On March 4, 1961, a guided missile intercepted and destroyed the approaching warhead of an intermediate range ballistic missile SS-4 at the Saryshagan test site in the Kazakhstan desert. This event led to the emergence of a powerful political, military, scientific-technological, and industrial missile defense complex in the Soviet Union, a major factor in shaping U.S. defense programs and technologies during the Cold War.

Dr. Mike Gruntman is professor and chair of astronautics at the University of Southern California (USC). His life journey took him from a child growing on the Tyuratam (Baikonur) missile and space launch base during the late 1950s and early 1960s to an accomplished space physicist and engineer to joining USC in 1990.