

15. Berliner Colloquium zur Zeitgeschichte

1983—The Most Dangerous Year of the Cold War?

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Conference language: English

23 and 24 May 2014

Questionnaire

Session 1 Able Archer and the Second Cold War, 1979-1984

Introduction Klaas Voß

Chair Bernd Greiner

- * What were the national and international dynamics behind the Second Cold War?
- * How significant were the changes and power shifts within the American (Reagan) and Soviet governments (Andropov) in the early 1980s?
- * What can be said about the mental and intellectual mindset of both elites and the public at large?

- * How can we explain the accumulation of crises in 1983 (e.g. the shoot-down of KAL 007, the Soviet early warning failure in September, the invasion of Grenada in October, Able Archer in November)? Were they contingent upon each other?

- * In comparison to other incidents and moments of crisis during the Second Cold War and the year 1983, does Able Archer really stand out?
- * Was Able Archer an example of calculated risk-taking?
- * How serious was the danger of inadvertent escalation?

- * The record: What do we now know about Able Archer?
- * Missing links: What do we still not know about Able Archer?

Session 2 Deterrence, Perceptions and War Scare

Introduction Svetlana Savranskaya

Chair Beatrice Heuser

- * In the case of the Soviet Union, what role did fears of nuclear decapitation play?
- * How did Soviet elites perceive the US in general and President Ronald Reagan in particular?
- * Were there different schools of thought in Moscow, hawks and doves? Did institutional affiliations, e.g. a political-military divide, play a role?
- * Within Soviet military and political elites, who perceived a window of vulnerability and on what grounds?
- * Did memories of 1941 have an impact on Soviet perceptions and to which extent?
- * Between 1980 and 1983, was there an actual war scare in Moscow? Or was the war scare mostly a matter of propaganda and impression-management, and if so, was it primarily for domestic or foreign consumption?

- * In the case of the US, what created the panic about »windows of vulnerability«?
- * How did the alarmist assumptions about Soviet superiority (Team B, Committee on Present Danger) find their way into the political mainstream?
- * On what calculations and assumptions did the Reagan Administration build its security strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union?
- * What was behind the US discourse about »limited,« »survivable« or »winnable« nuclear wars and the »decapitation« of the USSR (PD-59, NSDD-13)?
- * Did public and internal debates about nuclear war reflect a serious belief in war-fighting capabilities? Or were they merely a matter of instilling fear in the adversary?
- * What were the reasons for the so-called Reagan reversal vis-à-vis the Soviet Union?

**Session 3 Intelligence Agencies, Threat Perceptions
and Political Decision-Making**

Introduction John Prados

Chair Claudia Kemper

- * What can be said about the functioning or malfunctioning of the Soviet intelligence apparatus?
- * How informed or uninformed was Soviet intelligence about the US-government and military?
- * What can be said about the political clout of Soviet intelligence agencies at the time?
- * Was the inter-service rivalry between the KGB and the GRU of any significance?
- * What do we make of the controversial gap of communication between the KGB's Moscow Centre and the Politburo?
- * How were Soviet strengths and weaknesses calculated in relation to the US?
- * Did Operation RYAN contribute to threat-inflation and crisis-escalation? Or did it prevent Moscow from overreacting by feeding sobering accounts into the threat-equation?
- * What role did the media and public play in the policy calculations of Soviet intelligence agencies?

- * What can be said about the functioning or malfunctioning of the American intelligence apparatus?
- * How informed or uninformed was American intelligence about the Soviet government and military?
- * How was the impact of American policy on Soviet strategy and outlook calculated?
- * What can be said about the political clout of American intelligence agencies at the time?
- * What role did the media and public play in the policy calculations of American intelligence agencies?

Session 4 Cold War Crises in Comparison: 1945-1983

Introduction Bernd Greiner

Chair Klaas Voß

- * From Berlin in 1948 and 1958-61 to Cuba in 1962 and Yom Kippur in 1973, the Cold War was beset by a variety of political and military crises. What did they have in common, what are the differences?
- * Especially in terms of calculated risk and inadvertent escalation, what do Cold War crises have in common? And what are the differences?
- * Are the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the proliferation of cold war crises intertwined?
- * Did innovations in weapons-technology contribute to Cold War crises, and if so, to what extent?
- * Did public expectations and/or reactions have an impact on political and military risk-taking?

- * How does Able Archer fit into the pattern of Cold War crises?
- * What lessons does the comparison with other moments at the brink of nuclear war yield?

- * Starting from the general assumption that nuclear deterrence or mutual assured destruction were strategies of using threats and unpredictability to influence the calculus of the adversary, what can be said about this assumption in the light of Cold War crises in general and Able Archer in particular?
- * How important was deliberate fear-mongering?
- * What can be said about the limits of fear-mongering (e.g. in the light of public reactions)?
- * Does the experience of Able Archer testify to the precarious and innate instability of nuclear deterrence? Or did it vindicate the intellectual assumptions of deterrence?

Suggested Reading

Benjamin B. Fischer, The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s. In: International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence. 19(2006),3; 480-518

Vojtech Mastny, How Able was Able Archer? Nuclear Trigger and Intelligence in Perspective. In: Journal of Cold War Studies. 11(2009),1; 108-123

Beth A. Fischer, The Reagan Reversal. Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War. Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press, 1997; 102-142

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Central Intelligence Agency Memo for the Director and Deputy Director from Vice Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, Herbert E. Meyer, Subject: Why is the World So Dangerous? In: National Security Archive/Electronic Briefing Book 428, Document 4

Interview with Viktor M. Surikov, Deputy Director of the Central Scientific Research Institute, by John G. Hines, September 11, 1993, in *Soviet Intentions 1965-1985: Volume II Soviet Post-Cold War Testimonial Evidence*, by John G. Hines, Ellis M. Mishulovich, of BDM Federal, INC. for the Office of the Secretary of Defense Net Assessment. Unclassified with portions retroactively classified. In: National Security Archive/Electronic Briefing Book 426, Document 7

Interview with Lieutenant General Geliı Viktorovich Batenin, by John G. Hines, August 6, 1993, in *Soviet Intentions 1965-1985: Volume II Soviet Post-Cold War Testimonial Evidence*, by John G. Hines, Ellis M. Mishulovich, of BDM Federal, INC. for the Office of the Secretary of Defense Net Assessment. Unclassified with portions retroactively classified. In: National Security Archive/Electronic Briefing Book 426, Document 23

Interview with Colonel General Varfolomei Vladimirovich Korobushin with participation by Senior Defense Department Advisor Vitalii Kataev, by John G. Hines, December 10, 1992, in *Soviet Intentions 1965-1985: Volume II Soviet Post-Cold War Testimonial Evidence*, by John G. Hines, Ellis M. Mishulovich, of BDM Federal,

INC. for the Office of the Secretary of Defense Net Assessment. Unclassified with portions retroactively classified. In: National Security Archive/Electronic Briefing Book 426, Document 24

Series of Six Interviews with Dr. Vitalii Nikolaevich Tsygichko, General Staff Analyst, by John G. Hines, December 10, 1990-1991, in *Soviet Intentions 1965-1985: Volume II Soviet Post-Cold War Testimonial Evidence*, by John G. Hines, Ellis M. Mishulovich, of BDM Federal, INC. for the Office of the Secretary of Defense Net Assessment. Unclassified with portions retroactively classified. In: National Security Archive/Electronic Briefing Book 426, Document 25