

Brezhnev scores radicals, offers U.S. leverage

by Rachel Douglas

Opening the 26th Soviet Communist Party Congress in Moscow Feb. 23, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev deflated both the Soviet bloc's own international destabilization specialists, like Fidel Castro, and the eager anticipation of Alexander Haig that he would soon be facing down Moscow eyeball-to-eyeball.

If Brezhnev and his close associates continue to dominate the congress on the policy and personnel levels, the outcome will be as momentous as the defeat of Jimmy Carter in the United States. Brezhnev's keynote address affirmed Moscow's belief that Carter's exit created vital opportunities for strategic stabilization.

To the surprise of Soviet watchers, Brezhnev addressed to the West and especially to President Ronald Reagan, with whom he offered to meet, a packet of proposals for talks on the international crisis and on specific issues. The Brezhnev agenda, including an explicit offer to discuss Afghanistan in conjunction with Persian Gulf security guarantees, contains several concessions to West European initiatives.

Europeans, especially in France, saw the Brezhnev speech as leverage to get the Reagan administration moving on international issues of substance. Europe has been impatient with the uneven emphasis on El Salvador emanating from the Haig State Department.

President Reagan appeared at a White House press briefing early the same morning to give his personal preliminary response to Brezhnev's summit offer. "I was most interested," said the President, adding that he intended to discuss the Soviet proposals with the Western allies. Even Haig, in a brief statement that night, said he

was "very interested" in Brezhnev's speech. It was after a lengthy meeting with France's visiting foreign minister, Jean François-Poncet, that Haig pronounced the view that elements of the Soviet leader's remarks are "new and remarkable."

French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing revealed to the *Washington Post* this week that he has been in frequent contact with Brezhnev, including on the sticky question of international talks on Afghanistan, where the Soviets intervened over a year ago. The *Post* report added that Giscard is preparing several initiatives geared to open up East-West dialogue after the Reagan administration's first few months in office.

If Brezhnev startled Alexander Haig with his East-West proposals, Haig found company in the person of Cuba's Fidel Castro.

Brezhnev's swat at the socialist bloc's destabilization faction came as he admitted there need not be "uniformity" among communist parties. "Differences of opinion between communists can be overcome," said Brezhnev, "unless, of course, they are fundamental differences between revolutionaries and reformists or between creative Marxism and dogmatic sectarianism and ultraleft adventurism. In such a case there can be no compromise—today just as in Lenin's lifetime."

That this remark was aimed at Castro and other radicals—abetted by a Soviet support network of KGB security and other operatives and sanctioned at the highest Kremlin levels by Central Committee Secretaries Mikhail Suslov and Boris Ponomarev—Brezhnev proved by his remarks on Third World policy.



Courtesy of the Government of India

At January's summit meeting.

Brezhnev spoke prominently of India, the major developing-sector power where state-to-state economic development-based agreements have taken precedence in recent months in Soviet policy over the left radical whims of local communist party leaders.

It was in India last December that Brezhnev first presented the Persian Gulf security guarantees initiative he has now renewed. The Brezhnev plan calls for the United States, U.S.S.R., Western Europe, Japan, and China to pledge protection of national sovereignty and safe sea transit in a demilitarized Persian Gulf. In the keynote speech, he pushed the point, saying "it is absurd to think that the oil interests of the West can be 'defended' by turning that region into a powderkeg."

Brezhnev then agreed to a unique form of linkage between his Persian Gulf proposals and "the international aspects of the Afghan problem," which he said could be discussed together.

This unusual formulation was widely seen in Europe as a connection to Giscard's call for an international conference on Afghanistan. The French president indicated to the *Washington Post* that he had received a letter from Brezhnev on Feb. 4 which did not formally reject the French proposal. Washington sources said recently that François-Poncet, in his conversation with Haig, had put forward ideas on Afghanistan.

Appealing for the Soviet-American summit, Brezhnev said that "in many ways the international situation depends on the policy of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A." However, he added a number of proposals geared for Europe and other strategic areas.

Hailing the accomplishments of his own talks with Giscard and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in the five years since the last Soviet party congress, Brezhnev called for new Europe-wide "confidence-building measures." He said that the entire European section of the Soviet Union could be included in such new measures, again a modification of the Soviet attitude in evident reaction to French proposals: Giscard has suggested an "Atlantic to the Urals" approach to European arms limitation.

Brezhnev proposed an international conference on the Middle East, a summit of United Nations Security Council members on steps to reduce the danger of nuclear war, and consultations among the Soviet Union, the United States, China, and Japan to initiate "confidence-building measures in the Far East."

A *Pravda* article by Soviet Defense Minister Dmitrii Ustinov, published on the eve of the party congress, confirmed the personal dominance of Brezhnev in the Soviet elite. The election of a new party central committee, at the close of the congress, will reveal more of the Kremlin lineup, as several dozen Brezhnev protégés and other party officials are added to this crucial decision-making body.

Ustinov's article in *Pravda* called the international war danger serious—as did Brezhnev—and portrayed Brezhnev as the Soviet leader most suited to handle such an international crisis. Referring in glowing terms to Brezhnev's World War II career, Ustinov wrote that Brezhnev's personal example showed the unity of the army and the party.