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By: TS NARA Date: 3/17/99

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USSR

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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INFORMATION  
September 22, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KISSINGER

FROM: Helmut Sonnenfeldt ✓  
SUBJECT: "Message" to You from Arbatov

During the ISS conference in The Hague (September 18-21), Arbatov sought me out several times to propose a private talk. We eventually had one for about an hour.

He said he had a message for you along the following lines. The situation in Moscow had deteriorated substantially in the last few months. All the old suspicions of the President had returned and the prospects for progress in our relations had distinctly worsened. He said the general conclusion was that our talk of negotiations was a sham, that words had not been followed by deeds; on the contrary the deeds had all been in the opposite direction. He cited in the first instance China, where most people in Moscow were convinced the US was seeking tactical advantage from Soviet problems. Next was the Romanian trip, which was seen as a bad sign. Also fitting into this pattern was the decision to continue export controls as before. At a later stage in the conversation he also mentioned our refusal to make constructive proposals on the Middle East. To this catalogue he added the tone of the American press and of American Kremlinologists who were spreading fantastic stories about leadership crises in Moscow and about Soviet internal developments. (Arbatov displayed great bitterness about the ISS conference papers dealing with Soviet affairs.) Arbatov said he did not expect you or me to agree with all the foregoing, but he wanted us to know the mood in Moscow because it was at the basis of Soviet slowness in answering our SALT proposal, even though the answer would shortly come and would be positive. He said he was now pessimistic about SALT and believed an opportunity had been missed.

I took a little time to respond to his particular points. But while I used our formal rationale for the Romanian trip and for our China policy -- and also assured him that there had been no White House backgrounding about internal Soviet matters, I thought it best, however, not to attempt a wholly convincing rebuttal.

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Authority: E012958  
By: T.J. ABARA Date: 3/17/99

SECRET/NODIS

- 2 -

I then told him that I too felt that our relations were in an unfortunate phase. I said that we had failed to get a single encouraging response to our farreaching moves on Vietnam. I pointed out that the President had set out to bring the war to an end honorably, even though the steps he had undertaken were not without political risk. It seemed to us that Hanoi was banking on the President being driven further and further down the road of unilateral concessions by domestic pressures; by every objective standard the Soviets were abetting this North Vietnamese course. I told him that this was dangerous business. Concessions must inevitably end if they are not reciprocated and a new situation would then be created. Moreover, it seemed to me quite unlikely that US-Soviet relations could improve as long as the Soviet Union was not only supporting a war against us on the battlefield but also a war against the President's political position at home. As expected, Arbatov rejected the validity of this whole line; I simply told him that I did not expect him to agree but I did expect him to take with the utmost seriousness the fact of our attitude.

I then told him that relations were also complicated by our growing uncertainty about Soviet strategic arms programs. He said we simply resented the fact that we were no longer superior. I said that maybe we did and maybe we did not; the issue I was raising was not psychological or subjective, but the very practical one of a Soviet weapons system, the SS-9, that made sense only as a threat to our land-based missiles. He said he had no technical competence (a point he repeatedly made in the ISS sessions in response to questions about the SS-9), but he could not understand why we thought a weapon was inevitably a counterforce one when, if it could hit Minuteman it obviously could also hit cities. I said that that was precisely what was worrisome about the SS-9: its range and other characteristics made it suitable uniquely as an anti-Minuteman weapon. He then said that even if that was the case, he could not see why we should worry. After all, neither side would wait if it received warning of an attack but instead it would empty out its silos by launching a counter-strike at once. I told him that was pretty dangerous talk: launch on warning doctrines are precisely what we should do without if there is going to be a semblance of strategic stability. (I doubt that Arbatov was necessarily reflecting existing doctrine.)

The conversation ended with Arbatov again saying he wanted you to know that things looked gloomy from Moscow. I said it looked to me that without progress on Vietnam they would stay that way. NOTE: There is nothing unique in the content of this "message." Pravda has been on the "deeds not words" kick for some time and Arbatov made virtually the same

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DECLASSIFIED  
Authority: E012958  
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SECRET/NODIS

- 3 -

points he made to me to others with whom he talked. I have no doubt we look recalcitrant from Moscow and this is unquestionably one of those periods where each side believes itself to have ample reason to be resentful of the other. I hope we'll have staying power enough to continue giving the Soviets reason for resentment because I see no other way to get them to move on Vietnam.

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