



1983: Reagan. Andropov and a World on the Brink

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Little Brown, New York, 2018, pp. 400

Downing demonstrates how on 9 November 1983 the USSR put its nuclear forces on high alert in fear of a pre-emptive US nuclear strike, bringing the world close to nuclear war. (Fortunately the US did not react rapidly.) Whereas in 1962 both sides in the Cuba crisis knew it could trigger nuclear war (and tried frantically to avert it), in 1983 the Reagan Administration had no idea that its renewed Cold War anti-communist rhetoric and military build-up (including 'Star Wars' plans) were seen by Moscow as a rationale and strategy for an attack. A NATO exercise and change in codes were therefore interpreted as a prelude to attack. Downing revealed the main lines of this story in a TV documentary in 2008.

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