

and technological power in a new arena of the arms race were being realized. All of the trends in the West that they had seen and worried about over the preceding two years came together symbolically in SDI: accelerating U.S. economic growth that would give Washington the money to build an expensive new capability if it chose to do so; an explosion of technological advances in the West that likely would make SDI feasible; a widely popular and massive U.S. military modernization and expansion under way, of which SDI would be a part; and a confident, assertive American leadership likely to see the project through. And because they believed the United States could build a defensive system that would work (in contrast to their knowledge of the limitations of their own), they were convinced that such a system would give the United States a first-strike capability—allowing us to destroy the USSR while sitting under our defensive umbrella.

It wasn't SDI per se that frightened the Soviet leaders; after all, at best it would take many years to develop and deploy as an effective system. I think it was the *idea* of SDI and all it represented that frightened them. As they looked at the United States, they saw an America that apparently had the resources to increase defense spending dramatically and then add this program on top, and all of it while seeming hardly to break a sweat.

Meanwhile, an enfeebled Soviet leadership, presiding over a country confronting serious economic and social problems, knew they could not compete—at least not without some major changes. In my view, it was the broad resurgence of the West—symbolized by SDI—that convinced even some of the conservative members of the Soviet leadership that major internal changes were needed in the USSR. That decision, once made, set the stage for the dramatic events inside the Soviet Union of the next several years.

At the same time, Reagan's launching of a new arms race two weeks after the "evil empire" speech further increased the levels of tension and suspicion. And, for a leader like Andropov already half-persuaded the United States was preparing for a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union, SDI likely added to his paranoia.

"THE TARGET IS DESTROYED": KAL-007

One of the most horrifying tragedies of the second half of the Cold War was the Soviet shoot-down of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 on September 1, 1983. The plane apparently had strayed off

course and crossed into Soviet territory, where it was tracked and then attacked by an SU-15. The shoot-down was viewed in the United States as a stark demonstration of the callous brutality of the Soviet regime. U.S. intelligence agencies provided the evidence that condemned the Soviet government, specifically the conversations between the attacking pilot and his ground controller. We documented the order to fire on the unidentified plane, acknowledgment of the order, and the report of a successful attack.

Under great pressure from Shultz, we agreed to his use of the intelligence in a press conference he gave at 10:45 A.M. on September 1. He provided a chronology of what had happened and expressed this country's righteous indignation. His apparent anger was pale compared to the wave of fury that swept across the United States. Several hundred innocent people had gone to their deaths in a twelve-minute plunge to the sea, thanks to the Soviets, and Americans were just plain mad. It appeared that the Soviet pilot ultimately had identified the plane as a passenger aircraft and was authorized to shoot it down cold-bloodedly anyway.

The intelligence community continued to examine the evidence in the immediate aftermath and, later the same day (September 1), our experts concluded that the story might be a little more complicated. CIA reported in the *President's Daily Brief* on September 2 our conclusion that throughout most of the incident the Soviets had thought they were tracking a U.S. RC-135 reconnaissance plane that earlier had been in the area monitoring an expected Soviet ICBM test. We said that the Soviets had been tracking the RC-135 for at least an hour before detecting the KAL flight. About an hour later, the Soviet SU-15 pilot reported that he had observed the target "visually," and in the next fourteen minutes—until the attack—he reported flying around the aircraft, closing at times to within two kilometers. He never identified the plane as a passenger aircraft.

Later the same day at an NSC meeting with the President, Casey briefed that while there had been no reconnaissance planes in the area of the shoot-down, "That is not to say that confusion between the U.S. reconnaissance plane and the KAL plane could not have developed as the Cobra Ball [reconnaissance] plane departed and the Korean airliner approached the area northeast of the Kamchatka Peninsula." In fact, the majority of CIA and DIA analysts believed that the Soviets on the ground misidentified the plane.