

Question for Soviets: Can Nixon deliver



President Nixon, Leonid Brezhnev at Simferopol airport.

—UPI Photo

By Peter Lisagor
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MOSCOW — Like much else about their summit talks, the subtle chemistry of the two summit leaders' personal relations is a secret.

They tell each other in formal toasts that they can either save the world or blow it up. They obviously have built a mutual trust after three meetings. But President Nixon and Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev seem poles apart in temperament and style.

The American is stiff, formal, tense, inner-directed. The Russian appears relaxed, self-confident, jovial, outgoing. Yet a man can't survive Kremlin politics unless he is tough and probably ruthless.

Little is known about the interaction of the two men in their head-to-head negotiations. For in one respect, they are alike: secretiveness is deeply ingrained in each. The problem with the American is that he is accountable to the people he serves. Brezhnev is accountable only to his party comrades.

Most intriguing about this summit is Brezhnev's judgment of his guest's ability to deliver on deals, or even to make them. The talks have not yet revealed whether Brezhnev has put Watergate into his calculations and tried to wring concessions from Nixon.

But the common judgment is that, Watergate or not, Nixon is a devotee of detente. The support for him is everywhere evident, although a storm of sorts blew up yesterday when the Russians deleted the word "personal" from a passage of the published Nixon toast claiming that his personal relationship with Brezhnev was vital to the agreements they have reached in the past and plan to reach here.

Resident American newsmen saw in it an attempt by the Russians to loosen the adhesive to Nixon just in case he failed to survive the impeachment process at home. But Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler and Soviet spokesman Leonid Zamyatin claimed it was a mistake in translation, that both men were unwavering in their devotion to a unique personal relationship. Veteran observers here say that Pravda rarely makes such mistakes unless they have a political reason.

There is a strong disposition among Western newsmen to believe that Nixon deliberately and perhaps unjustifiedly emphasized the personal angle to support his argument that he is indispensable to detente and to the conduct of America's affairs in the world.

This tendency to see almost everything about the President in terms of his Watergate problem has led some to speculate that Nixon is at odds with his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. The evidence for this is scant, but the theory is that resentment has grown and that the President may soon pull the skeins of policy back into his own hands, maybe even here.