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USSR/ANDROPOV
DEATH

BELL: In Moscow yesterday, Bush had what he called an excellent talk with the new Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko.

SIMPSON: Last week U.S. officials didn't learn that Soviet leader Yuri Andropov had died until the Soviets announced his death nearly 24 hours later. That underscored U.S. problems with getting information on the Soviet Union and its rulers. Rick Inderfurth reports.

INDERFURTH: The U.S. intelligence community, headed by William Casey, and made up of 12 different departments or agencies, including the super secret National Security Agency, which listens in on worldwide communications, Air Force intelligence, which takes those high-altitude spy photographs, and the Central Intelligence Agency, with its network of agents and spies. All told, an estimated 150,000 people work in U.S. intelligence at an operating cost of over \$12 billion a year. But when it comes to the Soviet Union, specifically its leaders and their policy deliberations, the intelligence pickings are very slim. One recent example. That woman is the widow of Yuri Andropov. She came as a surprise to U.S. intelligence, which didn't know she existed. The private lives of Kremlin leaders are very private. A few years ago things were a little better. U.S. intelligence was able to eavesdrop on the radio conversations of Soviet leaders as they rode around Moscow in their big limousines, but no longer. Now those conversations are scrambled. Today there is an occasional glimpse behind those Kremlin walls by a defector or a revealing comment in the Soviet press, but only rarely. So U.S. intelligence is left with what can best be described as informed speculation about Soviet intentions. And that leads to a disturbing conclusion. The nation we need to know the most about, we know the least. Rick Inderfurth, ABC News, the Pentagon.