

September 19, 1983

Note about the Talks of Comrade Minister [Erich Mielke] with the Deputy Chairman of the KGB, Comrade V. A. Kryuchkov, on 19 September 1983 in Berlin

Citation:

"Note about the Talks of Comrade Minister [Erich Mielke] with the Deputy Chairman of the KGB, Comrade V. A. Kryuchkov, on 19 September 1983 in Berlin", September 19, 1983, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Office of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU), MfS, ZAIG 5306, pp. 1-19. Translated by Bernd Schaefer.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115718>

Summary:

Meeting between KGB Deputy Chairman Kryuchkov and East German Minister for State Security Mielke, including discussion of the shootdown of Korean Airlines (KAL) Flight 007.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

N o t e

About the Talks of Comrade Minister [Erich Mielke] with the Deputy Chairman of the KGB, Comrade V. A. Kryuchkov, on 19 September 1983 in Berlin

[Additional] Participants:

From the KGB:

Comrade Lieutenant General Shumilov
Comrade Captain Ryabinnikov (Interpreter)

From the MfS:

Comrade Major General Grossmann
Comrade Major General Damm
Comrade Lieutenant Colonel Salevsky (Interpreter)

Comrade Mielke:

Welcome.

It's a great pleasure. I understand how the difficult situation makes it hard for you [Kryuchkov] to leave the Soviet Union temporarily. We are happy that it worked out nonetheless.

I have to convey greetings from Comrade [Markus] Wolf [the Deputy Minister for State Security]. He will return from Hungary on 1 October 1983 and come [for a further bilateral MfS-KGB meeting] to Tabarz [in the Thuringian Forest in the GDR where Kryuchkov will stay for vacation]. Then we can already talk there about some issues and return to Berlin during the course of Sunday, 2 October 1983. We will have time on 3 and 4 October to discuss some more issues and requests for mutual cooperation, possibly to be forwarded later to Comrade [CPSU General Secretary] Y. V. Andropov. [Your] return to Moscow is scheduled for 5 October.

I have some requests to hear from you Moscow's perspectives concerning assessments of the following issues:

- What is the perspective on [Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) disarmament] talks in Geneva? (West German newspaper "Die Welt" says there is no more optimism left, just hope!)

- What does this mean in terms of concrete assignments to the MfS, how should we proceed? (Maybe you could also outline problems for us to forward Comrade E. Honecker.)

- Regarding the entire complex of heightened tensions after the plane incident (South Korea) and ensuing boycott measures: What are the assessments? What does this mean for the future? Which counter-measures are planned? [1]

- [CSCE follow-up conference in] Madrid

Even elements from the FRG [West German] bourgeoisie are talking about the option to continue disarmament negotiations after the buildup [of INF in Western Europe].

There have been several statements in this regard (Vogel/SPD, Weizsäcker/CDU, even Strauss/CSU).

They all believe something is going to happen, and that even after missile deployment the negotiations will continue. Even Strauss said in his first two election campaign speeches that we must avoid a nuclear world war; otherwise the world will perish.

You can view him as you like, but in a certain regard he is a realist. He believes the balance of forces to be such that there can be no winner. This does not yet make him our friend. You have to analyze this thoroughly.

I also still want to talk to you later about other issues in private.

There are many who believe there will be a continuation of talks even after an INF deployment. In addition, there are the full impacts of the boycott in effect.

We are interested in the actual [KGB] assessments of the situation, in addition to what is known at the Politburo level.

Comrade Kryuchkov:

Many thanks for the welcome.

I am grateful for the invitation to spend parts of my vacation here in the GDR. My apologies that I was not able to come on 10 September already. Yet there were a couple of issues preventing me from doing so. The most important one was the plane incident. You do not shoot down such a type of airplane once a month.

Thus I messed up all of our comrades' schedules to a certain degree. This has created some problems.

Comrade Mielke:

We have solved this in an effective fashion. Just come when you are able to come.

Comrade Kryuchkov:

I am tasked to convey cordial greetings from Y. V. Andropov and his best wishes. He again thanks you for the joint work done for state security.

He rates meetings and talks with you very highly, in particular your cordial and focused development of cooperation with the USSR.

It is his special pleasure to greet you again cordially. Now he is on vacation in the South. For politicians like him, there is no actual vacation. Once in a while he has visitors.

For a half day he is reading information, including ours [KGB] and what we received from you. Also I convey cordial greetings from [KGB Chairman] V. M. Chebrikov and

his deputies. They all know you very well. Almost all of them have worked with you in the past, and all of them have very fond memories.

Now to the concrete questions you have raised.

These are questions discussed at the highest level. I myself am not placed so highly.

Hence I will do my best to respond to these questions based on my state of knowledge and responsibilities.

Obviously I will not be able to answer them in full. Yet since we are all part of the process to determine policy and concrete measures, issues of detail included, I can explain at least some aspects and inform you accordingly.

On the Plane Incident

Some issues have been already explained at the [9 September 1983] press conference. Now one can outline how the story happened and unfolded in its entirety.

During the first days we were reluctant to provide information. From the beginning, however, there were no reasons to keep the incident secret. We wanted to wait to see what the West had to say. Reagan's initial reaction was very important to us. The full timeline about what happened to the plane was meanwhile published in our press. Yet we have not yet published everything we have.

We did not know that the downed plane was a civilian airliner. Our pilots were not aware of that. We were convinced that it was a military aircraft. When the regional ground command issued its orders, it did not know it was a civilian airliner. We are not going to make this public, but this was just how it was. We were convinced that this was a special aircraft on a specific reconnaissance mission.

Our radar detected the plane prior to its violation of our airspace, about 600 to 800 kilometers before Kamchatka. The dot on the radar approached Kamchatka, i.e. the area where we have military bases. Some of them are nuclear bases.

Our services were to a certain extent shocked that the plane headed directly towards Kamchatka. Such a brazen incident had never happened before. Thousands of planes fly through the air corridors there. Previous violations were just about between 1 and 5 kilometers. Yet until 1 September 1983, there had been no single incident involving a direct flight over Kamchatka.

The plane was detected by ground radar and by our military aircraft. We decided to do nothing against the plane. We were in doubt what kind of plane it was, and whether it really was an aircraft flying over Kamchatka for intelligence monitoring.

The plane left Soviet airspace over the Sea of Okhotsk. A large part of this ocean consists of open, international waters. There our radar lost the plane. Sometime later the plane showed up in Sakhalin airspace. In Sakhalin they already knew that an airplane had violated airspace over Kamchatka.

We again undertook measures to identify this plane. 4 aircraft went up (2 SU-15, 2 MIG-23). They tried to establish connection; various signals were given. No response. More than 120 [warning] shots were fired.

There were still a few kilometers left for the plane before its departure from our airspace. Our pilots said this is not a passenger plane. It was especially relevant that this plane flew around our anti-aircraft defenses. One SU-15 was especially close, just about 2 kilometers away. The speed of the [KAL] Boeing was 800 kilometers [per hour]; the SU-15 had [a speed of] 2,400 kilometers [per hour], the MIG-23 [had a speed of] 2,000 kilometers [per hour].

For reasons of speed they could not get closer to each other. At the plane, windows were not illuminated and position lights not turned on. We fired special tracer bullets parallel to the plane's course of direction. Some of them were shot right in front of its nose. The plane's pilots must have noticed this. The plane maneuvered and changed its altitude to evade our aircraft. Then, on the instructions of ground control, two missiles were fired. The shutdown occurred over the territory of Sakhalin.

After the firing of the missiles the plane still flew for 11 minutes. It lost altitude, went down to 5,000 meters, and then it fell into the sea 9 to 11 nautical miles from the coast. In the morning we noticed an oil spot on the ocean. Parts from the plane were found near Moneron Island (near Nevelsk). Ocean currents carried other parts to the Japanese coast at Hokkaido. The spot of the crash has been located quite exactly. Now Soviets, Americans, and Japanese are searching there for the wreck. Everybody is attempting to find the flight recorder. Until my departure it had not been found.

The plane had deviated from the air corridor towards Sakhalin by about 600 kilometers, altogether by an average of between 200 and 500 kilometers. There were four American and four Japanese air control points along the regular corridor. None of them had issued a signal.

We were completely convinced that this plane was on a reconnaissance mission. If we would have known that this was a passenger plane, we would not have shot it down. Yet everything pointed in another direction. We have recordings of exchanges between ground control and our aircraft.

So far not everything has been published. Why should we make everything available right away? We have posed and forwarded 11 questions to the Americans and Japanese. They have not responded to any of them.

We have still more details about this [KAL] flight. Reagan declared that mankind will unfortunately never know who entered the wrong programming [at the KAL plane]. You could say, this way he conceded this mistake; since mankind wants to know who did that, and why.

Just among us: We have received very interesting information from an American source. He informs how, and by whom, this airliner was prepared for its flight. In the coming days we will provide this information to the Americans without making all of it public. In this way this American will be "sacrificed" as a source. We have to wait for a couple of more days.

Obviously there are still a couple of other facts. There are people who have consciously sent this plane to its demise. Sooner or later everything will come out.

Reactions in individual countries were very different; in some there were very tough, in others, rather irrelevant. The saying goes that such events do not "live" for more than 2 weeks. The Americans will exploit this further when the parts of the plane and the dead are recovered. Some dead bodies have already been found at the Northern shore of Hokkaido. All this will be exploited propagandistically. In the Western press you always find the question raised over and over whether this is beneficial to Reagan.

We [KGB] want to contribute with our active measures towards the revelation of all causes and links of this plane incident. We hope that our friends from the MfS will support us in this regard.

For the first time, [on 9 September 1983] a large press conference was held with the First Deputy Foreign Minister and the Chief of the General Staff [Marshal Nikolai Orgarkov]. Everything had been thoroughly prepared.

In a few days an article will follow by Air Force Marshal [Pyotr S.] Kirsanov, featuring new facts that this [KAL] flight was not a normal one. It will be proven that simultaneously to this flight a US satellite crossed the flight route three times. The Americans knew that we were preparing missiles for launch on this territory at that time. The launch had to be postponed. Also telling is the following episode: On the downed plane there was a well-known US Senator [sic] who initially did not want to board this flight. [2] He decided to book only at the last minute.

Still some "white spots" remain. After the incident, US Senator [Henry "Scoop"] Jackson [D-WA] delivered a very strong anti-Soviet speech demanding further tough sanctions against the Soviet Union. When he left the podium, he fell and dropped dead. He was an extremely strong anti-Soviet (a pathological case).

We express our deep regrets for the victims but do not accept responsibility. Our Foreign Minister, Comrade Gromyko, did not travel to the U.N. General Assembly in New York. He stayed home since the US did not give guarantees for the safety of his plane.

We will also not participate in the IPU [International Parliamentary Union] Meeting in Seoul (but not because Kim Il Sung has asked us to do so).

It was also because of the plane incident that I was not able to come earlier [to the GDR].

Comrade Mielke:

I have the following questions.

I said from the beginning one has to be more on the offensive, based on the fact that this was an organized provocation. You have to declare that the Americans use other nations to cover their own provocations. They apply this method frequently.

You have to say immediately that this is a provocation in order to go on the offensive. You should have done that right away. This is my only critical remark. I did not have any other alternative thoughts.

This argumentation was lacking right from the onset. There are plenty of examples how they operate here at our place. They exploit other nations, and simultaneously use the opportunity to drag others in whom they actually want to get rid of. I said so immediately when this happened. The issue is now evident. In [our central newspaper] Neues Deutschland we published the full transcript of your press conference. We also broadcasted it on television.

You should have gone on the offensive somewhat faster. Sure, you should listen to what the enemy has to say. Yet everything else you could have added later. You have to work out additional arguments that this was a targeted provocation together with

South Korea. It is not so much about the issue of the shootdown. Yet that you could not identify the airliner as a passenger plane - I do not think this is good.

This event had exceptional elements of surprise. I said so also to Comrade E. Honecker. What could have come out of this? We have to be extraordinarily vigilant. Nobody can say in advance what is going to happen; whether this plane incident could lead to a provocation transforming into a war. I note the problem of surprise over and over again. This surprise can lead to a war.

It is quite uncomfortable to say that one did not recognize it. It can happen. Everyone is human. Yet there lies a great risk also for other issues.

Everything you say is correct, but the Western press says you were not able to identify the type of plane since your aircraft were flying below. They also say the flight recorder has already been found. If you do not have it, you have to search for it further. They [in the West] sense the danger coming from the flight recorder. We are in complete agreement with you and will continue our measures.

A captain from [the West German airline] Lufthansa has written a wonderful article with sound arguments:

1. This is how they [the US] operate
2. Why did they not guide the plane on a correct course if the US and Japan were aware of this?

Arguments are on the table. You just have to use them for the fight against Reagan. It is interesting that Reagan can get into trouble when a part of the bourgeoisie disagrees. If [CNN Chairman Ted] Turner is saying he will not "swear on a bible" that the [KAL] flight was not a spy mission, he therefore argues against Reagan. They provide the arguments themselves. This is why some countries will not join the boycott. We have to continue our work.

I have no further questions. Only if there are new arguments coming up; but then so we can respond quickly. This is important to the entire world, to your good friends, to those who waver, but also to the enemies who are smart and realists. More timely information would have been better: This just privately since you asked.

There are also comrades who say: Did you really have to shoot down the civilian airliner?! Were they not in a position to recognize this?

This is why the argument that you were not able to identify the type of plane is so dangerous.

Comrade Kryuchkov:

They were not able to recognize it.

Comrade Mielke:

Of course, those two plane types look similar. Honest specialists from the West are saying this, too. They also say: Why were there so many RC planes flying at that time in this area?

Comrade Kryuchkov:

The entire incident occurred at 7:00 hours [A.M.] local time. In Moscow it was midnight. Already at the evening of 1 September all issues were discussed, and a first brief news report issued on [state TV newscast] "Vremya." The same day we established a large commission and send them to the East. On 3 September they provided a comprehensive report.

Comrade Mielke:

We already exchanged our opinions on 2 September. Please understand why I was so arrogant and told V. T. Shumilov: Tell Moscow this was a specially prepared South Korean plane for spying; the most important thing is missing in your public statement!

Comrade Kryuchkov:

I can only say: If we had released our second statement 24 hours earlier, the slander would not be this harsh. We did not see through everything right after the incident.

Comrade Mielke:

Tomorrow the Central Committee secretaries in charge will meet in Moscow. There we will submit our proposal accordingly.

The adversary immediately coordinated its measures aimed at you and us.

That is why it was necessary to strike immediately and not just release 5 lines. This may suffice at the parochial level, but not for the global public.

Comrade Kryuchkov:

It is alright what you say. I completely agree with you. But there is one problem: As a Politburo member you know that such issues first have to be discussed by party leaders. So - 10:0 for them.

Comrade Mielke:

No, 10:1 - since you shot down the plane.

I just want to say: There must not be any moments of being surprised. You have to go on the offensive. This is important for future incidents.

Comrade Kryuchkov:

In his talks with you, Comrade Y. V. Andropov always agreed with you on issues of

how to focus on operative impacts of events.

Comrade Mielke:

We can now see how he reacts, how he has got Marxism-Leninism to move again, like for instance concerning

- the national [ethnic] problem
- agriculture
- the class question

This is an enhancement of the [Marxist-Leninist] theory!

Comrade Kryuchkov:

On Geneva [Arms Negotiations]

Reagan has imposed sanctions against us that will not damage him as a president. He wants to run again in the next election. You could say, these are "hollow sanctions." He proposed areas that do not play any major role in bilateral relations between both countries. We had expected sanctions on grain exports or the pipeline deals. As far as Geneva is concerned, he immediately stated the US will [continue to] negotiate.

Still, the question looms for us: Why do we have to continue to discuss these issues when the missile deployment in Western Europe goes forward? Reagan would be delighted to abandon negotiations and act even more impertinent. Yet this would not yield any benefits for him. So he will not walk away from negotiations. Yet those negotiations conducted by the US are a deception of the common people.

These are the facts. However, the USSR cannot abandon negotiation. Otherwise, the common folks will say, the Soviet Union does not want peace.

The issue is very serious. There exist different opinions. Some comrades say: Does it really make sense to continue negotiations?

Comrade Mielke:

One has to continue negotiations.

Comrade Kryuchkov:

Some are proposing to maybe do something to placate the public. This is a very important issue - to undertake a step of this kind. Our leading comrades are currently discussing this. We attempt to find paths leading to an agreement, like our recent proposal on the SS-20.

Yet in the West there is NATO, in the East there is China, and Japan is ascending. We are ready to destroy SS-20 missiles. This is a very courageous step. It means really destroying them, not a relocation to the East of the USSR. This is why government circles are contemplating that our side will have to move somewhat further.

There are very important issues to consider. Our proposal has divided Western allies to a certain extent. We must exploit this. We are discussing an idea to maybe merge negotiations over both strategic arms and medium-range missile limitations. We have to do so thorough calculations. On the one hand, you would gain allies, but on the other side, the problem gets more complicated. France and England currently have 200 nuclear-capable missiles. Yet in a few years that will rise to 600. This is why we have to include them in our calculations.

Comrade Mielke:

A major number of politicians are already in favor of including them.

Comrade Kryuchkov:

The aggravation of the international situation is continuing. The military-industrial complex, of which Reagan is a representative, believes in exploiting the latter for its purposes. In light of such a tense situation, they hope to succeed in liquidating the liberation movement in Central America. Likewise in Africa and Asia. They do everything to win in the Middle East. If the global economy does not change, there is no expectation for any changes of US administration policy.

In this context, we in the KGB has undertaken multiple measures through the international press and other channels; also we do a lot jointly [with the MfS] after respective coordination.

As far as the FRG is concerned - a very important topic - I will certainly have the chance to talk with Comrade Wolf in detail. On Strauss our perspective is essentially shaped by your position.

Comrade Mielke:

I will have to say something on this issue.

I still remember your face, Vladimir Alexandrovich, when I talked with [KGB Chairman] V. M. Chebrikov about Strauss. Comrade E. Honecker authorized me to become active in this matter. We will talk about this separately later.

As a party, we are performing a gigantic work. V. T. Shumilov, with whom we have talked, has seen the document. You have to talk with everybody and argue against the missile deployment. Everybody, even the biggest enemy, has to be addressed in order to make it clear that a nuclear inferno will leave nothing behind of him.

This is always linked to issues of "surprise" [attacks].

Comrade Kryuchkov:

Will we continue to negotiate if the West deploys INF? We do not view the struggle for peace as over. Obviously this struggle is very difficult as a completely new situation will eventually arise. We have to work out new positions. We conduct a very large propaganda campaign. It is a fact that through INF deployment the Americans turn

the Western European countries into "hostages." In any case, it will result in the end of Europe. This is fully clear. How can you make this understandable to the Western Europeans (getting it into their heads) so that no politician can deny it? This is the task. We must jointly contribute to that.

Concerning the question of war: We say that currently its foundations are laid. Whether there actually will be a war, depends on both sides. But we can say that the weak will have no influence here. Our strength is the most important factor, e.g. in Afghanistan. There the struggle is between socialism and capitalism. If we are weak, we will be defeated there. We can say it already now: Afghanistan remains a Soviet-friendly country. Basic changes have been made there.

[The CSCE follow-up conference in] Madrid was a major success. This is how you can propagate it. The plane story has already receded somewhat to the background. Madrid will resume its place in the global campaign. In January 1984 there will be the next round of negotiations on an entirely different level. Then we will see. Madrid is an example for solving problems through negotiations.

We have used the neutrals very well. Malta's position is quite strange. It results from opinions held by Prime Minister [Dom] Mintoff. Basket III depends on our interpretation, and how we will fill it out through practical steps by the party and security services. Basket III provides nobody with the opportunity to interfere with the internal affairs of another state. It contains very many references to domestic legislation.

Comrade Mielke:

On Madrid I hold a somewhat different opinion. Not regarding the overall assessment, or issues of disarmament and peace - but on Basket III.

Moscow is 1,600 kilometers from Berlin. The situation looks quite different from just 1 kilometer of distance (GDR vs. FRG; Germans vs. Germans). We are not Chinese in favor of [Western INF] deployment. Yet FRG citizens are Germans and not Chinese.

We will talk about Madrid later again when Comrade V. A. Kryuchkov is rested.

Today I talked about this issue before the [internal MfS] party meeting with extraordinary stridency.

The issues of "peace" and methods in the struggle about "peace" have unmitigated impacts in the GDR. Among us, almost every week we arrest about 150 people. There is no end in sight. Thus we will have to talk about this.

At the party meeting I talked about the political relevance, and about what we will have to focus on in our work. I talked about the Church, and about the "Greens." Marx himself has commissioned us communists to take care that the world gets preserved for our descendants once we are no longer around. For that, we do not need any "Greens."

Intentionally, we also published the Madrid Document in full. If they [in the West] publish it, it will be wrongfully interpreted. Footnotes are also included. One thing we already did.

On 27 September our state legal bulletin will publish a decree about marriages and

family meetings [between GDR and FRG] coming into effect from 15 October 1983. Simultaneously there will be an unpublished decree issued about its concrete handling.

Yet I am not as happy about Madrid as you from the Soviet Union.

Comrade Kryuchkov:

Our comrades cooperated in Madrid very well with your comrades. [GDR Foreign Minister] Comrade [Oskar] Fischer has invited Comrade Kondrashov to the GDR for that reason.

Comrade Mielke:

Still, Comrade Fischer does not think differently than I do. Compromises had to be made. Yet the GDR is hit hardest since we are a divided country. Germans vs. Germans. If you are a united nation, then it is a different story.

Many thanks for your statements. I am glad I provided the correct line at our party meeting. Even the term "hostages" for the Western Europeans was used in my speech.

Our problems are somewhat different from those of other countries. This is a consequence of our special location.

I am proud we assessed the situation correctly, including the plane incident. I am pleased with your assessment. Like [when talking] with Y. V. Andropov.
Many thanks.

Thank you for the wonderful greetings [from Andropov], and that he still remembers me this well. We will continue to work in the same vein we collaborated with him over all those years; like a true combat unit of the Cheka that puts its ideas into the joint struggle.

Many thanks for the greetings from V. M. Chebrikov. About the "Batashov" question we will talk later.

Many thanks also for the greetings from all deputies of the KGB chairman. How is G. Karpovich doing?

Comrade Kryuchkov:

Many thanks. He is doing according to his age. His health is not great.

Comrade Mielke:

Again heartfelt thanks. Some of your information has confirmed our assessments, including on Afghanistan.

Your remarks about Geneva were important. Hence we will continue our talks with all [Western] politicians. The CPSU leadership has to decide how to continue and make use of this.

Tomorrow we have the meeting of Central Committee secretaries in Moscow. Then these issues will be discussed as well.

[1] Referring to the Soviet shoot down of Korean Airlines Lines Flight 007 on 1 September 1983.

[2] It was actually Congressman Lawrence P. McDonald (D-Georgia).