

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

Subject: Rod McDaniel
Position: NSC Staff Member, 1985-1987
Location: Mr. McDaniel's apartment, Crystal City, VA
Interviewer: John G. Hines
Date/Time: November 12, 1991, 3:30 p.m.
Duration: 2 hours
Prepared by: Daniel Calingaert

Mr. McDaniel was involved in a strategic planning project for the Navy in 1983-85. He later served on the NSC Staff, enjoying in 1986 much personal access to President Reagan.

President Reagan did not spend much time thinking about the Soviet military threat. He simply wanted to rebuild U.S. strength and to stand firm until the Soviet leaders were ready to negotiate. Defense Secretary Weinberger had no strong views aside from caution in using the U.S. Armed Forces. Mr. McDaniel described the views prevalent among the Joint Chiefs.

The Soviet military was risk averse. It was eager not to fight but also not to lose if war broke out. President Reagan felt that the USSR accepted his view that nuclear war cannot be won and should not be fought. By the NSC's assessment, the Soviets made mischief in the Third World but did not seriously contemplate the use of force against the U.S. or NATO. They were, however, dangerous when pushed into a corner.

The Soviet Union believed in deterrence. In fact, the United States was deterred by Soviet nuclear forces. The USSR did not consider nuclear weapons militarily useful.

President Reagan thought that the Soviet Union rejected strategic parity, but after meeting Gorbachev, he changed his mind. He believed that the Soviet leadership wanted a first-strike potential, not to use militarily but instead to surpass American capabilities. Soviet force building was influenced by U.S. weapons programs.

No one expected the USSR to absorb a large U.S. nuclear strike without response. The Soviets were worried about being trapped by their lack of response time. They would probably launch on tactical warning and they might even preempt strategically.

The Soviet Union clearly preferred to keep a central war conventional. The U.S. military always assumed that if nuclear war broke out, NATO would be the side to go first. The USSR probably did not have limited nuclear options. In the view of the Joint Chiefs, the Soviets probably would retaliate against NATO's first use with 100s of nuclear weapons, and they would escalate rapidly from theater nuclear exchanges to global nuclear war.

Given the large Soviet stockpiles of chemical weapons and the frequent Soviet exercises with CW, the USSR was likely to employ CW and to have no particular restraints on CW use.