

Little News, But Lots of

By Robert G. Kaiser
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Moscow

Two years ago they flew the Washington Post and the New York Times to Moscow every day. The chief of the American delegation to the strategic arms talks sped from Helsinki to Moscow at the last possible minute with a draft treaty he had just worked out with his Soviet counterparts. The Soviets churned out press releases — in Russian — as fast as the White House.

That was May, 1972 — the first Soviet - American summit conference in 11 years, the first visit by an American President to the Soviet Union, the first formal treaty to control the arms race. The whole proceeding exuded high drama, tense excitement.

June, 1974, is less grand, less tense. The routine is familiar. The White House is not distributing the U.S. papers, and the Russians aren't trying to match the Americans' output of press releases. The men meeting at the summit may be conducting important business, but only calculated hints of that have reached the carnival of reporters and television technicians following them.

Soviet-American meetings, the Soviets say, should be made regular, normal events. They would like one every year. This one suggests that normalization has already set in. It all seems old hat.

Well, not all of it. There is still something remarkable about the public displays of affection between Leonid Brezhnev, the heir of Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev, and Richard Nixon, the prosecutor of Alger Hiss and the harranguer of the parlor pinks of California. "They look like kissing cousins," a Russian journalist remarked aptly.

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Soviet authorities did an excellent job in 1972 organizing an efficient press center in Moscow's Intourist Hotel,

and this year they precisely duplicated it. The bar is open around the clock; its most regular customers are the English-speaking Soviet journalists who have been detailed to the press center to socialize with American and foreign colleagues. They don't have to write stories, and they ordinarily don't have many opportunities to drink gin and tonic, so they have been drinking their share of it this week. Many of the White House press corps walked into the Intourist Hotel last Thursday and felt they had never left. "It hasn't changed in two years," one said. "It's a little dirtier," said another. One change is unmistakable, however—the price of a room in the hotel, which about doubled in two years. For such a room, an ordinary Russian would pay no

more than five rubles (\$6.50) a day: an ordinary American tourist might pay \$40; but an American correspondent traveling with the President is paying \$104.

One-hundred-seventy journalists are paying that rate for six nights — a total tab of \$102,000, all in the hard currency the Soviets always need. American television networks have paid \$280,000 more for the use of Soviet

Warmth at the Summit

facilities to make and transmit their programs.

"They've made enough from us to finance all their entertaining of President Nixon," one American reporter observed.

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One thing missing from this summit session — at least thus far—is some real news. The meeting's managers have created a pseudo-event which blocks the real

event from view. A series of photo opportunities, pre-negotiated and marginally significant cooperation agreements, uninformative briefings and press releases has been the entire diet until now.

This doesn't bother the Soviet news media, which are past masters at the coverage of pseudo-events. No Soviet newspapers carry interpretive reports or what is

really going on at the summit.

They merely print all the formal documents the meeting produces, pictures of the participants, and scanty factual accounts of the two leaders' activities.

The American press wants a little more than that, but isn't getting it. Connie Chung of CBS television made a report here Sunday morning on what it's like to go to the beach in Yalta.

In Moscow the television correspondents tried to film interviews with prominent Soviet dissidents. Several of them were able to interview Andrei Sakharov, the dissident physicist. "You should have seen the faces of the Soviet TV technicians," one American producer said, "when they saw that interview with Sakharov being broadcast out of Moscow television's own studios."