



# FROM THE SHADOWS

THE ULTIMATE  
INSIDER'S STORY  
OF FIVE  
PRESIDENTS  
AND HOW  
THEY WON  
THE COLD WAR

*"From the Shadows is an indispensable contribution to our understanding of America's response to the Soviet challenge during the waning years of superpower rivalry."* —Arch Puddington, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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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, Cassey 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.

Yeltsin was elected to that position on June 12, 1991. With his support, the Russian Supreme Soviet approved the draft Union Treaty and by mid-July all of the other eight republic Supreme Soviets except the Ukraine had done so, as well as the USSR Supreme Soviet. The Ukraine set its vote for December 1. The draft treaty was published on July 23, and it was announced that signature of the treaty would take place on August 20:

CIA warned us at the White House that once the signing date was set, a deadline of sorts would be established for the conservatives to act. The changes that would follow signature, together with public sentiment, would make action after that date much more difficult. Scowcroft and I had always split Bush's August vacation in Maine, with me taking the first half. Thus it fell to me on August 17 to hand the President his CIA *President's Daily Brief*, which warned of the strong chance that the conservatives would act within the next few days. It said, "The danger is growing that hardliners will precipitate large-scale violence" and described their efforts to prepare for an attempt to seize power. We were sitting on the deck of Bush's house looking out to the Atlantic. He asked me if I thought the situation was serious and if the Agency's warning was valid. I explained the meaning of the August 20 signing ceremony, and said I thought he should take the *PDB* warning quite seriously.

I returned to Washington the next day, a Sunday, and Scowcroft took my place in Kennebunkport. He always stayed up late, and at about 11:30 P.M. called me to say he had heard on CNN about a possible coup in Moscow. Had I heard anything and would I check with CIA? Through the night, we learned more about the house arrest of Gorbachev and the identity of the coup leaders. The leaders of the military, KGB, Interior Ministry, and the party all seemed involved.

Success of the coup seemed assured based on past events in the USSR. By Monday morning, August 19, French President Mitterrand had publicly as much as accepted the coup as a done deal. Bush's first statement, early in the morning, was equivocal but disapproving. The realities of power were (and are) such that there was no point in needlessly antagonizing a new and potentially unstable government with tens of thousands of nuclear warheads. Bush decided to return to Washington.

As the morning progressed, however, our sense in Washington was that something didn't smell right, something was amiss in Moscow. Why were all telephone and fax lines in and out of Moscow