

Nixon Talk Reflects a Fascination With Soviet

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WASHINGTON, May 12—Richard M. Nixon's interview tonight was useful, not only for its insights into his personal relationships with Henry A. Kissinger, Mao Tse-tung and Leonid I. Brezhnev, among others, but also for the candid and constant reminder of how heavily he relied upon the Soviet connection in formulating foreign policy. This second broadcast conversation with David Frost produced no major historical revelations and surprisingly few disclosures. What Mr. Nixon said seemed consistent with the known record, though ardent supporters of Mr. Kissinger might argue with the former President's portrait of his adviser.

On the substance of his foreign policy, at least in the portions of the taped interview that were televised, Mr. Nixon kept coming back to the Russians.

Ever since his "kitchen debate" with Nikita S. Khrushchev in Moscow in 1959, Mr. Nixon has been fascinated by the Russians. As he illustrated time after time in his discussion with David Frost,

2d Taped Interview Shows That He Enjoyed Role of a Peace Broker

however, Mr. Nixon had ambiguous feelings about the Soviet Union.

On the one hand, the Russians were the enemy whose actions had to be countered worldwide; on the other hand, only the Russians and Americans could guarantee the peace, and he rather liked acting as a peace broker with Leonid I. Brezhnev.

The Soviet connection, as Mr. Nixon made clear tonight, was the key to understanding some of his Administration's more controversial moves.

For instance, the American "tilt" to Pakistan during the India-Pakistan war of December 1971 had nothing to do with Pakistan itself, Mr. Nixon told Mr. Frost.

In fact, he said, he did not approve of the brutal efforts by the Pakistan Government to crush the rebellion in East Pakistan that touched off the Indian invasion of the region and the eventual formation of the independent state of Bangladesh.

Rather his concern was that the Indians

would go on to crush West Pakistan and in effect obliterate Pakistan as a state. "Our point of view was very strongly stated," Mr. Nixon said. "We thought that if the Russians allowed their client, India, using Soviet arms to destroy Pakistan, both East and West, that this would imperil our future relationship."

Six months later, in May 1972, Mr. Nixon ordered the mining of Haiphong Harbor in retaliation against North Vietnam's military actions in South Vietnam. From Mr. Nixon's account tonight, what stuck in his mind was that despite this provocative American action the Soviet Union did not cancel the summit planned for later that month in Moscow.

A year later, Mr. Brezhnev was in the United States for a reciprocal visit. That June 1973 trip was probably the high point of détente. Mr. Nixon was still not crippled by Watergate, and the alliance of conservatives and liberals who later combined to assault détente had not yet taken full shape.

From that visit, Mr. Nixon told Mr. Frost about the conversations on the Middle East, an area where the ambiguity of détente has always been most evident. In that region, the United States and the Soviet Union are at once rivals for influence and major peace brokers.

Contacts on Possible Cease-Fires

This ambiguity was underscored by the October 1973 war. It has never been clear—and Mr. Nixon said that he did not know the answer—whether the Russians encouraged the Egyptians and Syrians to attack Israel.

It is known from Egyptian accounts and from intelligence reports that the Soviet Union was told a few days ahead of time that something was about to happen and many Russians were evacuated. Under the principles of détente that the two sides had agreed upon the Soviet Union should have informed Washington of the impending attack, but it did not, Mr. Nixon said.

During the war, the United States and Soviet Union were in constant communication to discuss possible cease-fires, even while their transport planes were flying in military equipment to the two sides. But, of course, the most publicized strain in détente during the October war was the crisis caused by Israel's violation of the Soviet-American imposed cease-fire.

The Israelis, seeking to wipe out the Egyptian Third Army that they had encircled by crossing to the west side of the Suez Canal, had allowed their units to respond in force to some small-scale Egyptian violations. This caused President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt to call on the United States and the Soviet Union to send in their own military units to enforce the cease-fire.

U.S. Receives 'Ominous' Note

As recounted by Mr. Nixon, the United States rejected the Sadat plea. But later, Mr. Brezhnev sent what Mr. Nixon called "an ominous" note warning that Russia was ready to act unilaterally. This led to the American decision to put forces on a low-priority alert. The crisis passed overnight and Mr. Nixon in discussing it argued that the alert had less to do with Israel than with Soviet-American relations.

"It was because we did not want to have major powers rubbing together in a critical area of the world like the Middle East where their interests were far more involved than they were in Vietnam," he said, that the alert was called.

As Mr. Nixon noted in the interview, there were two sides to the alert. Not only was it a show of strength to caution the Russians, but it also was an effort to persuade the Russians that cooperation was possible in the Middle East.

To back up the pledge of future cooperation, Washington put pressure on Israel to live up to the cease-fire and to allow the Egyptian Third Army to survive. When Mr. Frost asked Mr. Nixon whether the United States threatened Israel if it did not permit the Egyptian forces to remain intact, he answered that the United States "reasoned" with Israel as in "The Godfather."

"We gave 'em an offer that they could not refuse," Mr. Nixon said.

Portions May Be in Nixon Book

Mr. Frost reportedly taped about 12 to 13 hours with Mr. Nixon on foreign policy and some parts will be shown in succeeding 90-minute shows. But according to his aides, Mr. Frost cut out a great deal of material on China and Russia that might be of interest to historians. Presumably, Mr. Nixon will include much of it in his own book.

On China, there was disappointingly little about the events leading up to the opening and virtually nothing of the substance of his conversations with Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai. The best humorous anecdote in the interview though touched on Soviet-Chinese relations.

It is an old story that had some circulation in Moscow in the late 1960's, but Mr. Nixon attributes it to Hua Kuo-feng, the new Chinese leader, who told it to him during his trip to Peking in 1976.

The story, going back to Prime Minister Aleksei N. Kosygin's effort in 1965 to ease tensions with China, has Mr. Kosygin hearing from Mao that relations will continue to be difficult for ten thousand years.

When Mr. Kosygin asks that after the good discussions they have had whether the total could not be reduced, Mao reportedly said, "Well, in view of the very persuasive arguments that the Premier has made I'll knock off a thousand years. Our disputes will continue for nine thousand years."

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