

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Who covers up Soviet provocations?

The U.S. State Department, Rozann Ridgway, and Richard Burt—who else?

In all critical periods of the past 40 years, Berlin has been a measuring-rod of Soviet intentions, whether for détente or confrontation. In order to increase the pressure on Central Europe, the Soviets have always used a crisis over Berlin—an enclave surrounded by East German territory and Soviet troops. Among the few privileges the three Western allied powers—U.S.A., Britain, and France—have maintained since the occupation period, the foremost are air transit from West Germany to the city, and military inspection tours in East Germany. Any attack on these privileges would unmistakably signal Soviet commitment to confrontation.

The shooting of U.S. Major Arthur Nicholson by Soviet soldiers in March was a clear signal that the confrontation was on. Then, on July 5, a British airliner was “attacked” by Soviet MiG jetfighters during unannounced air exercises. On July 12, a U.S. military patrol, which observed the return of Soviet military units from maneuvers to their barracks near the city of Satz Korn, was slammed by a Soviet truck. The American car was damaged, and one of the three U.S. officers injured.

There can be no doubt that the Soviets are intentionally building confrontation in and around Berlin. Yet, one finds that the American authorities in Berlin are not only reluctant to inform the public about these incidents, but even misrepresent the situation. Just one day before this latter incident, the media were told that co-

operation between the Western powers and the Soviets worked “generally well.” The fact that East German customs had caught two Arab terrorists who had planned to hijack an American airliner in West Berlin was cited as a prominent example.

An exact date for this affair was not given, but it must have occurred during the days around the exchange of spies in Berlin on June 12, which was presented as another example of “cooperation with the East.” This was the exchange new U.S. Ambassador to West Germany Richard Burt personally handled, and West Berlin journalists were surprised to see the “iron information curtain” lifted during that exchange by the same authorities who would normally block any information from reaching the public.

The picture presented to the public is a very selective one, therefore, and the fact is, the U.S. Department of State plays a key role. While American soldiers get shot, beaten up, or intimidated by the Soviets around Berlin, the information policy of the U.S. authorities in Berlin—which operate according to State’s guidelines—present a kind of “East-West love story.” While Western airliners get harassed by Soviet jetfighters, and the Soviet confrontation strategy could not be clearer, certain people on the American side talk of “understanding” with the Soviets.

The real “Berlin Story” is that with the full consent of the East German authorities, East Berlin functions as a huge sluice for Soviet-steered secret

agents and terrorists into the West. It functions as the main trading point for drugs and illegal weapons in Central Europe. The region around the city of Berlin is increasingly being militarized—the incidents between Soviet and Western soldiers outside Berlin find their explanation in the simple fact that the Soviets don’t like the Western powers to exert their rights to monitor this militarization.

Senators Helms, Goldwater, and eight others had good reasons to oppose the nominations of Richard Burt and Rozanne Ridgway to their new posts. Mrs. Ridgway should have told the full story on what was going on in and around Berlin, while she was U.S. Ambassador to East Germany from January 1983 to June 1985. Richard Burt, whose European Affairs section at the State Department was obviously complicit in covering up the incidents in and around Berlin, is not qualified to take the post of ambassador to Bonn. Nor is John Kornblum, head of the U.S. Mission in Berlin since the end of 1984, qualified for his job. His role in the Berlin agent exchange of June 12 is less interesting than his role in the Central European desk at Burt’s European Affairs section between 1982 and 1985.

With this variety of diplomat in the most sensitive region between East and West in Central Europe, more Nicholson cases seem to be certain to occur. The fact that during the Senate debate on the confirmation of the Burt and Ridgway nominations on July 15-16, at least some aspects of that cover-up were made public, leaves some hope for a change, however.

The Soviets, and their State Department friends, should be warned: The next, even minor incident might just provoke the Senate debate on the policy of the State Department in Central Europe which is long overdue.