Preface

Controversy over the performance of the Central Intelligence Agency during the Cold War has raged since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union. From its origins in 1947, the Agency had, as one of its major missions, the responsibility of analyzing and explaining the intentions and capabilities of the Soviet Union to US policymakers. It was a daunting task. A tightly controlled society, the Soviet Union presented CIA analysts with major challenges as they struggled to make sense of its political, economic, military, and scientific developments. CIA was not always correct in its analysis but the Agency, over the decades, made a unique contribution in helping US policymakers understand America's major adversary. As a long time intelligence analyst, then Deputy Director for Intelligence, and finally Director of Central Intelligence, I spent much of my career watching and analyzing the Soviet Union. In my judgment, overall, the CIA performed admirably in meeting the challenges of assessing Soviet strengths and weaknesses. Others disagree.

I have always believed that the record of actual intelligence assessments represents the best defense of CIA's and the Intelligence Community's analytical performance vis-à-vis the USSR – the good, the bad and the ugly. Thus, as DCI, I began the systematic process of declassifying intelligence assessments from the Cold War, beginning with all National Intelligence Estimates on the USSR. My successors have continued this process. This latest compilation of key documents from CIA's files and the related declassification and release of a large amount of new material on CIA analysis of the USSR will further help scholars and the public assess for themselves CIA's analytical performance during the Cold War. Making these materials available to everyone is a major step in furthering the dialogue. Researchers may now judge the accuracy of CIA forecasts and with that judgment gain deeper insight into the impact of CIA analysis on US policymakers. As a strong believer in government openness, I applaud this effort and look forward to continuing declassification and release programs by the Agency.

Robert M. Gates,
former Director of Central Intelligence