
Conference Report

Soviet spokesmen backed into corner on TWA hijacking

by Nicholas Benton

"This is a prime example of what is to blame for the TWA hijacking and the imminent demise of Western civilization. It is the combination of deceitful Soviet killers and U.S. 'Neville Chamberlains' that has brought mankind to the brink of World War III," charged a leaflet distributed by the National Democratic Policy Committee, protesting the week-long "U.S.-Soviet Dialogue" held at the elite Chautauqua Institution resort in western New York State June 23-28.

An intervention at the meeting by a five-man NDPC delegation from Pittsburgh and Chicago and *EIR* correspondents created global political shockwaves. According to a national Associated Press wire, a question posed by *EIR* to Soviet embassy spokesman Oleg Sokolov on the opening day elicited what was termed the "first official, on-the-record response of a Soviet official to the TWA hostage crisis."

EIR asked Sokolov, "Since many Americans believe the Soviets are behind international terrorism, will you dispel that belief by calling for the unconditional release of the TWA hostages."

Sokolov's evasive answer: "I understand that is the American position. They should handle that"—drew a loud groan from the audience and prompted conference moderator, Hearst Newspapers foreign correspondent John Wallach, to remark, "I don't think you answered the question," which he then repeated. Sokolov squirmed visibly, rubbing his hand over his mouth, and blurted out, abruptly, "It is an American problem. Let the Americans have a free hand."

Again, the audience emitted a loud expression of shock, and Wallach mused, "I'm still not sure if that is a yes or no."

As that response was reported worldwide as the first formal Soviet comment on the hijacking incident, it created rapid repercussions in Washington and Moscow. First, a State Department deputy press spokesman put the identical question to the Soviets the next day in Washington: "We want the Soviets to take a stand. Do they support or oppose this hijacking?" Next, Soviet foreign ministry spokesman Limenko, speaking from Moscow, replied, "Our position is

well known. We do not support hijackings . . . but these hijackings have deep causes in the injustices that have been perpetrated."

Exposé of the Soviets did not end there. *EIR* later asked Sokolov whether he condemned the terrorist bombing of the Air India flight that took over 300 lives. When he said, "Of course," *EIR* followed up: "Then we can assume you also condemn the similar taking of 269 innocent lives in the Korean Airliner incident." Sokolov flushed. Many in the audience began to applaud. In guttural tones, he mumbled, "The Soviet official position on that matter is a matter of record."

Such questions began to shake loose some more patriotic elements among the general audience, who began to open fire with similar challenging questions to the increasingly defensive Soviet diplomat. Unaccustomed to such pressure, Sokolov began chain smoking, wincing, rolling his eyes, and pressing his tongue into his left cheek, distorting his facial expression. "You say you are against the militarization of space, yet the Soviets are the first to place an anti-satellite weapon into orbit. Isn't that the militarization of space?" one person challenged. Sokolov began to sputter, and couldn't repeat the question. He asked to have it repeated, and then he replied in one word, "No." Other questions, pertaining to Soviet repression of Jews and the Soviet role in international terrorism, received similar, terse, paranoid responses.

Kissingerians upset

The Chautauqua conference, occurring in the midst of a rapidly deteriorating world situation highlighted by the hostage crisis and Soviet war build-up, was billed as "the first of its kind" to offer the general public a first-hand opportunity to enter into the dialogue between U.S. diplomats and their Soviet counterparts.

"Kissingerian" diplomats Helmut Sonnenfeldt (of Kissinger Associates), H. Mark Palmer (Richard Burt's underling at the State Department and a former Kissinger speechwriter), Brent Scowcroft (also of Kissinger Associates), and

NSC head Robert McFarlane were invited to represent the U.S. side on the program, although Scrowcroft and McFarlane both failed to show (the latter being replaced by Paul Nitze). On the Soviet side, Washington embassy representative Sokolov and U.S.-Canada Studies Institute director Dr. Pavel Podlesny led the delegation, which included a gynecologist to talk about Soviet family planning, a Soviet jazz-musician, and Soviet "grunt-and-roar" poets Andrei Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko (they were matched during the "cultural" components of the dialogue by such U.S. artistic giants as the middle-aged Kingston Trio).

The lone bright spot on the program was the last-minute addition of Lt.-Gen. James Abrahamson, head of the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative office, who stopped by en route to Europe to debate Sokolov. However, Sokolov "copped out" of the debate in characteristic Soviet style, and Abrahamson was left to present a powerful, in-depth picture of the need for the SDI that clearly "converted" many in the 2,000-strong, predominantly liberal audience.

U.S. representatives at the event were hardly immune to criticism. NDPC congressional candidate Carl Schoepfel of Illinois confronted Palmer on his boss Richard Burt's role in keeping the pro-Soviet Papandreaou in power in Greece. Palmer lied, denying the Burt role, but when asked why the State Department had taken Syria off its official "terrorist nation" list just prior to the TWA hijacking, Palmer had to shake his head and admit, "I don't know."

The SDI debate

Sokolov's decision not to appear at the debate with Abrahamson was his worst, and most revealing, move. His diatribes against the SDI had been incessant throughout the earlier sessions. With the floor to himself, Abrahamson confirmed that the Soviets plan to have a conventional anti-missile missile defense capability in three years, which would make the idea of a Soviet first-strike "conceivable." He clarified this in response to an *EIR* question, agreeing with the notion that U.S. failure to match current Soviet development of a laser-based defense would give the Soviets an irreversible strategic advantage.

When an SDI opponent complained that the Abrahamson panel was too one-sided and that an anti-SDI spokesman should have been invited to participate, Wallach interjected—perhaps unwittingly, but nevertheless properly—that "no one could better represent your anti-SDI position than the Soviets, and they chose not to come."

But if Sokolov failed the first day, Podlesny fared even worse after that. Heading the delegation from Moscow, Podlesny is the director and chief of department of the USA and Canada Studies Institute, the operation headed by Georgii Arbatov, which was described as the equivalent to a combination "think tank" and national security council. Podlesny conveyed a more affable presence than the shaken Sokolov,

but his treachery was badly exposed by the intervention of the NDPC delegation on the second day.

The NDPC representatives began each of the first two days with protest rallies in front of the Chautauqua Institution, attracting a half-dozen TV camera crews and more reporters. On June 25, they confronted Podlesny directly during an "open microphone" public session. Noting that the four-man Pittsburgh NDPC contingent was the only non-white representation at the conference—either in the program or in the audience—NDPC leader John Johnson challenged the conference organizers on this fact, demanding to know why "in a conference of this magnitude, there aren't any representatives of the Third World." He then challenged Podlesny to report on Soviet efforts to stop the deaths of 70,000 a day from famine and pestilence in Africa.

The moderator, Wallach, took the occasion to take his own stab at the Soviets, noting that they offered virtually no relief to Africa—in the case of Ethiopia, sending only a plane load of East German snow tires. Then Podlesny attempted to evade the issue by changing the subject to starvation in Russia after World War II! Otherwise, Podlesny had not one word to say about Africa.

Shortly thereafter, Podlesny became even further disoriented when confronted by Pittsburgh NDPC leader Tony Heard's challenge to stop the international drug trade. "Since the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has documented that Soviet client states Cuba and Nicaragua are engaged in running drugs into the U.S., will the Soviets agree to collaborate with the U.S. to stop this, and shut down all international drug trafficking?" Heard asked, evoking a loud applause from the audience.

"We are against drugs, of course. But what you ask cannot be done. It requires all countries to do this. We cannot do it alone," Podlesny replied.

These responses belied the cynical, racist Soviet posture toward the Third World, as well as a revealing lack of preparation on Podlesny's part to deal with such questions. Any illusions Moscow had that America's black population was "in the pocket" of the KGB wing of the Democratic Party were rudely dashed by the NDPC interventions.

Later, in response to an assertion by *EIR* that the Soviets are mobilizing for a war-winning, strategic first-strike capability in compliance with the Sokolovski military doctrine under the leadership of Marshal Ogarkov, Podlesny was forced to resort to a litany of transparent lies. First, he said that the Sokolovski doctrine is no longer operative for the Soviets. Then, he said that Ogarkov has no military command position any longer. Finally, he said that Gen. Abrahamson's assessment of Soviet ABM capabilities was "absurd."

All in all, a shabby performance by the Soviets. But then, they really didn't count on being put on the spot the way they were. They surely didn't expect it to come from the Chautauqua audience, which proved more than they could handle.