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# Why Is U.S. Mute on Russian CBW Atrocities?

By PETER SAMUEL

Author and commentator Tom Wolfe recently said in Washington that the way we talk about communism has been transformed into a matter of social etiquette.

"I don't know many writers who have anything very good to say about the Soviet Union, but on the other hand, they certainly wouldn't say anything *against* the Soviet Union. Why? It's impolite. It's just not good form. It would be like saying something anticlerical. People might agree with you, but it is just bad taste to go around saying such things."

So it was not surprising there was an embarrassed silence when two former U.S. intelligence officers — Quentin Crommelin and David Sullivan — published a book, *Soviet Military Supremacy\**, recently in Washington — cleared by the CIA — which reported for the first time that the Soviets have been routinely tying prisoners to stakes at the Shikhany Chemical Test Range southeast of Moscow to test the lethality of chemical and biological weapons.

Only one newspaper out of the 1,750-odd American dailies reported the claim and not a single TV network or radio station. The wire services ignored it, as far as I can establish.

The American media recently spent weeks devoting forests of newsprint pulp and hundreds of TV hours to the atrocities of a long-extinct tyranny in Germany, but don't want to face up to the similar present nastinesses of Communists.

**Almost everyone here is rendered speechless by this tasteless subject of the staked prisoners at the Soviet chemical test ranges.**

The CIA won't say anything. Nor will the State Department. Nor the White House. Nor the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. None say the charges of Crommelin and Sullivan are untrue. Neither will they say they accept them. It's the old neither-confirm-nor-deny doctrine, evolved in order to protect American secrets, but used to protect a Soviet secret.

The Pentagon spokesman's response when I called was typical. He interrupted me even before I had completed

my tasteless question, almost as if he hated hearing me put it. "We do not have anything on that," he spat out his stock reply.

What garbage! Of course they do. They have photographs of the Shikhany Chemical Test Range, including the stakes to which the miserable human guinea pigs are tied to test these diabolical weapons (see illustration). The Pentagon has said in the past that the Soviets routinely train their soldiers in exercises where live and lethal chemicals and biological agents are present.

Says the Pentagon report, "Continuing Development of Chemical Weapons Capabilities in the USSR," dated October 1983: "The Soviets have developed the firing data required to use chemical weapons in battle situations. This includes the types and numbers of weapons required to attack various targets under a variety of weather and combat conditions. They continue today to explore and test systems with improved dissemination, larger payload, increased range and better accuracy. This gives them greater target flexibility and deeper strike capability."

Quote that bland-sounding technocratese back at people in the U.S. defense and intelligence community and they will readily confirm that: "Yes, of course that means that the Soviets stake people up and try chemical weapons and germs on them. They do it as a matter of routine and they have for years, but don't quote me."

I got that response several places, but on strict condition that the persons concerned not be identified — as if this is somehow an American secret they are protecting rather than a Soviet one.

No, perhaps it is that the precious anti-anti-Soviet etiquette of the writers of Wolfe's acquaintance has spread into the Pentagon, the CIA, etc. And of course public discussion of the activities of the contemporary Russian Mengeles might "sour the atmosphere" for arms control negotiations and other righteous efforts at "dialogue" with Moscow. I imagine

that consideration most inhibits the State Department.

The one paper that investigated the prisoner staking story was the May 6 Washington *Times*, which quoted one U.S. official as saying: "We've seen the stakes, we've seen the people. We've seen just animals tied to the stakes. We've seen just people and we have seen both together. They are testing the [chemical and biological] agents to see how long it takes to kill. We've seen people down. We don't know if they were dead or wounded... they are political prisoners. We've seen crematoria nearby... we've seen hundreds of people tied to stakes."

I'm jealous I couldn't track that fellow down, but *Times* correspondent Tom Diaz reported that.

One source of mine who should remain unnamed — one wouldn't want him ostracized for his bad form, would one? — told me casually that the Soviets have been testing their poison and germ weapons on people for years and that it is documented. He slipped me a photocopy of three pages of a report with a stamped "SECRET" on it, assuring me it actually isn't really secret anymore, just mighty difficult to get hold of.

The report, colloquially known as the "Hirsch Report," is an old report, said however to be the most comprehensive study (600 pages long) ever done on Soviet chemical and biological warfare capabilities. It originates in the Intelligence Branch of the U.S. Army Chemical Corps.

One page I was given says: "Chemical warfare agents were tried [by the Soviets] on political prisoners in a most inhuman way without any consideration whatever."

Another page reads: "In the Urals and in Mongolia are established numerous BW [biological warfare] proving grounds having always in their close proximity a camp for political prisoners to furnish the human experimental subjects."

There is a description of an experiment during World War II with

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prisoners held in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, by the Soviet's Mengele, a Prof. Klimoshinski:

"The subjects for the experiments were political prisoners; Japanese prisoners of war were also used in some cases.

"The prisoners in chains were brought into an eight-man tent, on the floor of which were kept wire nets, a number of rats infested with pest fleas; the latter transmit the infection to the subject cases and the infection ended in bubonic plague. Besides the rats, ground squirrels and other rodents also proved efficient intermediate hosts.

"The escape of a prisoner infected with bubonic plague started a great plague epidemic among the Mongols in the summer of 1941. To check the further spread of the epidemic, a chase was unleashed with the participation of many air units, during which some 3,000 to 5,000 Mongols met their death. The corpses were burned with large amounts of gasoline or were buried with disinfectants...."

The subject, "Humans Used as Guinea Pigs in the Soviet Union," was addressed in hearings of the Committee on the Judiciary in the U.S. Senate, March 30, 1976. Various Soviet emigres detailed cases of university students apparently tricked into damaging themselves by preparing toxic chemicals. They were then studied in hospital.

Luba Markish said she had been alternately threatened and offered bribes not to testify to the Senate committee, apparently by the KGB. Prof. David Azbel said students at the

Moscow Institute of Chemical Technology were made the subject of experiments with chemical agents and many died.

One of the foremost Washington authorities on Soviet chemical weapons, Dr. Joseph Douglas, says he does not personally have direct evidence of Soviet use of human guinea pigs, but points to persuasive secondary evidence.

He points out the Soviets appear to have used several wars in which they are involved as testing grounds for chemical and biological weapons—Cambodia and Afghanistan in particular.

The known use of live chemicals in Soviet training exercises and their very large-scale chemical forces, together with the general Soviet emphasis on realistic and rigorous testing of weapons, should lead a dispassionate analyst to expect horrific Soviet experiments on humans.

Finally, there is a parallel in the Soviets' systematic misuse of chemical drugs in psychiatric "hospitals," where they attempt to break dissidents' minds. And they routinely use drugs as a means of torture.

Between 1977 and 1983 the Soviets were subjected to intense professional criticism by their professional peers in the West for their inhumane use of drugs in psychiatric establishments. So severe were the indictments of Soviet psychiatrists for their complicity in horrible experiments on prisoners that the Russians withdrew from the World

Psychiatric Association in 1983. They were being damaged by the publicity.

The upside of this is the knowledge that the Soviets, despite their contemptuous demeanor and ruthless nature, are in fact susceptible to exposure and outside political pressure. They did cut back their use of mycotoxin weapons in Southeast Asia following publicity about this "yellow rain" horror. Maybe publicity about the staking of prisoners at the Shikhany Range might save the lives of some hundreds of brave Russians awaiting their fate as guinea pigs for these diabolical weapons. And publicity might reduce, just a little, the Soviets' collection of "experimental data" on these poisons and germs that they might one day threaten to loose upon America. ■

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