

The President's Daily Brief

20 May 1972



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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The circumstances of yesterday's party central committee meeting in Moscow suggest that Brezhnev may feel the need to protect his domestic position.
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Despite completion of parliamentary action in Bonn on the Eastern treaties, final ratification may still be delayed, while a shift in Moscow's position on transmitting the all-Bundestag resolution spells more trouble for both Brandt and Barzel. *(Page 3)*

In Vietnam, the An Loc relief column reports encountering a heavy ground attack this morning.
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SOVIET UNION

The party central committee, meeting in a one-day session yesterday, approved a report by Brezhnev on the international situation, which almost certainly included an outline of the leadership's plans for its meeting with President Nixon. The circumstances surrounding the plenum, particularly the timing so close to the summit, suggest that Brezhnev may feel the need to protect his domestic position.

According to TASS, the session in addition to discussing Brezhnev's speech also heard a report by party secretary Kapitonov on the exchange of party documents.

Brezhnev had proposed an exchange of party membership cards--which provides an opportunity to review and perhaps weed out party members--in his report to the 24th Congress in March 1971. However, neither Brezhnev nor his closest allies have referred to the subject since then, and Politburo member Shelest (who has opposed Brezhnev on detente policy among other matters) has wondered aloud why the exchange was not yet under way. It is thus possible that Kapitonov's report on this topic was added to the agenda to quiet Brezhnev's opponents on domestic issues.

The plenum also named Boris Ponomarev an alternate member of the Politburo. He is a long-time party secretary and chief of the central committee's international department that handles relations with countries and parties outside the "bloc." He is probably a protege of senior party ideologist and foreign affairs expert Suslov. Ponomarev was reported to have opposed the 1968 Czech invasion, because of the opposition he knew it would arouse among international parties. His boss, Suslov, helped provide the ideological justification for the new opening to West Germany in early 1969.

Ponomarev's promotion would thus seem to bolster the commitment to detente policies a bit, but not to add to Brezhnev's personal strength.

The central committee is usually convened either well in advance of an important event or after it has taken place, to put its seal of approval on the Soviet position. The general line on

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summitry was, in fact, laid down at the last plenum held in November 1971. It is therefore highly unusual for the central committee to be convened at this time on the very eve of the President's arrival.

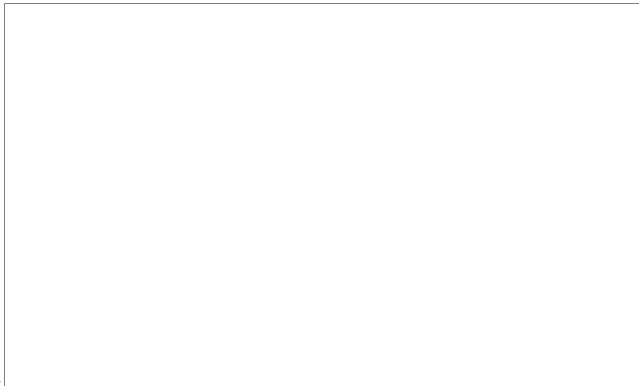
These pieces of evidence, plus the seemingly counterproductive way in which the Soviet ambassador to Bonn handled the Eastern treaties yesterday (see the next item), do not add up to clear proof of important difficulties within the Soviet leadership. Against the background of the strains arising from the situation in Vietnam, the summit, and the cliff-hanger in Bonn, however, they suggest to us that such is the case. If so, the problems of preserving unity may affect the leadership's maneuverability at the summit.

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WEST GERMANY

Parliamentary consideration of the Eastern treaties is now complete, but final ratification may still be delayed. A legal challenge was lodged yesterday by a conservative politician, who asked West Germany's constitutional court to issue an injunction against the promulgation of the treaties. Although the court is likely to reject a request made by an individual, the Bavarian state government, dominated by anti-treaty Christian Socialists, is considering a similar action. The court's willingness to hear a challenge would delay the entry into force of the treaties by at least several weeks.

Another difficulty arises from a last-minute change in Moscow's position on transmitting the all-Bundestag resolution that was the opposition's price for not opposing the treaties. The Soviets provided only oral acknowledgment of the resolution, rather than a written aide memoire as previously agreed. They attribute this switch to the CDU failure to vote for the treaties.



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VIETNAM

The government relief column edging toward An Loc reported itself under heavy ground attack this morning. Preliminary reports indicate that seven enemy tanks have been knocked out. Yesterday a Soviet ZSU-57-2 tank with twin 57-mm. gun mounts was captured in the besieged town--the first time this weapon has been seen in South Vietnam.

In other parts of the country, scattered shellings and ground attacks continue. The Communists have been especially aggressive around Kontum City. Yesterday the government abandoned Fire Support Base November just to the north and moved its defenders into the provincial capital. Government troops continue to expand their defenses around Hue. An assault against enemy positions northwest of Fire Support Base Birmingham caught over 400 enemy troops in the open, and heavy artillery strikes were called in on them.

The Communists are still moving substantial amounts of supplies and equipment south along Cambodian roads near South Vietnam. [redacted] heavy truck traffic in the northeast along recently widened Route 975, linking south Laos with the Stung Treng area of Cambodia--the jump-off point for Communist supplies destined for the southern half of South Vietnam. South of Stung Treng, [redacted] heavy Communist use of Route 13, particularly between Kratie City and Snuol, just north of South Vietnam's Binh Long Province. Numerous enemy tanks were observed parked along the roadway on 18 May.

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Hanoi continues to show anxiety that the Vietnam peace talks might be broadened. Yesterday a Radio Hanoi broadcast reiterated criticism of proposals to give the United Nations a direct role in the negotiations and scored the British for calling for a new Geneva Conference. Labeling the idea of "internationalizing" the Vietnam problem "a sinister scheme of US imperialism," the broadcast insisted that the matter must be settled between the US and Vietnam at the Paris conference.

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