

Russians, In Nixon's Camp, Explain Support

By HEDRICK SMITH

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MOSCOW, Dec. 7—There is a curious parallel these days between the official Soviet attitude toward President Nixon and the feelings many Americans had toward Nikita S. Khrushchev at the time he was ousted as Premier in 1964.

In those days Washington was both puzzled and pained because after confrontations with the ebullient and unpredictable Soviet leader, the United States found him a partner in peaceful coexistence and had come to regard him as something of a force for moderation in the Soviet Union.

Few Americans understood the extent to which Mr. Khrushchev—who also held the more powerful position of party leader—had stirred domestic opposition with his de-Stalinization program, his virginlands plan, his shake-up of the Communist party apparatus and other lurches of domestic policy.

Though it was the domestic divisiveness he had engendered that did him in, it was a reversal of the moderating trend of his foreign policy that many Americans feared.

Russians Are Puzzled

In much the same way, members of the Soviet Establishment — high-level journalists, governmental officials, specialists on American affairs—find it hard to comprehend the depth of the domestic passions that Mr. Nixon has awakened with what is broadly termed the Watergate affair. And like the Americans in the Khrushchev case, they find it hard to separate the domestic opposition to President Nixon over Watergate from their own interest in seeing him survive to broaden détente.

About a month ago, just after the dismissal of Archibald Cox as special Watergate prosecutor and the resignation of Vice President Agnew, and at the height of the Middle East crisis, there was notable concern here about Mr. Nixon's chances for survival.

But authoritative Soviet figures, talking with Americans nowadays, express relief that, as they see it, the peak of the Watergate affair seems to have passed. Once again they make quite clear their respect and

sympathy for the embattled President and their hopes that he will survive.

Two salient points keep recurring in Soviet conversations about President Nixon.

Practical Steps Cited

The first is that he has won confidence in Moscow as the American President who not only talked about accommodation with the Soviet Union but actually took practical steps, such as the strategic arms agreement and moves to lift trade barriers, to put détente "into life," as the Soviet expression goes.

To some knowledgeable Russians, this is all the more important because of Mr. Nixon's past, much as Mr. Khrushchev's eventual accommodations with President Kennedy on nuclear testing had special meaning for Americans after the confrontation during the Cuban missile crisis in October, 1962.

With quite genuine expressions of respect, Soviet insiders recall Mr. Nixon's role in the investigation of Alger Hiss in 1948 and his testy kitchen debate with Mr. Khrushchev in Moscow in 1959, and they observe that in spite of this past he was a man who had the courage to change his views and come to Moscow in 1972 to strike up a partnership with Leonid I. Brezhnev, who succeeded Mr. Khrushchev as party chief.

"In an earlier period, he obviously acted out of conviction," a Soviet insider commented. "Then he thought things through and came to a new position, and now he acts out of conviction too."

The second salient point about Mr. Nixon that appeals to the Soviet Establishment is, as more than one authoritative

Russian has put it, that "he accepts us as we are."

In other words, Mr. Nixon, as a pragmatist, is seeking to promote accommodations in fields of foreign policy—strategic arms, trade, diplomacy in the Middle East and Europe—without putting pressure on Moscow for changes in Soviet society as a condition for détente.

Knowledgeable spokesmen for the Soviet Establishment make no secret of their disappointment and disenchantment with American liberals, whom they had long counted among the foremost proponents of détente.

Liberals Are Embarrassing

Now, they complain, these same liberals are joining forces with conservatives to pose conditions for broader trade and other ties—such as free emigration for Soviet Jews and the lifting of pressure on such dissidents as Andrei D. Sakharov. Moscow finds it especially disturbing that many of the liberals who raise embarrassing questions of human rights are also in the forefront of the domestic attack on President Nixon.

Some Russians make the crude equation that those who oppose Mr. Nixon domestically are doing so as an indirect means of disrupting the trend toward détente. Occasionally this is a theme in the Soviet press. More sophisticated Soviet analysts of the American scene have moved beyond that line of reasoning. They have now watched the Watergate affair long enough to understand that it is a problem with an importance and a dynamism of its own.

Some are concerned that even if Mr. Nixon survives the

coming months of Watergate trials and political pressures, his Administration is too crippled to carry through with more bold foreign-policy initiatives, such as a second agreement on strategic arms or a basic agreement on reducing forces in Central Europe.

The prospect of his possible removal or resignation from office worries them even more.

To Moscow, Gerald R. Ford, the new Vice President, remains an unknown quantity. Soviet insiders seem to doubt his ability to sway Congress on the crucial issues of East-West détente. And they find little reassurance in American assertions that the basic line is set and that no matter what happens in the White House, Henry A. Kissinger will probably remain as Secretary of State and gain even more authority as the architect of American foreign policy.

"You have to understand us," observed a responsible member of the Soviet Establishment. "Many other American leaders have talked about détente, but it is under Nixon that practical steps have been taken. Not Johnson, not Kennedy even, but Nixon. You have to understand what that means to us."