

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Leonid Brezhnev: The Man and His Style

By way of background information for your Vladivostok visit, this memorandum seeks to capture the flavor and style of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. It is based both on my encounters with Brezhnev and on our observations of his interaction with other leading Soviet officials.

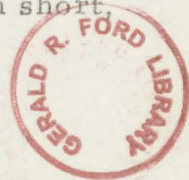
The Personal Importance of Vladivostok

For Brezhnev, and the other Soviet leaders for that matter, the Vladivostok meeting is an important one. The Russians set great store by personal relationships with foreign leaders; their curiosity about you will not have been satisfied by Foreign Minister Gromyko's report following his September meeting with you. Soviet President Podgorny told the Finnish President last month that statements you and I have made vowing to continue the Nixon foreign policy have been reassuring to the Soviet leaders but, just the same, they are reserving judgment until they can assess you personally.

Brezhnev's interest in this meeting with you has another, more personal side. Ever since Stalin, Soviet leaders have seen an encounter with the American President as a boost to their authority and a recognition of their stature. Brezhnev, like his predecessor Khrushchev, finds this useful in terms of the never-ending power struggle within the leadership. And whether he recognizes it consciously or not, to be seen in the company of the U.S. President or closeted with you in secret sessions fills a deepseated Russian need to be accepted as an equal.

The Personal Side of Brezhnev

With experience and exposure in dealing with Western leaders, Brezhnev has gained assurance. He has come to enjoy the perquisites of office -- he enjoys fancy cars, natty clothes and a certain elevated lifestyle. In short,

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he has some of the characteristics of the nouveau-riche. Yet he is proud, as Khrushchev was, of his proletarian background and of his successful march up the ladder of power.

Brezhnev clearly enjoys power, and has told his wife that for the last five years he has felt 40. He revels in the role of leading a great power.

Like many Russians, Brezhnev is a mixture of crudeness and warmth. Yet, self-conscious about his background and his past, he eschews Khrushchevian excursions into profanity. He has the Slavic love of physical contact -- back slapping, bear hugs, and kisses. His anecdotes and imagery, to which he resorts frequently, avoid the language of the barnyard. His humor is heavy, sometimes cynical, frequently earthy.

Brezhnev prides himself on being a sportsman. He mentions ice-skating, skiing, cycling, and parachute jumping as former pursuits. He vows he will never give up hunting, and he remains an avid soccer fan, attending matches at Moscow stadiums. Prior to the important concluding session of our SALT discussions in the Kremlin two weeks ago, he suddenly suggested that we adjourn instead so that I could go to the ballet while he took in a soccer match.

Another passion is automobiles; he enjoys getting behind the wheel of one of his collection of foreign luxury cars whenever he has the chance for a fast spin. He likes to be with the "boys" and in the past made it a practice to gather up his Ukrainian colleagues for hunting parties, weekend retreats and vacations.

Brezhnev enjoys a drink but exercises restraint in public. He smokes strong cigarettes at a rate distressing to his doctors. The Soviet party chief cultivates an image of vigorous well-being in public, but privately he shows tender concern for his health. He is given to incessant complaining to his colleagues about minor ailments, the work load he is bearing, and the strain he is under. In late 1973, for example, Brezhnev complained to Belorussian party boss Masherov that he had been "busy as the devil" and hardly had the strength to go on. These same complaints, in bantering fashion, have emerged in my meetings with him.

Brezhnev's health, in fact, appears none too good. He has a number of cardio-vascular problems. He suffers from high blood pressure and is



reported to have had two heart attacks in the past and possibly a stroke. While he is still vigorous, he does tire more easily than a year ago. In addition, he has long been plagued by hoarseness, which causes him difficulties during long speeches, and he has serious dental problems.

Brezhnev is a nervous man, partly because of his personal insecurity, partly for physiological reasons traced to his consumption of alcohol and tobacco, his history of heart disease and the pressures of his job. You will find his hands perpetually in motion, twirling his gold watch chain, flicking ashes from his ever-present cigarette, clanging his cigarette holder against an ash tray. From time to time, he may stand up behind his chair or walk about. He is likely to interrupt himself or you by offering food and drink. His colleagues obviously humor him in these nervous habits.

He can put in long hours when necessary, and his wife complained last month that he had been working 16 hours daily in connection with my visit and that of German Chancellor Schmidt.

As he has gotten older, Brezhnev has permitted himself to wonder aloud about his reputation. He wants a "good" image, although he probably does not mind in some respects the older image of a brutal man, and he wants to be seen as good for Russia in the history books. He will talk about his family, being especially proud and fond of his granddaughter who grew up in his house. (She recently presented him with his first great-grandchild.)

As with other Russians, the War remains an earth shaking experience for him. He has taken to having his role inflated in publicity. He is proud of his service, of having been a general, of being a veteran. He knows something of the human disaster of war -- one should credit him with genuine abhorrence of it, though, of course, he uses fear of war in others to obtain political ends.

The Negotiator

Brezhnev attaches importance to striking a direct human rapport with his interlocutor, and he has been known to spend considerable time in preliminary talks with a foreign leader trying to establish a personal relationship and take the measure of the man. For his own part, Brezhnev comes across as a vigorous, vital person, with an inquiring mind and intuitive perceptions about men and situations.



Brezhnev probably will remind you of a tough and shrewd union boss, conscious of his position and his interests, alert to slights. He will be polite sometimes to the point of excessive warmth. He may lapse into orations, sometimes standing up to deliver them. He will be knowledgeable, but uninterested in detail (though his underlings will be extremely careful with fine print.) He may try to test you at some point with a vigorous and ideologically-tinged statement of his position, but he will let you do the same, though perhaps trying to get you off-stride by offering you tea and sandwiches when you break for interpretation.

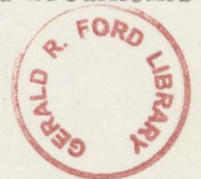
He will try to flatter you, usually when he wants you to be "statesmanlike" and "generous", and in fact he sometimes betrays an almost reverential view of "the President."

When he wants something, Brezhnev will be voluble in explaining how much in your own interest a certain position is; he may intimate that it took a great deal of effort to get his colleagues to agree to a concession; he may even brag that he overruled this or that bureaucratic interest group -- he likes to poke fun at his Foreign Ministry, although in fact Gromyko and several of its members do a great deal of Brezhnev's backstopping. He will invite you to "improve" on his own efforts and tell you how much the history books will praise you for the effort.

Typically Russian, when Brezhnev thinks he has made a major concession or breakthrough, he will get impatient to get the matter wrapped up. He may stall interminably, but once he moves he will want things settled at once so as to take up the next subject. He almost certainly will not want to get involved in drafting exercises or the shaping of precise formulations himself, preferring to delegate this to his associates, probably Gromyko.

While Brezhnev will keep the center stage and generally demonstrate that he is the master of his brief, he relies heavily for expert support on his growing staff of personal foreign policy advisors, particularly the senior of these, Aleksandrov. Aleksandrov treats the boss with politeness but does not hesitate to break in if he feels his chief is getting confused or has made a serious mistake. There is in fact an air of informality in Brezhnev's office, and his aides are not reluctant to approach him.

Though impatient with details, Brezhnev clearly masters the significant issues and understands Soviet interests. He has stopped his earlier practice of bringing copious notes to meetings, except for formal documents



he plans to hand over. Although these are obviously drafted by his staff, he is familiar with their contents, presumably having participated in Politburo discussions of them.

The Politician

Brezhnev seems to operate fairly comfortably within the constraints of collective leadership, although he has not hesitated to advance his own interests at the expense of his colleagues. He appears to prefer the human interaction of a closely-knit working group to the more complex and abstract rewards of the solitary leader. His career has been based primarily on his long years as a regional party leader. He is an expert at finding a consensus to lead.

Although the boss, Brezhnev still gives the impression of being highly sensitive to the needs of the collective, constantly reassuring himself that his colleagues can have no conceivable grounds for complaint or soliciting their compliments. Last January when he was in Cuba, for example, Brezhnev called up a number of his Moscow colleagues to solicit their reactions to his televised speech the night before at a huge public rally. He was at pains to explain to each one that he had deliberately chosen a more flamboyant style than usual to match Castro's performance. He discussed the matter at length and seemed eager for approval.

Brezhnev is free to expound an agreed position of the collective, perhaps adding some nuances and emphases of his own, but once he has exhausted his guidance he evidently is required to go back for more, as well as for any changes necessitated by the course of negotiations. He also seems to be under some obligation to report back. At the same time, if Brezhnev believes a particular change in position is necessary, it appears he has the authority to persuade the Politburo to agree to it. In any case, situations could well arise where Brezhnev will say that he must check back with his colleagues. This may be a tactic, but may also reflect the actual situation.

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The attached briefing book contains maps and photos of the Vladivostok area and background papers on the Soviet leadership.

