

Scandal as a Soviet Bargaining Chip

Leonid Brezhnev's claim that it had not even "entered his head" to consider whether President Nixon had lost any influence as a result of Watergate would, if true, suggest an extraordinary degree of incompetence on the part of the Soviet leader.

But his remark, made at a Kremlin meeting shortly before he left for Washington, need be taken no more seriously than the answers which Western politicians give when they evade questions put to them by correspondents. It could be argued that the very opposite of what he said may be true, and that the Kremlin, having made the most thorough assessment of the impact of Watergate on Mr. Nixon's position, devised its whole summit strategy around it.

If Mr. Brezhnev had really given no thought to the impact of Watergate, he would have been badly served by his advisers, who include some of the most sophisticated observers of the Washington scene. It is inconceivable that they would have failed to tell him about the decline of Mr. Nixon's influence with, for instance, the United States Congress.

He would have needed to know about this, if only because of the major role which Soviet-U.S. trade is to play in the summit talks. Whatever massive trade deals may be endorsed at the summit, whatever general principles may be agreed about economic cooperation, the volume of trade between the two countries will depend in the long run on Congress. But he cannot bargain with Congress, only with Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Brezhnev has obviously come to the United States to make the best deal he can. But in the remarks on Watergate which he made before his departure, he insisted that he did not

intend to bring any pressure to bear on Mr. Nixon. He was going to Washington, he said, not "to bargain with Mr. Nixon, but to conduct negotiations."

Here again Mr. Brezhnev's words cannot have conveyed a true account of his thoughts. He must certainly know from experience that he cannot negotiate with Mr. Nixon unless he also bargains with him. The lessons he learned must surely be deeply engraved on Mr. Brezhnev's mind. "There is one unbreakable rule of international diplomacy," proclaims the most authoritative of all teachers. "You cannot get something in a negotiation unless you have something to give." In other

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words, to negotiate is to bargain, whatever Mr. Brezhnev might now say. This principle was proclaimed not by Lenin or Stalin, but by that hard-headed realist, Richard M. Nixon, at the end of last March when the summit preparations were well under way.

In considering the impact of Watergate on the summit, the Kremlin would have concluded that the Soviet Union has indeed "something to give" to Mr. Nixon in his present predicament. It could give him a spectacular agreement on strategic arms which his supporters might then try to use in an attempt to restore Mr. Nixon's image, to present him once again as the man who is leading the world to the prom-

ised land, to a generation of peace.

Or, his supporters might ask—indeed, some are already asking—should the whole structure of peace, the glittering prospects of disarmament implied in such an agreement, be undermined by the partisan squabble about Watergate? Should the squabble be allowed to go on for the remainder of Mr. Nixon's term, thus making it impossible for him to negotiate credibly with the Russians?

This line of reasoning appears to have persuaded the Kremlin that it could ask a very high price for such an agreement. When Dr. Kissinger came back from his last preparatory trip to Moscow, he indicated that other matters had been settled, but the arms agreement was the one issue on which negotiations would have to continue until the summit.

But the White House could not afford to pay the price the Russians were asking. Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) has repeatedly warned Mr. Nixon that he would not let the administration get away with it, and he has the power in the Senate to give effect to such warnings. Dr. Kissinger has now ruled out any new substantive agreement on arms at the summit. But even this is part of the game. What he is really saying to the Russians is that no major agreement is to be expected if they insist on too high a price.

So the negotiations will continue during the summit and, whatever Mr. Brezhnev may say, they will entail a great deal of tough bargaining in which both sides will keep Watergate very much in mind—even if they never mention the word. Mr. Nixon could still produce a spectacular surprise in keeping with his style.