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# SOVIET INTENTIONS 1965-1985

## Volume II
## Soviet Post-Cold War Testimonial Evidence

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BDM FEDERAL, INC.

September 22, 1995
CONTRACT #MDA903-92-C-0147
OSD-NET ASSESSMENT

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*Interviews and Discussions with Cold-War Era Planners and Analysts*

This volume contains much of the raw material on which this study is based. All items in this collection represent the testimony, in some form, of Soviet and American strategic planners and analysts whose professional careers were largely dominated by the need to understand and respond effectively to the military threat from their Cold War opponents.

Most of the items are structured as records or summaries of interviews conducted on the basis of a specific list of questions. In follow-up interviews or interviews with difficult subjects, the questions served only as a general guide to research. Long, narrative responses also often did not address questions in the same format and sequence in which the questions were presented.

For many reasons, items do not follow precisely the sequence and contents of the interview questions. Soviet interview subjects often were uncomfortable with the interview situation, the questions, or the implications of the research (the Cold War was over and the West had won). As a result, the nature of the record of interview or discussion varies from interview to interview. Transcripts of taped interviews are the record of choice, of course, followed by records based on notes and, finally, summaries based on the memory of the interviewer prepared shortly after the interview.

Many Soviet interview subjects were uncomfortable with tape recorders, especially early in the project (1989-1990) when several were far from convinced that the Cold War was, indeed, over. Likewise, several of the questions caused discomfort which forced rephrasing and special prompting (provocative statements or allusions to other information) on the part of the interviewer. Some interview subjects responded with almost a stream-of-consciousness flow of information that moved from association to association through an entire series of related issues. Stopping such a response to adhere precisely to our questions could result in the loss of valuable insights and information not anticipated by the questioner.

This resulted in incomplete coverage of some questions requiring, when possible, subsequent, supplementary interviews focused on specific issues. To compensate when possible, we revisited some of the most knowledgeable interview subjects several times over the course of 3 or 4 years.

We tried, when possible, to isolate the interview subject from his colleagues during questioning to avoid mutual intimidation, collegial responses, and contamination of data and observations. We were generally successful in meeting this objective but were sometimes forced by those who helped arrange a given interview to involve them in the process. When possible, we would subsequently isolate the interview subject and revisit one or two key questions to validate the original response.

The record that follows, therefore, is inconsistent in level of detail and comprehensiveness despite the planning and good intentions of the researchers. Imperfect as they are, they nevertheless represent a unique record of information and beliefs of Cold War participants who were able to trust their former enemies sufficiently to share their thoughts and beliefs in some detail before they themselves passed into history.

For the convenience of the reader, a list of acronyms and abbreviations appears in the appendices, as well as a selective list of decision makers and analysts cited or referred to in the interview record.

## SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

| | |
|---|---|
| **Subject:** | Gen.-Col. (Ret.) Varfolomei Vladimirovich Korobushin |
| **Position:** | Former Deputy Chief of Staff of Strategic Rocket Forces |
| **Location:** | Office of Vitalii Kataev, Former Central Committee Building, Moscow |
| **Interviewer:** | John G. Hines |
| **Date/Time:** | December 10, 1992 |
| **Duration:** | Approx. 1 hr. |
| **Language:** | Russian |
| **Prepared by:** | Ellis Mishulovich, based on notes |
| **Note:** | Vitalii Kataev participated in the exchange. |

Throughout the mid-1970s and up through the mid-1980s, I firmly believed that the U.S. was willing and capable of a first strike against us. NATO's official stance, which did not rule out this possibility, only affirmed my belief that this was possible. We were very much afraid of this possibility.

I was responsible for control systems for the Strategic Rocket Forces. Because our main fear was of a U.S. first strike, our main objective was to design a system that was capable of launching as soon as launches were detected. I believe that we reached this objective.

As for our side, I am deeply convinced that no one on our side was capable of initiating a first strike.

Q: Even at the theater level?

A: At the theater level, in case of a war in Europe, we would have crushed NATO forces in a conventional conflict, and NATO would have been forced to use nuclear weapons first.

Q: Our relations with Europe were always very complicated. In discussions with former Secretaries of Defense, it was clear to me that nuclear use would have been unlikely.

A: In the mid-1980s the U.S. held exercises in which it used three to five preventive selective nuclear strikes against the territory of the Soviet Union during an imaginary conflict in Europe. This was done in order to demonstrate U.S. willingness to use nuclear weapons if necessary. A conflict in Europe was possible.

We came closest to nuclear war during the Cuban crisis. This was Khrushchev's adventure and I did not agree with what we did there. But we in the military did our job. Marshal Biriuzov, the commander of Soviet forces in Cuba, informed us of the decision

to couple our existing nuclear warheads to our missiles. We had very few missiles at that time capable of reaching the U.S. There were some in Plesetsk. But in Cuba there were around 40 missiles, including 9 R-5[73] missiles with a 5,000 km range and carrying 1 megaton warheads. [*According to Danilevich, the missiles based in Cuba carried two types of warheads: 1.8 and 4.2 megatons.*] If it had come to war, we would have wiped out Europe, Africa, Israel, Turkey.

We never planned any selective strikes [*vybornye udary*]. As Grechko stated on more than one occasion, we would answer with full force to any use of nuclear weapons on the part of the Americans, no matter how limited. We never conducted any exercises using selective strikes, and I know because I participated in all our nuclear exercises. I suggested to Akhromeev that we conduct exercises using limited strikes, but he rejected this idea. We never considered using selective strikes even in theory. There were never documents or studies suggesting their use. Up until the 1970s we never even considered that the Americans might use limited strikes, so we did not consider how to respond to them. Limited nuclear use only occurred in American exercises in 1982-85.

Q: What led to fears in the early 1980s that a U.S. attack was imminent?

A: All U.S. actions pointed in this direction: the deployment of more Minuteman missiles, the deployment of MIRVs, the deployment of the L-492 flying command centers which used the recorded voice of the president to activate launch commands. These command centers began development in the early 1970s. In 1977 we developed a similar but better system which could order missile launches.

Q: Did the issuing of Presidential Directive No. 59 (PD-59)[74] influence General Staff perceptions?

A: Yes, but your PD-59 would have been futile. Right now we have a system in place which would automatically launch all missiles remaining in our arsenal even if every nuclear command center and all of our leaders were destroyed. This system, called the Dead Hand [*Mertvaia Ruka*] would have been triggered by a combination of light, radioactivity, and overpressure, and would cause several command rockets to be launched into orbit, from where they would send launch codes to all our remaining missiles. These special rockets were protected in special hardened silos with protection to 240 kg/cm$^2$ [3,412 psi]. Thus, there was no need for anyone to push a button. All of our ground-launched missiles are protected to over 100 kg/cm$^2$ [1,422 psi]. Your missiles are not as well protected. We assumed this was because they were meant to be first strike weapons.

Q: What about accidental triggering, by earthquakes, for example?

A: The system is not on. It is to be activated only during a crisis.

Kataev: We in the Central Committee's Defense Department considered the early 1980s to be a crisis period, a pre-wartime period. We organized night shifts so that there was always someone on duty in the Central Committee. When Pershing IIs were deployed, there appeared the question of what to do with them in case they were in

[73] Probably the missile NATO designated the SS-5, although other Soviet sources identified the SS-5 as the R-14. R-5 may be an abbreviated industrial designation for the same missile.

[74] Presidential Directive 59, a key White House statement, on U.S. nuclear strategy that was discussed by knowledgeable U.S. government officials in the U.S. press. Published accounts reinforced the concept of selective use of nuclear strikes under various scenarios and suggested early targeting of Soviet leadership and command and control in the event of Soviet aggression.

danger of falling into Warsaw Pact hands during a war. These missiles had to be launched. This made them extremely destabilizing. Furthermore, the only possible targets of these missiles was our leadership in Moscow because Pershings could not reach most of our missiles.

Korobushin: I offer one more piece of evidence that we had no intention of initiating a first strike. In case of a conventional attack against us, we always planned to destroy all our missiles and silos, rather than use them to launch missiles. This was standard operating procedure. We had on hand mines and destruction devices which we would have emplaced in our silos if they were ever in danger of being overrun.

Q: Were there also provisions for destroying mobile missiles in Europe?

Kataev [after come hesitation]: Yes. The same was planned for theater weapons.

Korobushin: I argued with Akhromeev that because of our nuclear shield, we no longer had any need for East Germany and that we needed to negotiate directly with the FRG, not with the U.S. regarding the withdrawal of all our troops from Germany. I argued that it did not matter how many men the Americans had in Europe. I did not care if they increased their forces in Germany. We had to get out. But Akhromeev was solidly against this kind of move.

Kataev: Shevardnadze and the Foreign Ministry argued that the number of U.S. troops and our troops in Europe should not be linked. However, the military and the political-military leadership were against it.

Korobushin: We were very afraid of the Americans. If we were not afraid, why would we need missiles and silos with ready times of 60 seconds!? Our EW satellites were able to detect a strategic missile attack upon launch, approximately 30 minutes from impact but we did not consider the attack confirmed until our radar confirmed the trajectory to target approximately 14 minutes prior to the first splash. Yet our control system was so well prepared that this was more than enough time to launch a retaliatory strike, even if it took the leadership over 10 minutes to make a decision. It took just 13 seconds to deliver the decision from Moscow to all of the launch sites in the Soviet Union. This shows that we were preparing only for a retaliatory-meeting strike [*otvetno-vstrechnyi udar*]. Why else would we have spent billions of rubles to design and build such a sophisticated command and control system?

Q: Was such a term as "deterrence" [*sderzhivanie*] ever used in regard to strategy?

A: Maybe among the leadership there was such a concept. But speaking as a military man I have to say that all of our calculations for force building were based on the scenario of the retaliatory-meeting strike, not on the idea of deterrence. We calculated that a 40 - 45% destruction of the U.S. GDP would be enough to be considered unacceptable damage. Likewise, we know that the Americans calculated that 30 - 40% destruction of our GDP would be considered unacceptable.

Our early missile, the R-4,[75] was not capable of a retaliatory-meeting strike. It had a ready time of 20 minutes. It was only in the mid-1970s that we had acquired a generation of missiles with retaliatory-meeting capability.

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[75] Probably the liquid-fueled designated, "SS-7" by NATO.