

# Soviet Press Drops Criticism of Nixon

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MOSCOW, Oct. 31—The Soviet Union, apparently moving to smooth over public differences with Washington on the Middle East, today abruptly dropped its criticism of President Nixon's handling of the crisis last week.

The shift in the tenor of press coverage suggested that Moscow was more satisfied with the way President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger were taking steps to insure a successful cease-fire and to promote moves toward an over-all settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

For the previous three days, major Soviet newspapers had played up the cleavage that developed between Washington and Western Europe over the Middle East crisis.

## Shift by Nixon Omitted

In particular, the Soviet press had reported sharp West European disenchantment with Mr. Nixon for having put American forces on alert without giving the North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies advance warning, on grounds that Moscow was preparing to intervene unilaterally. Prior to that, the Soviet newspapers criticized Mr. Nixon for "adventurism" and for making "absurd" charges.

But today, the issue melted away, replaced by straightforward coverage of Secretary Kissinger's meeting in Washington with Egypt's Acting Foreign Minister, Ismail Fahmy.

The Soviet press also passed over, without comment or report, the Nixon Administration's decision to postpone an

attempt to gain Congressional approval for easier tariff conditions for Soviet exports to the United States. The labor newspaper, *Trud*, did, however, carry a lengthy commentary chastising Congressional opponents of such concessions to Moscow.

Soviet press treatment of the United States has fluctuated during the Middle East crisis, evidently reflecting the changing assessments by the Soviet leadership, though possibly with some delays.

At early stages, the Soviet newspapers played up American military aid to Israel but later they emphasized the negotiations here between the Communist party leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, and Secretary Kissinger.

When problems developed with the cease-fire proposal, publicity about those talks and Mr. Brezhnev's personal role in them stopped abruptly and Soviet propaganda reflected the split with Washington. Today the pendulum swung back toward moderation.

## Cairo Newspaper Quoted

One Tass dispatch from Cairo quoting the Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahram*, went so far as to say for the first time in several days that developments "visibly demonstrated that relaxation of international relations can promote a just settlement of the MIDDLE East problem."

Previously, that had been Moscow's formula for asserting to the Arab states that through cooperation with Washington the Soviet Union was assisting their cause. Often the Soviet press quotes others to make a point that the Soviet Union

itself favors and wants to promote.

Today, the Communist party newspaper, *Pravda*, and other central newspapers gave prominence to Arab expressions of thanks for what in *Pravda* was termed "full Soviet political and military support to the Arabs." *Pravda* ran its stories under the headline "high Estimation of Soviet Aid."

Just yesterday, a more dominant theme in Soviet international news was the angry reaction in Europe to American handling of the Middle East crisis. The Soviet press played up European comments that the Western alliance had never faced a worse crisis and charged that Washington treated its allies like vassals.

## Western Discord Noted

Some Western diplomats thought that Moscow had sensed a new opening to exploit. Others contended that it was too early to judge whether Moscow would try to capitalize on the divisions in the West over Middle East policy.

*Pravda* on Monday particularly underscored the disagreement in the Western camp over how to meet the threat of an Arab oil embargo or cutbacks in production, noting that Western Europe had split from the United States on what was a political as well as an economic issue.

That commentary particularly caught the attention of some Western diplomats as a sign that Moscow was probably encouraging the Arabs privately as well as publicly to apply oil pressures that were putting strains on the Atlantic alliance.