

Appendix

A. Editorial Note

Stark deviations in assessments by the U.S. Intelligence Community of the November 1983 NATO exercise Able Archer and the Soviet “war scare” led to a much later 1990 investigation by the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board during the George H.W. Bush administration, resulting in the report, “The Soviet ‘War Scare.’” (George H.W. Bush Library, Bush Presidential Records, President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, Subject Files; Reports to the President-War Scare Report 1990 [OA/IDCF01830–020]) The February 15, 1990, PFIAB report analyzed intelligence and reporting on the Soviet war scare, Able Archer, and other related activities. The PFIAB report stated: “During the past year, the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board has carefully reviewed the events of that period to learn what we (the U.S. intelligence community) knew, when we knew it, and how we interpreted it. The Board has read hundreds of documents, conducted more than 75 interviews with American and British officials, and studied the series of National Intelligence Estimates (NIE’s) and other intelligence assessments that have attempted over the last six years to interpret the war scare data. Additionally, we have offered our own interpretation of the war scare events.” (PFIAB, pages vi–vii) Although outside the normal scope of this volume, the 1990 PFIAB report and other memoranda from 1988 and 1989 are addressed in this editorial note because the documents focus upon crucial events from 1983 to 1984.

Reactions from the Intelligence Community (IC) and policymakers to the events surrounding Able Archer and the Soviet “war scare” differed significantly and evolved over time. The contemporaneous reporting in 1983–1984 from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), National Intelligence Council (NIC), [*text not declassified*] drew varied conclusions about Soviet anxieties. While some reporting assessed that “Contrary to the impression conveyed by Soviet propaganda, Moscow does not appear to anticipate a near-term military confrontation with the United States” (see Document 157), another analysis presented evidence that [*text not declassified*].

Retrospective assessments of these events seem to conflate the NATO Able Archer exercise with the broader “war scare” talk emanating from Moscow related to INF deployments. The Soviet military unquestionably reacted to Able Archer differently than to previous NATO exercises. (See Document 134.) Whether the Soviet response was attributable to the circumstances of the time, to the “war scare”

(whether real or Soviet propaganda), or to a credible belief within the Soviet military leadership or the Politburo that the United States was planning to launch a nuclear first strike against the USSR, under the guise of a NATO exercise or otherwise, remains unclear on the basis of the available evidence.

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

"In two separate Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIEs) in May and August 1984, the intelligence community said: 'We believe strongly that Soviet actions are not inspired by, and Soviet leaders do not perceive, a genuine danger of imminent conflict or confrontation with the United States.' Soviet statements to the contrary were judged to be 'propaganda.' [See Documents 221 and 264.]

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

During November 1983, Able Archer and the Soviet responses to this exercise received little immediate attention in the U.S. Intelligence Community. (See Document 135.) However, by spring 1984, some in the intelligence communities in the United States [*text not declassified*] believed the Reagan administration should have recognized Soviet sensitivities and anxieties about a potential U.S. first strike. [*text not declassified*].

According to the PFIAB report, [*text not declassified*] "KGB Deputy Resident Colonel Oleg Gordiyevskiy, [*text not declassified*] had witnessed what he saw as Soviet paranoia over a US nuclear first strike; [*text not declassified*] As one of the most senior KGB officers in London, [*text not declassified*]." (PFIAB, page 10)

In a covering memorandum [*less than 1 line not declassified*] to Director of Central Intelligence William Casey and others, Herbert Meyer, Vice Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, wrote: [*text not*

declassified]. The PFIAB report commented that the [*text not declassified*] report was “not well received in the US intelligence community.” (PFIAB, pages 10–11)

Another contemporaneous analysis from the CIA, the May 1984 SNIE 11–10–84/JX concluded: “We believe strongly that Soviet actions are not inspired by, and Soviet leaders do not perceive, a genuine danger of imminent conflict or confrontation with the United States.” (See Document 221.) The PFIAB report commented on this SNIE: “The estimate boldly declared that ‘Recent Soviet war scare propaganda . . . is aimed primarily at discrediting US policies and mobilizing ‘peace’ pressures among various audiences abroad.’ In a more piecemeal fashion, it was judged that ‘Each Soviet action has its own military or political purpose sufficient to explain it.’ The accelerated tempo of Soviet live exercise activity was explained simply as a reflection of ‘long-term Soviet military objectives.’

“The Soviet reaction to Able Archer 83 was dismissed as a ‘counter-exercise,’ but analysts acknowledged that the ‘elaborate Soviet reaction’ was ‘somewhat greater than usual.’ [*less than 1 line not declassified*] prior to and during the exercise indicated that the Warsaw Pact Intelligence services, especially the KGB, were admonished ‘to look for any indication that the United States was about to launch a first nuclear strike,’ analysts concluded that ‘by confining heightened readiness to selected air units, Moscow clearly revealed that it did not, in fact, think there was a possibility at this time of a NATO attack.’ The assessment, however, was not specific about what type of defensive or precautionary Soviet activity might be expected—and detected—were they preparing for an offensive NATO move.” (PFIAB, page 13)

The PFIAB report continued its critique of SNIE 11–10–84/JX: IC “analysts dismissed [*less than 1 line not declassified*] on the war scare, including the KGB’s formal tasking to its Residencies. ‘This war scare propaganda has reverberated in Soviet security bureaucracies and emanated through other channels such as human sources. [See for example, Document 144.] We do not believe it reflects authentic leadership fears of imminent conflict.’” The report contended: “Such judgments were made even though the analysis was tempered ‘by some uncertainty as to current Soviet leadership perceptions of the United States, by continued uncertainty about the Politburo decisionmaking processes, and by our inability at this point to conduct a detailed examination of how the Soviets might have assessed recent US/NATO military exercises and reconnaissance operations’—which, of course, included the previous Able Archer exercise. In other words, US analysts were unsure of what the Kremlin leadership thought or how it made decisions, nor had they adequately assessed the Soviet reaction to Able Archer 83. This notwithstanding, the estimate concluded: ‘We are confident that,

as of now, the Soviets see not an imminent military clash but a costly and—to some extent—more perilous strategic and political struggle over the rest of the decade.” (PFIAB, page 14)

The Board had similar criticisms of the August 1984 SNIE 11–9–84, “Soviet Policy Toward the United States in 1984” (see Document 264), for its “categorical and unqualified” judgments “about the likelihood of the war scare,” and the analysts’ conclusions: “We strongly believe that the Soviet actions are not inspired by, and Soviet leaders do not perceive, a genuine danger of imminent conflict or confrontation with the United States. Also, we do not believe that the Soviet war talk and other actions ‘mask’ Soviet preparations for an imminent move toward confrontation on the part of the USSR.” (PFIAB, page 19–20) The PFIAB report continued: “Analysts readily acknowledged that the previous six months had seen extraordinary, unprecedented Soviet activities. Large scale military exercise, ‘anomalous behavior’ during the troop rotation, withdrawn military support for the harvest (last seen prior to the 1968 Czech invasion), new, deployed weapons systems (termed ‘in response to INF deployments’), and heightened internal vigilance and security activities were noted. These events, however, were judged to be ‘in line with long-evolving plans and patterns, rather than with sharp acceleration of preparations for major war.’” (PFIAB, page 19)

The PFIAB report acknowledged that its assessment and criticism of the May and August 1984 SNIes “derives from information not known at the time. Our purpose in presenting this report is not so much to criticize the conclusions of the 1984 SNIE’s as to raise questions about the ways these estimates were made and subsequently reassessed.” (PFIAB, page ix) The PFIAB report concluded: “Reasonable people can disagree about the conclusions of the 1984 SNIE’s. The PFIAB does disagree with many of them. More worrisome to us, however, is the process by which the estimates were made and subsequently reassessed. Although both estimates were reportedly reviewed by outside readers—and both, but particularly the first, contained alternative scenarios—strongly worded interpretations were defended by explaining away facts inconsistent with them. Consequently, both estimates contained, in essence, single outcome forecasting based in large part on near-term anomalous behavior. Moreover, neither alerted the reader to the risks erroneously rejecting the correct scenario.” (PFIAB, page 30) The PFIAB report criticized the performance of the IC in 1983–1984, showing that contemporary assessments of Soviet intentions after Able Archer did not go far enough in providing President Reagan with alternative scenarios, explaining that the anxiety from the Soviet leadership could have been real.

In criticizing contemporary estimates, the PFIAB report emphasized intelligence that had not been available to the IC during these

years, principally information provided by Gordiyevskiy after he defected in 1985. Robert McFarlane's thoughts on the influence of Gordiyevskiy's information on the President are recorded in a December 16, 1988, memorandum for the record:

Memorandum for the Record

16 December 1988

SUBJECT

[*less than 1 line not declassified*] Robert F. McFarlane Regarding the Influence of Oleg Gordiyevskiy's Reporting on President Reagan

On 15 December [*less than 1 line not declassified*] Robert F. ("Bud") McFarlane, formerly National Security Advisor to the President, as to the veracity of claims [*less than 1 line not declassified*] that the reporting of KGB officer [*less than 1 line not declassified*] Oleg Gordiyevskiy about the Kremlin's fear of war greatly influenced President Reagan in the mid-1980s to seek better relations with the USSR. In response, Bud made several points:

He definitely remembered the reporting associated (later) with Gordiyevskiy that conveyed the Kremlin's fear of war. He also specifically recalled [*less than 1 line not declassified*] on Gordiyevskiy's assessments given to the President [*less than 1 line not declassified*].

He noted that he discussed this reporting with the President on several occasions. This was in the course of numerous discussions extending throughout 1983 and part of 1984 about the apparent anxieties being transmitted by Moscow through many channels, [*less than 1 line not declassified*].

The President, according to Bud, saw this reporting attributed to Gordiyevskiy in the larger context of a Soviet "war-scare" campaign arising from the NATO decision to deploy INF and from Reagan's hard line on defense, SDI, etc. In the President's view, either the Soviets were paranoid in strange ways we could not let bother us, or they were fabricating the appearance of fear to intimidate and sway us, which we should even more be prepared to ignore.

Often in these conversations, according to Bud, the President outlined his sustained intention to concentrate on building US strength and credibility in the first term and to move toward diplomatic reengagement in the second. The President's key speech of January 1984 [see Document 158] was a natural step in a long-planned shift of policy. Neither Gordiyevskiy's reporting nor the Soviet "war-scare" campaign in general were responsible for the evolution of the President's policy.

Bud said he'd been queried before on this matter by [*name not declassified*], a journalist, who might be (or have been) writing an article on it. Against the background of the above, Bud said he discounted Gordiyevskiy's impact on the President [*less than 1 line not declassified*].

[*1 paragraph (8½ lines) not declassified*]

[*name not declassified*]

(Central Intelligence Agency, National Intelligence Council, Job 90T00435R: Chronological Files (1988), Box 1, Folder 12: C/NIC Chrono for December 1988)

McFarlane's recollections in this memorandum for the record correlate with a January 1984 memorandum by Jack Matlock, Soviet specialist on the NSC Staff, which demonstrated an awareness of potential Soviet concerns, but concluded:

"—The Soviet leadership is not overly nervous about the immediate prospect of armed confrontation with the U.S.;

"—They are however very nervous about the prospects five to ten years down the road—not so much of a confrontation as such, as of a decisive shift in the balance of military power." (See Document 157.)

As mentioned in the 1988 memorandum for the record, McFarlane did recall "later" reporting to Reagan about Gordiyevskiy. The PFIAB report addressed Gordiyevskiy's situation in relation to the war scare and the 1984 SNIE assessments: "The Board found that after the 1984 assessments were issued, the intelligence community did not again address the war scare until after the defection to Great Britain of KGB Colonel Oleg Gordiyevskiy in July, 1985. Gordiyevskiy had achieved the rank of Acting Resident in the United Kingdom, but he fell under suspicion as a Western agent. Recalled to the Soviet Union, he was placed under house arrest and intensely interrogated. Able to flee his watchers, Gordiyevskiy was exfiltrated from Moscow by the British Secret Intelligence Service."

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

military exercise. He described the leadership's worries of a 'decapitating' strike from the Pershing II's, and its belief that the US could mobilize for a surprise attack in a mere seven to ten days. He explained how the London Residency responded to the requirements, and the effects that reporting had back at Moscow Center in reinforcing Soviet fears. He described conversations he had held with colleagues from Center and from the GRU. The next month, President Reagan held his first summit with Mikhail Gorbachev and relations began to thaw." (PFIAB, pages 22–23)

The PFIAB report also cited a January 1989 "End of Tour Report Addendum" by Lieutenant General Leonard H. Perroots, who had served as Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, US Air Forces Europe, during the 1983 Able Archer exercise, to emphasize the potential consequences of the intelligence gap during the Able Archer exercise. Perroots addressed Able Archer as well as Gordiyevskiy's reporting in that memorandum:

1. (U) In 1983, I was assigned as the DCS for Intelligence, US Air Forces, Europe, Ramstein AB, Germany. The annual NATO Command and Control exercise ABLE ARCHER was scheduled to begin during the first week of November. The context of this nuclear command and control exercise was relatively benign; the scenario had been purposely chosen to be non-controversial, and the exercise itself was a routine annual event. This exercise closely followed the bombing of air defense sites in Lebanon and directly followed the invasion of Grenada. As I recall, however, there was no particular feeling of tension in the European Theater beyond that which is normal.

2. [*portion marking not declassified*] Only the fact that Soviet Intelligence collection assets (primarily low level signals intercept units) had failed to return to garrison after their normal concentrated coverage of NATO's AUTUMN FORGE exercise series could be reckoned strange at all. As the kickoff date of ABLE ARCHER neared it was clear that there was a great deal of Soviet interest in the forthcoming events. Again, this seemed nothing out of the ordinary. We knew that there was a history of intensive Soviet collection against practice Emergency Action Messages (EAM's) related to nuclear release.

3. [*portion marking not declassified*] ABLE ARCHER started in the morning of 3 November, and progressed immediately in the scenario to NATO STATE ORANGE. At 2100Z on 04 November NSA issued an electrical product report G/00/3083-83, entitled "SOVIET AIR FORCES, GSFG, PLACED ON HEIGHTENED READINESS, 2 NOVEMBER 1983." I saw this message on the morning of 5 November and discussed it with my air analysts. It stated that as of 1900Z on 02 November the fighter-bomber divisions of the air force of Group Soviet Forces, Germany had been placed in a status of heightened alert. All

divisional and regimental command posts and supporting command and control elements were to be manned around-the-clock by augmented teams.

4. [*portion marking not declassified*] In addition to the directed command and control changes the fighter-bomber divisions were also ordered to load out one squadron of aircraft in each regiment (if this order applied equally across GSFG the result would have been at least 108 fighter-bombers on alert). These aircraft were to be armed and placed at readiness 3 (30 minute alert) to “destroy first-line enemy targets.” The alert aircraft were to be equipped with a self-protection jamming pod. We knew from subsequent NSA reporting that a squadron at Neuruppin, East Germany sought and was apparently granted permission to configure its aircraft without the ECM pod because of an unexpected weight and balance problem. My air analysts opined that this message meant that at least this particular squadron was loading a munitions configuration that they had never actually loaded before, i.e., a warload.

5. [*portion marking not declassified*] At this point, I spoke to CinC-USAFA, General Billy Minter. I told him we had some unusual activity in East Germany that was probably a reaction to the ongoing ABLE ARCHER. He asked if I thought we should increase the real force generation. I said that we would carefully watch the situation, but there was insufficient evidence to justify increasing our real alert posture. At this point in the exercise our forces were in a simulated posture of NATO State ORANGE and local SALTY NATION tests involving simulated generation of combat aircraft were underway at various locations including Ramstein AB. If I had known then what I later found out I am uncertain what advice I would have given.

6. [*portion marking not declassified*] An NSA message dated 022229Z DEC 83 provided the rest of the picture as far as we knew it—at least until the reports began to surface from the British penetration of the KGB, Oleg Gordievskiy. This GAMMA message was entitled “SOVIET 4th AIR ARMY AT HEIGHTENED READINESS IN REACTION TO NATO EXERCISE ABLE ARCHER, 2–11 NOVEMBER 1983.” This report stated that the alert had been ordered by the Chief of the Soviet Air Forces, Marshal Kutakhov, and that all units of the Soviet 4th Air Army were involved in the alert “which included preparations for immediate use of nuclear weapons.” This report described activity that was contemporaneous with that reflected in East Germany, but because of the specific source of this material it was not available in near realtime. The two pieces taken together present a much more ominous picture.

7. [*portion marking not declassified*] Equally ominous in its own way was the fact that this alert was never reflected at all by the I&W system.

At the time of this occurrence there was no distribution of electrically reported GAMMA material to the Tactical Fusion Center at Boerfink. I remedied that shortfall in the aftermath of this activity. Secondly, a real standdown of aircraft was secretly ordered in at least the Soviet Air Forces units facing the Central Region, and that standdown was not detected. The Soviet alert in response to ABLE ARCHER began after nightfall on Wednesday evening, there was no flying on the following two days which led to the weekend, and then the following Monday was 7 November, the revolution holiday. The absence of flying could always be explained, although a warning condition was raised finally on about the ninth of November when overhead photography showed fully armed FLOGGER aircraft on air defense alert at a base in East Germany. When this single indicator was raised, the standdown had been underway for a week.

8. *[portion marking not declassified]* For the next six months I was on a soapbox about ABLE ARCHER whenever I could discuss it at the appropriate classification level. I spoke to the Senior Military Intelligence Officers' Conference (SMIOC), and I buttonholed a lot of people. I suggested that perhaps we should move our annual exercise away from the November 7 holiday, because it is clear to me that the conjunction of the two events causes a warning problem that can never be solved. Our problem here was that we had a couple of very highly classified bits of intelligence evidence about a potentially disastrous situation that never actually came to fruition. For decision-makers it was always difficult to believe that there could have been any serious reaction by the Soviets to such a "benign" exercise as ABLE ARCHER. From the Soviet perspective, however, it might have appeared very different. It was difficult for all of us to grasp that, but Oleg Gordievskiy's reporting began to provide a somewhat more frightening perspective when it became available in the Fall of 1985.

9. (S) By the time Gordievskiy's reporting began to surface for analytical review I was the Director of DIA. Gordievskiy's initial reporting about a "war scare" in 1983 immediately caught my attention. It should be pointed out at the outset that Gordievskiy knew nothing of a military alert during ABLE ARCHER. He did, however, tell us something of a chilling story about Moscow Center's Intelligence tasking during 1983. He related that there was a project called either "RYaN" or "VRYaN," the latter probably being the full form of a Russian acronym meaning "sudden rocket nuclear attack." There was a cadre of specialists in Moscow Center charged with, among other things, finding the evidence of planning for a western attack on the Soviet Union. Beginning in 1982 and continuing into 1983 Gordievskiy says that this group became ever more insistent that an attack was being planned by the West. By March 1983 the KGB officers in Moscow

had decided that ABLE ARCHER 83 would provide an excellent cover for the planned attack, and KGB and GRU residencies around the world were being directed to find the evidence. Gordievskiy, living in London at the time, states that he never believed there was really a threat, and that the London residency of the KGB simply ignored the collection requirements until it began to become clear that Moscow was serious. During the summer of 1983 the London residency sent some reports that, in retrospect, Gordievskiy believed might have hyped the war hysteria. He never really believed in the threat, however, and reported during his debriefing in 1985 that he thought the VRYaN hysteria might have been some kind of internal political ploy. I must reiterate again that Gordievskiy did not know about the secret military alert of November 1983.

10. *[portion marking not declassified]* The US intelligence community has never really closed with this analytical problem. A SNIE addressed this subject, *[1½ lines not declassified]*. The position has been taken again and again that had there been a real alert we would have detected more of it, but this may be whistling through the graveyard. It is not certain that we looked hard enough or broadly enough for information. For Western collectors the context was peacetime without even the most basic ripples of crisis. For the Soviets, however, the view may have looked quite different. It is uncertain how close to war we came or even if that was a possibility at all, but we know from Gordievskiy that the analysts in Moscow had predicted that the West would launch the attack from a posture of NATO State ORANGE. What might have happened that day in November 1983 if we had begun a precautionary generation of forces rather than waiting for further information?

(Central Intelligence Agency, National Intelligence Council, Job 91B00551: Speeches, Lectures, Briefing Files (1988–1989), Box 1, Folder 2: C/NIC (Ermarth) Chrons March 1989)

The PFIAB report commented that “as his parting shot before retirement,” Perroots, who served as DIA Director from 1985 to 1989, sent a January 1989 “letter outlining his disquiet over the inadequate treatment of the Soviet war scare to, among others, the DCI and this Board.” The report continued: “Following the detection of the Soviet Air Forces’ increased alert status, it was his [Perroots’s] recommendation, made in ignorance, not to raise US readiness in response—a fortuitous, if ill-informed, decision given the changed political environment at the time.” (PFIAB, pages 27–28) In further accord with Perroots’s report, the PFIAB report concluded: “As it happened, the military officers in charge of the Able Archer exercise minimized the risk by doing nothing in the face of evidence that parts of the Soviet armed forces were moving to an unusual alert level. But these officials acted correctly out of instinct, not informed guidance, for in the years leading up to Able

Archer they had received no guidance as to the possible significance of apparent changes in Soviet military and political thinking.” (PFIAB, page x)

[*name not declassified*] the National Warning Staff and [*name not declassified*] of the Office of Soviet Analysis prepared an undated memorandum reacting to Perroots’s comments, which was distributed by Ermarth to the DCI and DDCI for consideration:

SUBJECT

Comments on Memorandum of Lieutenant General Perroots

Summary

1. General Perroots’s memorandum describes in detail a worrisome episode in which Soviet Air Forces in Central Europe assumed an abnormally high alert posture in early November 1983 in response to a routine NATO command post and communications exercise. Two Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIEs)—written in May and August 1984 respectively—treated the events described in the General’s memorandum in the larger context of US-Soviet relations. Those Estimates judged that the Soviets displayed a heightened sense of concern in many areas of national life primarily because of the more aggressive policies of the US Administration in the early 1980s, the US strategic modernization program that included the peacekeeper ICBM and the D-5 SLBM, the actual implementation of NATO’s 1979 decision for Intermediate Range Nuclear Force (INF) modernization by deployment of the first Pershing-II missile systems to Europe, and because of the leadership instability in the USSR from the successive deaths of three general secretaries between 1981 and 1985. A National Intelligence Estimate in 1988 assessed the significance of the events in 1983 with the benefit of a longer time perspective and reached the same broad conclusions. General Perroots’s memorandum and its enclosure neither raises no new issues nor contains new data that change the strategic judgements already written. [*portion marking not declassified*]

2. At the tactical and theater level, however, General Perroots’s memorandum surfaces a long-standing warning problem, i.e., the need for the Intelligence Community in Washington to provide more timely, discriminating, and accurate warning in support of the theater commander. Perroots, who at the time was Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, US Air Forces Europe (USAFE), describes three serious problems for which there are only partial answers. First, he believes that, despite the enormous amount of resources and energy spent in guarding against a strategic surprise attack, USAFE was not well informed in that the US warning systems did not detect in a timely fashion the extent of Soviet precautionary readiness measures undertaken in November 1983 in response to NATO exercise Able Archer.

Secondly, he believes that Washington-based agencies had relevant information which was not available to the European Command when he recommended against a precautionary US alert by US Air Forces Europe in response to the detection of the increased alert status of the Soviet Air Forces. Finally, [1½ lines not declassified], General Perroots is concerned that in similar circumstances—even if there is better intelligence—another officer in his position might recommend a precautionary US Air Force alert in Europe that could have serious escalatory consequences, unless there are timely, national level assessments available. [portion marking not declassified]

3. The dilemma that General Perroots has described is characteristic of the warning problems faced by senior US military intelligence chiefs in many past crises, in which decisions about US force posture were dependent upon threat assessments prepared rapidly and based on fragmentary and incomplete intelligence. General Perroots's memorandum reinforces two long-standing lessons of warning: warning systems are no substitute for seasoned, professional judgment and assessments; and they require constant attention and improvement. In terms of process, however, his memorandum reinforces the requests of successive SACEURs and other US theater commanders for better ways to provide more timely national-level warning assessments to the theater intelligence staffs.

The Setting of Exercise Able Archer, 1983

4. The larger context of the period, often referred to as the “war scare,” reflected increasing Soviet concern over the drift in superpower relations, which some in the Soviet leadership felt indicated an increased threat of war and increased likelihood of the use of nuclear weapons. These concerns were shaped in part by a Soviet perception that the correlation of forces was shifting against the Soviet Union and that the United States was taking steps to achieve military superiority. These fears were exacerbated by planned improvements in US strategic forces, as well as by progress made by NATO to implement its 1979 decision began with NATO's deliberations in the late 1970s to modernize its theater nuclear forces by deploying Pershing-II missiles and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) to Europe. By 1981, after the new US Administration was inaugurated, the Soviet concern intensified almost concurrently with General Secretary Brezhnev's decline in health [portion marking not declassified]

5. [1½ lines not declassified] the increased Soviet concern stemmed from a fear by some Soviet leaders that the West might seek to exploit its new capability in Europe for a preemptive nuclear surprise attack against the USSR, for which the Soviets had no defense. From a national security standpoint, this Western capability led to questions about the

long-standing Soviet view that crises and other adverse developments in international affairs would precede the outbreak of war and be the basis for long-term early warning. The Soviets had concern that the West might decide to attack the USSR without warning during a time of vulnerability—such as when military transport was used to support the harvest—thus compelling the Soviets to consider a preemptive strike at the first sign of US preparations for a nuclear strike. *[portion marking not declassified]*

6. From Brezhnev's death in 1982 through late 1984, the Soviets ordered a number of unusual measures not previously detected except during periods of crisis with the West. These included: disruption of the normal troop rotation cycle for Soviet forces in central Europe in 1984; updating civil defense procedures in the USSR from 1982 through 1984; in the spring of 1984 the first, and apparently only, time that Soviet military trucks were not sent to support the harvest since the end of World War II; and increased alert reactions even to routine NATO training from 1982 to 1984. The cumulative effect of these and other measures was to reduce the Soviet and Warsaw Pact vulnerability to a surprise attack. The abnormal Soviet reaction to NATO Exercise Able Archer in November 1983 occurred within this setting. *[portion marking not declassified]*

7. Concurrent with the military dimension, *[less than 1 line not declassified]* other precautionary measures taken by the Soviets probably were a reflection of the political maneuvering in the Kremlin in 1982 and 1983 associated with Andropov's rise to power. In exchange for military support for his bid to become General Secretary, Andropov, then KGB Chairman, may have promised greater allocations of resources for military industrial expansion, improved civil defense readiness, and military modernization. All of these were espoused by the Chief of the General Staff at the time, Marshal Ogarkov. Successful manipulation of threat perceptions by the KGB at Andropov's direction would have helped cultivate the strong military backing Andropov enjoyed when he came to power. In this environment, the heightened Soviet military reactions to NATO exercises would have been expected. *[portion marking not declassified]*

8. Finally, *[less than 1 line not declassified]* the Soviets wanted the new US Administration to tone down its anti-Soviet rhetoric, moderate its hostile attitudes, and begin serious business on trade and arms control. Some analysts believe that the Soviet activities, *[1 line not declassified]*, were intended to be detected and were contrived to nudge Washington toward a more conciliatory and cooperative attitude in dealings with Moscow. *[less than 1 line not declassified]*

Intelligence Community Performance

9. Since 1983, the Intelligence Community, CIA's Office of Soviet Analysis, and the Defense Intelligence Agency have treated the events

surrounding the Able Archer episode in a number of in-house publications and national estimates. When General Perroots was Director, DIA, analysts concurred in the Community assessments in 1988 that the “war scare” period of heightened Soviet concern was triggered by the change of the US Administration and its policy decisions toward the Soviet threat; that at least some Soviet leaders concluded that a surprise nuclear attack by NATO was possible outside the context of a crisis; and that this led to a number of Soviet responses consistent with such a conclusion, including high priority intelligence collection taskings. DIA believes, however, that the Soviet measures were primarily a function of the internal leadership instability from which Andropov emerged as General Secretary. *[portion marking not declassified]*

General Perroots’s Problem

10. The events surrounding NATO Exercise Able Archer, however, all occurred some months before the first national-level assessments were written, and General Perroots was confronted with a serious choice of what recommendation to make to the Commander, US Air Forces Europe. The Department of Defense warning indicators system reflected that, *[less than 1 line not declassified]* Soviet air units in Poland and East Germany were observed at a high state of alert, although no other Soviet strategic forces adopted such a posture. *[2½ lines not declassified]* Consequently, the Commander, US Air Forces Europe, was concerned whether he should exercise his discretionary authority to increase the alert posture of his force. General Perroots recommended that no precautionary US alert be instituted, despite the evidence of his own warning system. Several days later, the Soviet air forces returned to normal alert status. *[portion marking not declassified]*

11. *[1 paragraph (10 lines) not declassified]*

12. General Perroots’s concerns about this episode are legitimate to the extent that they deal with Washington’s support to the US military commands. *[4½ lines not declassified]* Third, national-level assessments of Soviet intentions were not available when most needed. The General’s memorandum indicates the Defense Department has taken steps to correct the problems in the processing and dissemination of intelligence. The third problem, of timely national-level support, is continuous. As Director of DIA, General Perroots himself initiated organizational and procedural changes to improve DIA’s support to the commands. *[portion marking not declassified]*

13. Underlying all of the above, however, is the paradox that General Perroots believes he made a correct judgment, but for the wrong reasons. This is not a new problem nor is there a solution to it. General Perroots has accurately identified inherent limits of the warning systems as they now exist. His candor is a safeguard against complacency

and denial that problems exist. Additionally, he raises again the need for better understanding in Washington of the problems facing intelligence in the field. [*portion marking not declassified*]

[*name not declassified*] [*name not declassified*]
Chief, TFD/RIG/SOVA Director, National Warning Staff

(Central Intelligence Agency, National Intelligence Council, Job 91B00551: Speeches, Lectures, Briefing Files (1988–1989), Box 1, Folder 2: C/NIC (Ermarth) Chrons March 1989)

The 1990 PFIAB report repeatedly stressed: “During the November 1983 NATO ‘Able Archer’ nuclear release exercise, the Soviets implemented military and intelligence activities that previously were seen only during actual crises. These included: placing Soviet air forces in Germany and Poland on heightened alert, [*4 lines not declassified*].”

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

The PFIAB report concluded that the IC’s failure to adequately report on Able Archer and the 1983–1984 Soviet war scare had important implications for the future: “In cases of great importance to the survival of our nation, and especially where there is important contradictory evidence, the Board believes that intelligence estimates must be cast in terms of alternative scenarios that are subjected to comparative risk assessments. This is the critical defect in the war scare episode.” (PFIAB, page ix)