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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary  
(Geneva, Switzerland)

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FOR RELEASE AT 10:00 AM Local  
4:00 AM EST

November 21, 1985

U.S. FACT SHEET

North Pacific Air Safety Agreement

The US, Japan, and the USSR signed an agreement November 19 on procedures to implement the North Pacific [NOPAC] Air Safety Memorandum of Understanding which was signed in Tokyo on July 29 of this year. The Memorandum of Understanding provides for a new communication link between Anchorage, Tokyo, and Khabarovsk for use when a civil aircraft assigned to a NOPAC route is in trouble. It specifies certain cooperative measures among the three sides to identify and assist such aircraft and offers the use of a radio broadcasting station on Kamchatka as a navigation aid.

The implementation procedures amplify on these undertakings and specify what the respective area control centers [ACCs] will do in the event an aircraft is lost, has deviated from course, has a communication failure, been hijacked, or has an in-flight emergency requiring immediate landing on USSR territory. The procedures agreement also stipulates that the USSR will inform Japan or the U.S. if an unidentified aircraft appears in a Soviet Flight Information Region [FIR] which could be an aircraft that had strayed from a NOPAC route.

# # #

Q & As on the NOPAC Air Safety Implementation Accord

Q: When will this agreement come into force?

A. -- The Memorandum of Understanding came into force through an exchange of diplomatic notes on October 8 of this year. It will take several more months for the communication circuit to be set up and become operational, however.

Q. Does this agreement mean the Soviet Union has agreed there will be no more Korean Airliner shootdowns?

A. -- It doesn't. But it does reduce the danger of a repetition of such a tragedy, and that was what we were aiming for. Agreeing to take these steps does not change anyone's legal responsibilities and obligations. In our view, using the new mechanisms we have agreed on is a very practical way of reducing the chances of recurrence, and that is why we are pleased that agreement has been reached on the implementation procedures. The basic objective in all of these talks was enhancing air safety.

Q. If an airliner strayed off a NOPAC route toward Soviet territory, would the Soviet Union get in touch with us under this agreement?

A. -- This agreement establishes the mechanisms and means for doing that, and the Soviet Union has committed itself to get in touch with us when an unidentified civil aircraft enters one of their flight information regions.

Q. But if Soviet law provides for shooting down an airplane, and no one is changing their legal obligations, what is this agreement worth?

A. -- We never expected or aimed for changes in their law, because current international law obliges all countries to assist a civil aircraft to proceed safely without shooting it down. What we were aiming for was new mechanisms and commitments to use them which would make it more likely that those obligations under current law are honored in the future. We have achieved that aim. In addition, the mechanism we have agreed on will provide some means to assist aircrews before they are in violation of Soviet territorial airspace.

Q. What type of situations does the procedures document cover?

A. -- It provides that in the event of an emergency situation in-flight that requires an immediate landing, the Soviet Area Control Center will provide assistance to the aircraft up to and including a landing on Soviet territory if it cannot reach U.S. or Japanese territory.

-- It also delineates what each control center should do when it has information, or reason to suspect, that an aircraft has strayed into airspace controlled by the Soviet Union.

- For example, if either the Anchorage or Tokyo Centers is aware that an aircraft under their control has inadvertently deviated into a Soviet Flight Information Region and is out of communication with Tokyo or Anchorage, they will advise the Khabarovsk Center of that fact. The Soviets will then attempt to relay information to the aircraft to return it to course.
  
- Conversely, if the Khabarovsk Center has reason to believe that an unidentified aircraft detected in its airspace has strayed from one of the Northern Pacific routes, it will communicate with Tokyo or Anchorage and provide the information it has on the aircraft's location, altitude, and course.
  
- With this information, either the Tokyo or Anchorage Center will attempt to provide all pertinent information on the aircraft to Khabarovsk.
  
- Other procedures spelled out in the agreement provide guidance for handling an aircraft that has been hijacked and is heading into airspace controlled by the Soviet Union, or one which has suffered a loss of communications.

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