Peking Move a Setback to Soviet Leadership

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PARIS, July 16 — China's invitation to the President of the United States to visit Peking — unthinkable in 1961, 1964 or even early 1968 —represents a major political setback for the present post-Khrushchev leadership of the Soviet Union, Soviet experts here believe.

It is, moreover, a setback for which Leonid Brezhnev's leadership team has, in large measure, its own rigidity to blame. For, in nearly seven years in power, Brezhnev has failed to make the concessions needed to conciliate either Washington or Peking—and, by the invasion of Czechoslovakia on Aug. 20, 1968, helped bring the two together.

Moscow's dilemma—which Brezhnev and his associates have tried to evade—dates back nearly a dozen years, to the autumn of 1959. During that fateful season, former Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev toured first the United States and then China.

He praised the late President Dwight D. Eisenhower as a "man of peace," while in Peking he formally refused to honor a previous promise to give China a "sample" atomic bomb and the technical data for the manufacture of others.

Turned to U.S.

Despite numerous efforts by other Soviet leaders to arrange a compromise between Moscow and Peking, Khrushchev increasingly indicated—particularly after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962—that his personal choice was for a deal with the United States.

Realizing by the summer of 1964 that more than atmospherics were required, Khrushchev sent his son-in-law, Alexei Adzheubei, to West Germany with the message that Moscow was ready to discuss dumping East German boss Walter Ulbricht and talk seriously about German reunification. Khrushchev's bid to Bonn (assailed publicly by Brezhnev and Kremlin ideologist Mikhail Suslov), combined with successful Chinese development of their own atomic device, led to Khrushchev's overthrow, announced Oct. 15, 1964.

The new leadership, with its youngest member, Alexander Shelepin reportedly playing a key role, immediately set out to attempt a reconciliation with Peking. But even the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam failed to drive Mao into Brezhnev's arms, to respond to the Soviet leader's ambiguous appeals for "unity of action."

However, the Vietnam war did give Brezhnev and his colleagues the opportunity to shelve most of Khrushchev's theses on "coexistence", and harden their line both toward the United States and toward West Germany.

The Middle East War in June, 1967, led to sharp increases in the Soviet military budget, a more repressive regime internally, and continued reluctance to cede anything of substance either West of East.

Anti-Maoist Figures

According to some osbervers, Moscow may have counted too heavily between 1965 and 1969 on such anti-Mao Chinese leaders as Liu Shao-chi, Teng Hsiao-ping and Peng Chen to defeat Mao's Cultural revolution or, at the very least, plunge China into semipermanent chaos.

While continuing to fuel the Vietnam war, expand its military presence in the Middle East and reject Western overtures toward a more realistic German policy, the Brezhnev group shocked both Washington and Peking with the invasion of Czechoslovakia. New possibilities for U.S.-Chinese entente were apparent the day after calling the Russians "modern revisionists" —instead of again calling the Russians "modern revisionists"—branded the Brezhnevites "fascists" and "the new tsars," definitions with which many Americans could agree.

The Sino-Soviet clashes on the Ussuri River in March, 1969, frightened the Brezhnev team, which had fewer troops on the Chinese frontier than Khrushchev had emplaced there in 1964.

News Analysis

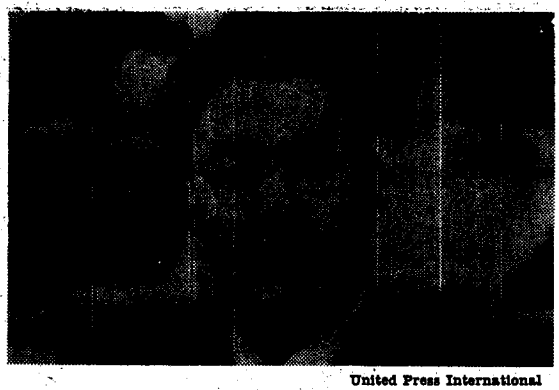
The death of Ho Chi Minh in September, 1969, provided an opportunity for a meeting between Chou and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin, which led ultimately to the restoration of ambassadorial relations and some (not much) trade but little else. The Chinese have been aware that, whatever the Soviet "comrades" have been

saying, a massive Soviet military buildup has been continuing on their frontiers.

Meanwhile, the Brezhnev team has approved incapable of following through on its initial overtures to West Germany's Willy Brandt, which were actually launched shortly after the invasion of Czechoslovakia when Brandt was foreign ministers and not yet chancellor. A package deal with Bonn appeared to be on the verge of conclusion in the spring of 1969, but Ulrbicht came to Moscow and the deal was quashed. At the same time, Brezhnev was pursuing the will-o-the wisp of a "world" Communist conference, which he originally intended to serve as an anti-Chinese platform but in fact saw Romanian, Italian and other Communist defiance of the Soviet line.

By the summer of 1970, when Brezhnev at last took the plunge and pemritted Brandt to sign the West German-Soviet nonaggression treaty, he had clearly promised West German negotiators a new and satisfactory settlement for West Berlin as quid pro quo for such Bonn concessions as recognition of the disputed Oder-Neisse Polish-German frontier. Brandt's associates expected a Berlin settlement to be reached within a few months.

But again — whether through the pressure of the East Germans, the Soviet marshals or other hardliners — Brezhnev could not deliver the goods. More than 15 months of Big Four negotiations of Berlin have yet to produce a settlement satisfactory to Bonn and the allies, while Soviet conduct in the Middle East has further eroded U.S. confidence in Kremlin credibility and last winter's Polish uprising demonstrated continuing instability in Eastern Europe.



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Soviet Communist Party Leader Leonid Breshnev.