

An Implied Soviet Threat Spurred U.S. Forces' Alert

Brezhnev Note on 'Acting Alone' to Back Mideast Cease-Fire Led to Test of Wills Oct. 24-25, Washington Aides Say

By DAVID BINDER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 20—The Soviet note that led to a precautionary alert of United States forces around the world on the night of Oct. 24 carried an implied threat rather than an actual threat of the dispatch of Soviet troops to the Suez war zone.

"We strongly urge that we both send forces to enforce the cease-fire and, if you do not, we may be obliged to consider acting alone," the Soviet note said, according to two officials who have read it.

A reconstruction of the cascading events of that night—many of which remain masked in secrecy — shows that the note from the Soviet leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, to President Nixon and the alert ordered by the Nixon Administration were only two of a series of firm signals exchanged in a complicated test of wills over the Middle East.

The exchanges lasted more than 12 hours, according to interviews with United States officials and Soviet, Israeli and European diplomats, but the crucial exchange—delivery of the Brezhnev note and the calling of the alert—took place in less than an hour, approximately between 10:40 and 11:30 P.M.

The alert was put into effect by 2:30 A.M., Oct. 25, officials said, and formally authorized by President Nixon half an hour later.

Only hours before the arrival of the Brezhnev note, the Nixon Administration had rejected two earlier pleas for a joint United States-Soviet expeditionary force to enforce peace on the Suez front.

The first had come from President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt in a message read over the Cairo radio at about 3 P.M. on Oct. 24. The next, in the form of a message from Mr. Brezhnev, had been delivered at about 8 P.M. to Secretary of State Kissinger by Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin.

The crisis that Mr. Kissinger faced then had been building up for several days.

On Oct. 16, Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin, on a hasty visit to Egypt, discovered that the Egyptian Army, in contrast with President Sadat's boasts, was near a state of collapse. In addition, the Egyptian III Corps, on the east bank of the Suez Canal opposite the city of Suez, faced encirclement by the Israelis as a result of the

Continued on Page 17, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

Israeli crossing to the western bank early that morning.

Mr. Kosygin returned to Moscow Oct. 19 urging that the Soviet Government press for an immediate cease-fire in the Middle East war, which was then in its 14th day. Mr. Brezhnev thereupon invited President Nixon to send Mr. Kissinger to Moscow, and the Secretary arrived the next day.

In sessions Oct. 20 and 21 Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Brezhnev reached a compromise in which Moscow won its point that no time could be lost in achieving a cease-fire, while the Americans won their point that the cease-fire must be linked to negotiations between the Arabs and Israelis.

The joint cease-fire proposal they agreed upon was adopted by the United Nations Security Council early Oct. 22, and the truce in place officially went into effect about 12 hours later.

Mr. Kissinger stopped in Israel on that day on his way home from Moscow. Four hours after he had left, Israeli forces

went on to complete the encirclement of the Corps, an action he later, reportedly with may and a sense of outrage they regarded as a

While the Russian intelligence co-drawing principally their Oct. 21 un-electronic surveillance c-land, sea and air fo-already noted the pre-seven landing craft-ships with troop helic-eastern Mediterranean

dat's Oct. 24 call States and Soviet tr Electronic surveilla also monitored signal seven divisions of Sc-borne troops — abo-men — on a standby a-division had been pla-higher level of alert d-day, making it ready-out on call.

Mr. Kissinger wa-ting what he later Middle East conflic-began Oct. 6, and m-landing craft in the r-the activities of Sov-on Oct. 24 by them-caused no undue ala-Defense Department, officials said.

Still the Soviet Air-pulled most of the la-ports it had used for-military supplies to-and Cairo back to th-bases in the Soviet Un-er than to the bases-been using in Hung-some Pentagon offici-preted this as a sign-cow might use the-take Soviet weapon-Suez battle zone.

When the second note came at about 1 warning that the Sov "may be obliged to acting alone," the re-American officials—p

the new truce went in Oct. 24—to a resolu-uthorizing an expe-force for the Suez r-a resolution authorizin-ed States-Soviet expe-force.

The intelligence co-drawing principally their Oct. 21 un-electronic surveillance c-land, sea and air fo-already noted the pre-seven landing craft-ships with troop helic-eastern Mediterranean

Troop Standby Mon
Electronic surveilla also monitored signal seven divisions of Sc-borne troops — abo-men — on a standby a-division had been pla-higher level of alert d-day, making it ready-out on call.

But, two intelligenc-observed, there had-viet alerts before d-Middle East conflic-began Oct. 6, and m-landing craft in the r-the activities of Sov-on Oct. 24 by them-caused no undue ala-Defense Department, officials said.

Still the Soviet Air-pulled most of the la-ports it had used for-military supplies to-and Cairo back to th-bases in the Soviet Un-er than to the bases-been using in Hung-some Pentagon offici-preted this as a sign-cow might use the-take Soviet weapon-Suez battle zone.

When the second note came at about 1 warning that the Sov "may be obliged to acting alone," the re-American officials—p



Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger, who issued the official alert.

...to put troops in the Middle East.

Describing the situation of the Cabinet involved in the decision said of the second intelligence "Either one, apart, have ignored." How two together, he implied not be ignored.

Ambassador Dobryn the second note with singer without ob-reply.

The Secretary of immediately telephoned Nixon, who was in

quarters in the and suggested the es response should as well as political, on-curred.

Nixon remained in-oughout, his aides- was also remote, entire night in his apartment and re-telephone messages-ssinger and Mr. Mr. Nixon em-em to manage the-ir own, the Cabinet, leaving them to-nd carry out the-res.

inger convened a-what Mr. Schles-termed "the abbrev-ional Security Coun-austere, map-filled-oom in the White-ment.

bbreviated in part- chairman of what-ix-man panel, Presi-was upstairs. Mr.-as there in his dual-Secretary of State

...and the President's assistant for national security affairs.

Another chair was empty because Spiro T. Agnew had resigned, and there was no director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness since George A. Lincoln had retired 14 months before.

"Officially the meeting consisted of Kissinger, Kissinger and Schlesinger," a council aide commented. Attending as the intelligence adviser was William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, whose agency had played a major role in handling the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and was now on the sidelines. Mr. Colby had been called in belatedly.

The C.I.A. was familiar with

the electronic intelligence obtained by its powerful sister agency, the National Security Agency, but it was not apprised of the Soviet notes until Mr. Colby arrived at the White House.

Haig's Role Described
Attending as the military adviser was Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Mr. Schlesinger had been told of the second Soviet note by Alexander M. Haig Jr., chief of the White House staff. He, in turn, called Admiral Moorer. General Haig functioned more as a go-between than as a member of the decision-making group, aides said.

The abbreviated National Security Council met at about 11 P.M., and Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Schlesinger swiftly agreed on a modified alert as the United States military response designed to persuade the Soviet Union against acting alone.

The technical term for the alert is Defense Condition 3, explained by a Pentagon official as "an order to stand by for further orders that may come." It is an order any area commander can issue without higher authority if he feels his forces may be threatened.

Mr. Schlesinger is said to have issued it at 11:30 P.M., and it was passed to the service chiefs by Admiral Moorer.

The Washington order alerted most but not all United States forces. The Coast Guard, with its vital air-sea rescue system, was not brought in until 12 hours later. Strategic Air Command tanker planes hovering along the United States-to-Israel airlift route were left in their Middle Atlantic patterns rather than sent north for possible fueling of long-range B-52 bombers.

Mr. Schlesinger returned to the Pentagon about 1:30 A.M. to bolster the alert by ordering the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean with her A-4 fighter-bombers and telling the 15,000-man 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N. C., to get ready to board transport craft.

Asked if the Soviet Union had been notified of the alert, a United States official said: "No, the alert itself was a signal which we knew they would get through their own electronic intelligence."

Heightened United States military activity could clearly be discerned through the amount and nature of the radio traffic, it was said.

Mr. Kissinger was busy, meanwhile, on the diplomatic front. He conferred repeatedly from the outset of the American-Soviet exchanges with Israel's Ambassador, Simcha Dinitz, advising him of Soviet and United States moves.

About 1 A.M. he told the British Ambassador, the Earl of Cromer, of the note and the alert. Other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were informed through the mechanism of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, which was advised of the alert by the Defense Department about 2 A.M. Pentagon officials say the news went out to the alliance capitals much later because of a foul-up in the Brussels communication machinery.

Mr. Kissinger was also in touch with the United States delegate to the United Nations, John A. Scali, who had just been through some bruising exchanges with Mr. Malik.

The Soviet delegate had accused the United States of allowing Israel to violate the

cease-fire of Oct. 22 and make territorial gains.

Through Mr. Scali, Mr. Kissinger was working to get the Soviet Union to agree to a new resolution in the Security Council setting up a peace-keeping force for the disputed Suez region.

Reply to Brezhnev Drafted

Finally, Mr. Kissinger drafted a reply to the last Brezhnev note saying the United States would not tolerate a unilateral action by the Soviet Union, hoped that Moscow would not take that course, and warned that any such move would damage the cause of peace. He also called for joint action in the United Nations.

That done, according to an aide, a weary Mr. Kissinger walked upstairs and reported to President Nixon and obtained his "ratification" of the moves, including the second note to Mr. Brezhnev. It was about 3 A.M. on Oct. 25, three and a half hours after the alert had been called.

At his news conference at noon, the Secretary publicly reminded Moscow that both the Soviet Union and the United States had nuclear arsenals "capable of annihilating humanity," but that they also had "a special duty to see to it that confrontations are kept within bounds."

An hour or so later, both countries joined in the 14-to-0 vote by which the United Nations Security Council decided to establish a United Nations peace-keeping force excluding the major powers—a move that in effect brought the American-Soviet exchanges to an end.

And in those exchanges, officials noted, the hot-line teletype machine that connects Washington and Moscow was never used.