

ERIC
MARGOLIS



KGB killers

Last week one of the U.S. intelligence agencies leaked a fascinating bit of news that gives us a small but laser-sharp insight into the nature of life in the Soviet Union.

Over the past 18 months, according to this report, 10 Soviet senior air defence officers in the Far Eastern military district were shot.

These officers were executed by the KGB because they had apparently failed to shoot down RC-135 and SR-71 American intelligence aircraft that had been skirting Kamchatka, the Kuril Islands and southern Sakhalin Island, Russia's second most sensitive air defence zone.

The Americans have admitted that one of their RC-135s was in the general area of the doomed South Korean airliner. The Russians now claim that there were seven U.S. spy aircraft airborne that day. Reconnaissance aircraft often fly very close to regular civilian flights in order to mask their presence from ground radars. The Russians will probably claim that this is exactly what happened to Korean Air Lines Flight 007.

Lately, the Pentagon has been speaking of a new strategy aimed at destroying Russia's Far Eastern bases in the event of a Soviet attack on Europe. The Russians have reacted with intense alarm, well aware of the vulnerability of their distant Pacific bases that are menaced on three sides by the U.S., China, Japan and South Korea.

With this gruesome example freshly in mind, it is not difficult to understand why the senior officers of the Russian air defence command would be trigger-happy. Presented with an intruding aircraft virtually over their heads, the Russians had the unpleasant choice of shooting it down or letting it escape and thus facing a KGB special execution squad.

Heinous act

Whether the decision to shoot down the Korean airliner was made in Moscow or Vladivostok is unimportant. The significance of this heinous act is what it tells us about the communist rulers of Russia, people whom our media and peace activists claim are very much like ourselves. They are not.

Russia is still an empire run by terror. Perhaps not the Mongol-like cruelty of Stalin, but still a system of fear that permeates all levels of Russian society. The executioner's bullet awaits "anti-state elements," hoarders and capitalists, "defeatists," traitors, drunken drivers and a host of other malefactors.

Russia's rulers live in terror of their 273 million citizens, almost half of whom do not even speak Russian. They live in fear of the armed forces, maintaining a separate KGB army to watch the regular army. The citizens of Russia live in daily fear of the KGB and its hundreds of thousands of paid informers. They live in constant apprehension of a government that can take away their jobs and apartments without any process of law. They live in awe of petty bureaucrats who can easily make the life of an ordinary citizen unbearable.

Pall of fear

This pall of fear has been wonderfully described by Victor Suvarov, a Russian army officer who defected to the West. In his book *Inside the Soviet Army*, Suvarov paints a lugubrious portrait of a vast military force of sullen conscripts who are treated like medieval serfs and ruled by the iron hand of terror.

Fear of superiors, fear of subordinates, fear of KGB informers, fear of prisons and cruel punishment are all, according to Suvarov, the abiding nature of the Soviet armed forces.

Military analysts also know that behind each Russian division facing Europe is a special KGB military unit whose mission, in the event of war, is to shoot down any Russian soldiers seeking to retreat, surrender or flee. These "Smersh" units proved remarkably effective during World War II, executing hundreds of thousands of Russians, from privates to generals.

Living in this constant state of fear and terror, is it any wonder that a group of Russian air defence officers would risk their lives by failing to shoot down an intruding aircraft. Why should the Russians, who have butchered tens of millions of their own people, show concern for a plane-load of foreigners?

Russia's action in shooting down the Korean airliner should show us that the secretive band of men who lead the USSR, and the millions of regimented agents who enforce this power, are very different from us. Much of our media, our churchmen, and our other resident leftists would have us believe that the Russians are simply misunderstood, frightened introverts who can be brought to a state of peaceful coexistence by moderation and mutual understanding.

The destruction of Flight 007 should show even the most credulous that an empire whose motive force is the bullet and the gulag operates on a very different moral and ethical system alien to the West. Are we to rely on the humanity and goodwill of the Soviets, expressed through non-aggression pacts and treaties, to ensure that their odious system is not imposed upon us through sheer brute force?

Are we to give the Russians the benefit of the doubt, as suggested by Jean-Luc Pepin. Or shall we now realize, confronted by the latest evidence of Russia's utter contempt for human values, that the Soviet empire is, in fact, a genuine menace, and one that can only be contained within its own unhappy borders by the armed might of the West.

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