



Brezhnev May Have Nixon on the Spot

Joseph Kraft

SUPERCILIOUS Westerners mocked him for years as the dullest of the dull, the apparatchik's apparatchik. But now the hour of Leonid Brezhnev comes round with a vengeance.

Russia's Party Secretary heads into the summit meeting with President Nixon three weeks hence as the leading figure in the Communist world and the point man on peace or war. He has forced the President into a position where the United States can crowd on military pressure in Vietnam only at the risk of losing a good agreement on arms control.

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FRESH evidence of Brezhnev's supremacy in the Communist world emerged from his recent talks with Henry Kissinger, the President's chief adviser on foreign policy. Their conversations lasted through four days and covered the full menu of matters from Vietnam through trade to arms control. At the end of each session, Brezhnev reported to his colleagues in the Politburo.

But he handled the discussions without any assistance from the other political leaders. Even Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin, who figures so importantly in so many foreign policy issues, did not sit in. Brezhnev stood alone as the responsible figure on the biggest questions.

At first glance, the emergence of Brezhnev bodes well for the Moscow summit. President Nixon clearly does have an opposite number on the Russian side. He and Brezhnev can get into a one-on-one situation. And on matters where there is

underlying harmony, they can cut through details to agreement.

A clear case in point is arms control. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, in Vienna and Helsinki, have pretty certainly reached the point of breakthrough on two central issues.

All that remains is for President Nixon and Brezhnev to approve the details. That can be done with ease at the summit. For Brezhnev, in particular, there would be no trouble since the terms which are now emerging would formalize Soviet equality with the United States in strategic weapons.

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BUT VIETNAM presents an almost opposite case. In the past, a tacit Big Two agreement has been in effect. The Russians have been willing to negotiate with the United States on arms control despite this country's role in Vietnam. But Moscow has never been prepared to abandon its help to Hanoi for the sake of agreement with Washington.

What this means is that Brezhnev has put it up to the President. Mr. Nixon can get a settlement in Vietnam by accepting Hanoi's terms. But failing that, the war will go on to what now looks like a disastrous end. And if Mr. Nixon augments the military effort, then he risks a Russian counterstroke that would force abandonment of the summit and the arms control agreement which lies at the heart of the President's claim to have initiated a generation of peace.