

## SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

**Subject:** Robert W. Komer

**Position:** Advisor to the Secretary of Defense for NATO Affairs, 1977-1979;  
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, 1979-1981

**Location:** Washington, D.C.

**Interviewer:** John G. Hines

**Date/Time:** October 22, 1991, 3:00-5:00 p.m.

**Duration:** 2 hours

**Prepared By:** Daniel Calingaert, based on notes

The Soviets, in Ambassador Komer's view, were reluctant to wage war because they were not sure that they would win. The more they developed their nuclear capabilities, the more aware they became of the destructiveness of nuclear war.

The Soviets thought that the United States had strategic superiority into the late 1970s. They had achieved parity and were striving for superiority. Mutually assured destruction was too sophisticated a concept for the Soviets. They built up their nuclear arsenal in order to enhance deterrence and also to gain leverage over the U.S. They spent a great deal on intelligence to copy U.S. nuclear weapons programs.

The U.S. government hoped that limited nuclear strikes would work but was unsure whether the USSR would back down if the U.S. fired nuclear warning shots. There were no hard indications of what the Soviet leaders thought.

The Soviets would try to wage war with conventional weapons, but if the U.S. were about to use nuclear arms, the USSR would preempt. The advantage gained from preemption would be large in a theater war.

The Soviets considered chemical weapons more useful than the U.S. did; nevertheless, they were deterred by U.S. stockpiles of CW.