stated that the US and NATO, rather than "maintaining the approximate parity" that had developed, were trying to tip the strategic balance of forces in their favor. The document also assessed a US Presidential directive (PD-59) signed by President Carter as a "new nuclear strategy" intended to enhance "the readiness of US strategic nuclear forces to deliver a sudden preemptive strike against . . . the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact." Vladimir Kryuchkov, then head of the KGB's foreign intelligence directorate, evidently shared this evaluation. In a secret speech in late 1980, he reportedly declared that "US imperialism is again becoming aggressive and is striving to change the strategic balance." He also revealed that the party had admonished its intelligence organs not to "overlook the possibility of a US missile attack on our country."

* * *

Meanwhile, the Soviet Navy began to implement steps to reduce the missile launch readiness of "duty status" submarines. Prior to 1980, submarines were required to be able to launch their missiles within 4 hours after receiving orders. In the summer of 1980, a much reduced launch readiness, perhaps as low as 30 minutes, was being considered by Northern Fleet commanders. By October 1980, they had achieved a readiness of 3 hours, and sometime between 1982 and 1985, duty status submarines were able to launch within 20 minutes.

1981: Reducing Vulnerabilities

By early March 1981, the Soviet leadership may well have concluded that a period of US-Soviet confrontation had arrived. Moscow's trial balloon suggesting an early summit never got off the ground. The US declared that Brezhnev's proposals on arms control did not provide a basis for serious negotiations and insisted that

future talks would be contingent upon Soviet behavior in Poland, Afghanistan, Central America, and other trouble spots.

Moscow's response was hard line. The first salvo appeared in Pravda on March 25 in an article by "I. Aleksandrov" -- a pseudonym signifying leadership endorsement. It attacked US foreign policy on a broad front -- the first such barrage since the Reagan Administration had entered office. Increasingly strident attacks followed in April and May. Brezhnev took the US to task in major speeches on 7 and 27 April, as did his protege, Chernenko, at a Lenin Day address on 22 April. Brezhnev's delivery commemorating Soviet VE day charged that the Reagan Administration no longer belonged to the "sober-minded" forces in the West and that Washington had made military superiority its "main political credo" -- while relegating arms control to the bottom of the priority list. [REDACTED] 25X1, E.O.13526 [REDACTED] senior Soviet officials with high-level contacts said that during this time Soviet leaders formally cautioned the bureaucracy that the new US Administration was considering the possibility of starting nuclear war, and that the prospect of a surprise nuclear strike against the Soviet Union had to be taken seriously.

In August 1981, Brezhnev met secretly in the Crimea with each of the Warsaw Pact leaders to obtain signatures on a strategic war planning document that streamlined the decisionmaking process to go to war. This top secret accord in essence codified the Soviet Union's authority to order Warsaw Pact forces to war without prior Pact consultations. It included a discussion of likely Soviet responses to possible changes in the correlation of forces. Soviet preemption of an attempted US surprise attack was one of the scenarios depicted. [REDACTED] 25X1, E.O.13526 [REDACTED] the Soviets had become concerned that there might be little time to react in a fast-moving political crisis and that the upper hand could be lost militarily if Pact consultations were required before committing forces.

* * *

Probably reflecting the rising concern among the political leaders, the Soviet intelligence services clearly began girding its officers for difficult times ahead. In a secret February speech, Vladimir Kryuchkov -- on this occasion to a group of mid-level KGB officers -- stressed that ". . . the political situation world-wide is going from bad to worse and there is no end in sight . . . China continues to be a threat . . . the general situation in East Europe, both politically and economically, is not good . . . the Soviet economy is currently in a poor position resulting from poor harvests, bad planning and a general lack of discipline." He also exhorted all KGB Residencies to work to "prevent the US and its allies from deciding to make a first strike attack on the Soviet Union and the KGB."

By the spring, unease at the top of the political hierarchy evidently had become so pronounced that it called for extraordinary efforts from its foreign intelligence apparatus. In late May, then KGB chief and Politburo member Yuriy Andropov declared to a major KGB conference that the new US Administration was actively preparing for war and that a nuclear first strike was possible. Andropov disclosed that, in response, the KGB was placing strategic military intelligence at the top of its collection priorities list. The KGB had always been tasked to report on US political intentions, but this was the first time it had been ordered to obtain such strategic military information. Thus, VRYAN took on a new dimension, and now both the KGB and the GRU had as their foremost mission the collection of intelligence to protect the USSR from strategic nuclear attack. 25X1, E.O.13526

Kryuchkov and several of his key officers in the First Chief Directorate -- including the Chief of the "US Department" -- increasingly became strong VRYAN proponents.

The rank and file began to respond. While many senior KGB specialists in US and military affairs apparently had serious reservations about some of Andropov's views on this matter, there reportedly was general accord on two important points. First, KGB officers in the Center agreed that the United States might initiate a nuclear strike if it achieved a level of overall strength markedly greater than that of the Soviet Union. And many apparently were convinced that events were leading in that direction. A group of technocrats advising Andropov reportedly persuaded him that the USSR would continue to fall behind the US in economic power and scientific expertise. Second, there was common concern that the Soviet domestic situation, as well as Moscow's hold on Eastern Europe, was deteriorating, further weakening Soviet capacity to compete strategically with the US.²⁰

Andropov hastily ordered a special "institute" within the KGB to implement the new strategic military intelligence program. The institute was told -- despite protestations for more time -- to quickly define the task, develop a plan, and be ready to levy the initial collection and reporting requirements to KGB Residencies by November 1981. Some KGB officers in the field reportedly felt that the short, arbitrary deadlines for developing VRYAN requirements resulted in poorly conceived requirements.²¹

As the KGB mobilized, it also began pressuring its East European allies for strong support. Both Andropov and Kryuchkov actively lobbied the Czechoslovak intelligence service on this score. Andropov approached Czechoslovak Interior Minister Obzina early in 1981 regarding the VRYAN collection effort, presenting it as an unprecedented KGB collection effort that demanded the "best intelligence techniques." He followed up with a private visit to

25X1, E.O.13526

²¹Ibid.

Prague, where he expressed strong disappointment with the Czechoslovak response and solicited the direct intervention of senior intelligence officials.

Andropov's efforts at personalizing the issue evidently paid off. Obzina subsequently gave an emotional presentation to the Czechoslovak Politburo describing the immediacy of the threat from the US, which he said sooner or later would result in a surprise nuclear attack. Reflecting Moscow's urgency, Obzina described the requirement as the biggest and most important strategic task the Czechoslovak service had ever undertaken. Not long after, Prague issued to its field offices a "Minister's Directive of Top Priority" to collect VRYAN-related data on five substantive areas -- political, economic, military, science and technology, and civil defense.

* * *

Developments within the Soviet military, meanwhile, also strongly suggested a growing apprehension about a possible US strategic first-strike. Military leaders began to improve the readiness of nuclear forces most vulnerable to surprise attack.

25X1, E.O.13526 in May, 1981, for example, Soviet Navy officials initiated a program to shorten launch times for ballistic missile submarines in port. Submarines undergoing repairs were ordered to be ready to launch within 48 hours notice (as opposed to 8 days), and boats awaiting redeployment were told to be ready to launch within 3 to 4 hours. Lower-level Navy officials reportedly viewed these new readiness times as unrealistic because they would strain maintenance capabilities and be difficult to sustain indefinitely. In addition, the Navy began experimenting with missile launches from submarines pierside, reportedly achieving a notice-to-launch time of one hour.

Furthermore, the Soviet military took several steps during

this time to improve their theater nuclear forces. All-weather capable SU-24 bombers were deployed in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary, greatly enhancing the availability of nuclear strike forces in the forward area. The Soviets for the first time also deployed nuclear-capable artillery to the front-line ground forces opposite NATO.²²

1982: Strategic Preparations

Signs of disquiet within the Soviet military hierarchy over national strategic vulnerabilities became more openly pronounced in 1982. Marshal Ogarkov, in particular, publicly expressed his concern over the readiness of Soviet society to respond to US challenges. Notably, he called for moving Soviet economic priorities from business-as-usual to a prewar footing. In his book History Teaches Vigilance, he sternly admonished his countrymen:

The element of surprise already played a certain role in World War II. Today it is becoming a factor of the greatest strategic importance. The question of prompt and expeditious shifting of the Armed Forces and the entire national economy to a war footing and their mobilization deployment in a short period of time is much more critical today

. . . coordination between the Armed Forces and the national economy as a whole is required today as never before, especially in . . . ensuring the stability and survivability of the nation's entire vast economic mechanism. Essential in this connection is a constant search for improving the system of co-production among enterprises producing the

²²Warning of War in Europe, NIE 4-1-4.

principal types of weapons . . . to establish a reserve supply of equipment and materials in case of war.

The view of impending nuclear war with the United States was apparently seeping into the mid-level officer corps. A Soviet emigre who attended a 1982 training course at the Moscow Civil Defense Headquarters quoted one instructor -- a lieutenant colonel -- as saying that the Soviet Union intended to deliver a preemptive strike against the United States, using 50 percent of its warheads.

The Soviet leadership convened a conference in late October, perhaps in part to reassure the military. Top political deputies, ministry officials, marshals, service commanders, regional military commanders and commanders of Soviet forces abroad were in attendance. Defense Minister Ustinov, in his introduction of General Secretary Brezhnev, declared that "the acute intensification of the aggressive nature of imperialism threatens to incite the world into flames of a nuclear war." In his address to the conference, Brezhnev promised the Soviet armed forces that the Central Committee would take measures "to meet all your needs."²³

* * *

Meanwhile, KGB Headquarters had issued formal instructions to KGB Residencies abroad to strengthen significantly their work on strategic warning. [redacted] 25X1, E.O.13526 [redacted] these instructions were sent first to KGB elements in the US, and within a month, an abridged version was sent to Residencies in Western Europe. Reflecting the same concerns expressed by Andropov at the March 1981 KGB conference, the tasking from Moscow primarily focused on detecting US plans to launch a surprise attack:

²³FBIS TV Report, 28 October 1982.

The current international situation, which is characterized by a considerable strengthening of the adversary's military preparations as well as by a growing threat of war, requires that active and effective steps be taken to strengthen intelligence work dealing with military-strategic problems. It is of special importance to discover the adversary's concrete plans and measures linked with his preparation for a surprise nuclear missile attack on the USSR and other socialist countries.

The cable went on to specify information to be collected in direct support of the VRYAN requirement, including NATO war plans; preparations for launching a nuclear missile attack against the USSR; and political decisionmaking leading to the initiation of war (see Figure 2 for VRYAN requirements).²⁴

Indeed, KGB bosses seemed already convinced that US war plans were real. A former KGB officer said that while attending a senior officer course, he read an order to all departments of the KGB's foreign intelligence arm -- but especially those targeting the US and NATO -- to increase their collection efforts because there was information indicating NATO was preparing for a "third world war."

The reactions of Soviet intelligence to the death of General Secretary Brezhnev on November 10 suggests to us that there was serious concern that the USSR was militarily in jeopardy and that the US might take advantage of the confusion concomitant with a leadership change. [REDACTED] KGB and GRU Residencies in at least two Soviet missions abroad were placed on

[REDACTED]

25X1, E.O.13526

Figure 2. VRYAN Collection Requirements

Throughout the early 1980's, VRYAN requirements were the number one (and urgent) collection priority for Soviet intelligence and, subsequently, some East European services as well. They were tasked to collect:

- Plans and measures of the United States, other NATO countries, Japan, and China directed at the preparation for and unleashing of war against the "socialist" countries, as well as the preparation for and unleashing of armed conflicts in various other regions of the world.
- Plans for hostile operational deployments and mobilizations.
- Plans for hostile operations in the initial stage of war; primarily operations to deliver nuclear strikes and for assessments of aftereffects.
- Plans indicating the preparation for and adoption and implementation of decisions by the NATO political and military leadership dealing with the unleashing of a nuclear war and other armed conflicts.

Some specific tasking concerning the United States included:

- Any information on President Reagan's "flying headquarters," including individual airfields and logistic data.
- Succession and matters of state leadership, to include attention to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- Information from the level of Deputy Assistant Secretary on up at the Department of State, as it was believed that these officials might talk.
- Monitoring of activities of the National Security Council and the Vice President's crisis staff.
- Monitoring of the flow of money and gold on Wall Street as well as the movement of high-grade jewelry, collections of rare paintings, and similar items. (This was regarded as useful geostrategic information.)

25X1, E.O.13526

alert. Intelligence officers were tasked with monitoring US installations, both military and civilian, for indications of US military mobilization or other actions which might portend a move against the USSR, and to report frequently to Moscow. This alert,

[redacted] continued until Brezhnev was buried on November 15. [redacted]

[redacted] considerable anxiety within the Soviet military during this time over who had nuclear release authority in case of a feared US surprise attack.

* * *

25X1, E.O.13526

As Yuriy Andropov settled into the General Secretaryship, Soviet strategic forces continued to improve their readiness posture. In December, for example, the Strategic Air Force Commander-in-Chief authorized a plan for the improvement of the combat readiness of Arctic air bases. [redacted]

[redacted] this initiative provided greater flexibility in dispersing the Soviet bomber force and reducing the flight time for attacks on the US.²⁵ Moreover, beginning at about this time and continuing through 1985, Soviet bomber training was devoted largely to the problem of enemy surprise nuclear strikes. One solution that evolved was launching aircraft on tactical warning.

1983: Nearing the Precipice

Growing Pessimism, Additional Precautions

The new Soviet leadership's public reaction to two major US Presidential speeches early in 1983 seems to indicate that its concern about American strategic intentions was mounting markedly. In response to the President's so-called "evil empire" speech on

²⁵Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the Late 1990's, NIE 11-3/8, December, 1987.

March 8, the Soviet press charged that Reagan "can think only in terms of confrontation and bellicose, lunatic anti-communism." Later that month, Andropov responded in Pravda to the President's Strategic Defense Initiative speech:

On the face of it, layman may even find it attractive, since the President speaks about what seem to be defensive measures In fact, the strategic offensive forces of the United States will continue to be developed and upgraded at full tilt and along quite a definitive line at that, namely that of acquiring a nuclear first-strike capability.

In the early 1980's, many "civilian" Soviet foreign affairs experts apparently looked upon US actions as aggressive and diplomatically hostile, but not necessarily as precursors to strategic war. By early 1983, however, these specialists, probably realizing they were out of step with Soviet officialdom, also seemed to take a bleaker view of the US-USSR relationship. In January, the Soviet Institute of the US and Canada (IUSAC) held a conference on "strategic stability," and the overall mood was characterized [redacted] as "pessimistic." The group appeared particularly disturbed by the planned Pershing II deployments and underlying US motivations: "The Pershing II, with a flight of 5-6 minutes, represents surprise, and cruise missiles in great numbers also are first-strike weapons." But some optimism prevailed. Evidently expressing the views of many of his colleagues, one participant reportedly commented, "Strategic stability is being disturbed in the 1980's, but is not broken."

25X1, E.O.13526

Also early in the year, Marshal Ogarkov began to earn a reputation: his pessimism toward relations with the US was almost unequalled among senior Soviet officials. Ogarkov's strident advocacy for increased military expenditures to counter the US

military buildup led one [] 25X1, E.O.13526 [] to call him a "dangerous man." In a February press article, he cited the US "Defense Directive of Fiscal 1984-1985" as proof of "how far the 'hawks' have gone," and implied that procuring new, sophisticated military hardware had to proceed apace in the USSR. Sometime thereafter, in a meeting with a Deputy Minister of Defense Industry, he urged that Soviet industry begin preparing for war, [] 25X1, E.O.13526 [] In a speech in March, Ogarkov revealed that his pressure on the political leadership seemed to be having an effect:

The CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet Government are implementing important measures to further increase the defense potential and the mobilization readiness of industry, agriculture, transport, and other sectors of the national economy, and to ensure their timely preparation for the transfer to a war footing

By late summer, General Secretary Andropov's own attitudes seemed to be increasingly accentuated by the same foreboding, judging from the signals he apparently was sending Washington. In August, he told a delegation of six US Democratic Senators that "the tension which is at this time characteristic of practically all areas of our relationship is not our choice. The United States' rationale in this is possibly clearer to you." Moreover, in a comment to the Senators but probably directed at President Reagan, Andropov warned:

There may be someone in Washington who believes that in circumstances of tension, in a 'game without rules,' it will be easier to achieve one's objectives. I do not think so. In the grand scheme of things it is not so at

all. It will not work for one side to be the dominant one. Would the United States permit someone to achieve superiority over them? I doubt it. And this is why we would not tolerate it either.²⁶

* * *

And there apparently was little doubt at the top of the Soviet intelligence services about where US policy was heading. In February, KGB headquarters issued a new, compelling operational directive to the KGB Residence in London, as well as to other Residences in NATO countries. The "Permanent Operational Assignment to uncover NATO Preparations for a Nuclear Attack on the Soviet Union" reaffirmed the Residency's task of "discovering promptly any preparations by the adversary for a nuclear attack (RYAN) on the USSR." It also included an assessment of the Pershing II missile that concluded that the weapon's short flight time would present an especially acute warning problem. Moscow emphasized that insight on NATO's war planning had thus become even more critical:

Immediate preparation for a nuclear attack begins at the moment when the other side's political leadership reaches the conclusion that it is expedient to use military force as the international situation becomes progressively more acute and makes a preliminary decision to launch an attack on the Soviet Union . . . the so-called nuclear consultations in NATO are probably one of the states of

²⁶Dangerous Stalemate: Superpower Relations in Autumn 1983, a Report of a Delegation of Eight Senators to the Soviet Union, September, 1983.

immediate preparation by the adversary for
VRYAN.

The time between NATO's preliminary decision to launch a surprise attack and when the strike would occur was assessed to be 7-10 days. Residents were also requested to submit reports concerning this requirement every two weeks -- regardless of whether there was any new information. This marked the first time that KGB Residencies were required to submit "negative" collection reports.

The immediacy of the threat also permeated GRU reporting requirements. Directives from Soviet military intelligence headquarters stated that war could break out at any moment. Residencies were constantly reminded that they must prepare for war and be able to recycle their operations to a war footing in a moment's notice.

25X1, E.O.13526

About the same time, the GRU also took direct steps to ensure that intelligence reporting would continue after the outbreak of war. It created a new directorate to oversee illegal agents (assets operating in a foreign country without diplomatic or other official status). This unit, [redacted] was tasked to move quickly to form agent networks that could communicate independently with headquarters in Moscow. [redacted]

[redacted] "The idea of creating such illegal nets was not new, but the urgency was." [redacted] the urgency reflected Soviet perceptions of an increased "threat of war"

Throughout the summer of 1983, Moscow pressed KGB and GRU Residencies hard to collect on the VRYAN requirement. A June dispatch from KGB Center in Moscow to the Resident in London, for example, declared that, "the US Administration is continuing its preparations for nuclear war and is augmenting its nuclear potential." [redacted] KGB and GRU Residents world-wide were also instructed to increase operational

25X1, E.O.13526

25X1, E.O.13526

coordination with each other and "define" their relationship with ambassadors and chiefs of mission. [redacted] that this was designed to improve the overall effectiveness of the intelligence effort. In August, the Center dispatched additional VRYAN requirements, some quite specific. It alerted Residencies to increased NATO intelligence activities, submarine operations, and counterintelligence efforts.

25X1, E.O.13526

But not everyone was on board. [redacted] some KGB officers overseas during this time became increasingly skeptical of the VRYAN requirement. Its obsessive nature seemed to indicate to some in the London KGB Residency, for example, that something was askew in Moscow. None of the political reporting officers who concentrated on VRYAN believed in the immediacy of the threat, especially a US surprise attack. In fact, two officers complained to the Resident that Moscow was mistaken in believing the United States was preparing for a unilateral war. They felt that the Residency itself might be partly to blame -- it had, willy-nilly, submitted alarmist reports on the West's military preparations, intensified ideological struggle, and similar themes to try to satiate Moscow's demands for VRYAN reporting.

* * *

Inside the Soviet armed forces, commanders evidently had sufficiently voiced alarm regarding their forces' state of preparedness against a surprise attack. In January 1983, Moscow issued a new key element to its military readiness system: a condition called "Surprise Enemy Attack Using Weapons of Mass Destruction in Progress." It augmented the four existing levels of readiness: (1) Constant Combat Readiness, (2) Increased Combat Readiness, (3) Threat of War, and (4) Full Combat Readiness. This fifth condition could be declared regardless of the readiness stage in effect at the time. It involved a wide variety of immediate defensive and offensive measures -- such as dispersing forces,

taking shelter, and preparing to launch forces.

Probably in response to new US and NATO strategies and equipment upgrades, the Soviet military forces also initiated a number of steps to reduce vulnerabilities to attack:

- o A crash program to build additional ammunition storage bunkers at Bulgarian airfields. This would improve capabilities to preposition air ammunition for Soviet aircraft deployed to support the air defense force against an improved NATO air threat on the Southern Front.

- o The institution of a new regulation to bring tactical missile brigades from peacetime conditions to full readiness within eight hours. (In the late 1970's, a day or more was needed.) Moreover, improvements were introduced at nuclear warhead storage facilities that halved the time needed to remove warheads.

- o Creation of a unique Soviet naval infantry brigade on the Kola peninsula to repel amphibious landings -- probably a direct response to the US Navy's new forward maritime strategy.

- o For the first time, a test of combat and airborne command post aircraft in a simulated electromagnetic pulse (EMP) environment. Soviet planners evidently had come to recognize the serious EMP threat to their command and control systems posed by a US nuclear strike.

Reflecting the heightened emphasis on defense preparedness, Moscow increased procurement of military equipment in 1983 by 5 to 10 percent, apparently by reducing production of civilian goods. Commercial aircraft production, for example, was reduced by about 14 percent in favor of military transports. To overcome this particular shortfall, the Soviets reportedly bought back airframes from East European airlines. They also converted some vehicle

plants from tractor to tank production. One such plant -- at Chelyabinsk -- had not produced tank chassis since World War II.

Mounting Tensions

By September 1983, in a sign probably reflecting perceptions at the top that the USSR was increasingly in peril, military officers began assuming more of a role as official spokesmen. Marshal Ogarkov, for example, was the Soviet official who offered explanations for shooting down KAL-007. In the past, high-ranking officers rarely commented in public on major defense issues. The increased public role of the military, particularly by Ogarkov, coincided with the deterioration of Yuriy Andropov's health. The General Secretary was suffering from long-standing hypertension and diabetes, complicated by kidney disease. Kidney failure in late September led to a long period of illness, which ended in his death in February 1984.

Typical of the Soviet military attacks against US policy during this period, Marshal Kulikov, Commander of the Warsaw Pact, warned in Pravda that the deployment of US Pershing II and cruise missiles "could give rise to an irresistible temptation in Washington to use it against the socialist community countries." An Ogarkov Tass article on 22 September, in which he warned that a sudden strike against the USSR would not go unpunished, was particularly vitriolic:

The USA is stepping up the buildup of strategic nuclear forces . . . to deal a 'disarming' nuclear blow to the USSR. This is a reckless step. Given the present development and spread of nuclear weapons in the world, the defending side will always be left with a quantity of nuclear means capable of responding to the aggressor with a retaliatory

strike causing an 'unacceptable damage'.

He further warned that "only suicides can stake on dealing a first nuclear strike in the present-day conditions . . . and . . . new 'Persings' and cruise missiles in Western Europe are a means for a first strike." Perhaps most ominous, however, was the comparisons Ogarkov made between the US and prewar Nazi Germany.

The conspicuous public appearance of Soviet military leaders and their relentless, often crude attacks on US policy seemed to spread the fear of war among the population. In Moscow, programs highlighting the seriousness of the international situation and the possibility of a US attack were broadcast on radio and television several times a day. At least some Westerners living in Moscow,

[redacted] have said that these programs appeared not for external consumption, but to prepare Soviet citizens for the inevitability of nuclear war with the US. The propaganda campaign seemed to work. Conversations by Westerners with Soviet citizens at the time revealed that the "war danger" line was widely accepted.²⁷

From September onward, the Kremlin offered up increasingly bitter public diatribes against the US. Its language suggested that there was almost no hope for repairing relations. Soviet spokesmen accused President Reagan and his advisors of "madness," "extremism," and "criminality." By this time, Moscow evidently recognized that its massive propaganda campaign to derail the Pershing II and cruise missile deployments had failed. According to press reports, Soviet officials had concluded that the Reagan Administration deliberately engineered the KAL incident to poison the international atmosphere and thereby ensure the missiles would be deployed -- i.e., a demonstration of resolve. Yuriy Andropov,

²⁷Soviet Thinking on the Possibility of Armed Confrontation with the United States, CIA, 22 December 1983.

commenting in late September on the KAL-007 shootdown, wrote in Pravda: "Even if someone had illusions as to the possible evolution for the better in the policy of the present Administration, the latest developments have finally dispelled them."

By late summer, the leadership appeared to be bracing the population for the worst. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the population was being prepared for a possible war. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] signs were being posted everywhere showing the location of air raid shelters. Factories reportedly were required to include air raid drills in their normal work plans. Moreover, a Western visitor to Moscow reported that Andropov sent a letter to all party organizations declaring that the motherland was truly in danger and there was no chance for an improvement in relations with the United States. This letter was reportedly read at closed party meetings throughout the country. In October, Marshal Kulikov announced that preparations for deploying new nuclear missiles to Czechoslovakia and East Germany had begun. The US invasion of Grenada brought a renewed shrillness to the Soviets' public attacks on the US. The Kremlin said it held the President personally responsible for what it described as a "bandit attack" and a "crime against peace and humanity."

* * *

Also toward the end of the year, clear evidence of the Soviet military's preoccupation with readiness again surfaced. The 4th Air Army in Poland received orders to reduce arming times for aircraft with nuclear missions. This apparently stemmed from a new readiness directive issued in October, which ordered several procedural reviews, including: the time needed to prepare nuclear weapons for transport; the time needed to transport nuclear weapons from storage sites to the aircraft; and the time needed to hand

over nuclear weapons to aircraft crews. The instructions also included maximum allowable times for loading nuclear weapons onto aircraft -- 25 minutes for one weapon, 40 minutes for two. In October, the 4th Air Army apparently exercised these new procedures during an inspection by Marshal Ogarkov.

* * *

Within the Soviet leadership, another crisis of transition was in the offing. Andropov apparently became gravely ill and, sometime during October, may have had one of his kidneys removed. His failing health very likely caused the cancellation of a state trip to Bulgaria -- even though the official reason given was the intense international climate. The seriousness of Andropov's condition was apparent when he failed to appear in Kremlin celebrations on November 7 commemorating the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

25X1, E.O.13526

This event, code-named "Able Archer," occurred at a time when some Soviet leaders seemed almost frantic over the threat of war. According to press accounts, Politburo member Gregory Romanov grimly stated in a speech at the Kremlin on the same day that Able Archer commenced: "The international situation at present is white hot, thoroughly white hot."

Able Archer 83

From 7-11 November, NATO conducted its annual command post exercise to practice nuclear release procedures. This is a recurring event that includes NATO forces from Turkey to England,

and is routinely monitored by Soviet intelligence. Typical Soviet responses in the past have included increased intelligence collection and increased readiness levels at select military garrisons.

The 1983 version of Able Archer, however, had some special wrinkles, which we believe probably fueled Soviet anxieties. NATO tested new procedures for releasing nuclear weaponry that emphasized command communications from headquarters to subordinate units. In addition, unlike previous scenarios wherein NATO forces remained at General Alert throughout, the 1983 plan featured pre-exercise communications that notionally moved forces from normal readiness, through various alert phases, to a General Alert.

Soviet intelligence clearly had tip-offs to the exercise, and HUMINT elements underwent a major mobilization to collect against it. On 8 or 9 November, Moscow sent a circular telegram to KGB Residencies in Western Europe ordering them to report on the increased alert status of US military bases in Europe. Residencies were also instructed to check for indications of an impending nuclear attack against the Soviet Union; the London KGB Residency interpreted this as a sign of Moscow's VRYAN concern. Similar messages to search for US military activity were received by GRU Residencies.²⁸

Other Warsaw Pact intelligence services reacted strongly as well. [REDACTED] intelligence officer intimated that during the Able Archer time frame he had been, "particularly occupied trying to obtain information on a major NATO exercise" The officer said that his efforts were in response to a year-old, high-priority requirement from Moscow "to look for any indication that the United States was about

[REDACTED]
25X1, E.O.13526

to launch a preemptive nuclear strike against the countries of the Warsaw Pact."

The Pact also launched an unprecedented technical collection foray against Able Archer 83.

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

The Soviets also conducted over 36 intelligence flights, significantly more than in previous Able Archers. These included Soviet strategic and naval aviation missions over the Norwegian, North, Baltic, and Barents Seas -- probably to determine whether US naval forces were deploying forward in support of Able Archer.

Warsaw Pact military reactions to this particular exercise were also unparalleled in scale. This fact, together with the timing of their response, strongly suggests to us that Soviet military leaders may have been seriously concerned that the US would use Able Archer 83 as a cover for launching a real attack.

The Soviets evidently believed the exercise would take place sometime between 3 and 11 November, but they initiated significant military preparations well in advance. Beginning October 20, for example,

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

These [redacted] were highly unusual. Most notably, they probably

25X3, E.O.13526

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA GAMMA~~
WNINTEL NOFORN NOCONTRACT ORCON

involved [redacted] activity
seen only during crisis periods in the past. Moreover, [redacted]

[redacted]

o Transporting nuclear weapons from storage sites to delivery units by helicopter.

o A "standdown," or suspension of all flight operations, from 4 to 10 November -- with the exception of intelligence collection flights -- probably to have available as many aircraft as possible for combat.

o Invoking a 30-minute, around-the-clock readiness time and assigning priority targets [redacted]

[redacted]

Similar measures were taken by about a third of the Soviet Air Force units [redacted]

[redacted]

Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

There were a number of other unusual Soviet military moves that, taken in the aggregate, also strongly suggest heightened concern:

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

By November 11, the Soviet alert evidently was withdrawn. Flight training by Soviet Air Force units in East Germany returned to normal on the 11th

On the same day that Soviet forces returned to normal status, Marshal Ustinov delivered a speech in Moscow to a group of high-ranking military officers that, in our view, offers a plausible explanation for the unusual Soviet reactions to Able Archer 83. Calling the US "reckless" and "adventurist," and charging it was pushing the world toward "nuclear catastrophe," Ustinov implied that the Kremlin saw US military actions as sufficiently real to order an increase in Soviet combat readiness. Finally, possibly referring to the use of an exercise to launch a surprise attack, he warned that "no enemy intrigues will catch us unawares."

Ustinov also voiced his apparent conviction that the threat

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

of war loomed heavy. Exhorting his forces, he declared that the international situation -- "the increased danger of an outbreak of a new world war" -- called for extraordinary measures:

We must actively and persistently foster high vigilance and mobilize all servicemen both to increase combat readiness . . . and to strengthen military discipline.

There is little doubt in our minds that the Soviets were genuinely worried by Able Archer; however, the depth of that concern is difficult to gauge. On one hand, it appears that at least some Soviet forces were preparing to preempt or counterattack a NATO strike launched under cover of Able Archer. Such apprehensions stemmed, in our view, from several factors:

o US-Soviet relations at the time were probably at their lowest ebb in 20 years. Indeed, the threat of war with the US was an ever-present media theme throughout the USSR, especially the armed forces.

o Yuriy Andropov, probably the only man in the Soviet Union who could authorize the use of nuclear weapons at a moment's notice, was seriously ill

25X1, E.O.13526

25X1, E.O.13526

Pact exercises to counter a NATO surprise attack always portrayed NATO "jumping off" from a large training maneuver before reaching full combat readiness. Soviet doctrine and war plans have long posited such a scenario for a Warsaw Pact preemptive attack on NATO.

On the other hand, the US intelligence community detected no evidence of large-scale Warsaw Pact preparations. Conventional

25X3, E.O.13526

thinking assumes that the Soviets would probably undertake such a mobilization and force buildup prior to a massive attack on NATO. The Board questions, however, whether we would indeed detect as many "indicators" as we might expect, [REDACTED]

The "mixed" Soviet reaction may, in fact, directly reflect the degree of uncertainty within the Soviet military and the Kremlin over US intentions. Although the Soviets usually have been able to make correct evaluations of US alerts, their increased number of intelligence reconnaissance flights and special telegrams to intelligence Residencies regarding possible US force mobilization, for example, suggests to us serious doubts about the true intent of Able Archer. To us, Soviet actions preceding and during the exercise appear to have been the logical steps to be taken in a period when suspicions were running high. Moreover, many of these steps were ordered to be made secretly to avoid detection by US intelligence. This suggests that Soviet forces were either preparing to launch a surprise preemptive attack (which never occurred) or making preparations that would allow them a minimum capability to retaliate, but at the same time not provoke the attack they apparently feared. This situation could have been extremely dangerous if during the exercise -- perhaps through a series of ill-timed coincidences or because of faulty intelligence -- the Soviets had misperceived US actions as preparations for a real attack.

Winter, 1983-84: Winter of Crisis

[REDACTED] 25X1, E.O.13526 [REDACTED] by December 1983, rumors of imminent war were circulating at all levels of Soviet society. For example, at the Warsaw Pact Defense Ministers' Conference in Sofia, Pact Commander Kulikov characterized the international situation as "prewar." He called for more active

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

reserve training, as well as stockpiling of ammunition, food, and fuel in case of an "emergency." In Moscow, a respected US expert on the USSR, after extensive conversations with Soviet government officials, came away convinced that there was an obsessive fear of war, an emotionalism, and a paranoia among his contacts.

25X1, E.O.13526

Nevertheless, the General Secretary continued to participate actively in foreign policy matters. In late November, he sent a toughly worded letter to Margaret Thatcher, calling the cruise missiles slated for Greenham Common a "threat" to the Soviet Union that had to be removed. This letter, undoubtedly a last ditch effort to prevent cruise missile deployments in England, was characterized [25X1, E.O.13526] as "resentful to the point of anger, and even threatening." When the first Pershing II's arrived in West Germany in December, Andropov reportedly ordered his negotiators to leave the Geneva strategic arms talks and not return until the missiles were removed.

Andropov's lengthy infirmity very possibly left the USSR with a feckless leader for several months thereafter, a situation that could have exacerbated any uneasiness among his colleagues over international tensions.

25X1, E.O.13526

25X1, E.O.13526

He died on 9 February.

Konstantine Chernenko's ascent to power left the reins of the USSR in the hands of another seriously ill man. Chernenko had long suffered from emphysema, complicated by pulmonary cardiac insufficiency, as well as from chronic hepatitis. His weak condition was clearly visible during his televised acceptance speech.

25X1, E.O.13526

* * *

The change at the top had no outward effect on the leadership's apparent preoccupation with the danger of war. The media campaign, intelligence collection efforts, and military preparations, in fact, appeared to accelerate in Chernenko's first months in office.

Speeches by Soviet military leaders in February continued to warn that US policies were flirting with war. The major themes gave notice to Washington that a surprise attack would not succeed, and exhorted the Soviet population to steel itself for a possible confrontation. Marshal Kulikov warned in a 24 February Red Star article that,

25X1, E.O.13526

When the United States and NATO play with fire, as they are now doing, theirs is not simply an irresponsible activity, but . . . an extremely dangerous one . . . the US-NATO military and political leadership must realize that whatever they create and whatever means they elaborate for unleashing an aggressive war and conducting combat operations, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies will be capable of a fitting response

Two days later, in a statement commemorating the Soviet armed forces, Marshal Ustinov made public, in vague but pointed language, efforts underway to bolster the national defense:

The CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet government have adopted the necessary measures to strengthen the country's defense, enhance the armed forces' combat readiness, and do all they can to prevent the forces of aggression from wrecking the military equilibrium which has been achieved.

He also quoted General Secretary Chernenko as justifying these measures "to cool the hot heads of the bellicose adventurists."

Judging from his exhortations to the Soviet bureaucracy, we conclude that Chernenko probably shared his predecessor's apparent concerns. In early March, for example, a circular telegram to Soviet diplomats abroad continued to emphasize the same war scare themes. Chernenko was quoted as declaring, "The present tension in the world is caused by the sharply stepped-up policies of the more aggressive forces of American imperialism, a policy of outright militarism, of claims to world supremacy." He reiterated earlier charges that the US deployment of nuclear missiles in

Europe had "seriously increased the threat of war."

* * *

Intelligence collection on VRYAN also continued apace during this period. [REDACTED] 25X1, E.O.13526 [REDACTED] 50 KGB officers were assembled into a new "strategic section," expressly to process VRYAN information. At a special KGB conference in January, the VRYAN requirement received special emphasis. In his speech to the conference, General Kryuchkov told KGB officers that the threat of nuclear war had reached "dangerous proportions."

The White House is advancing on its propaganda the adventurist and extremely dangerous notion of 'survival' in the fire of a thermonuclear catastrophe. This is nothing else but psychological preparation of the population for nuclear war. . . .

Urging the KGB officers to increase their efforts, he added:

Everything indicates that the threshold for using nuclear weapons is being lowered and the significance of the surprise factor has sharply increased. For the intelligence service this means that it must concentrate its efforts to the maximum extent on the principal task to be pursued -- it must not fail to perceive direct preparation by the adversary for a nuclear missile attack against the USSR nor overlook the real danger of war breaking out.

The fear that seemed to grip the KGB leadership evidently had a hold on many lower-level officials as well. [REDACTED] 25X1, E.O.13526 [REDACTED]

25X1, E.O.13526

[redacted] a KGB official [redacted]
[redacted] told him in April 1984, that the US and USSR were on the brink of war. This same official also confided that it was very important that the Soviet Union guard against surprise nuclear attack. Moscow Center generated even more, often curiously esoteric, VRYAN tasking to the field. The Residency in London received instructions to watch for government efforts to build up anti-Soviet feelings among the public; monitor activities at Greenham Common; and conduct surveillance of military and civilian groups, as well as banks, slaughterhouses and post offices.

25X1, E.O.13526

There was also a clear signal of VRYAN's significance among the high echelons of Soviet government. Moscow dispatched a circular telegram to all ambassadors and chiefs of mission instructing them not to interfere in or obstruct the work of KGB or GRU personnel. [redacted] this cable, signed by Foreign Minister Gromyko, was unprecedented.

25X1, E.O.13526

Indeed, a self-reinforcing cycle seemed to have taken life, wherein leadership concern was provoking more VRYAN reporting, and increased VRYAN data, in turn, was adding fuel to leadership anxieties. Because Moscow continued to demand every tidbit of information that might bear on NATO war preparations, many of the London KGB Residency's reports, [redacted] contained information that had, at best, only tenuous connections to real military activities. Ambiguous information went to Moscow without clarification and, as is customary in KGB field reporting, without specific sourcing. In March, for example, the KGB Resident in London instructed the officer in charge of VRYAN data to forward a report on a cruise missile exercise at Greenham Common. Although the Residency had gleaned the story from a British newspaper, the report arrived in Moscow as a top-priority cable, marked "of strategic importance" -- the first use of this format by the Residency in over three years. That same month London Residency

sent a second "flash" message to Moscow, this time on the initiative of a junior officer who had been listening to a BBC report on cruise missiles.

25X1, E.O. 13526

Because VRYAN reports were very selective, and usually not put into context, they tended to corroborate Headquarters' fears, further building the "case" of NATO war preparations. Even innocuous information from overt sources found their way into the data base. [redacted] one such story about a local campaign for blood donors met a VRYAN requirement to report evidence of blood drives; and the information was duly submitted.

And Moscow kept stoking the fire. In praising the London Residency for its VRYAN reporting in March 1984, Headquarters cited the "blood donor" report as especially interesting. Even though by this time most Residency officers had grown increasingly skeptical of the VRYAN effort, they nonetheless adopted a "can do" approach, forwarding any "evidence" they could find. Still, London Residency often failed to submit its mandatory bi-weekly reports, and Moscow repeatedly had to issue reminders.

The Center sometimes tried to spur on London Residency by sharing information from other sources. On one occasion, it offered an assessment of a NATO document that called for improvements in crisis-related communications links. According to the Center, this was yet another "significant sign of preparations for a sudden nuclear missile attack against the Soviet Union and socialist countries."

25X1, E.O. 13526

Moscow also heaped praise on its allies' efforts. [redacted] [redacted] the head of the KGB's VRYAN program singled out Czechoslovak reporting on the US Federal Emergency Management Agency as "priceless." The same official also lauded Prague for its collection of military intelligence, which, he said, helped make its civilian service second only to the KGB in fulfilling the

VRYAN requirement. The East Germans reportedly placed third.

25X3, E.O.13526

In addition, GRU Residencies geared up. In fact, there were some indications that Residencies were about to be placed on wartime readiness.

[redacted] As a result, Residencies put as many agents as possible in direct radio contact with Moscow. This measure was intended to ensure that Headquarters could handle the agents directly should a rupture in diplomatic relations occur and an embassy had to be abandoned. To timely monitor military developments abroad, the GRU implemented a special 24-hour watch staff at Headquarters. These tasks, according to GRU training, were to be implemented during time of war.

Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

25X1 and 3, E.O.13526

Moscow's emphasis on wartime preparedness was reflected in training exercises throughout 1984. For the first time that year, the Soviet strategic forces training program concentrated on surviving and responding to a surprise enemy strike. This seeming obsession with wartime preparedness really came to the fore in March and April: the Soviet armed forces conducted the most comprehensive rehearsal for nuclear war ever detected [redacted]

Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

[redacted] Indeed, several of the component events were, by themselves, the largest, or most extensive of their type ever observed. This activity included [redacted]

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under §6 of the National Security Act of 1959, 50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

The naval exercise involved over 148 surface ships and probably close to 50 submarines. At one stage, approximately 23 ballistic missile submarines were activated, making it the most extensive dispersal of its kind ever detected. The Northern and

Baltic Fleets were especially active, conducting dispersals, defensive maneuvers, anti-submarine operations, simulated reactions to nuclear attack, and offensive nuclear strikes.

The naval exercises ended just as the Strategic Aviation and Strategic Rocket Force maneuvers jumped off. Here, too, the level of effort was impressive:

o The Strategic Rocket Force exercise and associated naval activity involved 33 missile launches, including SLBM's, MRBM's, and ICBM's. [REDACTED]

o The Soviet Strategic Aviation exercise involved at least 17 bombers deployed to various staging bases. On one day alone, over 80 bombers conducted a large-scale strike exercise.

Summer, 1984: Preparations for War

In mid-May Ustinov, in response to a series of questions published by Tass, continued the media attack against the US by accusing Washington of trying to "achieve military superiority" to blackmail the Soviet Union. He warned that "any attempts at resolving the historical dispute with socialism by means of military force are doomed to inevitable, utter failure." In addition, he reemphasized the military's readiness theme by quoting Chernenko: "No military adventure of imperialism will take us by surprise, any aggressor will immediately get his deserts." And he called upon the Soviet people to work even more "perseveringly" and "purposefully" to strengthen the economy. Finally, Ustinov revealed that "the Army and Navy are in permanent readiness for resolutely repelling any aggressor."

About this time, Chernenko's leadership position may well have been significantly impacted by his declining health. [REDACTED]

25X1, E.O.13526

Chernenko's physical deterioration and lack of stamina could well have accelerated the accumulation of power by younger Politburo members, namely Mikhail Gorbachev.

25X1, E.O.13526

Moreover, according to a public statement by the then Deputy Director of IUSAC, Gorbachev, during this period assumed the responsibility for "strategy formulation" on defense matters.

We do not know how strongly Gorbachev subscribed to the same view on the threat of a surprise attack apparently held by many of his Politburo colleagues. There are some very slim pieces of evidence suggesting the opposite. [redacted]

[redacted] some officials in Soviet intelligence believed he was less bellicose toward the US, and might even "surrender" if conditions in the USSR continued to deteriorate. [redacted]

[redacted] by "surrender," [redacted] meant retreat or withdrawal from an expanding Soviet empire, not military submission.

Gorbachev's speech to the people of Smolensk in late June betrayed no obvious obsession with the war scare. He was there to award the city the Order of Lenin for its citizens' bravery during

the Second World War -- presumably a good setting in which to attack the US publicly. The speech, however, focused primarily on improving the economy and the standard of living. Rather than exhorting the people to increase military readiness, he called for the mobilization of "creative potentialities of each person; the further strengthening of discipline and the increase of responsibility at work; and the implementation of school reform and an integrated solution to the contemporary problems of education."

Nevertheless, the fear of a US attack apparently persisted among some Soviet leaders into the fall. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the Politburo secretly forbade the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, and other responsible military and KGB leaders from being absent from their offices for any length of time. [REDACTED]

General Akhromeyev, then First Deputy Minister of Defense, was quoted during this period as saying that war was "imminent." Akhromeyev reportedly compared the situation in Europe to the weeks preceding the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. He asked GRU Chief Ivashutin whether, in case of war, there were sufficient agents in place in NATO's rear areas. He also asked whether the GRU had agents in NATO General Staffs who could give twenty days warning of hostile action.

* * *

In fact, Soviet military actions into the early fall suggested continued deep concern about Western hostility. Presumably at the behest of the Soviet military leadership, Warsaw Pact security services increased harassment of Western attaches and imposed greater restrictions on their travel. [REDACTED]

25X1, E.O.13526

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

25X3, E.O.13526

Withheld from public release under
§6 of the National Security Act of 1959,
50 U.S.C. 3605 (P.L. 86-36)

Through early summer, Moscow's emphasis on preparedness evidently led to a number of military developments aimed at increasing the Warsaw Pact's ability to go to war:

o In March, to avoid reducing readiness among combat troops, the Politburo decided for the first time since the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia not to use military trucks and personnel to support the harvest.

o In April, the East German ammunition plant in Luebben increased to 24-hour production and more than doubled its output.

o In May, Polish women in several cities were called up for a short military exercise. In some families with young children, both husband and wife were called. Reservists were told that readiness alerts would be expanded and occur more frequently in factories and relief organizations.

o In Hungary, a recall of an undetermined number of reservists was conducted in May.

o In June, [redacted] during the previous 6-12 months additional SPETSNAZ troops had arrived in Hungary. [redacted] an increase of SPETSNAZ forces in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as well as an ongoing "aggressive indoctrination" of Warsaw Pact forces.

o Also in June, the Soviets conducted their largest ever

unilateral combat exercise in Eastern Europe. At least 60,000 Soviet troops in Hungary and Czechoslovakia were involved.

o A mobilization exercise in June in Czechoslovakia involved the armed forces, territorial forces, and civil defense elements.

o During the spring, according to Western press reports, Soviet civil defense associations were activated. Volunteers were knocking on apartment doors explaining what to do when sirens go off.

o For the first time in 30 years, Soviet railroad troops in the Transcaucasus conducted an exercise to test their ability to move supplies to the forward area while under air attack.

o [redacted] 25X1, E.O.13526 [redacted] the Soviets abolished draft deferments, even at defense plants.

o Both the Soviets and Czechs separately practiced modifying mobilization procedures in exercises to facilitate call-up of civilian reservists earlier in the force readiness sequence.

o In Poland, the length of required military service for new reserve officers was increased from 12 to 18 months.

o In an effort to limit contact with foreigners, the Supreme Soviet decreed, effective 1 July, that Soviet citizens who provided foreigners with housing, transportation, or other services would be fined.

o [redacted] 25X1, E.O.13526 [redacted] since 1983 men up to 35 years old had been drafted without consideration of family difficulties or their profession.

* * *

Inside the intelligence bureaucracy, however, there were signs by midyear that attention was shifting away from "surprise nuclear attack." [redacted] 25X1, E.O.13526 [redacted] Moscow Headquarters continued to press for VRYAN reporting, but the previous sense of urgency had dissipated. Both in London and at Moscow Center KGB officers were beginning to sense that official guidance on VRYAN was becoming ritualistic, reflecting less concern. KGB officers returning from Moscow to London had the clear impression that the primary strategic concern was focused on the possibility of a US technological breakthrough. This was expressed in tasking to both the KGB and GRU. Information on US scientific-technical developments that could lead to a weapons technology breakthrough began to assume a high priority.³⁰

Autumn, 1984: Reason Restored

By late summer, there were public hints of possible differences inside the Kremlin over how to deal with Washington on strategic matters. In an interview on September 2, Chernenko omitted any reference to the removal of US Pershing II or cruise missiles as a condition for resuming strategic arms talks. Gromyko, however, reiterated this condition in a tough speech to the UN on 27 September. On 6 October, Gromyko gave a characteristically harsh speech to the United Nations in which he attacked the Reagan Administration's "reckless designs" and "obsession" with achieving military superiority. Chernenko's interview with the Washington Post on 17 October was lighter in tone.

By that time, a number of factors may have prompted some serious reflecting within the Politburo. Probably most important, the imminent US nuclear attack -- expected for more than two years

³⁰Ibid.

-- did not materialize. Likewise, the massive VRYAN collection effort, we presume, ultimately did not yield the kind of concrete indicators of US war preparations for which the Soviet leadership was searching. Other events that also may have prompted some policy reexamination included:

- The ineffectiveness of "countermeasures" in slowing US INF deployments or significantly stimulating the West European "peace" movement.
- Moscow's inability to match the US military buildup -- because of severe economic problems.
- Growing concern for possible US technological breakthroughs in space weaponry.
- Soviet perceptions of the increasing likelihood of President Reagan's reelection.

In addition, several leadership personalities perhaps most suspicious of US intentions departed the scene. Notably, Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov, whose public statements on US-USSR relations were particularly onerous, was sacked and reassigned. Although we do not know for certain, Ogarkov may have been the casualty of a changing Politburo, which seemed to want improved relations with the US and greater control over the military.

25X1, E.O.13526

the impetus for improved US-USSR relations was coming from the "younger" generation -- specifically Gorbachev, Romanov, and Aliev -- whose views had prevailed over those of Gromyko and Ustinov.

Ogarkov was replaced with Akhromeyev to make the Soviet military more flexible on arms control issues.

25X1, E.O.13526

Not long after Ogarkov was dismissed, Dimitry Ustinov -- another key believer in the US surprise attack -- became seriously ill with pneumonia. His condition worsened in the late fall, and he died on December 20. Ustinov's demise was paralleled by a softening in the Kremlin's arms control policy. In late November, Chernenko abandoned Andropov's vow not to return to the Geneva talks as long as US INF missiles remained in Europe and agreed to resume talks in January 1985.

* * *

Attitudes were also changing inside Soviet intelligence. By late 1984, a new KGB collection requirement (levied during the summer) for scientific-technical intelligence had acquired equal standing with VRYAN. By early 1985, [redacted]

[redacted] the threat of surprise nuclear attack was not being taken seriously at all in the KGB, even within the First Chief Directorate. On a visit to Moscow in January 1985, the Acting Resident from London reportedly attempted to discuss the VRYAN requirement with a senior First Chief Directorate friend, but was put off by "a strong Russian expletive." Officers at the London Residency reportedly welcomed the decline of VRYAN because it would diminish the possibility of misperceptions about US preparations for nuclear attack.³¹

By early 1985, Soviet leadership fears of a US surprise attack seemed to evaporate steadily. Chernenko's health eroded throughout the early months of 1985 and he died on March 10. Within hours, Gorbachev became General Secretary.

* * *

For some time after Gorbachev assumed power, tensions remained

³¹Ibid.

high between Washington and Moscow. However, Soviet public expressions of fear that the US was plotting a sudden nuclear attack eventually subsided. A new, more upbeat mood among the leadership began to emerge. In July 1985, Gorbachev delivered a speech to a group of military officers in Minsk in which, according to a Western reporter, he distanced himself from the policies of his immediate predecessors and placed a high priority on achieving arms agreements -- to facilitate a reduction in arms spending and help bail out the disastrous economy.

In the military arena, however, the vestiges of the war scare seemed to have a lasting effect. The Soviets continued until 1987 the forward deployment of their ballistic missile submarines. In late 1984, they also began conducting strategic bomber "combat" patrols over the Arctic as part of their "analogous" response to US INF deployments. And they continued to reduce their vulnerabilities to a surprise nuclear attack -- in 1985, for example, by moving the SRF alternate command post at Smolensk eastward to Orenburg and out of Pershing II range.

The Legacy

Indeed, the Soviet military's experience during this period may well have had at least some influence in subsequent policy decisions regarding strategic force modernization and training. Soviet strategic military developments and exercises since then have particularly emphasized improving capabilities to survive and retaliate against a surprise nuclear attack. Such efforts have included:

- o The orchestration of five SRF exercises in 1986 and 1987 to test the ability of mobile missile units to respond to a US surprise attack.

- o Beginning in March 1986, a change in strategic aviation

exercises that featured "takeoff on strategic warning," i.e., aircraft were sent aloft during the onset of heightened international tensions.

o Impressive improvements in the survivability of their strategic arsenal. By the late 1990's, 75 percent of the force will be highly survivable mobile platforms -- compared to 25 percent in 1979. Although much of this change reflects the introduction of land-based systems, the sea-based and bomber forces have also greatly enhanced their ability to survive a sudden first strike.

The legacy of the war scare, however, has perhaps been most obvious within the Soviet intelligence establishment. [redacted]

[redacted] while the VRYAN collection requirement is no longer at the top of the KGB's priority list, it nonetheless ranks third -- behind only (1) US/NATO strategic and political-economic issues, and (2) significant international political changes. These updated priorities were stipulated in a paper jointly issued last summer by the new chief of the First Chief Directorate (FCD) and the new KGB party secretary. Moreover, the FCD evidently continues to process VRYAN reporting through a "situation room" at its headquarters, and still requires the larger Residencies abroad -- such as Washington -- to man VRYAN "sections." The same source says that the KGB's "illegals" and counterintelligence components have become major contributors of VRYAN reporting. Inside the GRU, warning of imminent nuclear attack remains the (traditionally) top collection objective, but

[redacted] 25X1, E.O.13526 [redacted] a headquarters directive late last year reemphasized its importance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

Recent events in Europe reinforce the Board's deep concern that US intelligence must be better able to assess likely Soviet

attitudes and intentions. Today, the dark clouds of political instability inside the Kremlin loom far heavier than even during those evidently precarious days of leadership transition in the early 1980's. Popular political expectations -- more often, demands -- throughout the Bloc have almost certainly outdistanced even Mikhail Gorbachev's reform-minded vision. As the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe crumbles, prospects are very good that strongly anti-communist governments will eventually emerge, making very likely a total realignment of the European political landscape. Domestically, ethnic strife threatens to rip the very fabric of the Soviets' socialist "Union." The economy continues to slide, while the leadership invokes so-called reforms that, at best, are only half-measures. All the while, Gorbachev is trying to project an image of control, but is probably barely able to hang on to the reins. And his political opposition may be preparing to pounce at the earliest, most opportune moment.

It's no news to our policymakers that this turmoil in the USSR makes for very unsettled and virtually unpredictable governmental relationships -- a conundrum that will probably last for some time. In such a charged atmosphere, particularly if events degenerate into a Kremlin power struggle that favors the "conservatives," misperceptions on either side could lead willy-nilly to unwarranted reactions -- and counterreactions.

It is clear to this Board that the US intelligence community, therefore, has a compelling obligation to make a determined effort to minimize the chances that future Soviet actions will be misinterpreted in Washington.