

The Road to Moscow

The White House released very little substantive information yesterday when it announced that Dr. Henry Kissinger on a four-day trip to Moscow had met with Soviet Communist party Secretary General Leonid I. Brezhnev and had discussed both the agenda for President Nixon's Moscow visit next month and problems arising from the current fighting in Vietnam.

It is not philanthropy on Moscow's part that made it willing to receive Dr. Kissinger and to firm up the arrangements for receiving President Nixon even while some of the bloodiest fighting in the Vietnam war is in progress. The political utility to President Nixon of a successful visit to Moscow has often been remarked upon. Less often discussed is the fact that the Soviet leaders have their own reasons for wanting the President to visit them and for securing some lessening of Soviet-American tensions.

One major factor is Moscow's pressing need to reassure the Soviet people that it is successfully countering the new relationship between Peking and Washington. For the Soviet public, a Nixon reception in the U.S.S.R. will help ease the expressed fears of a Sino-American alliance against the Soviet Union, fears raised by the Soviet press following the announcement last summer of the President's plan to visit Peking.

But beyond the Chinese factor, there is much the Soviet Union wants from the United States directly. More precisely, there is much that the dovish faction in the Kremlin hopes to get from the United States even though the Kremlin hawks have other priorities. Mr. Brezhnev has recently seemed closer to the Moscow doves than he appeared a year or two ago. To the most sensible people in the Soviet leadership, better relations with the United States would help to ease the expensive arms race, to assure a needed supply of feed grain for Soviet livestock and Soviet meat production in the years ahead, to secure more advanced American technology in the computer and other fields, and to enlist American capital in the gargantuan task of developing the rich resources of Siberia just across the Chinese border.

President Nixon has some high cards to play when he visits the Soviet capital; and, related to that visit, it would be surprising if the Kissinger trip to Moscow had not added another chapter to the history of secret diplomacy about Vietnam.