

The Brezhnev visit: a tribute to Gandhi

by Daniel Sneider

The following article is based on reports from our New Delhi correspondent, Paul Zykofsky.

The four-day visit of Soviet President Brezhnev to India comes seven years after his previous visit. Brezhnev's welcome in 1973 was very warm and tumultuous, an expression of Indian gratitude for the strong support given them in the 1971 Bangladesh crisis and war with Pakistan, when China and the United States were threatening to intervene on the side of Pakistan. This time the welcome was no less warm, though perhaps less enthusiastic. Brezhnev was clearly an older man making his last visit to India, but in many ways the strategic issues involved were no less critical.

For the Soviets, and particularly for Brezhnev personally, the Dec. 8-11 visit was clearly considered one of the highest importance, a fact underlined by Brezhnev's use of the platform provided by a speech to the two houses of the Indian parliament to unveil a new proposal for a global Persian Gulf "peace and security" pact.

The visit was made on Brezhnev's request, and many Indians familiar with the Soviet scene were impressed with the simple fact that Brezhnev undertook the strenuous trip when it is evident that his age and health severely limit his capacities for such journeys.

The view in New Delhi was that Moscow wanted to make clear how important in world affairs it considers India to be, particularly under conditions of turmoil, war and tension in the neighboring region of Southwest Asia, and as a counterweight to China in southern Asia. A large-scale economic assistance package emerged, including some \$800 million in industrial credits for coal, oil development, steel, and other infrastructure and a more than doubling of current trade levels over the next five years including increased Soviet oil exports to India. These agreements were meant to concretize the Soviet desire to maintain close relations with India and aid the efforts of the government of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to stabilize the Indian domestic scene.

What is perhaps more important and least understood, particularly in the West, is the significance of the visit as a statement of support for Mrs. Gandhi personally and for her leadership of India. The essence of the

visit took place in private meetings between Brezhnev and Gandhi, including a concluding talk reportedly lasting 80 minutes, without the presence of any aides aside from interpreters.

The two world leaders are known to have a close relationship, having risen to power in their respective nations at the same time and having developed a close understanding during that early 1970s crisis period when, as Indians often put it, "the Soviet Union stood by our side." Brezhnev made repeated warm personal references to Mrs. Gandhi in his public statements as he did in his first speech at a banquet given by Indian President Sanjiva Reddy when he said, "I make no secret of the fact that we have always had a particular liking for Shrimati Indira Gandhi, that outstanding political and state figure of contemporary Asia."

Mrs. Gandhi and Moscow

Mrs. Gandhi could find satisfaction in the outcome of the visit from several different standpoints. On the strategic level, it was a welcome statement of Soviet support at a time when Delhi views with increasing alarm the hostility of the military dictatorship of General Ziaul Haq in Pakistan, who is conducting a military buildup based on military assistance and coordination with China and support from the United States.

Uncertainties about Reagan administration policy toward the region, the prospect of an explosion of a Pakistani nuclear device in the near future, the continuing tension flowing from the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and Pakistani backing for Afghan rebel activity, as well as the explosive nature of the situation in the Middle East, all combine to emphasize the practical value in Indian eyes of good ties with Moscow.

There is no question that many in Delhi, even aside from the professional pro-Western lobby, are unhappy with the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Mrs. Gandhi had made it repeatedly clear that she fears the escalation of tensions in the region which could make it a point of East-West confrontation.

The Indian position remains balanced in looking for circumstances, through political negotiation, that would allow the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan while at the same time showing understanding for the complex circumstances that led to that event. This includes the buildup of U.S. naval and other armed forces in the Indian Ocean region, a buildup that Delhi views with unconcealed distrust and even fear.

The Western press, in characteristic fashion, spent much time searching for points of difference between Brezhnev and Gandhi, particularly on Afghanistan; but in fact the differences were clear before, and there was neither a change in that or any evidence of rancor over it in the talks which took place.

Mrs. Gandhi's satisfaction also has to do with the

Indian domestic political scene. Over the past months her government, elected to power in a sweeping victory last January, has faced a concerted effort by opposition parties to destabilize the situation, particularly by exploiting frustrations over the continued economic difficulties inherited from the previous regime. Inflation and continued communal (Hindu versus Muslim), regional, and caste tensions have been manipulated against the government.

The role of the left

Mrs. Gandhi has appealed to the opposition parties to join with the government in dealing with problems like communalism, casteism, and the separatist movements in places like the northeast state of Assam, problems on which there is ostensible agreement. The appeals have largely fallen on deaf ears. A crucial element in that is the negative attitude of the Indian left, including the pro-Soviet Communist Party of India (CPI) and the more Maoist-oriented (but also Moscow-influenced) Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) which heads the government of several states. The Communists have continually agitated against Mrs. Gandhi's alleged "authoritarianism" while offering half-hearted support on certain foreign policy issues.

It was not lost on anyone in Delhi that the Brezhnev visit, particularly the clear statement of support for Mrs. Gandhi's personal leadership, was a direct slap at the "short-sighted" and dangerously destabilizing activities of the left, particularly the CPI, which from 1969 to 1977 was a strong and crucial supporter of Mrs. Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi made sure the message was not lost when she spoke at a civic reception in Delhi for Brezhnev. With the Soviet president looking on, Mrs. Gandhi spoke of the Indian nationalist movement as "our revolution," a "revolution" she said that was "understandably" opposed by right-wing elements but "not so understandably" also by the leftist parties.

During the course of the visit Brezhnev had a private meeting with the leadership of the CPI, not unusual in these circumstances. Informed sources reported before the visit that the top CPI leaders were unhappy with his decision to make the visit at all. It is likely that Brezhnev made it clear that the strategic interests of the Soviet Union and the imperatives of the dangerous international situation should be clearly understood by the Communist leadership in India; whether the message got through is not yet easy to tell.

Mrs. Gandhi and Brezhnev have both acted from clear practical realities of national interest. The Reagan team could learn something from the view in Moscow of the importance of India's role in the world, as opposed to the swings from benign neglect to blundering geopolitical interventionism that have most often characterized U.S. policy toward India.

Europe rejects NATO line on East bloc

by Susan Welsh

The U.S. press is deceiving the American public with blaring headlines of "tough anti-Soviet measures" by U.S. allies.

According to the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*, the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels Dec. 11-12 resulted in total unanimity on the Carter administration's proposal to threaten the Soviets against a possible military intervention into Poland.

U.S. press reports notwithstanding, the Dec. 11-12 NATO meeting resulted only in the release of a mild communiqué stating that, while a Soviet military move against Poland would end détente, the NATO allies were committed to pursuing dialogue with the U.S.S.R.

Instead of heating up the situation, the NATO meeting "attempted to cool the rising temperature in East-West relations," noted the British *Daily Telegraph*.

Throughout the meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Edmund Muskie was insistent that the Europeans announce the cancellation of multibillion-dollar energy deals with the Soviet Union as an automatic response to any Soviet involvement in Poland. Muskie demanded that such deals be scrapped, even if the Poles attempt to use their own army to squelch unrest from the Solidarity independent trade union. (Under international law, the Soviets are entitled to move into Poland militarily, if the Polish government requests such intervention.)

His demands were rejected; instead, the Atlantic Alliance representatives only pledged to meet in an emergency session after a Soviet military move into Poland, if it should occur, and then to discuss possible retaliation.

German weight

France is not a member of NATO, but its partner West Germany used all its leverage in NATO to block the insane demands coming from Washington.

Upon West Germany's request, the ministers held discussions on Poland in a unique "super-restricted session" with only ministers and ambassadors present, in order to keep the potential for rumors to a minimum. The West Germans refused to engage in any discussion of specific sanctions, delegating a lower body to look into measures that might be taken if the Soviet tanks roll in Poland.