

James Reston Reports

Focus of the Summit Talks

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The practical questions on the Nixon-Brezhnev agenda — the control of strategic weapons, the expansion of trade, the joint exploration of space, etc. — have all been settled or almost settled in advance.

So there will be plenty of time to discuss the problems of ending the war in Vietnam, and avoiding another Arab-Israeli con-

fusion in the Middle East.

There has been a good



deal of quiet diplomatic activity on the Vietnam peace terms in recent days. Henry Kissinger has seen the Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin almost every day since the blockade of Haiphong. Efforts have been made to persuade the friends of Hanoi elsewhere — specifically in Peking and Paris — that a cease-fire after or even before the battle for Hue would leave Hanoi in control of all the strategic territory she now holds in South Vietnam and lead inevitably to some kind of coalition government.

ATTEMPT

When Kissinger was in Moscow to arrange the Nix-

on mission, he tried, with the help of the Soviets, to arrange for top North Vietnamese leaders to come from Hanoi and meet him in the Soviet capital, but nothing came of this and of course it was before the U.S. air and naval counteroffensive against Hanoi and Haiphong.

Nevertheless, efforts to revive the peace talks continue. In fact, there is some influential support here for sending the retiring Secretary of the Treasury, John Connally, to Paris to spell out President Nixon's latest peace offer and try to break the diplomatic stalemate.

Mr. Nixon's three-point suggestion was (1) that all prisoners of war should be released; (2) an internationally supervised cease-fire should be proclaimed, at which time (3) all American forces would be removed from Vietnam within four months and the political settlement of the country left to the contending Vietnamese parties themselves.

The Nixon argument, which will undoubtedly be pressed hard in Moscow, is that this provides Hanoi with a better prospect than continued bombing of troops and supplies in the North, and that an agreement by the U.S. and the USSR to limit arms shipments would encourage both Hanoi and Saigon to reach a negotiated settlement.

It is doubtful that Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev would agree to do more than try to persuade Hanoi to reopen the talks. The Soviets are taking a very hard line about what they will do if there is any direct bombing attack on their supply ships in the Haiphong harbor, and even if they thought the North Vietnamese should reach an accommodation with Saigon, it's doubtful that they would admit this to Mr. Nixon.

MIDEAST

The chances of any U.S.-Soviet agreement on the Middle East are even slimmed. Moscow's influence in the Arab states that control most of the known petroleum reserves of the world greatly increases her strategic possibilities. With her expanding navy in the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean, she is already in a position to interfere with the supply of oil from the Middle East to Japan and Western Europe in any major crisis, and when she adds aircraft carriers to her navy, as she undoubtedly will do, this will greatly expand the range of her power.

Against these larger world strategic considerations, any Soviet deal with the United States that seemed to limit the Arab claims against Israel is not at all likely. Mr. Nixon and Brezhnev have common interest in seeing that the U.S. and the USSR do not allow the Israeli-Arab difficulties to drag them into a major war against their will, but outside of precautions to this end, plus keeping nuclear weapons out of the hands of all the Middle Eastern states, little more can be expected on this front in Moscow.

BEGINNING

Even so, the agreements between the United States

and the Soviet Union on strategic arms, trade, space, Berlin, and the European security conference clearly mark the beginning of a more hopeful phase in East-West diplomacy.

Moscow has not yet accepted the notion that it has more to gain by cooperating with the United States than by opposing the United States, but at least it is prepared to make limited agreements which do not tip the balance of power against her.

One day the two major nuclear powers may take a wider view of their responsibilities and try to work together for the neutralization of critical areas like Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, and Central Europe, but despite visible progress in the last year, that time has not yet come.