

“Man of Peace: Leonid Ilich Brezhnev and His Diaries”

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As one of Stalin’s *vydvizhentsy* (promoted workers) who ran the USSR during the Cold War, Leonid Ilich Brezhnev ruled in a manner fully consonant with that of his generation, sharing his comrades’ strengths, shortcomings, and understanding of a world divided by two universalizing ideologies. Yet he also left his personal stamp on Soviet foreign policy during his years in office. Despite the role that speech and ghost writers played in crafting Brezhnev’s many public addresses and “autobiographical” accounts, he believed unconditionally in peace and saw himself as its architect. Leonid Ilich nurtured the propaganda image of him as man of peace because, at heart, he was.¹ His diaries and a spate of published memoirs written by his comrades make that clear.

His diaries? Perhaps more accurately described as Brezhnev’s work notes or work logs, these relatively unknown and heretofore little-used documents are of enormous historical significance, despite their intermittent and at times laconic or ambiguous nature, because they provide unique insight into what issues Brezhnev deemed important and because they chronicle how he spent his time. Brezhnev began keeping the diaries in earnest in 1957. Originally preserved in the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, they have been declassified and transferred to the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI),

¹ As Soviet Ambassador to the U.S. Anatolii Dobrynin wrote, Brezhnev “completely excluded any possibility of a war with the United States, for this would amount to ‘the end of the world.’” See *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents, 1962-1986* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 229, 371.

where they are stored in fond 80, op. 1, dela 974, 975, 977-990.² Until recently, only two individuals—the late military historian D. A. Volkogonov and Russian Duma member and journalist A. Khinshtein—utilized the diaries, but they apparently had only limited access to them. In his highly opinionated account of Soviet leaders, Volkogonov cast Brezhnev as a mediocrity. Not surprisingly, the colonel-general found what he was looking for in the diaries (pages of which are stored in his personal papers at the Library of Congress): evidence of the “pathetically low intellectual level of the highest Soviet state official and fourth leader of the Communist Party.”³ Some fifteen years later, Khinshtein included excerpts from the diaries in his nonacademic biography of Brezhnev, which can be read as much as a damning indictment of Boris Yeltsin and an exoneration of Vladimir Putin as it can a sympathetic rehabilitation of Brezhnev.⁴ Acknowledging the diaries’ limitations, Khinshtein nonetheless appreciates that they “provide the opportunity to trace how the personality of their main protagonist changed over time.”⁵ Fortunately, a number of academic articles based on the diaries authored by historians Viktor Denningkhaus (Victor Dönninghaus) and Andrei Savin published since 2012 demonstrate the real potential of Brezhnev’s written legacy.⁶ Moreover, a multivolume edition

² For a discussion of the origins of Brezhnev’s personal archival collection, see Sergei Kudriashov, ed., *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta*

. *Spetsial'noe izdanie: General'nyi sekretar' L. I. Brezhneva, 1964-1982* (Moskva: Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta. Spetsial'noe izdanie, 2006), 9-15. This volume was published on the 100th anniversary of Brezhnev’s birth.

³ Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime*. Ed. and trans. by Harold Shukman (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 315.

⁴ Aleksandr Khinshtein, *Pochemu Brezhnev ne smog stat' Putinyim: Skazka o poteriannom vremeni* (Moskva: OLMA, 2011). The author claims that Brezhnev made his first diary entries already back in 1944, followed by a fourteen-year gap. The pages of the diary that he published can be found on 461-557.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 461-62.

⁶ See Viktor Denningkhaus and Andrei Savin, “‘Epokha Brezhneva’ glazami genseka: Rabochie zapisi Leonida Il’icha kak istoricheskii istochnik,” *Rodina*, no. 2 (2012): 120-23; “‘Evreiskii’ nalog: Brezhnev i evreiskaia emigratsiia iz SSSR v 1972-1973 gg.,” *Rodina*, no. 5 (2012): 105-10; “Podarki i otdarki Leonida Il’icha: Lichnost’ genseka v svete podnoshenii,” *Rodina*, no. 7 (2012): 139-45, no. 8 (2012): 110-15, and “Leonid Brezhnev: Publichnost’ protiv

of the diaries and related materials will be published in Moscow by ROSSPEN thanks to the collaboration of the German Historical Institute in Moscow in cooperation with RGANI, under the title *Rabochie dnevniki L. I. Brezhneva*. I prepared this essay as part of that endeavor.

Brezhnev had witnessed both world wars. As a result, even though he remained dedicated to promoting peace and understood the colossal economic burden of the arms race, he believed in “the need to achieve peace from a position of strength.”⁷ As Brezhnev himself put it in a public address in 1965, “We are fully aware that the larger our defense capacity, the stronger our combat power, the safer we can live, the more certain we can guarantee our people and other nations peace.”⁸ His “Kissinger,” diplomat-adviser A. M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, agreed that Brezhnev promoted “a steady course of peaceful coexistence . . . with the West, without weakening the country’s defense,” and that, in contrast with his predecessor, Brezhnev was “more likely to listen to the opinions of others.”⁹ The latter quality had its plusses and minuses.

Kremlin leaders harshly criticized Khrushchev’s transgressions when they removed him from office, but not the aims of his foreign policy: continuity with the Khrushchev period therefore characterized the new leadership’s foreign policy matrix comprising peaceful coexistence with the West, maintaining the East European status quo, containing China, and supporting liberation movements in the Third World. On November 6, 1964, in his first major public address following Khrushchev’s removal, Brezhnev emphasized that, in continuing to

sakral’nosti vlasti,” *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 4 (2012): 179-94. These essays have appeared in English translation in *Russian Studies in History* 53, no. 1 (Summer 2014), which I edited.

⁷ Evgenii Chazov, *Zdorov’e i vlast’: Vospominaniia “kremlevskogo vracha”* (Moskva: Novosti, 1992), 89-90.

⁸ Kudriashov, *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta*, 48.

⁹ Andrei Mikhailovich Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva: Vospominaniia diplomata, sovetnika A. A. Gromyko, pomoshchnika L. I. Brezhneva, lu. V. Andropova, K. U. Chernenko i M. S. Gorbacheva*, ed. by I. F. Ogorodnikova (Moskva: “Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia,” 1994), 119.

conduct a Leninist policy of peaceful coexistence, the Soviet Union sought to avoid thermonuclear war, to resolve differences via negotiation, and to respect the rights of each nation for self-determination and for resolving its own domestic problems. According to Brezhnev, "Our policy is a policy of good relations and of mutual cooperation with all states."¹⁰

Students of Soviet foreign policy have identified a dynamic inherent in it that manifested itself from the start: the tension between the country's interests as a great, then superpower, and its mission as the self-proclaimed center of revolutionary messianism that backed liberation movements. Political scientist Adam B. Ulam wrote about this in his classic 1968 study, *Expansion and Coexistence*.¹¹ More recently, historian Vladislav Zubok described this dualism as the "revolutionary-imperial paradigm."¹² Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatolii Dobrynin offered a telling example of it in regard to Vietnam, a country about which the Soviet public knew little and one that was not vital to Soviet national interests. Yet, as Dobrynin observed, "international solidarity with the socialist republic of Vietnam'—was deeply ingrained in the minds of the Kremlin leaders . . . at times to the detriment of our own basic interests."¹³ Soviet statesman Georgii Arbatov, advisor to five general secretaries and founder of the Institute of USA and Canada, perceptively claimed that this dynamic greatly

¹⁰ Cited in Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, 131. But CIA analysts wrongly concluded that Brezhnev had devalued peaceful coexistence because he mentioned it as the last of six points he identified as defining features of Soviet foreign policy. See CIA, DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE, Intelligence Report, Policy and Politics in the CPSU Politburo: October 1964 to September 1967 (Reference Title: CAESAR XXX) SECRET August 31, 1967, p. 21.

¹¹ *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-67* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968).

¹² Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), x. Similarly, Jonathan Haslam labeled its practitioners "realists in terms of means, though utopian in terms of ends." See *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), ix.

¹³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 137.

increased the likelihood of making grave foreign policy mistakes after Brezhnev's health deteriorated.¹⁴

The Rise and Fall of Brezhnev's Foreign Policy

As Khrushchev's "president" (chair of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet), Leonid Ilich traveled in the early 1960s to Guinea, Ghana, Morocco, Czechoslovakia, Sudan, India, Bulgaria, Finland, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iran. Gromyko or someone else from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) often accompanied him on these trips, for which Brezhnev carefully prepared.¹⁵ Aleksandrov-Agentov maintained that, in all discussions on foreign policy within the collective leadership after October 1964, Brezhnev predominated from the start and that he relied on Andrei Gromyko—a friend.¹⁶ This was the case not because Brezhnev lacked ideas but because Gromyko shared them. Not seeing any immediate possibility for improving relations with the U.S., Brezhnev initially let his comrades continue pursuing the USSR's policies regarding America while he concentrated on the Eastern bloc, Vietnam, the Arab world, Western Europe, and India.

Until the early 1970s, Aleksei Kosygin, as head of state, also played a key role in foreign affairs and this exacerbated the well-known rivalry between him and Brezhnev. In early 1965, for instance, Kosygin headed a delegation to Vietnam, stopping in China before and afterward for consultations. He met with Prime Minister Harold Wilson of Great Britain and visited Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt in May 1966. When President Lyndon B. Johnson proposed that a Soviet

¹⁴ Georgii Arbatov, "Iz nedavnogo proshlogo," in Iu. V. Aksiutin, comp., *L. I. Brezhnev: Materialy k biografii* (Moskva: Politizdat: 1991), 74-76.

¹⁵ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, 120, 118.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

leader journey to the U.S., the Kremlin leaders requested that he come to Moscow instead since they could not decide who among them might travel to America. “Gromyko quietly supported Brezhnev,” remembered Dobrynin, “having secretly instructed ambassadors to explain discreetly to the leaders of their host countries 'who was who' in the Soviet leadership. As a result, Brezhnev eventually got the upper hand.”¹⁷

But this strained his already crowded schedule, as his public addresses and diary entries make clear. In the summer of 1965 Brezhnev listed the many foreign delegations that visited Moscow, because “the USSR continues to remain the center of international politics. It’s not we asking to go to England and to other countries, but it’s they who are requesting to visit us. We cannot manage to host [them all].” He believed that “many need to come to the USSR either before elections or on the eve of elections at home to elevate their prestige.”¹⁸ This sentiment found reflection in his diaries, in which, a year later, he noted that he had met with Indira Gandhi, Iraqi Prime Minister Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, Prime Minister Wilson of Great Britain, Vice President Adam Malik of Indonesia, the Ethiopian emperor, and others, “but there’s not enough time.”¹⁹ As a result, by mid-1968, he concluded that, “we sometimes try to do the undoable,” and that the USSR needed to distinguish between its primary and secondary

¹⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 133-35. See also Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, 260. Hints of the strained relationship between the men find reflection in Brezhnev’s diaries when, during a trip to London in early 1967, Kosygin conveyed a message about Vietnam from the American ambassador. Brezhnev noted in his diary that, during Kosygin’s report to the Politburo, “he was criticized” for accepting a letter from Wilson concerning the U.S. (2/24/67).

¹⁸ Kudriashov, ed., *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta*, 47-48.

¹⁹ He wrote this sometime between June 16 and October 10, 1966.

interests.²⁰ The former included cooperating with European Social Democrats to promote mutual coexistence, détente, and the development of economic and other ties.²¹

Nineteen seventy-one marked a turning point in Brezhnev's influence over foreign affairs, as the proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Party Congress make clear, where he assumed responsibility for relations with Bonn and Washington and spotlighted the theme of European détente and peace, emphases he echoed in other public pronouncements. Perceptively, a CIA report maintained that, during his meeting with West German Chancellor Brandt in the Crimea that September, Brezhnev established himself as the chief spokesperson for détente, thereby indicating that he was the man in the Kremlin with whom President Nixon should talk.²² Brandt confirmed this: "Brezhnev's definite and undisputed supremacy could not escape the eye or the ear. He was also a master of his material."²³

Many observers agree that he reached the pinnacle of power as a result of *Ostpolitik* and of promoting détente with the U.S., as evinced in Nixon's visit to Moscow in 1972 and Brezhnev's trip to the U.S. in 1973. Adviser A. S. Cherniaev, for instance, observed that a fundamental change in Brezhnev's style of rule—and power—took place when he gave a keynote address on foreign policy at the April 26-27, 1973, plenum, the first at which his remarks were not open to discussion, let alone criticism.²⁴ In preparing his report to the

²⁰ Kudriashov, ed., *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta*, 76.

²¹ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, 207-8.

²² CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, Intelligence Memorandum, "The Soviet Party Leadership" May 15, 1972, No. 0866/72, Released in Full 1998, 7.

²³ Willy Brandt, *People and Places: The Years 1960-1975*. Trans. from the German by J. Maxwell Brownjohn (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 334.

²⁴ Cherniaev observed that, for Brezhnev, peaceful coexistence became *realpolitik* as he took responsibility for preventing nuclear war, promoted détente in Europe, thought of ways to snuff out regional conflicts in the Third World with the U.S., and considered possibilities for normalizing relations with China. See A. S. Cherniaev, *Sovemestnyi iskhod: Dnevnik dvukh epokh, 1972-1991 gody* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2008), 81.

plenum, Brezhnev did not see his role or that of the Soviet Union modestly: “For a long foreseeable period we will have a tremendous impact not only on those countries with which we deal, but on all of international politics.” Chief of the International Department of the CPSU Boris Ponomarev stressed the Kremlin’s understanding of the new correlation of forces in the world: “now not a single foreign policy issue can be resolved without the Soviet Union, because of our power, our strength, and our astute, wise Leninist foreign policy.” Brezhnev’s personal stamp remained unambiguous: “The question now is either nuclear war or a durable and lasting peace.”²⁵

Minister of Health Evgenii Chazov claimed that, although the beginning of Brezhnev’s decline manifested itself already during his 1973 trip to the U.S., he remained fully capable of hard work and analytical thinking until his November 23-24, 1974, summit in Vladivostok with Gerald Ford, during which Brezhnev suffered a seizure. Afterward, his capacity for work diminished and breakdowns became longer and deeper.²⁶ Reasoned Dobrynin: “If there was any point at which it could be said that detente had reached its height and then begun its decline, it probably would have been at the very moment of Brezhnev’s seizure, for from that moment the summit process was inevitably slowed.”²⁷ Indeed, Brezhnev had tied his reputation to the Helsinki process, inspired to finalize postwar boundaries in Europe, to facilitate cooperation in key areas, and to acknowledge general standards on human rights, but his comrades had to keep him on a short leash during the signing of the Helsinki Accords in August 1975, after which his dependence on tranquilizers and sleeping medication could no

²⁵ Kudriashov, ed., *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta*, 133, 137.

²⁶ Chazov, *Zdorov’e i vlast’*, 126, 129.

²⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 329.

longer be kept secret.²⁸ Aware of his limitations, Brezhnev began to entrust formulation of foreign policy to Gromyko, KGB chief Yu. V. Andropov, Minister of Defense D. F. Ustinov, and K. U. Chernenko, and to Politburo commissions, and to avoid contact with Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter.²⁹

The Diary Entries and Foreign Policy

Entries on foreign policy occupy over half the space in Brezhnev's journals until after his health deteriorated. At their best, those penned during his first six years in power—especially his summaries of conversations with foreign leaders—read like notes that a top university student might take during a lecture. He kept his diaries intermittently. Brezhnev made only a few entries for all of 1970, when his working notebooks fall silent between March and late fall. They contain another gap between then and March 31, 1971, as he prepared for the Twenty-fourth Party Congress (March 30-April 9). Afterward other pressing concerns preoccupied him: a party conference in the GDR in June, hosting Willy Brandt in September, and traveling to France in October. Yet his notes on a Politburo meeting of June 29-30, underscore the importance of foreign policy: most of the twenty-two agenda items concern foreign affairs. At the apogee of power in 1973, Brezhnev seemingly had no time to keep his diary. On August 31, 1973, while on "vacation" he wrote "In the evening I spoke with A. A. Gromyko about the most important foreign policy issues." There is another gap in the diary from late 1973 until the spring of 1974.

²⁸ Chazov, *Zdorov'e i vlast'*, 126, 129, 131-32.

²⁹ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, 273.

The vicissitudes of Brezhnev's health find reflection in his diary entries, which change in fundamental ways in 1976 when he now seemed more preoccupied with how things looked and with how he looked and felt, as comments on foreign policy became fewer and less detailed: "I signed a letter to Asad" (10/5/76); "Negotiations with Neto" (10/7/76); "The Chinese over the construction of a building and location for the sarcophagus of Mao" (10/9/76); "A meeting with the Polish delegation(.) Talks with the Polish delegation(.) Lunch—an exchange of speeches, Gierek and I" (11/9/76). Konstantin Chernenko's role in scheduling Brezhnev, his reliance as well on Iurii Andropov (despite a sentiment he expressed in his diary on 5/5/75, "It seems to me that he's narrow-minded") and on his secretary Galina Doroshina and another aide, Blatov, are all recorded. "A talk with c[omrade] Blatov(.) It's necessary to seriously prepare for the Japanese(.) Galia read material about Japan. . . . a continuation of the discussion about Japan with c(omrade) Blatov and with Doroshina" 8/(12/76).

When Brezhnev's condition temporarily improved in 1977, his more frequent and longer remarks reflect a renewed involvement in foreign affairs. "I received the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy—Forlani(.) They promise to give 700 billion rubles in credit. On many issues their point of view corresponds with ours" (1/12/77). "Talks with Mr. Vance(.) During the second half of the day—worked with Doroshina over encryptions(.) Didn't finish—left to watch television" (3/28/77). "Conversation with Chernenko/several times/" (1/31/77). "They taped me for French television" (5/25/77). "Thanks from Sadat for the birthday wishes(.) 62 years old" (7/29/77). "Fidel Castro about the Chinese(.) Said they are traitors to the international Communist movement" (8/6/77).

Dealing mostly with domestic policy, the awards he received and conferred, and his health issues and insomnia, Brezhnev's entries for 1978 are roughly half as many as in 1977. "Brzezinski is going to Peking" (5/18/78). "Spoke with Gromyko about Africa—change nothing" (6/22/78). "There will be an important meeting of the American-Soviet Trade Committee here. December 6-7" (boxed off) (10/20/78). For 1979 the working notebooks are even shorter. They begin with a flurry of activity in foreign policy; however, his entries that summer demonstrate that he became less able to focus. "I worked with Galia and Anatolii Ivanovich over the materials on Poland—with Gierek." (8/3/79).

Brezhnev's work notes for 1980 are more voluminous than those for the previous year, but reveal his progressive decline and the essential role played by Doroshina and Blatov. The alarming situation in Afghanistan and the resulting impact of the December 1979 Soviet invasion on the Moscow Olympic Games preoccupied him early that year, but in late March and early April he made entries only about his weight, which had become an obsession. In late September 1980 they deteriorate into lists of names of those he received that day without the heretofore obligatory "I received" or "I spoke with." One can only imagine his thoughts when he wrote "We stood alongside A. N. Kosygin's coffin" (12/22/80). Brezhnev himself took ill at the end of February 1981. Entries such as "Met with the Congolese" (5/12/81) point to his desire to affect policy, while "A session of the Supreme Soviet(.) My speech(.) My address to the parliaments of the world" (6/23/81), which he boxed off, suggests his interest in preserving his legacy as peace maker. The laconic entries for 1982 make almost no mention of foreign affairs; however, they do indicate his ongoing sense of responsibility.

In sum, I agree with Denningkhaus and Savin that “in the future, when the bulk of documents of the Central Committee and Politburo will become available to scholars, Brezhnev’s notes will be widely used as an invaluable addition and the meaning of the majority of unclear passages without doubt will become clear.”³⁰

Relations with Eastern Europe

Since Khrushchev’s ouster came as a surprise to the Soviet Union’s East European allies, Brezhnev put substantial effort into reassuring their leaders over the phone following the October 1964 plenum that Nikita Sergeevich’s removal was in their best interests. The diaries make clear that, to nurture these relationships, Brezhnev regularly telephoned them and spoke with them at Warsaw Pact gatherings and when they traveled to Moscow. For instance, together with the leaders of the Communist parties in the bloc countries plus Cuba and Mongolia, Brezhnev visited the Baikonur cosmodrom on October 19-20, 1966, to witness the launch of Kosmos 130 and Molniia-1-04. Afterward they convened with their ministers of defense and heads of state in Moscow. Brezhnev consulted with them about the Vietnam question and about European security and borders, which, along with arms control, constituted the burning foreign policy concerns of the time. His journal entries shed light on his style of rule. In February 1968, for example, he phoned Władysław Gomułka, János Kádár, and Todor Zhivkov to discuss a Romanian proposal on arms control scheduled to be considered at an upcoming meeting of the Warsaw Pact’s Political Consultative Committee. Then he reported on these conversations to the Politburo. For the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution in

³⁰ They made this remark in an essay, “Rabochie dnevniki general’nogo sekretar’ia TsK KPSS L. I. Brezhneva,” a shortened version of which was published in *Rodina*, no. 2 (2012): 120-23. See f. 6.

1977, he urged the Politburo to find room on the mausoleum for leaders of the bloc parties during the parade. In conjunction with the Twenty-sixth Party Congress in February-March 1981, he met with Poland's Stanisław Kania, and with other leaders. He sustained this sense of responsibility until the end. On April 5-10, 1981, he attended the Sixteenth Party Congress in Czechoslovakia. And he met with the bloc leaders on November 4, 1981, following the anniversary of the October Revolution.

Brezhnev also fostered personal contacts with bloc leaders by sending them birthday greetings and by acknowledging their national holidays. For example, while still recuperating from health problems, Brezhnev called Czechoslovak leader G. N. Husak in Prague. He also reminded himself: "I have to phone Edward Gierak and wish him [a Happy Birthday]" (6/7/75). Entries of this kind pepper his working notebooks. So do terse remarks about giving—and receiving—gifts. In preparing for a visit to Czechoslovakia in early 1968, his diary entry indicates that he decided on a model of the Battleship Aurora as a collective gift and, undoubtedly owing to the evolving crisis there "not take personal ones." Here are some more examples: "I examined and approved souvenirs for comrades Zhivkov and Tsedenval and for the Japanese businessmen" (8/8/76). "From 5 to 9 PM conversations with com. Kadar(.) I gave him the book about Deprodzerzhinsk and a photo of me in a marshal's uniform" (8/26/76). "I met with Andropov—we looked at the gifts for the leaders of FRG" (6/26/78).

Moreover, by the end of the 1960s, he invited the bloc leaders to vacation each summer in the Crimea, during which they met with him: "At 8:30—I met c[omrade] G. N. Husak at the airport—he arrived to vacation" (7/15/72). "I met with Ceaușescu for 2 ½-3 hours. . . . During the second half of the day I met with com. E. Honecker" (8/1/72). He convened the leaders of

the Warsaw Pact Communist parties in the Crimea on July 30-31, 1973, not long after his influential foreign policy speech at the April 1973 plenum: “A conversation with com. E. Gierek about the meeting of brotherly [countries]. From July 25—he will be in the Crimea with his family. He likes the Crimea. . . Conversation with com. G. N. Husak—he said hello to me[.] Will be in the Crimea on the 18-19—he will be there with his family . . . he’s in agreement on everything” (7/4/73). These visits abated temporarily as a result of Brezhnev’s health crisis in the middle of the 1970s, but they resumed as soon as he was able to hold them through 1982.

Aware of the crucial importance of bolstering the rituals and symbols of power—and hierarchy—Brezhnev, to build and nurture trust, likewise conferred Soviet medals and honors on his East European comrades, making mention of this in his diaries. In turn, the bloc leaders often named Brezhnev the recipient of one of their own national awards. This practice continued until his death. Czechoslovakia’s Husak extended his largesse to others as well. Observed Brezhnev: “I spoke with G. N. Husak. He asked permission to award c[omrade] Ustinov the Order of White Lion of the First Degree and I gave my consent” (3/31/77). On June 2, 1982, in timing that could not have been accidental, Husak presented Konstantin Chernenko with Czechoslovakia’s highest award.

Brezhnev developed different degrees of closeness with his East European comrades. According to his bodyguard V. T. Medvedev, the GDR’s Erich Honecker sought hardest to ingratiate himself with Brezhnev while Romania’s Nicolae Ceaușescu behaved as if he were head of the Warsaw Pact, showing up for half a day of talks in the Crimea with his own cooks, food, and even bottled water. Medvedev remembered how twice Brezhnev chewed out Ceaușescu in front of others. Husak, who spoke excellent Russian, remained Brezhnev’s closest

associate among the East European leaders. For instance, when Husak's wife died in the mid-1970s and he began to drink heavily, Brezhnev even flew to Prague to console him.³¹

Brezhnev's son-in-law, Iurii Churbanov, confirmed that Brezhnev disliked Ceaușescu and "all of that Romanian socialism," but remained on good terms with Husak, Honecker, and Zhivkov.³²

KGB head in 1964 Vladimir Semichastnyi observed that the secrecy surrounding Khrushchev's ouster had offended Walter Ulbricht, Gomułka, and especially Czechoslovak leader Antonín Novotný, who had recently honored Khrushchev in Prague. Novotný purportedly told Brezhnev not to make a visit to the country a top priority, since the news of Khrushchev's disgrace had surprised his countrymen.³³ Instead, in September 1965 Novotný journeyed to Moscow. Brezhnev's notes reveal that their conversation focused on economic questions, credits, and problems the country faced, and that Novotný made disparaging remarks about the GDR's Ulbricht for criticizing the other bloc countries.

Brezhnev's wartime experience in Czechoslovakia and fondness for the country where his wife regularly vacationed may have contributed to his reluctance to use force to crush what the Kremlin saw as the deleterious effects of the Prague Spring. His working notebooks document issues debated at Politburo meetings, conversations with Soviet Ambassador Stepan Chervonenko and with ambassadors to other bloc countries, and talks with bloc leaders both in Moscow and abroad. Brezhnev's diary entry for May 6 suggests that he concluded that the proponents of the Prague Spring, nurtured by the West, sought to discredit the party and to cast Communists as murderers responsible for all of the country's economic difficulties. On

³¹ V. T. Medvedev, *Chelovek za spinoi* (Moskva: "Russlit" 1994), 96-98.

³² Iurii Churbanov, *Moi test' Leonid Brezhnev* (Moskva: Algoritm, 2007), 85.

³³ Vladimir Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe serdtse* (Moskva: Vagrius, 2002), 378-79.

May 21 Brezhnev made reference to an encrypted telegram and to Kosygin who was vacationing in Karlovy Vary: “Spoke with Kosygin on the 21st and 22nd and proposed that to drink water—means to stay too long.”

Fearful of triggering a NATO response, Brezhnev placed considerable weight on personal diplomacy as he navigated the diversity of opinion among his comrades both at home and abroad. “During the months of the crisis, people often saw him shaken, pale, and lost, with trembling hands,” wrote Zubok. According to some reports, Brezhnev began to take tranquilizers in order to alleviate unbearable pressure on his psyche, a strategy that would “later grow into a fatal habit.”³⁴ Indeed, much was at stake. At one meeting he told Chervonenko, “If we lose Czechoslovakia, I’ll resign my post as General Secretary.”³⁵

Brezhnev’s entries following the invasion confirm his command of the issues—and ideological understanding of them. They document numerous meetings and conversations he had with Czechoslovakian leaders and his direct, polite, even respectful manner in dealing with them. Following a conversation with secretary of the Central Committee of Czechoslovakian Communist Party Josef Kempný on February 28, 1969, Brezhnev noted that Alexander Dubček was “an incapable political organizer.” Importantly, he wrote: “It’s necessary that [Oldřich] Černík [prime minister of Czechoslovakia from April 8, 1968 to January 28, 1970] meet with Kadar—to convince him that he has to stop the counter(revolutionaries) with decisive actions and not incremental ones (эволюц. путем) (2/28/69). But this was not to be: “Černík is not firm in his convictions and gives into the influence of the right” (3/13/69), while Dubček could not shake the illusion that he had created a new kind of socialism. Brezhnev underscored:

³⁴ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 208.

³⁵ Quoted in Aleksandrov Agentov, *Ot Kollontaj*, 149.

“The breathing space—temporary—is dangerous” and “the matter will lead to no good.” He also boxed off the remark that “the very, very bad situation” would have been even worse if had not been for the presence of Warsaw Pact troops (3/13/69).

In September 1969 Brezhnev presented Gustav Nikodimovich Husak who had replaced Dubček with the Order of Lenin. Among the most detailed of all the diary entries, this one considered who was best suited for various positions within the postrevolutionary leadership and throughout the ranks of the brother party. Brezhnev commented on ideological work and propaganda courses, on rehabilitation, work within trade unions, drawing new workers into the party, and the actions of émigrés. He discussed the army, foreign travel and tourism, and border guard cadres. The confidence permeating Brezhnev’s diary entries at the time confirms what journalist and diplomat Aleksandr Bovin and others noticed: “a different Brezhnev emerged from the crucible of Czechoslovakia,”³⁶ since his morale soared when the reaction abroad remained muted, despite demoralization among the intelligentsia at home and complications within the world socialist movement.

Judging by the detailed notes on his meeting with Władysław Gomułka in Warsaw in April 1965, Brezhnev ascribed top importance to this relationship with the USSR’s most populous ally. Their conversations became more wide ranging following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, touching upon all of the world’s hot spots before turning to bloc concerns. On October 2, 1969, he met with Gomułka and a visiting Polish delegation. “That which we heard from you yesterday evening was a huge shock for us,” he recorded in his diary. The Poles had raised prices on vodka and beer and reported there was no butter for sale.

³⁶ Aleksandr Bovin, *XX vek kak zhizn’* (Moskva: Zakharov, 2003), 195.

Brezhnev's reaction appears not to have been exaggerated: as a result of rioting over economic conditions in late 1970, Edward Gierek replaced Gomułka. Afterward, Brezhnev's diaries devote more attention to détente, but this changed at the end of the 1970s with the rise of Solidarity. Although short on details, Brezhnev's journals show how frequently the Politburo deliberated over the Polish crisis. On January 17, 1981, Brezhnev spoke with Stanisław Kania, who had replaced Gierek, and again on January 29, April 15, April 21, and June 16. "I worked with Blatov and Doroshina over material on Poland" (8/12/81). "A meeting of the members of the Politburo in my office on the Polish problem" (12/7/81).

Brezhnev remained determined to avoid military intervention in Poland, despite pressure from the heads of some East European states and hawks within the Kremlin, not only because the Soviet Union had exhausted its quota of interventions but also because he believed it possible to resuscitate détente, and thereby fortify his historical legacy.³⁷ Political scientist Matthew J. Ouimet argues that a radical shift in Moscow's understanding of its national interests had occurred between 1968 and 1981, during which concerns for Soviet domestic stability took precedence over the country's international ideological commitments.³⁸ But Dmitri Volkogonov—otherwise overly critical of Brezhnev—spotlights his personal role in this: "His caution was providential. The decision as to whether to invade had hung by a thread."³⁹ Concluded Cherniaev: "the approach that Brezhnev proposed—was the only wise one. It was he who said that we cannot take on Poland as a dependent."⁴⁰

³⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 500.

³⁸ Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 5.

³⁹ Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire*, 301-2

⁴⁰ Cherniaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 459.

Brezhnev's diary entries likewise reveal that he trusted Hungarian leader Janos Kadar's advice. Both leaders' complicated relationship with Romania (with its large Hungarian minority) probably had something to do with this. In May 1965, when Kadar and Brezhnev conferred over the topic of friendship within the socialist camp, Brezhnev penned, "Romania—is a special situation" (5/24-25/5). On subsequent visits, Brezhnev's diaries indicate, they shared views on European security and relations with the FRG. Brezhnev first wrote about the Prague Spring after speaking with Kadar over the phone on January 22, 1968, shortly after his visit with Aleksandr Dubček. In a conversation on June 12, Brezhnev detailed Kadar's assessment of political power in the country and his opinion that the leadership lacked the will to whip the country's propaganda organs into shape. Following the invasion, Brezhnev relied on Kadar's advice to "normalize" Czechoslovakia.

In contrast, Brezhnev's diaries reflect his problematic relationship with the GDR's Walter Ulbricht, in part because he offered advice on Comecon, bloc integration, the need to step up socialist cooperation, and just about everything. But they shared reservations about Romanian leader Ceaușescu's independent course. All told, Brezhnev's detailed entries spotlight the significance he placed on the German question from the start, believing that if the Soviet Union would promote a campaign on European security the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) might recognize the GDR. After younger leaders removed Ulbricht in 1971 with the Kremlin's blessing, Brezhnev maintained deferential relations with him and showed concern for his health. Brezhnev saw Ulbricht's successor Erich Honecker as a source of information about Willy Brandt, whom Honecker cast as an anti-Communist demagogue, but as someone who saw the need to ratify treaties with the USSR and Poland.

Brezhnev's diary entries on Bulgaria suggest that the close relationship between the USSR and this Slavic Balkan country was more complicated than first meets the eye. He and Todor Zhivkov spoke a great deal about economic matters, especially about Bulgaria's need for Soviet energy. In March 1969 Brezhnev noted that Zhivkov complained that Soviet deliveries to Bulgaria were less than promised. Brezhnev also saw in Zhivkov's frequent refrain that Bulgaria should become the sixteenth Soviet republic an effort to extract additional economic benefits for Bulgaria.⁴¹ An entry for May 3, 1982, intimates that their relationship had soured: "Gromyko spoke with [Petar] Mladenov [Bulgarian foreign minister] and he said that Zhivkov gets rid of those who relate positively to the Sov. Union(.) Our ambassador is of the same opinion as Mladenov."

Despite his years in Moldova, Brezhnev did not develop any special interest in Romania, but that also had much to do with its independently minded leader since 1965, Ceaușescu. Although in mid-1965, Brezhnev publicly remarked that relations with Romania were improving,⁴² they remained strained, because Ceaușescu took an independent line on limiting nuclear arms, was the only bloc leader to establish diplomatic relations with West Germany as of mid-1967, and played the China card. During their meeting on April 24-26, 1967, Ceaușescu told Brezhnev that they needed to prevent any further deepening of the Sino-Soviet split. Brezhnev boxed off a remark: "But he doesn't say and doesn't draw any conclusion about who began the split—not a word about what caused the disagreements with China." On March 6, 1968, after hearing a speech by Ceaușescu, Brezhnev wrote: "Ceaușescu's remark about the agenda—he tried to change point 3 . . . and in doing so he lied." Following the invasion of

⁴¹ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, 157.

⁴² Kudriashov, ed., *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta*, 48.

Czechoslovakia, he penned: “Relations with Romania have become strained” (no exact date). In 1976, when the Romanian publications cast doubt on Russian and Soviet claims to Bessarabia (Moldova) and Northern Bukovina, Brezhnev commented: “The Romanians, you know, write about Bessarabia and so on in all of their textbooks and other publications. We need to take all of this into account during the negotiations” (5/21/76).

Brezhnev’s diaries likewise document the extent to which the bloc countries became a drain on the Soviet economy, making regular requests for grain and energy resources as they became further indebted to the West: “The balance with the socialist countries is getting worse—in their favor. 920 million on 1/1/74” (10/30/73). “We made a decision about Poland—to give it macaroni—and 1 million ton of grain” (11/23/76). “In the morning I spoke with com. Kosygin about 300-400 ton of food—Czechoslovakia/he agrees/” (10/29/76). “The reaction of Husak and Zhivkov to our proposal to reduce oil [deliveries]” (11/1/81). Brezhnev acknowledged that, if the East European countries failed to satisfy their populations economically, the USSR could expect problems. He therefore saw no need to curb their economic ties with the West, but believed it necessary to neutralize this politically.

The Developing World and International Communist Movement. Brezhnev’s diaries indicate that he nurtured relationships with foreign Communist party leaders in ways not unlike those he employed with his East European comrades. First, he met with them: As late as June 21, 1982, for instance, he received the head of the Portuguese Communist party, Álvaro Cunhal. Second, he extended economic aid to them. Even the Italian Communist Party sought Soviet money to help fund its newspaper. Third, he presented them with Soviet awards and medals.

For example, he bestowed the Order of Friendship of Peoples on Mozambique's Mahel on November 18, 1980. Fourth, he offered them medical assistance. On September 15, 1969, Brezhnev recorded that he sent Minister of Health Chazov to evaluate Nasser and on January 11, 1970, he wrote "about doctors for com. Longo" (secretary of the Italian Communist Party). Fifth, Brezhnev attended party congresses abroad. Revealing are his notes taken at a congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party: "Weak presentations by Romania, Mongolia, Finland, Italy, GDR, Yugoslavia. Strong ones by the African representatives, Spain, and France" (11/14/66). None of these efforts, of course, guaranteed solidarity in the world communist movement: At an international conference of Communist and Workers' parties in Moscow in June 1969, for example, West European Communists sharply rebuked Kremlin leaders for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. And, at a pan-European conference in Berlin in 1976, the Spanish, French, and Italian Communists rejected Soviet-style socialism.

In turning to the specifics, it is worth mentioning that Brezhnev attentively followed events in Mongolia, traveling there in 1966 and often meeting with the leader of the Mongolian Communist Party, Iu. Tsendenbal, who did not hesitate to ask for Soviet help. Given Mongolia's politics and location, Brezhnev fostered the relationship with him, regularly receiving and phoning him, even though Tsendenbal had totally discredited himself at home. Brezhnev purportedly considered Mongolia's joining the Soviet Union and raised it in private with his comrades, but neither they nor Tsendenbal reacted positively to the idea.

Ever since visiting Yugoslavia in 1962, Brezhnev remained on good terms with Josef Broz Tito, maverick Communist who served as a bridge between the nonaligned world and Moscow. Brezhnev methodically prepared for Tito's June 1965 visit, during which he and Tito deliberated

over China, Vietnam, relations with other countries, Soviet attitudes toward convening an international conference of Communist parties, and elucidating the terms of military cooperation between the Warsaw Pact countries. Owing to Tito's support during the Six-Day War of 1967, Brezhnev considered inviting Yugoslavia to join the Warsaw Pact. When Tito died in 1980, a sick Brezhnev, barely standing, ignored doctors' orders to attend his comrade's—and hunting buddy's—funeral.

Brezhnev fostered friendly relations with Cuba's Raul and Fidel Castro, but avoided publicizing the relationship once the general secretary promoted détente. When Brezhnev received a Cuban delegation that included Raul Castro on November 11, 1964, the Cubans asked for more vociferous support of the socialist camp against outside aggression and military and economic aid. They insisted that Brezhnev visit. But he decided the time was not ripe given the Vietnam conflict. Leonid Ilich visited Cuba only in 1974, following his trip to the U.S., but afterward Cuba played a minor role in Soviet affairs. On July 26, 1977, Brezhnev wrote: "A telegram from Havana—about conditions on the eve of the celebration of the holiday of the national uprising—about the bad situation and moods of the population. To send [there] members and candidate Politburo members." In general, Brezhnev exercised caution in backing leftist regimes in Latin America. When Salvador Allende perished in a military coup on September 11, 1973, Leonid Ilich penned: "Our theoreticians need to draw even some minor generalizations about the situation with the deviation that imperialism is still strong."

Brezhnev never visited China and had almost no personal contact with Chinese leaders, the country, its people, or its culture. He told Willy Brandt that he found the Chinese mode of thinking, mental disposition, and behavior hard to fathom and he inveighed against their

Maoist, anti-Soviet activities. Seeking to normalize relations with China after Khrushchev's ouster, the Kremlin responded positively to Premier Zhou Enlai's proposal to send a delegation to Moscow for the anniversary of the Revolution. The Politburo hoped for a breakthrough during the visit, but Premier Zhou Enlai took a tough line. Moreover, an inebriated Minister of Defense, Marshall Malinovskii, told the Chinese guests they needed to throw out Mao the way the Kremlin leaders had sacked Khrushchev. Insulted, Zhou Enlai flew home. Acknowledging the vituperative exchanges with the Chinese, Brezhnev remarked that, after the October 1964 plenum, "We decided not to give cause for an open polemic." This was not a sign of weakness, he argued, but correct Marxist-Leninist principles, which contrast with chauvinistic Chinese efforts to split the communist movement. The Chinese baffled him: "Their way of thinking is altogether incomprehensible, I would say, to a European and their form inadmissible."⁴³

In his diaries, Brezhnev chronicles Chinese transgressions. In August 1966, the Chinese issued a communique attacking the CPSU and USSR. On January 26, 1967, Chinese citizens carried out provocations against the Soviet Embassy in Peking. On February 2, 1967, Kosygin warned Zhou Enlai that they be stopped. Brezhnev summoned the ambassadors of the bloc countries to request their help in responding to Chinese affronts in the mass media. Tensions deteriorated further when Chinese students on March 4, 1967, protested American aggression in Vietnam at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. For the remainder of Brezhnev's tenure, sharp conflict that resulted in some bloodshed (especially over the Damansky Islands in 1969), and attempts at talks that led nowhere, characterized Sino-Soviet relations. On July 21, 1971, prior to Richard Nixon's February 1972 historic visit to China, Brezhnev made a note to send a

⁴³ Ibid., 44.

confidential statement to party leaders: “About Nixon’s trip to Peking, show the traitorous role of China—and show Nixon’s striving to pressure the USSR to get out of Vietnam, and so on. That’s necessary in order to avoid unnecessary interpretations.” Later entries on China are remarkably few. “It appears that Mao died,” he wrote on 9/9/76. “The Chinese rejected our telegram about Mao” (11/12/76).

Stalin’s ally, North Korea played a strategic role in the rivalry with China and therefore Brezhnev met with North Korean leader Kim Ir Sen (Kim Il-sung) in Vladivostok in May 1966, and again in Moscow on December 7, 1966. Brezhnev wrote in his diaries that the purpose of the meetings was “to carry out open discussions”—and “to consult with the doctors.” They discussed a wide range of political issues before Kim Ir Sen requested grain. On February 28, 1973, another Korean delegation asked for Soviet military assistance and economic aid. Brezhnev’s diary quotes what his visitor had to say: “We of course are in need of military assistant from Your side. . . . Our friendship—is eternal and indestructible.”

Brezhnev visited India in 1961, 1973 and 1980, and appears to have liked the country and its people, especially as relations worsened with China. Upon coming to power, he promoted economic and defensive ties with India, resulting in Soviet assistance in dozens of important construction sites. Moreover, the Soviet Union backed India in the 1965 war with Pakistan. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri visited Moscow in May 1965, and his successor Indira Gandhi met Brezhnev in Moscow in September 1971. He received the ministers of foreign affairs of India several times (and also hosted President Bhutto of Pakistan on March 17, 1972). In September 1973 the Politburo voted to provide India with tanks. According to Aleksandrov-Agentov, Brezhnev even favored giving the country the atomic bomb or technical

know-how to make one, but his advisors insisted this idea violated the Treaty of Non-Proliferation and might provoke China. On May 21, 1976, in preparation of a visit by Indira Gandhi, Brezhnev penned: "I spoke with [foreign policy expert] com. [Evgenii] Samoteikin . . . about the speech at the luncheon with Indira Gandhi at MID [the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] they prepared but it's rough and I asked them to get it into shape (но она сырая я поручил отжать)." Brezhnev's in-depth entries for October 25, 1977, on his meeting with Prime Minister Desai, reveal that they discussed the Near East, the Somalia/Ethiopia conflict, China, and relations between rich and poor countries. True to form, Brezhnev presented him and the minister of foreign affairs with Soviet watches.

Vietnam represented a key arena of Soviet foreign policy once the Kremlin voiced its solidarity with the country, whose fate was also linked to Moscow's relations with the U.S. and China. Brezhnev sought hard to understand the country's conflict with the Americans, as the volume of Soviet military and technical aid mushroomed following Kosygin's visit to Hanoi in early 1965. Before the Fourth Conference of Solidarity of Peoples of Asia and Africa opened in May 1965, Brezhnev recorded the need "on the eve of the Afro-Asian Conference to show our help and commitment (твердость) to Vietnam(.) That would be worth it" (not later than May 9). A Vietnamese delegation that visited the USSR in October 1965 made a long list of requests to Moscow. Brezhnev's copious diary entries mention that the North Vietnamese were open to contact with the Americans and wanted peace. Tellingly, Brezhnev recorded that the Vietnamese told him, "We want to be friends with you and with the Chinese comrades" (9/13/65). An undated entry from this time reveals his attitude about what to do regarding U.S.

policies toward Vietnam: “How to use the double game of the Americans(.) Shouldn’t we lead a double or triple game(?)”

One of Brezhnev’s most detailed entries concerns his discussions with a Vietnamese delegation headed by Le Than Ngi, deputy prime minister, on September 12, 1967. Ngi underscored Vietnamese victory in the war, heavy U.S. casualties, and the impact of American bombing and losses and the people’s hatred of the enemy, despite which the Vietnamese nation restored the economy. Brezhnev boxed off in his diary: “We achieved all of this with the help of the Sov. Union.” He likewise drew a circle around their request that thanks be extended to the Politburo and government. On October 14, 1969, Brezhnev documented Fan Van Dong’s appeals for aid from the USSR and bloc countries, because Vietnamese leaders wanted their people to experience the benefits of socialism sooner than they otherwise might. On July 10, 1973, after Brezhnev returned from the U.S., the Politburo met with a Vietnamese delegation headed by party leader Le Duan. What Brezhnev recorded about Le Duan’s presentation offers insights on how he saw himself as peacemaker: “The peace offensive in particular the trip of com. Brezhnev and the measures enacted—were absolutely correct. We support them and approve of them. We consider your policy, your offensive—as the continuation of our struggle. We need peace.” He ended with: “I agree with com. Brezhnev and we have to keep the Banner of Peace in our hands.”

The Near East also figures prominently in Brezhnev’s working notebooks, and for good reason given the successive wars that challenged Soviet interests there. Since the Suez crisis of 1956, the USSR had backed Egypt, thereby hoping to spread its influence in the Arab world, to curb Western dominance in the area, and to secure access to warm-water ports. During the

Six-Day War in June 1967, when Israel launched a preemptive attack against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, Brezhnev brought his consultative skills to the table by inviting the heads of the East European states to Moscow to hammer out a policy toward the Arab states' request for aid.

Dealing with Nasser had its disadvantages, but the Kremlin backed him because of his growing stature among Third World leaders, extending additional military aid and advisors. Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser as president of Egypt when the latter died in October 1970, visited Moscow in October 1971, and signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, but the next year ordered Soviet military personnel to leave the country, after which he developed close relations with the Western powers. As a result, Syria soon became the favorite Soviet client state in the Third World; after Hafez al-Assad became president in 1971, he continued a policy of close cooperation with the Kremlin. Brezhnev's diaries note that Assad regularly visited him in Moscow as late as May 15, 1981. They indicate that, in addition to Syria and Iraq, the Soviet Union promoted relations with Libya, the Yemen Arab Republic and South Yemen. On three occasions in the second half of the 1970s, Brezhnev received Yasser Arafat, chair of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. He met with the king of Jordan. Libya was not as firmly within the Soviet orbit, but the Kremlin developed amicable ties with the anti-Western regime of Omar Qadhafi, who had overthrown Libya's pro-Western monarchy in 1969. Qadhafi visited Moscow several times to meet with Brezhnev. On August 30, 1977, Brezhnev recorded in his diaries that Qadhafi had told his military officers that they need to learn from the Russians, that "the Russians are our best friends." Given the U.S.'s support of Iran, the Kremlin also emphasized cooperation with it. Revealing are Brezhnev's notes on his meeting

with the new Soviet ambassador to Iran V. M. Vinogradov on February 8, 1977. Brezhnev wanted him to find out “what induced the Shah to purchase weapons for such a huge amount.”

Brezhnev most likely believed Africa was of secondary importance to the USSR, but some of his foreign policy advisers saw more opportunities than challenges. Brezhnev carried out discussions with the head of the Revolutionary Council of Algeria, Houari Boumédiène, already in December 1965. They met on subsequent occasions, too, but Boumédiène thereafter pursued a policy of nonalignment. Brezhnev’s working journals contain numerous entries on his receiving delegations from Sudan, Mali, French Guinea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Angola. On July 14, 1977, Brezhnev wrote: “Ethiopia—is in a difficult position domestic(ally). And an external counterrevolution is coming—consultation in Moscow must take place with the representatives from Ethiopia and Somalia/[and] experts.” The USSR had secured a military base in Somalia in 1974, but on November 13, 1980, it broke off the friendship treaty and rejected Soviet specialists. Recorded Leonid Ilich: “Somalia’s actions—denouncing the treaty with the USSR and Cuba—a ban on calling at ports and use of terminals and to approach territory[ial] waters.” In October 1964, Politburo member D. Polianskii had criticized Khrushchev for the deplorable results of his African policy, despite Soviet spending. Yet, as Zubok argues, the “Lessons were again forgotten during the 1970s.”

Until the end of the 1970s, Brezhnev’s journals make little mention of Afghanistan, by which time his health greatly constrained his observations. He observed that on December 5, 1978, he received Nur Mohammed Taraki. On September 10, 1979, he and Gromyko saw Taraki again: “I worked with Iurii Vladimirovich(,) Andrei Andrei (sic) Andreevich and Ustinov—about Afghanistan.” On November 22 he noted that the Politburo members exchanged their views

about the situation in Afghanistan: “Amin is shooting many cadres”—including Taraki, with whom Brezhnev had developed a personal relationship. On December 10, the Politburo discussed the crisis, but his diaries contain no revelations about the decision to launch an invasion.

Although Brezhnev ultimately signed off on the intervention, Dobrynin maintained that Gromyko, Andropov, and Ustinov convinced him “not to lose Afghanistan.” They, plus Suslov, Moscow party boss Viktor Grishin, Andrei Kirilenko (Brezhnev’s chief lieutenant within the Central Committee), and Ponomarev joined Brezhnev at a secret meeting on December 12. Aleksandrov-Agentov called their decision to invade “the biggest sin and miscalculation of Brezhnev in foreign policy,” but Aleksandrov-Agentov acknowledged Brezhnev’s reluctance to send in troops and the factors that made the decision possible. Arbatov claimed that, of the people making the decision, two did not foresee the consequences—Brezhnev owing to his poor health and Ustinov owing to his political myopia. Arbatov, however, could not fathom how Gromyko and Andropov made such a mistake. Chazov also exonerated Brezhnev. So did Cherniaev: “We had entered a very dangerous period for the country of decay of the ruling elite, who is not even able to appreciate what it was doing and why.”

Relations with Western Europe and the United States

Brezhnev’s working journals reveal the extent to which he fixated on the German question and on West Germany, the subject of some of his most detailed diary entries in 1967 and afterward. In March 1969 Brezhnev noted that Nixon arrived in West Germany: “A good analysis of what took place in the FRG is needed,” Brezhnev wrote. He and Willy Brandt,

elected in 1969, were natural allies since Brandt backed peace with the USSR. Diplomats on both sides worked assiduously on the Moscow Treaty recognizing postwar borders and renouncing force, which Brandt signed in Moscow in August 1970. Brandt's talks with Brezhnev in the Crimea in September 1971 resulted in a joint communique that called for speeding up convocation of a European-wide meeting on security. Since their 1970 encounter, Brandt noticed two changes in Brezhnev, which found reflection in his diary entries, too. "First, his status as the dominant member of the Soviet leadership could hardly have been more manifest and he made no attempt to disguise it. Secondly, he showed greater self-assurance when discussing international affairs and leaned far less heavily on the written briefs."⁴⁴ In May 1973, Brezhnev visited Brandt to sign various bilateral agreements. The second visit to the FRG took place in May 1978, but it was a sick Brezhnev who made the journey. When he traveled to the FRG again in November 1981, the USSR had intervened militarily in Afghanistan and Brezhnev showed signs of even greater physical impairment.

The USSR's relationship with the U.S. defined global politics in this bipolar world, especially as Brezhnev took charge of putting a face—his—on Soviet foreign policy. Brezhnev's diaries first mention the U.S. on November 26, 1964, regarding Gromyko's visit to the 19th Session of the UN General Assembly. Brezhnev remarked on the U.S. again on various occasions mostly in an informational way. For instance, he made a reminder to himself in June 1968 to ask Dobrynin who Moscow should support in the U.S. presidential elections. Seeing political crisis in America as an opportunity to increase Soviet influence on the U.S., Brezhnev believed that the main aim of the USSR was not only to end the conflict in Vietnam, but to

⁴⁴ Brandt, *People and Places*, 346, 348.

encourage the positive long-term tendency of curbing the global ambitions of the United States so that the Americans would concentrate more on their domestic problems. “The stronger this tendency will operate, the better off we will be,” he maintained. He trusted that Soviet proposals to limit offensive and offensive weapons, floated before the American elections, would deal a blow to extremists.⁴⁵

On February 5, 1971, Brezhnev publicly opined that Nixon requested a meeting to help him stay in the White House, calling him “the most demagogic of all presidents there were. . . . He is not a deep politician, but an intriguer.”⁴⁶ Yet, in taking on the role of peace maker and architect of détente, Brezhnev responded favorably to a request from Nixon regarding a visit. In discussing the reply, Brezhnev wrote in his diary, “The answer to Nixon—which issues would serve the long-term interests of both our countries—that’s the main thing that is desirable to determine—and next the basis of an agreement” (7/26/71). The personal stamp Brezhnev left on détente should not be underestimated especially since the gathering storm over Vietnam almost derailed Nixon’s trip to Moscow. Aleksei Kosygin, for instance, called Brezhnev on March 9, 1972, “Look how insolent Nixon has become. He’s bombing the hell out of Vietnam, the bastard. Hey, Lyon, maybe we should postpone his visit?”⁴⁷ But Brezhnev had too much at stake personally to consider this. In May 1972 he crossly questioned Minister of Defense Marshal Andrei Antonovich Grechko whether he could guarantee that, without talks, he could promise military superiority over the U.S. “Then what’s wrong? Why should we continue to

⁴⁵ Kudriashov, *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta*, 77-78; quotation on 77.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 103. Detailed analysis of Brezhnev-Nixon and Dobrynin-Kissinger relationship can be found in Michael V. Paulauskas, “Moscow on the Potomac: The Soviet Embassy and Détente, 1969-1979,” PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2012.

⁴⁷ Cherniaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 8.

exhaust our economy, increase military expenses?’⁴⁸ Brezhnev also convened a Central Committee plenum to win support for his decision to invite Nixon. His aides concur that this was a nerve-wracking time for the General Secretary, exacerbated by uncertainty over ratification of the Moscow Treaty in Bonn. Aleksandrov-Agentov recalled “that atmosphere of concentrated tension, in which the text of the report was prepared” in Brezhnev’s dacha at Zavidovo. “Leonid Ilich was a walking bundle of nerves. He popped in and out of the room, smoking one cigarette after another.”⁴⁹ In preparing for the plenum and in presiding over it, Brezhnev insisted Nixon’s visit must take place despite Vietnam, opining: “Strength—it’s namely that language, which American imperialists understand best. In the balance of forces between the United States and us, both in terms of international influence and prestige and in the military realm, things are now more favorable to us than ever before.”⁵⁰

Brezhnev’s emphasis on peace through strength in due course convinced Kosygin, Gromyko, Suslov, and Andropov to back detente.⁵¹ A victory for Brezhnev, the Moscow summit that May produced a document thanks to Soviet initiative declaring that only peaceful coexistence and the principle of equality could serve as the basis for mutual relations. It also resulted in the signing of the SALT I agreement. Moreover, that September, during Henry Kissinger’s visit to Moscow to prepare for Brezhnev’s trip to America, they discussed Lend-Lease and how much the Soviet Union would pay back in order to become recognized as a most favorite nation in regard to trade. Wrote Leonid Ilich: “The negotiations over Lend-Lease are complicated—we did not reach an agreement during the first half of the day—it was agreed to

⁴⁸ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, 210.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 223-24.

⁵⁰ RGANI, f. 2, op. 3., d. 265, l. 44.

⁵¹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 220-22.

think about it more and to turn to other problems of economic cooperation/gas/and others” (11/20/72). On March 16, 1973, he jotted down: “The conversations with the Americans have gotten under way(.) There’s a lot that’s complicated.—it’s necessary to sit and think.”

Brezhnev traveled to the U.S. between June 18-25, 1973, when he was at the pinnacle of power, in command of the issues, and at times still robust. His June 18 diary entry on the Near East quotes his hosts: “We do not and will not have any desire to drive the Sov. Union from the Near East where it has trad[itional] ties” (6/18/73). Brezhnev’s trip to the U.S. resulted in an agreement on the prevention of nuclear war and another that outlined principles for limiting strategic weapons. At Brezhnev’s assistance, the communique “declared the promotion of Soviet-American friendship as a permanent factor in world peace.” At Nixon’s ranch in San Clemente, a soused Brezhnev told an equally inebriated Nixon that some of his Kremlin comrades tried to undermine his authority. “He . . . was especially critical of Kosygin and Podgorny,” remembered Dobrynin.⁵²

Linking détente to his personal success, on October 20-22, 1973, the general secretary held talks with Kissinger in Moscow over the Yom-Kippur War between Israel and Egypt and Syria—a particularly dangerous episode in the Cold War that threatened to torpedo détente—during which they worked out a proposal for the U.N. Security Council. “I spent all night in negotiations with com. [Vladimir Mikhailovich] Vinogradov [Soviet ambassador to Egypt] from Cairo, from 3:40 to 7 AM” (10/21/73), yet at 9 AM he conducted a Politburo meeting and at 11:30 continued his conversation with Kissinger.

⁵² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 276, 281-82.

Brezhnev's diary entries for 1974 make no mention of Nixon's second trip to Moscow that June. Yet, as Nixon's last friend, Brezhnev saw to it that the Soviet press avoided anti-Nixon sentiments as his presidency crumbled. Once Brezhnev's health became compromised, however, he had difficulty remaining in command of the issues, despite his interest in the U.S. On March 5, 1977, he mentioned a proposal by President Jimmy Carter for a new arms agreement, instructing Ustinov to have Gromyko, Andropov, and Ponomarev prepare a response. On April 12, 1977, he boxed off in his diary "I read a note from Aleksandrov on delivering our proposals to the Americans on all questions of strateg[ic] rockets." During the summer of 1977, his entries are more reflective. "In all of the Latin American countries they see Carter with his human rights as interference in the internal affairs of st[ate]s" (8/6/77). In June 1978 Brezhnev told the Politburo that the Carter administration had fallen under the influence of anti-Soviet types; however, he lectured that "we must fight actively and persistently for peace and détente."⁵³ American plans to produce a neutron bomb especially troubled him. On August 6, 1977 he penned, "In FRG—they are preparing for my visit and expect—important political results[.] [Chancellor Helmut] Schmidt is against the neutron bomb[.] Schmidt believes that Carter does not have a clear policy while Brezhnev does and it's easy to talk to him" (8/6/77). In one of his clearest entries for 1981 he wrote in September, "At the Politburo. Can't we think up something against the neutron bomb besides propaganda measures[?]" Importantly, on June 18, 1979, at the Vienna Summit, Carter and Brezhnev signed the SALT-II-Treaty. About their first meeting Carter wrote, "He and I agreed that success was

⁵³ "Speech by L.I. Brezhnev to CPSU CC Politburo, 08 June 1978" June 08, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Center for Storage of Contemporary Documentation (TsKhSD), Moscow, fond 89, per. 34, dok. 1; obtained by D. Wolff; trans. M. Doctoroff. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111257>

necessary for ourselves and for the rest of the world, and he startled me by placing his hand on my shoulder and saying, "If we do not succeed, God will not forgive us."⁵⁴ Carter later reversed deployment of the neutron bomb.

Apart from the FRG and America, Brezhnev likewise put energy into courting France, especially since Charles de Gaulle struck him as a potential ally. The first major foreign leader to visit the USSR after 1964, de Gaulle found a common language with Brezhnev. An entry in his diary in May 1965 reveals why: "de Gaulle will play a role in shak[ing up] NATO" (5/24-25/65). In a public statement in July 1965, Brezhnev explained: "That would undermine faith in the Americans—and that's the most serious defeat for America."⁵⁵ Afterward regular visits took place with successive French presidents, Georges Pompidou (1969-74) and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-81). Brezhnev enjoyed an especially warm relationship with Pompidou, who was president while Brezhnev was at his best, and when Brezhnev made his inaugural visit to France in 1971—and first to the West. His diary entry for July 26, 1971 reads, "G. S. Pavlov [get] presents—for Pompidou and his wife." During his travels to France in October, Brezhnev suggested that, if it seemed that the FRG were taking the lead in European affairs "that's because of a certain passivity on the part of France." He urged the French president to play a greater role in issues of European security and to expand ties with the USSR (25-30 October 1971). The two men met six times.⁵⁶

Given the importance of the Communist Party in Italy, Brezhnev frequently met with Luigi Longo, its head, while at the state level economic ties with Italy grew, especially with the

⁵⁴ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 245.

⁵⁵ Kudriashov, *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta*, 47.

⁵⁶ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai*, 179-82.

construction of the Lada (Fiat) plant in Togliatti and owing to Italy's need for Soviet energy supplies. Judging by the number and nature of entries in Brezhnev's diaries, Great Britain and Japan simply did not occupy a central place on Brezhnev's agenda. He did not visit either. Moreover, Britain, on the periphery of Europe, behaved as the U.S.'s closest ally, while the Soviet Union and Japan disputed ownership of islands in the Pacific. Revealing, however, are Brezhnev's observations made during a visit to Moscow by Prime Minister K. Tanaka, when the question of "the islands" came up. "A unique occurrence—when two states, two leaders reached an agreement on cooperation regardless the situation—without advantages for either side" (10/8/73).

One also finds in Brezhnev's diaries regular mention of the Soviet Union's closest non-bloc neighbor, Finland. Brezhnev had a chummy relationship with Finnish President Urho Kaleva Kekkonen (for which Khrushchev had criticized Leonid Ilich), who backed a policy of extensive trade with both NATO and Warsaw Pact countries. In 1977 the Politburo honored Kekkonen with a spot on the mausoleum during the October Revolution celebration.

Conclusion

Although there is no denying his unflinching commitment to peace, Leonid Brezhnev's belief in peace through strength ultimately undercut his promotion of détente. As Arbatov argued, the policy of military intervention in the second half of 1970s resulted in the Soviet Union acquiring a reputation as an expansionist state and this ended detente. At one point Central Committee secretary responsible for defense, Brezhnev understood the importance of the military-industrial complex in bolstering his own power. As a result, he took part in the

arms race as the military-industrial complex swelled under his protection. True, sometimes Brezhnev got into conflict with the Soviet military, but, with Ustinov in charge of military affairs, political control over the military establishment weakened, while Gromyko and Andropov feared spoiling relations with the military. Then, too, Brezhnev's sentimentality grew with age and, as his health deteriorated, he took greater pride in his own military career, real and imagined. In the second half of the 1970s the cult of war reached its apogee, and this during détente. Arbatov concluded that, at end of 70s and start of 80s, Soviet foreign policy had led to "disastrous results."⁵⁷

Ironically, in preparing for the October 1964 plenum that removed Khrushchev, Brezhnev had noted in his diary that the new collective leadership needed to emphasize that Khrushchev had chosen retirement "owing to age and the condition of his health" (10/15/64). Brezhnev did not have this "choice," and as a result had less control over his historical legacy. Yet official documents, memoirs, reports, and Brezhnev's diaries demonstrate that he depleted himself in fighting for peace. Not uncritical of Brezhnev's shortcomings, Zubok argued that "it was Brezhnev's personal and increasingly emotional involvement and his talents as a domestic consensus builder that proved to be the most important factor in securing the policy of détente in the period from 1968 to 1972."⁵⁸ Historian John Lewis Gaddis concurs, arguing that "Brezhnev worked hard for détente and wanted it to succeed; but within the Soviet Communist Party and especially the emerging regional institutes—Moscow's equivalent of think tanks—a new generation of experts was insisting that this was the time to seize the initiative." They

⁵⁷ Arbatov, "Iz nedavnogo proshlogo," 77-80.

⁵⁸ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 223.

undercut Brezhnev's support for detente.⁵⁹ Egan Bahr, creator of *Ostpolitik*, believed that "Brezhnev was necessary for the transition to Gorbachev; what the latter accomplished, the former introduced. He was an asset for world peace."⁶⁰ Even Cherniaev—who had little respect for Brezhnev, if any—had to admit that "the main idea of Brezhnev's life was that of peace. That is how he wanted to be remembered by mankind."⁶¹

⁵⁹ "Grand Strategies in the Cold War," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Vol. II: *Crises and Détente*, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15-16.

⁶⁰ Egan Bahr, *Zu meiner Zeit* (Munich: K. Blessing, 1996), 420.

⁶¹ Cherniaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 133.