

Interview with

**DMITRI TIMOFEEVICH YAZOV**

This interview was conducted on March 11, 1999, in Moscow by Oleg Igorevich Skvortsov, project director, *An Oral History of the Cold War*, Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Publication, citation, or general dissemination without the express written consent of the authors is prohibited.

A brief biographical sketch: D.T. Yazov was born in 1924. Member of the CPSU since 1944. Fought in the Great Fatherland War (World War II). Graduated from Frunze Military Academy, 1956. Graduated from the Military Academy of the Soviet Armed Forces General Staff, 1967. Division commander, army corps; army commander; first deputy commander of the Far East military district. Commander of Central Group forces, 1979-89. Commander of forces in Central Asia, 1980-84. Commander of forces in Far East military district, 1984-87. Appointed deputy minister and head of the ministry's Main Administration for Personnel, January 1987. Appointed Minister of Defense, May 1987. Named Marshal of the Soviet Union, 1990. Candidate-member of the Politburo 1987-90. Member of the Presidential Council (appointed March 1990). Member of the Security Council appointed March 1991). Member of the State Committee on the State of Emergency.

O.S. What was the basis of the new defense doctrine adopted under Gorbachev? If I'm not mistaken, it was adopted in 1987?

D.Y. No new doctrine was adopted under Gorbachev. In any case, what do we mean

when we speak of a doctrine? There is a political dimension and a technical one. On the political level, the doctrine assumed the existence of the Warsaw Pact and NATO. NATO and the United States of America were our enemy. This situation remained unchanged in 1987. The Warsaw Pact states consulted with one another, held meetings, and presented their views.

As regards the military and technical aspect of the doctrine, it is widely known that a certain parity in strategic offensive weapons existed. And the level of parity allowed for the mutual destruction not only of the Soviet Union and the United States but of the whole world as well. And so the time was ripe for negotiating reductions in strategic offensive weapons, although this process had already begun under Brezhnev. It was at that time that the negotiations actually began, and several treaties were concluded at that time, in particular, the ABM treaty. The latter was concluded in 1972.

The starting point under Gorbachev was SALT-2. But in Washington in December 1987, the question of reducing medium- and shorter-range missiles was settled and the corresponding treaty signed. But this in no way meant a change in a doctrine that regarded the United States as a potential enemy. The United States remained a potential enemy, as did NATO, and the level of weapons remained comparable. But at the same time active negotiations, which involved thirty-five countries in the Council on Security and Cooperation in Europe, began with respect to conventional arms reductions. And here the United States deceived us. Sometime in 1984 the framework for negotiating conventional weapons was established. And when all the data on the arsenals of the Warsaw Pact and NATO were put on the table, it was clear that the United States didn't wish to take into consideration its conventional forces and weapons. Only its deployments in Europe were included. There were only two corps in Europe. There weren't a lot of weapons there. In our case, weapons in stockpiles and bases were counted together with those in the possession of the troops.

O.S. We included everything that was in our possession up to the Urals?

D.Y. Of course. The entire European part of the Soviet Union and all Warsaw Pact states were included in the framework of these negotiations.

O.S. These circumstances couldn't be changed?

D.Y. Perhaps. They could have been changed if there had been the will in the country's top leadership. But in my opinion neither Shevardnadze nor Gorbachev wanted this. On the contrary, after they received information on how many weapons we had and how our weapons surpassed NATO's by twenty thousand units, they became even more committed to liquidating the imbalance.

So in this instance it makes no sense to confuse the reduction of strategic offensive and conventional weapons with doctrine.

O.S. In other words, we can say that under Gorbachev there was no new doctrine as such.

D.Y. Of course there wasn't.

O.S. And there was no effort to formulate one?

D.Y. A doctrine isn't formulated. The system, the economic base, creates the doctrine. The Finns, for example, cannot make a declaration with respect to nuclear weapons because they have none.

O.S. After Gorbachev came to power wasn't there any attempt at reevaluating basic technical parameters? If the political parameters remain unchanged, as you have observed, then was the technical implementation of the doctrine reconsidered on the basis of the reasonable sufficiency principle?

D.Y. As soon as Gorbachev came to power, people started talking about "reasonable sufficiency" all the time. Not only with respect to our system, but between systems. At this point England and France objected: "Our nuclear resources in this regard are not to be taken into

account. Negotiate with the United States if you like.”

O.S. So we ended up losing on two counts: in terms of nuclear weapons, the countries that took part in conventional weapons talks didn't want to come to any agreement about its nuclear arsenals, and the United States refused to include its conventional weapons in negotiations.

D.Y. Not quite.

O.S. But they failed to include all of their forces, agreeing to reduce only those in Europe!

D.Y. But they didn't refuse categorically. At first, when the framework was being established for the negotiations on the reduction of strategic offensive weapons England and France immediately said: “We're not participating. Let the United States and the Soviet Union negotiate. We only have enough nuclear weapons for self-defense. We're not a threat to anybody.” The same thing happened when negotiations on the reduction of conventional arms in Europe began; now the Americans were committed to the idea that the only thing that was subject to reduction was what lay between the Atlantic Ocean and the Urals; that is, everything the Soviet Union had, in all of Europe, and everything the Americans had in Europe. But up to the Urals we had military districts in the Baltics, Leningrad, Belorussia, the Carpathian mountains, Kiev, Odessa, Transcaucasus, the Northern Caucasus, Moscow, the Urals, and on the Volga: all of populated Russia. Beyond the Urals, the military districts of Novosibirsk, Trans-Baikal, the Far East, as well as Central Asia and Turkestan military regions were the only areas that didn't enter into the talks. If you think about it, the only part of the Soviet Union that was considered was the part in which an absolute majority of the country's population lived and where the greater part of the country's industry was concentrated. So the Americans remained the clear winners.

O.S. So our position at the talks was a weak one.

D.Y. From the beginning, our position on conventional weapons wasn't completely thought out, and on strategic weapons it was thought out only slightly better. Americans had shorter-range missiles, like the Pershing-2, but they had fewer than we had. And we agreed to reduce them. We destroyed almost an entire army of missiles, in all over a thousand medium- and shorter-range missiles, that is, much more than did the Americans. And we made much greater reductions in conventional weapons. You might ask, "Why did you agree to this?" The thing is, the negotiations began long ago, some in 1972, others in the early '80s. I became minister of defense in 1987. So I played hardly any role at all. The process was already mature. If you recall, negotiations were conducted in Reykjavik in 1986, and these ended in an impasse. Nonetheless, everything was prepared for the signing of the Intermediate Forces Treaty in December of 1987. I was appointed only in May of that year. But I couldn't just walk in and say: "Stop! Let's turn back the clock!" I needed to get up to speed. Moreover, we kept enough reserves in strategic offensive weapons to be able at any time to deliver a counterblow to the United States, which would have caused them irrevocable damage. Therefore, although we suffered a setback quantitatively, we remained powerful enough to deal with the United States as equals.

O.S. How did our military leaders perceive the US threat to the Soviet Union? How did you perceive the United States when you were the minister of defense? What was your attitude toward US military policy and policy implementation? Did you perceive the country as a potential enemy or as a partner with whom it was possible to come to an agreement? Or did your perception evolve through various stages?

D.Y. The Soviet Ministry of Defense never carried out an independent policy in international affairs that diverged from that of the government. We followed directives. Ultimately, the General Secretary of the Central Committee supervised and directed everything.

Beginning in 1987, especially after the signing of the treaty on the reduction and liquidation of medium- and shorter-range missiles, more trusting relations were established between the United States and the Soviet Union. You know that Shevardnadze was with Schultz and James Baker day and night. With the latter he walked arm-in-arm. They fished together. The best of friends! Eventually, whether we wanted it or not, such a situation influenced the position of the Ministry of Defense. Even though we understood perfectly well that regardless of how friendly relations were between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Americans were carrying out a policy in accordance with their own interests. Despite our seemingly friendly disposition, they had their troops in Panama and captured General Noriega. The Americans put their troops in Haiti as well and carried out Operation Desert Storm. Unfortunately, we always flattered them, never uttering a harsh word. On the contrary, during his trips Gorbachev accepted the decision about the need for further reductions in armed forces and weapons. That's what our policy was.

However, we constantly expressed our concerns to the United States over the unequal reduction of strategic offensive and other weapons. On many occasions I told Frank Carlucci, the US defense minister, and later Cheney, that America was being sly and deceiving us.

O.S. You said that to them personally?

D.Y. Yes, personally. When the Navy and the means for carrying out a nuclear attack and conventional weapons in the Navy were placed outside the framework of the talks. At that time the US Navy had more than a million men in its ranks, while at its largest our navy personnel amounted to around 400,000. The US Navy was two-and-a-half times the size of ours. And second, a significant part of their strategic offensive weapons was on submarines. Forty-one nuclear submarines equipped with Trident, Polaris, and A-3 missiles continually combed the world's oceans. From a base in England they patrolled the North Sea, the Atlantic, the Indian, and the Pacific oceans. If you were to draw a radius of ten to eleven thousand kilometers, they

had the entire territory of the Soviet Union targeted. And that's not including the enormous number of bases on land.

O.S. And how did Carlucci respond?

D.Y. Carlucci said that the United States was a sea power. If Warsaw Pact countries communicate among each other primarily by land (that is, highways are the key form of transportation), then for the United States sea routes are important. And they were justified in saying this, since their primary forces were in fact in the navy. That's why they placed their navy outside the framework of the negotiations and sought to have our land-based missiles reduced in number or destroyed. If you've noticed, even now negotiations are under way in which the Americans are aiming for the complete liquidation of all our heavy missiles (SS-18, of which we had 308 and which we reduced by 50 percent). But that's the foundation of our power. We deployed these missiles in Kazakhstan. Then we had to take them out of there. As a result, Kazakhstan became a non-nuclear state, as did Ukraine and Belorussia. What does this mean? It means a reduction in area, a reduction in territory. Now the Americans want to abrogate the ABM treaty. They interpret it broadly and want to create a system by which not a single one of our missiles could reach US territory. But these missiles have ten warheads and each might have dozens or more dummy targets. So it's hard to create an anti-missile defense that would protect 100 percent of the country's territory.

O.S. But if our missiles were liquidated, we'd be defenseless. Then it would be easier for them to control us. Right?

D.Y. Without a doubt.

O.S. What kind of proposals, if any, did you and your subordinates put forth in 1988-89 that went against the policy being carried out by Gorbachev?

D.Y. I can't remember now what kinds of proposals were being put forth. Gorbachev

and the group from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that participated in the negotiation process were trying to play give-away with the United States. They were ready to give everything away.

O.S. Why?

D.Y. I think they were in a hurry to come to an agreement as soon as possible. Maybe they were getting some kind of material benefits from the United States. At that time a commission often met that was headed by Zaikov and that discussed, for example, the question of how to account for B-52 planes. This plane was capable of carrying twenty missiles or ten bombs. How was it to be counted – per missile, per shell? As a result, the most advantageous solution for the Americans was settled on, as is always the case when you look at many other issues.

O.S. Did you personally suggest to Gorbachev alternative solutions?

D.Y. Before approaching Gorbachev on this question, I had to get by Zaikov's commission.

O.S. But you could have gone straight to him, bypassing the commission.

D.Y. That's what I did. In response to my information about the commission's decision, Gorbachev said: "Act in accordance with this decision." More often Zaikov would take the whole commission to Gorbachev and say: "Look, they're opposed." Gorbachev would become upset: "Why are you opposed? What do you want, nose to nose, bayonet to bayonet?"

O.S. He meant you and Baklanov?

D.Y. Yes. He said: "What are you? You have to look ahead!"

O.S. And did you ask, in which direction?

D.Y. At that time Gorbachev was general secretary.

O.S. Did he use his authority to apply pressure?

D.Y. It's not that he used his authority to apply pressure, but we had to use certain tact

with him. I'm not an impudent person. Now we can talk about Gorbachev the loser, but at that time he was an important figure. But you also can't say that he consciously accepted such a solution to the questions. He was the one who thought of creating this commission within the Central Committee and placed Zaikov, a member of the Politburo, at its helm; Zaikov seemed to stand above squabbles, not representing the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At its meetings were representatives of the Ministry of Defense, the KGB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the negotiators – in other words, people who took part in negotiations with the United States. They discussed the problem of how to account for various pieces of weaponry, for example the B-52. The negotiators from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were always in favor of adopting the most favorable solution for the United States.

O.S. We all know that there are always alternative positions prepared for any negotiations. It turns out that we immediately agreed to an alternative position to our greatest disadvantage.

D.Y. That's exactly right.

O.S. Were they in a great hurry?

D.Y. I don't know why they were in such a hurry. There was a certain Oleg Alekseevich Grinevsky. I met him in Austria during the CSCE negotiations, which were held in Vienna. At that time all of our latest technology was distributed among our troops in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the Carpathian and Belorussian districts. I made the decision to send a part of this technology beyond the Urals, and at the same time to remove the old technology from there. Formally, we weren't violating anything by doing this. But this Grinevsky scoundrel came out with an article in *Izvestiia* criticizing the Ministry of Defense, who, he alleged, was deceiving somebody.

O.S. Did he sign this article with his real name, or did he write under a pseudonym?

D.Y. He signed his real name. You can draw your own conclusion from this example as to what kind of struggle was going on between the Minister of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We tried to keep anything we could, but they were prepared to give everything away, if only to remain pure in the eyes of the Americans.

O.S. But why didn't Gorbachev like the military?

D.Y. I can't say. Shortly after coming to power, Gorbachev called all the generals "parasites." He didn't like them? Maybe.

O.S. Gorbachev didn't understand defense policy. It seemed that he didn't want to concern himself with it. This is the conclusion I have drawn after reading his books and those of his aides.

D.Y. By that time a certain way of thinking had developed: "If there is going to be a war, then we'll need soldiers. Right now we should concern ourselves with the economy. And what kind of soldiers are these! They must be somewhere on the periphery." Maybe that's why Gorbachev had that kind of attitude. True, he never expressed this point of view in my presence or to me personally. He treated me with great respect. But I think that this attitude came about as a result of the fact that, when he was transferred to the Central Committee, Brezhnev was a marshal, Ustinov was a marshal, and Andropov was an army general. In other words, it was the same group of people that had taken part in the destruction of the Germans during the war. You might have noticed an article once in *Ogonek* that said: "If they thought the German commanders were good-for-nothings, then he, Misha Gorbachev, at age 11, saw in the Germans not some kind of caricatures thought up by Stalin or Stalinist propaganda, but normal, everyday, decent people."

O.S. Was this when Gorbachev was in German-occupied territory?

D.Y. Yes, in 1942. That is, he didn't think of the Germans as caricatures created by Kukrynik and his ilk. And I think this was said about the Germans at a time when Gorbachev

began shuttling back and forth between European countries, when he was made into – and began to be thought of – as an exemplary German.

Maybe there was a certain subtlety at work here. Maybe the West was playing with his pride. But Gorbachev didn't openly come out against the army. He watched the parade on May 9, 1990, which was dedicated to the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory in World War II, with great pride and pleasure. And he didn't just watch, but consulted with me the day before: "What would you think if I were to make a speech at the parade? You receive the parade, enter, and greet the crowd; they'll yell 'Hurrah,' and I'll make a speech as a political figure." I said, "I agree Mikhail Sergeevich, that would be great." And in fact, at a parade celebrating the anniversary, the general secretary, president, and head of state, made a speech honoring not only the soldiers, but everyone, the whole country, for the great victory. This was enough to reawaken the entire nation's memory, the nation in whose name we sacrificed so many lives and today commemorate and celebrate with honor.

Therefore, you can't say unequivocally that he had a hostile attitude toward the army. But at the same time he would say: "The generals are parasites." Which generals were parasites? Maybe he made a generalization on the basis of a single general who was a parasite. Incidentally, among us party members there were a lot of thieves, but not all of them were thieves!

O.S. In your opinion, did Gorbachev believe that he could preserve the Soviet Union?

D.Y. During and after the referendum of March 17, 1991, it seemed to me that he believed he could. It was in the name of preserving the Soviet Union that the referendum was carried out. But after that, when Gorbachev, Yakovlev, and his closest subordinates gathered in Novo-Ogarevo and started discussing a "union of sovereign states", it had become clear that Gorbachev's position had changed. Then he created the so-called council to the president, in which representatives from all the union republics took part. Not secretaries of the republic-level

Central Committees, but the presidents, the chairmen of the Presidia. It was then that I understood that we were talking about the collapse of the Soviet Union. I made speeches at several meetings of this council and said: "How can this be! The army must be united if we want to defend ourselves." Everyone agreed. And what happened? As soon as we split up into groups, the irrevocable process of collapse began. The army was splitting up and was no longer a single defensive unit. And now, even the Commonwealth of Independent States is no more.

O.S. Could we have maintained the status quo in the Cold War in the '80s?

D.Y. No, the Cold War was already of no use to anybody.

O.S. Should we have renounced it?

D.Y. Absolutely. It all comes down to the fact that we didn't have the strength to fight America and Europe. Many people don't take into account the historical record and geography. If you look at it from a historical point of view, all Warsaw Pact countries were weakened during the Second World War.

O.S. And even before the war these weren't exactly the most powerful nations.

D.Y. All these states also took part in the First World War, and they all suffered an economic collapse and the consequences of the two world wars. Thus they were all weaker than other European states.

The second factor is geography. We constituted a sixth of the world's landmass. But this one sixth of the landmass lies in a zone where farming is difficult. Approximately 50 percent of the population lives in the tundra, where nothing grows. And in these circumstances we didn't have the strength to oppose the United States, England, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain – flourishing states that had united in the NATO bloc. We had to find a way to disengage.

O.S. You also understood this?

D.Y. Of course.

O.S. Both when you were deputy minister of defense and when you became minister?

D.Y. Of course I understood. Who didn't understand? We had visited the other states where our troops were stationed.

O.S. So you could say that we ended up at a strategic impasse. All the countries of the world had united against us.

D.Y. All the countries that were wealthier than we were and that had exploited the rest of the world. The United States exploited virtually all of Latin America. Europe exploited Africa and Asia. And we were supposed to help other countries without compensation. So it's not coincidental that India, China, Iraq, Ethiopia, Angola, Cuba, and Mozambique ended up \$90 billion in debt to us. Who didn't owe us! In this situation we really were in no shape to continue the Cold War. We had to find an alternative to the arms race.

O.S. In other words, if in the mid-1980s we had taken stock of our resources and made an appraisal of our possibilities, the conclusion would have been this: we can no longer participate in the arms race.

D.Y. No, you can't say that. We had to look for another alternative.

O.S. I mean at the given level at that time we couldn't keep up.

D.Y. Of course. And in addition to the fact that we ourselves were in a difficult situation, we were still supporting the so-called national liberation movement. And what is the national liberation movement? Giving everything and getting nothing in return. I was in Cuba myself during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and I realized what it cost us.

O.S. And what was your assignment at that time, if it's not confidential?

D.Y. I was the commander of a regiment in Cuba in 1962. All the technical equipment that we brought there we left with the Cubans. This was a very expensive operation, with large sunk costs. There was a price for every tank, every rocket. Billions of dollars altogether. But

what would it have cost to bring it there and back? Given the situation we had to find another solution to the problem. Beginning in 1945 we had been drawn into various conflicts. The war had ended, everything was in ruins. And in 1950-53, there was the war in Korea. How could we stand by without helping?

O.S. Yes, I know, a lot of money was spent. We sent airplanes and advisers there.

D.Y. And when it ended, we gave Kim Il Sen billions, free of charge. We did the same thing at that time with India. Hardly had it achieved independence when we recognized the Indian state in 1947 and concluded an agreement with it. The same thing again with Egypt and Syria. And, naturally, as we rehabilitated the country and helped others, we couldn't create conditions that would allow the Russian people to match the standard of living in Europe and America.

Let's shift, now, to the time of Napoleon, when in 1814 Russian troops returned from Paris. What were people thinking about? About reforms. About how life was better there than here. The same thing has happened in our time. We left our troops in Germany, Hungary, Austria, and Poland. Officers who came back from there said, "Life is good there." They brought back consumer goods with them.

O.S. At the same time you have to keep in mind that you're just talking about countries of Eastern Europe, and not France, or even Switzerland.

D.Y. Of course. Why was it that the sixties generation happened to appear under Khrushchev? Khrushchev initiated a relaxation of control, "the thaw," more open contact with other countries. Here the Israel factor comes into play. The state of Israel was created in 1948. The United States helped the new country, and many of our own people emigrated there. And all this created a particular state of affairs.

O.S. Are you suggesting that our lack of resources should have prevented us from

thoughtlessly entering the “Third World”? We should have paid more attention to rehabilitating our own country?

D.Y. I think that even if our resources allowed us to get involved in the Third World, the economy didn't.

O.S. We needed to concentrate on ourselves before going anywhere else. Establish order at home, rehabilitate the economy, and develop light industry and production of consumer goods.

D.Y. We got too carried away with “the liberation of humanity from the fetters of capitalism!” And we paid the price for it. Maybe we didn't learn how to count properly, maybe we failed to acquire good work habits. But what was it like after the ruin of tsarist Russia, how were we to establish scientific institutions? In essence, after 1917, we built the government anew. We invested so much in basic scientific research, we trained so many specialists! And all at the expense of the people's labor. And the Americans? Theirs is a wealthy state, but they didn't develop basic science as we did. They literally buy up everything they can. So do the Japanese. It has reached the point where our own magazines, imitating the ways of private enterprise, buy the slogan “Just do it.” The problems are tremendous, as you can see.

O.S. But was it possible to resolve the problems facing our country in the 1980s?

D.Y. At the time it seemed to me that we were doing everything right. And the resistance that existed was nonetheless easier than the war. Thanks to parity, we were able to avoid war. Still, it seemed to me that we ought to have negotiated gradually, then cut, cut, cut, especially expensive weaponry.

O.S. And keeping pace with the United States in this category of weaponry was especially costly.

D.Y. It was costly to us, and to the Americans as well. Who got it cheaply? Expensive weaponry costs everyone a lot, but since we paid our workers less than the Americans did, our

weaponry wasn't so expensive.

O.S. But then our GNP was much lower, which is why weapons production wasn't cheap for us.

D.Y. Of course, it wasn't cheap. All the more considering our technology. You can't make an atomic bomb directly from the ore that is mined. And you can't set up the electronics immediately, either. When it comes to high technology, ambition is not enough. You have to train personnel, and training takes time

O.S. Did we have good personnel in the mid-80s?

D.Y. They were good, and we provided training for them. We had a system for professional education at plants and factories. We had many design bureaus with a lot of experience; their work didn't involve just academic abstractions but was directly associated with production. Every ministry had its own affiliated institutes. The Ministry of Defense alone had one hundred scientific research institutes.

O.S. Is it really possible that we couldn't use all this potential for resolving those problems Gorbachev posed: acceleration, progress in science and technology?

D.Y. You know, for Gorbachev these were just catch phrases. No program had been worked out: no what or how. No sequence.

O.S. In your opinion, there was no comprehensive program?

D.Y. Of course there wasn't. There were words: "The acceleration of progress in science and technology," "uniting science with production." But who was supposed to do this? And how was it supposed to be accomplished?

O.S. So people didn't sit down days and nights on end to work out some kind of strategy?

D.Y. No! Okay, only the team in charge of cutting strategic offensive weapons worked well. But with respect to the introduction of high technology that would help achieve certain

types of production – all we got was vague talk and calls to action.

O.S. One of the people that I interviewed told me that there was indeed a restructuring program. There were allocations of about 200 billion rubles for renewing basic funds for machine building. Seventy billion was earmarked for the development of technology in light industry and food production. Supposedly everything was signed.

D.Y. I don't know. I'm not aware of it, at any rate. Maybe Gosplan did in fact propose something in its plans. I didn't see any such program. We gave industry a job. They fulfilled our assignment, put out new tanks and sold the old ones (if anyone bought them from us). Most likely, we gave them away. It's hard now to gather pieces of the story together and set it all out. Beginning with Stalin's death, the leadership made so many mistakes, they enabled certain people to blame everything on the communist party and the communists. And yet who was it, if not the communists, who destroyed Germany by creating a material base for victory? After all, in order to beat the Germans, you had to create a material base. But it wasn't just Germany we were fighting. We were fighting all of Europe. Three hundred and seventy million people took part in the war against us. All of Europe, except for England. If you want to take them in order, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Romania, France, Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Finland, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. Even though the last two were considered neutral, the Swedes delivered 8.4 million tons of chromium ore to the Germans. Switzerland also worked for the Germans, selling them precision equipment for planes and rockets. And if we hadn't had a material base, we wouldn't have won. We created this material base in something like thirteen or fifteen years.

O.S. In general, history shows that many governments are always uniting against us. Have you noticed this tendency?

D.Y. Exactly. But we'll never learn from experience how to shatter this united front.

And now everyone is uniting against us: Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. Uzbekistan doesn't want anything to do with us anymore. The same with Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Moldavia.

O.S. What do you think, was Gorbachev an idealist?

D.Y. Gorbachev himself thought that he was a Marxist and materialist. He still thinks so. But he's probably more of an idealist than materialist, both in terms of his knowledge and his actions.

O.S. In other words, he is more an idealist?

D.Y. A subjective idealist. He gets an idea in his head, for example, or borrows it from someone else, and he starts to analyze it: what others say, what's really going on. So he liked the capitalist way of life. Margaret Thatcher instilled this in him...

O.S. You think meeting with Thatcher was a defining moment in Gorbachev's life?

D.Y. Not quite. This idea was later developed for him by Yakovlev. As soon as Gorbachev came to power, Yakovlev turned up in Moscow. He took the most active part in preparing the speech for the Twenty-seventh Party Congress. I was at that Congress as the commander of troops of the Far East district.

O.S. Did you meet Gorbachev at this time?

D.Y. No, we had met earlier. I was then the commander of troops in Central Asia district. We were at meetings in Belorussia, I think. At that time Sergei Leonidovich Sokolov was the minister of defense. Gorbachev arrived there one day to inspect the new technology. It was there that Sokolov introduced me to him as the troop commander in Central Asia. But we met even before that, at plenums of the Central Committee, of which I was a member. True, I never spoke with him face to face. I got to know him better in the Far East when he came there.

It's hard to recreate everything now, to determine at what time Gorbachev started to betray his people, his government. I'm sure that he personally doesn't think that there was any

betrayal. He thinks he wanted to do what was best but that he was unsuccessful because the people didn't understand. And why didn't the people understand? Because he talked a lot but didn't do anything. When Gorbachev arrived in the Far East district, I called together all the members of the war council and commanders of the armies (at that time in the Far East district there were about five armies, three border districts, the most powerful army of the anti-aircraft defense, an air force). All told, there were about 50 people. My chief of staff was Ivan Alekseevich Moiseev. When I informed them about the state of the district, about the general state of affairs in the Far East, I naturally told the truth. I said: "Mikhail Sergeevich, there are fewer than six million men on such an enormous territory. And in order for us to be combat ready, we need about one million from the center. But every year you take about three thousand automobiles for gathering the harvest. For this you have to call up additional civilians. Already there are not enough people here, and they're being sent off to places with much larger populations: Central Asia, Kazakhstan, etc. We're taking cars from the Kuril Islands and Kamchatka." Gorbachev agreed and was indignant: "Why don't they inform me about this?" He seemed to understand everything. But after I became minister, he issued a command: "Give us thirty thousand men for the harvest." Gorbachev looked upon the army like a worker's brigade. Nonetheless, after his speech in the Far East I had the impression that he understood the army's needs.

And who recommended me for the position of defense minister, whose initiative was this? To this day I don't know. Sergei Fedorovich Akhromeev called me in the middle of the night: "There is a session of the Politburo tomorrow at 1000 hours. You are required to attend." Savinkin led me into the meeting hall after the discussion. Gorbachev says: "We have consulted and have decided to appoint you defense minister. What do you think?" I answer: "I'm not ready." "Okay, we'll give you twenty-four hours to start your new responsibilities."

In general, Gorbachev had a funny way of talking, and compared with his predecessors, of course, he was in good physical shape. He was young compared to them. He was 54 when he became general secretary. Others were in their sixties or seventies when they assumed the position. There was a twenty-year age difference with some of them. Since he hadn't been anywhere except Stavropol, and because the Stavropol krai is an agricultural region, he started playing with the workers. He started with Leningrad, going to the workers brigades. The film of his meeting is well known. Then he went to Krasnoyarsk. But you can't fool the people. I was there in 1986 when Gorbachev came to Komsomolsk-on-Amur, where he visited an aviation plant, as well as a submarine plant. There he couldn't strike up a conversation. He even got rude: "There's no outshouting you!" He let loose words like: "as a result of the consensus," "advances in science and technology". But workers are interested in whether or not they have a job, a home, food to feed their families; whether they receive their wages on time; and whether they can get the things they need.

O.S. So it was clear early on that Gorbachev was isolated from the people?

D.Y. From the very beginning. He just couldn't find his bearings on many issues. When the conversation turned to agriculture, he knew his stuff. For example, when he was still secretary of the Central Committee on agriculture, he came to Kazakhstan with Kunaev. At that time I was a member of the Central Committee bureau of the Kazakh Communist Party and heard Kunaev say that Gorbachev was pleased with his visit. Kunaev himself was pleased. But this trip for Gorbachev touched only on agriculture. He didn't visit a single ore-enrichment complex or a single factory.

O.S. So it seems that Gorbachev was lacking in knowledge.

D.Y. It's hard to say what he was lacking. Stalin, for example, had it all.

O.S. Dmitri Timofeevich, thank you for this interesting interview.