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Wife and Mother of Soviet MIG Pilot Appeal for His Return

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MOSCOW, Sept. 23—The wife and the mother of a Soviet pilot who flew his jet fighter to Japan were brought forward today by the Soviet authorities to plead for him to come home without fear of punishment.

At a news conference for Soviet and foreign reporters, Lyudmila Petrovna Belenko said she had been assured "at a sufficiently high level" that her husband, First Lieut. Viktor I. Belenko, would be forgiven, "even if he had made a mistake." A Foreign Ministry spokesman present, Lev V. Krylov, added that "official guarantees have been given by competent Soviet bodies."

Mrs. Belenko and her mother-in-law, Lyudmila Stepanovna Belenko, said they sent a cablegram to President Ford 10 days ago asking him to return the pilot to his family.

Comments Are Widely Publicized

Lieutenant Belenko landed his MIG-25 fighter on the Japanese island of Hokkaido three weeks ago and, according to Japanese authorities, requested asylum in the United States. It was promptly granted by President Ford. The plane, believed by some to be the most advanced of its kind, is being dismantled by Japanese experts with American assistance.

The women's comments figured prominently in Soviet radio and television newscasts, injecting an emotional element into Moscow's campaign to get the plane and pilot back and presenting the United States with an implicit challenge

to present Lieutenant Belenko publicly. He has not been heard from since he arrived in the United States on Sept. 9.

George Bush, the Director of Central Intelligence, said in a television program in the United States on Sept. 19 that the defection was a "major intelligence bonanza" and that the debriefing of the pilot was "going well."

The incident has brought a chill to relations between Moscow and Tokyo, with repercussions for Washington. In a statement made public today, the Soviet Union warned Japan a few days ago that failure to return the plane promptly would affect relations between the two countries.

The two women painted a portrait of Lieutenant Belenko as a "patriot" as well as a devoted son and husband. They said he "had excellent marks at school," was a party member and had nurtured the hope of becoming a test pilot.



Associated Press

Ludmilla S. Belenko, left, wife of Lieut. Viktor I. Belenko, the Soviet defector, appears with the pilot's mother at press conference in Moscow.

Wife Says Marriage Was Happy

His wife, who is 25 years old, said they were married five years and had been living happily in the Soviet Far East. A dispatch from Tokyo, published Sept. 22 in The New York Times, quoted intelligence sources as having said that Lieutenant Belenko had an unhappy marriage.

In the news conference, his wife frequently referred to their 3½-year-old son, nicknamed Dima, for Dmitri. The day before the flight to Japan, she said, the pilot played with his son and read him fairy tales.

In their cablegram, sent from the Far Eastern city of Khabarovsk, the two women said they had asked President Ford as "father of a family" to "understand our great sorrow and help as far as possible." Copies of a cablegram and of an intimate letter to Lieutenant Belenko from his wife were distributed today.

Mr. Krylov, who presided at the news conference, called the affair "tantamount to splitting a family by force" and said it contradicted the Helsinki accord signed by President Ford last year.