

10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister mt

The Soviet Defence  
Minister and the Head of  
the Soviet Air Defence  
Command have both been  
sacked by the Politburo —  
in response to the incident  
involving the West German  
aircraft.

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MR POWELL ✓ EDP 2/6

c Sir Robert Armstrong

Soviet Union: Defence Shake-up

Gorbachev has clearly decided to use the arrival of Herr Rust and his aircraft in Red Square as a pretext for shaking up the Soviet military establishment. The Defence Minister, Marshal Sokolov, and the Air Defence Forces Commander-in-Chief, Koldunov, have both been sacked (Sokolov's departure was euphemistically termed "retirement"). A Politburo statement referred to "major omissions in the management of troops on the part of the Soviet Ministry of Defence" and a decision was reportedly taken to strengthen the Ministry's leadership.

2. The retirement of Marshal Sokolov had been rumoured for some time. He is 75, and a Brezhnev appointee. But he had recently been active, and was with Gorbachev in East Berlin for the Warsaw Pact Summit when the incident occurred.

3. His replacement, General Yazov, is a complete surprise. He has only been a Deputy Minister of Defence since February, and has now leapfrogged over the three First Deputy Ministers, General Lushev and Marshals Kulikov and Akhromeyev. We assume that Gorbachev hopes thereby to have created a new broom, which will be responsive to the leadership's direction.

4. Yazov is only a Candidate Member of the Central Committee. He may get promotion to full membership at this month's Central Committee Plenum but promotion to the Politburo, while possible, seems unlikely then. The lack of Politburo representation will be a sign that the influence of the military establishment has been further reduced. (There has been no full representation of the military in the Politburo since Sokolov's predecessor.)



5. We can probably expect some major overhauling of the Soviet air defence apparatus. And the rules of engagement for aircraft infringing Soviet air space are likely to be changed. This would increase the risk of further KAL 007 incidents.

6. We are preparing a paper on this subject for this Thursday's JIC.

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CONQUEROR

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