

# [Less to prove it.” robert norris, senior analyst](https://assignbuster.com/less-to-prove-it-robert-norris-senior-analyst/)

Less than a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a group of Russia’s topatomic-weapons scientists agreed to sell to the United States a massive, secret study of Soviet nuclear-weaponstesting, providing firsthand information about Cold War events stretching over more than four decades, accordingto documents and interviews with key Russian participants. The history project, which was led by Alexander Tchernyshev, a theoretical physicist at Russia’s firstnuclear-weapons laboratory, remains shrouded in secrecy both in Russia and the United States. But the scope of the project — a detailed, 2, 000-page history of 715 Soviet nuclear tests over 41 years — isunprecedented, and appears to have given the United States valuable insights into Soviet military and scientificprocedures.

It could also help U. S. specialists better prepare to monitor any future nuclear explosions by roguestates that defy a new ban on nuclear tests. Starting in December 1992, Tchernyshev and about 200 other scientists wrote the history under contract tothe U.

S. Defense Special Weapons Agency for a fee of $288, 501. At the time, the scientists were sufferingeconomically and the United States was trying to prevent them from taking their nuclear-weapons know-howelsewhere. The information the scientists provided was the objective of a long and costly detection and monitoring effortby the United States during the Cold War.

By filling in the gaps, the history will help the Pentagon betterunderstand Russian procedures, and adjust its systems to allow better monitoring of tests in the future. According to a 10-page outline of the report, much of the work of the Russian scientists appears to have beenon scientific themes, such as measurements of radioactivity and the impact of nuclear tests on the environment andpeople. The history did not directly delve into the design or deployment of the Soviet — and now Russian –nuclear arsenal, and would probably not affect nuclear strategy or arms control. Tchernyshev said the Russian scientists did not divulge state secrets.

However, he acknowledged that theinformation was “ sensitive.” He said all the material was screened by a Russian declassification process, “ andwe have the documents to prove it.” Robert Norris, senior analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council in Washington, has tracked Sovietand U.

S. nuclear testing for a decade. He described the Russian project as a potential “ intelligence gold mine” for U. S.

policy-makers. The 200 authors each received about $500, Tchernyshev said, with the rest going to taxes and expenses. Atthe time, the average monthly wage in Russia was $38.