American Pershing II,
At the White Sands Missile Range Museum

Operation RYAN, Able Archer 83, and Miscalculation: The War Scare of 1983

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Introduction

"My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes," broadcast the voice of President Ronald Reagan over American radio waves.[1] More startling than the President's poor sense of timing and humor was the dangerous and secret nuclear confrontation between the Soviet Union and United States during the War Scare of 1983.

Mikhail Gorbachev has recalled, "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."[2] The Soviet State was mired in a costly and seemingly unwinnable war in Afghanistan, and its economy was continuing to fall behind the West in technology and consumer goods production. The Western introduction of new, qualitatively more powerful weapons such as the space-based missile defense system and the "super-sudden first strike" Pershing II missiles increased Soviet leadership's belief that the "correlation of World forces" was turning against the USSR. The eminent European deployment of Pershing II missiles was especially startling to Moscow; they could reach the Soviet Union in minutes and—theoretically—could decapitate Soviet nuclear command before it would be able to launch a counter attack.[3] In a frantic attempt to maintain parity with the United States, the Soviet leadership launched Operation RYAN, an acronym for *Raketno Yadernoye Napadenie*, nuclear missile attack. RYAN was the largest intelligence operation in Soviet history with the intention to detect and, frighteningly, preempt an American nuclear attack.

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[1] On 11 August 1984 Reagan jokingly made these comments during a mic check before his national radio address. His "joke" was promptly broadcast by news associations, but not live. See *New York Times* 14 August 1984.
[2] February 1986. Quoted in Benjamin B. Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum," *History Staff Center for the Study of Intelligence* (1997). https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm, accessed 20 March 2008.
[3] Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, eds., *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions Top Secret Files on KGB Foreign Operations, 1975-1985* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 67-81.

Reagan, for his part, also realized the absurdity of nuclear war; as he accurately surmised, "It would be like two spiders in a bottle locked in a suicidal fight until both were dead."[4] Upon entering office he signed a secret executive order, known as the Continuity of Government Program (Cog). This order established 50 wartime bunkers for government leadership throughout the United States and created three "shadow government" teams that would assume control during and after a catastrophe. It also kept a real-time computer database on each of the seventeen US officials in line to succeed the president.[5] Despite this aversion to atomic weapons, Reagan's justification for his early military buildup was that "At the foundation of my foreign policy, I decided we had to send as powerful message as we could to the Russians… Our policy was to be one based on strength and realism. I wanted peace through strength, not peace through a piece of paper."[6]

The crucible of the War Scare--the intersection of the two superpowers' nuclear fears and provocations--was a November 1983 NATO exercise codenamed Able Archer 83. Able Archer 83 was a command post exercise which simulated a NATO war with the Soviet Union and culminated in a coordinated and highly realistic simulated nuclear release. Although the sources remain meager, historians now know that on 5 November 1983, KGB agents in the London Residency received a telegram from the KGB Center in Moscow. This telegram instructed the agents to gather information regarding an imminent nuclear first strike by the United States or its allies.[7] The Center, fearing the "stepped up... tempo and scale of military preparations" of the United States, stated in telegram that it was the duty of the agents abroad to detect the American decision to attack: there would be a crucial delay between this decision and actual strike. If intelligence agents detected this window, the Soviet Union could preempt the nuclear attack and, as some Politburo members believed, survive nuclear war.[8]

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[4] Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 257
[5] James Mann, *The Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004), 139-145.
[6] Reagan, *An American Life,* 267.
[7] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 87-88.
[8] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 74-86.

Paranoia reached its height less than a week later when the Center sent further telegrams to intelligence agents abroad announcing that some US military bases had moved to alert. It appeared to Soviet Intelligence that the "Main Adversary" had decided to launch a secret nuclear attack. Despite –or perhaps because of--this complete miscalculation by Soviet intelligence, this November crisis was the closest the world had come to nuclear war since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.[9]

This paper will continue to develop and contribute to the historical narrative of Operation RYAN and Able Archer 83, with particular regard towards the mindset and perspective of the Soviet leadership during this secret crisis. This paper historiographically follows *War Scare: Russia and America on the Nuclear Brink* by Peter Vincent Pry, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*, by Beth A. Fischer, and "A Cold War Conundrum" and "The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s," by Benjamin B. Fischer. This paper's research draws from primary source KGB and CIA documents, journals, memoirs, and interviews--published and unpublished--with key actors. Included in this body of original research is the memorandum revealing a June 1983 meeting between Andropov and former Ambassador to the Soviet Union Averill Harriman, text of Andropov's 1983 speech to the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee, and an interview with US Ambassador to NATO David M. Abshire, who served from July 1983 to January 1987. This paper has also drawn from Russian language sources including an article detailing Operation RYAN in *Novosti razvedki I kontrrazvedki*, and *The Offensive,* a manual describing Soviet military doctrine.

The Era of Renewed Confrontation is an important yet relatively unstudied area of the Cold

[9] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions*, 87-88; John Lewis Gaddis, interview by CNN, 27 September 1998, http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/guides/debate/chats/gaddis/, accessed 20 March 2008.
[9] Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 74-86.
[9] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions*, 87-88; John Lewis Gaddis, interview by CNN, 27 September 1998, http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/guides/debate/chats/gaddis/, accessed 20 March December 2008

War.[10] In many ways, today's American-Russian relations mirror those of the early 1980s; after all, one of Vladimir Putin's first actions as President was to reinstall Andropov's plaque at Lubyanka.[11] Furthermore, Able Archer 83 serves as a case study of nuclear escalation between states. The Soviet implementation of the colossal—if ineffective—intelligence operation can be studied as an example of the drastic measures waning state actors can take.

Operation RYAN and Able Archer 83 pushed the world dangerously close to the nuclear abyss. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to an understanding of these events and explore the policies which created the War Scare as well as the policies which were born out of it.

The Era of Renewed Confrontation

The nuclear danger of the early 1980s was directly related to the decline of détente. When Reagan assumed the presidency, American-Soviet relations had returned to the contentious conditions present five administrations earlier during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. The signs of the deterioration of détente were visible in such Soviet actions as its invasion of Afghanistan and provocative introduction of SS-20 missiles aimed towards the West. This deterioration hastened with the election of Reagan, who declared in his first press conference that, "Détente's been a one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue its own aims…of world revolution and a one-world Socialist or Communist state."[12] In his effort to stand tall against the Soviet Union, he curtailed both formal and backchannel contact, and abandoned SALT II (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.) The relative parity achieved by the two powers during the twenty years since the Missiles of October had disappeared by 1983, preparing the path for the Missiles of November.

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[10] This period has also been coined "The Second Cold War." See Raymond L. Garthoff *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994).
[11] See *Literaturnaia gazeta* 31 May 2000.
[12] 29 January 1981, Ronald Reagan, The President's First News Conference, Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building, Washington D.C., , http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12981b.htm, accessed 30 March 2008.

On 4 January 1983 Andropov gave speech in Prague to the Political Consultative Committee, the controlling organ of the Warsaw Pact counties. Andropov spoke almost exclusively of the escalation of Western weapons capabilities; he clearly implied the European deployment of Minuteman and Pershing II missiles. He announces that the Warsaw's Pact's only option was to continue striving to maintain parity but warned,

> The new round of the arms race, which is being imposed by the United States, has principal qualitative features that distinguish it from the previous ones. If in the past the Americans, when speaking about their nuclear weapons, preferred to emphasize the fact that those were, first of all, means of "deterrence," now, by creating the improved missile systems, they are not trying to conceal the fact that those are realistically designed for a future war. This is where the doctrines of a "rational" or "limited" nuclear war come from, this is the source of the arguments about the possibility to survive and to win in a protracted nuclear conflict."[13]

In a Politburo meeting four months later, Andropov continued to decry the "anti-soviet coalition…being formed out there." To combat the growing danger, the Chairman counseled that, "we should show more brightly and fully the military actions of the Reagan administration and the supporting countries of Western Europe, which in other words means disclosing in full scale the aggressive character of the enemy."[14] As alluded by Andropov, the introduction to Europe of "super sudden first strike" Pershing II missiles dashed the nuclear parity between the superpowers and directly contributed to the danger of 1983.

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the Era of Renewed Confrontation was the lack of communication between the superpowers. During his fifteen month reign as Secretary General, Andropov never substantively met with a high level American official. Reagan did not meet with a Soviet leader until his second term. Reagan's first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, justified this lack

[13] 4 January 1983, Speech by Andropov, to Political Consultative Committee in Prauge, the VA-01/40473, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg; translated by Svetlana Savranskaya from the National Security Archive, George Washington University.

[14] 31 May 1983 Session of Politburo of CC CPSU in Moscow, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii [Russian State Archive for Contemporary History] F.89,Op.42,D.53,L1 1-14; translated by Lena Milman from The Cold War International History Project *Bulletin,* Issue 4, Fall 1994.

of dialogue because, "At this early stage there was nothing substantive to talk about, nothing to negotiate, until the USSR began to demonstrate its willingness to behave like a responsible power. That was the basis of our early policy toward Moscow."[15] On 2 June 1983, W. Averell Harriman, in what the Soviets viewed as "the first real meeting between the United States and the Soviet Union since the start of the current [Reagan] administration," travelled to Moscow to meet Andropov.[16] Although Harriman claimed to meet as a private citizen, he was briefed and debriefed by George Schultz, Reagan's second Secretary of State. Harriman's memorandum of his conversation with Andropov reveals a frank exchange of views and aspirations. Andropov began the conversation: "Let me say that there are indeed grounds for alarm." He bemoaned the harsh anti-Soviet tone of the President and warned that, "the previous experience of relations between the Soviet Union and the United States cautions beyond all doubt that such a policy can merely lead to aggravation, complexity and danger." Andropov alluded to nuclear war four times during his short statement; most ominously he morosely stated, "It would seem that awareness of this danger should be precisely the common denominator with which statesmen of both countries would exercise restraint and seek mutual understanding to strengthen confidence, to avoid the irreparable. 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.'"[17]

Harriman concluded that "the principal point which the General Secretary appeared to be trying to get across to Mrs. Harriman [who was also present] and me was a genuine concern over the state of U.S.-Soviet relations and his desire to see them at least 'normalized,' if not improved. He seemed to have a real worry that we could come into conflict through miscalculation." Some believed Andropov was coyly using "accidental nuclear blackmail" to trump the superior strategic position of the United

[15] Alexander Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Scribner, 1984), 105.
[16] 2 June 1983, Memorandum of Conversation with Arbatov. W. Averill Harriman Papers, Box 655, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
[17] 2 June 1983, Memorandum of Conversation with Andropov. W. Averill Harriman Papers, Box 655, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

States. The Acting Director of Central Intelligence, John N. McMahon, asserted in a 3 Feb 1984 letter to National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane, that, "Clearly, Andropov has a stake in the 'appearance' of bilateral tension as long as it appears that the United States is the offending party. This would not be the first time that Soviet leaders have used international tensions to mobilize their population."[18]

The body of evidence refutes McMahon's claim and supports Ambassador Harriman's belief that Andropov was truly fearful of the rapidly deteriorating Soviet-American relations. Even Reagan's previous Secretary of State, the hawkish Alexander Haig, believed that Soviet-American hostilities, "[were not] a tit-for-tat response. The Soviets stayed very, very moderate, very, very, responsible, during the first three years of this administration. I was mind-boggled with their patience. They were genuinely trying. What they hadn't faced up to was what it would really take to convince us."[19]

Any lingering hopes Andropov had for normalized relations with the United States were lost on 1 September 1983 when the Soviet Union shot down a civilian airliner, KAL 007, after it had flown into its airspace. To Reagan, the attack represented everything wrong with the Soviet Union; he decried the Soviet actions as "barbaric," and a "crime against humanity."[20] What Reagan did not tell the American public was that the US Navy had conducted psychological warfare operations in the area months earlier, and the Soviets likely genuinely believed the plane to be an American RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft.[21] A Soviet attack may have been provoked by military PSYOP (Psychological Warfare Operation) maneuvers by the US Navy in the North Pacific just months earlier.[22] KAL 007 illustrated the Soviet Union's increased fear of US aggression. Five years earlier, during the period of détente, another South Korean airliner had flown into Soviet airspace, and although fired upon, it was allowed to land.

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[18] 3 Feb 1984, Letter from John N. McMahon to Robert C. McFarlane. CIA FIOA electronic reading room.
[19] Alexander Haig, quoted in Garthoff, *The Great Transition,* 131.
[20] 2 September 1983, Ronald Reagan, Remarks to Reporters on the Soviet Attack on a Korean Civilian Airliner, Point Mugu Naval Air Station, California, http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/90283c.htm, accessed 20 March 2008; 5 September 1983, Ronald Reagan, Address to the Nation on the Soviet Attack on a Korean Civilian Airliner, Oval Office, White House, http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/90583a.htm, accessed 20 March 2008; George Shultz, quoted in, *A Cold War Conundrum*.
[21] Peter Vincent Pry, *War Scare: Russia and America on the Nuclear Brink* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 28.
[22] Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum*.

However, by 1983, Soviet attitudes and actions had hardened. In his memoirs, Reagan pondered the danger posed by the hair-trigger mindset of the Soviet Union: "If, as some people speculated, the Soviet pilots simply mistook the airliner for a military plane, what kind of imagination did it take to think of a Soviet military man with his finger close to a nuclear push button making an even more tragic mistake?"[23] Reagan, in all probability, pondered this question again, during the tension of Able Archer 83.

A survey of Soviet media portrays the dramatic domestic fear of war amongst the Soviet population. Soviet citizens, influenced by Soviet media, appear to have believed that as the United States nuclear superiority grew, so too did the threat of war. According to the Soviet Defense Ministry, the purpose of the Western introduction of Pershing and Minuteman missiles was to "steeply increase the striking power of the strategic offensive forces, especially in preemptive surprise attacks" and achieve "the ability to win nuclear war." A 1983 editorial entitled "Increase Vigilance and Be Alert" explained to the Soviet people, "Impossible dreams of world domination and a hatred of freedom and progress… move today's 'crusaders' from across the sea…Washington is inventing more and more new versions of initiation of nuclear war."[24] In an interview by Munich's *Radio Libert* , a Soviet citizen described the perceptions of the citizens in the USSR:

> We have been hearing a lot of rumors about the possibility of war in the near future. At political information meetings they are saying that the United States is getting ready to attack the Soviet Union and that we should be prepared for an attack at any moment. From what I could see, those who believed these warnings significantly outnumbered those who didn't. The simple people are very frightened of war.[25]

During this period, citizens held official "peace rallies," military members and party activists held briefings about the "war danger", excerpts from Stalin's World War Two speeches were broadcast,

[23] Reagan, *An American Life,* 548.
[24] As cited in, Pry, *War Scare,* 35.
[25] As cited in, Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum*.

Reagan was compared to Hitler, and the Soviet media proclaimed that the chance of war was higher than any point since World War II.[26]

This fear was not exclusive to the Soviet public; fear of vulnerability to a nuclear attack had reached Soviet leadership as well. On 26 September 1983 a Soviet OKO satellite detected incoming Minuteman intercontinental missiles in route from the United States. After a few terrifying minutes, the on-duty officer, Colonel Stainslav Petrov, realized that the satellite had malfunctioned, and, on his own authority, stopped the false nuclear alert.[27] In addition to the OKO malfunction, the KAL 007 disaster proved further shortcomings existed within Soviet defense. It took two hours before Soviet fighter jets were able to reach the aircraft and, more alarmingly, eight of the eleven tracking stations on the Kamchatka Peninsula and Sakhalin Islands had failed to track the plane. Coupled with the deployment of Pershing II missiles capable of striking Moscow within ten minutes, these satellite failures certainly did not help Soviet leadership sleep soundly.[28]

Although he had no plans for launching a nuclear attack, President Reagan did implement and oversee the largest peace-time military buildup in American history. He proposed a 2.7 trillion dollar defense budget for 1982-1989, spending more on defense than was spent during the Korean and Vietnam Wars combined. [29] Indeed, the President's justification for this spending--that "the Soviet Union does have a definite margin of superiority"--was not true. In fact, the CIA, in a September 1983 Congressional hearing, testified that Soviet military expenditures had been and continued to be reduced since 1976.[30] The belief in the need for increased military spending was likely advanced by the conservatives of Reagan's administration. Thirty-two of his advisors were members of the Committee

[26] Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum*.
[27] Pry, *War Scare,* 37.
[28] Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of Cold War (*University of Missouri Press, 2000) 126.
[29] Ronald E. Powaski, *Return to Armageddon: The United States and the Nuclear Arms Race, 1981-1999* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.
[30] Garthoff, *The Great Transition,* 41; 31 March 1982, Ronald Reagan, The President's Ninth News Conference, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/33182d.htm, accessed 20 March 2008.

on the Present Danger, a committee which staunchly stood against START II and other weapons reductions. Reagan no doubt delighted them as he pressed ahead with his nuclear proposals for deployment of Pershing II and Peacekeeper missiles in Europe and his Strategic Defense Initiave.[31]

Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), dubbed by the press as "Star Wars," was the most public example of Reagan's arms buildup. When Reagan presented his initiative at a speech on 23 March, 1983, pinning upon it the hopes of ending Mutually Assured Destruction, his Joint Chiefs of Staff were shocked to hear that the President planned to implement an initiative which a report prepared by the Air Force, Army and private industry had concluded was "not technically feasible" and should "not be funded as proposed, nor modified and funded."[32] Nevertheless, "Star Wars" research (and hype) ensued. For its part, the Soviet Union did not see SDI as an end to Mutually Assured Destruction but rather as an advance of the arms race into a new arena. Sectary General Andropov asserted that Reagan was not attempting to end the arms race but was instead "inventing new plans on how to unleash a nuclear war in the best way, with the hope of winning it."[33]

While "Star Wars" aroused the apprehensions of Soviet leaders about the arms race, the 1983 deployment of Peacekeeper and Pershing II missiles in Europe aroused fears for their personal safety. [34] The Pershing II, a third generation nuclear weapon, could reach Moscow from Germany in minutes. The missiles--deployed in response to the Soviet SS-20 deployments—shifted the balance of power. Soviet leaders now believed an attack launched from Europe could reach Moscow within four to six minutes.[35] Because of their new "super-sudden first strike" capability, Soviet leadership now correctly perceived their command structure as more vulnerable and incorrectly perceived a nuclear attack as more likely.

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[31] Powaski, *Return to Armageddon,* 15.
[32] Powaski, *Return to Armageddon,* 30-31.
[33] Yuri Andropov, quoted in Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum.*
[34] Germany likely received the Pershing II missiles in 1984. Great Britain, Italy, Holland, and the Netherlands, received the Peacemaker) It is unlikely the Soviet Union knew when the Pershing II missiles were operational.
[35] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 74-76; Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum*; Andrew White, *Symbols of War Pershing II and Cruise Missiles in Europe* (London: Merlin Press, 1983), 25-29.

In response, it launched the colossal intelligence Operation RYAN. This joint KGB and GRU intelligence operation put the Soviet political and military intelligence on hair-trigger alert with the hope of discovering and preempting a surprise NATO nuclear strike.[36] Due to their vulnerability to attacks which could decapitate their command structures, both sides relied on preemption, this was termed "launch on warning (LOW)" by the United States.[37]

Operation RYAN

At a secret conference in May 1981, KGB chief Andropov announced to his agents that the United States was actively preparing for nuclear war. To combat this threat, Andropov announced that the Politburo had ordered the largest peace time operation in history. The KGB and GRU mounted an unprecedented worldwide operation to detect --with the hopes of preempting—an American nuclear strike. This behemoth was codenamed Operation Nuclear Missile Attack *Raketno Yadernoye Napadenie;* or, as it has become known to the West, Operation RYAN. The impetus for Operation RYAN appears to have ended with the deaths of Andropov, Kryuchkov, and Ustinov.

To date, the only KGB documents detailing Operation RYAN accessible to historians are those which have been published by Oleg Gordievsky in his book, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions: Top Secret Files on KGB Foreign Operations, 1975-1985*.[38] According to Gordievsky, these documents were sent to KGB residencies in the West, Japan, and some Third World countries. These documents include correspondence between the London residency and Moscow center requesting and reporting "the preparations for war" Great Britain was making; the first telegram from Moscow is the most explanatory of the series, as it describes the impetus for Operation RYAN, the tasks required of the agents, and

[36] Pry, *War Scare,* 15-22.
[37] Benjamin B. Fischer. "The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s," 481-483. *International Journal of Intelligence* Fall (2006), 480-517.
[38] One facsimile of an original Russian document has been provide by Gordievsky. The rest of the documents have been translated and are published in English.

provides a detailed description of a Western nuclear attack.[39]

On 2 February 1983, the London residency received this first telegram entitled "Permanent operations assignment to uncover NATO preparations for a nuclear missile attack on the USSR."[40] It was addressed to the station chief by name, labeled "strictly personal," and was designated to be kept in a special file. The telegram stated:

> The objective of the assignment is to see that the Residency works systematically to uncover any plans in preparation by the main adversary [USA] for RYAN and to organize a continual watch to be kept for indications of a decision being taken to use nuclear weapons against the USSR or immediate preparations being made for a nuclear missile attack.[41]

Attached to the telegram was a list of seven "immediate" and thirteen "prospective" tasks for the agents to complete and report. These included: the collection of data on potential places of evacuation and shelter, an appraisal of the level of blood held in blood banks, observation of places where nuclear decisions were made and stored, observation of key nuclear decision makers, observation of lines of communication, reconnaissance of the heads of churches and banks, and surveillance of security services and military installations.[42]

Many of the assigned observations would have been very poor indicators of a nuclear attack. Others, including communications lines, nuclear decision makers, and--most significantly--missile depots, would have proved to be accurate indicators of nuclear attack. The emphasis placed on these targets may suggest that Soviet intelligence had discovered aspects of Reagan's Continuity in Government Program.[43]

Also attached to the telegram was a thorough and accurate description of the likely methods by which the United States or NATO would launch nuclear war. This attachment emphasized that after the

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[39] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions.* 67-90
[40] He writes that other residencies received an identical telegrams. Andrew and Gordievsky *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 69.
[41] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrde Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 70.
[42] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 71-73.
[43] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 71-73.

West had decided to launch a nuclear attack, a substantial period to prepare would be required. These preparations included nuclear consultations through secret channels, transportation of nuclear weapons, and preparation of civil defense institutions. Detecting the Western decision to launch was imperative to the Soviets because their military doctrine held that preemption of an attack was the only possible way to avoid Mutually Assured Destruction. In a chapter from a basic Soviet military text entitled "The Employment of Nuclear Weapons and Destruction of the Enemy by Fire," states, "Preemption in launching a nuclear strike is considered to be the decisive condition for the attainment of superiority over him and the seizure and retention of the initiative."[44] The imminent arrival of Pershing II missiles in Germany substantially shortened the window for preemption and meant that the situation "had acquired an especial degree of urgency."[45]

Oleg Kalugin, the head of KGB operations in the United States confirms that Reagan's hard-line, anti-Communist stance, his 'Star Wars' program, and the massive American military buildup "scared the wits out of our leadership, and Andropov notified KGB stations around the word to be on the lookout for signs of an imminent American attack. A brand new program [Operation RYAN] was created to gather information on a potential American first nuclear strike."[46] Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, acknowledges that the KGB resident in Washington informed him of operation RYAN.[47] He also writes that none of the General Secretaries with whom he served--Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Chernenko, and Gorbachev--believed "an attack could take place unexpectedly at any moment." Andropov was the "probable exception" to this; he recalls a "very private" conversation with Andropov in which he cautioned that "Reagan is unpredictable. You should expect anything from

[44] A. A. Sidorenko, *The Offensive (A Soviet View)* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1970), 115.
[45] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 74.
[46] Oleg Kalugin, *The First Directorate: my 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 302.
[47] Dobrynin spells it "ryon." Other spellings include "VRYAN" "v*nesapnoe raketno yadernoe napadenie"* secret nuclear missile attack.

him."[48]

It has been estimated that up to 80 percent of all Warsaw Pact Intelligence came from the German Democratic Republic.[49] It is therefore not surprising that the capable GDR intelligence agency played a large role in Operation RYAN. "The man without a face," Marcus Wolf, the decades-long head of East Germany's General Reconnaissance Administration or (HVA) wrote, "our Soviet partners had become obsessed with the danger of a nuclear missile attack." The HVA's most important priority was the surveillance of Perishing II and Cruise Missile sites.[50]

Karel Kocher, a Czechoslovakian spy working illegally in the United States in the early 1980s confirms the existence of Operation Ryan and justifies it. In *Novosti razvedki i kontrrazvedki*, he asserts that Operation RYAN was an effective counter to the increased risk of nuclear war under Reagan. He contends that Reagan added an additional nuclear war scenario into the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), "in which the United States was able to not only survive a nuclear attack, but also to inflict defeat upon the enemy," and thus may had believed nuclear war was winnable and desirable.[51] In "Did East German Spies Prevent a Nuclear War?" Vojtech Mastny also pursues this line of reasoning. Using German military, intelligence, and Warsaw Pact documents, he argues that Soviet Leadership, particularly Andropov and Ustinov, believed that changes in Western military doctrine (provided by Rainier Rupp, an East German spy with the highest level of NATO security clearance, Cosmic Top Secret) were likely precursors for attack.[52]

Gordievsky, Kalugin, and Wolf, it is important to note, were extremely skeptical of a the idea of

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[48] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (University of Washington Press, 2001), 528 -529.
[49] Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum.*
[50] Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum.*
[51] Korel Kochrer *Novosti razvedki i kontrrazvedki*, 1 September 2006.
[52] Vojtech Mastny, "Did East German Spies Prevent a Nuclear War?" http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/coll_stasi/mastny.cfm?navinfo=15296, accessed 20 March, 2008; Rainer Rupp Interview, "Soviet War Scare 1983" Director Henry Chancellor; Exec Producer Taylor Downing; Quoted with permission of Flashback Television, London, 2008; Marcus Wolf, *Man Without A Face: The Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster* (Random House, 1997), 298-300

a NATO first strike. Wolf recalls, "Like most intelligent people, I found these war games a burdensome waste of time." Both Dobrynin and Gordievsky believed that the drive for Operation RYAN came from the leadership of Andropov, Minister of Defense Ustinov and KGB chief of Foreign Operations, Vladimir Kryuchkov, the last guards of the Stalinist Generation. Oleg Kalugin describes Kryuchkov as, "the most paranoid, most anti-western, [and] totally inflexible man [he had ever] met."[53] A recently declassified CIA report from May 1983 could not confirm that Andropov held influence over the Politburo; it noted, "Despite Andropov's initial strong showing on assuming the General Secretary pose and recent signs that his political bandwagon is gaining momentum, he still does not control the Politburo."[54]

Although most agents did not believe an attack was imminent, they were ordered to report their raw observations of events, not their estimation of what their observations meant. This critical flaw in the Soviet intelligence system—coined by Gordievsky as the "intelligence cycle"—was the factor which fed the fear of US nuclear aggression and fueled fears that an attack was likely.[55] In November 1983, ten months after Soviet intelligence was ordered to detect a nuclear strike, NATO began to practice one.

Able Archer 83

The United States and its allies had no intention of launching a preemptive nuclear attack in November 1983. However, in the nuclear era, even a genuine fear of a nonexistent attack creates a genuine danger. Soviet intelligence was not mistaken; it correctly assessed that from 2 through 11 November 1983, the United States and NATO were conducting secret exercises related to nuclear weapons which spanned the continent of Europe. Able Archer was a NATO command post exercise conducted annually after the Autumn Forge tactical exercise, but Able Archer 83 was perceived by the Soviet Union as much more of a threat than previous exercises for several reasons: the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl played integral roles and a new

[53] Marcus Wolf, *Man Without a Face,* 299-301.
[54] May 1984 *Andropov's Political Position: The Importance of the June Plenum.* CIA FOIA electronic reading room.
[55] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 69.

type of launch encryption was used.[56] David Abshire, US Ambassador to NATO from July 1983 to January 1987, explained that in the usual NATO war game scenario, the Soviet Union broke through NATO lines on the continent and headed towards the English Channel; at this point, when they crossed the "nuclear trip wire," SACEUR (Supreme Allied Command of Europe) would request to launch a signal attack on a Warsaw Pact country. If the USSR did not "understand" this signal, SACEUR would request another signal, this time attacking a Soviet republic. The exercises frequently concluded when the actors "got word from the White House that the Soviets understand our determination and will withdraw from Europe."[57]

Due to the vulnerability of their command center to a decapitating attack, the Soviets believed a surprise attack was the most likely method of an American or NATO nuclear release. To preserve this surprise Soviets believed that it was likely that an actual attack would be masked as a drill. The February 1983 telegram described such an attack:

> In view of the fact that the measures involved in 'State Orange [a nuclear attack within 36 hours] have to be carried out with the utmost secrecy (under the guise of maneuvers, training etc) in the shortest possible time, without disclosing the content of operational plans, it is highly probable that the battle alarm system may be used to prepare a surprise RYAN in peacetime.[58]

Soviet dogma also held that it was likely for an attack to occur during a holiday; Commander Viktor Tkachenko, who was stationed in a strategic missile silo during Able Archer 83 explains, "Our commanders always told us that war would begin on the eve of some holiday. When people were out celebrating, when people were relaxed."[59]

The world events proceeding Able Archer 83 caused further distortion and steered Soviet

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[56] Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal*, 123, 131. Pry, *War Scare,* 33-44.
[57] 29 February 2008 David Abshire interview by author. Abshire "was not a M.A.D. man." He recollected to me that he had always wanted to tell Reagan during a drill that Soviets were launching a nuclear attack on Boston but not to worry, "It's only signaling." His account follows the description provided in Shaun R. Gregory, *Nuclear command and Control in NATO* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).
[58] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 78.
[59] Viktor Tkachenko Interview, "Soviet War Scare 1983."

intelligence into reporting their belief in the increased likelihood of US aggression. In addition to the KAL 007 fiasco, US military bases heightened their security following the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, an indication likely mistaken for preparation of a nuclear attack.[60]

Several other indications described in the 17 February 1983 Permanent Operational Assignment to discover a nuclear attack were present during Able Archer 83, furthering the impression that the exercise might be a cover for a real attack. The indications included actions by:

> A cadre of people associated with preparing and implementing decision about RYAN, and also a group of people, including service and technical personnel…those working in the operating services of installations connected with processing and implementing the decision about RYAN, and communication staff involved in the operation and interaction of these installations.[61]

More conspicuously, the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl participated (though not concurrently) in the nuclear drill. President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and Secretary of Defense Weinberger were also intended to participate. Fortunately, National Security Advisor McFarlane --who had assumed the position just two weeks earlier--realized the implications of such participation early in the exercise's planning and rejected it.[62]

Another misleading indicator probably noticed by Soviet analysts was an influx of ciphered communications between Great Britain and the United States. Soviet intelligence was informed that "so-called nuclear consultations in NATO are probably one of the stages of immediate preparation by the adversary for RYAN."[63]

To the Soviet analysts, this burst of clandestine communications between the United States and Great Britain one month before the beginning of ABLE ARCHER may have appeared to be this

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[60] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions, 85-87;* Benjamin B. Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum;" Pry, *War Scare*, 37-38.
[61] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 72.
[62] Robert McFarlane, quoted in Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1991* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1998), 65.
[63] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions, 76.*

"consultation." The burst of communication did not, of course, regard nuclear attack, but rather the US invasion of Grenada, an island of which Queen Elizabeth was the nominal sovereign.[64]

A further startling aspect reported by KGB agents regarded the NATO communications used during the exercise. According to the Moscow Center:

> It [was] of the highest importance to keep a watch on the functioning of communications networks and systems since through them information is passed about the adversary's intentions and, above all, about his plans to use nuclear weapons and practical implementation of these. In addition, changes in the method of operating communications systems and the level of manning may in themselves indicate the state of predation for RYAN.[65]

Soviet intelligence stirred further alarm when it reported that NATO was, indeed, using unique, never-before-seen procedures as well as message formats more sophisticated than previous exercises which possibly indicated the proximity of nuclear attack.[66]

Finally, during ABLE ARCHER 83 NATO forces simulated a move through all alert phases. While these phases were simulated, alarmist KGB agents mistakenly reported them as actual. According to Soviet intelligence, NATO doctrine stated, "*Operational readiness No 1* is declared when there are obvious indications of preparation to begin military operations. It is considered that war is inevitable and may start at any moment."[67]

Upon learning that US nuclear activity mirrored its hypothesized first strike activity, the Moscow Center sent its residencies a flash telegram on 8 or 9 November–Gordievsky cannot recall which--incorrectly reporting an alert on American bases and frantically asking for further information regarding an American first strike. This alert precisely coincided with the seven to ten day period estimated

[64] Martin Walker, *The Cold War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 276.
[65] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions*, 80-81.
[66] Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 599-600.
[67] Andrew and Gordievsky, *Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions,* 79.

between NATO's preliminary decision and actual strike.[68] This was the peak of the War Scare.

The Soviet Union, believing its only chance of surviving a NATO strike was to preempt it, readied its nuclear arsenal. The CIA reported activity in the Baltic Military District and Czechoslovakia, nuclear capable aircraft in Poland and Germany were placed "on high alert status with reading of nuclear strike forces."[69] Former CIA analyst Peter Vincent Pry goes further, suspecting that the aircraft were merely the tip of the iceberg; he hypothesizes that-- in accordance with Soviet military procedure and history-- ICBM silos, already at a high state of alert and difficult for the United States to detect, were also prepared for a launch.[70] Commander Victor Tkachenko, stationed at a Soviet Missile Silo during Able Archer 83, recounts, "When we reached the command bunker that night, we received a special order. We were told to immediately go to raised combat alert. It was so serious that there was a third man there with us, to maintain uninterrupted communications."[71]

Vojtech Mastny, of the Parallel History Project asserts that neither East German nor Soviet intelligence agents, "out of common sense or because of incompetence," provided the Defensive Ministry or Politburo with information; this conjecture has recently been refuted by Rainer Rupp, known as Agent Topaz.[72] Rupp, recently released from an espionage prison sentence, recounted in a 2008 televised interview that during Able Archer 83, a courier delivered him a message which read "High alert, the Russians are really scared and they want to know… NATO is preparing for war and so on. I was really upset, I was thinking where this leading?" He went on to recount that he had then transmitted a message to his handlers stating: "There was no indication that NATO was preparing for war at this time."[73]

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[68] Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB,* 600.
[69] Pry, *War Scare,* 43-44. Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster*,* 2007), 271, 272.
[70] Pry, *War Scare,* 44.
[71] Victor Tkachenko Interview, "Soviet War Scare 1983."
[72] Vojtech Mastny, "Did East German Spies Prevent a Nuclear War?"
[73] Rainer Rupp Interview, "Soviet War Scare 1983."

In May 1984 the Secret National Intelligence Estimate entitled *Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities* concluded "We believe strongly that Soviet actions are not inspired by, and Soviet leaders do not perceive, a genuine danger of imminent conflict with the United States."[74]

This conclusion has recently been refuted by Robert Gates, CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence during Able Archer 83:

> Information about the peculiar and remarkably skewed frame of mind of the Soviet leaders during those times that has emerged since the collapse of the Soviet Union makes me think there is a good chance — with all of the other events in 1983 — that they really felt a NATO attack was at least possible and that they took a number of measures to enhance their military readiness short of mobilization. After going through the experience at the time, then through the postmortems, and now through the documents, I don't think the Soviets were crying wolf. They may not have believed a NATO attack was imminent in November 1983, but they did seem to believe that the situation was very dangerous. And US intelligence [SNIE 11-9-84 and SNIE 11-10-84] had failed to grasp the true extent of their anxiety.[75]

Ambassador Abshire also seems to contradict the 1984 CIA report, he stated in an interview, “They [the USSR] knew our war plans. That they might figure we could attack was a possibility.”[76]

Upon learning of the Soviet reaction to ABLE ARCHER 83 by way of the double agent Oleg Gordievsky, a British MI6 asset, President Reagan commented, “I don’t see how they could believe that--but it’s something to think about.”[77] After some thought, his policy towards the Soviet Union took a sudden change.

Reagan’s Reaction

In 1990, Ronald Reagan was asked why he thought relations between the Soviet Union and United States had improved so dramatically. He answered that it was due to mutual interest: Gorbachev’s interest in dealing with the economic emergency in the Soviet Union and Reagan’s belief

[74] May 1984 Secret National Intelligence Estimate: *Implications of Recent Soviet Military-Political Activities*, CIA FIOA electronic reading room.
[75] Robert Gates, *From the Shadows,* 273.
[76] 29 February 2008 David Abshrire interview by author
[77] Ronald Reagan, as cited in, Oberdorfer, *A New Era,* 67.

that "it was a danger to have a world so heavily armed that one misstep could trigger a great war."[78] Reagan acted on his interest first.[79] Thirteen months before Gorbachev rose to power, Reagan delivered a pivotal 16 January 1984 speech which marked the end of the War Scare. In his speech, given at a special 10:00 AM E.S.T. time and broadcast through a satellite hookup so that it could be viewed during primetime in the Soviet Union, Reagan declared: "If the Soviet Government wants peace, then there will be peace. Together we can strengthen peace, reduce the level of arms, and know in doing so that we have helped fulfill the hopes and dreams of those we represent and, indeed, of people everywhere. Let us begin now."[80] This may have been the olive branch Andropov was seeking when he spoke to Harriman of "the growing number of explosive problems."[81]

Shultz sent a cable to Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko promptly after Reagan's speech. It read, "The combination of circumstances, domestic and international--or, if you prefer 'the correlation of forces'—provides the opportunity for positive movement for the first time in several years." Later in the cable Shultz emphatically stated, "The central issue between us is the avoidance of war. If we do not agree, at least tacitly, on that issue, the remainder of our agenda and yours is irrelevant."[82]

In his memoirs, Reagan wrote of two events which profoundly affected him in the weeks leading up to ABLE ARCHER 83. The first was a screening of *The Day After,* "a film which depicted the "'horrific vision of nuclear holocaust.'" Reagan wrote in his diary that the film was "very effective and left me greatly depressed."[83] The Second was a Pentagon briefing on nuclear war—quite possibly linked to his Continuity of Government Plan.[84]

These two glimpses of nuclear war psychologically primed Reagan for ABLE ARCHER 83, giving

[78] Oberdorfer, *A New Era, 479.*
[79] An expanded argument for this assertion can be found in Fischer, *Reagan Reversal*.
[80] Ronald Reagan, United States-Soviet Relations, 16 January1984.
[81] 2 June 1983, Memorandum of Conversation with Andropov. W. Averill Harriman Papers.
[82] January 1984 Shultz cable to Gromyko from the CIA FIOA electronic reading room.
[83] Reagan, *An American Life,* 585.
[84] Fischer, *Reagan Reversal, 120-122.*

him a very specific picture of what would occur had the situation further developed. After receiving intelligence reports from sources including Gordievsky, it was clear that the Soviets had panicked. While officials were concerned with the Soviet panic, they were hesitant about believing the proximity of a Soviet attack. Shultz, at the time, believed it to be "incredible, at least to us" that the Soviets would believe the US would launch a genuine attack.[85] Reagan, for one, did not share the belief that cooler heads would prevail, writing:

> We had many contingency plans for responding to a nuclear attack. But everything would happen so fast that I wondered how much planning or reason could be applied in such a crisis…*Six minutes* to decide how to respond to a blip on a radar scope and decide whether to unleash Armageddon! How could anyone apply reason at a time like that?"[86]

McFarlane stated that ABLE ARCHER 83 had a "big influence" on Reagan's subsequent approach to foreign policy: "He did receive from the CIA the key core issues that were exposed in Gordievsky's reports and was very moved by them." [87] The president who had believed the prophecy of Armageddon would be fulfilled by a nuclear apocalypse, had stated that MAD policy was madness, and who had written that civilization had regressed because of nuclear weapons, finally administered a policy which reduced rather than enflamed the risk of nuclear war.[88] In late 1983, Reagan began implementing a policy of increased of US-Soviet dialogue, weapons reductions, and rapprochement.

In his memoirs, Reagan, without specifically mentioning ABLE ARCHER 83--he states earlier that he cannot mention classified information-- wrote of his realization:

> Three years had taught me something surprising about the Russians: Many people at the top of the Soviet hierarchy were genuinely afraid of America and Americans. Perhaps this shouldn't have surprised me, but it did….
>
> During my first years in Washington, I think many of us in the administration took it for granted that 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

[85] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph,* 464.
[86] Reagan, *An American Life,* 257.
[87] Robert McFarlane, quoted in Fischer, *Reagan Reversal,* 135; McFarlane Interview, "Soviet War Scare 1983."
[88] Robert McFarlane, quoted in Fischer, *Reagan Reversal,* 106-107; Reagan, *American Life,* 278, 549.

> many Soviet officials feared us not only as adversaries but as potential aggressors who might hurl nuclear weapons at them in a first strike…
>
> Well, if that was the case, I was even more anxious to get a top Soviet leader in a room alone and try to convince him we had no designs on the Soviet Union and Russians had nothing to fear from us.[89]

And so concludes the little known history of Able Archer 83. After the Missiles of November, Reagan bravely changed his policy toward the Soviet Union in the hope of avoiding future nuclear occurrences between the two superpowers. The fruits of Reagan's rapprochement would begin to blossom during his summit with Gorbachev in Geneva…but that is a history well chronicled.

Conclusion

In mid-May, 2007 I grabbed, opened, and rapidly thumbed through the pages of my copy of *The Reagan Diaries,* hot off the press. As I reached November of 1983 my breathing quickened—I was looking for any further insight I could glean into President Reagan's reaction to the news--learned through the British asset, Oleg Gordievsky—that the NATO drill in which he was supposed to have participated had aroused nuclear panic within the Soviet Union. Finally, I reached the dates just after the exercise and scanned the page, looking for any historical clue. There it was: **Thursday, November 24 […Redacted].** Oh, the agony of the historian!

To be sure, there are many "grey areas" in the young history of the War Scare. Most American intelligence documents regarding this era are still not eligible for declassification. Even when they are eligible, many will fall under the declassification exemptions of Executive Order 12958.[90] The most comprehensive US document, Nina Stewart's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board report on Able Archer

[89] Reagan, *An American Life,* 588-589, 585.

[90] Executive Order 12958 deals with Classification, http://www.archives.gov/isoo/policy-documents/eo-12958-amendment.html#3.3 accessed 20 March 2008. Documents relating to the War Scare could very likely be exempt for the following reasons: (3) revealing cryptologic systems or activities, (4) revealing U.S. weapon systems information, (5) revealing U.S. military war plans, or (6) revealing information which would damage relations with a foreign government.

83, presented to the President in 1990, remains classified. Other classified CIA reports include those published in the aftermath of Able Archer 83 with such tantalizing titles as *Why is the World So Dangerous?* and *Soviet Thinking on the Possibility of Armed Confrontation with the United States*. The prospects from the Russian side appear worse. Politburo minutes, which would likely illuminate the creation of Operation RYAN and present an unfiltered account of Soviet appraisals and fears, remain almost entirely inaccessible. They are held in the Archives of the President of the Russian Federation and are still classified as top secret and unavailable to all but a very select few historians.[91] Karel Koffer, a former Czechoslovak spy reports that his Russian intelligence colleagues with knowledge of Operation RYAN have told him that it will "remain forever classified top secret."[92]

However, the view from some former Warsaw pact countries appears less gloomy. Vajtech Mastny draws extensively from GDR defensive documents in his presentation of the Eastern Bloc's perceptions on NATO. Likewise, Jordan Baev draws from recently opened archives in "The Soviet Bloc Intelligence Service's Collaboration Against the USA and NATO in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean 1967-1987."[93] There are also many Cold Warriors on both sides eager to tell their stories and justify their actions. Their histories, though not replacements for documents, are avenues for immediate research on the War Scare.

Able Archer 83 is an important chapter in the histories of the United States, the Soviet Union, the Cold War, and the nuclear era. It remains a stark reminder of the paradox of nuclear weapons: while these inventions helped to prevent direct war between two diametrically opposed superpowers for 45 years, they also could have erupted into worldwide catastrophe at any given moment. The lessons of

[91] ArcheoBiblioBase http://www.iisg.nl/~abb/abb_c1.html, accessed 20 March 2008; The minutes cited in this paper were declassified as possible evidence for the 1992 Constitutional Court trial of the CPSU.
[92] Korel Kochrer, *Novosti razvedki i kontrrazvedki*, 1 September 2006.
[93] Vojtech Mastny, "Did East German Spies Prevent a Nuclear War?;" Jordan Baev"The Soviet Bloc Intelligence Services' Collaboration Against the USA and NATO in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean 1967-1989," Seminar Paper, Norwegian Nobel Institute, 2002.

Able Archer 83, one of the most telling encounters between the superpowers, must be brought to the attention of the Russian and American public. As one studies the Missiles of November, one gleans a glimpse of the worst, and the best, of mankind.

In *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History,* renowned historian, John Lewis Gaddis uses a metaphor of two dinosaurs, one healthy, the other ailing, to explain the Cold War.[94] The Soviet Union, he says, is an ailing triceratops; his insides, mirroring the Soviet domestic economy, are rotting. America, perhaps a healthy tyrannosaurus, stands opposed from the triceratops; however, the two never fight, as each is rationally deterred by the others spikes, capable of mass destruction. Left alone, the ailing triceratops collapses and dies of its internal sickness. This, argues Gaddis, was the Long Peace; nuclear weapons prevented war between the United States and Soviet Union.

Gaddis's metaphor is accurate to a point; his assertion that the domestic economy of the Soviet Union would always lag behind that of America is true. His error lies in his belief that the two sides--under no circumstance-- would ever begin a nuclear war. *We Now Know* largely seems to present, like so many other old Cold War histories, a linear path--albeit with a few third world scuffles--from the brink of war at the Cuban Missile Crisis straight through the SALT, START, and IMF treaties and concluding with Reagan and Gorbachev's visit to the Statue of Liberty. As those who study prehistoric Earth know, if a tyrannosaurus encroached upon and threatened an ailing triceratops, a terrible battle would likely have erupted. I contend that this dynamic was approached during Operation RYAN and Able Archer 83. There was never a pact between the superpowers never to launch a nuclear war; frighteningly, the use of nuclear weapons was, and continues to be, a very real possibility.[95]

This study of the War Scare has proven three things: First, the danger of nuclear war was indeed

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[94] John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 1989). And Jim Hershberg counterargument, "Reconsidering the Nuclear Arms Race: The Past as Prelude?" in *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered 1890-1993* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 187.

[95] Gaddis politely omits that dinosaurs had brains the size of walnuts.

heightened in November of 1983. Second, the continued military buildup and confrontational policies of the United States contributed to this danger. Finally, President Reagan comprehended this danger and corrected American policy. In the end, it appears that he and Andropov agreed; "the Soviet People and the American people have a common foe—the threat of a war incomparable with the horrors we went through previously. This war may perhaps not occur through evil intent, but could happen through miscalculation. Then nothing could save mankind."[96]

[96] Memorandum of Conversation with Andropov. W. Averill Harriman Papers.

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