



The Importance of Brezhnev's Visit

— Joseph Alsop

IN LESS THAN a week, Leonid Brezhnev will arrive in Washington for a long visit, to be mainly devoted to talks with the President. The absence of advance interest in this remarkable event is a measure of the near-insanity produced by the Watergate obsession.

The whole country, please remember, was passionately excited by Nikita Khrushchev's visit in President Eisenhower's time. Yet the Khrushchev visit was strictly atmospheric. Neither side attempted to enter into substantive negotiations. The only result was the much vaunted "Spirit of Camp David," which had no detectable effect on the course of history.

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IN SHARP CONTRAST, the Brezhnev visit has excited no one. Yet if you trouble to look into the facts, you are forced to conclude that we should all be intensely excited. For the facts plainly indicate that the Brezhnev visit will be altogether different in basic character from any previous Soviet-Western summit meeting — with the sole possible exception of President Nixon's visit to Moscow.

So much is plain from the mere nature of the preparations. These had no precedent in the whole strange, difficult history of Soviet-American relations. Even the place where the work was done was unprecedented; for no Western emissary had ever before seen the Politburo's huge hunting lodge at Zavidovo, where Henry Kissinger was received by Brezhnev and his Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko.

The character of the work done at Zavidovo also had no precedent. No Western chief of state — let alone a mere emissary like Kissinger — had ever been given four days of the undivided time of any of the successive bosses of the Soviet Union.

The purpose was in fact hard, preparatory work on the forthcoming meeting between Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon. In sending Kissinger to Zavidovo, the President recognized the simple principle that ill prepared meetings between heads of state are never very useful, and can even be dangerous. In giving so much time to Kissinger, Brezhnev recognized the same principle.

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BREZHNEV will therefore come to Washington with the main lines already laid out, for prolonged, complex and deeply important negotiations of the most substantive character. If all goes well, the result will instead be a series of solid, carefully drawn up agreements, probably numbering six in all, between the American President and the Soviet General Secretary.

The subjects to be covered — the progress of the SALT talks, economic and technological relations between the U.S. and the USSR, and so on — are all sufficiently obvious. But another aspect of the forthcoming Brezhnev visit is less obvious, yet vastly more significant.

In brief, if all goes well, the Brezhnev visit's main result may well be an historical turning point in the Soviet Union's over-all relations, not just with the U.S., but with the rest of the world.