

Nation/world

Soviets blame U.S. in ship bumping

New York Times News Service
MOSCOW—The Soviet Union Saturday blamed the United States for the "military provocation" in which two American Navy vessels and Soviet warships bumped in the Black Sea on Friday. But a Foreign Ministry spokesman expressed hope that the incident would not hamper Soviet-American relations.

The spokesman, Gennady Gerasimov, told a news conference that the incident was not the first of its kind to take place before a major East-West meeting. Secretary of State George Shultz is scheduled to visit Moscow in nine days, paving the way for a summit visit later by President Reagan.

"If we look back at history, always when there is a tendency toward improvement in our relations, we see some military provocation," he said.

He recalled the May 1, 1960, flight of the U-2, an American reconnaissance aircraft that was shot down over Soviet territory, leading to the cancellation of a meeting of Soviet, American and Western European leaders in Paris.

But the tone of Gerasimov's remarks did not suggest the Kremlin was threatening to abort the summit meeting between Reagan and

the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, planned for the spring.

Instead, Gerasimov, apparently reflecting the Kremlin's desire not to let the incident become a major source of tension, said Moscow hoped it "would not hamper the process of improving Soviet-U.S. relationship."

The U.S. destroyer Caron and cruiser Yorktown, sailing 7 to 10 miles off the Crimean Peninsula on Friday, had entered the 12-mile limit claimed by the Soviet Union. The Pentagon said the exercise was part of a Navy policy of asserting the right of passage in waters exceeding the 3-mile territorial limit recognized by the United States.

When the American ships failed to respond to an order to leave, they were scraped by Soviet warships, the Pentagon reported. The United States on Friday protested the Soviet actions.

Pentagon officials said Saturday that the ships have remained in the Black Sea and are continuing routine operations.

A State Department spokesman said that no comment on the incident was planned.

Gerasimov said Moscow considered the American action a "military provocation" aimed at undermining Soviet-American relations

before Shultz's visit and talks next month in Switzerland between Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci and Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov.

Earlier Saturday, U.S. Ambassador Jack Matlock was summoned to the Foreign Ministry to receive a formal protest.

Gerasimov, reading from the diplomatic representation, said: "The American ships did not react to signals given by a Soviet border guard ship in advance to warn them of their approaching the state border of the USSR and did not make suggested changes in their course."

He added: "A considerable distance inside Soviet territorial waters, the American naval ships executed dangerous maneuvering which led to a collision with Soviet naval ships."

Adm. Nikolai Markov, who also appeared at the news conference, said the U.S. ships should have left Soviet territorial waters by the shortest possible route.

Under international law, nations are supposed to allow free passage to vessels operating peacefully in short transits across territorial waters. But Markov said that Moscow does not recognize the right of free passage along its Black Sea coast.

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