

Can U.S. policy stand the heat?

by D. Stephen Pepper

In the wake of the cold-blooded Soviet decision to shoot down the KAL 7 jetliner and escalate the drive toward thermonuclear confrontation with the United States, the Reagan administration has redoubled its efforts to gear up America's strategic defense, and has publicly re-emphasized the U.S. commitment to develop defensive beam weapons to end the threat of nuclear war. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger took the occasion of his keynote address to the Air Force Association in Washington on Sept. 12 to reiterate the President's March 23 strategic doctrine: "To those who say we should not pursue this new technology I say we have no choice."

Weinberger's address, virtually blacked out in the U.S. press, puts back on the agenda of strategic priorities the one potential for reviving America the Soviets fear most—a beam weapons-driven technological revolution ensuring U.S. military and economic survival.

Secretary Weinberger encompassed the theme of security and prosperity in a discussion of "the importance of human ingenuity." He told the Air Force Association, "It is fortunate that nature gives us a steady supply of younger men because we cannot get along without imagination. It was imagination that made Leonardo da Vinci cry, 'There shall be wings.' It was imagination that made Wilbur and Orville Wright build them. And it is imagination that we will need as we try to create a safer, more prosperous, more peaceful world for ourselves and our children."

As an exemplary "new idea," Weinberger cited President Reagan's announcement "that the United States would take a new look at emerging technologies to see whether we could at some point in the future develop a defensive system that

could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reach our own soil or that of our allies. The naysayers have already proclaimed that we will never have such technology, or that we should never try to acquire it. Their arguments are hardly new."

Weinberger called the strategy of deterrence based on instant retaliation "an uncomfortable way to keep the peace" and attacked those who cling to the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction. "There will still be some who close their minds to the dream of a world where fear of nuclear weapons is wiped away," he noted. "It is possible that in this dangerous world we actually fear to look upon a vista of greater safety, that we fear mankind will once again be disappointed in the quest for a lasting peace. But just as those first aviators had the imagination to look into the future and the courage to help shape it, let us also bring imagination and courage to the future, which it is our responsibility to shape."

Weinberger's speech is a forceful response by the Reagan administration to the Kremlin's determination that the U.S. political and policy leadership can be cracked by turning up the heat all around the world—the determination that lay behind the command decision to shoot down KAL 7 and murder 269 human beings. That action set in motion new laws governing superpower relations that greatly accelerate the momentum toward nuclear war. Although the decision to shoot down the jet arises from a military mode of thinking dominating Moscow policy and already identified by Lyndon LaRouche last April, the incident marks a qualitative shift, a turning point that American policy-makers and politicians hysterically deny.

Reagan's Democratic competitors have responded in such

a way to call into question their sanity, their morality, or both. The six main announced contenders for the presidential nomination, as *EIR* documented last week, all attacked the President for not doing enough while denying that there were any long-term implications of the shutdown to require them to drop the nuclear freeze. All that has happened since then is that George McGovern has announced his candidacy on a straight arms control line.

The right wing has been even more absurd in its tantrum at the Soviets. The storm center of this reaction has been Howard Phillips, Richard Viguerie, Phil Crane and their allies in such groups as the Moral Majority and the American Conservative Union. These circles, in urging a knee-jerk reaction, have been much more venomous toward the President than the liberals. Things have gone so far that in this moment of crisis, Viguerie and Phillips announced the search for a candidate to oppose Reagan. These individuals' fundamental blunder is their inability to admit that the Russians are seeking a confrontation, and if we fuel that attitude, we will lose. It is a sound measure of Reagan's sanity that, despite the infantile ravings from this circle, he has avoided exactly the traps which the right wing would have us fall into.

Indeed, it was the conservatives who denied the President the support of a unanimous vote in the Senate for a resolution condemning Soviet actions. The fact that the leadership resolution had been drafted by Sen. Jeremiah Denton (R-Ala.), a man who has directly experienced the harshness of war, did not deter Senators Armstrong, Symms, and Helms from trying to block it. They put forward an amendment to the resolution to recall the U.S. ambassador and temporarily suspend all negotiations: just those steps the Soviet Union would welcome from Reagan. Then, in a moment of great cleverness, they called for declaring the Polish debt in default, a move that might bring down the West's rickety credit structure. All amendments were voted down.

Think tankers right and left: no method

The sharp divisions that dominate the country's reaction are reflected in the reports of in-depth discussions this writer conducted recently with resident think tankers responsible for pronouncing on policy. Although the individuals quoted here are two conservatives and two liberals, common to all of them is the denial that anything special happened with the shooting down of the jet. For the conservatives it was simply the demonstration of what they had always known and which remains unchanged, the brutal, criminal nature of the Soviet system. For the liberals it represented some kind of aberration due to Soviet paranoia or a military cold coup, which should not, however, prevent us from conducting business as usual.

Milton Katz of Harvard University Law School characterized the incident as "damned foolishness."

Katz is a member of the European Security Study Group, whose study seeks to prove that Europe can be defended through conventional arms buildup without nuclear weapons. Hence he has a vested interest in dismissing the shutdown as anything that would provoke rethinking of his group's

strategic assessment. Beyond that, Katz is a leading advocate of incremental austerity, that is, reduction of military and cost of living expenditures. But he finds that the political remedies to curtailing the worldwide demand for higher living standards are not at hand. "How to accomplish this is the stickler," he laments.

Or, in essence: "If reality demands that I give up my pet prejudices and positions, well, the hell with reality." While Katz is the most outrageous in this practice, it ran through all my discussions. Stanley Hoffman, also of Harvard, explained the incident as "standard operating procedure. . . . This may not be very reassuring, but that's pretty much the way it was, local commanders making autonomous decisions." This self-consoling thesis relieves one of having to rethink the strategic realities of the world in light of the decision to shoot down the jet. Hoffman maintains one of the canned explanations of the event, namely, a military decision made without due political considerations. The critical factor in Hoffman's response is: "I don't know of any Soviet who thinks they [the Soviets] have achieved strategic superiority." Neither Hoffman nor any other liberal "thinker" is prepared to entertain the significance of the shutdown from exactly that standpoint—as a crucial demonstration that the Soviets not only think they have achieved superiority but are prepared to act on it in a provocative way.

Conservatives are much more inclined to accept that standpoint and therefore are closer to reality (this however does not apply to right-wingers). Both William van Cleave at University of Southern California and Edward Luttwak at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic International Studies grasp the point that the Soviets committed a deliberate act of brutality to achieve the political effect of terrorizing and intimidating their enemies. Van Cleave formulated it thus: "We are on course for a confrontation, not excluding a nuclear confrontation, and the Soviets are convinced that we will draw back from it before they will."

But van Cleave has no policy proposal to make to avoid a Cuban-missiles confrontation except to plunge ahead by recalling ambassadors, etc. The reason is that he is skeptical of beam-weapons defense and therefore can see no way out but trying to draw the line in terms of the incident itself. Luttwak did see that the most important response to the crisis is not in relative degree of tough actions now, but in next year's defense budget. For him the most important effect of the event is to give Reagan "license to revert to his own instincts," that is to assert his commitment to a defense modernization policy. Luttwak also asserts, almost certainly correctly, that it means the end of the planned spring 1984 summit, which is bad news for Henry Kissinger. But on Soviet intentions, he sees merely continuing brutality.

What this reveals is that among politicians and think tankers alike there is little or no consistent method to evaluate reality. Instead, what passes for thinking is the impressing upon events of each person's prejudged positions. The striking exception to this is Lyndon LaRouche and the National Democratic Policy Committee that he has shaped.