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KOREAN AIRLINER GUMBEL: As we return at 7:15, we continue with our discussion of KAL flight 007. From the start, the United States has steadfastly maintained that the Korean airlines plane was not on a spying mission, it accidentally strayed into Soviet air space, but now an article in The Nation magazine takes the U.S. to task for inconsistencies and omissions in public statements about events surrounding the destruction of that plane by Soviet interceptors. Joining us this morning is David Pearson. He is the author of the article to be published next week, by The Nation, and he's a doctoral candidate in sociology from Yale. Good morning. DAVID PEARSON: Good morning, Bryant.

GUMBEL: Essentially, what's wrong with the U.S. position on KAL 007? PEARSON: Well, I think what we see as we read the U.S. account of the incident is selective prevision of evidence and omission of critical evidence which could establish, on all fronts, the nature, the role of U.S. agencies, the role of the U.S. aircraft, which we know was flying in the area, as Korean airlines flew toward Soviet territory, and I think the nature of what can only be called the Korean airlines cover-up subsequent to the incident.

GUMBEL: So right up front let's establish what are you charging U.S. officials with, a cover-up and what else? PEARSON: Well, I think a cover-up is a strong term but I think what we see, again, is certain information that could be made available without sacrificing any legitimate national security needs has been withheld from public scrutiny.

GUMBEL: Why isn't it possible that KAL flight 007 was off course? Why won't you buy that? PEARSON: Well, I think the Air Navigation Commission summed that up very succinctly in their addendum to the ICAO report, the International Civil Aviation Organization report, and they said that all of these scenarios, the possible deviation from course according to a, for example for taking a great circle route, the incorrect setting of magnetic heading and so on, that all of these could not explain the course actually flown by the jetliner.

GUMBEL: We have a map available that shows what was the intended course and the course that was actually flown. Is it not possible that their readings were off within the cockpit, that this was just pilot error? PEARSON: No, there is no possibility of that.

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GUMBEL: Why not? PEARSON: And the reason, the reason because reconstructions by the Air Navigation Commission showed that in every instance those scenarios could not account for the flight path shown. To describe precisely why would be a very technical discussion and I think we just have to turn back to the original reports.

GUMBEL: You have also contended that U.S. officials knew all along that the plane was lost. How can you be so certain of that? PEARSON: All right. There are three important points to make here. The only possibilities are the following: one, that there was no knowledge at all by U.S. officials, and this means an extraordinary wealth of intelligence and military equipment, hardware and personnel in the area somehow didn't see a 747 straying miles and miles off course.

GUMBEL: But that's possible. PEARSON: In fact, it's not possible unless we're to admit the largest single failure in communications command control in intelligence and early warning in the history of the United States.

GUMBEL: OK, so you're saying the radar facilities were in place so that the U.S. officials had to know the plane was off course. PEARSON: Not only radar facilities but also signals from intelligence facilities at Shamei Islands in the Aleutians, on mainland Alaska and on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido.

GUMBEL: We noted a little bit earlier in the report that Jane was talking about that an RC-135, a U.S. reconnaissance plane, was in the area. What role do you claim it played with 007? PEARSON: Well, the evidence suggests that Korean Airlines flight 007 made a slight course change when it was in proximity to the RC-135. I think that is indeed suggestive. And also the U.S. statements regarding the RC-135 have been incomplete, to be kind. I think an example of that would be the U.S. statement, and I quote, was, 'The closest approach of the two aircraft was 75 nautical miles while the U.S. aircraft was in its mission orbit.' A mission orbit is a very specific flight path, and what that leaves open is a possibility that the airliner came much closer to the U.S. aircraft while it was outside of its mission orbit.

GUMBEL: So what is it you're suggesting? I mean, why, even assuming that U.S. officials knew the plane was off course, why would they let it stay off course? What did they have to gain? PEARSON: It brings us to our two other possibilities. The first one would be lack of knowledge of U.S. agencies. I think that is not a credible explanation. The second one is that U.S. military and intelligence services were collecting that

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information and simply didn't make it available to the civilian leadership in the United States.

GUMBEL: But again, what did they have to gain by allowing the Soviet, this airlines to continue to stray over Soviet airspace. PEARSON: The best response to that is precisely what occurred. One of the largest intelligence coups in history occurred that night.

GUMBEL: What kind of an intelligence coup? PEARSON: By that I mean, U.S. signals intelligence and radar equipment monitored, monitored the Soviets, turning on virtually every piece of electronic equipment in the Far East. They monitored communications patterns over the Kimchaek peninsula, over the Sakhalin Island, between those two locations and between those locations in regional command centers and between those locations and Moscow.

GUMBEL: One Pentagon official reacting to your article has called it 'absolutely absurd,' that in the past when charges have come up like this Caspar Weinberger has said those who are saying such things have bought the total Soviet package of lies. PEARSON: I think what we need to do at that point is to call for certain evidence that is available to the United States which could establish without any doubt the nature of the role of the RC-135 and the active and ongoing knowledge of U.S. agencies of the flight of 007.

GUMBEL: But they would say that compromises national security by releasing that information. PEARSON: In every instance the U.S. has made public information which already provides in the public domain knowledge of our capabilities. The selective withholding of further information on that basis simply is not a sound argument.

GUMBEL: Let's face facts. You're a doctoral candidate, you have no government experience, you're not an insider on national security. Why should anyone give a great deal of credence to this? PEARSON: Well, I think the best argument for that is, with the information in the public domain, is it possible to understand larger events with a certain amount of dedication and with a certain amount of insight? And I think for all of us, all of us in the country, if we can't have information, sufficient information available to us to be able to ascertain the nature of large public events, then, then I think we're indeed in sad straits.

GUMBEL: David Pearson, thank you. PEARSON: Bryant, thank you.

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