

[*name not declassified*] the National Warning Staff and [*name not declassified*] of the Office of Soviet Analysis prepared an undated memorandum reacting to Perroots's comments, which was distributed by Ermarth to the DCI and DDCI for consideration:

SUBJECT

Comments on Memorandum of Lieutenant General Perroots

*Summary*

1. General Perroots's memorandum describes in detail a worrisome episode in which Soviet Air Forces in Central Europe assumed an abnormally high alert posture in early November 1983 in response to a routine NATO command post and communications exercise. Two Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIEs)—written in May and August 1984 respectively—treated the events described in the General's memorandum in the larger context of US-Soviet relations. Those Estimates judged that the Soviets displayed a heightened sense of concern in many areas of national life primarily because of the more aggressive policies of the US Administration in the early 1980s, the US strategic modernization program that included the peacekeeper ICBM and the D-5 SLBM, the actual implementation of NATO's 1979 decision for Intermediate Range Nuclear Force (INF) modernization by deployment of the first Pershing-II missile systems to Europe, and because of the leadership instability in the USSR from the successive deaths of three general secretaries between 1981 and 1985. A National Intelligence Estimate in 1988 assessed the significance of the events in 1983 with the benefit of a longer time perspective and reached the same broad conclusions. General Perroots's memorandum and its enclosure neither raises no new issues nor contains new data that change the strategic judgements already written. [*portion marking not declassified*]

2. At the tactical and theater level, however, General Perroots's memorandum surfaces a long-standing warning problem, i.e., the need for the Intelligence Community in Washington to provide more timely, discriminating, and accurate warning in support of the theater commander. Perroots, who at the time was Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, US Air Forces Europe (USAFE), describes three serious problems for which there are only partial answers. First, he believes that, despite the enormous amount of resources and energy spent in guarding against a strategic surprise attack, USAFE was not well informed in that the US warning systems did not detect in a timely fashion the extent of Soviet precautionary readiness measures undertaken in November 1983 in response to NATO exercise Able Archer.

Secondly, he believes that Washington-based agencies had relevant information which was not available to the European Command when he recommended against a precautionary US alert by US Air Forces Europe in response to the detection of the increased alert status of the Soviet Air Forces. Finally, [1½ lines not declassified], General Perroots is concerned that in similar circumstances—even if there is better intelligence—another officer in his position might recommend a precautionary US Air Force alert in Europe that could have serious escalatory consequences, unless there are timely, national level assessments available. [portion marking not declassified]

3. The dilemma that General Perroots has described is characteristic of the warning problems faced by senior US military intelligence chiefs in many past crises, in which decisions about US force posture were dependent upon threat assessments prepared rapidly and based on fragmentary and incomplete intelligence. General Perroots's memorandum reinforces two long-standing lessons of warning: warning systems are no substitute for seasoned, professional judgment and assessments; and they require constant attention and improvement. In terms of process, however, his memorandum reinforces the requests of successive SACEURs and other US theater commanders for better ways to provide more timely national-level warning assessments to the theater intelligence staffs.

*The Setting of Exercise Able Archer, 1983*

4. The larger context of the period, often referred to as the "war scare," reflected increasing Soviet concern over the drift in superpower relations, which some in the Soviet leadership felt indicated an increased threat of war and increased likelihood of the use of nuclear weapons. These concerns were shaped in part by a Soviet perception that the correlation of forces was shifting against the Soviet Union and that the United States was taking steps to achieve military superiority. These fears were exacerbated by planned improvements in US strategic forces, as well as by progress made by NATO to implement its 1979 decision began with NATO's deliberations in the late 1970s to modernize its theater nuclear forces by deploying Pershing-II missiles and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) to Europe. By 1981, after the new US Administration was inaugurated, the Soviet concern intensified almost concurrently with General Secretary Brezhnev's decline in health [portion marking not declassified]

5. [1½ lines not declassified] the increased Soviet concern stemmed from a fear by some Soviet leaders that the West might seek to exploit its new capability in Europe for a preemptive nuclear surprise attack against the USSR, for which the Soviets had no defense. From a national security standpoint, this Western capability led to questions about the

long-standing Soviet view that crises and other adverse developments in international affairs would precede the outbreak of war and be the basis for long-term early warning. The Soviets had concern that the West might decide to attack the USSR without warning during a time of vulnerability—such as when military transport was used to support the harvest—thus compelling the Soviets to consider a preemptive strike at the first sign of US preparations for a nuclear strike. [*portion marking not declassified*]

6. From Brezhnev's death in 1982 through late 1984, the Soviets ordered a number of unusual measures not previously detected except during periods of crisis with the West. These included: disruption of the normal troop rotation cycle for Soviet forces in central Europe in 1984; updating civil defense procedures in the USSR from 1982 through 1984; in the spring of 1984 the first, and apparently only, time that Soviet military trucks were not sent to support the harvest since the end of World War II; and increased alert reactions even to routine NATO training from 1982 to 1984. The cumulative effect of these and other measures was to reduce the Soviet and Warsaw Pact vulnerability to a surprise attack. The abnormal Soviet reaction to NATO Exercise Able Archer in November 1983 occurred within this setting. [*portion marking not declassified*]

7. Concurrent with the military dimension, [*less than 1 line not declassified*] other precautionary measures taken by the Soviets probably were a reflection of the political maneuvering in the Kremlin in 1982 and 1983 associated with Andropov's rise to power. In exchange for military support for his bid to become General Secretary, Andropov, then KGB Chairman, may have promised greater allocations of resources for military industrial expansion, improved civil defense readiness, and military modernization. All of these were espoused by the Chief of the General Staff at the time, Marshal Ogarkov. Successful manipulation of threat perceptions by the KGB at Andropov's direction would have helped cultivate the strong military backing Andropov enjoyed when he came to power. In this environment, the heightened Soviet military reactions to NATO exercises would have been expected. [*portion marking not declassified*]

8. Finally, [*less than 1 line not declassified*] the Soviets wanted the new US Administration to tone down its anti-Soviet rhetoric, moderate its hostile attitudes, and begin serious business on trade and arms control. Some analysts believe that the Soviet activities, [*1 line not declassified*], were intended to be detected and were contrived to nudge Washington toward a more conciliatory and cooperative attitude in dealings with Moscow. [*less than 1 line not declassified*]

#### *Intelligence Community Performance*

9. Since 1983, the Intelligence Community, CIA's Office of Soviet Analysis, and the Defense Intelligence Agency have treated the events

surrounding the Able Archer episode in a number of in-house publications and national estimates. When General Perroots was Director, DIA, analysts concurred in the Community assessments in 1988 that the "war scare" period of heightened Soviet concern was triggered by the change of the US Administration and its policy decisions toward the Soviet threat; that at least some Soviet leaders concluded that a surprise nuclear attack by NATO was possible outside the context of a crisis; and that this led to a number of Soviet responses consistent with such a conclusion, including high priority intelligence collection taskings. DIA believes, however, that the Soviet measures were primarily a function of the internal leadership instability from which Andropov emerged as General Secretary. [*portion marking not declassified*]

#### *General Perroots's Problem*

10. The events surrounding NATO Exercise Able Archer, however, all occurred some months before the first national-level assessments were written, and General Perroots was confronted with a serious choice of what recommendation to make to the Commander, US Air Forces Europe. The Department of Defense warning indicators system reflected that, [*less than 1 line not declassified*] Soviet air units in Poland and East Germany were observed at a high state of alert, although no other Soviet strategic forces adopted such a posture. [*2½ lines not declassified*] Consequently, the Commander, US Air Forces Europe, was concerned whether he should exercise his discretionary authority to increase the alert posture of his force. General Perroots recommended that no precautionary US alert be instituted, despite the evidence of his own warning system. Several days later, the Soviet air forces returned to normal alert status. [*portion marking not declassified*]

11. [*1 paragraph (10 lines) not declassified*]

12. General Perroots's concerns about this episode are legitimate to the extent that they deal with Washington's support to the US military commands. [*4½ lines not declassified*] Third, national-level assessments of Soviet intentions were not available when most needed. The General's memorandum indicates the Defense Department has taken steps to correct the problems in the processing and dissemination of intelligence. The third problem, of timely national-level support, is continuous. As Director of DIA, General Perroots himself initiated organizational and procedural changes to improve DIA's support to the commands. [*portion marking not declassified*]

13. Underlying all of the above, however, is the paradox that General Perroots believes he made a correct judgment, but for the wrong reasons. This is not a new problem nor is there a solution to it. General Perroots has accurately identified inherent limits of the warning systems as they now exist. His candor is a safeguard against complacency

and denial that problems exist. Additionally, he raises again the need for better understanding in Washington of the problems facing intelligence in the field. [*portion marking not declassified*]

[*name not declassified*]      [*name not declassified*]  
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(Central Intelligence Agency, National Intelligence Council, Job 91B00551: Speeches, Lectures, Briefing Files (1988–1989), Box 1, Folder 2: C/NIC (Ermarth) Chrons March 1989)