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*The opinions expressed in these articles are those of the authors alone. They do not reflect the official position of the U.S. government, nor that of the National Military Intelligence Association, nor that of the organizations where the authors are employed.*
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Welcome to the Spring 2013 issue of American Intelligence Journal. No, that’s not a typo. This issue is admittedly very late, in part due to the last issue being somewhat late too. We at AJI appreciate your patience and understanding of the many competing demands on our time. However, we would like to think in terms of an “eternal spring” in the intelligence business; hence, we’re never really late, just selective in the timing of our dissemination!

The overall focus of this issue is “Intelligence/Information Support to Small Unit Operations,” and it was selected by the NMA Board of Directors to expound in more depth on the theme of our Fall 2011 National Intelligence Symposium. The keynote speakers for that 2-day event were then-MG (USA) Mike Flynn, fresh back from serving as ISAF J2 in Afghanistan and preparing for a position as Deputy DNI for Partner Engagement (prior to taking over DIA in July 2012), and then-BG (USA) Gregg Potter, at the time Commander of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence at Ft Huachuca but later deployed to Afghanistan himself in a key role. The purpose of that forum was to explore the ways strategic intelligence—and not just finished intelligence but also actionable unprocessed information—could be used to support the “little guy,” both in the military arena and in the civilian world at the state, local, and tribal levels.

The NIF examined the merging of high-level military intelligence and lower-level homeland security/law enforcement information for the protection of U.S. personnel in all walks of life. Just as important as the intelligence provided by the national-level Intelligence Community to the White House and other top policymakers is the information used by first responders to protect regular citizens. Training is critical at the small-unit level, which was the piece filled in by now-MG Potter and representatives from such organizations as FEMA, USAID, DTRA, the Marine Corps, the Coast Guard, the Army National Guard, and various institutes responsible for training in peace operations. Without a doubt, such functions as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, law enforcement, fire emergency medical services, and search and rescue operate in small tactical teams that must perform many functions and require comparable support from intelligence information organizations, often without the benefit of high-level security clearances or the ability to process large amounts of data requiring extensive bandwidth. Creating situational awareness, fostering teamwork, and capturing lessons learned are key.

To quote from the announcement of the November-December 2011 NIF which examined this theme: “Small units are the foundation of all direct actions conducted by military, law enforcement, public safety, intelligence community COIs [communities of interest], and disaster management organizations. These units must effectively and quickly observe, acquire, and process information and intelligence to determine their specific situations, establish a common operating picture within and among their units and their command and control hierarchies. They must apply information and intelligence to find and fix their ‘targets’ and engage or prosecute them. Finally, they must create and report information for peers and superiors as they complete missions, recover, reconstitute, and prepare for the next engagement. All this has to happen, appropriately for what they diagnose the situation to be, in very ambiguous and complex circumstances, with the circumstances rapidly developing and evolving, without bias, in the face of never-before-seen combinations of phenomena with agility and thoughtfulness. As we look at the evolution of small unit operations across the entire spectrum of engagements, we perceive large changes in requirements for, as well as capabilities of, small units to collect, process, and use information and intelligence to be more efficient and effective in their operations. We believe small unit activities have evolved, as they must in asymmetric warfare, to adapt to the needs of the situations, and have gotten ahead of doctrine and our ability to institutionalize approaches, mental models, and learnings. We also perceive that small units can make increasingly large contributions of information and intelligence to the larger enterprises.”

We had hoped that many of the speakers/panelists at that event would turn their presentations into prose. To a limited degree that happened. However, most of the submissions to this issue of AJI arrived after the fact and add to the body of knowledge already acquired. We begin this issue, as we like to do whenever possible, with an NMA award-winning paper. Air Force Maj Richard Vasquez received the 2012 writing award at the Air Command and Staff College for his “Preparing the Air Operations Center to Leverage the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Capabilities of Current and Future Aircraft.” Other articles which examine the intelligence requirements of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan include “HUMINT Intelligence Operations in ISAF,” written by Erik Jens, a repeat AJI author and NIU faculty member recently returned from a rotation to the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), who has made multiple deployments to that troubled country in support of DIA, and “Transition Planning for the Intelligence Community in Afghanistan: Adaptive Frameworks, Unifying Future Missions, Enduring Capabilities, and Resource Implications,” by a group of ODNI officials and contractors, Andrew Trice, Hannah Powell, and William Patchak. Also looking to the future, Army MAJ Mike Adamski, another repeat AJI author, draws upon his own recent deployment experience in “Finishing Strong: Adjusting Intelligence Practices for the Drawdown in Afghanistan.” Moving to the book review section of this issue, the reader will find a stimulating review essay looking at the memoirs of an icon of that conflict, GEN (USA, Ret) Stanley McChrystal, and bouncing those insightful views off those from two other books, one about the U.S. effort in Iraq and the other dealing with the U.S.’s seemingly interminable quest to eradicate al Qaeda.
THE EDITOR'S DESK

This issue also showcases a piece on tactical intelligence, and UAVs in particular, by one of General Potter’s young students at Huachncma. 2LT (USA) Matthew Polak, a UAV operator and recent graduate of the Van Deman Program at the MA Officer Basic Course, writes about the Shadow’s ISR capabilities when compared with other UAV systems. A thinkpiece in the “In My View” section also looks at the increasingly controversial drone program, which is making news as the Obama administration continues to prosecute it with vigor. Of course, using UAVs/drones for data collection is a bit different from using them for targeting terrorists. Former Marine Alex Mathew opines about the psychological and cultural effects of kill operations in future warfare. Somewhat related to Maj Vasquez’s article mentioned earlier, another Air Force pilot talks about ISR, not just supporting small unit operations but also being operations. This incisive essay, which heavily references one of our very own NMIA board members, Lt Gen (Ret) Dave Deptula, is written by another repeat author, Air Force Maj Rob Folkert.

With the continuing revelations by fugitive Edward Snowden of extensive NSA surveillance activities, it is fitting to follow up previous AIJ issues that focused on the themes of “Cyber Security and Operations” and “Counterintelligence, Information Assurance, and Operations Security” with additional cyber-related articles. One of my former NIU students, LT (USNR) Michael Horta, has teamed with an Air Staff official, Dr. Mark Gallagher, to develop the “Cyber Joint Munitions Effectiveness Manual (JMEM),” with an article about that critical effort shared between this journal and a more specialized, technical publication. With cyber always at the forefront of current threat concerns, Thomas Litant of Mitre Corporation peels into “Dark Networks and the Missing Link Inference Problem,” while graduate student Troy Smith, a native of the small Caribbean nation Trinidad and Tobago, examines cyber warfare and explains why it misrepresents the true cyber threat. Another recurring area of interest for AIJ, the clandestine arena, is discussed by UTEP professor Alf Walle in “The Social Context of Clandestine Operations.”

Intelligence analysis and assessments receive coverage in this issue in a handful of provocative articles. Defense analyst and repeat author Welton Chang, who up until recently served in the Army Reserve, offers some suggestions for fixing intelligence by reengineering the enterprise for better analysis. NASIC analyst John Robb laments “A Lack of Process: Why the Intelligence Community Finds It Difficult to Assess Military Threat,” while Naval Reserve CDR Kevin Riehle of NIU’s Reserves Program faculty holds forth on “Assessing Foreign Intelligence Threats.” Similarly, independent author David Hoover muses “A Failure of Imagination in the U.S. Intelligence Community.” Of course, language expertise is essential for analysts, attaches, and other practitioners of cultural intelligence. Wanda Penn of the Defense Language and National Security Education Office reveals that the federal government is looking for volunteers for its National Language Service Corps.

To follow up our recent issue of AIJ on “Cultural Intelligence and Regional Issues,” AMU graduate student Briquette Carstensen discusses a close-in part of the world neglected by that issue, which boasted at least one article on every region except Latin America, this editor’s first love and scene of most of his FAO exploits. She examines in detail “Cartel-Extremist Relations: Increasing Concerns at the U.S.-Mexico Border,” one of the most dangerous areas in the hemisphere right now. Lawrence Cline of the Center for Civil-Military Operations at NPS does a wonderful job applying cultural intelligence to the theme of this issue of AIJ in “Culture for the Masses? Supporting Small Units with Cultural Intelligence.” Intelligence historian and repeat AIJ contributor Bill Streifer joins with a Russian colleague in examining the development of the Soviet atomic bomb in “The Shock of First Lightning: An Intelligence Failure?” As has become a custom with the Journal in recent years, we are proud to present another fascinating essay by intelligence historian Ken Campbell regarding a prominent German World War II official, Ludwig Beck.

To whet your desire to write more, I would urge you to consider submitting a manuscript for future installments of AIJ. The next issue, already closed out and undergoing final copy-editing, will examine the state of “Intelligence Education and Training,” hopefully building on the 1-day workshop jointly sponsored in November 2012 by the local chapters of NMIA and IAFIE. The theme for the Spring 2014 issue will relate to that of the Fall 2013 NIF, which in part discovered the exciting new world of “Identity Intelligence.” However, this issue will broaden the scope a bit more and delve into “New Paradigms of Intelligence Analysis.” Looking ahead to the Fall 2014 issue, and trying not to fall behind again, we are strongly considering a theme that is a staple of intelligence historians and also pertains to a very popular certificate program at NIU, “Denial and Deception.” Naturally, as I have preached before, your topic does not have to match closely any of these announced themes, but your chances of having your work included in the Journal are better if it does. Thank you for your support of this publication in the past; we anticipate you will continue to enjoy its offerings in the future. To make it even better, we need your help and would like to see your byline included! If interested in submitting a manuscript, please contact me at AIJEditor@nmia.org or my cohort in crime, Kel McLanahan, at AIJ.Associate.Editor@nmia.org.

Bill Spracher
The Shock of "First Lightning": An Intelligence Failure?

by Bill Streifer and Irek Sabitov

Тридцатилетие Великой Октябрьской социалистической революции
Доклад В. М. МОЛОТОВА на торжественном заседании Московского Совета 8 ноября 1947 года

“The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Great October Socialistic Revolution”
Report by V.M. Molotov at the Ceremonial Meeting of the Moscow Soviet, November 6, 1947

We in the Soviet Union are utilizing atomic energy, but not in order to stockpile atomic bombs — although I am convinced that if, unfortunately and to our great regret, this were necessary, we should have as many of these as we should need — no more no less.¹

- Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Vishinsky, during a speech at the United Nations, November 10, 1949

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the world’s first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, a second atomic bomb demolished Nagasaki, hastening the end of World War II. Then, four years later, the Soviet Union conducted its first atomic test on the range near Semipalatinsk at 4:00 a.m. Moscow time (7:00 a.m. local time) on August 29, 1949, codenamed Pervaya Molniya ("First Lightning"), ending the U.S. nuclear monopoly.²

In June 1941, after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Lavrenti Beria, the head of the Soviet security and secret police apparatus (NKVD), and member of the State Defense Committee (GKO), was responsible for Soviet war production in addition to security. According to Michael P. Grabovski, the Russian author of “Atomic Rush Job,” after the successful atomic test in 1949, Beria, the head of the Soviet atomic program, excitedly embraced and kissed the atomic scientists on their foreheads. Meanwhile, he whispered to Igor Kurchatov, the scientific head of the program, and Yuli Kharton, a Soviet nuclear physicist, “It would be a great misfortune if it failed... It would be a great misfortune.” Beria understood full well the punishment that would result from a failed atomic test.³

Beria then ordered (by telephone) General Vlasik, the head of Stalin’s protective service, to awaken Stalin from his sleep with the good news. “Josef, it has burst, like the American one!” Beria shouted. “I know already,” Stalin replied, and he hung up the telephone. Beria was angered because
someone had already notified Stalin. The following day Beria traveled to Moscow to hand-deliver a detailed report to Stalin entitled “The report by L.P. Beria and I.V. Kurchatov to Stalin about preliminary data obtained during the test of the atomic bomb...” And later, a letter of gratitude was mailed to Stalin—signed by Beria, Kurchatov, and thirty other members of the Soviet atomic program—congratulating him for this great Soviet achievement.

“Thank you passionately for the high estimate of our work, which was granted to us by Party, Government and You privately.” About a month later, President Truman held a brief press conference. According to The New York Times, his carefully worded statement implied that the absolute dominance of the U.S. in atomic weapons had virtually ended:

I believe the American people to the fullest extent consistent with the national security are entitled to be informed of all developments in the field of atomic energy. That is the reason for making public the following information: We have evidence that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the U.S.S.R.

The Soviet News Agency TASS, however, offered an alternative explanation for the enormous explosion. In response to published reports in the American, British, and Canadian press a few days after Truman’s announcement, TASS explained that large-scale blasting work in connection with the building of hydro-electric stations, mines, canals and roads, was taking place throughout the Soviet Union using “the latest technical methods.” Therefore, it is possible, TASS said, that such blasting might have drawn attention “beyond the borders of the Soviet Union.” TASS, which neither confirmed nor denied that the Soviet Union had conducted an atomic test, then reminded the world that two years earlier—on November 6, 1947—Vyacheslav Molotov, the then-Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced that the secret of the atomic bomb had “long ceased to exist.” According to The New York Times, “It took a moment for [Molotov’s] statement to sink in; then pandemonium broke out.” Members of the audience, composed of top Party leaders who had packed the gold-and-white Bolshoi Theatre to hear speeches commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, sprang to their feet, greeting Molotov’s words with a loud and prolonged applause. “Mr. Molotov evidently made a sensation in Moscow,” The New York Times said. Although Molotov said only that Russian scientists knew, in theory, how to build the atomic bomb, the distinguished audience and the Soviet press understood Molotov to mean that the Soviet Union had the atomic bomb “at her disposal.”

Scientific circles in the U.S., however, thought Molotov was bluffing since the Russians were many years away from the atomic bomb, or so they believed.

Then in 1953, after the Soviet Union had conducted its third such test—and despite “evidence” of a nuclear explosion years earlier—former President Truman, by then a private citizen, publicly expressed doubt that the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons:

I am not convinced Russia has the [atomic] bomb. I am not convinced the Russians have achieved the know-how to put the complicated mechanism together to make the A-bomb work. I am not convinced they have the bomb.

Truman’s comments immediately drew criticism from three members of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy. In a joint statement, Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper (the ranking Republican on the Committee), Representative Carl T. Durham (a Democrat and retiring chairman), and Representative W. Sterling Cole (the ranking House of Representatives Republican) said that information concerning the 1949 Soviet nuclear test began arriving in August, and by the following month the evidence had been “fully evaluated and it simply did not admit of doubt.” Nevertheless,” the joint statement read, the Executive Department, “with the backing of President Truman,” elected not to disclose the nature of the evidence to the Joint Committee. This, they added, was in violation of the Atomic Energy Act which specifically requires that the Committee receive such information. Shortly afterward, however, the Committee gained access to “all details” of the Soviet test. In a separate statement, Senator Hickenlooper, a former Committee chairman, said:

I believe he [Mr. Truman] is entirely out of place making any such statements as a private citizen, based on sensitive and classified information, which he may have received while he was President. If Mr. Truman made such ominous statements in 1949, and later, as President, for the purpose of frightening the American people without being convinced that they were factually correct, then it is apprehensible indeed.

In the summer of 1946, three years prior to the first Russian test, the Soviet Union sent representatives to observe the U.S. atomic tests at Bikini Atoll, codenamed “Able” and “Baker.” Professor Simon Alexandrov, a specialist in non-ferrous metals including uranium and thorium, indicated his government wanted to know how such tests should be organized and conducted. “I do not know whether we have an atomic bomb right now,” Alexandrov said. “Perhaps we have; perhaps we have not. But I believe that very soon, we will have everything that you have in the United States.” Alexandrov then said that UN representatives would undoubtedly be invited to attend if the Russians “should sometime be obliged to make their own demonstration...like the Americans.” Instead, Stalin tried to convince the world...
that the first Soviet nuclear test was nothing more than an enormous conventional explosion. Moreover, instead of triumphantly announcing the end of a nuclear monopoly—which the United States had enjoyed for four years—he chose to equivocate. Why? By denying that the Russians had recently conducted its first atomic test in 1949, Stalin tried to leave the impression that his country had any number of atomic bombs at its disposal because, just as Molotov had said two years earlier: the secret of the atomic bomb no longer existed.

In 2004 Gennady Kiselev, a leading researcher at the Institute of Theoretical and Experimental Physics (and a participant and historian for the Soviet atomic project) discussed Molotov’s speech with journalists at Radio Liberty. Kiselev began by conceding, “Radio listeners should understand that I am a researcher and I can interpret this record only from a perspective of a researcher and a man who knows the history of the Soviet atomic project. Maybe a political scientist will explain this another way.” When Molotov reported in 1947 that the secret of the atomic bomb did not exist, Kiselev said it was “really so” because Kurchatov and his team knew perfectly well how the atomic bomb should be designed and what was required to construct it, but the Soviet Union lacked sufficient plutonium. “I would say it was a kind of political bluff. In reality we had very little.” In response, Vladimir Tolts of Radio Liberty replied, “Yes, of course, in was a political bluff. We know indeed that atomic bombs entered service only after Stalin’s death [in 1953].”

Following Truman’s announcement of the Soviet atomic test, Western diplomats and government officials in Washington, DC, and in New York City—where the United Nations had just convened—offered sober and guarded comments. Senator Brian McMahon, Chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, stated, “We have our most crucial dilemma”; U.S. Army Chief of Staff Joseph L. Collins had “absolutely no comment”; Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Vishinsky, who had recently surprised his UN colleagues with an “uncharacteristic affability,” smiled blandly and said nothing; and Life magazine argued that the possibility of war was “undoubtedly closer.” In April of the following year, in a report titled “Estimate of the Effects of the Soviet Possession of the Atomic Bomb Upon the Security of the United States and Upon the Probabilities of Direct Soviet Military Action,” the CIA acknowledged that it was not yet possible to estimate with any precision the effects of Soviet possession of the atomic bomb upon the probability of war,” and “the implication of atomic warfare, either military or psychological” had not yet been “fully appraised.”

According to veteran journalist Arthur Krock, of Washington, DC, “Psychologically the super-target of an atomic weapon in enemy hands” received and weighed the President’s announcement with an attitude of calm, blended with resignation and hope. “That the explosion in Russia came sooner by months than some competent authorities expected, and sooner by years than others had,” Krock reflected, “fulfilled the only shock impact that was discernible in government offices and at the Capitol.” Was the shock due to a failure of U.S. intelligence?

Although senior officials at the Atomic Energy Commission sought detection capabilities to avoid an “atomic Pearl Harbor,” intelligence analysts had not seen a Soviet test as a near-term likelihood, and estimates by the CIA’s Office of Research and Estimates (ORE)* were nevertheless significantly off-base. According to an October 1946 report by the Central Intelligence Group (the immediate predecessor of the CIA), “real information” relating to the Soviet nuclear weapons program was “meager.” Nevertheless, the report assessed, it is probable that the Soviet Union might develop an atomic bomb to the stage of production sometime between 1950 and 1953. Based on this assumption, the CIA determined that a quantity of such bombs could be produced and stockpiled by 1956. Then in 1948—in response to questions by the Intelligence Divisions of the Armed Services based on available intelligence a year prior to the first Soviet atomic test—the CIA produced a nearly identical assessment: “The Russians do not have the atomic bomb at this time,” and the “earliest date” the Soviet Union might conduct an atomic test is mid-1950, although mid-1953 was the “most probable date.”

Then in July 1949—six weeks before the Soviet atomic test—an inter-agency assessment by the United States Air Force’s Executive Directorate of Intelligence, like the CIA, was off by approximately two years.

*[Editor’s Note: Subsequent correspondence with the author revealed that ORE was reorganized and renamed on October 27, 1946, as the Office of Reports and Estimates.]

Despite a warning in July 1946 that the Russians would make a “maximum effort” to develop guided missiles and atomic bombs “as quickly as possible,” CIA analysts were apparently so preoccupied with the big picture of Soviet intentions that work on the nuclear issue became a marginal part of their effort. Granted, exceptionally tight security measures in the Soviet Union made accurate estimates of Soviet nuclear activities difficult. Clandestine CIA operatives picked up highly relevant information that ORE failed to consider. According to Henry S. Lowenthaupt, a Yale University graduate and technical sergeant in the Army’s Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) assigned to the Manhattan Project during World War II, CIA scientific intelligence gained some insight into Soviet progress in the nuclear field in the 1940s through painstaking and complex efforts such as the opening of mail and access to bills of
lading, although most Soviet nuclear activities remained beyond the CIA’s grasp. As a result, the analysis of Soviet capability fell far off the mark—intelligence that Lowenhap\textsuperscript{u}t referred to as “thin.”\textsuperscript{16}

According to the Director of Central Intelligence, Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, during the summer of 1947, it was learned that a “high” Soviet official was disturbed by the lack of progress in the atomic project. Nevertheless, it remained “impossible” to determine when the Soviets would have an atomic bomb available, nor was it possible to estimate the number of nuclear weapons the Soviet Union might produce in future years due to “many unknown factors.” Still, the CIA offered the following intelligence estimates for 1955: (a) Based on a mid-1950 test explosion, the greatest possible number of bombs in the Russian stockpile was about fifty; (b) based on a mid-1953 test explosion, the probable number of bombs in the Russian stockpile was about twenty. Then in 1950, five months after the first Soviet atomic test, the CIA was asked to provide intelligence estimates on the ability of the Soviet Union to employ “new weapons, broadly defined” in the event of a “major war” by mid-1951. With respect to the atomic bomb, the CIA wrote:

The atomic explosion within the USSR in August 1949 is believed to be the first successful Soviet atomic bomb test. This event brought into focus information not previously integrated into estimates of Soviet atomic capabilities. It is now estimated, assuming plutonium bombs of roughly 20 kilotons [of TNT] explosive power, that the atomic bomb stockpile available to the USSR will be: [redacted].

The CIA also provided estimates in the event of a major war in 1954. If the simplest type of atomic weapon was assumed “for calculation purposes,” the report said, the Soviet atomic stockpile was estimated to be between 100 and 200 atomic bombs. While the CIA conceded there was “essentially no information on Soviet atomic bomb research,” the Russians could probably develop an atomic warhead for guided missiles. In addition, since the Soviet heavy water program provided certain essential raw materials for the development of the thermo-nuclear bomb, the CIA believed the Russians might develop such a weapon by mid-1954 if its development was “prosecuted vigorously.” The CIA admitted, however, that it had “no basis” for estimating the number of thermo-nuclear bombs, if any, they might produce by that time.

By 1951, however, the CIA had learned its lesson. It not only privately acknowledged that post-war intelligence was inadequate but that Soviet intelligence was superior to U.S. intelligence “in almost every field.” Although the situation would likely improve, the CIA said, “it is only prudent to assume that the U.S.S.R. will continue to secure relatively superior intelligence on the Western Powers in many fields.”

In addition, the U.S. would be “far more hampered by fear of compromising sources” due to the “paucity of overt data on the U.S.S.R.” Left unsaid was the tacit assumption that secrecy is more difficult to protect in a free and democratic society than it is in a country under totalitarian rule.

Los Angeles Times reporter Tad Szulc later argued that the 1917 Russian Bolshevik Revolution and the first Soviet atomic test were the two great turning points of U.S.-Soviet relations. In 1984 Szulc had the opportunity to examine the narrative portion of a highly classified and never-published study on the Soviet atomic program. Hundreds of pages long, most of which were highly technical, the report was assembled by the CIA and specialized scientific organizations. According to Szulc, the report concluded that the success of the Soviet atomic test at the Semipalattinsk test site in modern-day Kazakhstan had not relied exclusively on the “theft” of American secrets, as many had believed. Rather, apart from the conventional industrial espionage in the West, the Russians developed their atomic bomb by harnessing their considerable native talent, captured Nazi scientists, slave labor on a colossal scale for the industrial infrastructure, and the full resources of the KGB’s security forces. Although the Soviet Union is a “comparatively underdeveloped society” in many respects, Szulc wrote, the Russians, when pushed by the demands of national security, can perform “prodigies of scientific and technological achievement.”\textsuperscript{17}

Although the Soviet atomic weapons program officially began in 1943, it only became a top priority after World War II ended. Years earlier, however, Nikolai Semyonov, Director of the Institute of Chemical Physics at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR—in a letter to the Soviet People’s Commissariat of the Oil Industry (the umbrella organization of Semyonov’s Institute)—suggested the possibility that an atomic bomb could be constructed. He received no reply. Then on August 20, 1945, five days after the Japanese declared their surrender, Stalin chose Beria to head the newly formed Special Committee, the leading Soviet organ for the development of nuclear weapons, and Kurchatov, a prominent Soviet nuclear physicist, became the scientific leader of the project. At the same time, a major search for uranium—the substance crucial for all nuclear weapons—was launched. According to a CIA memorandum, the Russians were probably mining “low-grade” uranium ore in Czechoslovakia, Austria, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia “as fast as possible.” Szulc, quoting that 1984 intelligence study said, “It may be said that this was the modest beginning of the Russian atomic project.” Meanwhile, it was “indeed astounding.” Szulc said, that the U.S. remained “wholly unaware” of the Soviet nuclear effort.
Notes
2 At the time, the consensus of opinion was that the power of the Soviet nuclear explosion did not rival the U.S. A-bombs. Only later was it learned that “First Lightning” was nearly an exact copy of “Fat Man,” a plutonium-type 20 KT nuclear weapon.
6 Recently, Yevgeny Lobikov, the leading researcher at the Kurchatov Institute Russian Research Centre, claimed that powerful conventional explosives were detonated at various locations throughout the Soviet Union in an attempt to disguise the upcoming nuclear test. Lobikov, Yevgeny, “Is It Possible to Hide a Nuclear Explosion?” Knowledge Is Power magazine, #4, 2008.
9 According to Life magazine in 1949, “If the first evidence of the burst came from radiation counters it was probably clinched by the seismographs which could have recorded the detonation a few minutes after it occurred. If several such instruments picked up the signal, the location of the explosion could have been established by triangulation.”
14 According to a memorandum to President Truman in July 1948, the Director of the CIA said it was “remotely possible” that the Soviets would conduct an atomic test by mid-1950, but the “most probable date” was mid-1955.
15 After World War II ended, Lowenhaupt, then a civilian, joined the Central Intelligence Group (CIG) and, in 1947, the Central Intelligence Agency when CIA nuclear intelligence work began.

Intelligence Reports and Background Material (in chronological order):


Memorandum No. 22729, R.H. Hillenkoetter, Director of Central Intelligence, July 6, 1948.

“CIA Answers to Selected Questions for the Intelligence Briefing by the Intelligence Divisions of the Armed Services,” CIA Intelligence Memorandum #59, September 20, 1948.


Special Estimate, “Intelligence Implications of the Census and Verification of Armed Forces and Armaments,” CIA, Number 4, May 12, 1951.


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