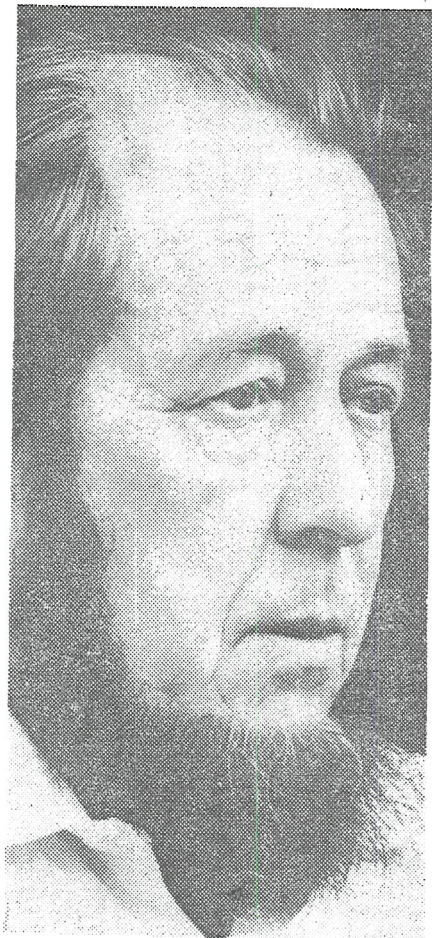


Nixon Lauds Solzhenitsyn's 'Courage'

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Solzhenitsyn after exile

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President Nixon praised the "great courage" of exiled Russian novelist Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn last night but he said the United States cannot vent its disapproval by turning back to confrontation with the Soviet Union.

The President firmly recommitted the United States to the "policy of negotiation" with the Soviet Union, "recognizing that they don't like our system or approve of it, and I don't like their system or approve of it."

What "is essential," Mr. Nixon told his news conference, is that while recognizing these differences, in the nuclear age "we must either live together or we will all die together."

The Nixon administration has come under criticism for not speaking out more vigorously against the decision that stripped the most eminent Soviet dissident of his citizenship and sent him into exile in Western Europe on Feb. 13. The exiling of Solzhenitsyn has intensified the American debate over the costs and scope of East-West detente, especially on granting U.S. trade and credit benefits to the Soviet Union.

President Nixon said he personally admires Solzhenitsyn as the winner of a Nobel prize for literature and as a man who "has shown such great courage" in speaking out against the Soviet system.

Mr. Nixon said if he thought "that breaking relations with the Soviets or turning off our policy of negotiation and turning back to confrontation would help him or help thousands of

others like him in the Soviet Union, we might do that."

In the years of U.S.-Soviet confrontation, however, Mr. Nixon pointedly said, dissenters like Solzhenitsyn "rather than being sent to Paris would have been sent to Siberia. Or probably worse."

The President erred on the city; Solzhenitsyn initially was flown to Frankfurt, West Germany. During the cold war era, Solzhenitsyn was imprisoned in Siberia, and his record of its prisons, published in the West in his latest book, "The Gulag Archipelago," was the last straw for the Soviet regime.

The national policy of the United States, Mr. Nixon emphatically said, remains committed to its present course with the Soviet Union because that is the greater priority for nuclear-armed superpowers.

"In a nutshell," said the President, "this is what we have to consider: do we want to go back to a period when the United States and the Soviet Union . . . stood in confrontation against each other and risk a runaway nuclear arms race and also crisis in Berlin, in the Mideast, even again in Southeast Asia or other places of the world?"

Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) recently charged that Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger "posed a false choice" with a similar argument, "between avoiding nuclear war and keeping faith with traditional values of human decency and individual liberty." Jackson and other critics maintain there is a middle ground in place of

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what he calls this "narrowed . . . conception of detente . . ."

The President last night used a diplomatic response, but with an edge on it, over the disappointment of the hopes he raised last month for lifting the Arab oil embargo against the United States.

In his State of the Union address to Congress on Jan. 30 he said he had been "assured" by "friendly" leaders in the Middle East area, that an urgent meeting will be called in the immediate future to discuss the lifting of the oil embargo.

Mr. Nixon said last night that this meeting was to have taken place Feb. 14 (in Tripoli, Libya), "but the Arab leaders, as you know, are not a united group necessarily, and that's an understatement."

The Arab leaders who gave the assurance, he said, "were unable to get the cooperation of others. I believe now, however, that they will get that cooperation, that the meeting will be held and I believe that they will lift the embargo."

Ending the embargo is "not conditioned" on the present negotiations that Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger is embarked upon to seek a disengagement of Syrian and Israeli forces, the President said, diplomatically.

"By the same token," he cautioned, "if the embargo is not lifted, it will naturally slow down the efforts that we are making on the peace front."

This was a more delicate way of putting Kissinger's blunt warning earlier this month that the United States would regard prolongation of the Arab embargo as "a form of blackmail" and would gauge its diplomacy accordingly.

The President noted last night that he met last week with the foreign ministers of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. They came to urge Kissinger to return to the Middle East and duplicate with Syria and Israel, his work in producing the disengagement of Egyptian and Israeli troops from the lines they reached in the October Arab-Israeli war. Kissinger is now on that mission.

Mr. Nixon said the Arab oil-producing countries should lift the embargo against the United States "independently of what happens on the front of the negotiations with regard to developing a permanent peace in the Mideast." He said the United States believes that is "a goal worth achieving apart from the embargo."

But "what happens in one area inevitably affects what happens in the other," he said, and based on his conversations last week and other reports, "I believe we are going to make continued progress on the peace front. I believe that will be helpful in bringing progress on getting the embargo lifted."