

This document is made available through the declassification efforts
and research of John Greenewald, Jr., creator of:

The Black Vault



The Black Vault is the largest online Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
document clearinghouse in the world. The research efforts here are
responsible for the declassification of hundreds of thousands of pages
released by the U.S. Government & Military.

Discover the Truth at: **<http://www.theblackvault.com>**

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

5 June 2017

Mr. John Greenewald
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Reference: F-2017-01637 / NSA 82610-R1

Dear Mr. Greenewald:

In the course of processing your 25 October 2015 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for **an article from Intellipedia on the subject of Able Archer 83**, the National Security Agency located CIA material and referred it to us on 3 May 2017 for review and direct response to you.

We have determined that the document can be released in segregable form with deletions made on the basis of FOIA exemptions (b)(1) and (b)(3). A copy of the document and explanation of exemptions are enclosed. Exemption (b)(3) pertains to information exempt from disclosure by statute. The relevant statutes are Section 6 of the Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, as amended, and Section 102A(i)(1) of the National Security Act of 1947, as amended. As the CIA Information and Privacy Coordinator, I am the CIA official responsible for this determination. You have the right to appeal this response to the Agency Release Panel, in my care, within 90 days from the date of this letter. Please include the basis of your appeal.

If you have any questions regarding our response, you may contact us at:

Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, DC 20505
Information and Privacy Coordinator
703-613-3007 (Fax)

Please be advised that you may seek dispute resolution services from the CIA's FOIA Public Liaison or from the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) of the National Archives and Records Administration. OGIS offers mediation services to help resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies. You may reach CIA's FOIA Public Liaison at:

703-613-1287 (FOIA Hotline)

The contact information for OGIS is:

Office of Government Information Services
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road – OGIS
College Park, MD 20740-6001
202-741-5770
877-864-6448
202-741-5769 (fax)
ogis@nara.gov

Contacting the CIA's FOIA Public Liaison or OGIS does not affect your right to pursue an administrative appeal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Allison Fong', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Allison Fong
Information and Privacy Coordinator

Enclosures

Explanation of Exemptions

Freedom of Information Act:

- (b)(1) exempts from disclosure information currently and properly classified, pursuant to an Executive Order;
- (b)(2) exempts from disclosure information, which pertains solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of the Agency;
- (b)(3) exempts from disclosure information that another federal statute protects, provided that the other federal statute either requires that the matters be withheld, or establishes particular criteria for withholding or refers to particular types of matters to be withheld. The (b)(3) statutes upon which the CIA relies include, but are not limited to, the CIA Act of 1949;
- (b)(4) exempts from disclosure trade secrets and commercial or financial information that is obtained from a person and that is privileged or confidential;
- (b)(5) exempts from disclosure inter-and intra-agency memoranda or letters that would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency;
- (b)(6) exempts from disclosure information from personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy;
- (b)(7) exempts from disclosure information compiled for law enforcement purposes to the extent that the production of the information (A) could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings; (B) would deprive a person of a right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication; (C) could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy; (D) could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source or, in the case of information compiled by a criminal law enforcement authority in the course of a criminal investigation or by an agency conducting a lawful national security intelligence investigation, information furnished by a confidential source ; (E) would disclose techniques and procedures for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions if such disclosure could reasonably be expected to risk circumvention of the law; or (F) could reasonably be expected to endanger any individual's life or physical safety;
- (b)(8) exempts from disclosure information contained in reports or related to examination, operating, or condition reports prepared by, or on behalf of, or for use of an agency responsible for regulating or supervising financial institutions; and
- (b)(9) exempts from disclosure geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells.

April 2012

(b)(3)

Able Archer 83

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

From Intellipedia

You have new messages (last change).



During the early 1980s, Soviet leaders grew very worried that the United States was preparing for a surprise nuclear attack against

the USSR. Soviet intelligence services went on alert in 1981 to watch for such preparations. This alert was accompanied by a new Soviet intelligence collection program to monitor indications and provide early warning of US intentions. Two years later, a major war scare erupted in the USSR.



See the Wikipedia article
Able Archer 83

(b)(3)

(b)(3)



In November 1983, NATO, during what became known as the **Able Archer 83** exercise, rehearsed a nuclear response to a hypothetical Soviet attack on Western Europe between 7-11 November 1983. For many reasons — including the anticipated deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe — Soviet intelligence was at that time actively preparing for a possible surprise nuclear missile attack by the West. Declassified Soviet documents show that Kremlin leadership genuinely feared a full-scale war with the West, and that this fear greatly increased the risk of nuclear war in the fall of 1983. But due to failures of the US declassification system, the most important documents about this potentially dangerous nuclear episode remain unavailable to academic researchers, locked in secure facilities.

(b)(3)

The text above and below was derived from two articles by CIA historian Ben Fischer.^{[1] [2]} He was not asked to endorse this Intellipedia page.

(b)(3)

Contents

- 1 ☐ An intense look-out begins
- 2 ☐ US moves apparently frighten Moscow
 - 2.1 ☐ Soviet Shoot-down of Korean Airliner, September 1983
- 3 ☐ Exercise Able Archer, November 1983
- 4 ☐
- 5 ☐ Open Source Articles
- 6 ☐ Quick Links
- 7 ☐ References
 - 7.1 ☐ Additional References

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

An intense look-out begins

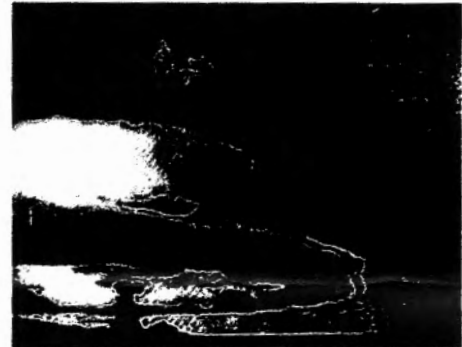
(b)(3)

(b)(1)

(b)(3)

(b)(1)

[redacted] In May 1981, General Secretary Brezhnev and then KGB chief Andropov briefed the Politburo's assessment to a closed KGB conference. Andropov told the audience of intelligence managers and officers that the KGB and the GRU were being placed on a permanent intelligence watch to monitor indications and warning of US war-planning and preparations. Codenamed RYAN—for *raketno yadernoye napadenie*, or nuclear missile attack—this alert was the largest Soviet peacetime intelligence effort.



(b)(3)

[redacted] KGB headquarters regarded collection of this information as a high priority in 1982, but by February 1983 it relayed "eyes only" messages to its field stations saying this requirement had "acquired an especial degree of urgency" and was "now of particularly grave importance." These field stations were ordered to organize a permanent watch using their entire operational staff, recruit new agents, and redirect existing ones to RYAN requirements.

(b)(3)

[redacted] US moves apparently frighten Moscow

(b)(3)

[redacted] Moscow's new sense of urgency was explicitly linked to the impending deployment of US Pershing II intermediate-range ballistic missiles in West Germany. The Soviets, as well as some Western military experts, saw the Pershings as a new, destabilizing element in the nuclear balance. The missiles were highly accurate and able to destroy Soviet hard targets, including command-and-control bunkers and missile silos. Their flight time from Germany to European Russia, moreover, was calculated to be only four to six minutes. In a crisis, the Soviets could be attacked with little or no warning and therefore would have to consider striking the Pershing sites before the US missiles were launched.

(b)(3)

[redacted] Other US actions also added to the tension. On 23 March 1983, President Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative, a program to develop a ground- and space-based, laser-armed, anti-ballistic-missile shield that the media quickly dubbed "Star Wars." Andropov, now General Secretary, lashed out four days later. He accused the United States of preparing a first strike on the USSR and asserted that Reagan was "inventing new plans on how to unleash a nuclear war in the best way, with the hope of winning it."

(b)(3)

[redacted] The US continued psychological-warfare operations initiated in the early months of the Reagan administration. In April and May 1983, the US Pacific Fleet held its largest exercises to date in the northwest Pacific. Forty ships, including three aircraft carrier battle groups, participated, along with AWACS-equipped B-52s. At one point, the fleet sailed within 720 kilometers (450 miles) of the Kamchatka Peninsula and Petropavlovsk, the only Soviet naval base with direct access to open seas. US attack submarines and antisubmarine aircraft conducted operations in protected areas ("bastions") where the Soviet Navy had stationed a large number of its nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines. US aircraft from the carriers Midway and Enterprise carried out a simulated bombing run over a military installation on the small Soviet-occupied island of Zelenny in the Kuril Island chain.

(b)(3)

Soviet Shoot-down of Korean Airliner, September 1983

The US reacted strongly to the destruction of a Korean Boeing 747 airliner by a Soviet Su-15 interceptor on 1 September 1983. Within a few hours, Secretary of State Shultz denounced the Soviet act as one of deliberate mass murder of innocent civilians. President Reagan called it "an act of barbarism, born of a society which wantonly disregards individual rights and the value of human life and seeks constantly to expand and dominate other nations." Although US intelligence eventually reached a consensus that the Soviets probably did not know that they were destroying a civilian airliner, the official US position never deviated from the initial assessment. The incident was used to keep up a campaign in the UN and to spur worldwide efforts to punish the USSR with commercial boycotts, law suits, and denial of landing rights for Aeroflot airliners. These efforts focused on indicting the Soviet system and its top leadership as being ultimately responsible.

Moscow, however, blamed the United States for the tragedy. On 9 September, First Deputy Defense Minister and Chief of the Soviet General Staff Ogarkov, in an unprecedented two-hour live press conference, asserted that the Korean plane was without question on a US or joint US-Japanese intelligence mission and that the local Soviet commander had carried out the correct order. Andropov thereafter moved quickly to exploit the shootdown, asserting that an "outrageous military psychosis" had overtaken the United States.

- A classified memorandum from that period, sent to Andropov by Defense Minister Ustinov and KGB Chairman Chebrikov and released in 1992, shows that the Soviet leadership's private view of the incident essentially concurred with its public pronouncement. They saw it as "a major, dual-purpose political provocation carefully organized by the US special services" to gather intelligence and to use any interception and shootdown "to mount a global . . . campaign to discredit the Soviet Union."

Exercise Able Archer, November 1983

An academic article, prepared in 2008 and published in the Winter 2009 edition of the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, described the situation thusly:

The year 1983 was the climax of the "second Cold War." The term applies to the sharp worsening of relations between the two superpowers after the détente of the 1970s soured for reasons neither side found entirely clear. None of the well-known Cold War crises has generated as much sensational publicity as the crisis that went unnoticed at the time—the November 1983 "Able Archer" incident, subsequently believed to have been the closest the world ever came to a nuclear war apart from the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.^[3]

On 23 March 1983, President Ronald Reagan lived up to Soviet's image of an unpredictable capitalist leader by announcing a radical change of U.S. strategy in his "Star Wars" speech. Yuri Andropov - who had become CPSU General Secretary only a few months earlier, following the death of Leonid Brezhnev in November 1982 - gave vent to the Soviet Union's fear, in a letter to the premier Soviet-era newspaper, *Pravda*, on 28 March 1983: "It is time Washington stopped devising one option after another in search of the best ways of unleashing nuclear war in the hope of winning it. Engaging in this is not just irresponsible, it is insane."^[4] His ranting was not merely for public effect. In a secret speech to the East

European party chiefs in June 1983, Andropov expressed his foreboding that the United States was moving from statements to practical measures aimed at gaining unchallengeable military superiority, asserting that the Reagan administration was intent on "radically changing the international situation to its advantage in order to dictate to us how to live and how to handle our own affairs."^[5]

☐ The Soviet war scare appeared to peak in November 1983, when NATO conducted its annual command post exercise called **Able Archer**. The Soviets were familiar with this exercise from previous years, but the 1983 version was to include two important changes:

(b)(3)

- Involvement of high-level US officials, including the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in major roles, with cameo appearances by the President and Vice President. According to National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, participation by most of these officials was cancelled out of concern for the high state of Soviet nervousness.^[6]
- A practice drill taking NATO forces from the use of conventional forces through a full-scale mock release of nuclear weapons.

☐ According to KGB Col. Oleg Gordiyevskiy, who was number two in the London residency at the time and later defected to the UK, on the night of 8 or 9 November, Moscow sent a flash cable from KGB headquarters advising that US forces in Europe had been put on alert and that troops at some US bases were being mobilized—information we now know to be incorrect. The cable speculated that this alert might have been ordered in response to the bomb attack on the US Marine barracks in Lebanon, or was related to impending US Army maneuvers, or was the beginning of a countdown to a surprise nuclear attack. As Gordiyevskiy described it:

(b)(3)

"In the tense atmosphere generated by the crises and rhetoric of the past few months, the KGB concluded that American forces had been placed on alert—and might even have begun the countdown to war. . . . The world did not quite reach the edge of the nuclear abyss during Operation RYAN. But during Able Archer 83 it had, without realizing it, come frighteningly close—certainly closer than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962."

According to a US foreign affairs correspondent, the "volume and urgency" of Warsaw Pact communications increased during the exercise. In addition, US sources reported that Soviet fighter aircraft [sic] with nuclear weapons at bases in East Germany and Poland were placed on alert.

(b)(3)

☐ **Further academic reading:**

- "How Able Was 'Able Archer'?", article by Vojtech Mastny, in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, (January) Winter 2009 (Vol. 11, issue 1; pp. 108-123); accessed 26 OCT 2012 using Discovery Tool.

This 2008 article discusses the **Able Archer** nuclear incident which took place in 1983 during the Cold War. Details are provided about the incident, which was caused by testing exercises conducted by NATO. The potential of the incident to ignite nuclear war between the Soviet Union and western nations including the U.S. is explored. The reasons why a nuclear war was avoided during the Able Archer incident are also examined. The article also discusses U.S. President Ronald Reagan and his relationship with the Soviet Union.

- "When Truth is Stranger Than Fiction: The Able Archer Incident", article by Arnav

Manchanda, published in *Cold War History*, February 2009 (Vol. 9, issue 1; pp. 111-133); accessed 26 OCT 2012, using JWICS Discovery Tool.

(b)(3)

Abstract: In November 1983 a routine NATO nuclear readiness exercise code-named **Able Archer** could have led to a Soviet nuclear strike against the West. What is remarkable about this possible Soviet strike is that it was perceived by the Soviets as a defensive and pre-emptive strike. Therefore, the Soviets somehow believed that there was an impending Western nuclear attack that they had to pre-empt. American rearmament, NATO missile deployment, and Reaganite rhetoric somehow convinced the Soviets that the nuclear endgame was near. These fears climaxed in November 1983 during a seemingly innocuous nuclear-readiness exercise by the West.

(b)(1)

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

Open Source Articles

- **"Countdown to Declassification: Finding Answers to a 1983 Nuclear War Scare"**, feature article by Nate Jones, published in *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Vol. 69, issue 6; pp. 47-57) November 2013; accessed with *EBSCOhost* search using JWICS online Discovery Tool database of periodicals.
 - Author Nate Jones is the Freedom of Information Act coordinator for the National Security Archive. He oversees the thousands of FOIA requests and appeals that the archive submits each year and acts as its FOIA liaison to the government and public. He earned his master's degree in Cold War history from the George Washington University, where he used FOIA to write his thesis on the 1983 Able Archer nuclear war scare. He is also editor of the National Security Archive's blog, *Unredacted*.
 - **Abstract:** In November 1983, NATO, during what became known as the Able Archer 83 exercise, rehearsed a nuclear response to a hypothetical Soviet attack on Western Europe. For many reasons - including the anticipated deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe - Soviet intelligence was at that time actively preparing for a possible surprise nuclear missile attack by the West. Recently declassified documents show that Kremlin leadership genuinely feared a full-scale war with the West, and that this fear greatly increased the risk of nuclear war in the fall of 1983. But due to failures of the US declassification system, the most important documents about this potentially dangerous nuclear episode remain unavailable, locked in secure facilities. Declassification of those Cold War-era documents, the author writes, could help protect the United States and the rest of the world from nuclear war.

(b)(3)

Quick Links

- Historical project on warning of nuclear conflict during the Cold War
- Cuban Missile Crisis

(b)(3) (b)(3)

References

2. ↑ [redacted] Benjamin B. Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare*, <http://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm>. (b)(1)
(b)(3)
(b)(3)
3. ↑ [redacted] "How Able was 'Able Archer'?", by Vojtech Mastny, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, (January) Winter 2009 (Vol. 11, issue 1; pp. 108-123); accessed 26 OCT 2012 via DISCOVERY. (b)(3)
4. ↑ [redacted] "Replies by Yuri V. Andropov to Questions by a Correspondent of Pravda," *Pravda* (Moscow), 28 March 1983, page 1. (b)(3)
5. ↑ [redacted] "Speech by Andropov at Moscow Meeting of Party Chiefs," 28 June 1983, DC/201/3/1950, p. 68, in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Berlin. (b)(3)
6. ↑ [redacted] Don Oberdorfer, *The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1990* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), pp. 65. (b)(3)

Additional References

- In 1983 'war scare,' Soviet leadership feared nuclear surprise attack by U.S. - The Cold War adversaries may have come close to war because the Kremlin misunderstood U.S. intentions [redacted] Washington Post, 24 October 2015 (b)(3)
- The Soviet "War Scare" [redacted] 109-page declassified President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board document from February 15, 1990 (b)(3)
- UK author Christopher Andrew [redacted] has some directly relevant sections in his book "The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive [redacted] and the Secret History of the KGB," based on original KGB documents and defector interviews (b)(3)
- The National Security Archives (nsaarchive.gwu.edu) has a tranche of declassified original documents in a section called "The 1983 War Scare"
- CIA's public webpage (www.cia.gov) has a link to a CSI monograph called "A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare" by Benjamin Fischer (available on CIA's ADN (<http://www.internet.cia/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm>))
- The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s [redacted], Benjamin B. Fischer, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, September 23, 2006 (b)(3)
- *Deutschland 83*, television series on the Sundance Channel about an East German soldier who is forced into undercover work as a West German lieutenant working as an aide to a General assigned to NATO. Able Archer and the discussion of US Pershing (INF) deployment in Europe—and the East German and Soviet intelligence reaction to it—is a main plot theme throughout the first season. It captures the timeframe and environment very well and covers the facts and heightened Soviet fears. (German production with subtitles)

Retrieved from [redacted] (b)(3)

Categories: Wars | History of Russia | Intelligence Lessons Learned and History | History of Intelligence | Soviet Union | History of the United States | Diplomatic incidents | Nuclear Politics | Missiles | Cold War

Able Archer 83 - Intellipedia

(b)(3)

- This page has been accessed 987 times.

(b)(3)

- This page was last modified 01:28, 29 October 2015 by [redacted] USA CIV. Most recent editors: Gamble Richard DIA USA CIV, [redacted] USA CIV and Brian Justice and others.

(b)(3)

(b)(3)

finipedweb13j