

# Press Reporting

## '73 Soviet Alert

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In a crossfire of alleged Soviet-Egyptian disclosures of secret dealings between Moscow and Cairo, the Soviet Union is reported boasting that it mobilized seven Russian divisions to fight for Egypt last October.

These published reports now rebounding across the Middle East cannot be independently authenticated. If verified, they would be the first Soviet admission of what the United States charged was happening, resulting in the American global military alert the night of Oct. 24-25 during the Arab-Israeli war.

At the time, the Soviet Union accused the United States of "absurd" attempts "to intimidate the Soviet Union" by contriving a global alarm. President Nixon, on Oct. 26, claimed the crisis was "the most difficult we have had since the Cuban (nuclear missile) confrontation of

1962." Privately, many U.S. officials believed the President overstated the crisis, but that a threat did exist at the time.

U.S. officials are intrigued by the claims that are now tumbling out as Egypt, in a dramatic shift of position, is openly turning closer to the United States, to the dismay of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, in turn, is appealing over the head of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to try to demonstrate that it has been loyal to Arab nationalism.

Much of what is being said on both sides "has the ring of authenticity to it" and basically "is credible" when compared with information known to American intelligence, U.S. sources said yesterday. However, "this is a propaganda brawl" between the Russians and the Sadat regime, a specialist noted, and "both sides

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undoubtedly are stretching the truth."

The most revealing "disclosures" are appearing in the Lebanese press; in Beirut, a great variety of publications with various shadings of political objectives supply a ready market for any point of view.

On April 16, the newspaper *As Safir*, which U.S. officials regard as an anti-Western, pro-Libyan organ, published what was described as "the text of a statement by former Soviet Ambassador in Cairo Vladimir Vinogradov," made to "a number of Egyptian official and political personalities." Vinogradov is now the Soviet ambassador in Geneva for the Middle East peace talks.

The *As Safir* article came to the attention of officials in Washington when it was reprinted, next day, by the Beirut newspaper *An Nida*, which American sources say is a Communist organ supporting the line of the Soviet Communist Party. *An Nida* said, "As *Safir* has obtained an important document which contains the Soviet Union's views and what happened during the October war," which began on Oct. 6, 1973.

Its account of the October alert, attributed to Vinogradov, is as follows:

"In the early hours of 20 October, at exactly 0300, President Sadat contacted me and asked me to convey an urgent message on the situation to Brezhnev and to ask him to intervene to achieve an immediate cease-fire.

"(As I learned later, Syria did not want to have a cease-fire at that time because it was on the verge of launching its big counter-offensive.) (parenthesis as published.)

"I contacted Moscow. The director of the office informed me that Comrade Brezhnev had gone to bed only one hour before and that he could not wake him up. I asked him to wake him up on my responsibility. I informed Brezhnev of the situation as explained by President Sadat and of his request.

"The Soviet leaders immediately issued a decision for a partial alert of the Soviet forces. Seven Soviet military divisions were mobilized and put on the ready to be taken to fight on the Egyptian front. In fact, an advance group arrived in Cairo."

"According to the document, Vinogradov concluded his talk with a number of Egyptian official and political personalities by saying: We all know the story of the days that followed, the Israeli anguish over the cease-fire, the Soviet threat of unilateral intervention and the contacts with the United States until the achievement of the final cease-fire on 26 October."

In earlier portions, the alleged statement by Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov states that he saw President Sadat "daily from 4 to 29 October," and there "were no acrimonious debates or differences of any kind" between them.

"On 4 October," two days before Egypt launched its surprise attack on Israeli forces across the Suez Canal, the report says, "President Sadat informed me of Egypt's decision that it had no course before it now except war.

"Naturally, the president did not specify the day he had chosen for the war, but merely said that the matter had been decided. He asked me to convey the Egyptian attitude, decision and its urgent requirements to the Soviet leadership. . . . The answer was that the war decision was an Egyptian decision and that the Soviet Union would fulfill its commitments and would support the Arab right with all military, political and economic means."

According to the account, on Oct. 6, after Egyptian forces succeeded in quickly crossing

the Suez Canal and piercing Israel's Bar-Lev line in the Sinai desert, Vinogradov told Sadat that Moscow had informed him of a communication from Syria. That message reportedly said that "a few days before the outbreak of fighting," Syrian President Hafez Assad "had informed the Soviet leadership that Syria and Egypt were about to enter an all-out military confrontation with Israel. . . ."

Syria was said to have asked the Soviet Union "to make a quick move" to get international agreement on a cease-fire "within 48 hours" from the outbreak of fighting. On Oct. 6, however, the account

continued, Sadat told Vinogradov that "it was too early" to call for a cease-fire. On Oct. 9, the report said, Syria again urged a cease-fire; Sadat again demurred.

On Oct. 16, however, after Israeli forces crossed the Suez Canal and threatened to penetrate deeply into Egypt, the account states, Sadat conferred with Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in Cairo and it was agreed that the Soviet Union would begin "contacts to obtain a cease-fire."

"Kosygin returned to Moscow, called Kissinger," the report continues, "and the efforts to obtain a cease-fire began." It was after a cease-fire call was agreed upon by the United States and the Soviet Union that the alert crisis began, out of Soviet-Egyptian concern that the Israeli forces would not halt their advance.

A separate, lengthier account of the history of Egyptian-Soviet relations was received in Washington on Tuesday, in the form of an interview with President Sadat published in the Lebanese weekly, *Al Hawadith*. The undated interview was reportedly given to *Al Hawadith's* publisher, Salim Al Hawzi.

Sadat is quoted as saying, "I am eager not to sever the tread with the Soviets" now, even though Sadat expressed considerable dismay with Soviet behavior."

After Israel's victory over the Arabs in the six-day 1967 war, Sadat said in the account, the Soviet Union came to Egypt's aid when "everything on the land of Egypt was bleeding," and Egypt had "neither planes nor air bases" left.

Egypt "had absolute confidence in the Russians" then, said Sadat, and even asked them "to appoint a Soviet commander for the Egyptian air force," but "they refused."

The Soviet Union supplied Egypt initially with all military requirements it needed, Sadat said, but then President Gamal Abdel Nasser told Yugoslavian President Josip Broz Tito that the Russian "method was rough. . ." In 1972, Sadat said, he made "the decision to expel the Soviet (military) experts and then the decision to abolish (Soviet) custodianship," because neither Nasser "nor myself could accept anyone pulling the strings behind our backs."

In March, 1971, said Sadat, during a secret trip to Moscow, when the Russians refused to send certain aircraft unless they could control their use, "something snapped between me and them. . . ."

Sadat said that "Egypt's decision to launch the battle (in the October, 1973 war) was against the will of the two superpowers" (the Soviet Union and the United States). Even now, said Sadat, when Egypt has repaired relations with the United States, "the relations between us and the Soviets have not reached the breaking point. All that we want. . . is to establish clear, frank and equal relations."