

'A Step To Peace' In Mideast

Washington

President Nixon said last night that the U.S. and the Soviet Union have agreed "to use our influence more than we have in the past" to put pressure on the Israelis and Arabs to reach a permanent settlement in the Middle East.

As a result of the renewed Soviet-American interest in a solution, Mr. Nixon said "I think I would safely say that the chances for not just a cease-fire ... but the outlook for a permanent peace is the best that it has been in 20 years."

Mr. Nixon began his nationally televised news conference from the White House with a discussion of the Middle East situation, including his assessment that the cease-fire "is holding," although he expected some violations to occur.

ALERT

He said the events leading up to his decision on Wednesday night to put American forces on alert produced "the most difficult crisis" since the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Mr. Nixon stressed that because of his close relationship with Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet Communist party leader, the two countries were able to agree on a formula to ease tensions.

"We not only avoided a confrontation but we moved a great step forward toward real peace in the Middle East," Mr. Nixon said.

OBSERVERS

Mr. Nixon also said that the U.S. is prepared to join with the Soviet Union in sending small numbers of unarmed peace observers to

From Page 1

the Middle East under U.N. auspices. He said the U.S. expects to be asked by U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim to dispatch some observers, and he said Washington would comply.

He stressed again, however, that the U.S. remains opposed to the introduction of Soviet or American armed forces into the area.

With the crisis considerably eased, Mr. Nixon said, the nation's nuclear striking forces and air defenses have now been taken off alert, but he indicated other elements of U.S. military power remain at the ready.

EXCHANGE

He said that on Wednesday night, when the U.S. believed the Russians were planning to send "a very substantial force" to the Middle East, he had a tough exchange of messages with Brezhnev.

Brezhnev's note to him, he said, "was very firm and it left very little to the imagination as to what he intended.

"And my response was also very firm and left little to the imagination of how we would react," the President said. "And it's because he and I know each other and it's because we have had this personal contact that notes exchanged in that way result in a settlement rather than a confrontation."

He credited his contacts with Brezhnev as a major factor in getting the Soviet Union to vote for Thursday's Security Council resolution barring big powers from participating in a Middle East peacekeeping force.

CRITICAL

"We now come, of course, to the critical time in terms of the future of the Middle East and here the outlook is far more hopeful than what we have been through this past week," he said.

He said that "I think now that all parties are going to approach this problem of trying to reach a settlement with a more sober and a more determined attitude than ever before."

After saying that the countries in the Middle East can-

not afford another war, he said the U.S. and the Soviet Union both "now realize that we cannot allow our differences in the Middle East (to) jeopardize even greater interests that we have."

NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. Nixon did not give details on the Soviet and American positions on the Middle East negotiations due to start in coming weeks with the Arabs and Israelis meeting under joint Soviet-American auspices.

But he said that as the result of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's trip to Moscow last weekend, the two states have agreed "to use our influence with the nations in the area to expedite a settlement."

Earlier yesterday, administration officials, in private conversation, suggested that Washington and Moscow had worked out an understanding by which the U.S. would support joint participation in an observer organization, and in return, the Russians would refrain from sending armed units to Egypt.

Acting State Department spokesman Robert J. McCloskey said "no comment," when asked if such a compromise had been arranged.

CONTACTS

He did say, however, that from contacts with Soviet officials in the last 24 to 36 hours, Washington had "anticipated" Brezhnev's announcement yesterday that Soviet "representatives" had been sent to the Middle East "to observe the fulfillment of the Security Council's cease-fire resolution."

McCloskey stressed that these observers are distinct from peace-keeping forces.

New York Times