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STUDENT REPORT

THE SHOOTDOWN OF KAL 007:
ACCIDENT OR CONSPIRACY?

Major Frederick C. Barth

88-0225

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REPORT NUMBER 88-0225

TITLE THE SHOOTDOWN OF KAL 007: ACCIDENT OR CONSPIRACY?

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
requirements for graduation.

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PREFACE

In the wake of the tragic downing of the Korean Air Lines flight 007, charges and countercharges assigning guilt were made by both superpowers. Many investigators came to believe that the United States willfully used the civilian airliner as part of a reconnaissance mission because of the involvement of many sensitive military and civilian intelligence agencies. Shootdown by R. W. Johnson proposes such a conspiracy theory.

Could such a theory be possible? Did the US resort to such risks in the name of intelligence for national security? Could one come to any conclusions without having access to classified data which might ultimately hold the truth of what happened?

These were the motivating questions that led to this study. It is an exercise in speculation and logic, based on the writings of various investigators, journalists and experts. However, the ultimate truth of what happened may rest within classified files or with the wreckage of flight 007 at the bottom of the sea.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Frederick C. Barth is a development engineering officer with a diverse background. His most recent assignment was as an engineering division chief involved in the construction, activation, and operation of the West Coast Space Shuttle Launch Site at Vandenberg AFB, California. He also supported satellite programs scheduled for deployment from Vandenberg-launched Shuttle missions. When the West Coast Launch Site program was cancelled, he led facility deactivation efforts. Prior to this activity, Major Barth worked on the staff of the Commander, Armament Division (AFSC) at Eglin AFB, Florida. While there, he also served as an engineer in support of remotely piloted target aircraft programs. His earlier assignments were as an aircraft maintenance officer with F-105 and F-4 equipped units in TAC and USAFE. Major Barth received a B.S. degree in Aerospace Engineering from Syracuse University and was commissioned there through AFROTC in 1974. He will receive a Master's of Political Science from Auburn University in 1988.

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"insights into tomorrow"

REPORT NUMBER 88-0225

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR FREDERICK C. BARTH, USAF

TITLE THE SHOOTDOWN OF KAL 007: ACCIDENT OR CONSPIRACY?

I. Purpose: This paper analyzes the main thesis of the book Shootdown by R. W. Johnson. His thesis concludes that Korean Air Lines flight 007 was shot down while participating in a US sponsored reconnaissance mission.

II. Problem: The first task in this research was to identify Johnson's logic as well as his conclusions. When this was done, insight into his work from other points of view was examined by studying reviews of his book. Finally, Johnson's arguments were balanced against alternative interpretations of evidence as well as new information.

III. Data: Johnson's thesis that flight 007 was participating as a passive probe in a US sponsored reconnaissance mission is a direct result of his logic. He looks at the evidence to support or refute four theories. The first theory proposes that the flight crew of 007 made an innocent navigational error. The second is that the Captain was short-cutting his route in order to save fuel. The third theory claims the Soviets used an electronic interference system to lead the airliner off course. The final theory, which Johnson believes, proposes that flight 007 willfully penetrated Soviet airspace to assist in a US intelligence gathering effort of the Soviet air defense system. His logic argues the conspiracy theory is most sound, not because

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the evidence strongly supports it, but rather because the evidence does not support the other theories. Thus, one is logically left with the hypothesis that flight 007 was involved in espionage.

To critically analyze the validity of this theory and Johnson's logic, a five step process is undertaken. First, his thesis and logic are established. Next, Johnson's background and personal goals for his work are determined from his own words. Third, a new perspective can be gained by assessing some of the book reviews that appeared in the press on Johnson's work. Fourth, a critical analysis is made on the central argument of Johnson's hypothesis. Finally, alternative interpretations of the same evidence by another writer as well as additional information are introduced to the analysis. From these five steps, a conclusion about Johnson's thesis and the truth of flight 007 can be made.

The results of this process can be easily summarized. The first step, already mentioned, shows Johnson's belief that flight 007 was involved in a US reconnaissance mission because the evidence refutes all the other theories. In the second step, Johnson claims to be politically neutral and admits the evidence for his case is totally circumstantial. The third step begins to establish a common thread. Most reviewers find Johnson politically biased against the Reagan Administration and overly reliant on poor evidence. The fourth step compares Johnson's interpretation of evidence against an accidental navigational error to the interpretations of Murray Sayle and Seymour Hersh. Both of these investigative writers provide strong arguments for the human error hypothesis. Finally, the alternative interpretations of the evidence by Hersh and new information on Soviet policy towards airspace violations by ACSC graduate Major Martin Alvstad are introduced. This new data seriously challenges Johnson's reasoning for the conspiracy theory.

IV. Conclusions: A summation of all the arguments and data provided lead to the conclusion that the crew of flight 007 made an innocent error in navigation. The tragedy and its aftermath were the result of this error and the mistrust that exists between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviets made a mistake by authorizing a shootdown before the target could be visually identified; they assumed it was a US military reconnaissance aircraft. The US administration reacted to the incident with incomplete intelligence data. Johnson's thesis and

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logic are seriously contradicted because he has not considered the root cause of the incident: mistrust between the superpowers allowed an innocent human error to result in tragedy.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

On 1 September 1983 at approximately 06:25 local time, Korean Air Lines (KAL) flight 007 was struck by an air-to-air missile fired by a Soviet Sukhoi SU-15 fighter in Soviet airspace above Sakhalin Island. The Korean airline Boeing 747 subsequently crashed into the sea near the southwestern tip of Sakhalin, taking the lives of all 269 souls on board. It was the fifth worst air disaster in history (2:1).

Shortly after the tragedy, many explanatory theories began to surface. Most of these explored the possibility of human mistake initiating a navigational error (12:165). Later, theories began to appear in the media linking the tragedy to a US conspiracy using a civilian airliner as part of an intelligence gathering mission. Some of these became published as books.

R. W. Johnson was the author of one such book, Shootdown. It is the result of exhaustive research on almost all information available from the public record. Johnson's conclusion was that KAL 007 (it should be noted here that both flight designators, KAL 007 and KE007, are used in this paper) was a passive probe willfully violating Soviet airspace as part of a US sponsored intelligence gathering mission.

The purpose of this paper will be to answer the questions that such a book poses. What really happened? Was Johnson correct? Does he have a solid case for his theories? Are there alternative interpretations of the evidence? This paper will attempt to analyze Johnson's arguments and the logic central to his belief. In addition, new evidence will be introduced to help answer the questions.

To accomplish this goal, five steps will be taken. First, a synopsis of Johnson's thesis as presented in his book will be provided. Next, a brief background on Johnson will be offered to serve as a starting point for further analysis. Third, several book reviews of Johnson's work will be examined. Fourth, a critical analysis will be offered of a central argument to Johnson's thesis. Fifth, the analysis will be considered in the light of additional evidence. When these tasks have been accomplished, the original questions can then be answered.

Chapter Two

SYNOPSIS

This synopsis highlights Johnson's thesis and logic. It provides the important information from the book illustrating Johnson's rationale for his conclusion that KAL 007 was part of a US reconnaissance mission. Understanding his logic is essential to the purpose of this paper.

Overview

In his book Shootdown, Johnson attempts to explain the tragedy of KAL 007 in two ways. First, he tries to address the manner in which KAL 007 came to be so far off course based on the technical facts concerning the route of flight as these became available to the media and the public. Secondly, he tries to establish the political and diplomatic context in which the tragedy took place. This includes events both before and after the incident and looks within the Reagan Administration as well as the international situation. Johnson amasses his evidence by drawing on all information available from the public record (2:297). His stated purpose is to assess all the possible theories by weighing all the evidence and the probabilities for each (2:2). However, it is ultimately the readers who must decide for themselves which theory to accept and why (2:2). Thus, armed with a mass of technical data, balanced against the political background of the time, Johnson has compiled evidence to support or refute four hypotheses that have been proposed in the wake of the tragedy.

Two of these theories involve an innocent explanation and the other two involve either US or Soviet culpability. The first hypothesis puts KAL 007 on its disastrous course by a navigational error caused by a misuse of equipment and an inattentive crew. The second hypothesis is that the KAL pilot, Captain Chun Byong-in, was deliberately flying off course to conserve fuel, but not to commit or support any espionage mission. The third hypothesis is that the Soviet Union was using some type of electronic interference system that caused 007 to fly off course. The fourth and final hypothesis is that KAL 007 was a passive probe, willfully flying into Soviet airspace to activate their air defense radar systems, in support of a US

Intelligence gathering mission (2:243).

It is Johnson's conviction that the last hypothesis, the intelligence mission scenario, is the only one supported by the evidence (2:276). Furthermore, he believes that the same evidence refutes the possibility of the other three theories (2:274). He also believes the intelligence mission hypothesis gains acceptance because most of the principal governments involved have refused to conduct an official inquiry (2:275). Only the Soviet Union has conducted an investigation, while the US, Japan and South Korea have not (2:275). But before describing Johnson's hypothesis or the other three, it is important to understand the background to the accident as Johnson has related it.

Background

The backdrop to the tragedy is the entire region of the northwest Pacific, a highly important strategic area in the balance of power between the US and the Soviet Union (2:45). The Soviets were quite active in building up their military in the region, particularly their navy (2:45). The US had also recently begun a massive increase in defense spending under the Reagan Administration bolstering US and allied forces in the area (2:51). Confrontation between the superpowers in this region was inevitable and in fact occurred quite routinely in the form of US and Soviet forces testing each others capabilities. This usually involved aircraft testing, or "tickling," the air defense systems of the other side, occasionally with fatal results (2:51).

The months before the tragedy were one of the lowest points in US and Soviet relations, although an apparent lull was occurring during the summer of 1983 (2:62). The Reagan Administration was in need of support at home to avoid having to make unwanted concessions at the arms control negotiations (2:63). In addition, Congressional support for the Administration's arms programs, such as the MX, was eroding (2:65). In Europe, allied support was also eroding for the deployment of Pershing II and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM) (2:64). Finally, President Reagan was concerned about the total support of the political Right which he felt was essential for his reelection in 1984 (2:75).

Also during the summer of 1983 a large Soviet phased array radar was discovered by a US reconnaissance satellite at Abalakova (also known as Krasnoyarsk) deep inside Siberia (2:70). This was significant because, depending on how the radar would be used, it could be a violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty (2:71). Allegations were made by the US that the Abalakova radar was a Treaty violation. This was to be handled by the US-Soviet Standing Consultative Commission

(SCC) in Geneva, not due to meet until sometime in the fall of 1983 (2:73).

Political Perspective

According to Johnson, all of these events are related. To have some kind of proof that the Abalakova radar was a treaty violation, in lieu of the slow moving SCC, would provide the Reagan Administration the kind of political leverage it needed to ensure support (2:75). However, Johnson also states quite plainly, "There is-it is important to say-no proof that the flight of 007 was connected with the [Abalakova] issue." (2:75)

Another factor important to Johnson's hypothesis is the key players in the Reagan Administration who were intimately involved in US foreign policy and national security. These were William Clark, the National Security Advisor (NSA), and William Casey, head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Prior to Reagan's Presidency, William Clark had absolutely no experience to prepare him for responsible positions in foreign policy (2:85). His extreme right-wing views led him to a key role in Reagan's campaign for the California governorship, and later to an appointment to the California Supreme Court (2:85). In 1981, when current NSA Richard Allen had to resign over charges of corruption and misconduct, Reagan appointed Clark the new Advisor (2:86). Friction developed between Clark and his former boss Al Haig, with the result of Clark using his influence to force Haig out of office (2:87). "With Haig went the last pretense to any real expertise in foreign affairs. US foreign policy was now in the hands of a rancher who wore a Stetson and cowboy boots and cheerfully admitted he didn't know a thing about foreign affairs." (2:87) Once in office, it was Clark's style to keep the new Secretary of State, George Schultz (a boardroom executive from Bechtel Corporation), and others in the dark as to what he was doing (2:88).

Added to this was the new head of the CIA, William Casey. Casey came to the Reagan Presidential campaign as its manager at the suggestion of William Clark (2:86). Casey was a successful businessman, a self-made millionaire, with experience in the wartime Office of Strategic Services (OSS) giving him a background in clandestine operations (2:91). He also had a reputation for being able to make extremely tough decisions under pressure, was a risk-taker, and a right-wing hater of the "Eastern WASP Establishment." (2:91) When Casey became Reagan's appointee as the head of the CIA, he did two things. First, he tightened security at the Agency making it difficult for even Congress to know what was happening (2:93). Second, he increased the number of CIA covert operations worldwide to perhaps 12 to 14 (2:94). Clark and Casey, as portrayed by Johnson, were now

responsible for the two US organizations most involved in the events surrounding the last flight of KAL 007.

The Four Hypotheses

To explain that last flight of KAL 007, Johnson evaluates the four hypotheses, each of which will be synopsized here. They will be presented in the same order Johnson uses: the navigation error hypothesis, the fuel-saving hypothesis, the electronic interference hypothesis, and finally, the surveillance mission hypothesis which Johnson believes to be the explanation for the incident.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) considered several accident theories, but only two seriously. One proposed that the controlling Inertial Navigation System (INS) was misprogrammed at Anchorage, Alaska, with an erroneous takeoff position of ten degrees too far to the east. Furthermore, the controlling INS had no normal interaction with the other two INS's. The resulting ground track would be close to the track plotted by Soviet radars (2:243). The other theory had the INS correctly programmed, but the autopilot mode-selector switch was left in Magnetic Heading position rather than the INS mode. This would also result in a track similar to the Soviet radar data (2:243). Either scenario flew 007 north of the intended course, international airway Romeo-20 (R-20). The ICAO, as well as other investigators who support an accident theory, discount the first scenario because there are too many technical arguments against it (2:244). Johnson cites Australian journalist Murray Sayle as the principal proponent for the magnetic heading mode hypothesis and quotes him often in explaining the theory (2:244).

In this scenario, the autopilot mode selector switch is left in the magnetic heading mode instead of the INS heading mode. The aircraft would then have flown a magnetic heading of 246 degrees throughout the flight, the first course flown after takeoff (2:244). This hypothesis requires several suppositions. It requires a good deal of crew inattentiveness to fail to catch the wrong switch position and the subsequent differences in navigation. It requires a failure to check course with the first and only radio navigation station (Very High Frequency Omni Range-VOR) at Bethel, Alaska. Flight 007 passed 12 miles north of the Bethel VOR on its 246 degree heading. It requires a failure to use weather radar in ground mapping mode, for the ground terrain of Alaska and the Soviet coastline provided excellent radar targets. A further requirement would be the failure to monitor the emergency radio frequency of 121.5 MHz (Mega Hertz) over which Soviet fighters tried to contact 007. Johnson believes this theory requires too many suppositions and

has other technical flaws the evidence does not support (2:249).

The next hypothesis, which has little acceptance, is the notion that Captain Chun was short-cutting his route in order to conserve fuel. Based on the route of flight, this would have saved about 6.2 tons of fuel worth \$2500 (2:251). This theory has largely been discounted for several reasons. First of all, there is no evidence that any Korean Air Lines flight has ever tried this. Also, this particular route would be the last place a Captain would want to risk his flight and passengers for only \$2500 in saved fuel (2:252). Therefore, this theory has been virtually abandoned.

The third hypothesis, according to Johnson, proposes that the Soviets employed a sophisticated electronic interference system to disrupt KAL 007's navigation. Some, mostly from the ultra-conservative political right-wing of the US, believe this was done to justify shooting the aircraft down, perhaps to assassinate Congressman Larry McDonald, an ardent anti-Soviet (2:253). There is virtually no evidence that the Soviets ever considered Congressman McDonald any kind of threat, nor is there any evidence to suggest that they possess the technology or capability to produce such an electronic system (2:255). Johnson, as well as most serious investigators, do not give any credence to this theory.

This leaves the surveillance hypothesis, the one Johnson says is best supported by all the evidence and the one he believes. One must recall the US political situation mentioned earlier, the discovery of the new Soviet radar complex in Siberia, and the need to know its intended function. The Abalakova radar was not estimated to be operational before 1988. Therefore a thorough testing of the Soviet air defense system might reveal deficiencies the new radar might neatly fill, thus proving it might be a treaty violation (2:258). To do this, an airspace intrusion more effective than the "tickling" done by RC-135s was needed (2:258). If a military aircraft performed the penetration, it could be shot down or forced to land, an unacceptable proposition for the obvious reasons as well as the negative propaganda (2:259). However, an airliner would solve the problem. "If the Russians did catch up with it, they would see it was an airliner and, clearly, nobody would wittingly shoot down an airliner....If he was forced down, the Russians would search the plane, find nothing, and would quickly have to let the crew and passengers go...." (SD:259) Johnson argues the Korean CIA virtually controlled the Korean government and had deep relations with Korean Air Lines (2:261). Because the CIA had close ties to the Korean CIA, KAL was the natural candidate for such a mission (2:261). Finally, the two men in the US government with the responsibility for planning and initiating such an operation would be the high risk-takers, William Clark

and William Casey (2:262).

The Conspiracy Theory

Once the mission was put in motion, many of the incidents surrounding KAL 007's last flight can be explained. At Anchorage, some cargo was off-loaded and more fuel was taken on for the extra speed and maneuvering that may be needed later (2:262). The apparent rendezvous with an RC-135 off the coast of Kamchatka was an attempt to confuse the Russians and lead them to believe 007 was another RC-135 (2:263). KAL 007 proceeded on its way, giving false position reports, and ultimately overflying the sensitive Soviet military bases on the Kamchatka peninsula and Sakhalin Island, triggering a massive Soviet air-intercept effort (2:264). Once intercepted over Sakhalin, Captain Chun broke with his probable orders to land in the Soviet Union if picked up by fighters. Instead, he took a chance that he could evade the Soviet jets and make it to international airspace (2:265). Such an aggressive tactic would not be outside Captain Chun's experience, since he was trained as a fighter pilot in the Korean Air Force and had a reputation as being bold, aggressive, and willing to take risks (2:6). It was the last risk the Captain ever took, for the Soviets did not realize 007 was an airliner and shot it down (2:265).

What followed in the aftermath of the tragedy was also quite consistent with Johnson's hypothesis. The US, needing to hide its guilt, had to cover up its involvement and put the Soviets on the defensive, while at the same time reaping the most from the propaganda opportunity. "With really blitzkrieg news-management tactics, one could even news-manage and package the deaths of 269 people in a politically effective way-the greatest news-management challenge the Reagan Administration had ever faced." (2:267) For William Clark, the outcome was to weigh heavily on his conscience, and he quickly sought release by resigning and taking on the Secretary of the Interior job when James Watt had to go (2:268). Unlike the 269 victims of the tragedy, the theories and hypotheses about what happened and why lingered on.

Chapter Three

AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND AND REVIEWS OF BOOK

This chapter will attempt to establish Johnson's background expertise, political bias (if any), methods of research and logic. This will be done by first examining what Johnson says of himself and his efforts in his book. Next, reviews of the book will be studied to obtain the same information, but from the view point of others. This information will serve as the starting point for the analysis

Johnson's Background

The first step in analyzing the KAL 007 tragedy as Johnson sees it is to try and learn something about the author himself. How he uses information and reports it, as well as his logic, may have as much importance as what he says in his book. To do this, one must look at what Johnson says of himself as he sets about his task of investigating the event. In addition, one must examine the critiques of Johnson's book from several of the reviews that came out on the work. From these, a rough picture of Johnson and his effort begins to emerge.

Shootdown is an in-depth work. Johnson has done an exhaustive amount of research, looking at almost every piece of evidence available in the public record (9:473). Other information comes from "unnamed and unidentified intelligence sources." (7:111) The factual data and second-hand information through which Johnson must work have both technical and political implications and have led most investigators, including Johnson, to either an accidental theory or a conspiratorial theory (9:472). Johnson's book looks at both types and results in the examination of four hypotheses (10:67). Before exploring these hypotheses, the first task is to determine Johnson's area of expertise in order to gain an insight as to where his personal strength lies to deal with this mass of data.

All that can be discerned about Johnson comes from the biographical information provided by the book jacket and from his reviewers. Quoting directly from the book jacket, "R. W. Johnson is a Fellow in Politics at Oxford University, in England. He is a frequent contributor to such topical publications as The

Guardian, New Statesman, and The Listener. His previous books include African Perspectives, How Long Will South Africa Survive?, The Long March of the French Left, and The Politics of Recession." Several reviews repeat this same data; the conclusions drawn by them from Johnson's biographical information will be discussed later. Now, what Johnson says of his own investigation should be addressed.

Johnson's Personal Perspective

At the outset, in his book's Forward, Johnson establishes his intent to investigate from a neutral, politically unbiased point of view. "I wished to avoid as far as possible the accusation of political bias (in the end an impossible task, of course)." (2:xiv) He felt there were too many unanswered questions in the Reagan administration account of what happened and he was dissatisfied with that explanation (2:xiii). He wanted to explore all the other possibilities those unanswered questions implied, including the Soviet version of the events (2:xiii). This version contends that KAL 007 was participating in some kind of US sponsored reconnaissance mission (2:xiii). But Johnson wants mainly "to lay out all the evidence that exists to date so that the world can make up its own mind." (2:xiv) Finally, he states his political neutrality by saying "...I am, in any case, not a joiner-I am not a member of any political party or group. I was happy to stay that way." (2:xiv) In summation, Johnson has established his starting point as being politically unbiased, unprejudiced by preconceived notions, and seeking only truth from the evidence available (2:xiv).

Finally though, it is important to note Johnson's reasoning for his conviction that the reconnaissance mission hypothesis is the only one which makes sense. Johnson admits that his hypothesis of a reconnaissance mission scenario is a hypothesis because it is based solely on circumstantial evidence-there is no "smoking gun." (2:274) But more important is his stated logic for his thesis.

And, most of all, the hypothesis gains its strength not just from the way it fits-or can be made to fit-a very large number of disparate facts, but by the sheer inadequacies of all other possible hypotheses. That is, even if one did not consider the surveillance hypothesis on its own merits, one would be impelled towards it by the simple elimination of possible alternatives (2:274).

In short, Johnson's theory works because none of the other ones can be made to fit the facts. This will be discussed later.

Book Reviews-Other Perspectives

Now that Johnson's position has been established, the next step is to examine some of the many reviews that appeared after the release of his book. Some of these compare Johnson's work to other books on the incident. Some come from what must be considered biased viewpoints, such as The New American (5:20). Still, a common thread begins to emerge after going through the reviews.

Some reviews, though rather limited in the depth of the review, get right to the point. Publisher's Weekly, for example, praises Johnson's method of replaying the events as if his reconnaissance theory were true; "...most readers will likely agree that it is the only one that makes sense." (10:67) The book review section of the Library Journal finds Johnson "acknowledging that the evidence remains incomplete," but, "he concludes that KAL 007 was most likely on a US directed intelligence mission...." This is related to similar conclusions of one other book and contrary to another. Finally, this review concludes with "Readers will find more detail...than in earlier analyses as well as an accusation of Reagan Administration dishonesty on the matter. A readable and useful contribution to the debate. Recommended for most libraries." (10:60) The review in Booklist finds Johnson's hypothesis of the reconnaissance mission as "not definitive." (3:1582)

Philip Windsor, reviewing for the Times Literary Supplement, was not totally convinced by Johnson's argument, but saw merit in the more political aspects of what Johnson was saying. For example,

What does emerge about the Reagan White House during the President's first Administration certa'nly suggests that it was possible for a conspiracy to be mounted at the higher levels of the CIA or the National Security Council or both. The picture is one of cynicism, ignorance and a self-righteous brutality, all held together by the winsome bonhomie of a leader who delegated virtually all his responsibilities and whose attention span on a good day was remarkably limited (13:669).

As for Johnson's reasoning, Windsor wrote "Nobody can argue from the negative to the positive, and declare that just because so many things look so very odd, a historical conspiracy was indeed afoot. But the least one can say is that R. W. Johnson's hypothesis holds water better than most...." (13:669) Windsor has perceived Johnson to have a distinct political tone and he appeared to concur with it. However, other reviewers who also noted this political tone did not find it agreeable.

James J. Drumme in his review for The New American is, to say the least, somewhat biased in his critique of Johnson's book. Phrases like "the Kremlin killers" tend to indicate Mr. Drumme is not without some prejudice of his own (5:21). Still, he comments on the political tone of Johnson's book similar to the review of Windsor's, albeit from a different perspective.

That R. W. Johnson, a fellow in politics at Oxford University in England, is impelled toward the spy mission hypothesis comes as no surprise in light of the vitriol he heaps on any American perceived to be anti-Communist. He rails against 'Senate ultra-conservatives and Pentagon hawks'; says that President Reagan's lack of knowledge about foreign policy compares with that of Warren Harding; assails the 'extreme right wing views' of former National Security Advisor William Clark, CIA Director William Casey, and Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle; and attempts to smear Larry McDonald, one of the 269 victims of the Korean airliner massacre, by alleging that his congressional district in Georgia contained 'a flourishing chapter of the Klu Klux Klan.' (5:20)

Other reviewers find the same tone.

John L. Kelleher, writing for the US Naval Institute Proceedings, finds Johnson's credibility questionable because of his political observations (7:110). "It is not too surprising...that Johnson's conclusion indicts 007 as an intelligence collection mission sponsored by the United States. Providing sinister undercurrents for otherwise normal events, he leaves the reader no possibility for reaching any other conclusion." (7:110) In addition, Kelleher points out that Johnson made no effort to investigate the Soviet allegations (as other authors such as Seymour Hersh have done) that 007 was engaged in a US reconnaissance mission, but rather "demands that the United States prove its innocence." (7:110) Subsequent reviews begin to mention, in addition to the political overtones of Johnson, problems with his technical arguments.

Marilyn Young and Michael Launer, writing for Commonweal, find Johnson's research somewhat suspect because, as Johnson himself admits, his material comes "almost exclusively from the public record, which means he relies on secondary sources, a practice some have labeled 'scrapbook scholarship'." (9:473) They also see his theory as an attempt to vindicate an earlier allegation made by Johnson in the December 1983 issue of The Guardian. This theory proposes that 007 was a deliberate attempt by "the CIA to provoke a violent Soviet reaction," necessary for justifying the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe (9:472). "Shootdown represents his attempt to

assemble proofs demonstrating U.S. culpability. In addition, the book posits a scenario in which such a drastic and dangerous course of action might make political sense. We are convinced, however, that Johnson has no solid evidence for his belief." (9:472) Their belief rests on the technical flaws they see in Johnson's use (or misuse, according to Young and Launer) of sources (9:472). "Throughout the book Johnson misuses sources, particularly when discussing the primary reason, in his mind, for executing such a spy mission in the first place: a new radar installation deep within Siberia." (9:472) The radar referred to is the Abalakova (Krasnoyarsk) installation. Johnson's hypothesis contends that KAL 007, acting as a passive probe, would provide some intelligence data on the radar (9:472). Young and Launer refer to one of Johnson's own sources. This was Philip J. Klass, who was then the Senior Avionics Editor for Aviation Week and Space Technology. "Klass indicates that KAL's flight could not possibly have been detected by either this new radar installation under construction or a similar one in operation in Kamchatka because such equipment is designed to ignore the presence of aircraft." (9:472) They go on to quote Klass, "I've never read a book so filled with errors." (9:473) In addition, they attribute a similar assessment of Johnson's analysis of airline procedures to Harold Ewing, a senior 747 pilot as "wrong in many respects." (9:473) Other reviewers provide more insight into Johnson's political themes.

Joel Brinkley, reviewing for the New York Times, was not persuaded by Johnson's logic because of the monumental conspiracy it requires and the overt political tone. The following quote sums up his review.

Mr. Johnson's larger thesis is not so easy to accept, particularly since such a cynical conspiracy would require the contrivance of so large a number of people from several countries that, by now, someone most certainly would have come forward. Beyond that, Mr. Johnson's presentation is flawed on several points, not the least of which is his strident tone. He treats the major figures in the Reagan Administration with disdain bordering on contempt. He has scoured the world's press to find the most visceral, mudslinging descriptive quotations for each, and several times he declares one or more of them to be liars...This heavy-handed approach weakens the credibility of the rest (4:21).

The last review examined extends the thread by seeing the same problem in Johnson's work, but with a different twist.

While Douglas B. Feaver, writing for the Manchester Guardian Weekly, sees Johnson discrediting his argument, the reason is

because of Johnson's disinformation (6:18) rather than his political tone. For example, "Johnson asserts that the National Transportation Safety Board was ordered off the case by the State Department. I know from my own reporting at the time of the accident and from rechecking since that [this] is garbage."

(6:18) Treaty requirements dictated, according to Feaver, the primary responsibility for the investigation rested with the Soviets or the Koreans, but clearly not with the United States. Johnson calls Clark's quick departure after the shootdown from the National Security Advisor position to the relatively quiet post of Secretary of the Interior highly suspicious. Feaver points out, "Reporters covering the White House at the time know that the exhausted Clark had been looking for a way out long before the shootdown and the opportunity presented itself when former Interior Secretary James Watt put his foot in his mouth once too often." (6:18) Finally, in using the International Civil Aviation Organization's report on the accident as it relates to the possibility of a navigation error due to misprogramming the inertial navigation system, Johnson limits the quote. The report actually says that such errors "assume a considerable degree of lack of attentiveness on the part of the entire flight crew but not to a degree unknown in international civil aviation." (6:18) Johnson did not include the information after "flight crew." Feaver says of this, "The effort is to make impossible something that has happened many times, a misprogrammed computer guiding a carelessly monitored flight. Just that scenario is the generally accepted explanation among non-conspiracy theorists." (6:18)

Summary

Before exploring any of the hypotheses, one must evaluate the preceding. The relevant information that one can distill from the reviews of Johnson's book is that which is mentioned consistently by reviewers. First, Johnson's expertise, as his biographical information details, is as a professor of politics at a major academic institution. He informs his readers in his book's Forward that he relies on others for technical expertise (2:xv). Johnson claims political neutrality, but many of the reviews regard his work as politically biased against the Reagan Administration. His use of sources has been questioned, as it relies solely on what even Johnson admits is circumstantial evidence. Finally, there is Johnson's logic. He believes his hypothesis of a surveillance-intelligence mission is the explanation for the tragedy, not so much because the evidence supports it so well, but because the evidence does not support the other hypotheses. The next step in this analysis, then, is to examine the evidence to see whether it supports any of the other hypotheses.

Chapter Four

CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND NEW EVIDENCE

This analysis proceeds in two ways. First, Johnson's argument against the human error theory will be closely examined and compared with the case made by another investigative writer Murray Sayle. Next, the alternative views of author Seymour Hersh and new evidence will be introduced to lead towards a more complete insight on the tragedy.

Analysis

To examine the evidence and how it may explain the fate of KAL 007, this analysis will accept the arguments made by Johnson and others that two of the theories are unsupportable. This paper, therefore, will not address the hypotheses for a fuel-saving explanation or the Soviet use of electronic interference. Instead, it will examine Johnson's argument against the possibility of a navigation error balanced against the case put by Murray Sayle that just such an error could well have caused the tragic sequence of events. Sayle's arguments were documented in the 26 September 1985 issue of the New York Review of Books, although it should be noted that his article was not a book review. The analysis will then consider interpretations of the evidence by other investigators.

Both Johnson and Sayle deal with a navigational error caused by incorrectly positioning the autopilot mode selector switch. Neither one believes an accident based on misprogramming the INS with a 10 degree error to the east in latitude can account for the estimated ground tracks, although the ICAO report says that this is plausible (11:52). It is also important to note that Johnson does not deny it was possible for the crew to incorrectly position the autopilot mode selector switch (2:244). As a starting point, both consider the autopilot mode selector switch mistakenly left in the magnetic heading mode.

Johnson's primary argument against this hypothesis is that Sayle's 246 degree magnetic heading track is different from the ICAO plot, based on simulations done with Boeing, the aircraft manufacturer, and Litton, builder of the INS used on KAL 007 (2:245). The ICAO simulation of the 246 degree magnetic heading

puts 007 6.5 miles north of the Bethel VOR when it was observed on radar to be 12 miles north and too far to the south of Sakhalin Island to be consistent with the Soviet radar track (2:245). Sayle's track is closer to the Soviet radar version, or further north than the ICAO simulation (11:47).

Sayle's argument for his hypothesis begins with a point that must be considered. He points out that those who argue for a conspiracy theory where the US is guilty of falsifying and withholding information do not consider the Soviets equally capable of the same thing. "To rely on a Soviet radar trace, derived from unspecified equipment, in order to support a conclusion that KE 007 changed course shortly before it was shot down, and therefore, as the Soviets charge, was on a spying mission, strikes me as incautious, to say the least." (11:51) Sayle's track was developed with the cooperation of the British Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The differences between this track and that plotted by the ICAO are, according to Sayle, attributable to the different estimates of the winds aloft made by the CAA (vs. the ICAO) (11:53). The map was rechecked by the CAA at Sayle's request and considered is to be consistent with the CAA view on the incident: "...KE 007, the CAA believes, was inadvertently flown to disaster in magnetic heading mode, a view it conveyed to ICAO." (11:53)

Johnson's next major criticism of the navigational error hypothesis concerns Sayle's accounting of how the INS alert lights would be illuminated when passing the preprogrammed waypoints. Waypoints are predetermined navigational positions of latitude and longitude along the correct course and programmed into the INS before takeoff. If the INS controlled the autopilot it would fly 007 directly to these points. These alert lights will illuminate even if the INS is not controlling the autopilot. Furthermore, they will come on even if the aircraft does not fly over the waypoint but passes abeam (passes at an angle of 90 degrees) and within a range of 200 miles. As Johnson points out, KAL 007 was 365 miles off course when it was shot down and this leaves some doubt as to whether the alert lights could have illuminated at waypoints towards the area of the shootdown (2:246). Johnson concludes also that had the crew checked the INS when the lights illuminated, they would have seen the distance to the waypoint was not zero, as it should be if they passed directly overhead (2:246).

First of all, Johnson's own technical advisor on this point, Robert Allardyce (Johnson identifies him only as a veteran US pilot and navigator on page 14 of his book) has found that a similar INS made by Delco has, in Johnson's words, "...no known limit in distance 'abeam' at which the alert light will fail to illuminate. This may, of course, not be true of the Litton INS carried by 007-but it quite probably is." (2:319)

Sayle, in arguing his case, quotes page 2 of the ICAO report, which states "...with the INS system activated although not controlling the flight navigation, the crew would have been provided with regular indications of INS waypoint passages at or near the flight plan estimates for such passages and could, therefore, have been under the impression they were navigating in the INS mode." (11:57) Sayle also checked with the American Air Lines Pilots Association (ALPA). Captain John O'Brien, the Safety Officer for American ALPA and a former Pan American pilot, explained

We understand that the 28 program of the Litton LTN-72R-28 [the same type INS used on KAL 007] illuminates the alert lights on a time and distance basis, as long as the INS system is running, even if the INS system is not in fact steering the aircraft. In the case of KE 007, when the track actually followed by the aircraft ran roughly in the same direction as the preprogrammed flight plan, the alert lights would have come on when the true waypoints were more or less abeam, not because they were abeam but because the calculated time had elapsed. KE 007's crew could thus have been misled into thinking that they were actually at the waypoints (11:57).

Sayle's final point on this matter concerns the INS readout when the lights illuminate and how the crew may have interpreted this. He says that every position report required of 007 was made by the copilot, according to the US and Japanese air traffic control voice tapes, and that he would give an arrival time at the waypoint and an estimated time to the next waypoint (11:56). The INS provides the time and distance to the next waypoint when the alert light goes out (11:56). Therefore, the copilot would be checking the INS readout when the light went out and did not notice the readout when the light came on (11:56). According to Sayle, this view is also held by the ICAO and the British CAA (11:56).

Another charge made by Johnson against the navigational error hypothesis is the unexplained maneuvers just before the aircraft was shot down. These include a turn to the northwest over Sakhalin, evidenced by the Soviet radar track and, according to Johnson, the Japanese radar tapes (2:246). Another maneuver, or lack of maneuver, Johnson points out is the failure of flight 007 to climb to 35,000 feet as requested of Japanese air traffic control. Johnson acknowledges the ICAO attributes the effect of slant range to account for differences between the Soviet and Japanese radar traces of the turn over Sakhalin (2:247), but makes no mention of this in his charge about the failure to climb.

Part of Sayle's reasoning about these events goes back to the earlier argument of relying solely on the radar data supplied by the Soviets. As for the radar information provided by the Japanese government from their Self Defense Agency, there has been much controversy due in large part, according to Sayle, to the lack of knowledge by the general press about radar (11:57). To assist Sayle in considering this matter, he was advised by Dr. Eli Brookner, a consulting scientist to the Raytheon Company on defense radars. Dr. Brookner considered the Japanese radar data highly unreliable because of the distances involved. Wakkanai, on the north coast of Hokkaido, was the closest station at 160 nautical miles (NM) to the position of KAL 007 at 0312 local time (11:57). Dr. Brookner based his opinion in part on the Radar Handbook, edited by Dr. Merrill I. Skolnik of the Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, which provided estimates of height error in relation to slant ranges. At 200 NM the expected error is given as between 4000 and 8000 feet (11:58). The Wakkanai radar site, at 160 NM, could not have improved the accuracy enough to determine if flight 007 actually climbed 2000 feet or not, and thus corroborate the Soviet data. As for the turn over Sakhalin, Sayle goes on to say "We know that when KE007 appeared on the Japanese radar screen, it was beyond accurate radar tracking range, as the radar textbook and the Japanese Self Defense Agency both say." (11:58) Because of the long range reliability problem of the Japanese radar data, one is left solely with the Soviet radar track data. Another possibility will be discussed later.

Johnson's final criticisms of Sayle's hypothesis cover several smaller arguments. He claims that Sayle's case requires that the crew could not have used the 747's weather radar in the ground mapping mode despite the fact that, according to Johnson, this is a standard practice for KAL and other airlines flying the R-20 route (2:246). As Johnson has pointed out, the Kamchatka coast provides an excellent radar target. Along the same lines, Johnson claims that Sayle suggests there was no reason for the crew to monitor the emergency frequency of 121.5 MHz, over which the Soviets supposedly tried to contact KAL 007 (2:246). Also, when the Soviet fighter fired warning shots (tracer shells), flight 007 failed to respond. Johnson also claims the crew did not use the Shemya VOR to check its position (2:246). Finally, Johnson discounts Sayle's theory because he fails to mention the computerized flight plan, upon which Captain Chun allegedly made notations corresponding to the route actually flown by 007.

Sayle does address some of these arguments. Sayle agrees that the crew could have used the 747's weather radar in the ground mapping mode, but questions whether or not they were actually required to do this (11:55). He referred again to the American ALPA, particularly to the Public Affairs Officer John Mazar and the Safety Officer, Captain John O'Brien. Neither

individual endorsed the "requirement" to use weather radar in mapping mode, although since the accident this is probably a standard precaution (11:55). Sayle does not specifically account for the other minor criticisms leveled by Johnson, but one can speculate or turn to other analyses of the incident.

An Alternative View

In addition to Sayle's speculation, writer Seymour Hersh has made an in-depth investigation into the tragedy providing another point of view. In his book The Target Is Destroyed, he has addressed many of the same issues Sayle and others have studied. Hersh concluded that the crew of 007 made a navigational error in the same innocent manner as Sayle's hypothesis (1:199-205). However, Hersh believes the error was made by neglecting to enter all waypoints into the INS during an inflight reprogramming, resulting in the fatal turn over Sakhalin (1:225-226). In addition, Hersh made several important conclusions about the incident based on his research which are decidedly different from Johnson's. The initial intelligence that reached the White House was incomplete, yet the Reagan Administration over-reacted and used the incident for political advantage because of their mistrust of the Soviets (1:249-250). When more complete intelligence data and analysis became available, the Administration did not change its rhetoric, but "looked the other way" (1:249-250). In this manner Hersh believes the US Administration made a serious mistake. The Soviets also made serious errors in the intercept of 007 (1:239). Primarily, they failed to positively identify the aircraft before authorizing the shootdown (1:236-237). The incident resulted in a significant reorganization of their Far East Air Defense Force (1:236). Thus, some of Hersh's conclusions support Sayle's hypothesis and answer Johnson's criticisms of it.

Other criticisms can be answered by speculation and more of Hersh's reasonings. Sayle makes no mention of 007's failure to monitor the emergency frequency of 121.5 MHz, but to guard this channel is considered universally standard in airline and military aviation. Johnson reports that the Soviets had tried to contact 007 over this frequency (2:246). Speculating, one can assume KAL 007 most likely did set up one of its radios to guard this frequency, but a malfunction occurred preventing 007 from receiving the Soviet warnings. Even Johnson documents the fact that during the flight from New York, 007's point of origin, one of the VHF radios was written up for problems, although it was reported in good working order in Anchorage (2:4). Concerning the failure to respond to the Soviet SU-15's tracer fire, one must rely on the Soviet version of events. The SU-15 pilot, Major Kasmin, claims he fired tracers "right by his nose." (2:22) Johnson reports Kasmin was 2000 meters behind 007 when he fired

and that the tracers maintain their brilliance for almost 3000 meters so that the crew must have been able to see them (2:246). But Johnson also reports the visibility was poor due to multiple cloud layers and little moonlight (2:186). Speculating again, this could have made it harder to see the tracer fire. Furthermore, just before Major Kasmin fired, KAL 007 requested and was given authorization by Japanese air traffic control to climb to 35,000 feet. Hersh claims at the time Kasmin fired, the aircraft was nose high initiating its climb and the crew's attention was inside the cockpit flying on instruments (1:284). This could also explain why the crew had not seen Kasmin's fighter earlier when he flew nearby to attract their attention (2:22).

There remains but two final criticisms by Johnson against the navigational error hypothesis. First, he has said that flight 007 did not use the Shemya VOR, a standard practice on R-20, and thereby failed to see its true position was off course. This can be argued in two ways, both speculative. To begin with, there is no evidence that 007 failed to use the Shemya VOR. The heading information could have been misunderstood or ignored. Also, the crew may not have even bothered to use it. Johnson's interpretation of what is standard and normal practice has been challenged before (concerning the use of weather radar for ground mapping); he may have the same problem on this matter. Second, the question of Captain Chun's notes on the computerized flight plan for 007's route (which was left behind in KAL's Anchorage dispatch office) must be answered. Johnson has speculated these notations to correspond to times for entering and leaving Soviet airspace (2:31). Nowhere did he indicate that the ICAO or anyone else believed these notes significant. Hersh considered the same data and concluded that Captain Chun was exercising his prerogative to revise the flight plan for fuel efficiency (1:196).

This, then, is Johnson's argument against the navigational error hypothesis and the case for it as presented by Sayle and Hersh. Sayle in particular has sound explanations backed up by expert testimonials. Hersh's conclusions are equally based on factual data, analysis by experts, and many interviews with individuals from the US intelligence community (1:xi; 7:110). Neither relied on the information available in the public media. What is important is that each criticism by Johnson has an alternative explanation based on fact or plausible speculation. Next, one must consider Johnson's logic for believing in a conspiracy theory.

His belief in an intended surveillance mission rests on the logic that the evidence does not support the other theories. Therefore, KAL 007 was involved in a conscious act of espionage. Yet this paper has shown the evidence soundly supports an accidental navigational error. However, there is even more

evidence available that casts serious doubt on the possibility of the intended surveillance mission hypothesis.

Johnson's theory that KAL 007 was an intentional part of a US sponsored spy mission rests on a major premise: "Nobody would wittingly shootdown an airliner." (2:259) If the Soviets managed to intercept the "passive bait" airliner, they would force it down, not shoot it down. This, Johnson believes, was the mindset of the American intelligence community planning the mission (2:259-260). If the airliner was forced down, the Soviets would search it, the passengers, and crew. Finding nothing, they would have to release them as they had with KAL 902 in 1978 (2:260). It is this incident that makes a conspiracy theory highly unlikely.

On 20 April 1978, Korean Air Lines flight 902 enroute from Paris to Seoul was shot at, hit and forced to land by Soviet fighters. Flight 902 had committed a navigational error and strayed into Soviet territory over the Kola Peninsula. Two passengers were killed and 13 injured (1:3). The US intelligence community carefully studied the event.

US intelligence analysts learned two significant things from the incident. First, the accident happened in an area where the US flies reconnaissance missions with RC-135 aircraft, although in international airspace (1:9). And secondly, the Soviets assumed the airliner was one of these reconnaissance flights despite the visual identifications made by the fighters (1:14). Author Hersh obtained this information from interviews with US intelligence analysts who said that the Soviet authorities considered the airline markings to be a deception (1:14). Such a Soviet reaction to airspace violations is nothing new.

Additional Research Evidence

The Soviets have a long history of shooting down or forcing down any aircraft which enters Soviet airspace. Major Martin Alvstad has documented in his 1987 ACSC research project 32 incidents since 1946 where Soviet fighters have fired upon, forced down, or shot down aircraft violating their airspace. His conclusion based on this is clear: Soviet policy will always be to force down any violating aircraft or shoot it down if it fails to respond (14:18, 25). This long history of Soviet predictability is also undoubtedly known to the US intelligence community. Clearly then, it is highly unlikely for the US to have considered Johnson's scenario.

Chapter Five

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The question of whether or not KAL 007 was a passive probe in a US sponsored intelligence mission as postulated by Johnson can now be addressed. All the data presented in this paper must be considered so that conclusions can be drawn. It has been shown that Johnson's case is tainted by political bias. His sources have been considered by reviewers and even Johnson himself to be circumstantial. His technical arguments against a navigational error are not as strong as the arguments for such an accident. This seriously undermines the logic for his case. Other investigators examining the same data have drawn much different conclusions. Finally, in light of additional evidence on Soviet behavior towards airspace violations, there is sufficient reason to doubt the plausibility of Johnson's conspiracy theory.

It is evident that the tragic sequence of events leading to the destruction of Kal 007 and the loss of 269 lives began with an innocent human error. Crew inattention failed to catch the error until it was too late. It is possible Captain Chun realized his desperate position over Sakhalin and attempted a gamble. Being a former fighter pilot, he may have thought he could evade an interception by flying over Sakhalin to the northwest rather than turning away from it (another possible explanation of the turn). He must not have realized how close the fighters were, otherwise he would not have tried. The Soviets were determined to stop the aircraft whether or not it could be identified. The unfortunate outcome was inevitable given the Soviet mindset. Thus, KAL 007 was not involved in a US reconnaissance mission. It flew over Soviet territory because of an accidental error in navigation.

But this paper does not attempt to answer all the questions that still remain. Did the Soviets believe flight 007 was a reconnaissance aircraft, an airliner, or just an unidentified intruder? Did the US have the information to know what was happening and thus be able to warn KAL 007? If so, why didn't they? Was the initial US response to the incident justified? These are some of the serious questions that will only be answered by more research.

Can anything be learned from the tragedy? Hopefully there are lessons that have been learned by both the Soviets and the US. Both nations need to ensure their mistrust will never again endanger innocent lives in such a way. At the very least, this is their obligation to the 269 victims who perished along with KAL 007.

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