

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

Subject: Viktor M. Surikov

Position: President of the Institute for Defense Studies (INOBS); former Deputy Director of the Central Scientific Research Institute for General Machine Building (TsNIIMash) 1976-1992. Over 30 years experience in building, testing and analyzing military and civilian missiles and related systems (C³I, satellites, space flight control, etc.)

Location: INOBIS, Moscow

Interviewer: John G. Hines

Language: Russian

Date: September 11, 1993

Prepared by: John G. Hines, based on notes

I raised with Dr. Surikov the issue of first strike versus retaliatory meeting strikes [*otvetno-vstrechnye udary*] and pure retaliation (ride out). He responded with a challenge that the U.S. strategy and posture was to strike first in a crisis in order to minimize damage to the U.S. He added that U.S. analysts had concluded that there were tremendous differences in levels of damage to the U.S. under conditions where the U.S. succeeded in successfully preemptively striking Soviet missiles and control systems before they launched versus under conditions of a simultaneous exchange or U.S. retaliation. He said, "John, if you deny that, then either you're ignorant about your own posture or you're lying to me." I acknowledged that the U.S. certainly had done such analysis.

Dr. Surikov continued with the assertion that the basic Soviet position and posture also was preemption—primarily because truly knowledgeable military and civilian leaders simply did not believe Soviet systems had the reliability [*ustoichivost'*] to ride out an attack and respond effectively, if at all. He made it clear that he was referring to the *whole* system—communications and control, launch systems, and the missiles themselves. Retaliatory-meeting strikes [essentially what U.S. strategists would call "launch-under-attack—LUA"] represented a far less attractive fall-back given the consequences to the USSR of allowing the U.S. to launch its arsenal.

I asked Dr. Surikov if submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) were relegated to the role of strategic reserve or could they be included, in whole or in part, in any preemptive first strike. He stated that SLBMs were sufficiently accurate by the late 1980s to have been included in a preemptive strike. SSBNs⁸⁵ tied to the pier and not under repair would be more likely to be involved.

I then asked Dr. Surikov about the "Dead Hand" [*Mertvaia Ruka*] automatic launch system. Dr. Surikov responded that he and his subordinates had designed the system—to

⁸⁵ SSBN — Submarine, Ballistic Missile equipped, Nuclear powered — a submarine designed to launch strategic nuclear ballistic missiles (SLBMs).

include the various sensors—seismic, light, and radiation—to launch the command missiles in the event the leadership were dead or unable to communicate. He continued that he briefed the concept and design to his chief, then Institute Director Mozzhorin, and to Baklanov, then the Central Committee Secretary responsible for military industry [Ustinov's former party position]. Both accepted and approved the concept. The design finally was rejected by Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeev [evidently when he was Chief of the General Staff, i.e., after September 6, 1984] on the recommendation of a trusted advisor and general officer, General-Colonel Korobushin [the officer who "revealed" the existence of the system to me months earlier]. As a result of this rejection, the "Dead Hand" trigger mechanism "was never realized."