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Jumbo Jet Reports UFO Over Soviet Union<RO>[PAR]

LONDON (AP) [MD] A British Airways jetliner made a diversion over the Soviet

Union to avoid what the crew reported as an unidentified flying object, airline spokesman Alan Solloway said Saturday.[PAR]

The incident occurred in April, but first came to light in a front-page article Saturday in The Times of London.[PAR]

Solloway confirmed that the crew of the Boeing 747 jumbo jet reported seeing a UFO over the Soviet Union on April 22 while flying from London to Bangkok, Thailand.[PAR]

He said it was the first such case in the airline's history.[PAR]

''We have had crews report seeing space debris burning, but we can't recall a UFO being sighted and being logged as a UFO,'' Solloway said.[PAR]

''Usually, there is a scientific explanation for whatever was seen, but there doesn't seem to be a scientific explanation for this.'' [PAR]

The Times said all five crew members reported seeing an object with twinkling lights fly directly toward them and then vanish quickly over the Kazakhstan horizon.[PAR]

''It was definitely not an aircraft,'' the paper quoted First Officer Anthony Colin, 42, as saying. ''Of that I am positive. None of us had ever seen anything like it before. We are all bitter, cynical aviators who like a scientific explanation for everything. But this has got us foxed.'' [PAR]

Solloway said that the crew checked with Soviet air traffic control, which reported no other aircraft were in the vicinity.[PAR]

Howard Miles, director of the artificial satellite section of the British Astronomical Association, told The Times that the crew could have seen a satellite re-entering the atmosphere.[PAR]

But he said satellites normally burn up at an altitude of about 80 miles and the aircraft was flying at about 10 miles.[PAR]

''It must therefore have been an optical illusion, with the actual lights being much further away,'' he was quoted as saying.[PAR]

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RAY NELKE via COUD—I