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Spirit of Confidence

Nixon-Brezhnev Meeting Looked Upon As an Exercise in Maintenance of Trust

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WASHINGTON, June 25—So much have Soviet-American relations improved in three years that the harmonious summit meeting of President Nixon and Leonid I. Brezhnev in the last week is being taken as only a modest success, more important for promoting the climate of détente than for providing practical results.

The meeting lacked the drama of Nikita S. Khrushchev's feisty barnstorming

tour of America in 1959 or the visit to the Kremlin last year of that old cold warrior Richard M. Nixon, snubbed in years past by Moscow's rulers.

It was held without the crisis tension of President John F. Kennedy's 1961 confrontation with Mr. Khrushchev in Vienna or even Mr. Nixon's 1972 journey to Moscow in the shadow of the mining of Haiphong harbor.

It did not produce the substantial achievements of the Moscow summit meeting, leaving most of the hard bargaining on the toughest issues until later. Nor did it provide any serious diversion from this capital's obsession with Watergate.

Spirit of Normalcy

In fact, for all the exuberant salesmanship of Mr. Brezhnev, whose first American venture added to his international stature, this meeting seemed blandly routine, an interim matter meant more to push Soviet-American relations farther along the track laid out in 1972 than to break new ground.

So normal did it seem that corn-state senators mingled with Soviet admirals at treaty signings and Mr. Brezhnev visited California's Orange County, a stronghold of anti-Communism, and supped with conservatives like Gov. Ronald Reagan. Ideology was so soft-pedaled that only Red Skelton had the wit and memory to ask Mr. Brezhnev kiddingly if he was really a card-carrying Communist.

Nonetheless, the second Nixon-Brezhnev meeting demonstrated that the sense of trust between the White House and the Kremlin has developed to such an extent and the political climate has improved so much that the two leaders dared to set a target, that may become a deadline. This was their pledge to reach their next agreement on limiting their strategic arsenals of offensive weapons in 1974, an act of mutual confidence unthinkable when the nineteen-seventies began.

Language Is Warmer

Moreover, their communiqué today ventures to talk warmly of "friendship and cooperation," compared with the more modest language of peaceful coexistence at the Moscow meeting a year ago.

Their new relationship is no longer merely beckoning but has taken root, as the communiqué observed, in their assertion that each is satisfied that the other has lived up to the terms of the crucial 1972 agreements putting limits on their nuclear-armament systems.

It is easy to inflate such a trend into the end of the cold war, though its legacies clearly remain on both sides, or to dismiss it as mere atmospherics when such an atmosphere is clearly vital to the hard negotiations on cutting back the forces of both East and West in the center of Europe.

For the substance of this meeting was largely its comradely atmosphere and only the next few months will tell how much practical impact this will have.

Mr. Brezhnev has won a promise of a "favorable and sympathetic" attitude on the part of President Nixon toward the huge Siberian gas deals that the Soviet leader came to promote, but no firm commitment that the United States Government will endorse them or help finance them. The question now remains whether Moscow will allow Western companies more access to the gas

fields to prove them out or lower its prospective prices, now four or five times the cost of American natural gas.

The Soviet leader has urged influential Congressmen to vote for the favorable tariffs that Moscow wants for its goods in this country, without any assurance that his arguments have swayed any of the skeptical Senators.

Force Reduction Bids

Mr. Nixon has won continued Soviet statements of interest in reducing forces in the center of Europe but no indication that Moscow accepts the Western idea that cutbacks in Soviet forces must be larger than American cutbacks because Moscow's troops have less distance to pull back from the center of Europe. Indeed, the communiqué suggests by a subtle shift in language that Mr. Nixon may have moderated his insistence on proportionate or "balanced" force reductions, a point that will worry his West European allies.

On the vital question of limitation of strategic arms, the two leaders made their most tangible gain by agreeing to accelerate the pace of Soviet-American negotiations to achieve an agreement in 1974.

But they have left unanswered the question whether they are willing and able to put limits on the qualitative and most expensive side of the arms race by somehow imposing controls on the development and use of multiple warheads on intercontinental missiles.

Jamming Issue Unresolved

Mr. Brezhnev has proclaimed to the American people that "to live at peace, we must trust each other, and to trust each other we must know each other better," without saying whether this means ending the Soviet jamming of the Voice of America, though Mr. Khrushchev was willing to suspend that jamming in 1959 and then again from 1963 until 1968.

Both sides have hailed their agreement on preventing nuclear war as a milestone for the postwar era, though its language does not go much beyond that of their reaffirmation last year of the principles of the agreement of late 1971 on preventing accidental nuclear warfare.

The Nixon Administration, hoping to head off the kind of Soviet probing it thought it detected in the Syrian invasion of Jordan in 1970 or the Indian-Pakistani war in 1971, asserts that this pact does not affect the current American bombing in Cambodia or possible resumption of bombing of North Vietnam.

The Soviet Union, anxious to ward off further American interventions abroad, like Vietnam, will not say that this pact would inhibit Moscow from intervening with force in Eastern Europe if it felt that its brand of socialism there was jeopardized—as it did in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Only on the Middle East did Mr. Nixon and Mr. Brezhnev acknowledge their failure to agree on a way to promote a settlement.

China Is Upstaged

For both leaders, the 1973 summit meeting produced intangible gains. Mr. Brezhnev has not only gained prestige and stature abroad from this highly visible American venture, but he has also managed to upstage China, at least for the time being, in the competition for firm partnership with Washington.

For Mr. Nixon, the series of minor agreements signed were important less for their modest particular benefits than for having increased Moscow's vested interest in détente and for drawing Moscow yet further into a framework of relations that will reduce the risks of returning to the cold-war tensions and probings of the past.

But to enjoy these gains, both must remain committed to perpetuating the present aura of goodwill and giving it more practical content in the months ahead.