

Moscow Downplays Scale of Setback to U.S.

By Peter Osnos

Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, April 30 — Official Soviet reaction today to the surrender of South Vietnam was predictably jubilant, but it continued the policy of restraint in portraying the scale of the setback to the United States.

A commentary issued by Tass, the Soviet news agency, said the Communist victory means that at least "a most dangerous seat of international tensions and military conflicts has been liquidated."

Tass said the "inevitable" defeat of the Saigon government proves that a regime that rests only on foreign

bayonets is utterly unviable." To sum up the American position, Tass quoted The New York Times, long a leading opponent of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, as "admitting" that "we took the side of those whose cause was a lost one."

The government newspaper Izvestia reported the surrender tonight with a modest front-page headline declaring "The Flag of the Patriots Flies Over Saigon." Inside, an article from the newspaper's Washington correspondent described the mood in the U.S. capital as the last Americans were evacuated from Saigon. "Now," he wrote, "the most frequently heard

words in Washington are: 'The End.'"

The Soviets evidently feel that the events in Indochina speak plainly for themselves about the failure of U.S. policy there and that little is to be gained by stressing facts that could exacerbate the already delicate condition of Soviet-American relations.

That has been the basic Soviet stance since the collapse of Saigon's armies began last month, interspersed with criticism of President Ford's requests for additional military aid for the former Thieu government.

The message the Soviets have conveyed, much like the sentiment coming from the U.S. Congress, has been

that for all concerned, the chapter of American involvement in Indochina is best closed.

Word of the events in Vietnam spread very slowly today among Muscovites, who were more interested in preparing for a long May Day weekend than in anything else. The early evening news broadcast skipped mention of the surrender altogether. Finally, at 9 p.m., a short commentary hailing the victory was aired.

Even the North Vietnamese embassy here was hours behind the news. At mid-morning Moscow time—eight hours after the capitulation—Hanoi diplomats were querying foreign jour-

nalists for the latest details. "Is it really over?" one asked.