

Soviets on KAL 007: LaRouche was right

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On Sept. 6, 1983, *EIR* Founding Editor Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. issued a news release on the Sept. 1 Soviet downing of the Korean Airlines Flight 007, in which 269 people were killed. Referring to a television address by President Ronald Reagan, LaRouche commented: "President Reagan's nationwide U.S. broadcast of Labor Day evening . . . replaying a tape-recording of the Soviet pilot describing the action of destroying the KAL 007 airliner, left no doubt that the Soviets knew that this was KAL 007, that its lights were showing in normal fashion, and that the Soviet command ordered the airliner and its passengers massacred."

Within days of the Reagan address and the LaRouche news release, Soviet Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, then the chief of staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, delivered the Andropov regime's official account of the downing of the plane. The Soviet version was a tissue of lies, aimed at portraying the civilian airliner as a spy plane that had intentionally penetrated Soviet air space near top secret military facilities on the Sakhalin Islands in the North Pacific. Photographs of the Soviet marshal standing in front of a map of the region adorned the covers of every news magazine in the West.

An 'evil empire'

Reagan and LaRouche both promptly denounced the Ogarkov version of the KAL shootdown as a pack of lies, masking a level of Soviet brutality that many in the West wished hysterically to deny.

Reagan labeled the Soviet Union an "empire of evil."

LaRouche, for his part, had been warning since the early summer that Moscow would take some kind of dramatic action to demonstrate its violent rejection of President Reagan's March 23, 1983 offer of joint Soviet-American development of a strategic defense against ballistic missiles—the Strategic Defense Initiative.

As one of the leading authors of the SDI, LaRouche had gone from being one of the quiet back-channels between the Soviet and American governments on a wide range of defense and economic matters, to becoming a target of public venom from Moscow's leading international press organs. The shift

occurred right after President Reagan's March 23 address unveiled the administration's adoption of the LaRouche SDI plan.

For LaRouche, the violence of the Soviet media attacks against him indicated that the Russian *nomenklatura* was locked into a confrontation course with the West that corresponded culturally to the centuries-old Third Rome doctrine. The Soviet rejection of President Reagan's generous offer of technological collaboration on the SDI was the "unique experiment" proof that Moscow had come under the sway of the Third Rome ideologues inside the Russian Orthodox Church, the Red Army, and the state apparatus.

Now, nearly eight years after the tragic downing of KAL 007, a series of 11-plus articles has been recently published in the Soviet government daily *Izvestia*, providing documentary proof that LaRouche was right about the events of Sept. 1, 1983, and that Marshal Ogarkov was telling a pack of lies.

No warning given

The *Izvestia* series, by Aleksandr Shalnev, Andrey Illesh, and Sergey Agafonov, provided eyewitness accounts, interviews, and maps proving that:

- The KAL 007 Boeing 747 was flying with all of its lights functioning in the normal configuration of a commercial airliner. The serial number of the commercial plane was visible to planes flying nearby. There was, therefore, never any doubt about the nature of the aircraft, never any real suspicion that it was on a spy mission. This version of the events of the early morning hours of Sept. 1 was provided to *Izvestia* by none other than Lt. Col. Gennady Nikolayevich Osipovich, the pilot of the Soviet Air Force Su-15 plane that shot down KAL 007. According to the Ogarkov press conference version, the KAL plane was mistaken for a military spy plane because it was flying without its lights on.

- The Su-15 never fired tracer bullets to confirm the precise nature of the plane that was violating Soviet air space for over one hour. Such tracer bullets illuminate the sky and would have further settled any doubts that the KAL was a commercial flight strayed innocently off course. Again from Colonel Osipovich: "If I had had tracers, everything would have been visible. They're bright as a cigarette at night. But I didn't have any of those, only armor-piercing bullets." Those comments were made during an interview with ABC-News "Nightline" correspondent in Moscow, Rick Inderfurth, which was aired on May 22. In contrast with the Osipovich statements, Marshal Ogarkov said that the Soviet pilot had fired "warning shots with tracer shells" along the path of the airliner.

- Nor did the Soviet jet fighter attempt to make radio contact with the KAL 007 pilot to order him to land or determine his status. According to Osipovich, he could not even attempt to make radio contact without losing the communications link to the ground control. That would have been a

violation of procedures, since by that point, the Su-15 was waiting for instructions from the military command whether to fire on the plane.

- The KAL flight had earlier strayed into Soviet air space and this had triggered an alert status, in which the Soviet Far East military command at minimum had been brought into the decision-making process. By Osipovich's account, he received two prior orders to shoot at the KAL airliner, which were quickly canceled, before finally getting the kill order. This chronology demonstrates beyond a doubt that there was a command decision process leading to the shootdown of 007, and that the decision-making structure could have certainly been activated at the level of Moscow Red Army headquarters and the Kremlin.

As Illesh put it in the May 24 *Izvestia* installment: "A military-political decision was made. Why? All this took too much time. Osipovich's attack in the air was called off twice. This means that somebody first decided: Shoot down! Then consulted someone, and canceled the order. Then made another decision, and again canceled."

- The two Soviet missiles that hit the KAL 007 caused the plane to immediately crash into the sea near Moneron Island. While Soviet reports on the shootdown at the time claimed that the Korean airliner took over 10 minutes from the point of attack to crash into the sea, the *Izvestia* reporters, interviewing members of the search team that combed the waters for months for details of the incident, received contradictory evidence. The plane fell from the sky at a 70-80° angle and crashed into the water less than two minutes after the rockets hit the airliner's tail and engine. The difference between the original "10-minute" account and the actual event, as told by witnesses like Soviet naval officer B. Kurkov to *Izvestia*, are critical. The impact of the initial rocket hit and the violence of the crash explain why none of the 269 bodies were found—with the exception of a scant few body parts. The bodies literally disintegrated due to the impact of the explosion and the 32,000-foot crash.

In contrast, Marshal Ogarkov and others had argued—based on the false account that the plane had gone into a slow descent into the sea—that there never were any passengers aboard the plane, that it was a spy mission and a provocation orchestrated by the Reagan administration against Andropov.

The missing black box

- Sometime between Sept. 15 and Nov. 7, 1983, Soviet naval diving teams searching the waters near Moneron Island managed to recover KAL's two black boxes—the flight data recorders. To this day, Soviet officials continue to deny that they ever found the crucial recorders. *Izvestia* interviewed several members of the Soviet Navy search teams, who provided detailed accounts of how the black boxes were transported in rubber containers filled with sea water to a top secret

military intelligence compound, the Central Science and Research Base of the Air Force, near Moscow, where the flight data was decoded and stashed away in files at the Soviet military intelligence (GRU) headquarters.

Commenting on the black box data, *Izvestia's* Illesh wrote on May 25: "There was, probably, quite a lot that went against our official version. If you recall, the Boeing crew, for all practical purposes, had not been warned of the impending attack, as is customary in international practice. They had no idea that they would be shot at shortly, and therefore remarks such as 'He is warning us . . . I see tracers. . . . He wants us to land at his airfield,' and so on were not in the conversations of the Boeing crew. The missile hit was a complete surprise altogether. If the recording of the crew's conversations among themselves had been published at that time, it would have become clear to the whole world that the U.S.S.R. PVO [Air Defense] had shot down a passenger aircraft without warning."

LaRouche's warning

In his Sept. 6, 1983 press release, LaRouche not only characterized the KAL 007 affair as a case of premeditated murder, sanctioned at the highest levels of the Soviet command. He urged the Reagan administration to take the incident as a clear indication that the SDI had to proceed on a crash program basis, both to offset continuing threats from Moscow and to reverse the economic collapse of the United States, which fueled Soviet ambitions. "The principal long-term reason for Soviet rejection of the offer of durable peace given to them publicly by the President is the Soviet estimation that the development of strategic ABM systems based on 'new physical principles' would cause a general economic recovery in the U.S.A. and Western Europe which the Soviet government presently refuses to tolerate," LaRouche wrote.

The LaRouche prescription for dealing with Moscow in the wake of KAL 007—the crash development and deployment of SDI in such a fashion that would fuel a general economic recovery—was, unfortunately, largely rejected by a Reagan administration under attack from both Moscow and from Western opponents of the SDI recovery plan. As the consequence of that and other missed opportunities, the U.S. economy now stands on the edge of total ruin—precisely as LaRouche warned. Only the Soviet economy, within the entire industrialized world, is worse off than America.

It is too late to go back and reverse those grave errors of 1983, just as it is impossible to go back and cancel the shootdown orders that sent KAL 007 into the sea. The recent glimmer of truth about the KAL affair emerging from the official Soviet press does, however, offer a useful opportunity for policymakers East and West to consider the broader consequences of those events and take remedial action, including in respect to the unjust imprisonment of LaRouche, the man who called the shots.