MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

From: Cyrus Vance

Subject: Your Meetings With President Brezhnev in Vienna

The Vienna Summit will represent a major milestone in your Administration and in US-Soviet relations. This memorandum is in three parts: first, some observations on the larger objectives of the meeting and the frame of mind of each side in approaching it; second, a discussion of dealing with Brezhnev; and third, an outline of the sequence and priorities of the issues over the course of the four days of meetings.

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I. Objectives and Approach

The Russians have a reputation for toughness in foreign affairs and meticulous attention to detail in any issue affecting their interests. Consequently, there is a temptation to Indian-wrestle them on each of many issues—and indeed they expect this. However, like other foreign leaders you have met, they also attach great weight to the personal element of political relationships. Brezhnev and his entourage will be heavily influenced by your personal style and their perception of your motivations.

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Despite Brezhnev's uncertain health and tenure, it is worth the effort and patience required to establish personal rapport with him. At the outset, especially, it will be important to convince him that the issue of war and peace is central to your perception of US-Soviet relations. While his interest in other aspects of the relationship is apparently waning as his energy fails him, his focus on this central question remains firm.

Neither Brezhnev nor any of his potential successors now in our field of vision questions the need for a managed relationship with the US which excludes the more dangerous form of competition. He and the other Soviet leaders crave the stability and respectability that go with a smooth US-Soviet relationship, but they want to pursue many of their familiar competitive tactics at the same time. They justify much of their behavior as a reaction to the American exercise of power and influence in areas of contention, and regard any questioning of their right to engage in such behavior as questioning their status as an equal power.

Given this Soviet attitude, and the fact that a new leadership is undoubtedly not far off, a major objective of this Summit should be to reinforce the incentives for the Soviet leaders to adhere to the general course they have taken away from the Cold War, while at the same time nudging them towards a more realistic understanding of what modifications in their behavior are essential if this course is to prosper.

There is an analogous Summit objective of bringing our own political leaders and the American people to a clear understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities of dealing with the Soviet Union—allowing neither euphoria nor animosity to blind us to our self interest. SALT will be the principal step forward towards rationality in managing the US-Soviet relationship. Other arms control efforts can contribute to steadiness in our relations. Differences on Third World issues should not be papered over. However, the primary focus of your exchanges with Brezhnev should be to reaffirm the basic framework of US-Soviet relations,
which is based on substantial common interest in strategic
stability, mutual acceptance of the status quo in the
developed world, and avoidance of confrontation in dealing
with the Third World.

One important factor is that Brezhnev has his own
domestic constituency. He has had to mold elite opinion in
the USSR to accept something more complex than the black-and-
white stereotype of Marxism-Leninism vs. US imperialism. In
the first instance he has portrayed better US-Soviet rela-
tions as essential for peace; beyond that, he has held out
the promise of access to American technology and even consumer
goods as the potential payoff for detente. Placing trade on
a less precarious footing is thus important as a Soviet
objective;

If we can resolve the impasse over MRN,
we will have restored the economic option to our tools for
dealing with Moscow, and we will have strengthened the hand
of those in the USSR who favor detente as a path to moderniz-
ing the economic and social system.

A principal objective for SALT is to strengthen the sub-
stantive case and the psychological climate for ratification.
In your discussions with Brezhnev, it will be important for
him to understand the practical implications of this US need.
At the same time, you will have an opportunity to gain in-
sight into the Soviet internal constraints—especially among
the military—that will shape Brezhnev's attitude towards
the inevitable burdens that the ratification process will
place on Soviet patience and willingness to facilitate veri-
fication. This is also a chance to probe Brezhnev's estimate
of the types and magnitudes of limits that might be negotiable
for SALT III. In general, the SALT discussions should offer
valuable insight into the Soviet concept of deterrence, which
is fundamental to our national security assumptions.
II. Dealing with Brezhnev

Brezhnev's performance in Vienna will depend on whether he is "up" for the occasion or not. At his best he will be alert and articulate, displaying the intelligence and cunning which brought him to the top in a tough and brutal political system. He may display personal charm and a sometimes earthy sense of humor.

The most recent reports on Brezhnev's condition indicate that he is in one of his better periods, putting in a full day's work and displaying considerable vigor in his discussions in May with Tito. During his visit to Hungary at the beginning of this month, Brezhnev seemed to cope well with the public portions of his program. Nevertheless, his broadcast speech on Hungarian television had been pre-taped before he left Moscow.

In any event, Brezhnev's physical condition will severely limit what he can do. Two hours is about the maximum he can spend in a negotiating session and he will require a long rest between morning and afternoon sessions. At the dinners at the end of the day he will probably be showing the strain of the day's activity.

Because of his unpredictable condition and his failing grasp of detail, Brezhnev is carefully programmed by his aides. In the May meeting with Giscard, real dialogue proved difficult in plenary sessions, but this could change in Vienna. He will undoubtedly start off by reading from a
paper prepared by his aides and this, combined with the
time needed for interpretation, will take up much time
at the four planned meetings on June 16 and 17. More
give-and-take should be possible at the two dinners and
the small meeting planned for the last day, but actual
negotiation on central issues is unlikely. This is
especially the case since he will be away from Moscow and
the Politburo whose endorsement of major changes in the
Soviet position would be required.

Despite these limitations, none of Brezhnev's sub-
ordinates will hem him in if he is determined to take
charge of his own program—and there is a fair chance that
he will do so if he senses the opportunity to reach a
greater understanding with you than his advisors have told
him to expect.

III. Meeting Sequence

The structure of the first four plenary meetings has
been jointly worked out in advance.

June 16 - US-USSR Relations 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

The morning meeting on June 16 will give you and
Brezhnev an opportunity to state your general views on US-
Soviet relations, the place of arms control in these rela-
tions, etc. As host for this meeting (decided by the toss
of a coin) you will lead off with a statement as long as
30 minutes (excluding time for consecutive interpretation).
This statement can set a constructive mood for the talks,
stress the importance of SALT ratification and the need for
restraint and emphasize cooperation in the period ahead.
We suggest that you take this opportunity to put forward
our proposal on regular consultations, military exchanges
and the defense dialogue. The Soviets have told us that
their statement will be general and not acrimonious. Judg-
ing by Brezhnev's discussions with Giscard and earlier
Summits with Nixon and Ford, he will concentrate on the
dangers of rapprochement with China.