

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

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MISSING PLANE/
JAPAN

BROKAW: Good evening. It was a war of words between the United States and the Soviet Union on the shooting down of Korean Airline's Flight 007. The Soviet foreign minister insisted the plane was on a special mission for the United States, but a spokesman for President Reagan said, 'The evidence is as plain as the nose on your face that it was a civilian passenger plane.'

BROKAW: At the White House, President Reagan's spokesman and advisers would have none of the Soviet explanation. Chris Wallace has been talking to a lot of them, and he tells us tonight that they're confident the Soviets know much more than they're saying.

WALLACE: Government sources tell NBC News that less than one hour after that Korean airliner was shot down, the U.S. intercepted communications between Soviet ground crews in the area in which the Soviets discussed having shot down a passenger plane. The communications between Soviet installations were picked up by highly sensitive U.S. intelligence equipment, and sources tell NBC News that the Soviets discussed 'in a very matter-of-fact way' having shot down a passenger plane. The government sources say this is one more piece of evidence that contradicts the official Soviet story. Last night a Soviet government statement on television said the Soviet pilots could not know that it was a civilian aircraft. Despite the new evidence, White House spokesman Larry Speakes slightly backed off his charges against the Soviets. Yesterday, Speakes said the U.S. has irrefutable evidence that the Soviets knew they were shooting down a civilian airliner, but today Speakes changed that to practically irrefutable evidence, saying it stretches the imagination to believe the Soviets made a mistake. Government sources say the reason for this back-off is that even with the interception of Soviet ground communications, the U.S. still lacks one important piece of proof, a clear statement by the Soviets before the attack that they knew they were going after a passenger plane. Chris Wallace, NBC News, at the White House.