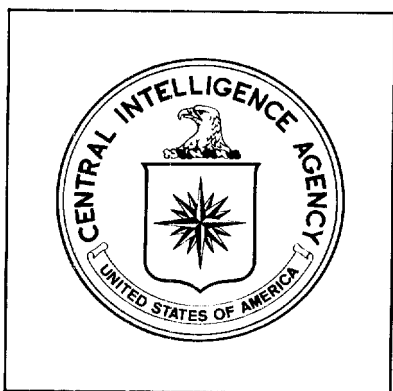


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## STAFF NOTES:

# Soviet Union Eastern Europe

State Department review completed

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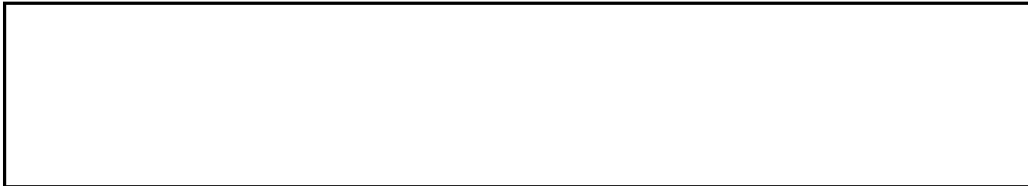
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**SOVIET UNION - EASTERN EUROPE**



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Position of Soviets on MBFR Talks

With the fifth round of the MBFR talks scheduled to begin next week, chief Soviet delegate Khlestov laid out the Soviet negotiating position in a recent conversation with Ambassador Stoessel.

Khlestov claimed he was optimistic about the talks and said the Soviets were still interested in reaching an agreement. He declared that the talks were "condemned to succeed," but gave no indication of any new flexibility on the part of the Soviets. Instead, he called for the US to put pressure on its Allies to get the negotiations moving. While Khlestov may have been merely setting out the maximum Soviet position in advance of the resumption of negotiations, the tenor of his remarks suggests that another lackluster round is in store.

Much of Khlestov's presentation reiterated standard Soviet positions. As in the past, he stressed the need to reduce West German forces from the outset. This was an apparent backtrack from Soviet willingness--expressed toward the end of the last negotiating session--to countenance initial reductions limited to US and Soviet forces. Khlestov rather lamely explained that the earlier concession had been made in the particular context of a Warsaw Pact proposal for "symbolic reductions."

Khlestov noted that it was especially important to resolve the Bundeswehr question this year, the 30th anniversary of the end of World War II. It appears, however, that the Soviets view this historical factor as a ploy to win sympathy for their position, rather than as a reason for them to make concessions.

When asked about the fundamental NATO objective of seeking to reach a "common ceiling," Khlestov repeated the usual Soviet argument that Moscow could

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not accept an agreement that put it at a disadvantage. He added that any reductions should consider total "firepower," reflecting the Soviet position that reductions limited to ground forces would be unsatisfactory, but perhaps also suggesting that the Soviets might eventually be willing to accept unequal reductions of ground forces if accompanied by cuts in air and nuclear elements.

Khlestov explained that the Warsaw Pact proposal of November 1973 to reduce each side's forces by approximately 15 percent was still alive and had not been replaced by subsequent attempts to win acceptance of various concepts of token reductions.

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Concern in Romania  
over Brezhnev's Status

The Yugoslavs and Romanians are "deeply concerned" over the impact on them of a leadership shake-up in the Kremlin.

In two separate conversations with his US counterpart last week, the counselor of the Yugoslav embassy in Bucharest said that on instructions from Belgrade he had sounded out the Romanians on their view of the Soviet political situation. The counselor said that the Romanians fear either that Kirilenko will succeed Brezhnev or that the Soviet military will gain a dominant role in any post-Brezhnev scramble for power. The Yugoslav embassy believes that either the rise of Kirilenko or the Soviet military would be a "nightmare" for Bucharest, requiring Romania to adopt a more obliging relationship in dealings with Moscow. A third anxiety is that a Kremlin power struggle could restore collective leadership, a phenomenon that could embarrass Ceausescu's conspicuously one-man show.

Political uncertainties in the Kremlin always produce a bad case of heartburn in East Europe. The fact that Belgrade would direct its embassy to query the Romanians about the Soviet leadership almost certainly shows Belgrade's healthy concern over the post-Brezhnev era. The instructions also reflect a keen awareness that the Tito-Brezhnev relationship is the keystone of rapprochement with the Soviets.

There is little doubt that Bucharest is worried about the political ramifications of Brezhnev's health, but Yugoslav diplomats have a spotty record of reporting on Soviet-Romanian relations. Ceausescu and Brezhnev have sometimes argued heatedly, but the Romanians still prefer to deal with a known

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quantity. Ceausescu thus probably finds himself in the ironic position of wishing Brezhnev a full recovery.

If Brezhnev does not resume full activity, the Romanians know that their selective defiance of the Kremlin will have to be tuned to the limits of tolerance of either a collective or of a new boss in the Kremlin. Bucharest almost certainly prefers a collective if only because it would probably least affect Romanian foreign policy initiatives.

The worst outcome for Romania would be a dominant role for the Soviet military. Bucharest knows that Moscow's marshals would brook little foot-dragging in the Warsaw Pact. By contrast, Bucharest could probably learn to live with Kirilenko. In October 1964, when Brezhnev replaced Khrushchev, the anguished Romanians were ascribing many of the same tough qualities to him that they now ascribe to Kirilenko.

Since the Romanian party congress last fall, Bucharest has seemed intent on accentuating the positive in its relations with Moscow. This could prove a useful introduction to a new Kremlin leadership. It would cost the Romanians nothing of significance and would give them some bargaining time.

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Warsaw Pact Deputy Foreign  
Ministers To Meet in Moscow

Deputy foreign ministers of the Warsaw Pact states will meet in Moscow on January 29, according to several East European officials. The session was probably called to lay the groundwork for the Pact summit scheduled for mid-May in Warsaw. It may also take the opportunity to re-emphasize Pact support for detente. Normally, these sessions yield few public statements of any significance.

The participants may also discuss plans for celebrating the 30th anniversary of the end of World War II and review tactics at the European security and force reduction talks. The Pact countries now expect conclusion of the European security conference sometime this summer, and are pressing for discussions of the proposals they put forth at the force reduction talks last fall.

This will be the first formal meeting of the Pact deputy foreign ministers since 1970, and it will kick off a round of political meetings commemorating the 20th anniversary of the alliance. The May summit meeting of the Political Consultative Committee could well be preceded by a gathering of foreign ministers.

At last year's summit it was generally agreed to enhance the political character of the Pact, and the Soviets may be trying to use the events of this anniversary year to further the role of the Political Consultative Committee and other Pact institutions in foreign policy coordination. Renewed meetings of the deputy foreign ministers could presage efforts to transform the moribund office of the Pact secretary general (headed by a Soviet deputy foreign minister) into a permanent multinational body for foreign policy consultation.

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Polish Reassurance on Detente

High-level Polish officials have recently sought out US diplomats in Warsaw to emphasize that they do not view Moscow's abrogation of the Soviet-US trade agreement as a threat to detente. They have also expressed some concern over the Soviet leadership situation.

One official recently said that widespread speculation in the West about a return to the cold war was "nonsense" and that neither the Soviets nor the Poles want to turn back from detente. He added that although problems will continue, they should be solved in the atmosphere of detente, not cold war.

Despite these assurances, Polish officials seem concerned about possible short-term developments within the Soviet leadership. A prominent party press spokesman, who was in Moscow in December, said that "something was going on in the Soviet hierarchy," but that whatever leadership changes might occur--"possibly in the next three to four months"--the policy of detente or Soviet relations with the US would not be affected. He also described the Soviet military as the most skeptical force in the Soviet Union, but added that the Vladivostok agreement had apparently reassured Moscow's marshals.

According to the embassy, a number of well-informed Poles believe that Brezhnev's health is failing and that he may be forced at some point to step down. They quickly add, however, that this would not affect detente. A prominent Polish journalist recently said that the only event his colleagues fear is an abrupt change in the Soviet leadership that could lead to a period of uncertainty.

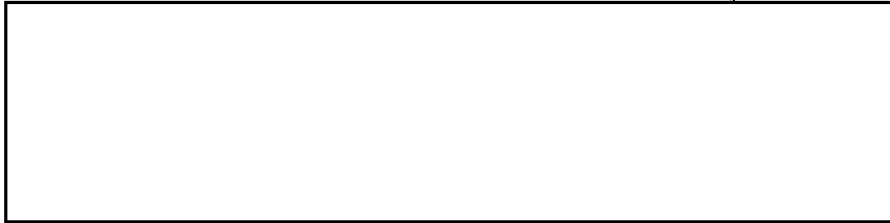
Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Olszowski arrived in Moscow on Wednesday for periodic consultations.

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He will probably stress the importance of even further assurances on Moscow's detente policies.

Although there is no evidence on the point, the Kremlin may make an effort to reassure Olszowski about Brezhnev's health and the state of the Soviet leadership. Warsaw and Moscow share a confidentiality that is probably unique among Warsaw Pact members. This special trust has sometimes cast the Poles in the role of carrying out particularly delicate assignments for the Soviets. Given widespread speculation on the Soviet leadership situation, the Poles might thus be entrusted with trying to allay anxieties in Eastern and Western Europe that are connected with Brezhnev's absence from the public eye.

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Literary Russia Features  
Article on Brezhnev

The January 17 issue of *Literary Russia* features a two-page panegyric to Brezhnev and his contribution to the Soviet military effort in World War II. The article is ostensibly about Lt. General Anton I. Gastilovich, a corps commander in the Soviet 18th Army on the Ukrainian Front, but in fact it concentrates on Brezhnev's role as chief political commissar of the 18th Army.

Brezhnev is portrayed as a wise counsellor to Gavrilovich on the conduct of various battles. He was not only concerned with the material needs of the soldiers, but he also shored up the troops' morale by his inspiring personal example and his tireless appearances and lectures. The article makes the particular point that Brezhnev, loved and admired by all, was a true comrade in arms of the professional officers with whom he served. Marshal Zhukov himself, according to the article, urged Gastilovich to bring the young Brezhnev (then a colonel) on board as his political officer.

The author says Brezhnev was at the side of the troops during the thick of the fighting and exposed himself to constant danger with no thought for his own safety. There is no claim, however, that Brezhnev was wounded or that he took an active part in the fighting.

Appearing as it did amidst speculation concerning Brezhnev's physical and political health, the article is probably intended to keep Brezhnev's name before the public and help scotch rumors that he is in political trouble. It may also be an attempt to reaffirm the party's close ties with the military.

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