



Nixon's Choices at Moscow Summit

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Moscow

WHEN President Nixon came here for his first Moscow summit two years ago, the city had been spruced up in dozens of different ways. This time there has been no refurbishing.

That is a sign that the Russians now assess the President at lower value and may even be tempted to take advantage of his weakness. But it is also — and this is far more important, I think — an indication that Big Two summit meetings have entered the realm of business as usual.

Beyond any shadow of a doubt the Russians are fully informed of Mr. Nixon's troubles at home. The fact is shouted from the roof tops in silence, but nobody official speaks of Watergate in public.

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THE SHOW of strength which the President tried to make by stopping off at NATO headquarters in Brussels en route to Moscow impressed nobody here.

A Russian economist pointed out to me that the West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt had raised the issue of inflation at the NATO meeting as if it were as important as national security. "Inflation," the Russian said, "eats at the social stability of your country."

Not only are Russians mindful of American weakness, but they show an undoubted self-confidence. Not sprucing up Moscow for the summit is one sign. Another was a gratuitous hint from Party Secretary Leonid Brezhnev in his opening toast that he could help Mr. Nixon fight his battles at home against "those who

oppose international detente, who favor whipping up the arms race and returning to the methods and mores of the cold war."

The leadership troubles which supposedly plagued Moscow in the past have clearly abated. Brezhnev's presence and behavior at the airport ceremonies welcoming Mr. Nixon left no doubt he was the top banana.

Two other problems which once agitated the Russians now seem to be under control. The Soviet leaders — as the release and deportation of liberal and Jewish dissidents makes plain — now manage the internal opposition to the regime with sophistication.

The challenge from China, which made Russia seem psychotic last year, is obviously taken less seriously now.

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IN THESE conditions it is easy to see how Mr. Nixon could make a mess of the present summit meetings.

If he shot very high, if he tried for ambitious agreements, the Russians could easily take advantage of his bargaining weakness.

But Mr. Nixon will not get burned if he concentrates on setting forth general principles of trade and offensive nuclear weapons while leaving the details to other and future talks.

In short, the choice is between self-interest and national interest. Self-interest dictates dramatic personal diplomacy. But the national interest lies in avoiding drama, in playing it long, in having a summit as usual, leading to another summit as usual, and another and another.