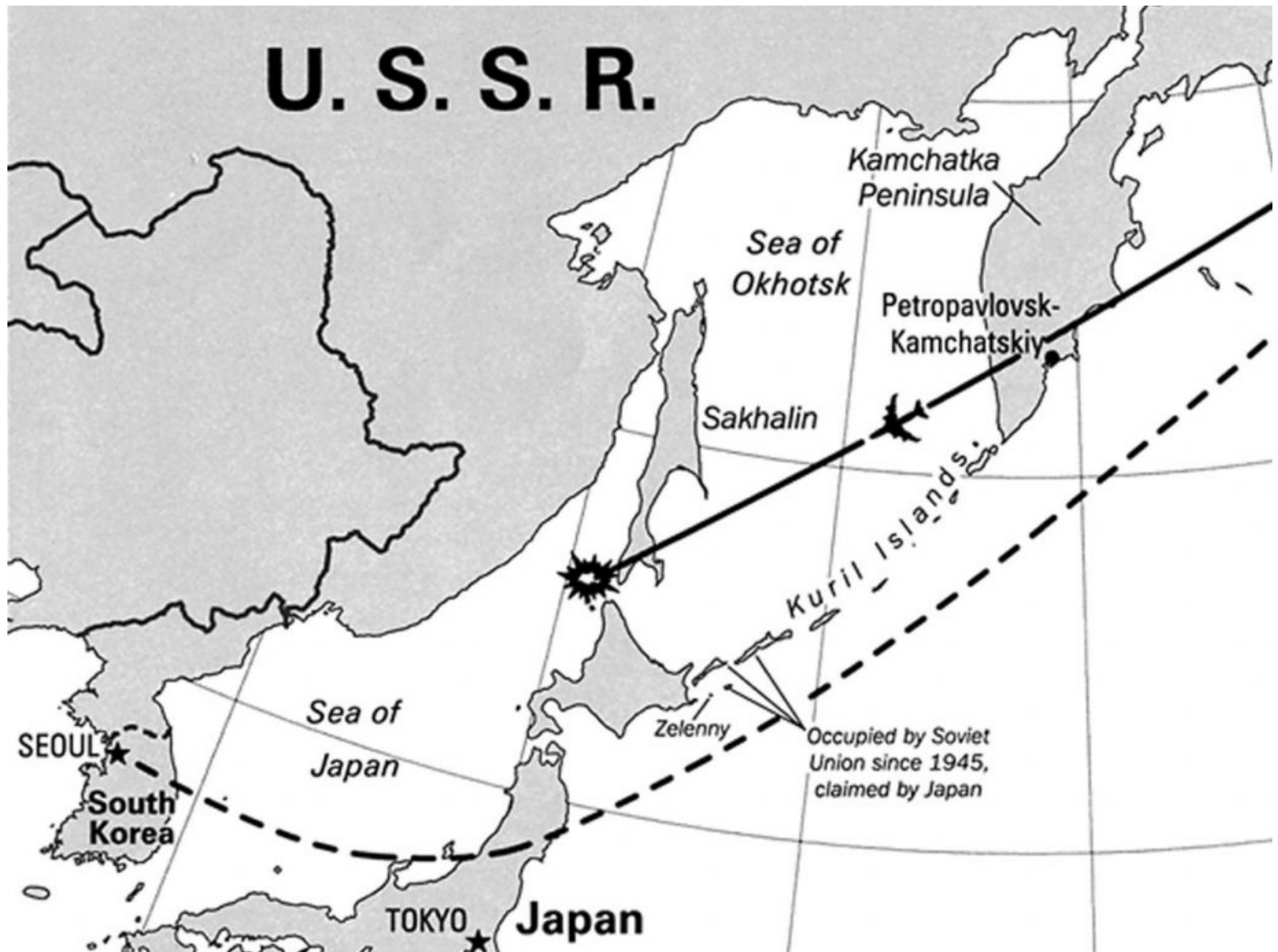




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How Reagan's war drive exploited a tragedy: The real story of Korean Air Lines Flight 007

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This map produced by the CIA shows how wildly off course Flight 007 flew on Sept. 1, 1983.

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Forty years ago, 269 people were killed when Korean Air Lines flight 007 was shot down over the Soviet Union on Sept. 1, 1983.

President Ronald Reagan called it “an act of barbarism.” U.S. cops kill as many people every three months.

Less than five years later, the U.S. Navy blew up Iran Air flight 655 on July 3, 1988, killing 290 people. Reagan's Vice-President, [George H.W. Bush, declared](#) a month afterwards, "I will never apologize for the United States — I don't care what the facts are."

The Korean airliner flew as far as 365 miles off course to go over sensitive Soviet military bases at night. Monitoring Soviet communications, the [National Security Agency later admitted](#) the socialist country's air defense personnel thought the jet was a U.S. RC-135 spy plane, a Boeing military plane that's identical to the Boeing 707 commercial aircraft.

The Iranian airliner, on the other hand, was on its expected course when it was shot down in broad daylight, 7,600 miles from the U.S., by a missile fired by the USS Vincennes. Both tragedies were used by the military-industrial complex to get what it wanted.

After its airliner was shot down, Iran was compelled to end the Iran-Iraq war on poor terms. Using the "divide and conquer" tactic, both the Carter and Reagan administrations promoted this bloody war that killed hundreds of thousands of people. Now it was time to end it, with both Iran and Iraq severely weakened.

The shootdown of the Korean airliner unleashed a tidal wave of hate against the Soviet Union. Corporate media acted as cheerleaders. Reagan used the 269 deaths to push through huge increases in the Pentagon budget.

A crucial part of this war drive was deploying Pershing II medium range nuclear missiles in West Germany in November 1983. These mass murder weapons — that could hit Soviet soil in eight minutes — were installed despite millions of people having demonstrated against them.

War propaganda at the U.N.

Pumping up the anti-communist campaign was a Hollywood spectacular at the United Nations Security Council, courtesy of the U.S. Information Agency. Its director was Reagan's buddy Charles Wick, co-producer of "Snow White and the Three Stooges."

Five TV screens were set up in the council chamber to show the video. The MC was U.S. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick.

She had dismissed the murder and rape of four churchwomen in El Salvador by the oligarchy's National Guard. "The nuns were not just nuns," [Kirkpatrick said](#). "The nuns were also political activists."

Thirteen years later the video's producer, [Alvin Snyder, admitted](#) that "the video was powerful, effective and wrong." It featured alleged comments of Soviet pilots, many of which were mistranslated.

Adding to the right-wing uproar was the death on flight 007 of John Birch Society leader and Congress member Larry McDonald. The fascist had nominated Nazi war criminal Rudolf Hess for a Nobel Peace Prize.

The Birchers claimed that flight 007 was actually captured by a secret Soviet weapon with McDonald and the other passengers being held captive. Interestingly, other Congress members — including Ku Klux Klan Senator Jesse Helms — flew on KAL flight 015, which followed flight 007 and kept on the correct flight path.

All the while, the Reagan regime was conducting a massive cover-up that rivaled Watergate. Key radar tapes were destroyed. Gag orders were issued to silence witnesses.

By law, the National Transportation Safety Board was supposed to investigate the shootdown. It was illegally ordered instead to turn over its evidence to the State Department, which sat on it.

Deliberately off course

One of few voices to question the White House story about flight 007 was British journalist R.W. Johnson. His book "Shootdown" was published in 1986 and is worth reading today.

Johnson described the tremendous odds against the Korean airliner having accidentally flown so far from its designated flight path. He quotes retired Canadian Major-General Richard Rohmer: "Did the [Korean] 747's crew know the aircraft was off course? ... Yes, they knew exactly where they were ..."

Here's some of the reasons "Shootdown" gives for disbelieving that flight 007 flew 250 miles over Soviet territory by "mistake":

- *The Boeing 747 was equipped with the Inertial Navigation System. The INS has three computers so it can continue to function even if two of the computers crash. Over a five-year period there was only one INS error per every 20,000 flights, most likely caused by programming errors.
- It's hard to believe that such an error was made by the captain of flight 007, Chun Byung-in. The experienced pilot was known as a "human computer."
- Chun wasn't alone on the 747 flight deck. Even if the INS and the autopilot were uncoupled, the crew would have had to ignore the amber warning light. They also would have had to fail to notice the reading on the magnetic compass.
- Standard procedure would be for the plane's weather radar to be in its ground-mapping model. This would have clearly shown the Soviet Union's rocky Kamchatka peninsula that the plane flew over.
- Captain Chun repeatedly gave false positions of his location. He flew almost directly over the Soviet bases of Petropavlovsk and Korsakov. Chun turned to go over the Soviet Union's Sakhalin Island.
- In order to make evasive maneuvers, including increasing the speed, Captain

Chun took 10,000 pounds more fuel than he put on the flight release sheet.

- Retired Trans World Airlines pilot and navigator Robert Allardyce along with his associate James Gollin listened to the last words of flight 007's First Officer Son Dong-Hui. It was first broadcast on ABC's "20/20" program. They heard: "For South Korean Director ... repeating instructions. Hold your bogey (or 'bogies') north (or 'course') ... repeat conditions. Gonna be a bloodbath ... you bet."

As R.W. Johnson pointed out, both "director" and "bogey" are military, not civilian, aviation terms. He wrote that First Officer Son "was in touch with the mission director of what could only have been a surveillance mission."

Using passengers as bait

Flight 007 wasn't the first Korean Air Lines plane to go over Soviet territory by "mistake." On April 20, 1978, KAL flight 902 flew over the Soviet base at Murmansk before it was forced to land by a Soviet fighter. One passenger was killed.

South Korea is a virtual colony of Wall Street and its military-industrial complex. In the middle of Seoul is a U.S. military base. That's like British or German troops occupying New York City's Central Park.

The CIA uses South Korea to spy on the socialist Democratic People's Republic of Korea and, at that time, the Soviet Union. KAL flight 007 was used as bait to "light up" every Soviet radar in the region, as well as to listen to radio communications.

Collecting info for the Pentagon were at least two RC-135 spy planes; another spy plane, the Orion P-3C; the USS Observation Island, operating the Cobra Judy radar; and the 1982-41c spy satellite. The U.S. also had a series of ground radar stations. Meanwhile the space shuttle Challenger was circling the earth.

Ernest Volkman, editor of "Defense Science," described the results:

“As a result of the KAL incident, United States intelligence received a bonanza the likes of which they have never received in their lives. Reason: because of the tragic incident it managed to turn on just about every single Soviet electromagnetic transmission over a period of about four hours and an area of approximately 7,000 square miles, and I mean everything. ... Now, admittedly, that’s a cynical statement, but we’re talking about a very cynical business here.”

More good news from the 269 dead passengers and crew was a boom in “defense” stocks, including Lockheed.

Risking nuclear war

The Reagan administration was possibly the most adventurist in U.S. history. It wanted to put MX nuclear missiles on Japanese bullet trains.

Secretary of Defense [Caspar Weinberger wrote](#) that Secretary of State Alexander Haig wanted “to invade Cuba and, one way or another, put an end to the Castro regime.”

Reagan worshipper [Peter Schweizer bragged](#) how U.S. bombers would fly to the edge of Soviet air space before peeling off at the last minute. Every time Soviet fighters were forced to scramble. Pretending to launch a nuclear first strike must have been great fun!

This was the most dangerous time of the Cold War since the Cuban missile crisis. A Soviet diplomat told Brian Becker — now the ANSWER Coalition’s national director — that the KAL 007 crisis reminded him of John F. Kennedy’s assassination. Many on the far right claimed that accused JFK assassin and patsy Lee Harvey Oswald was a Soviet and/or Cuban agent.

Starting on Nov. 7, 1983 — the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution — U.S. and other NATO forces staged the Able Archer ‘83 exercise, which included a simulated

nuclear attack. Soviet Defense Minister [Dmitry Ustinov warned](#) that NATO's exercises "are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from a real deployment."

Meanwhile U.S. naval exercises were staged in the northern Pacific near Soviet waters. These included the Fleetex '83 exercise and a simulated amphibious assault on Okinawa. This was seen as preparation for invading Soviet territories like the Kuril Islands, Sakhalin or Kamchatka.

The same year racist Reagan invaded the Black Caribbean island of Grenada while U.S. Marines landed in Lebanon. The CIA continued the Contra war in Nicaragua that cost 50,000 lives and was paid for by starting the crack epidemic.

Billions were spent to overthrow a progressive government in Afghanistan. Reagan did everything he could to prop up the apartheid regime in South Africa that was keeping Nelson Mandela in jail.

Gambling with 269 lives

Like Trump, the Reaganites wanted to ditch arms-control treaties. Part of this campaign was leaking to journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak that a huge radar was being built at Krasnoyarsk in Siberia. In their July 27, 1983, newspaper column, they claimed the facility would violate the anti-ballistic missile treaty.

What was needed to whip up this allegation was finding out if there was a radar gap on the Soviet Union's Pacific border. Hence the flight of KAL 007 over a string of Soviet military bases, forcing its military to turn on every radar.

U.S. electronic platforms jammed as many Soviets radars as they could. This allowed flight 007 to get clean across Kamchatka.

Soviet fighters were sent to stop the intruder. Flight 007's pilot Chun Byung-in

ignored warnings that included tracer shells shot by Soviet pilot Vassily Kasmin.

Chun instead staged diversionary tactics like a military aircraft would. (Chun was a former Korean Air Force pilot.) These tricks included reporting that he was climbing when he was actually descending.

Kasmin was finally given an order to fire missiles at the intruder. The Soviets had no idea that it was a commercial airliner.

R.W. Johnson believes that National Security Advisor “Judge” Bill Clark and CIA director William Casey were responsible for sending flight 007 into Soviet airspace.

If worse came to worse, flight 007 might be forced to land on Soviet territory, like KAL flight 902 did in 1978. But 007 pilot Chun Byung-in tried to escape instead. Two hundred sixty-nine people were killed.

Clark looked for an exit. When the Secretary of Interior James Watt was forced to resign after making bigoted remarks, Clark slipped into the job. Within a year he was back at his California ranch.

The sad tale of flight 007 should be remembered for the deadly risks taken by the U.S. military-industrial complex. Poor and working people shouldn’t believe White House lies about the Soviet Union 38 years ago or the People’s Republic of China today.

Unless otherwise noted, the source is “Shutdown: Flight 007 and the American Connection” by R.W. Johnson.

