

Nixon Given Credit for Soviet Arms Deal

By Lou Cannon

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The White House yesterday gave former President Nixon substantial credit for the new missile-limitation agreement with the Soviet Union.

In an about-face from a statement he had made after President Ford returned last week from Vladivostok, White House press secretary Ron Nessen described the agreement as the "culmination" of arms limitation efforts by Nixon.

After President Ford's announcement of the agreement reached with Soviet Communist Party leader Leonid I. Brezhnev, Nessen said the proposed pact was "something Nixon couldn't do in three years but Ford did it in three months."

Yesterday Nessen described his own comment as "a hasty and oversimplified remark." The White House press secretary added:

"It's clear to me now looking back that what happened in Vladivostok was kind of a culmination of what had happened over the years."

Along with giving Nixon credit for the agreement, details of which still have not been announced publicly by Mr. Ford, Nessen said that the White House had briefed the former President on the details of the talks.



RON NESSEN

... "hasty remark"

The details, including the precise numbers of the missile limitations, were given to former White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler yesterday via what Nessen called "a secure communication" channel. Presumably, this meant a call over military lines to the Coast Guard station adjacent to the Nixon seaside residence at San Clemente.

Ziegler was briefed for 10 minutes by an unidentified White House staff member with the understanding that he would communicate the conversation to Nixon.

Nessen said that the briefing was at Nixon's request. He added that "traditionally former Presidents receive briefings of important international developments."

The proposed agreement for "capping" the number of missiles and bombers in the U.S. and Soviet arsenals reportedly will allow both countries to considerably expand their totals of multiple warhead missiles.

These figures have been withheld by Mr. Ford, pending an exchange of messages with Brezhnev.

There is some possibility that details of the agreement will be announced at a Friday night news conference by the President. But this is dependent upon receipt of the message from Brezhnev. If it fails to arrive by Friday, the televised announcement will be made next week.

President Ford personally briefed congressional leaders on the content of the agreement Tuesday. Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) was briefed by a National Security Council official. Yesterday the President extended the circle of those privy to the agreement by giving a personal briefing to AFL-CIO president George Meany.

Nessen said that the meet-

ing with Meany was at the President's initiative.

There have been widespread reports that Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger was highly critical of Nessen's earlier statement giving the Ford administration, rather than Nixon, the credit for the missile agreement.

Nessen said that President Ford had discussed the matter with him but had not been critical.