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Watergate And the Summit

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As the Nixon-Brezhnev meetings draw to a close, the impact of Watergate is plain. It converted a pronounced American advantage into a stand-off.

The United States did not surface, or even define, the most important demands it has to make on Russia as part of an international settlement. The upshot was a summit rich with cordial atmosphere, but bare of substance.

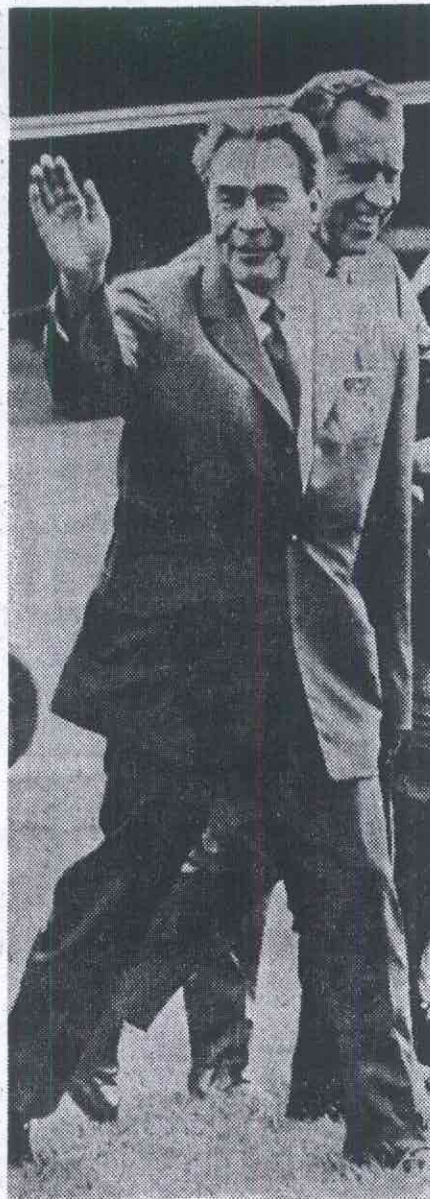
Mr. Brezhnev came here hungry for agreement. He had staked his power as general secretary on the policy of detente with the advanced countries. Any hitch in that policy would have exposed him to sharp attack from rivals only recently diminished in authority. Thus for the reason most dear to him, the reason of personal standing at home, he needed a success in the United States.

Not just any kind of success either. The Soviet Union has lagged way behind the other advanced countries in the development of an efficient, modern economy. The Russians need huge inputs of American capital and know-how to develop natural resources, to build basic industry and to forge ahead in the high technology field. What the Russians want is nothing less than a massive American aid program.

In return for such help, the American interest was to ask concessions from the Soviet Union in two critical areas. First, there is the matter of easy access to the Communist world for Western culture. Visitors, broadcasts, books and magazines and even art and music now enter Russia and many other Communist countries under an iron clamp. An easing of that clamp is essential to anything like normal, civilized relations between the Soviet world and the West.

But President Nixon did not bargain for any relaxation of the clamp in his talks with Mr. Brezhnev. On the contrary, he accepted an extension of the kind of cultural agreement that allows the Communists to maintain all their old restrictions.

Second, there is the matter of Soviet



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troops in Europe. If there is a single threat to peace and security, it is the massive Russian military presence in the heart of the continent. Nothing would be a surer sign of the easing of tensions than for the Russians to turn their men around and start them marching back home.

No doubt the process would be gradual. And, of course, there would have to be some kind of American troop pullback from Europe. Even so, just setting the Soviet withdrawal in motion would be a major American achievement. But Mr. Nixon also let that issue go by the board.

The President was not in position to press these claims largely because of Watergate. To shore up his sagging reputation, he needed the summit to end in some kind of accord as much as

Mr. Brezhnev. So instead of breaking new ground in important areas, he went after the enunciation of obvious principles on safe issues.

Against that background, the issue of emigration for Soviet Jews emerged. Intrinsicly it is not very important. It involves a relatively small group of people—a million or so Soviet Jews at most. It is not at all clear that their welfare is served by making their condition an obstacle to East-West detente.

But the emigration issue filled the void prepared by the absence of other serious demands on the Russians. So it has moved apace in the Congress. Sen. Henry Jackson has put forward the amendment that makes granting trade concessions to Russia dependent upon better emigration conditions for Jews.

Several senators, including Jacob Javits of New York, let Mr. Brezhnev know the issue was serious. Mr. Brezhnev, in responding to Sen. Javits, did not impress such key men as Sen. Clifford Case of New Jersey. He ducked an encounter with Sen. Jackson. So it is now practically certain that something like the Jackson amendment will be attached to the trade bill when it emerges from the Congress later this year.

In the long run, an accommodation can probably be worked out. But that American-Soviet relations should be made to hang on an issue that is so peripheral and involves such a relative handful of innocent bystanders, is truly sad. It shows that as a country we have not really thought hard about what it is we want from the Russians in the name of peace.