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By Joseph Goulden

# "MR. PRESIDENT THEY'RE GOING TO BOMB WASHINGTON"

## SUNDAY, AUGUST 21

Two days after Leonid Brezhnev's fatal stroke, with the Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia stalled short of the oil installations, Kremlinologist Victor Zorza wrote in the *Washington Post*: "One could pose as an oracle and pontificate about the power struggle now taking place inside the Kremlin, and its impact upon the Soviet-sponsored Middle East war. The fact of the matter, however, is that no one in Washington has the slightest idea what is happening—including Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin himself."

## MONDAY, AUGUST 22

The watch officer woke Stansfield Turner, the director of Central Intelligence, at 3:47 AM and said, "I think you had better come in." Turner did not ask any questions. He grunted, put down the phone, and was at Langley in half an hour, pouring himself a cup of Navy-black coffee. He listened to the briefing, interrupting only once. "Are you absolutely positive Firefly is reliable? The President is going to ask me the same question, and I want to be able to assure him that our Soviet friends aren't passing along disinformation." The briefer—a stooped, white-haired man in his mid-50s, eyes distorted by thick glasses, fingers indelibly stained by omnipresent Turkish cigarettes, asked Turner, "How much

This blend of facts about Washington's civil defense preparedness and fiction about what might happen to the city if there were an imminent threat of nuclear war is the work of Joseph C. Goulden, a *Washingtonian* contributing editor and the author of eight books, most recently *The Best Years*, published earlier this year by Atheneum.



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