

INTERVIEW OF MARSHAL SERGEI AKHROMEYEV

January 10, 1990

(Part 1)

Q First, would you tell me just briefly a little bit about your military history. I have heard from Mr. Nitze and others that you were in the army at a young age and that you in the battle for Leningrad, siege of Leningrad, were in these trenches and never came out for a year and so on. But in order to have it correctly in my own mind, could you just briefly sketch especially the earlier period of your military service?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I don't think that this has a direct bearing on the book.

Q Yes, but it's good for me to have a clear --

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I am a professional military person and enlisted even before the war in 1940. Before the war, for a year I studied at the higher military and naval school in Leningrad. Our school was in the Baltic at the time the war started and we had to fight practically from the very beginning from June of 1941. And until March of 1942 I participated in fighting in the Baltic region and in the defense of Leningrad. In March I was wounded and was taken to the mainland, as the rest of the country was called then. And after recovering I fought already at the Stalingrad front, then on the southern front, Fourth Ukrainian front.

I began my career as a deputy platoon leader and ended the war as the heads of a tank(?) battalion. My rank at the time was a Major. And after the war I studied at different military institutions and served in command and headquarter posts. And in 1973, I came to the main headquarters. And from 1973, I began to participate in solving military and political questions.

Q Thank you.

In March of 1983, President Reagan announced his plan to intensify activity in defense in space -- what became known as the strategic defense initiative. The Soviet Union then and for the next -- well, until recently -- took it extremely seriously. It became kind of the centerpiece of the debate and discussion on strategic and military questions between us. What was the reaction here in military circles to this Star Wars announcement? And did you and your military associates ever take it seriously that the United States could build such a shield as President Reagan talked about at that time?

SD I

MR. AKHROMEYEV. My reaction and the reaction of the Soviet government to the SDI program was from the very outset a negative reaction. The practical implementation of the SDI hampered talks on the limitation of nuclear armaments and worsened our relationships as a whole.

In the 1970s to when we signed our treaty, we agreed that neither of the countries should set up an anti-aircraft system -- anti-ballistic missile system. This was shared -- this view -- by both sides. Both sides understood that you can't simultaneously reduce strategic offensive arms and build -- and at the same -- radically reduce strategic offensive armaments and at the same time create an anti-ballistic missile defense.

Q I guess my point is I wonder if you and your people ever took it seriously that the U.S. could actually do this. And if you did not believe they could do it, why was it given so big importance?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I think that if any project can be implemented in theory, then at some later time there is a chance that it can be implemented in practice. Perhaps this will take a very long time, much funds, large amounts of scientific research, but in the long run the project can be implemented. And the very fact that such a project is adopted by such a powerful country as the United States, certainly has its bearing on bilateral relations.

Q Did you think that this could be implemented in theory even?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. It all depends on the level of whether it will be 100 percent proof(?) or at some lower level of --

Q I guess what I'm getting at is from a military standpoint, whether you and your colleagues in the military ever considered SDI as a serious military threat rather than some kind of theoretical or political --

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I'll answer this question, but I want to ask a question in return. Can the Soviet Union disregard a program in which the governments of the United States has allocated tens of billions of dollars? We always considered the United States as governed by people with pragmatic thinking, those who do not waste funds on something irrelative. (?) [irrelevant?] And the taxpayers in the United States do not allow the government of the United States to throw away tens of billions of dollars.

Q I wish that were true. (Laughter.)

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Do you really believe that this is so --

wasting billions of dollars?

Q Most people I know don't think that this thing can ever work.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. You see, seven years has passed since Reagan announced that project. This is the main obstacle to concluding an agreement on the limitation of strategic offensive arms. And your administration does not reject this program, although it is driving to conclude the treaty. What is the reason for this?

Q Well, if you're asking me what my personal opinion is, the reason is politics. It was a great dream of Reagan's and Bush is reluctant for political reasons to let it go.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I cannot agree with you on this point. Perhaps Reagan could have dreamed about this. I know from the scientific and engineering point of view, from the strategic point of view, how well-prepared he was. I'm not going to discuss this. But why does Mr. Bush have to put his weight, his political prestige behind this program? He has his own political goals. However, he does not reject this program.

Q Well, just think about this for a minute. Suppose he rejected the program. What would be the immediate statement and uproar from the former President Reagan out in California?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Why should George Bush feel somehow indebted to Reagan?

Q Well, this is my own personal view, you understand, as a reporter.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Yes, we're just talking.

Q It would be tough for Bush. My own view is there's nothing like the commitment to this program in this Bush administration that there was in the Reagan administration. I don't think the commitment is anything as strong as it was in my personal idea. The commitment is much weaker in this administration to this than --

MR. AKHROMEYEV. But despite this fact, they're carrying out this program. There is only one thing that Bush should do -- tell them to wait 'til the signing of the treaty on offensive strategic arms. This one point is the following: And this is to say that the ABM Treaty of 1972 will be implemented the way it was signed in 1972. There is nothing more needed for the progress of the talks -- to stick to the treaty that was signed by the United States back then. Then immediately the SDI program would have a ceiling. And the road to signing an agreement on a 50 percent reduction of nuclear strategic armaments would be open. However,

Original housed in Princeton University Library. No copies may be made.

Bush is not doing this.

Q Well, here we are in January of 1990 -- the story isn't over yet. Let's see what happens.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. (Laughter.) I can tell you one thing: That if the United States does not change its position on the SDI, the treaty will not be signed. These are two things which rule the other one out. It's one or the other.

Q Okay. Let me go to another subject if I may. In 1983 was the year of the U.S. deployments of the Pershing II and medium-range missiles in Europe, which had taken place after the Soviet deployment of what has been called SS-20 mobile missiles in Europe. In retrospect, looking at it now, is it your judgment that it was wise or unwise for the Soviet Union to deploy the SS-20s in Europe, and were the political and strategic elements taken into account when the Soviet Union made the decision to deploy these SS-20 missiles?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I think that if we consider in principle the deployments of SS-20 missiles in Europe I think that this measure was correct. These missiles were deployed for those that -- the old missiles which were taken off from the service. They were deployed for the SS-12 missiles, which were deployed previously. And there were around 600 missiles of the SS-12 class deployed in the European part of the Soviet Union. And I think that if the Soviet Union had deployed 200 SS-20 missiles, because each missile has three warheads, then this would have been a correct move. But the Soviet Union at the time decided to deploy more missiles so there were more warheads in general. And I think that was the mistake. And I think as a result of this move, the United States took the decision to deploy Pershing I's and cruise missiles in Western Europe.

Q How far back was the decision made in your understanding that the SS-20 would be deployed and that the numbers would be as large as they were? Does this go back to like the middle '70s or early '70s or when would it have been actually made?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Of the decision to deploy this amount of SS-20 missiles was taken in the late 1970s.

Q And at that time, as far as you know, was there any -- or let me put it this way: At that time as far as you know, what consideration was given to the strategic or political affect that this might have, or was it just a kind of procurement decision taken by the military alone?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. The Defense Ministry in the Soviet Union does not have the right to adopt such decisions on its own. Only the leadership of the state decides these matters.

Q Well, in this decision do you know whether Mr. Brezhnev and his associates gave any serious consideration to the strategic side of it or were they looking at it just as a kind of replacement and move it on?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. This question was debated in the Soviet leadership and there were different opinions as to what should be done. There were disputes on whether more than 600 warheads should be deployed in the European part. I believe that at the time the possible political consequences of the step were not taken into account.

Q You leave me a little puzzled, because if there was a debate on it, you would think that someone would say "Well, look, if we do this, what's the West going to do?" Do you have any explanation of why they didn't take it into account if they debated the issue?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I think now we can discuss this problem knowing the facts when everything has happened. At that time these consequences were not clear -- evident. I know that now there are a number of problems -- that the leaderships of different countries make mistakes.

I know in my opinion, for instance, the United States administration is making mistakes in its military political policies. For instance, I can tell you this. But I'm sure that they are being debated in the American administration and they're debated on a serious basis. However, these mistaken courses in policy decision-making are being taken.

Q This may be a semantic question, Alex. In answer to my question a while ago, did Marshal Akhromeyev mean to say that the political side of this, the affect of it, was not considered in this?

INTERPRETER: Considered enough.

Q So perhaps it was considered, but not given enough weight. Is that what --

INTERPRETER: Yes. That's the meaning.

Q All right. I kind of misconstrued him to say that it wasn't considered at all. But that's the problem.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. The problem was discussed and on several occasions. There were people who said that you can't [can't?] deploy more than 600 warheads. However, their opinion did not prevail. The other opinion was victorious.

Q Now, there were a number of times during the discussions -- negotiations -- when, in effect, the United States said "If you stop deploying these weapons, and cut them back to a certain level, we will not deploy many of the Pershing II missiles." There was the famous so-called walk in the woods with Mr. Nitze which he initiated back in 1982. In Marshal Akhromeyev's opinion, why were none of these efforts given approval here?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I think that in this respect it was not the Soviet Union that is to blame. At that time, there was a confidential talk between Nitze and ^{Kushin} Petzinsky, our ambassador. And it was almost short of an agreement. And then there was a leak in information on the American side. There was a scandal in the family in the State Department. And this agreement did not find its way. Whether it was done accidentally or purposefully, I cannot judge that.

KAL
001

Q Okay. Let me go on to the question of the shooting down of the Korean airliner which took place September 1 of 1983 -- the so-called KAL 007. As of now -- looking back on it now, what is your understanding of what happened? Was this just a case of mistaken identity or was it a U.S. provocation? How do you now, after all this time has passed and sifting everything out, understand this case?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I'm not a journalist, I'm a military person. And I do not go for sensation. And we can't judge this incident from the point of view of 1983 when the Cold War was at its height and from the point of view of today in the same way. Now I'm sure that the KAL 007 purposefully changed its route and flew over Soviet air space. This is my -- I'm certain of this. Whether it is a provocation -- whose provocation it is -- or was it a provocation, I don't know. And I cannot make assumptions of this fact.

Q When you say "purposefully", do you mean that it intended to come over Soviet air space or that it made some change which brought it over, not necessarily intentional? Do you get what I mean? You said the KAL "purposefully". Do you mean that they did it -- that someone changed its route with the purpose of bringing it over Soviet air space?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I do not want to go into these details, because I do not know them. But I know one fact: I know that such an airplane with the navigational equipment that it has -- the navigational equipment that has backup equipment -- cannot fly during two and one-half hours when it has swayed away from the main route for hundreds of kilometers away and without noticing this fact. I do not believe this. Who organized this? This is a secret and I do not know this. And because it was night time at the time and everything was in clouds our pilot did not see the plane. He did not see that it was a civilian plane. That is why

the decision was taken to bring this plane down. This was the middle of the Cold War. I think at the present time such a decision would not have been -- (inaudible). But at that time that was so.

Q At what level was the decision made to bring the plane down?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. It was decided by Moscow.

Q So Moscow means what? The military -- I don't know enough about your military system, but this means a military headquarters or do you have to consult the civilian leadership on something like that or what?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. There was a decision taken by Moscow.

Q A Soviet -- I guess you'd call him a Soviet -- ^{July 16} ~~Zoris~~ Medvedev(?) -- the historian -- wrote a book about Gorbachev and he said that because Mr. Andropov was out of town and sick probably -- Gorbachev was in charge of some kind of a task force in the immediate aftermath of KAL to manage its consequences. As far as you know, is this true? What part did Gorbachev plan in trying to respond to this crisis?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I do not know. I do not know Gorbachev's participation in this.

Q Also that fall there was a lot of war scares, fears of war. Things were getting very tense that fall. And it has been recorded that a NATO command post exercise called Able Archer caused some people in the Soviet leadership to believe that a war was almost about to start -- that the United States and NATO were about to attack the Soviet Union in the fall of 1983. Do you recall anything about this? Did it really happen in your view?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. The Soviet leadership at the time did not share the view that there was an immediate threat of war at the time. But there was the opinion that the tension between the two countries had reached a very high level, that the confrontation had reached its peak and that we should find ^{for} a solution out of this situation.

*Mla
prober*

Q Were you ever conscious of some NATO exercise in November of 1983 in which they were practicing what you would do in a nuclear war? Did this come through? Did you hear about this or did it come through as anything of a serious nature to Marshal Akhromeyev?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. We believed that the most dangerous military exercises are Autumn Forge and Reforger. These are the NATO exercises in Europe. They are held each year in the autumn.

Q Well, this one was what's called a command post exercise. In other words, they don't get troops in the field. They have officials sitting in --

(Tape turned over.)

(Part 2)

Q -- take part -- who are people in high posts. And I'd wondered if you'd heard of this -- that that command post exercise in the fall had come to your attention.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. It is hard for me to say. I probably do not remember that. Seven years have past. It is not clear in my mind.

Q Can you recall the atmosphere of those days -- the high tension after KAL, about the fall of the U.S. deployments in Europe, the high state of tension between our two countries? Can you describe what it felt like here?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. The Soviet leadership was gravely troubled by the state of Soviet-American relations. Practically from the time the Reagan administration had come to power in 1980, for four years our relationships deteriorated and we considered that the Reagan administration was largely to blame for this state of affairs. In this line, I can mention Reagan's statements of the Soviet Union being the empire of evil, that socialism should now go to the trash heap of history. We considered these statements as aggressive ones and we were seriously considering these statements. Naturally, at that time we thought -- we considered the political solutions that we should take to somehow reduce tensions. And naturally, as a result, the talks on reducing nuclear armaments -- medium-range armaments in Europe fall(?). But then again, measures to strengthen the security of the country also were taken.

Q And, of course, that fall when the deployments began, Soviet negotiators stopped participating in the arms talks and that raised the tension level even higher.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. From the tactical point of view, I think this probably should not have been done.

Q Admiral Crowe said to me that as late as the middle of 1988, which is not that long ago, you said to him that you felt that the prospects were there for a U.S. attack on the Soviet Union, but that by last year you had changed your mind. Can you give me an idea of what your own thoughts were going back to 1983 and after 1983 and the later '80s about the possibility that the United States would actually attack your country?

Original housed in Princeton University Library. No copies may be made.

Admiral Crowe

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I do not think that this is an accurate description of what I said.

Q Okay, so make it --

MR. AKHROMEYEV. No, I'm not saying anything about -- (inaudible.)

The first thing that I said is that today in the beginning of the 1990s, I think that the United States will not wage war against the Soviet Union. It will not start a war. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union wants a war. I'm convinced of this. But there is the other side of this problem. What is the policy that it has towards the Soviet Union? I believe that even today the United States is conducting a policy towards the Soviet Union from a position of force.

1990
Mil
doctrines

What is a policy from a position of force? It means that a state using different military methods at its disposal -- not military, sorry -- political, economic and other means tries to pressure -- has to put pressure on another independent sovereign state to make it carry out a policy favorable to it. This is the policy pursued by the United States, conducted by the United States in relation to the Soviet Union. And this policy continues. Although this policy is not so open as it was several years ago, it is not so evident and it is interlinked with another position by the United States -- the position of conducting talks, the line on cooperation. It is now not very evident as it was before and we understand this in the Soviet Union and we evaluate it and favor it.

How is this expressed? If we consider the political statements and the speeches that your officials make, then our relations are grown better. But if you look at the military doctrine of the United States and the NATO bloc, they have not changed. In the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, we have changed our military doctrine. Even in America everyone sees this. Well, most of the people in the United States, whereas the United States sticks to its policy of nuclear deterrence towards the Soviet Union. And the NATO bloc is following a policy of flexible response from 1968 and they have not(?) this strategy all these years. We're viewing everything from a realistic point of view. We can see what is happening on the other side. Then, again, the United States objects to carrying out talks on the limitation of naval forces.

Q You know, this is what Admiral Crowe had to say. I don't know if you saw it -- the last day or two -- saying that he's in favor of starting to do this.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I know and have heard of this, but I do not

want to undermine the position of my friend. Don't try to -- (inaudible.) It is my conscience to say and do what I must and it is his conscience and his will to do what he must.

I would like to conclude. So we're troubled by this combination -- the policy of improving the relations of the Soviet Union and growing friendliness and at the same time the policy from the position of force. The United States is lagging behind the changes that are going on in the world. They're looking behind, whereas the policy of the Soviet Union is going ahead in one vein. And I think that precisely in this, this is the mistake of the United States. They did not process. (?) And they're influenced by the Cold War more than we are.

Q As an American, I find that extremely interesting. I think that the U.S. is changing more than you suggest. And with the changes that have taken place here, and the changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe, for example, are having a tremendous affect on American political life and American public opinion, which might not be so clear here, but I'm sure that they are having

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I agree with you. (S) As I understand it, two lines in the United States policies (S) are fighting each other. The line on cooperation with the Soviet Union and the former line of confrontation. And I think that this is very important. This is a very important change. I think this cannot be underestimated. However, the elements of this Cold War have persisted. Why doesn't the United States change its military doctrine? We have changed ours three years ago and they see this. These are all practical measures of the Soviet leadership and I believe that this is another mistake. I don't know, maybe it is politics. But in the United States, they view the changes in this country and the changes in Eastern Europe as a result of pressure from the United States on our countries. I think that this is a mistake. I think all these changes are a result of the fact that we have reasoned out what should be done. We're conscientiously going to a more democratic state, to a state based on the principle of law. We're moving over to new relationships between socialist and capitalist countries, between socialist and developing countries. We have come to the conclusion that this is essential. That is why we are carrying this out.

Q Well, the whole point of my book is that the relationship between our two countries has changed a great deal in the past five or six years, and it is an attempt to understand and to document how this change has taken place. That's basically the story that I'm writing about. I don't want to exaggerate it. All problems have not vanished, as you say. But this situation is vastly different than it was.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I must tell you that I am convinced and

certain that relations between the Soviet Union and the United States should be developed and improved in every way, but naturally, on the basis of equality -- not to the detriment of the security of the Soviet Union. In this country I am considered a conservative. Maybe I am a conservative. I'm a man advancing in years. But I'm working purposefully to improving Soviet-American relations. And at the same time, I say outright where I think the American administration is wrong.

Q Can I just ask one more question on the line we were talking before? This began with a question of mine which I don't think I have completely the answer to. Did you feel in the middle 1980s that there was a real possibility that the United States would go to war against the Soviet Union? Was that your belief and was that the military estimate of the USSR at that time?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I must tell you that I personally and many of the people that I know had a different opinion of the United States in 1983 than I have today. I considered that the United States is pressing for world supremacy, that the Soviet Union is the barrier in these aspirations first of all, -- (inaudible). And I considered that as a result of this situation there can be a war between the Soviet Union and the United States on the initiative of the United States.

Q In March of '83 you were named a Marshal of the Soviet Union while you were First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. Did this mean that you had a broader, bigger responsibility or bigger horizon for looking at these questions than before?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I think that military titles do not play a role in this. Even before I received this post, I had an opportunity to evaluate the position of the United States and our relations. I had enough information to do this.

Q Now in the last year or two you've had an opportunity to go to the United States for the first time just as some of our military leaders, including Admiral Crowe, have had an opportunity for the first time to come to the Soviet Union and actually see the military equipment, see the people and so forth. Did your personal experience of going to the U.S. and having the talks and seeing things there make much of a change in your view of it? I'm wondering about, on the one hand, a view that is based on reports and briefings and pictures, and on the other hand, a view that is based on personal experience. Is it much different in your case?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. As I said in 1983, I believed that now the United States can start a war against the Soviet Union and their aim is world supremacy. And in 1989, I said and I believe it today as well -- that the United States will not start a war against the Soviet Union and I believe this. Drastic changes have occurred in

my thinking and my views during the six years. They were the result of the change, first of all, in the policy of the United States. We're sober-minded people and we judge according to the actions of the other side. But then again, my views changed as a result of the meetings I had with many Americans -- my personal contacts. But naturally, as a result of my personal meetings with George Shultz primarily and people like Crowe, Powell and Nitze, naturally my views changed as a result of -- (inaudible). I met George Bush for three times. Now I have a possibility to talk with Baker -- Scowcroft. Most probably, they have some impressions of talking to us and their views are modified in some way.

Q I want to ask you about -- in the fall of 1984, suddenly your superior, Marshal Ogarkov, was removed and sent to another job and there has been a lot of speculation about what all that was about. Can you shed any light on what happened there?

Removal of Ogarkov Apr 84

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I think that these are speculations on the part of the mass media, nothing more. There is not a single person who stays on the same post all of his life. We had a major reorganization in the structure of the armed forces in 1984. And there were main commands in strategic fields -- (inaudible) -- being set up. And Ogarkov was given the job of the western command. He became the head of the western command. And I moved to the post of the head of the general staff. I am six years Ogarkov's junior. Five years later, I left the job of the head of the chief of staff. A younger general replaced me on this job. And the mass media were again speculating as why Akhromeyev was relieved of his post. And he was relieved simply for the fact that he was told the time had come for him to move over.

Akhromeyev's retirement Dec 88

Q A lot of it was caused by the fact that there was -- it happened in a very sudden way with Ogarkov. He went out to the airport to say goodbye to some visiting delegation. I forget now -- Finland or some other country who visited Moscow. He said goodbye and then later that day it was just announced that he was out. I mean, it was such a sudden thing and no one would explain what happened.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. What of it (2)? And, well, every military person works until the moment he's relieved.

Q Was it in your view an ordinary change of command as far as you could tell at the time?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I think that this was simply a change of personnel and he had a prospective (2) of working on another job.

Q Is Marshal Ogarkov now retired? Is that correct?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. He's now 72 years old. There is a group of general inspectors (2) and he's working in that group.

Afghanistan

Q In March of 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and a new era began with Gorbachev. Later on, much later, he stated that with regard to Afghanistan the Soviet Politburo began a hard analysis seeking a way out following its April 1985 plenum. Can you shed any light on how the Soviet leadership began to grapple with the problem of having its troops in what seemed like an endless war in Afghanistan?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. By the time Mr. Gorbachev came to power, we understood even before that one cannot solve the Afghan problem by military means and we should search for political means of solving this problem, that we should withdraw our troops from Afghanistan. And all our efforts from 1985 to 1988 were directed at withdrawing the troops from Afghanistan and solving the problems of Afghanistan by political means. And naturally Mr. Gorbachev was the one who initiated this process.

Q Did it really begin right after the April plenum? Is that when really work started on it in a major way or was it just sort of talked about at that time and took a while --

MR. AKHROMEYEV. When any leader comes to power he has a host of different problems before him, both internal and external. And he tries to solve them simultaneously. I can't say that he solves them at the same day, at the same month, or even at the same year. Searches for approaches and solutions to solving the Afghan problem began right after Gorbachev came to power.

Q Was there any resistance in the Soviet military to withdrawing the forces? Was there a feeling that this should not be done, or was the military of the opinion that it would be better to terminate this war?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. First of all, the military considered that troops should not have been introduced into Afghanistan in the first place. The military proceeded from the purely military aspects of this. It was absolutely clear to us that in such a country as Afghanistan, in a country which has many deserts and mountains and has an area of 1.5 million square kilometers and that the troops numbering 100,000, the men would not solve the situation by military means. And as soon as troops were introduced we understood right away that we should withdraw them. So we were -- (inaudible) -- we shared the same views with Mr. Gorbachev.

Q Was the military judgment asked by the leadership in deciding to send the troops, or were the military not really consulted?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Yes, such consultation did take place. And we expressed this opinion that they should not be in --

(inaudible). But when such a decision was taken, we were following orders. We're military men.

Q Do you know whether it was stated rather emphatically that this would not be militarily feasible or was this more just an opinion without so much force behind it at the beginning?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Ogarkov was the chief of staff at that time. I was his first deputy. And General Verenikov(?) was at the time deputy chief of staff and was the operational head. And we gave our report to Minister of Defense Marshal Ustinov and we reported that even by introducing 100,000 people into Afghanistan, no problem will be solved. And they said that "We have heard your opinion. Now follow the orders." And we followed our orders.

Q As I recall, shortly before the introduction of Soviet troops -- maybe within the previous several months -- some high ranking Soviet officer went there on a study mission, maybe a General. I know this, but I don't remember his name. Was that the basis of your report?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. We're experienced military people. We know what Afghanistan represents. And we understand what an army of 100,000 people is, what its military capability is and we understood that by military means it is not possible to stop the situation. We had our military representatives there before the introduction of troops(?). General of the Army Pavlovsky(?), the head of the infantry, was there at the time. Many other military officials were there. And our opinion was based on the knowledge of the situation there. But it was a very difficult decision. But I do not want to blame the Soviet leadership -- at the time Ustinov, Andropov, Gromyko -- for taking this decision, because at the time it was very difficult to decide. Before us military people there were only military, political and economic questions to tackle and they had to see a combination of this all and take a decision. It is only now that we see that it was an erroneous decision, but we now can see this. At the time they were taking this decision this was not so.

Q Marshal Akhromeyev, I've followed a practice with Secretary Shultz and with others and that is I felt that if we had to talk about these things, it ought not last more than about 90 minutes, otherwise people get tired and their minds begin to find it difficult to grapple. I still have a number of questions about the Gorbachev era we've just started on. Would it be possible for me to come back and see you on another day? I will be here through the end of next week -- and ask some more questions and try to finish up at a different time the questions about what happened? Or if you prefer, I can continue now. Whatever --

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Perhaps we could continue for another 30

minutes.

Q Okay, sure.

(Tape turned over.)

(Part 3)

*Christian Skerwa
Munster article*

MR. A. -- was the statement from July, 1989?

Q Yes. When he appeared before the Supreme Soviet.

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I do not think that this concerns personalities. I was present at that Supreme Soviet session and Gorbachev did not pronounce this word "marshals". He did not say that. He said that some military persons said that I should move more slowly. And I can tell you as a person who witnessed this firsthand that this did not concern marshals.

Q Okay. But what was it that caused some military people to feel he should move more slowly and was there some controversy at that time over what should be done?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. A new policy was being worked out. A policy of perestroika was being worked out and the internal policy and a new foreign policy was being worked out. Basing on the new foreign policy, a new military doctrine was being worked out. It was evident that the military forces had to be reduced, because the relationships between the Soviet Union and the United States are being improved. The military threat is being reduced. The people -- the military persons who participated in elaborating this new course together with Gorbachev understood what was meant, because together with Gorbachev they participated in this work on working out a new foreign policy and a new doctrine -- military. Those who did not participate in this work did not understand it. And they were apprehensive of the new policy. The new military doctrine raised certain questions among them and they approached the General Secretary for his view of this, for his explanations, and that is the essence of it.

Q And was there some meeting or something? There was this famous meeting in Minsk in July of 1985 where Gorbachev made some kind of speech to the military. It's never been too clear. Was this an occasion for him to explain what he wanted to do or what was it all about?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. That is correct. In Minsk in July of 1985, Gorbachev spoke before the military leaders of the country and command officers. But that was only the beginning of the work. That was only the start. And when it was practically implemented, many new questions arose which necessitated answers.

*Minsk
1985*

Q And was there a series of meetings or how did the people who didn't understand what he was doing or felt they needed further explanation -- how did they receive this? Did they meet with Gorbachev on several occasions or what happened to satisfy their needs?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. We have a procedure according to which any communist -- rank and file communist can address the General Secretary with an open letter. Some of them direct their letters to him. From time to time, there are meetings in the Defence Ministry of the leadership of the Ministry. The results of the preparation of the service personnel is being carried out. People raise their questions and express their views.

Q And when they've raised it, did Gorbachev have some way of answering or giving his reply or his -- (inaudible)?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Sometimes he answered himself. Other times he asked the Minister to answer for him.

Q In May of 1986, Gorbachev went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and made a speech which was the inauguration really of a new line of policy, the biggest -- or most specific point of policy changes in foreign policy. Did he do something similar at some point with regard to military policy, expressing to the military people -- the Defense Ministry or some others -- the ideas of what he wanted to do to change the posture of the Soviet Union? And if he did so, when and in what way did he do it?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. You have mentioned July of 1985. That was a case in point. And the second meeting was a meeting of the main military council in October of 1989. And at that meeting, the leaders of the Ministry of Defense spoke and Mr. Gorbachev also delivered his speech.

Q And in the July 1985 meeting in Minsk, what was Gorbachev trying to tell the assembled military leaders of the USSR? What was the main message he was trying to get across?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Well, practically, there were two main ideas. He said that the foreign policy of the Soviet Union should be conducted in such a way that military tension in the world would be reduced. And at the same time, the security of the nation should be guaranteed. That report contained the basis of the future -- of the new foreign policy of the Soviet Union -- the three principles of the foreign policy. Demilitarization: first of all, the Soviet Union renounces the use of force in its foreign policy. If the United States would follow suit and reject the use of force in its foreign policy -- not the use of force, but does not act from a position of force in respect to the Soviet Union, this would be great(?). The second, democratization: That any country of the world has the right to build its society -- the

society that it thinks best for it, meaning that the Soviet Union would not interfere in the internal affairs of any country, including its allies. And the third principle is lifting -- the elimination of ideological aspects in foreign policy, because international law should govern in the relations between countries. And the realization of these three principles actually led to the changes in Europe. And on the basis of this new foreign policy, we have built a new military doctrine.

Q Is it your recollection that already at this very early point of July 1985, Gorbachev mentioned to the military leaders in Minsk these three principles?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. He did not mention these three principles one by one, but simply his ideas were close to these three principles. The principles themselves were formulated somewhat later.

Q Did the people who heard him -- and you listening to him in July of 1985 express his ideas -- did it indicate that there would probably be substantially big reductions in the military forces of the Soviet Union? Was that already in mind as something that would flow from the ideas that Gorbachev was expressing?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. You see, I participated in elaborating all of this and I had a very clear picture of where we were heading.

Q Gorbachev is not a military person. As far as I know, he never served as a soldier in the military. What is your own observation of how he is able to deal with the military concepts and military issues in his job as the General Secretary and as the job of the Chairman of the USSR Defense Council?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. You see, he is the leader of the country. He is the chairman of the Council of Defense. And he must solve major political and military aspects and the major military problems. And proceeding from the fact that he has large experience of being party leader and government leader, he is able to solve military problems of this caliber. He has quite enough experience for taking these decisions, because practically every day he comes up against these problems. I know that in your country some of your Presidents did not serve in the army and did not know what the army -- I think this is the job of any leader of a country.

Q I want to ask you about Reykjavik. Reykjavik was a very amazing event and you participated, Marshal Akhromeyev, in an important way. When you went to Reykjavik to this meeting, did you know that you would be designated to work with Mr. Nitze and others in this -- while Gorbachev and Reagan were working in one place, that you all would be hammering out solutions to military and strategic questions in another room in another place or all night long? Did you know that you would be given this task, or was this

Reyk

something that just developed at the time?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. Yes, I knew that.

Q What was the planning? What was the thinking ahead -- leading up to Reykjavik, what was the idea of what you expected or Mr. Gorbachev and his advisors expected to happen there?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. It was very hard to guess what the results of Reykjavik would be, because the problems that we wanted to discuss there were not discussed beforehand with the American side. There was no cooperation on a par which we have today. And that is why our proposal to reduce by 50 percent the strategic armaments was somewhat unexpected for the American side. But I must say that both sides produced very unexpected proposals in Reykjavik. In response, the American side offered us to eliminate completely the intermediate -- the ballistic missiles and those stationed on nuclear submarines. We discussed this proposal for 40 minutes and proposed to get rid of all the strategic armaments, both the IBMs -- those stationed on nuclear submarines and those on bombers. And they discussed that for another one and one-half hours and said no.

Q As a military person, do you think that either one of these ideas was a practical idea, either to eliminate all ballistic missiles within 10 years or to eliminate all strategic offensive nuclear weapons within 10 years? Is either one of these something that could actually have happened or is it just talk?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. In general, we proposed to get rid of all nuclear armaments by the year 2000, and in this sense we thought that our proposal was realistic. It was an integral part of our program.

Q Well, I won't question as to whether or not that could really happen. (Laughter.)

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I can't say that, because it's not even a bilateral, but multilateral process.

Q Yesterday in talking to Mr. Primakov, he suggested to me that Gorbachev was frustrated by the lack of progress. Things did not seem to be happening with the United States in the summer of 1986, and that this meeting in Reykjavik came in part out of this sense of the need to do something dramatic or big. I wonder if you could give me your interpretation of how this developed. What was the background of it?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I think that was exactly the situation the summer of 1986. The Geneva 1985 meeting gave an impulse to improve our relations between the two countries. And in the summer of 1986 there was a certain situation when nothing was being changed and we had to spurt on. And I think that Reykjavik was the major

c

event which contributed to our forward movement in the future.

Q Why was it decided not to have preliminary discussions with the United States to let the Americans know what was being thought of, but to sort of spring this as a surprise by Gorbachev?

MR. AKHROMEYEV. I would not say that we tried to somehow flood the American side with our proposals. It's simply that we did not have enough trust between our two sides.

Q Well, thank you for spending your time with me.

(End of interview.)