

• According to *Time* (Sept. 12), a White House aide "reminded" us (and not merely "claimed" or "argued") that KAL-007 shows Reagan "was right" when he said the U.S.S.R. is "essentially evil."
 "A Soviet pilot told his ground station that he was close enough to see the Korean airliner," asserted *Time* (Sept. 12), taking for granted without much evidence that the Soviets knew they were shooting civilians — an assumption amplified by Reagan but strongly challenged later by the U.S.'s own intelligence experts. (See *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 7)

• The *Globe's* first post-KAL-007 editorial was entitled "the deadly ambush." The incident "provided as shocking a testimony to Soviet perfidy as any Red-baiter could have imagined," said the *Globe*; the Soviets were "murderers" and their empire "a contradiction of the civilized, humane values we in the West cherish." Compare this with its editorial on the Sinai disaster. Written before Israel had admitted any wrongdoing or offered compensation, it was headlined "the deadly error." The *Globe* could find no harsher words than "an arrogant blunder by the Israeli military establishment" which is "in a mood to shoot first and ask later". There was no attempt to link the "error" with, e.g., Zionist "perfidy".

Defining the Issues: a Hierarchy of Access

Carleton journalism professor Peter Bruck has identified five discourses about disarmament in the mass media: those produced respectively by leaders of states (especially the superpowers), diplomats, disarmament experts, the victims of war, and the disarmament movement. As "alternative" discourses, these last two are generally subordinated in the mainstream media.

KAL-007 coverage showed much the same pattern. Who provided "the facts", who were the "primary definers" of the issue? The reports are filled with quotes from Reagan and his aides, senior Canadian and American politicians, Tass news agency, the Soviet chief of staff, U.N. ambassadors, "intelligence experts", and "diplomatic sources".

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By contrast, in their combined 45 pages of coverage, *Time* and *Newsweek* quoted an "antinuclear activist" just once. Out of the *Globe's* 129 articles, just one (and a small portion of another) gave reactions from the peace movement.

However, in contrast to the Sinai incident and many other war stories, the victims had a prominent place in news coverage; 13 *Globe* articles concerned the victims, their families, and memorial services. This time, the focus on victims suited "the West's" ideological purposes. Every fresh report of pathetic wreckage or mutilated bodies washed ashore in Japan reminded us of the atrocity of the passengers' deaths. In itself, this is commendable. If only such attention were paid to all victims of military actions — e.g., the hundreds of thousands of civilians butchered by the U.S.-backed Indonesian regime.

Underplaying the Soviets' Legal Rights

The legal aspects of KAL-007 received relatively little attention — e.g., just one *Globe* article, and a sidebar in *Time* and *Newsweek* which emphasized alleged Soviet violation of the rules of interception. Perhaps this is not surprising, since the Soviets' action, if not moral, may well have been lawful, and legal arguments did not figure prominently in the West's response. According to international law expert L.C. Green, KAL had no right, in the absence of a bilateral agreement, to fly in any Soviet territory. Moreover, the U.S.S.R. has the right to declare areas totally closed for security reasons, and "to take such measures as it considers necessary" to protect them. The treatment of off-course aircraft "depends on local legislation," adds Green; they "run the risk of being forced down or perhaps destroyed if they disregard the overflow state's demands."

Unlike the London *Times* (Sept. 13 and 15), the

Globe did not report the International Air Transport Association's judgement that the U.S.S.R. has "a pretty sound case in law," because it "issued advanced warning to all airlines that it reserved the right to protect the integrity of its air-space around Sakhalin island 'by any means,' which included shooting down even civil aircraft."

With all its inadequacies, international law ought not to be fetishized. But had this aspect received more media coverage, Western outrage might have been tempered.

Underplaying Reagan's Politics

"The incident reveals no horrors of the Soviet system that we were not already aware of, and if, as all but the most conspiratorial Sovietologists apparently surmise, it was not a deliberate act of Soviet policy, then it does not tell us anything whatever about Soviet intentions," wrote David Watt in the *Times* (Sept. 9). But Reagan's rhetoric "has been employed to portray the tragedy as fresh and startling evidence of Soviet aggression and therefore of the need to spend vast sums on defence, especially on the MX missile — and it will probably succeed."

The intelligence of this appraisal was not much in evidence from what I have seen of the North American press. Did the Reagan administration

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exploit the tragedy to win propoganda points? Is the Pope Catholic? After all, the U.S. could initially have gone to the Soviets privately with the taped evidence, using the threat of its public release to press for an explanation and compensation. Instead, despite knowing the Soviets' obsession with public face, the U.S. disclosed it at the U.N. and backed them into a corner. *Newsweek* gave this specific scenario just two sentences out of its 25 pages of coverage; *Time* and the *Globe* did not mention it.

Nor have the media, in their apparent relief at the realism of Reagan's immediate sanctions against the U.S.S.R., examined the relationship between his rhetoric and the long-term strategy revealed by Robert Scheer in *With Enough Shovels*: the abandonment of deterrence, the development of nuclear war-fighting capability, and the use of the arms race to shrink the Soviet empire and alter Soviet society. Blind to this, *Time* (Sept. 19) could see Reagan's plug for the MX missile in his "Korean airline massacre" speech only as a "jarringly inappropriate note". The long-term objectives of American militarism may have been disclosed in a release on "the massacre" by D. Hamm of the Heritage Foundation, a well-heeled right-wing think tank. It questions "the confidence the U.S. can vest in arms control agreements". Instead of relying on the U.S.S.R. not to attack, the U.S. should develop weapons to destroy "approaching Soviet missiles" — a Dr. Strangelove option that would cost hundreds of billions even if were technically feasible, that would increase U.S. readiness to take nuclear risks if it *did* seem to work, and that would be perceived by the Soviets as the pursuit of first-strike capability. Such reflections do not trouble Hamm. Instead, he praises Reagan for his tough rhetoric, for it better "educates" the American public to "support the increased defense measures needed to counter this (Soviet) threat." He advises Reagan to "translate moral outrage into lasting political support for national defense, realistic (sic) arms control, anti-missile defenses, and countering of the Soviet threat to the Caribbean."

His propoganda victory virtually handed to him by Moscow's blustering, Reagan is not likely to need much encouragement. To the extent that the media have (perhaps unwittingly) abetted this insane strategy, they may have brought Human Extermination Day significantly closer.

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