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KAL story may have been hoax to boost military magazine sales

By Peter Almond
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LONDON — A British defense magazine's "new evidence" that Korean Air Lines Flight 007 was on a U.S. spying mission when it was shot down by the Soviets may turn out to have been a publicity stunt.

The article was published just as a major military equipment fair opened this week at Aldershot, when the magazine was gearing up a sales promotion.

Some 30,000 invited guests from all over the world — most of them in the defense industry — were expected at the fair, and all were potential readers for Defence Attache.

The magazine's editor and defense editor were at Aldershot yesterday and could not be reached for comment. But the associate publisher was clearly delighted with the worldwide press interest, including that from South Korea.

He said he did not know the name of the author of the article, which was published under a pseudonym.

The article attracted scant attention in Britain, where the only publications to mention it have been the left-of-center Sunday Observer newspaper and the Economist magazine, slightly right of center, both of which were approached by the editors of Defence Attache.

"As an investigative piece it can be easily torn apart," said one British journalist who said his newspaper would not run it for that reason. "It is far too tenuous speculation."

Other journalists said the article appears to be little more than speculation larded with allegedly new intelligence evidence.

Published in London, Defence Attache is well-regarded by British government and defense industry officials as a small, specialized

monthly magazine of about 4,000 circulation. It is sent to government and defense experts around the world, including those at the Pentagon. Its articles focus on military equipment sales but are rarely controversial.

It appears the author of the KAL article had conversations with intelligence officials — possibly with as many Soviets as Americans.

But the credibility of the article's detailed reports of the movements of U.S. Ferret satellites in 1964 — coinciding with the shooting down of two U.S. military planes over East Germany, incidents the author

says are similar to the KAL incident — appears to be damaged by a plea for the U.S. press to "take up the challenge" and do more investigating of the incident.

The article also contains an unsupported suggestion that former National Security Adviser William Clark was forced from office because he erred in not expecting the KAL airliner to be shot down with the loss of so many lives.

The author appears to some to damage his credibility further by attempting to connect what he says is a decline in Defense Department

interest in the space shuttle with the failure of the Soviets even to mention the Shuttle's alleged involvement in the KAL operation.

Was a secret deal reached, he asks, where the Soviets would drop any mention of the Shuttle in exchange for the Shuttle's "demilitarization?"

Says Andrew Wilson, the Observer reporter who wrote the story for his newspaper about the magazine article: "There are still a lot of questions to be answered about the KAL incident, and I think you can expect this type of story."

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