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**Mere Seconds From Launch:  
Able Archer 83, the NATO Exercise That Almost Triggered a Nuclear War**

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**This is a history of an event that never took place.**

*“Never, perhaps, in the postwar decades was the situation in the world as explosive, and hence, more difficult and unfavorable, as in the first half of the 1980s.” -Mikhail Gorbachev*

## **1. Introduction**

In September 1983, Stanislav Petrov saved the world. Petrov was a lieutenant colonel in the Soviet Air Defense Forces and a duty officer stationed at Serpukhov-15, a secret command center outside Moscow where the Soviet military monitored nuclear warnings. At 12:15 a.m. on September 27, Soviet computers indicated an incoming Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile that had been launched from somewhere in the United States. If correct, they would detonate over their Soviet targets in minutes. About two minutes later, four more missile launches were reported. These Soviet reports had come from one of seven orbiting Soviet Oko [Eye] satellites that had been put into service in 1982. Oko satellites were used to identify launches of ballistic missiles through detection of their engines' exhaust plume in infrared light. However, over a dozen or so Oko satellites had failed previously. Petrov who was stationed at Serpukhov-15 during this time had only a matter of minutes to react to these reports and determine a proper Soviet counter-action. After careful consideration, Petrov realized there were no secondary indications of a launch and decided not to alert the Soviet chain of command. Petrov came to this conclusion due to the fact “that there was not yet enough corroborating radar or telescopic data, and because his gut instinct told him that the United States would not launch a sudden nuclear attack against the Soviet Union”<sup>1</sup>. Petrov did not want to take the chance of Serpukhov-15's warnings to be sent up the Soviet chain of command where they would decide if

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<sup>1</sup>Jones, “Able Archer 83” 28.

the threat was plausible and launch its own missiles. Therefore, Petrov decided not to report it. Petrov's action averted a potential nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States. An investigation into the incident would later confirm that the Soviet satellite system had malfunctioned due to detecting sunlight reflection off high-level clouds over the Western United States. To this day, Petrov is credited as "the man who saved the world!" This event took place two months before Able Archer 83, the NATO military exercises that almost triggered another outbreak of nuclear war. Contrary to what most people think, in the early 1980s the US and the Soviet Union repeatedly came perilously close to a nuclear holocaust.

In November 1983, NATO held a five-day military exercise known as Able Archer 83. The exercise lasted from November 7-11 and took place in various locations across Western Europe. The purpose of the Able Archer 83 was to model a process of conflict escalation that culminated in a simulated nuclear attack. For NATO and the United States, Able Archer 83 were exercises that should not have caused any alarm bells. However, the Soviet Politburo was convinced that an actual nuclear strike against the Kremlin was imminent. NATO had conducted these similar routine exercises in previous years. 1983, however, was different. The exercises included the participation of President Ronald Reagan and other top Western officials and it involved the use of new, highly encrypted communication codes.<sup>2</sup> The use of these encrypted communication codes was unprecedented, but the reaction of Warsaw Pact military forces and intelligence services was also unusual.

In February 1990, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board released a 90+ page document that provided a comprehensive account of the 1983 war scare. According to declassified U.S. intelligence sources, Soviet forces reacted unprecedentedly to Able Archer 83 than in previous years, revealing how serious the threat of war was during Able Archer 83 "Air

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<sup>2</sup>President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, "The Soviet War Scare" 88.

armies in East Germany were placed on alert. At the same time, the Soviets conducted significantly more reconnaissance flights than in previous years and sent special intelligence requirements to the KGB and GRU residencies in western countries to report any unusual military activity that might signal an impending surprise attack”<sup>3</sup>.

The seriousness and the potential impact of Able Archer 83 are revealed in these primary and secondary sources that I analyze throughout this paper. This thesis has three primary goals. First, I aim to comprehend US/Soviet relations in the early 1980s and the diplomatic actions that defined this tumultuous period. I do this by utilizing what historians have written about pertaining to US/Soviet relations in the late 1970s to early 1980s. Second, this paper looks at both the US and Soviet sides of the Able Archer 83 narrative through intelligence documents, memoirs, scholarly sources, and political speeches. I argue that US and Soviet intelligence misperceptions of one another, policies under the Reagan administration such as SDI and PSYOP, and Soviet fear of an attack from the West contributed to the nuclear war hysteria surrounding the year 1983. Even Yuri Andropov, General Secretary of the Communist Party, feared that there would be a war with the US due to “miscalculation”. Third, I hope to answer some questions: what led to the deterioration of US/Soviet relations in the early 1980s? Why did Soviet intelligence misperceive the intentions of Able Archer 83? I have organized this paper into six sections. The second section provides a historiography of US/Soviet relations from the late 1970s to early 1980s, starting with Presidential Directive 59 under the Carter administration and President Reagan’s policies in the early 1980s. In the third section, I examine the US/NATO side of the war scare using various intelligence documents from the CIA, President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, and top government officials. Part two describes the Soviet side of the war scare from various intelligence reports from top Soviet officials such as Andropov,

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<sup>3</sup>President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet War Scare” 89.

Ustinov, as well as interviews and political speeches. Finally, I end this paper with the fallout of the Able Archer 83 exercises and the impact it had on both the US and the Soviets. My goal by the end of this paper is to have a better understanding of US/Soviet relations in the early 1980s and the history of the Able Archer 83 military exercises.

## **II. Historiography of US/Soviet relations in the late 1970s to early 1980s**

To understand Able Archer 83 and what led to the increased polarization and distrust between the United States and the Soviet Union in the early 1980s, this section highlights what historians have written about in regards to US/USSR relations, specifically focusing on the shift in policy change from Jimmy Carter's Administration to the Reagan administration.

The shift in US foreign policy in the early 1980s can be traced back to President James E. Carter and certain policies that he pursued under his administration in the late 1970s. The assertiveness of the Reagan administration in the early 1980s marked a clear distinction from the "era of self-doubt" that ensued in the United States in the late 1970s. Soviet actions in Afghanistan, Poland, Central America, and around the world would institute a tougher US posture under the Reagan presidency.

In "The Soviet American War Scare of the 1980s," Benjamin Fischer, a retired Central Intelligence Agency agent, and Chief Historian on the History Staff of the Agency's Center for the Study of Intelligence notes that the US defense modernization program that began under the Carter administration and accelerated under President Reagan. Fischer comments US actions "surprised Moscow and caused serious concern among Soviet leadership, in part because it could undermine Soviet efforts to achieve parity with the United States and provide the United States with the capability of launching a disarming strike."<sup>4</sup> Presidential Directive 59 was one of these

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<sup>4</sup> Fischer, "The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s" 492.

policies that became a real concern for the Kremlin in the late 1970s. PD-59 originated under President Nixon in 1974 when he signed the National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 242 but was unveiled in August 1980. NSDM responded to unclear nuclear threats to make them “more plausible and to give presidents more choices than the SIOP attack options.”<sup>5</sup> Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) was the United States’ general plan for nuclear war in 1961 and remained in effect with modifications since then. SIOP gave the President a range of targeting options and launch procedures, using land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and sea-based submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). In the declassified memorandum “Our Nuclear War Doctrine: Limited Options and Regional Nuclear War Options,” National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski writes to President Carter about his dissatisfaction with SIOP and the NSDM 242 due to their limited nuclear war-fighting procedures “The SIOP, as you know, offers retaliatory options short of a full response, but they remain massive in both direct and collateral damage.”<sup>6</sup> What was needed was a more specific and adequate plan that targeted specific Soviet sites and better communication and intelligence assets to fight a possible nuclear war. Presidential Directive 59 called for pre-planned nuclear strike options and capabilities. It mandated US missiles targeting Soviet “political-military assets” such as underground bunkers, command-and-control posts, and nuclear storage sites.

PD-59 was vital for the policy of deterring a possible nuclear attack against the US as stated in the objective of the memorandum “Policy Guidance For The Employment Of Nuclear Weapons (NUWEP) (U), “To enhance deterrence and thereby reduce the dangers of nuclear war -- which is at once a military, a political, and moral objective -- we must continue to pursue an integrated policy of force modernization, equitable and verifiable agreements on arms

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<sup>5</sup> Burr, “Jimmy Carter’s Controversial Nuclear Targeting Directive PD-59 Declassified.”

<sup>6</sup> Brzezinski, “Our Nuclear War Doctrine” 1.

limitations, and more credible doctrine and plans for the employment of nuclear weapons.”<sup>7</sup> If deterrence failed, the United States must be able to fight successfully in the instance of a nuclear war. Under PD-59, the US would be prepared and not suffer costs that could have otherwise been avoided. PD-59 was a defense strategy for the United States. In contrast, the Kremlin viewed it as moving closer to the brink of war.



**Figure 1.** A *Washington Post* article featured in August 1980. Source: Getler, Michael. “Carter Directive Modifies Strategy for a Nuclear War.” *The Washington Post*, August 6, 1980. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb390/photos/Washington%20Post%20208-6-80%20headline.pdf>

PD-59 was an important strategic move that had the Soviets alarmed for several reasons. As highlighted in this article from the *Washington Post* in August of 1980, the US now possessed the capability of having more accurate weapons and better ways of controlling them. The US was no longer relying on Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), the strategy to deter the Soviets from even attacking due to US capabilities. Furthermore, the US could not only quickly destroy Soviet targets under PD-59 and go so far as to prevent a Soviet military victory. US intelligence

<sup>7</sup> Burr, “Policy Guidance For The Employment Of Nuclear Weapons”.

would have to be precise in hitting these targets, requiring an improvement of intelligence assets on their end. In conclusion, PD-59 was a shift from detente. The policy of detente was pursued by the United States from 1967-1979, a strategy aimed at reducing tensions with the Soviet Union through cooperation and Strategic Arms Limitations Treaties (SALT). PD-59 instead foreshadowed the Reagan administration's policies in the early 1980s that laid the foundation for the war scare of 1983.

The number one Soviet foreign policy priority during the 1980s was to prevent the deployment of US Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) missiles like the Pershing II because "Soviet military experts believed the Pershing II to be a greater danger than American ICBMs deployed to the United States."<sup>8</sup> The Pershing II missiles were a response to the Soviet deployment of the SS-20 missiles in Europe during March 1976. The Pershing II missiles were installed in West Germany in November 1983 and caused great concern amongst the Kremlin because the flight time from Western Europe to Moscow was an estimated ten to twelve minutes. From the American perspective, the deployment of these missiles was a symbol of Reagan's commitment to achieving global equilibrium by strengthening America's alliances "The White House saw the new missiles as a symbol of US commitment to NATO defense that was intended to prevent the Soviet Union from "decoupling" NATO's transatlantic partners."<sup>9</sup> The deployment of these missiles would have a significant impact on the Soviet response to the Able Archer 83 war scare "It was the imminent deployment of Gryphon and Pershing II missiles that played the largest role in shaping the Soviet response during the 1983 War Scare."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Soviets viewed this as a step closer to a possible first strike on Moscow by the West.

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<sup>8</sup> Fischer, "The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s" 494.

<sup>9</sup> Fischer, "The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s" 495.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, "Able Archer 83" 20.

If one quote could sum up President Reagan's policy towards the Soviet Union in the 1980s, it would be found in his speech delivered to the National Association of Evangelicals, referring to the Soviet Union as an evil empire "I urge you to beware the temptation of pride--the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire."<sup>11</sup> What commentators had characterized the string of losses for the United States in the 1970s as "America in Retreat", the tone quickly changed when Ronald Reagan entered the White House in 1981. What differentiated Reagan's Cold War strategy from the Carter administration is Reagan didn't want to just "contain" Soviet influence but *prevent* the Soviets from any further influence or military action "The great strategic innovation of the 1980s was the combination of containment with an attempt to break the stalemate of the Cold War with a complimentary policy of *offense*."<sup>12</sup> Not only did Reagan expand Carter's defense spending proposal from \$134 billion in 1980 to \$253 billion in 1985, but Reagan heavily engaged in an ideological counter-offensive. The policy of containing communist ideology was changing: as Fitzhugh Green remarked, "No longer would the US stand mute in the face of communist vilification."<sup>13</sup>

The Reagan administration began a program of modernization. This included developing accurate SLBM (SLBM are sub-launched missiles), bombers (the B-2), and ICBMs (specifically the MX) to penetrate Soviet air defenses. The ICBMs (intercontinental ballistic missiles) were to carry multiple warheads and strike targets with better precision. Reagan urged the buildup of America's defense to support and aid resistance to the Soviets and their allies. Reagan's policy would show that the Soviets would be met with heavy resistance if they tried to advance further in the future. The campaign of ideological warfare was a critical element in these policies.

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<sup>11</sup>Reagan, "Address to the National Association of Evangelicals."

<sup>12</sup>Busch, "Ronald Reagan and the Defeat of the Soviet Empire" 454.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 454.

Reagan described socialist ideology as follows “all Marxism had provided humanity was “a gaggle of bogus prophecies and petty superstitions.”<sup>14</sup> Through this rhetoric, Reagan was urging not only a Soviet-bloc at home but all around the world, taking an aggressive stance diplomatically. In labeling the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” and encouraging resistance, the goal of this rhetoric was to ultimately to discredit the Soviet Union as a whole, by labeling communism as inhumane, repressive, and an unproductive system. In regards to actions, not only did the US military buildup spook the Russians but a covert political-psychological effort to attack Soviet vulnerabilities escalated tensions as well. President Reagan’s military policies were aimed at reasserting US strength and exploiting Soviet vulnerabilities. On January 17, 1983, this strategy was outlined in the National Security Defense Directive or NSDD-75. This key directive set the course for 1983, leading up to the Able Archer 83 crisis. According to NSDD, the US’s foreign policy goals with regards to the Soviet Union were to be “External resistance to Soviet imperialism: internal pressure on the USSR to weaken the sources of Soviet imperialism; and negotiations to eliminate, on the basis of strict reciprocity, outstanding disagreements.”<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Reagan’s policies in the early 1980s, the rhetoric in his speeches aiming at the Kremlin, the military buildup, and lack of diplomacy subsequently worked in the opposite of what he hoped to achieve with the Soviet Union: cooperation to reduce nuclear weapons. The Soviets saw Reagan’s actions as warmongering. What Reagan saw as peace through strength had the complete opposite effect. Ambassador Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States commented about Reagan’s actions to have “strengthened those in the Politburo, the Central Committee, and the security apparatus who had been pressing for a mirror-image of Reagan’s own policy. Ronald Reagan managed to create a solid front of hostility among our leaders.

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<sup>14</sup>Brands, “Making the Unipolar Moment” 81.

<sup>15</sup>White House, “US Relations With The USSR” 1.

Nobody trusted him. Any of his proposals almost automatically were considered with suspicion. This unique situation in our relations threatened dangerous consequences.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the raising of the defense budget and the attack on the socialist ideology by the United States raised alarm bells with Yuri Andropov, the KGB Chairman at the time who remarked in the National Consultation Meetings of the Leadership and Members of the KGB the West was on a mission to erode socialist ideology “As to the ideological arena, the enemy, having confirmed for itself the fruitfulness of the activities of individual anti-social elements, is now trying to influence wider groups of the population with the objective to create so-called “pockets of social agitation” in order to ultimately achieve the “ideological erosion” of the Soviet society.”<sup>17</sup> In retrospect, the late 1970s and early 1980s laid the framework of mistrust that ensued between the United States and the USSR in the year 1983.

### **III. US Side of the “War Scare”**

The first key event in the timeline of 1983 is Reagan’s announcement of SDI, famously known as “Star Wars” coined by the media in the 1980s. In March 1983, Reagan announced that the United States would seek to develop a ballistic missile defense system, putting an end to the standoff of Mutually Assured Destruction or MAD. SDI was a missile defense system intended to protect the United States from an attack by ballistic strategic nuclear weapons such as intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. SDI illuminated the United States’s possible superiority over Moscow. Through SDI, Reagan hoped that it would throw the Kremlin badly off balance because this missile defense system was a “cost-imposing strategy...it was an area in which America’s immense wealth, and its superiority in computers,

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<sup>16</sup>Jones, “Able Archer 83” 18.

<sup>17</sup> Andropov, “On The Tasks of the KGB” 4.

sensors, and high-tech innovation, gave it all the advantages.”<sup>18</sup> SDI challenged Moscow in that it would either have to respond with a significant offensive buildup or develop its own defensive shield. The latter would put pressure on the Soviet Union’s already rigid economy, which was one of the critical aspects of the Soviet Union that Reagan intended to target during his presidency. It is no wonder that SDI became an obsession with Soviet leadership, as Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, and Mikhail Gorbachev all tried to derail SDI. SDI produced many pressures on the Soviets in that it forced the Soviet government to either accept a strategic defeat or an unacceptable technological and economic burden. The purpose of SDI was to prevent and deter a possible nuclear attack from the Soviet Union. By claiming to have this capability to destroy an oncoming Soviet missile, supporters of SDI claimed that this would eventually end the Cold War for the Soviets wouldn’t want to pose a threat in the first place “a successful defense system would destroy the Soviet ability to make the first strike, which in turn would undermine the USSR’s ability to pose a threat to the United States at all. So success in this area, supporters of SDI argued, could potentially also bring an end to the Cold War.”<sup>19</sup>

A second key event that further added to the buildup of tension in 1983 was the shooting down of Korean Airlines 007. On September 1, 1983, a Soviet Su-15 interceptor fired two air-to-air missiles at a Korean Boeing 747 airliner, killing all of the 267 passengers and crew aboard. The Soviet air defense had been tracking KAL 007 for more than an hour as it entered Soviet airspace over the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Soviet Union was convinced the airliner was a US spy plane invading Soviet air space. The United States, however, argued that it was shot down over international airspace. US intelligence into the incident would conclude that the Soviets were mistaken and did not know they were destroying a civilian airliner. The shutdown

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<sup>18</sup> Brands, “Making the Unipolar Moment” 78.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

was one of the tensest moments of 1983 in which President Reagan described it as “an act of barbarism, born of a society which wantonly disregards individual rights and the value of human life and seeks constantly to expand and dominate other nations.”<sup>20</sup> This incident was then used to punish the USSR with “commercial boycotts, lawsuits, and denial of landing rights for A airliners.”<sup>21</sup> The Soviet Union, though not charged technically murder, was going to be punished in other forms. The Soviets defended their actions saying that they reacted rationally, pinning the blame on US policies for this incident.

The climax of heightened US/Soviet tensions that almost led to a nuclear war occurred when the Able Archer 83 exercises took place in November. Able Archer 83 was a five-day command post exercise that was “designed to test the ability of the alliance to respond to increasing conflict with Warsaw Pact nations, culminating in a coordinated nuclear attack.”<sup>22</sup> It was sponsored by the NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR) conducted annually. Able Archer 83 was a final phase of a much larger, months-long series of NATO exercises known as Autumn Forge 83. Consisted of more than a dozen exercises with a different name, and was conducted with forty thousand troops across Europe. Reforger 83, was the largest and final phase of Autumn Forge, simulating a hypothetical Soviet invasion, airlifting 19,000 troops and 1,500 tons of cargo from the United States to Europe. The purpose of Able Archer 83 was to simulate a shift between conventional warfare to a nuclear war. The war game included several new components than in previous years such as new forms of coded communications, extensive use of radio silence, and participation by the actual leaders of NATO countries.

According to a declassified NATO document on the Able Archer 83 exercises, Able Archer 83 would begin in February “Change in leadership in ORANGE in February 1983.

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<sup>20</sup> Fischer, “The 1983 War Scare in US-Soviet Relations” 61.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>22</sup> Burris, “Slouching Toward Nuclear WAR: Coorientation and NATO Exercise Able Archer 83” 231.

Criticism of policies of an old government for allowing West to gain new influence in the Third World, especially the Gulf states and for failing to prevent the BLUE decision to modernize Western theatre nuclear forces in Europe.”<sup>23</sup> The exercise officially began on November 4 in which Orange, the hypothetical opponent (the Soviet Union), opened hostilities in all regions of ACE (Allied Command Europe) in which NATO, the Blue team declared a general alert. On November 6, ORANGE (hypothetically) uses weapons throughout Europe. On November 7, Orange still continues to use chemical weapons which then causes SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) debates using nuclear weapons. On November 8, in the game realm, a full-scale nuclear attack would be launched against the Soviet Union. Nuclear weapons would be delivered to their targets and exercise ends mid-day on November 11. In a document by the Department of Defense and Central Intelligence Agency titled “US and Soviet Strategic Forces” Joint Net Assessment, the reason Able Archer 83 was conducted and war-gamed was due to the fact that threats and challenges of US interests would initiate possible “crises” and challenged US interests in “friendly or client states in the Third World.”<sup>24</sup> This would be similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis in which a developed “period of crisis, the conventional phase of a theater war, a limited nuclear war, and large-scale nuclear strikes”.

The most extensive account of the on-the-ground action during the Able Archer 83 exercises is found in the declassified document titled “Exercise Able Archer 83, SAC ADVON, After Action Report” by the Seventh Air Division at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. For the first several days, NATO would be heavily engaged in conventional warfare, with conventional weapons and battlefield tactics. ORANGE forces would attack along the entire German border, attacking UK airfields and disrupting B-52 and KC-135 operations, and destroying aircraft. The

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<sup>23</sup> Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act, “US and Soviet Strategic Forces” 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 11.

first three days were of “low spectrum” conventional play followed by “high spectrum” nuclear warfare. After the three days, ORANGE then advanced to using chemical weapons, in which various equipment would now be used to simulate chemical warfare from ORANGE “Helmets, gas masks and chemical suits were required. Gas masks were used by players at Crest HIGH for several hours after an OR chemical attack”<sup>25</sup>. Then, on November 11, the final day and conclusion of the exercise, eight KC-135 Statotankers, an American military aerial refueling aircraft, “launched for survival” in the United Kingdom to respond to the simulated ORANGE nuclear attack.



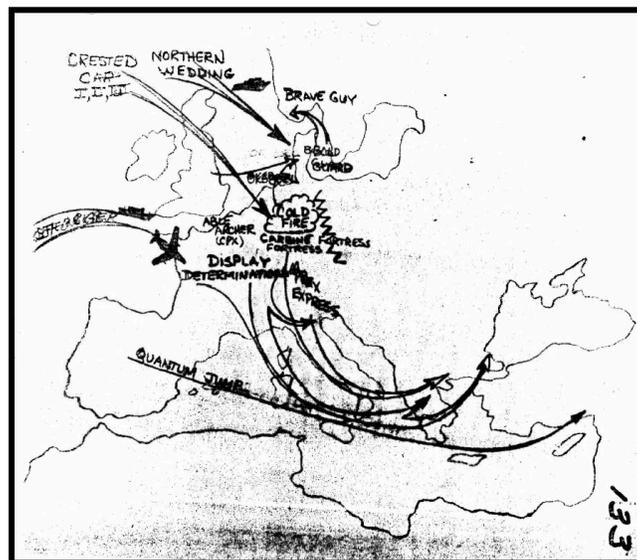
**Figure 2.** A tank and armored personal carrier, just two of the 3,500 used in the Autumn Forge, rumble through a small village. Source: National Security Archives.

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<sup>25</sup>Seventh Air Division, “Exercise Able Archer 83, SAC ADVON, After Action Report” 227.



**Figure 3.** Soldiers prepare to board an aircraft to participate in the war game. Source: National Security Archives.



**Figure 4.** A slide from the unclassified September 9, 1983, commander airlift forces briefing shows the expansive “footprint” of the Autumn Forge war games. Source: National Security Archives.

Able Archer 83 according to NATO and the United States was seen as a hypothetical war game. The President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board reflected on the Able Archer 83 exercise and examined what US intelligence and sources perceived at the time. At first, Soviet

media and propaganda about the fear of a war scare from the West were easily dismissed by the United States. In addition to media and propaganda, the USSR exhibited provocative behavior. In 1983, however, Soviet rhetoric towards the US sharpened as Moscow accused President Reagan of madness, extremism, and criminality. Westerners who were Soviet analysts began to report that citizens and Soviet officials “indicated that a large portion of the Soviet population believed nuclear war was dangerously close.”<sup>26</sup> US analysts acknowledged the fear and paranoia within the Soviet Union but failed to conclude that Moscow was unconcerned about a nuclear attack. Their fear and propaganda was smoke and mirrors.

To counter what was seen as imperialist aggression, the Soviet’s goals according to the United States, were to manipulate Western perceptions as follows: To foster the “peace movement” in Western Europe so as to derail INF deployments and encourage neutrality within NATO. To portray President Reagan as an incompetent warmonger so as to deepen cleavages among nations in the West. 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.<sup>27</sup> US officials reported that a number of factors contributed to the overall paranoia and fear: initiation of INF deployments, US action in Grenada, deployment of Marines in Lebanon, US aid to insurgencies, and against Soviet-sponsored regimes.

In April of 1983, the US conducted FleetEx ‘83, an exercise that incorporated 40 ships and 300 aircraft that would approach the Soviet Union and monitor their reactions in order to record information on their radar capabilities. Then, on October 26, the United States liberated Grenada from communist rule “The US liberation of Grenada was the first time the West had freed a nation from communism’s grip. The Soviets probably feared that the United States might

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<sup>26</sup> President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet War Scare” 84.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 56.

invade communist Nicaragua... since US public enthusiasm over Grenada inspired much rhetoric about liberating the nation too.”<sup>28</sup> The United States, on the other hand, described Soviet leadership as rational and driven by prudent calculations, unlike driven by irrational decision-making such as fear and anger. However, President Reagan acknowledged the paranoia and fear behind the Soviet thinking in which President Reagan wrote in his personal diary how the Soviets were paranoid about an attack:

“I feel the Soviets are so defense-minded, so paranoid about being attacked that without being soft on them we ought to tell them no one here has any intention of doing anything like that. What the hell have they got that anyone would want. George is going on ABC right after its big Nuclear bomb film Sunday night. We know it's anti-nuke propaganda but we're going to take it over and say it shows why we must keep on doing what we're doing. A most sobering experience with Cap W. and Gen. Vessey in the situation room- a briefing on our complete plan in the event of a nuclear attack.”<sup>29</sup>

Years after the war scare with the numerous declassified documents, President Reagan remarked that Able Archer 83, in the end, was “really scary”. Somehow US intelligence could not detect or understand the unusual Soviet behavior that was going on behind the scenes during the fall of 1983. While Able Archer 83 was conducted, the Soviets conducted more reconnaissance flights than in previous years and sent special intelligence requirements to KGB residencies in western countries to report any unusual military activity that might foreshadow a NATO attack. For US officials, “this abnormal Soviet behavior sounded no alarm bells in the US Indications and Warning System.”<sup>30</sup> US officials were not ready and prepared by their own intelligence. There are three reasons why US intelligence misperceived Soviet intelligence and did not think there was an act of aggression on their part. First, Moscow’s war scare was not the sole purpose of US intelligence focus for the United States. The intelligence community on NATO and the United States’s side did perceive unusual behavior among the Soviets but did not

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<sup>28</sup> Burriss, “Slouching Toward Nuclear War: Coorientation and NATO Exercise Able Archer 83” 231.

<sup>29</sup> Reagan, “November 16, 1983.”

<sup>30</sup> President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet War Scare” 89.

detect any military significance. The decision to stand down and do nothing about Soviet alerts was made by Lieutenant General Leonard H. Peroots, then Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence in US Air Forces in Europe. The report describes him as “fortuitous, if ill-informed” and that “these officers acted correctly out of instinct, not informed guidance, for in the years leading up to Able Archer 83 they have received no guidance as to the possible significance of apparent changes in Soviet and military-political thinking.”<sup>31</sup>

US and NATO analysts believed that if the Soviets were concerned about an attack, there would be more indicators of Soviet military activity. Soviet reaction to Able Archer 83 was dismissed as a counter exercise. In a memorandum from Herbert E. Meyer, Vice Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, Meyer wrote on the subject “Why the world is so dangerous?” explaining the year 1983. The reason behind the shooting down of KAL 007, the invasion of Grenada, according to Meyer is because Soviet leadership is that the Soviet Union is in decline “I believe it signals the beginning of a new stage in the global struggle between the Free World and the Soviet Union.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Soviet actions and the heightened tensions are because of this struggle for the balance of power, particularly with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union sees that they are losing and the balance of power is shifting towards the United States in the Cold War, therefore, they are fighting back “What we are seeing now is a Soviet-led effort to fight back, in the same way, the Mafia fights back when law enforcement agencies launch an effective crime-busting program.”<sup>33</sup> Meyer also points out that Moscow’s strategy in order to “set” the US off its course would be: Raise the level of violence, thus making the world a more dangerous place. Attribute the increased violence and danger to the inevitable result of reckless US policies.

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<sup>31</sup> President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet War Scare” 45.

<sup>32</sup> Meyer, “Subject: Why is the world so dangerous?” 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 1.

Hope that voters will force a change of course, either by replacing the incumbent leaders or forcing them to adopt more “moderate” policies.<sup>34</sup>

Aggression on the Soviet’s part provided further proof for Meyer’s argument. Still, US analysts were bent on the fact that Soviet leadership did not have a threat in any way or reason to be concerned with an attack from the West. Some reports about the Soviets actions were taken seriously by different intelligence officials. In 1984, a year after the exercise, Director of Central Intelligence William Casey sent a memorandum to President Reagan with a different view of opinion. DCI Casey essentially warned that the Soviet actions were to be taken seriously through the numerous indicators and actions that they exhibited. This included: Preparing Soviet citizens for war through civil defense activities and media broadcasts. Tightening of security procedures against Westerners, such as increased travel restrictions and isolation from the Bloc populace. 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.<sup>35</sup>

Other security advisors, like Robert McFarlane took a different approach in that he believed the Soviets were using this war scare as propaganda. The Board concluded in the end that “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. In 1983 we may have inadvertently placed our relations with the Soviet Union on hair trigger.”<sup>36</sup> US intelligence was ill equipped with handling Soviet foreign affairs and Able Archer 83 proved just how deadly intelligence failures and miscommunication can be if there is no accurate estimation.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Meyer, “Subject: Why is the world so dangerous?” 1.

<sup>36</sup> President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet War Scare” 1.

## Section VI: The Soviet Side of the War Scare

### The Origin of RYAN

Mikhail Gorbachev once remarked about this tumultuous period, “Never, perhaps, in the postwar decades was the situation in the world as explosive, and hence, more difficult and unfavorable, as in the first half of the 1980s.”<sup>37</sup> Gorbachev’s words reflected the feelings and attitudes of the Soviets towards the Able Archer 83 military exercises. The Reagan administration settled into its new role in the early 1980s and set forth new US foreign policies, meanwhile, the Soviet Politburo began to develop its own intricate intelligence operation behind the scenes.

In May 1981, Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev with KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov ordered the KGB along with the GRU (military intelligence) to “organize a joint clandestine operation to collect what, in Western intelligence jargon, would be called indications-and-warning-of-war.”<sup>38</sup> One of the largest intelligence operations in history is known as Operation RYAN meaning “Nuclear Missile Attack”. The purpose of Operation RYAN, according to Yuri Andropov, was not to miss the military preparations of the enemy “The main objective of our intelligence service is not to miss the military preparations of the enemy, its preparations for a nuclear strike, and not to miss the real risk of the outbreak of war.”<sup>39</sup> The reason for RYAN and increased tensions between the US and the Soviet Union according to Andropov, was due to US aggression “The reason behind the current rise of international tension is the attempt of the imperialists to change the course of events on the international arena for

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<sup>37</sup>Gorbachev, “The Soviet Side of the War Scare” 93.

<sup>38</sup>Fischer, “The Soviet-American War Scare” 484.

<sup>39</sup>Andropov, “On the Tasks of the KGB in Light of the Decisions of the 26th Congress of the CPSU” 43.

their benefit, to stop the forward movement of history.”<sup>40</sup> Operation RYAN, though not explicitly named in the Soviet documents, was specific in how intelligence was to be gathered. Instructions included how information was to be accurate, reliable, timely, and the importance of networking with other agents who could lead to other flows of information.

Ever since the 1960s, Soviet doctrine anticipated a global war that would ignite either from local escalation or as a nuclear bolt from blue (NATO and the United States). Thus, disrupting its preparations or preventing a nuclear war altogether through a preventive strike had been the main task for the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, this would come to fruition. When analyzing the Soviet’s initial alert of a surprise Western attack, pinpointing a specific cause to the creation of Operation RYAN is obscure. There are three explanations as to the origins of Operation RYAN. The first explanation argues that the war scare and this high alert readiness were due to Soviet paranoia about an attack by the West. In fact, this paranoia dates back to the early tsarist times, Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812, and the exacerbation of this fear during the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Nazis in Operation Barbarossa during World War II. A second view holds that the war scare was aimed at frightening the West Germans into backing out of an agreement to deploy US intermediate-range Pershing II and cruise missiles on their territory. By exhibiting fear of a nuclear war, the Soviet Union could pressure the West Germans to withdraw their support of US operations in Europe. A third and final argument posits that RYAN was a response to the secret psychological military operations (PSYOPs) that the United States had conducted in the early years of the administration. These actions were designed to induce paranoia in the Soviet Union and weaken Soviet power. For example, General Jack Chain of the US Strategic Air Command described the gaping holes in Soviet ocean surveillance through these PSYOP operations “we would send bombers over the North Pole and

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid, 2.

their radars would click on...Other times fighter-bombers would probe their Asian or European periphery.”<sup>41</sup>

The impact that PSYOP had on Soviet intelligence was insurmountable. US intelligence could now know where the Soviets fell short in their military and intelligence “The PSYOPs confirmed to Soviet intelligence, military, and political leadership that the Soviet Union was vulnerable to a US first strike—and convinced them that there was an increased possibility that the West could actually be planning one.”<sup>42</sup> In response to US actions, Yuri Andropov issued a “shoot to kill” order for any aircraft crossing into Soviet territory again. This would itself be seen again in the shooting down of Korean Airlines 007, in which the Soviet Union insisted that it was the United States who was to blame for Soviet actions by mistaking it for US aircraft. Even though US intelligence insisted at the time that the Soviet “war scare” was nothing but propaganda on their part, I believe that RYAN was a genuine response to US actions such as PSYOP and the deployment of the Pershing II missiles in West Germany. This may have segued into propaganda on their part in that they wanted to believe what they believed about the United States. Soviet judgments could have been blinded by the perception that the US was going to attack at any moment in time. Therefore, I believe the creation of Operation RYAN was a combination of all three arguments that I have presented.

So how intricate was the information contained on the computer model RYAN? RYAN consisted of a database of 40,000 weighted elements with a software program that reevaluated the data. The KGB was tasked with assessing American strategic intentions under the premise of if the United States were to launch a surprise attack on the Soviet Union. RYAN was a significant influence in the Soviet perceptions of Able Archer 83. According to the President’s Foreign

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<sup>41</sup>Jones, *Able Archer 83*, 27.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid, pp.27.

Advisory Intelligence Board, RYAN displayed the opposite of what the Soviets were hoping for in regards to superiority over the United States “by 1984, the VRYAN calculated that Soviet power had actually declined to 45 percent of that of the United States. Below this level, the Soviet Union would be considered dangerously inferior to the United States.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, if RYAN accurately depicted the strategic balance of the time, then it would have shown the USSR vulnerable to a surprise attack, an alarming feature that would have put the Soviets on edge during 1983 “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.”<sup>44</sup> Figure 1 below illustrates how the Soviet military planners potentially viewed their status of forces if caught by a surprise attack from the US and how to respond. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) also provided an immense amount of intelligence to the Soviet Union. Markus Wolf, who served for decades as East Germany’s spymaster, later wrote “our Soviet partners had become obsessed with the danger of a nuclear missile attack.”<sup>45</sup> Karl Koecher, a Czechoslovakian spy for the Soviet Union also noted in *Novosti razvedki i kontrrazvedki*, RYAN “acted as an effective counter to the increased risk of nuclear war under Reagan.”<sup>46</sup>

The main driving force behind these Soviet policies and the war hysteria that led to Operation RYAN was Andropov, Ustinov, and KGB chief of foreign operations Vladimir Kryuchkov. These men were labeled as “the last guards of the Stalinist mentality.”<sup>47</sup> Andropov had a reputation for his tough mentality that Ambassador Hartman to the Department of State warned that US relations with the Soviet Union should reduce the risk of a nuclear war “In short,

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<sup>43</sup>President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet War Scare” 126-127.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp. 126-127.

<sup>45</sup> Wolf and McElvoy, *Man Without the Face: The Autobiography of Communism’s Greatest Spymaster*, 37.

<sup>46</sup>Koecher, *Novosti razvedki i kontrrazvedki*, 7.

<sup>47</sup>Jones, *Able Archer* 83, 22.

we are confronting a regime which will be every bit as hard to deal with as the Brezhnev regime, which is more vigorous and probably more intelligent, but which has a certain dependency on its relations with the US.”<sup>48</sup>



**Figure 5.** Soviet Strategic Retaliatory Capabilities Given a US “Bolt from the Blue”.

The deployment of 600 Pershing II and cruise missiles did not sit well with Soviet leadership. Party Secretary Suslov and Defense Minister Ustinov who were the senior guardians of Soviet ideology and national security, expressed their concern over US actions to the Polish party congress in February 1980. Suslov and Ustinov described US actions to be aggressive “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.<sup>49</sup> Premier Kosygin echoed the same concern as Suslov and Ustinov on US foreign policy “a fully defined political policy calculated to

<sup>48</sup>Hartman, “Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State” 47.

<sup>49</sup>Suslov, *Able Archer* 83, 130.

undermine detente and provoke conflict situations. We cannot but draw the necessary conclusions from this for our practical activities.”<sup>50</sup>

According to RYAN, there were specific instructions given to the KGB that was to be carefully examined that might indicate a nuclear war. For example, indications on preparations for a nuclear war ranged on several, bizarre factors such as increases in the price paid to blood donors to heightened activity by Western intelligence and security services “one important sign that preparations are beginning for RYAN could be the increased purchases of blood from donors.”<sup>51</sup> In a document titled “Permanent Operational Assignment to discover NATO Preparations for a Nuclear Attack on the USSR,” the first part of the POA sent to Residents in NATO outlines sections of what data needed to be gathered against NATO and its allies in the following order: collecting data about possible routes of evacuations for government officials, identifying civil defense shelters, and the increase of purchases of blood from donors in the case of a nuclear explosion. The second section includes gathering data on NATO and the United States and their plans and possible routes of evacuation for high military officials.

### **Section 1 - Immediate tasks of Residences for Collecting Information and Organising their Work**

1. Collect data about places where Government officials and the members of their families are evacuated. Identify possible routes and methods of evacuation. Make suggestions about ways of organising a watch to be kept on preparation and actual evacuation.
2. Identify the location of specifically equipped Civil Defence shelters or premises which if necessary be used as shelters (underground garages and depots, basements, and tunnels) and arrange for a periodical check on their state of preparedness to accommodate the

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<sup>50</sup>Kosygin, *Able Archer* 83, 130.

<sup>51</sup>Andrew & Gordievsky, *Top Secret Files on KGB Foreign Operations, 1975-1985*, 70.

population at a particular time. Report to the Centre immediately if shelters are being taken out of storage or a start is being made on preparing certain premises for accommodation of the population.

3. One important sign that preparations are beginning for RYAN could be the increased purchases of blood from donors and the prices paid for it and the extension of the network of reception centres (the most widespread injury in a nuclear explosion), since the treatment of burns requires blood transfusions in very considerable quantity.

**Section II - Principal Prospective Directions for the Residency to Pursue its Work of Collecting the Information Needed to Discover the Adversary's Preparations for RYAN**

1. Detailed description of the nature of measures being carried out in your country of residency by NATO headquarters and agencies, American representations and military installations located there at a time of immediate preparation by the USA and NATO for RYAN.
2. Identifying places where the country's leading military and political figures, and state institutions, including personnel from the central apparatus of the special services, are to be evacuated.<sup>52</sup>

The second part of the POA's enclosure to Residents in NATO capitals was in response to the deployment of American Pershing II missiles in West Germany and ICBMs. Thus, Operation RYAN acquired a special degree of urgency "Uncovering the process of preparation by the adversary to take the decision for a nuclear attack and the subsequent measures to prepare the country for a nuclear war would enable us to to increase the so-called period of anticipation essential for the Soviet Union to take retaliatory measures."<sup>53</sup> This included the KGB to take all

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid, pp. 72.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, pp. 72.

areas into consideration i.e political, economic and military sectors, civil defence and the activity of the special services. Understanding NATO's alert system is crucial to RYAN. NATO's alert system consisted of three mutually dependent and complementary components:

- A state of 'military alert' (preparatory measures of a military nature)
- A battle alarm system (an emergency 'system of military measures to forestall and to break up a possible attack')
- An official alarm system (for putting on a war footing not only the armed forces, but also the NATO countries as a whole)<sup>54</sup>

It was of the highest importance to keep watch of the functioning communications of networks and systems since through them the adversary's intentions and goals would be spotted. The intelligence work through RYAN could not afford to miss any of the military's preparations and actions. The "heightened alert" is the maximum capacity that the KGB anticipated in which NATO armed forces are in a state of maximum readiness and fully deployed in accordance with operational plans. At this stage, if the heightened alert is not called off, then it is an indication of military action. RYAN's collection of intelligence included several items from the United States as well. The KGB was tasked to collect these items listed below concerning the United States: 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 activities of the National Security Council and the Vice President's crisis staff. Monitoring of the

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid, pp. 73.

flow of money and gold on Wall Street as well as the movement of high-grade jewelry, collections, rare paintings, and similar items.<sup>55</sup>

Soviet leadership leading up to Able Archer 83 according to scholars, was one of paranoia and domestic instability. The psychology of fear played out immensely amongst top Soviet leaders from Ogarkov, Andropov, Brezhnev, Ustinov, and the KGB. The Soviet leadership's chief concern was avoiding a surprise nuclear attack, hence, why Operation RYAN was so detailed in its instructions to find evidence of an impending nuclear war. In 1982, Marshal Ogarkov, a prominent Soviet military official, expressed his concerns over Soviet society being able to respond to the geopolitical challenges with the United States. In his book *History Teaches Vigilance*, he called for a pre-war footing in which the economy of the Soviet Union would be more prepared for a potential war.

“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 in such 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 to this connection is a constant search for improving the system of co-production among enterprises producing the principal types of weapons... to establish a reserve supply of equipment and materials in case of war.”<sup>56</sup>

Andropov's message to the KGB echoed Ogarkov's advice to the Soviet Union. After Brezhnev's death on November 10, 1982, Soviet intelligence reacted with serious concern that the USSR was militarily in jeopardy and that the US might try to take advantage of the confusion with a leadership change. Therefore, the KGB was placed on high alert and were to report frequently to Moscow in case of increasing US activity and US mobilization. This continued until Brezhnev's burial on November 15.

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid, pp. 74.

<sup>56</sup>Ogarkov, *History Teaches Vigilance*, 25.

Brezhnev's regime is described as close-minded and didn't allow for innovations within the Soviet Union "Brezhnev's regime reluctance to adopt major policy innovations and its propensity to embark incrementally on policy modifications, the next generation will want to produce policy shifts without delay."<sup>57</sup> Andropov was the only one out of three Soviet leaders who had dual status as full members and Central Committee secretaries. According to the document "Central Intelligence Agency Biographical Profile of Yuriy Vladimirovich Andropov, January 11, 1983," Andropov was a "sophisticated man" and better informed on foreign affairs, and on at least domestic matters, than any other Soviet party chief since Lenin.<sup>58</sup> Andropov made it clear that collective leadership would still continue to rule in the Soviet Union. However, the state of the Soviet Union when Andropov took over was chaotic "Andropov faces formidable domestic challenges, including an entrenched and aging bureaucratic structure, a Communist Party riddled with cynicism and corruption, and economy whose performance is in serious decline."<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, when Yuri Andropov succeeded Brezhnev, there was a change to Soviet domestic politics in which, at the end of 1982, he launched a massive anti-corruption campaign "One of the first areas of impact, when Andropov came to power, was that the Kremlin identified corruption as the number one problem."<sup>60</sup> The goal of this operation was to accrue as much information as possible in order to threaten the elite. Thus, in the years 1982 to 1983, mass arrests were made in Moscow by the KGB. Prosecutors who conducted these cases were surprised to find that corruption was rampant in the trade network. The CIA concluded that Andropov had the resourcefulness, astuteness, and political skills to handle the political

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<sup>57</sup>Shapiro, "The Soviet Leadership Enters the 1980s" 5.

<sup>58</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, "Central Intelligence Agency Biographical Profile of Yuriy Vladimirovich Andropov, January 11, 1983" 201.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid, pp. 201.

<sup>60</sup>Duhamel, "The Last Campaign Against Corruption in Soviet Moscow" 15.

instability. He believed fervently in detente, blaming Washington for the deterioration of East-West relations.

It was during this time that Andropov asserted that the Soviet Union had to show off its superiority over the United States. It was not just the United States that could exhibit this superiority behavior but that the Soviet Union would not tolerate it “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.”<sup>61</sup> In a memorandum between General Secretary Yuri Andropov and Averell Harriman, Harriman notes his eighty-minute meeting with Andropov on June 2, 1983, in which Andropov notes that war due to miscalculation was imminent. Andropov blamed the harsh anti-Soviet rhetoric of the Reagan administration and the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States “Today the Soviet people and the American people have a common foe—the threat of war incomparable with the horrors we went through previously. This war may perhaps not occur through evil intent but could happen through miscalculation.”<sup>62</sup>

Andropov also alluded to the nuclear war four times and criticized the Reagan administration for refusing to negotiate “However, I must say that I do not see it on the part of the current administration and they may be moving toward the dangerous ‘red line.’”<sup>63</sup> According to Andropov, negotiations were within reach and desirable to the Soviet Union. Andropov most desired to see US/Soviet relations improve and normalize. However, from his perspective, the current administration is unwilling to cooperate and seek mutual understanding, moving further away from detente. Andropov had long blamed Washington for the deterioration of the East-West relations since the late 1970s and has been a champion of detente. Andropov

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<sup>61</sup>“Dangerous Stalemate: Superpower Relations in 1945” p.145.

<sup>62</sup>Harriman, “Memorandum of Conversation Between General Secretary Yuri Andropov and Averell Harriman” 10.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid, pp. 10.

was not in favor of a nuclear war “He has warned that a nuclear war would have catastrophic consequences and has spoken out in favor of East-West detente, arms control, and the reduction of international tensions.”<sup>64</sup> The erosion of US/Soviet relations was due to the fact of Reagan entering the White House “When Reagan entered the White House, he said something in vain that he, you see, had nothing at all to discuss with the Soviet Union until the USA attained military superiority.”<sup>65</sup> The Soviets, on the other hand, acted differently in comparison to the US. The Soviet leadership acted with sophistication, confirmed its readiness to conduct a serious, extensive dialogue with the United States— but, of course, a dialogue of equals.

Despite the KGB’s actions, there were, however, disputes within the organization. Not all KGB members were on board. Some KGB officers were skeptical of RYAN. This seemed to indicate that something was askew in Moscow. None of the main officers focused on RYAN 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 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 RYAN reporting.”<sup>66</sup> Even amongst the Soviet armed forces, commanders voiced their objections and opinions regarding their forces' states of preparations against a surprise attack. The influence the Soviet officials had on the public in 1983 was prominent. Military officials like Marshal Kulikov, Commander of the Warsaw Pact, were outspoken about the United States’s military preparedness and plans for a first strike. In Moscow, programs that highlighted the seriousness of the international situation

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<sup>64</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, “Central Intelligence Agency Biographical Profile of Yurity Vladimirovich Andropov” 202.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid, pp. 202.

<sup>66</sup>President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet Side of the War Scare” 145.

and the possibility of a US attack were broadcast on radio and television several times a day. Media in the Soviet Union in the 1980s was controlled heavily as the government broadcast and highlighted only the positives surrounding the Soviet military. The accomplishment in weapons and foreign policy was illustrated on an average Soviet citizen's screen. Cartoons and TV shows did not exist. It would have been easy to manipulate the public and instill nuclear fear in the heart of the Soviet Union and paint the United States as the enemy.

When the United States deployed the Pershing II missiles to West Germany in 1983, Andropov believed a certain type of recklessness fell over the United States and a nuclear war was imminent "After all, at the button that activates occasions when the Americans fired rockets at flocks of geese. And if these rockets fell in our territory, it could lead to war."<sup>67</sup> Andropov believed that these missiles would be able to fly into the territory in close to six minutes as opposed to thirty minutes it took the ICBMs to reach the Soviet Union from the American continent. In addition to this, the general secretary told Vogel that in response to NATO's deployment, the USSR would deploy additional missiles to Europe aimed at the FRG.<sup>68</sup> As a result, from Andropov's perspective, this would stop the slide toward nuclear war. Andropov admits that the United States has superiority in strategic bombers.

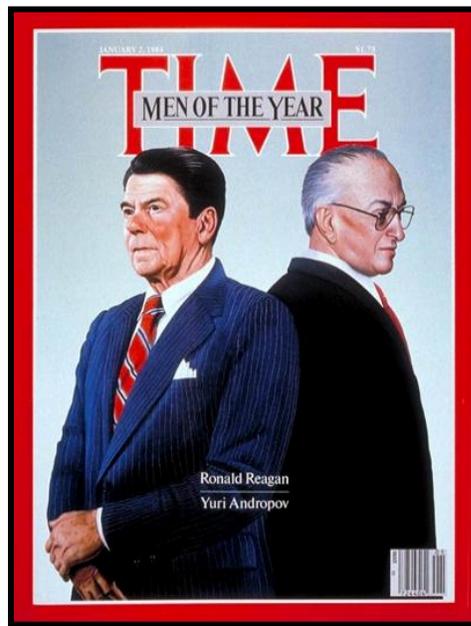
When it comes to negotiations, however, the United States does not meet the expectations of the Soviets. Instead, the United States wants to only limit and cut back on missile systems mainly and create a new submarine fleet equipped with more powerful and more precise Trident 2 missiles. Andropov expected a reduction of limitations "Our point of view is that limitations and cuts in strategic armaments should be carried out as a comprehensive package, encompassing land, sea and air-based weapons without any exceptions. It is critical to

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<sup>67</sup>"Notes of a meeting between Yuri Andropov and Hans-Jochen Vogel".

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

maintaining the principles of parity and equal security at every stage of reductions so that neither side obtains an advantage.”<sup>69</sup> The Soviet focus, according to Andropov, is peace and the elimination of the nuclear threat for socialism. The purpose of this is to seek to avoid confrontations, mutually-beneficial cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. In view of this rhetoric, Andropov paints the USSR as the beacon of light and peace. Moreover, the United States is seeking to increase conflict and competition while the Soviet Union is dedicated to peace and prosperity. From the viewpoint of Soviet officials, certain US policies indicated a large-scale war was imminent.



**Figure 6.** Andropov and Reagan were named Time Magazine’s Men of the Year for 1983.

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

In January 1983, Moscow issued a new key element to its military readiness system called “Surprise Enemy attack Using Weapons of Mass Destruction in Progress.” This consisted of four existing levels of readiness:

1. Constant Combat Readiness
2. Increased Combat Readiness
3. Threat of War
4. Full Combat Readiness

This novel element involved a wide variety of immediate defensive and offensive measures that included dispersing forces, taking shelter, and preparing to launch forces. The Soviets also issued numerous steps to reduce vulnerabilities to an attack. A crash program to build additional ammunition storage bunkers at Bulgarian airfields. This would improve capabilities to preposition air ammunition for the Soviet aircraft deployed to support the air defense force against an improved NATO air threat on the Southern Front. The institution of a new regulation to bring tactical missile brigades from peacetime conditions to full readiness within eight hours. Moreover, improvements were introduced at nuclear warhead storage facilities that halved the time needed to remove warheads. 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. 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 system posed by a US nuclear strike.

Additionally, Moscow wanted to deter any attack and in order to do so, it had to level up to the United States. If a state is attacked, it must be prepared to retaliate according to deterrence.

The conditions for deterrence are that the benefits of an attack are not greater than the costs of retaliation; the opponent has to believe that the state will strike back if struck. Most importantly, the arsenal has to survive the attack. In order to be successful in retaliating, weapons must be able to survive the blow from the threat. It is no surprise that in order to have defense preparedness, Moscow increased procurement of military equipment in 1983 by 5 to 10 percent. However, they did so by reducing the production of civilian goods “Commercial aircraft, was reduced by about 14 percent in favor of military transports.”<sup>70</sup>

The 1983 Able Archer exercise alarmed the Soviet Union for several reasons. These routine exercises had been monitored by Soviet intelligence, however, NATO tested new procedures for releasing nuclear weaponry that emphasized command communications from headquarters. On November 9, 1983, Moscow sent a circular telegram to KGB residencies in Western Europe that ordered them to report on the increased alert status of US military bases in Europe. Residencies were also instructed to check for the indications of an impending nuclear attack from the US. Similar messages were received by the GRU residents. A classified intelligence officer from the Warsaw Pact intelligence services stated that during the Able Archer 83 time frame “he had been particularly occupied trying to obtain information on a major NATO exercise...” and his high priority requirement from Moscow was to “look for any indication that the United States was about to launch a preemptive nuclear strike against the countries of the Warsaw Pact.”<sup>71</sup> In addition, the Soviets conducted over 36 intelligence flights, more than which was conducted in previous Able Archer military exercises, including 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. For the United

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<sup>70</sup>President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet Side of the War Scare” p. 147.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid, pp.148.

States, as I have stated previously in this paper, these alarming reactions from the Soviet Union were not taken into account and intelligence failed on their behalf to pick up Soviet fears.

In a 1983 *Pravda* article written by Defense Minister Dimitry Ustinov, several days after the exercise, the defense minister recounts in detail the actions of Able Archer 83. Ustinov confirmed what American and British intelligence forces concluded when it came to Able Archer 83 and the unusual activity brought about by the Soviet Union, “unparalleled in scale” Soviet military reaction, including transportation of nuclear weapons to delivery units, suspension of flight operations other than intelligence flights, and round the clock military preparedness.”<sup>72</sup> In a 2007 unpublished interview with Colonel-General Viktor Ivanovich Yesin, Colonel Yesin recounts his experience in charge of SS-20 medium-range missiles for the operative department of the general headquarters of strategic rocket forces during Able Archer 83. He notes how he and other forces were on combat alert amidst the Able Archer 83 exercises

“Er in the missile for strategic missile forces secretly let—secretly let some measures—some er measures aimed at increasing the state of alert er was certain measures were taken. Duty forces were on constant alert. The operative forces were on combat alert apart from that as I was involved with the mid-range missiles and part of those—and partly the pioneer missile complet is the regiments that had those missile complexes were sent to the field positions in the peaceful time er only about 10 maybe a maximum percent of those regiments were in the field positions but during the able archer 83 exercises about 50% of those regiments were in field positions. And it increased the readiness of those missile complexes for delivering the return strike in case of a sudden nuclear attack.”<sup>73</sup>

Colonel Yesin also mentions how the military and high-level officials, were aware and nervous during the Able Archer 83 exercises “During the climax of the NATO exercise when the strategic missile forces were on heightened combat alert, I can say with a high degree of confidence that Chief of the General Staff of the USSR Marshal Ogarkov was in the protected

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<sup>72</sup>Ustinov, “To Struggle for Peace, To Strengthen Defense Capability”.

<sup>73</sup>Downing, “Unpublished Interview with Colonel General Viktor Ivanovich Yesin” 7.

central command point of the armed forces of the USSR.”<sup>74</sup> It is no wonder that Marshal Ogarkov and other top Soviet officials were nervous and on heightened alert during Able Archer 83. In Ustinov’s article, Able Archer 83 was not just a “war game” or a simple drill but involved an overwhelming amount of people, equipment, and geographical scope “NATO’s Autumn Forge-3 maneuvers, which have just ended, involved 300,000 people and large amounts of arms and combat equipment. The area of the maneuvers encompasses Western Europe, from Norway to Turkey, and includes the Atlantic.”<sup>75</sup>

This hadn’t been the first time that the Soviet Union and the United States were squared off in a potential nuclear war. The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis was a near-miss of potential World War III. However, what made Able Archer 83 different due to the perceptions of a large-scale military attack in which a total of 40,000 US and NATO troops were moved across Western Europe and included 16,044 US troops airlifted overseas in 170 missions conducted in radio silence. Moreover, the practices and procedures that NATO conducted during Able Archer 83 were intense

“More ominously, US and NATO officers practiced the procedures they would have to follow the authorize and conduct nuclear strikes in an unpublicized exercise called Able Archer 83, shifting their headquarters as the game escalated toward chemical and nuclear warfare. In communications, they several times referred to non-nuclear B-52 sorties as nuclear “strikes” - slips of the tongue that could have been intercepted by Soviet eavesdroppers.”<sup>76</sup>

The intentions of Able Archer 83 were not clear on the Soviet part and easily were misperceived. NATO could have been deceiving, in Soviet thought that there was an actual attack “The Soviet military commanders knew that the Warsaw Pact had its own contingency plans to attack the West under the cover of military exercises.”<sup>77</sup> According to Andrew and

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid, pp.7.

<sup>75</sup>Ustinov, “To Struggle for Peace, To Strengthen Defense Capability”.

<sup>76</sup>Burris, “Slouching Toward Nuclear War: Coorientations and NATO Exercise Able Archer 83” 27.

<sup>77</sup>Andrew & Gordievsky, *Top Secret Files on KGB Foreign Operations, 1975-1985*, 70.

Gordievsky, the Soviet alert could have been a self-fulfilling prophecy “Because the operational orders for Project RYAN had been so specific as to what KGB agents were to look for, a self-fulfilling prophecy began to emerge as agents began to report not only what they saw, but what they assumed their superiors wanted them to see, even if what they saw was routine.”<sup>78</sup> In reality, most of the American alert measures were in response to the bombing of the Marine barracks at the Beirut International Airport. Thus, these heightened measures on the American part and the gameplay activities, rather than merely following a scenario at a tabletop may have been misinterpreted by Soviet spies.<sup>79</sup>

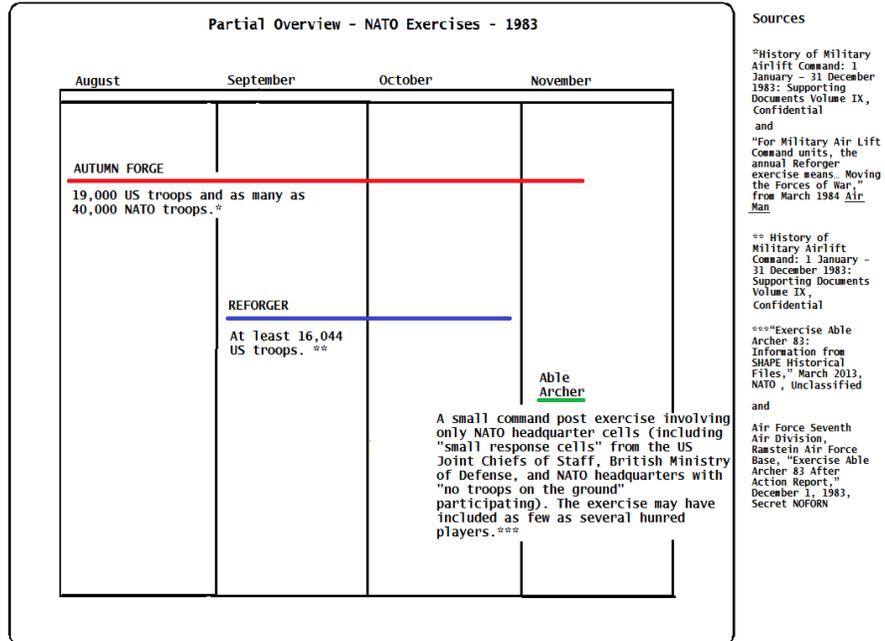


**Figure 7.** US Ground crews race toward an A-10 to prepare it for another sortie during Autumn Forge 83. Source: National Security Archive.

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid, pp.75.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid, pp.76.



**Figure 4.** A partial overview of the NATO Exercises conducted in 1983, produced by the National Security Archive.



**Figure 5.** Soviet Minister of Defense Dimitry Ustinov. Source: National Security Archive.



(U) Yuri Andropov

**Figure 5.** A photo of Soviet leader Yuri Andropov. Source: Central Intelligence Agency.

## V. Fallout

In May 1984, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) entitled “Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities,” was written to examine and understand the Soviet reaction to Able Archer 83. The intelligence document was correct in some respects in that it acknowledged Soviet actions leading up to Able Archer 83 as abnormal

“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. These activities have included large-scale military exercises (among them a major naval exercise in the Norwegian Sea, unprecedented SS-20 launch activity, and large-scale SSBN dispersal); preparations for air operations against Afghanistan; attempts to change the air corridor regime in Berlin; new military measures termed responsive to NATO INF deployments; and shrill propaganda attributing a heightened danger of war to US behavior.”<sup>80</sup>

However, what this intelligence source fails to conclude and document correctly is the legitimacy behind the Soviet fear during Able Archer 83 “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”<sup>81</sup>. The SNIE instead came up with several hypotheses analyzing what Soviet intentions were and concluded that they may have been using the alarm to “desensitize the United States to higher levels of Soviet military activity-thus masking intended future moves and reducing US warning time.”<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the conclusion of the SNIE and several other US intelligence documents concluded that the abnormal Soviet behavior was propaganda. Soviet behavior was in response to Washington’s rhetoric, US military exercises, and reconnaissance activities near Soviet territory, causing Moscow to flex its own military responsiveness.

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<sup>80</sup>Special National Intelligence Estimate, “Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities” 1.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid, 1.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid, 1.

Based on what has already been stated in this paper, we can conclude that Soviet beliefs about Able Archer 83 were genuine. In February 1984, an article in the most prominent Soviet military theory journal, *Voennaya Mysl*, warned that Autumn Forge (the Soviet name for Able Archer 83) “was more and more difficult to tell the difference between work on military drills and real preparations for wide-scale aggression.”<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the United States and NATO’s actions could be argued, were difficult to tell during the time of the Able Archer 83 military exercises. Thus, the analysis from the SNIE document proved contradictory in many ways. In one instance, it stated that Moscow had not shown any signs of fear “in private diplomatic exchanges with Moscow over the past six months the Soviets have neither made any direct threats connected with regional or other issues nor betrayed any fear of a US attack.”<sup>84</sup> This proved to be false in that Yuri Andropov in his conversation with Ambassador Averell Harriman noted that the Reagan administration was inching towards a dangerous red line of nuclear war.

The intelligence between the United States and the Soviet Union about the Able Archer 83 exercises continues to be a battle with who is right in their analysis of the war scare. As I have already shown in this paper, the Soviets were genuinely fearful of a nuclear attack, however, I do not rule out the possibility of propaganda and bureaucratic control within the Soviet leadership wanting to see only what they wanted to see about a potential nuclear war with the United States. US intelligence fails to acknowledge the seriousness of the Soviet actions and that their own actions, like PSYOPs, almost precipitated this military crisis. The President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) concluded what I have concluded about the Soviet side of the war scare. That it “was an expression of a genuine belief on the part of Soviet leaders that the

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<sup>83</sup>Jones, *Able Archer 83*, 43.

<sup>84</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, “Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities” 1.

US was planning a nuclear first strike, causing Sov[iet] military to prepare for this eventuality, for example, by readying forces for a Sov preemptive strike.”<sup>85</sup>

As for the impact that the war scare had on the Reagan administration, it is clear that the US had moved away from the aggressive US policies towards the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1980s. A month before the Able Archer 83 military exercises, Reagan wrote about an event that triggered him greatly about the potential effect of an all-out nuclear war. On October 10, 1983, Reagan viewed the film *The Day After*, an American drama series about the fear of nuclear war looming over the United States. It follows the lives of three ordinary American citizens and when nuclear war breaks out, their lives are forever changed. It was a “horrific vision of a nuclear Holocaust” wrote the *Washington Post* in the year 1983. Reagan wrote about the impact this film had on him psychologically “the film was very effective and left me greatly depressed.”<sup>86</sup> Days after Able Archer 83, intelligence documents revealing Soviet activity during the Able Archer 83 military exercises were made known to President Reagan, leaving him with “genuine anxiety and disbelief that his actions could have led to an armed attack.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, in 1984, Reagan was ready to negotiate and sought “a policy towards the USSR that reduced, rather than increased, the risk of nuclear war.”<sup>88</sup> In his memoirs, President Reagan reflects on the year 1983, without mentioning any specifics or referring to it as Able Archer 83. He writes

“During my first years in Washington, I think many of us in the administration took it for granted about the Russians, like ourselves, considered it unthinkable that the United States would launch a first strike against them. But the more experience I had with Soviet leaders and other heads of state who knew them, the more I began to realize that many Soviet officials feared us not only as adversaries but as potential aggressors who might hurl nuclear weapons at them in a first strike; because of this, and perhaps because of a sense of insecurity and paranoia with roots reaching

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<sup>85</sup>President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “The Soviet “War Scare” 56.

<sup>86</sup>Jones, *Able Archer 83*, 45.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid, 45.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid, 45.

back to the invasions of Russia by Napoleon and Hitler, they had aimed a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons at us.”<sup>89</sup>

Reagan’s reflection reveals that the US did eventually come to believe that the Soviets were genuinely fearful of nuclear war. However, the war scare did not diminish Reagan’s view towards communism. He still maintained a harsh posture towards the communist ideology. What changed Reagan’s attitude towards the Soviets was the realization of the danger of nuclear war through miscalculation. There is, however, no document detailing what Reagan knew about Able Archer 83 but we can infer that he knew the graveness of these exercises in order to change his tough posture on the Soviet Union in the years to come. The earliest that Reagan may have been informed of the Soviet’s actions towards Able Archer 83 was on June 19, 1984. During that year, a memorandum from Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey was sent to the president, vice president, secretary of state, secretary of defense, assistant to the president for national security affairs, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff entitled “US/Soviet Tension.” Casey warns the president in this conclusion from the memo

“The behavior of the armed forces is perhaps the most disturbing. From the operational deployment of submarines to the termination of harvest support to the delayed troop rotation there is a central theme of not being strategically vulnerable, even if it means taking some risks. 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 point of blustering is to do something that makes the opponent pay high costs while the blusterer pays none or little. The military behaviors we have observed involved high military costs...adding thereby a dimension of genuineness to the Soviet expressions of concern that is often not reflected in intelligence issuances.”<sup>90</sup>

What Director Casey has concluded is that the Soviets were not bluffing. The United States continued to spook the Russians and the Russians responded with measures that the United States was not expecting. They were in fact not bluffing with regards to their fear of a nuclear

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<sup>89</sup>Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1990), 588-589

<sup>90</sup>Casey, “US-Soviet Tensions” 5.

first strike from the West. After this report, Reagan responded to these events as having been “really scary” and expressed his surprise.

Furthermore, a new US policy towards the Soviet Union was drafted by members of the “in house group”. These members included Secretary of State George Schultz, Vice President Bush, National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, CIA Director Casey, and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. These new policies included

1. Reduce use and threat of force in international disputes
2. Lower high levels of armaments by equitable and verifiable agreements; and
3. Establish minimal level of trust to facilitate the first two objectives, including
  - a. Compliance with past agreements;
  - b. Human rights performance;
  - c. Specific confidence-building measures;
  - d. Bilateral ties when mutually beneficial<sup>91</sup>



(U) Briefing President Reagan. Clockwise: President Reagan, George Shultz, Robert McFarlane, William Casey, and Caspar Weinberger.

From the National Security Agency’s *American Cryptology During the Cold War, 1945-1989, Book IV: Cryptologic Rebirth, 1981-1989*

In summary, this would require the Reagan administration to use a mixture of both realism, strength, and negotiation. US policy would concentrate on how it would best cooperate

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<sup>91</sup>Jones, *Able Archer* 83, 46.

with the Soviet Union. Therefore, no longer would the United States challenge the legitimacy of the Soviet system, work toward military superiority, or attempt to force the collapse of the Soviet system. The steps that were included in the list of notes to be taken to improve relations were more dialogue, informal and unofficial means of communication. President Reagan even offered to resume negotiations on intermediate range missiles and attempts to establish backchannel contacts with the Soviet leaders were also implemented. This backchannel with the Soviet Union was quickly established. This would be known as a “hotline” between Moscow and Washington. This upgraded hotline was based on new satellite technology, allowing leaders to transfer higher quantities of information, including maps and pictures to each other. The hotline would allow for direct communication, no voice and video conference capabilities because the DOD believed that they were more subject to misinterpretation. Not only did Reagan’s policies change but the rhetoric and ideas towards how the United States and the Soviet Union could come together also were apparent in Reagan’s words. Reagan no longer asserted the difference between capitalism and communism. There was an urgency, a necessity and incentive on both sides to continue to work together. A reduction of arms, and peace was the end goal.

The effects of the war scare on the Soviet Union and how it shaped Soviet leadership and policy is difficult to tell. The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs was unsure of what to make of Reagan’s new policies and rapprochement. According to Ambassador Dobrynin “When we at the embassy heard the speech...we could not decide whether it was genuine or mere campaign oratory”<sup>92</sup>. Even though the Soviet Union still perceived that the United States couldn’t be trusted, Andropov during his last days wrote to President Reagan about steps towards mutual cooperation. The General Secretary stated that he believed the United States was threatening to challenge the security of the Soviet Union and its allies, however, there was incentive to improve

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<sup>92</sup>Jones, *Able Archer* 83, 50.

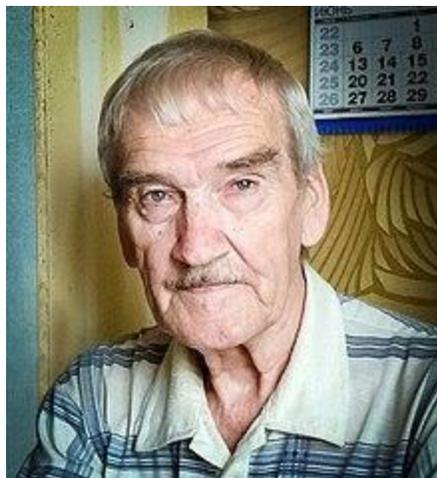
relations moving forward. Andropov, similarly to Reagan, listed mutual issues for the two superpowers to cooperate on. These included general and European nuclear arms reduction, demilitarization in space, and limiting conventional arms sales to third world countries.

Operation RYAN after Able Archer 83 continued to die down and was later realized by Soviet leaders that it did not contain the information that was desired for indicators of US war preparations. Certain leadership within the Soviet Union changed as well, including the reassignment of Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov. Ogarkov was amongst several leaders within the Soviet Union that drove Soviet policy during the beginning of the 1980s and many of these leaders after the incident departed and were no longer at the forefront of leadership. Therefore, the Politburo continued to improve relations with the US after those departures and have better control within the military. The older Soviet generation was dying out, while the younger generation of Soviet leaders was taking over. One of the younger leaders included Mikhail Gorbachev, in which, as history has shown, Reagan and Gorbachev worked together intensively to further improve Soviet/US relations in the latter half of the 1980s. These younger Soviet leaders were more flexible, especially when it came to arms control. KGB leadership also changed as well in which the attitudes about a surprise nuclear attack were no longer of chief concern and by 1985, this belief seemed to have evaporated steadily. Once Gorbachev became the new General Secretary, the public's beliefs about an attack from the United States also eventually subsided. Gorbachev distanced himself from his Soviet predecessors and placed a high priority on achieving arms agreements and facilitating a reduction of arms spending. A new chapter between the United States and Soviet Union emerged and policies seemed to be in alignment.

## VI. Conclusion

Stanislav Petrov was interviewed for a film titled *The Man Who Saved the World*, a narrative film about his heroic actions during the September 1983 incident. He was awarded the Dresden Peace Prize in Dresden, Germany in 2013 and was also honored at the United Nations in New York City. Petrov never regarded himself as a hero and stated he was just doing his job, “all that happened didn’t matter to me it was my job.” Petrov passed away on May 19, 2017 but his story is still alive today. The world came to the brink of nuclear war in the year 1983. In the end, President Reagan and Yuri Andropov are to be credited for having avoided war and paving the way to end the Cold War.

I have stated in this paper the details of the Able Archer 83, why Soviet intelligence was put on high alert and preparations were made to launch a preemptive strike if need be. I have examined both the United States and the Soviet side of the war scare, looking at what caused the heightened tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States. I argue that US policies, Soviet propaganda and rhetoric lead to these increased tensions as I have shown throughout this paper. My findings support this thesis, in that, I utilized speeches from Reagan and Andropov, US military policies such as SDI, Operation RYAN and Soviet actions towards these policies. While a nuclear war did not occur between the United States and the Soviet Union, the potential was there. Had the Soviets acted upon their fears, history as we know it would have been altered indefinitely.



Stanislav Petrov, “The Man Who Saved the World”

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