
Book Review

The psychosis of strategic cowardice

by Anthony K. Wikrent

Winter Hawk

by Craig Thomas

William Morrow & Co.

525 pages hardbound, \$18.95.

In ordinary times, Craig Thomas's new novel, *Winter Hawk*, would be an entertaining narrative of an imaginary covert operation of deep penetration into the very heart of the Russian beast. But, in these times, when the Western financial system is freely falling into the abyss, while a fantasy-driven President Reagan hastens to reaffirm Dec. 7 as a "Day of Infamy" by affixing his signature to a document that establishes Russian hegemony over all Europe, *Winter Hawk* becomes a description of the psychosis of cowardice that now grips Western elites in general, and the Reagan White House in particular.

Just weeks before Soviet General Secretary Nikitin and U.S. President John Calvin are to meet in Geneva to sign a sweeping nuclear disarmament pact—and while both countries have already begun, with great media fanfare, to dismantle portions of their nuclear arsenals—an American spy at the secret Soviet Baikonur space center shocks the CIA by warning that the Soviet military is rapidly preparing the world's first operational laser battle station for launch into orbit. The treaty President Calvin is about to sign makes no mention of such a weapon, because U.S. intelligence had convinced itself, and the President, that it would take the Soviets at least 10 years to develop such technology. Now, the Soviet Union is about to become the only militarily significant superpower on the planet.

Rather than finding some excuse to cancel or postpone the signing ceremony, a stunned and disoriented President Calvin is paralyzed by his fear of "unfavorable public opinion," and demands that the CIA bring the spy and the evidence to him for personal examination. The Director of Central Intelligence desperately concocts an improbable plan to steal two Soviet military helicopters, train American pilots

to fly them, and use them to fly into the heavily guarded Baikonur complex, pluck the spy and the evidence out of the maws of the KGB and the GRU, and fly them safely out again—all within a two-week period!

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the success of the mission hinges on the determination and sheer survival instinct of one man: a cynical, jaded, and emotionally drained Vietnam fighter pilot and POW, USAF Maj. Mitchell Gant, the hero of Thomas's previous two bestsellers, *Firefox* and *Firefox Down*.

A central feature of *Winter Hawk* is the struggle for power between the Soviet military, and the *nomenklatura* of the Soviet Communist Party. The animosity between the party faithful of the KGB, and the fanatically arrogant military GRU, is seared into almost every page, reflecting the power struggle inside the Soviet Union, between the "cosmopolitan" heirs of Nikolai Bukharin, who welcome a "New Yalta" deal with the West, and the hard-liners around Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, who view the West's financial collapse as the "final crisis of capitalism" which will usher in the new age of unchallenged Soviet world rule. The Ogarkov faction therefore views any suggestion that a deal be struck with the moribund and self-stupified West, with the deepest contempt. And, just like the tottering Reagan administration of today, the fictional President Calvin and his advisers, are oblivious to this crucial reality of Soviet power.

Thomas has Gant escape from the hotly pursuing Soviet military with the required proof, while a heroic KGB colonel is able to stop the use of the laser battle station. Nikitin and Calvin sign a slightly altered treaty that also prohibits the development and deployment of laser weapons. But, in the real world, the Soviets have already used laser weapons a number of times to irradiate Western aircraft and satellites; the most recent instance occurred last month, when the Soviets conducted a test flight of the TT-09 missile (follow-on to the silo-killer SS-18 ICBM) which landed within 300 miles of the Hawaiian Islands.

The one crucial difference between the real President Reagan, and the fictional President Calvin, is that Calvin comes to recognize the enormity of the disaster about to befall his country if he fails to confront the Soviets with hard proof of their military's duplicity: As he boards the plane that will whisk him to Geneva, Calvin turns to the admiring throng, and, with his recent words of "great hopes for peace" stale and bitter in his mouth, forces a faked smile, as he thinks to himself, "My fellow Americans, I leave you to engage upon the greatest betrayal of my country any American citizen has ever contemplated or achieved."

Let us beseech the Almighty that President Ronald Reagan be soon tormented with similar thoughts when he contemplates his imminent summit meeting with Mikhail Gorbachov, and before he signs an INF treaty that will assuredly reserve him a significant place in history—as the last President of a sovereign and independent United States.