DIPLOMACY

Summit III: Playing It As It Lays in Moscow

When the final communiqué was written and the last toast—so carefully worded—was delivered, the third summit meeting between President Nixon and Soviet Party Chief Leonid Brezhnev came to a quiet close last week. It had lived up to its advertised and modest expectations, and yet the result, despite the cautious advance billing, was something of a letdown. The dialogue had continued, the spirit of détente was nudged ahead by some useful if minor pledges of cooperation in scientific and cultural fields. What was worrisome about Summit III—and deeply disturbing about the future—was what had been left unsettled in Moscow. The meetings revealed, more clearly than ever before, that the two superpowers do not yet know how to curb and contain their nuclear-arms competition.

That outcome was at least in part shaped by the specter of Watergate. His domestic burden placed Nixon in a dilemma. He badly wanted some kind of major arms-limitations agreement in the area of strategic offensive missiles, not only for its own sake but also to bolster his image as the indispensable President, the man best qualified to handle foreign affairs. Success now at the summit was so important to Nixon that he did not delay his trip despite the dangers to his health posed by the blood clot in his left leg. Yet as he bargained with the Soviets, the President could not show any sign of political weakness by seeming to give up too much and thereby anger the conservative Senators who would be his strongest defenders if the impeachment proceedings come to trial.

Tough Talks. Nixon and Kissinger went to the summit prepared to accept any agreement that they felt was reasonable. They were ready to defend such a deal against the worries of Washington's hawkish Senator Henry Jackson and Defense Secretary James Schlesinger. But, says one top American official, "the outer limits of what we could take were unobtainable. We did not get the degree of Soviet cooperation we needed to fight our battles at home."

Throughout the seven-day trip, Nixon kept trying to emphasize his personal relationship with Brezhnev, grabbing for the Soviet leader's coattails. Ending one toast, for example, the President noted the great importance to peace of "the personal relations and the personal friendship that has been established by these meetings." But the Russians made it clear that they have no wish to hitch détente to Nixon's star, which will shine no longer than 1976, whatever the outcome of Watergate.

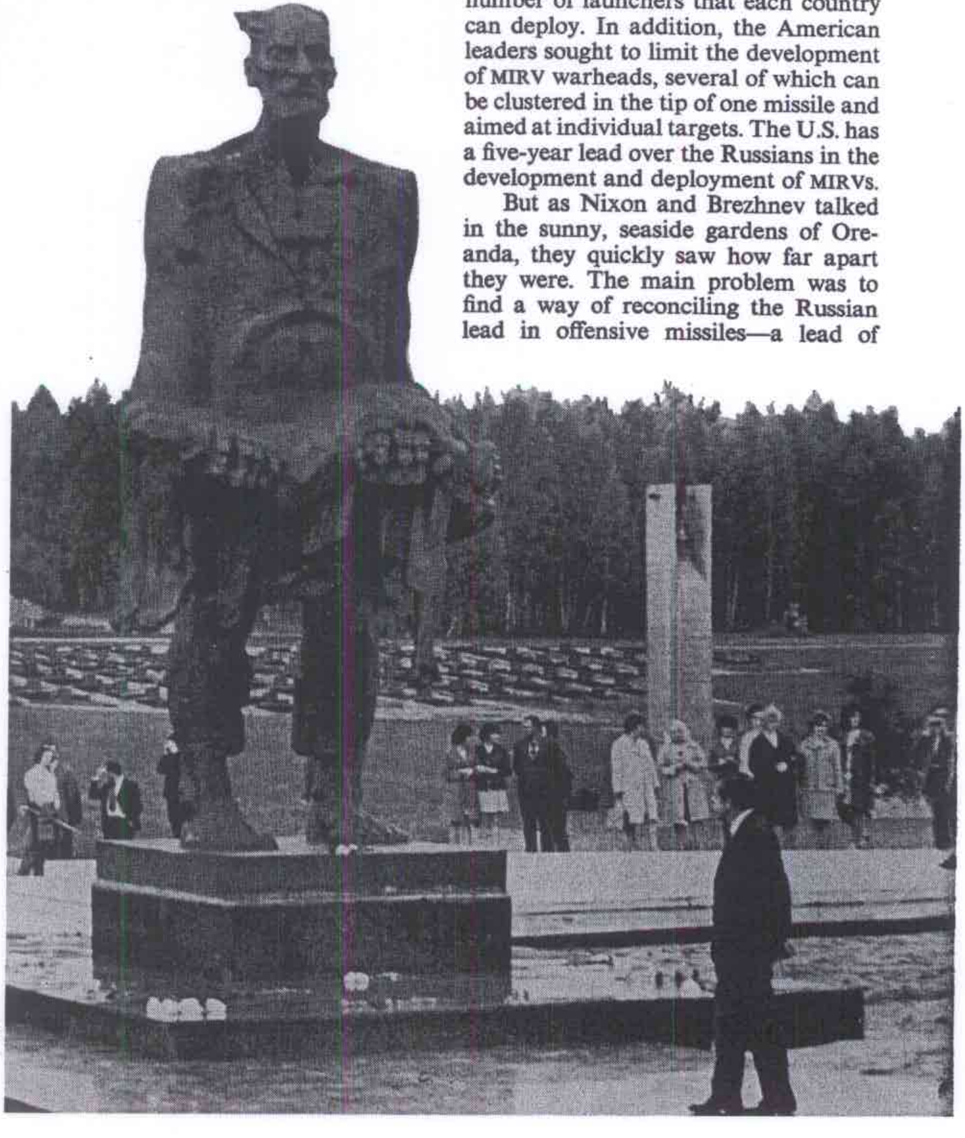
Nixon and Brezhnev settled down to the hard talks on arms limitations in an unsettling locale for the U.S. President—Yalta, the Black Sea site of the Big Three conference in 1945. Nixon and other Republicans had long charged that Franklin Roosevelt gave away postwar Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union during those talks. Hoping that Nixon would agree to meeting in the Livadiya Palace where F.D.R. had stayed, the Russians had refurbished the old summer residence of the czars. But when the White House objected, the meetings were moved to Brezhnev's handsome dacha, which was nearby.

The bargaining was long and arduous. It was conducted with a kind of harrowing frankness that Kissinger said would have been inconceivable at the first Nixon-Brezhnev summit in 1972 and, indeed, would have been judged to violate American intelligence restrictions. For 2½ hours, Nixon and Brezhnev met alone. Then Kissinger and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko joined them for two more hours.

They had no trouble agreeing on two issues that had been well sorted out beforehand. The first limits each nation to defending just one locale with antiballistic missiles. (The U.S. is protecting a Minuteman missile launch site in Grand Forks, N. Dak.; the Russians are ringing Moscow.) The second agreement strengthens the 1963 treaty banning major nuclear-weapons testing everywhere except underground. Starting on March 31, 1976, both countries will be restricted to testing warheads with yields of less than 150 kilotons—the equivalent of 150,000 tons of TNT. The delay in enforcement will give the Soviets time to complete the testing of warheads for their new family of huge missiles. The U.S. will have time to finish developing a new warhead for the 7,000-mile-range Minuteman III and a special bomb for the Air Force's B-1 bomber. Essentially, these are present-generation weapons. The test limitation, Kissinger noted, was aimed at restricting the development of the next generation of warheads.

Numbers Game. But the Soviets and the Americans deeply disagreed on the main issue: how to get the stalled SALT II arms limitation talks moving again. Nixon and Kissinger had hoped to negotiate another extension of SALT I's restrictions, expiring in 1977, on the number of launchers that each country can deploy. In addition, the American leaders sought to limit the development of MIRV warheads, several of which can be clustered in the tip of one missile and aimed at individual targets. The U.S. has a five-year lead over the Russians in the development and deployment of MIRVs.

But as Nixon and Brezhnev talked in the sunny, seaside gardens of Oreanda, they quickly saw how far apart they were. The main problem was to find a way of reconciling the Russian lead in offensive missiles—a lead of



NIXON AT KHATYN WAR MEMORIAL

CHARLON—GAMMA

KISSINGER CHATTING WITH BREZHNEV
Searching for an end to the impasse.

2,358 to 1,710—with the 3-to-1 American advantage in warheads, counting the MIRVs. The Russians' nightmare was their conviction that the U.S. is far stronger than they are today, largely because of its lead in MIRV technology; the Americans' fear was that the Soviets, catching up in MIRVs and with more launchers to mount them on, could surge ahead in the future. Brezhnev refused every mix of launchers and warheads proposed by Nixon, insisting that he would accept no proposal that in his view locked the Soviets into a state of inferiority.

Senseless Race. The Yalta meetings broke up without a decision. The next day, while flying back to Moscow, Kissinger and Gromyko searched for a way out of the impasse. The two devised a proposal that was soon accepted by Nixon and Brezhnev; their only other choice would have been to admit their failure to the world.

Instead of extending the present SALT I treaty, which limits only the number of missiles, the two leaders agreed to try to work out a comprehensive accord that would govern not only the quantity but also the quality of weaponry—the kind as well as the number of warheads and launchers. Negotiators will confer in Geneva in August and attempt to write a settlement that would begin in 1975 and run until 1985.

Publicly discussing this fresh and ambitious approach, Kissinger conveyed his fears of the consequences should these negotiations fail. The two superpowers, the Secretary warned, would continue building more and more weapons of such sophistication and power that the old worries about who was ahead of whom would become meaningless. Each side could end up with 10,000 warheads. "What in the name of God is 'strategic superiority' at those levels?" he asked. With no agreement, Kissinger declared, "We will be living in a world that will be extraordinarily complex, in which opportunities for nuclear warfare will exist that were unimaginable 15 years ago at the beginning of the nuclear age—and that is our driving concern."

For Kissinger, the Moscow summit was also important in personal terms. He surely sensed how the President, weakened by Watergate, was hampered in his bargaining with Brezhnev. Clearly, the freedom of the Nixon Administration in foreign affairs, as in every other sphere, was being cramped by Watergate. This fact may be one reason for the recent subtle change in the relationship between the Secretary and the President. Though the two men still agree on the basics of policy, Kissinger now seems more distant from the President than he did one or two months ago.

During his extraordinary press conference last month in Salzburg, Austria, Kissinger insisted that he would resign if he was not vindicated of charges that he had been less than candid in describing his role in wiretappings to find security leaks. Next week, during special hearings scheduled by the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, Kissinger will probably repeat his earlier testimony that Nixon ordered and former Attorney General John Mitchell approved the wiretappings.

Kissinger worries that he will be dragged further into the scandals of Nixon's White House. The Secretary has been subpoenaed to testify at the trial of John Ehrlichman, the former domestic affairs chief, who is charged with conspiracy and perjury in the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Ehrlichman's lawyers hope to show that Kissinger had told their client and the President that Ellsberg, the man who leaked the Pentagon papers, was a national security risk. With White House backing, Kissinger was fighting the subpoena, claiming that he knew nothing about Ehrlichman's innocence or guilt.

If Kissinger continues to be a center of controversy, he could resign. The secretary is concerned about his place in history and his continued effectiveness. He has told his friends: "I will not be another public official fighting for my life."

Tolling Bells. After the tough arms negotiations, Nixon flew to the Belorussian capital of Minsk to take part in ceremonies mourning the destruction of the region by the Nazis 30 years ago. In the village of Khatyn, standing before a huge black granite statue of a gaunt man holding his dead son in his arms, the President said quietly: "This is very, very moving."

Favoring his left leg, Nixon also walked around a section of the memorial area containing the outlines of 26 peasant houses that the Germans had burned to the ground. Inside each was an obelisk, shaped like a burnt smokestack, that contained a bell. Every 30 seconds, one of the bells tolled to honor the dead. Nixon wrote in the guest book: "May this moving memorial to the victims of war reinforce the determination of all those who come here to build a living monument to those who died—a world of peace for their children and their grandchildren."

Throughout his tour, Nixon was warmly if not enthusiastically welcomed by carefully assembled Russian crowds that often waved Russian and American flags that had been supplied by the government. The President occasionally startled the Russians by leaving his entourage and wading in to do some campaign-style hobnobbing.

Sometimes the trip looked like a rally back in Indianapolis, but the heavy hand of the Soviet bureaucracy was never far away. Although they had promised to impose no censorship on American television crews, the Soviets one night interrupted and killed three programs—one on each network—dealing

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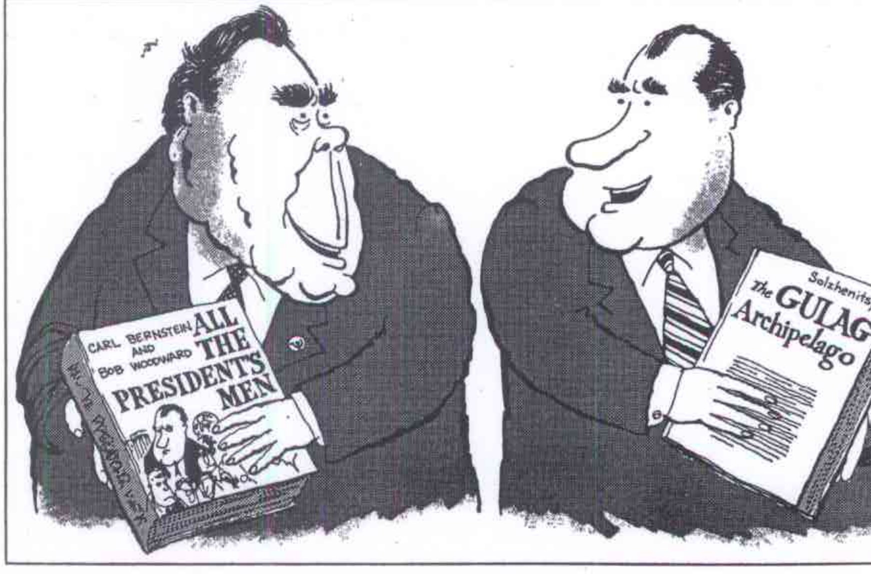

"May I have your autograph, please . . ."