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OVERSEAS BASES

Do Spy Flights Imperil US Alliances?

by Thomas R. Phillips

In the days between May 1, when the U-2 spy plane reconnaissance airplane crashed, or was shot down, and May 9, when the Soviet announced it, it is believed to reconstruct the "continuous" policy discussions in the Kremlin to decide what line to take. If an international issue was made, it would have to be admitted that an American airplane had penetrated 2,500 miles inside the Soviet Union before it was downed. The world, including the Russian and satellite people, would deduce that Soviet defenses were not effective against American aircraft. But if the flight, and the capture of the pilot and the recovery of the plane, was made public, it would give the Russians a propaganda weapon of high credibility in their campaign against American overseas bases. It would also furnish a lever to pry apart American alliances, particularly among small allies and neutrals. Unfortunately, no such careful planning of moves was made in the United States.

The decision to make the flight public was taken. There is little doubt that Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev expected that President Eisenhower would disown and condemn the flight over the Soviet Union. Indeed, he said in an address May 28 to the All-Union Labor Conference in Moscow: "We seriously considered the situation which had arisen and nevertheless decided not to undertake anything which would prevent the US President from extricating himself from this absurdly stupid situation he had got himself into. We even stated that the President was not likely to have known or approved such actions and that hotheads in the Pentagon and Allen Dulles, that professional spy, were apparently to blame. But Eisenhower did not take the opportunity offered to him and declared that the spy flights had been approved by him and were taking place with his knowledge. I am still of the opinion that he did not know. But he, as President, found it awkward to admit that he did not know what was going on in his

country... The question was whether to go on with the flight, the whole world would know that the two sides were to play golf, and his wife is the Presidential duty. Which is more important? The golf is the main one, and the Presidential duty is the secondary one.

The Kremlin chess players, in plotting their moves, had anticipated, in accordance with the protocol of espionage, that Eisenhower would disown and condemn the espionage flight over the Soviet Union. But Presidential press secretary James C. Hagerty insisted that the President should take the responsibility for the public image of the President as not knowing what was going on could not be maintained.

Khrushchev was angry with the President. Had the U-2 incident been disclosed, he would have had a cause against American bases and he could have maintained that the first overflight of the Soviet Union had been shot down. He would have had his base issue, but he would not have been exposed as a dupe of Eisenhower, whom he had advertised to the world as a man of peace with whom he could deal. Rather, Eisenhower would have been the man. It was necessary to show his intention for the man whom he had advertised as one he could work with for peace. The Khrushchev policy of dealing with Eisenhower had not been unanimously accepted in the Kremlin and Khrushchev was in trouble. He had to disown President Eisenhower and his dealings with him.

It was predictable, after the U-2 incident, that the Soviets would take advantage of any occasion to shoot down an American airplane flying near the Soviet frontier. They needed more incidents to bolster the campaign against American bases. The occasion came July 1, two months after the U-2 crashed, when an RB-47, a reconnaissance version of the B-47 bomber, approached the Kola Peninsula. It was shot down. Two crew members were captured, the body of the first pilot was recovered and three of the six-man crew were missing.

Undoubtedly, the RB-47 flight, and others like it that are going on several times weekly from overseas bases, are, as the Soviet radio asserted, being made for the purpose of locating and mapping Soviet radar defenses. The purpose of the Soviet Union in shooting down the

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