

Russia's stupidity a victory for mutual foe — the bomb

My daughter called last Thursday morning. A grim television bulletin had told her the Russians had shot down a Korean Air Lines jumbo jet with 269 people aboard.

She was crying. She cried like that the day President Kennedy was killed.

Like many, I was angry. The stupid Russians. How incredibly stupid of them! What could have been going through the minds of those who gave

And Reagan is far brasher than most.

"Better dead than red," he says, implying that he would make that choice for us all should the need arise. For him, the struggle is not between the bomb and humanity; it is a crusade between us good guys in the white hats who can do no wrong and the black-hearted denizens of the Evil Empire.

Sure enough, the moment the story of the Russians' stupidity broke, those who think as our president does began demanding we cancel the grain deal or delay the arms talks — as though impoverishing our farmers or increasing the risks of nuclear war would teach the Russians a lesson.

On Capitol Hill, an aide to right-wing Congressman Larry McDonald, who was killed in the crash, told the press: "We think of him as the first victim of World War III" — as though a nuclear holocaust were inevitable, as though the bomb had already won.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

I knew why my daughter was crying. The same words came to mind as they did the day Kennedy was killed. They are the last lines of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach."

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight.

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

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Arthur Hoppe

the orders to destroy an errant passenger plane? Paranoia, probably. The Russians and their stupid suspicions. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

It was odd. I found I wasn't angry at the Russians' callous disregard for human life. Plenty of others would be angry at that. I was angry solely at their stupidity.

Then I thought of the New Yorker magazine. I grew up on the New Yorker. I look upon the lead essay in "The Talk of the Town" as an enclave of wisdom in a world of contention.

In an issue several months ago, the New Yorker's anonymous essayist had written about the enemy: The enemy was not the Russians; the enemy was the nuclear bomb which threatens the extinction of our species.

It threatens the Russians just as much as it threatens us. So we and they are tied by that strongest of bonds: a common enemy.

Now I better understood my anger. Because of the Russians' stupidity, we and they had suffered another loss in our mutual struggle against the common enemy. They had stupidly betrayed us both.

That struggle has been waged for 37 years. I was particularly frustrated because it had seemed to be going better lately.

Thanks to our greed, we had signed a \$10 billion grain deal with our Soviet allies. Strategic arms negotiations were to begin again in Geneva. Cultural exchanges were being renewed. We would compete with them in the Olympics. Summit talks were in the wind. Perhaps even President Reagan would hold his tongue.

President Reagan scares me. If the Russians are dangerously suspicious, we Americans are dangerously brash.

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