

31. Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.)¹

Washington, October 20, 1969, 3:30 p.m.

Ambassador Dobrynin opened the conversation by handing the President a brief announcement suggesting November 17th as the opening of the SALT talks, and suggesting Helsinki as the place.² The President asked why Helsinki—he preferred Vienna. Ambassador Dobrynin replied that it did not make a great deal of difference to the Soviet Union, but since Helsinki had been proposed as one of the places by the Secretary of State in June, they decided to go along with that. The President said the Secretary of State had been under instructions to point out the difficulties of Helsinki. Ambassador Dobrynin replied that all the Secretary of State had said to Gromyko was, “to hell with ‘Sinki,” which is not a diplomatic suggestion. If the United States preferred some other place, this should not be too difficult.

Dr. Kissinger asked the Ambassador what they meant by preliminary discussion. He replied that this meant only the first phase of the discussions, and had no particular significance. But Ambassador Dobrynin suggested that one possible way of handling it would be by beginning in Helsinki and then moving on to Vienna. Dr. Kissinger pointed out to the Ambassador that we had to consult some Allies, but that there seemed to be no insuperable difficulties.

The President then said it would be dangerous if the talks were only a series of platitudes. Ambassador Dobrynin replied that there would be specific suggestions, depending on the range of our proposals, and they would probably be put in the form of several options.

The Ambassador then said that President Podgorny paid close attention to good relationships with the United States, and valued this private contact that had been established, but they wanted the President to hear directly their view of international relations. The Ambassador then read the attached Aide Mémoire³ to the President. After he was through reading the Aide Mémoire, the President pulled out a yellow pad, handed it to Dobrynin and said, “you’d better take some notes,” and began to speak almost uninterruptedly for half an hour.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1969, Pt. 1. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The meeting was held in the Oval Office.

² The original English text that Dobrynin gave Kissinger is printed in Document 33.

³ Document 32.

The President began by saying to Dobrynin, “you have been candid, and I will be equally so. I, too, am disappointed in US-Soviet relations. I am today, in office for nine months. The babies should have been born; instead, there have been several miscarriages. I recognize that the future of my country and of the world depends on the success the Soviet Union has in bringing us closer together. We have not done well. Let me point out why.”

Middle East. The President pointed out that Sisco and Gromyko, and Sisco and Dobrynin, have talked, but the Soviets have been taking a hard position based on total withdrawal without asking a similar sacrifice from the UAR. The President pointed out that the Soviet client had lost the war, had lost the territory, and was in no position to be extremely aggressive. Ambassador Dobrynin asked whether the President was suggesting that total withdrawal was no longer acceptable, and why a UN force was not adequate. The President said that in light of the experience with the other UN force, one would have to understand and take account of the Israeli position. We are not intransigent, the President added, and you must not be. If you are willing to press your client, we may be able to make some suggestions to Israel. Ambassador Dobrynin began to argue and the President cut him off by saying these were technical issues which should be discussed with Sisco.

Turning to *trade, European security and Berlin*, the President said that these could be dealt with later at a very high level, if we can make a breakthrough somewhere. The Ambassador asked, “How do we make a breakthrough?”

The President ignored him and turned to *China*. He said, “Look to the future of Asia—what will Asia be 25 years from now? China will be in a position of immense power and we cannot have it without communication. Anything we have done or are doing with respect to China is in no sense designed to embarrass the Soviet Union. On the contrary, China and the United States cannot tolerate a situation to develop where we are enemies, anymore than we want to be permanent enemies of the Soviet Union. Therefore, we expect to make moves in trade and exchange of persons and eventually in diplomacy. As the Ambassador has said himself, there are enough blocs in the world without contributing to another one. He repeated this was not directed against the Soviet Union. Within 10 years, China will be a nuclear power, capable of terrorizing many other countries. The time is

running out when the Soviet Union and the United States can build a different kind of world. The only beneficiary, then, of U.S.-Soviet disagreement over Vietnam is China. And, therefore, this is the last opportunity to settle these disputes.

The President then turned to Vietnam. He said that prior to the bombing halt, "which you are aware will be one year old on November 1st," Ambassadors Bohlen, Thompson and Harriman had pointed out that the Soviet Union could do nothing as long as the United States was bombing a fellow Socialist country, and that it would be very active afterwards. The bombing halt was agreed to and the Soviet Union has done nothing.

Of course, the President said, we now had an oblong table to the attainment of which the Soviet Union contributed something, but the U.S. did not consider that a great achievement. All conciliatory moves for the past year had been made by the United States. The President enumerated them.

The President said he therefore had concluded that maybe the Soviet Union did not want to end the war in Vietnam. They may think that they can break the President; they may believe that the U.S. domestic situation is unmanageable; they may think that the war in Vietnam costs the Soviet Union only a small amount of money and costs the U.S. a great many lives. The President did not propose to argue with the Soviet assessment. As a great power, it had the right to take its position. On the other hand, the Ambassador had to understand the following: the Soviet Union would be stuck with the President for the next three years and three months, and the President would keep in mind what was being done right now. If the Soviet Union would not help us to get peace, the U.S. would have to pursue its own methods for bringing the war to an end. It could not allow a talk-fight strategy without taking action. The President said he hoped that the Ambassador would understand that such measures would not be directed against the Soviet Union, but would be in the U.S. interest of achieving peace. The U.S. recognized that a settlement must reflect the real situation. It recognized the right of all Vietnamese to participate in the political process. But up to now, there had been a complete refusal of North Vietnam to make its own proposals in order to have any serious discussion.

The President pointed out that all the Ambassador had done was to repeat the same tired old slogans that the North Vietnamese had made already six months ago, and which he knew very

well could lead nowhere. It was time to get discussions started. The humiliation of a defeat was absolutely unacceptable. The President recognized that the Soviet leaders were tough and courageous, but so was he. He told Ambassador Dobrynin that he hoped that he would not mind this serious talk.

President Nixon said he did not believe much in personal diplomacy, and he recognized that the Ambassador was a strong defender of the interests of his own country. The President pointed out that if the Soviet Union found it possible to do something in Vietnam, and the Vietnam War ended, the U.S. might do something dramatic to improve Soviet-U.S. relations, indeed something more dramatic than they could now imagine. But until then, real progress would be difficult.

Ambassador Dobrynin asked whether this meant that there could be no progress. The President replied that progress was possible, but it would have to be confined essentially to what was attainable in diplomatic channels. He said that he was very happy to have Ambassador Dobrynin use the channel through Dr. Kissinger, and he would be prepared to talk to the Ambassador personally. He reiterated that the war could drag on, in which case the U.S. would find its own way to bring it to an end. There was no sense repeating the proposals of the last six months. However, he said, in the meantime, while the situation continued, we could all keep our tone down and talk correctly to each other. It would help, and would lay the basis for further progress, perhaps later on when conditions were more propitious.

The President said that the whole world wanted us to get together. He too wanted nothing so much as to have his Administration remembered as a watershed in U.S.-Soviet relations, but we would not hold still for being "diddled" to death in Vietnam.⁴

⁴ During a telephone conversation at 8:25 p.m., Nixon and Kissinger discussed how to proceed with Dobrynin: "P said in the meeting tomorrow with 'him.' He would like for K to give him that message. Then if the Vietnam thing is raised (try to get it raised) the P wants K to shake his head and say, 'I am sorry, Mr. Ambassador, but he is out of control. Mr. Ambassador, as you know, I am very close to the President, but you don't know this man—he's been through more than any of the rest of us put together. He's made up his mind and unless there's some movement,' just shake your head and walk out. He's probably right now figuring out what was said. K said he might type up everything the P said [October 20] on a plain slip of paper." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 2, Chronological File) When Kissinger called the next morning, Dobrynin agreed to meet at the Soviet Embassy in fifteen minutes. (Ibid.) Although no record of the conversation has been found, the "plain slip of paper" that Kissinger gave Dobrynin is *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1969, Pt. 1.

32. Note From the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon¹

Moscow, undated.

While in Moscow [I] had meetings with the Soviet leaders in the course of which we discussed questions of relations between the USSR and the US.

The President is aware of the importance with which Soviet-American relations are viewed by our side and of the significance attached to them in Moscow. Enough time has now passed since the inauguration of the new administration in the United States to permit an evaluation of the state of Soviet-American relations in the light of the exchange of opinion that has since taken place between our Governments, as well as of the events that have occurred in the world.

I am instructed to frankly inform the President that Moscow is not satisfied with the present state of relations between the USSR and the US. One gets the impression that the American side, while declaring in general words that it is ready to pursue negotiations with the Soviet Union, evades, in fact, concrete discussion of a whole number of major questions, such as measures to be taken to ensure that allied agreements reflecting the results of World War II and outlining steps for securing peace be put into life; greater coordination of our actions aimed at settling in practice the Middle East conflict, as well as certain concrete questions of bilateral Soviet-American relations, in particular, that of trade. Moreover, in a number of cases the American side has taken steps which obviously run counter to the declarations in favor of improving relations between our countries. All this cannot but alert us and, in any case, cannot contribute to better trust which is so necessary for relations between our Governments if we are indeed to make progress in removing the abnormalities that have piled up in our relations in the past, and in settling major international issues fraught with dangerous crises.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, President's Trip Files, Kissinger/Dobrynin, 1969, Pt. 1. No classification marking. The note printed here is the original English text that Dobrynin gave Kissinger (see Document 33). The Russian instructions from the Soviet Foreign Ministry, however, included two additional talking points, if necessary, on Czechoslovakia and SALT. Dobrynin removed both points from the English translation, however, as neither arose during his conversation with Nixon. (AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 53a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 16–20)

With this in mind the Soviet Government decided to outline for the President its considerations on a number of concrete questions.

2. It is known, for example, that the Soviet Government has expressed readiness to follow the path that would facilitate doing away with the existing military blocks and groupings which, without doubt, would make a most positive impact on the world situation. Unfortunately, one has to conclude that those statements have not met a positive response from the US Government. On the contrary, it is noted in Moscow that the activity of NATO is now on the increase.

Or take, for instance, the question of drawing a line through the vestiges of the Second World War in Europe and fixating the situation that has developed there. We on our part have always expressed readiness and proposed concrete ways for a just settlement of the questions involved, with due regard to the existing realities. The American side, however, acts contrary to the obligations assumed by the United States under the Allied agreements. Why could not the US, together with the USSR as great powers and allies in the past war, make necessary efforts at last in that important field?

The Soviet side stands prepared now to start an exchange of views with the US also on the question of West Berlin. Such an exchange of views, in our opinion, can be useful if both sides are guided by the aim of contributing to a relaxation of tension in Europe and of preventing in the future frictions and complications dangerous for the maintenance of peace and stability in Europe.

3. It is also known that the US and the USSR have long been conducting an exchange of views on Middle East settlement. We would like to say with all frankness, however, that, in our opinion, there has been no significant progress in this matter so far, while the situation in the Middle East in the meantime, far from getting normalized, is further deteriorating. In our deep conviction, such a course of events in no small degree is due to the failure on the part of the US to make adequate efforts to bring to an end the present arrogant behaviour of Israel which deliberately aggravates the situation and is wrecking a settlement.

Moscow would like to hope that the President will give this question all due attention and that appropriate steps will be taken from the American side to put an end to Israel's obstructionism which

would pave the way toward achieving a just settlement in the Middle East.

4. In Moscow development of events around Vietnam is being watched closely as before.

The Soviet Union, as in the past, is interested in a speediest peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict through negotiations and on the basis of respect for the rights and aspirations of the Vietnamese people. We can responsibly state that the position of our Vietnamese friends is the same.

I would like to recall in this connection a concrete program of just and peaceful settlement, put forward by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, and to emphasize, too, that the stubborn resistance of the American side to the creation of a coalition government in South Vietnam which would be based on the actual pattern of political forces there cannot but evoke questions as to the actual meaning of statements about the US desire to end the war in Vietnam and to achieve a political settlement of that conflict. These questions also arise in view of the fact that parallel to the Paris peace talks the US is conducting wide preparations for continuing the war in Vietnam.

Due note has been taken in Moscow, of course, of the hints by the American representatives about possible use by the United States of some "alternate" methods of solving the Vietnam question. Such hints cannot be regarded in any other way but as a rather open threat addressed to the DRV and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam.

If that is so Moscow feels that the President should be frankly told that the method of solving the Vietnam question through the use of military force is not only without perspective, but also extremely dangerous.

We hope that the United States will soberly weigh all factors connected with the continuation of the Vietnam conflict and will show a constructive approach to its solution through negotiation, on the basis of recognition of the unalienable right of the Vietnamese people to solve their matters by themselves and of withdrawal of the American troops from Vietnam.

5. Some time back due note was taken in Moscow of the assurances by American leaders to the effect that the United States was not interested in any aggravation of conflict between the Ch.P.R. and the USSR and did not have any intention to use

Soviet-Chinese relations to the detriment of the Soviet Union. We, on our part, assured the President that we did not have any intention, either, to make use of difficulties in the relations between the USA and the Ch.P.R. Those American assurances were received in Moscow as a sign of sober realization by the US Government that it would be unrealistic to stake on the use of the problem of Soviet-Chinese relations for bringing pressure to bear upon the Soviet Union and for getting one-sided concessions from us.

If someone in the United States is tempted to make profit from Soviet-Chinese relations at the Soviet Union's expense, and there are some signs of that, then we would like to frankly warn in advance that such line of conduct, if pursued, can lead to a very grave miscalculation and is in no way consistent with the goal of better relations between the US and the USSR.

6. In conclusion I would like to say that the Soviet leaders who attach great significance to improving relations with the United States, would like to know the President's own opinion on the above mentioned questions, as well as on concrete steps which the American side would be ready to take in that direction.

I would also like to tell the President that the Soviet leaders continue to attach great importance not only to official but also to the existing unofficial contacts with him for a confidential exchange of opinion on questions of mutual interest.

33. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)¹

Washington, October 20, 1969.

I visited President Nixon at the White House and, citing my instructions, told him that the Soviet Government, reaffirming its willingness to enter into negotiations with the U.S. Government on curbing the strategic arms race and, taking into account the exchange of views on this issue through diplomatic channels, proposes that a preliminary meeting between specially designated representatives of the USSR and the United States be held in Helsinki, beginning on November 17 of this

¹ Source: AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 53, p. 399, d. 7, l. 12-13. Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal.

year, to discuss matters related to the subject of the talks.

I further told the President that if the U.S. side concurs, we propose that a statement be issued simultaneously in Moscow and Washington in the near future, which would read as follows:²

“Confirming the agreement reached earlier to enter into negotiations on curbing [the] strategic arms race, the Governments of the USSR and the United States have agreed that specially designated representatives of the Soviet Union and the United States will meet in Helsinki on November 17, 1969, for preliminary discussion of the questions involved.”

After listening to our reply and looking over the text of our proposed statement for the press, Nixon said he had no objections in principle to the date we had specified for the meeting or to the text of the statement. He does, however, have some hesitation about Helsinki, where the U.S. Embassy is small and the means of communication with Washington are inadequate. He personally would prefer Vienna, which in addition has a “good past,” to use his words: in Vienna the first major postwar political agreement, namely the Austrian State Treaty, was signed with the participation of the United States and the USSR.

In reply to my comment that Secretary of State Rogers himself had once proposed Helsinki among other possible cities for the meeting, Nixon said that later on, however, in a conversation with Andrei Gromyko in New York,³ he, the Secretary of State, had clarified that the U.S. side preferred Vienna, not Helsinki.

Nixon suggested that the venue for the meeting be discussed with Rogers again, presumably tomorrow, since the latter is presently in New York.

Nixon then showed interest in our phrase “regarding a preliminary discussion,” saying that the U.S. side, after long, thorough study and consideration of all the issues related to curbing the strategic arms race, is now prepared from the very outset for a broad, serious, and in-depth exchange of views with the Soviet side, not just for a preliminary discussion of a general nature.

² Printed below is the original English text that Dobrynin gave Nixon. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1969, Pt. 1)

³ September 22.

I replied to Nixon that we too are ready for a serious discussion of this important issue. As for the idea of a preliminary exchange of views, it had at one time also been proposed, among other ideas, by Secretary of State Rogers.

Nixon further said that they are entering into negotiations in the hope of achieving some success, on a mutually acceptable basis, although these negotiations will require a great deal of time and effort on the part of both sides.

In conclusion, the President said they would probably need a few days before issuing the joint statement on the meeting between our representatives so that they would have enough time to notify their allies of this in advance, lest they find themselves faced with a “fait accompli.” He added that he would give Rogers appropriate instructions to get in touch with me for final clarification of all the details related to beginning the talks and issuing the statement.

A. Dobrynin

34. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)¹

Washington, October 20, 1969.

During my meeting with President Nixon at the White House on October 20, after the conversation regarding the opening of Soviet-U.S. talks in Helsinki on curbing the strategic arms race, I carried out the instructions approved by the Central Committee for the conversation with Nixon.

Referring to my meetings in Moscow with Soviet leaders, I said I had been instructed to tell the President frankly that Moscow is not satisfied with the present state of relations between the USSR and the United States; that one gets the impression that while the U.S. side declares, in general terms, that it is prepared to pursue negotiations with the Soviet Union, it is, however, basically evading concrete discussion of a whole series of major questions; moreover, in certain cases the U.S. side is taking steps that obviously run counter to its declarations in favor of improving relations between our countries. All this cannot but make us uneasy

¹ Source: AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 53a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 1–15. Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal.

and, in any case, cannot contribute to developing the trust that is so necessary in the relations between our Governments, if we genuinely want to make progress in removing the abnormalities that built up in our relations in the past, and in settling major international problems fraught with dangerous crises.

In this connection, I then set forth to the President in detail the Soviet Government's views on a number of specific issues: European affairs, bilateral Soviet-U.S. relations, a Middle East settlement, Vietnam, China, etc. (Kissinger, who was present, asked me at the end of the conversation, in view of the importance of the subject and with Nixon's consent, to give him, on a working basis, the text of the views I had presented orally, which I had prepared in English for the conversation with the President.² I did so.)

To begin with, I proposed to the President that we discuss all the issues in order, one by one. He preferred, however, to hear our views in their entirety on all the issues at once.

While I was setting forth our views, Nixon became visibly nervous, especially after our assessment of the situation regarding the Vietnam issue.

When I finished, Nixon immediately suggested that I "write down in detail" what he "intended to say for transmission to the Soviet leaders in Moscow." At first he rambled, repeating himself and losing his train of thought. Then he seemed to pull himself together and began speaking more calmly and clearly.

Nixon said the following.

You have stated, Mr. Ambassador, that the Soviet leaders are disappointed: with respect to Soviet-U.S. relations, during the nine months of my term in office a good baby should have been born. But there have been only miscarriages. I too am very disappointed with these developments. When I came to the White House, I had very much hoped our relations would improve, and I am still convinced of the need for this in the interest of our countries. But we—the United States and the USSR—have not been very successful in this area thus far. I want to briefly address some specific issues.

The Middle East. This issue, said Nixon, has been the subject of lengthy bilateral discussion between us through diplomatic channels. It received

the lion's share of attention at the three meetings between Secretary of State Rogers and [Foreign] Minister Gromyko.³ You criticize us harshly, but we can criticize you too on the same grounds, since the Soviet Government is taking a very hard-line position, demanding that we and Israel give up everything it obtained at a heavy cost during the 1967 military conflict. After all, it was Israel, and not the UAR, that ultimately achieved success in the war. Israel therefore wants to hold on to its gains until an agreement is reached that satisfies it and ensures its future security.

I interrupted Nixon at this point, saying I was quite surprised to hear from the President of the United States such "arguments," which essentially boil down to the following: an aggressor, if it is victorious or has influential patrons, has the right to do anything it pleases. The Soviet Union, like most countries in the world, vigorously opposes and will oppose such a "system of law." And it is common knowledge that in his speeches, the U.S. President himself has endorsed the principle contained in the UN Security Council resolution of November 22, 1967,⁴ that there must be no territorial acquisitions by means of war.

In this connection, I asked Nixon how, then, was one supposed to understand his statements today? Does this mean an official change in the U.S. position? It is important that I receive a reply from you in this regard, I added, in view of the fact that Soviet-U.S. consultations on a Middle East settlement are currently continuing and an authoritative statement of the U.S. position by the President himself would be very important.

Nixon evaded a direct reply to this question. He began to speak at length, saying that it was nonetheless necessary to take into account Israel's "just aspirations" to ensure its security.

In this connection, I pointed out to the President that the Soviet proposals had devoted much attention to concrete issues related to ensuring the security of all the countries of that region, including Israel, and that with goodwill it is quite possible to develop a reliable system of security, provided the whole issue is not turned into a means for hindering and subverting efforts to find a mutually acceptable agreement, as Israel is doing.

² Document 32.

³ September 22; see also footnote 3, Document 26.

⁴ See footnote 6, Document 5.

“You are overemphasizing the use of UN troops, and in the light of past sad experience, that is not really acceptable to Israel,” Nixon interjected in this connection.

“But aren’t we proposing to the United States discussing possible safeguards for a future agreement, provided it is concluded on equitable terms, which of course include the withdrawal of Israel forces from the occupied territories?” I asked Nixon. “Why is your representative (Sisco) stubbornly avoiding concrete discussion of this issue during the current consultations?”

Nixon began saying he had sent Sisco to Moscow for negotiations,⁵ but the latter returned empty-handed because of the Soviet side’s inflexibility. “The Soviet [Foreign] Minister stuck to that same hard line in discussions with Secretary of State Rogers, and the Soviet Ambassador is just as uncompromising in contacts with Sisco.”

I told the President I could not agree with such an arbitrary assessment of the Soviet position, if one is speaking of Soviet-U.S. consultations. Using the example of the latest meetings, I briefly reminded him of the one-sided pro-Israel position of the U.S. representatives during those consultations.

Nixon evaded a discussion of specific issues pertaining to the settlement, saying the United States has its own considerable difficulties with Israel, just as the USSR, it appears to them, has its difficulties with the Arabs, particularly the UAR and Syria.

Nixon elaborated upon this idea that the main thing now in the Middle East is to avert a “tragic development” of events that might lead to confrontation between the USSR and the United States.

In reply to my direct question as to how he, the U.S. President, regards the prospects for a Middle East settlement, particularly in the context of the ongoing Soviet-U.S. consultations on this matter, Nixon said that they, the United States, are not “immovable,” but that considerable difficulties remain. “I think,” he went on, “that progress can be achieved, at the very top, but it will take time.” It was quite clear from his subsequent remarks, although he did not say so outright, that to a large extent he believes that success in a Middle East settlement depends on the intensity of our efforts to resolve the Vietnam

conflict. At any rate, it was clear from Nixon’s remarks that for the time being the Americans are in no hurry to reach a Middle East agreement on mutually acceptable terms.

Nixon then touched briefly on issues relating to European security and Soviet-U.S. trade, saying in general terms that “in these areas, under certain conditions (the implication is the same: success in a Vietnam settlement) it is possible to achieve progress and even a breakthrough—at a high level—after careful preparation.”

The Soviet Union and the United States, he went on, are the two most powerful nations in the world. It is very important that at the present time they are headed by leaders who do not act rashly. I have not met personally with L.I. Brezhnev, A.N. Kosygin, or N.V. Podgorny, but based on all available information my assessment of them as statesmen is that they are persons with good self-control, great determination, and a strong character. I also include myself in that category of people, Nixon added. It is necessary that we somehow work together, without high emotions, to gradually make progress in seeking a solution to various issues.

But how are we ever going to tackle this mass of unresolved problems and move ahead energetically toward their solution, Nixon asked himself rhetorically.

Here, he said, we come to the main problem—Vietnam. But before that, he, Nixon, would like to say a few words about China.

In 25 years, he stated, you and we will confront a situation where the Chinese giant, with a population of one billion people and an enormous military machine that it has developed, will begin speaking with a loud voice in the world. We (the U.S.) do not think it’s a good thing for this giant to continue stewing in its own juice, because that could lead to bloody surprises from the unpredictable actions of the Chinese leadership in the world arena. We are convinced that China must not remain without ties to the outside world, to the Soviet Union and the United States. We do not want to remain enemies with China forever. Therefore we, the United States, think for our part that it would be advisable to gradually establish and develop contacts and cultural and trade relations between the U.S. and China. Eventually we hope to restore diplomatic relations with Peking. For the time being we are prepared to continue the dialogue with the Chinese in Warsaw.

⁵ See footnote 3, Document 25.

But none of this, Nixon went on, is directed against the Soviet Union in any way. I can reaffirm that the U.S. Government is not trying to somehow take advantage of Sino-Soviet differences and it will not do anything in this area that might be perceived in the Soviet Union as an attempt to cause it harm.

When I speak of the need to improve relations between the United States and China, Nixon continued, I do not mean organizing some sort of U.S.-Chinese bloc against the USSR. Leaving aside the fact that raising the question of such a bloc in this way is totally unrealistic, I agree in principle with the Soviet leaders when they speak of the need to pursue a policy of reducing and eliminating military blocs. We should have fewer blocs. That is one of the main tenets of my political philosophy in international affairs. As President of the United States, I do not intend to engage in the “liberation” of the Eastern European countries, but I hope Moscow has no objection to the United States’ developing normal relations with them, just as the USSR is doing now with the countries of Western Europe or Latin America.

In ten years, Nixon went on, China will have certain nuclear missile capabilities (he added that previously they had assumed this would happen in five years, but now, according to their latest data and assessments, China will need ten). Although in any event this arsenal cannot be comparable to the capability of the USSR and the United States in this area, it will nonetheless be sufficiently powerful to pose a serious threat to both of our countries. We in the United States never forget Mao’s words that he is willing to sacrifice three hundred million Chinese in a nuclear war. We both value human life too much to share such views. So let us work together to create the conditions for better international peace, for peace on the Asian continent, after the Vietnam War—a peace in which China would also find a worthy place for itself.

In the final analysis, Nixon emphasized, the main beneficiary of Soviet-U.S. disagreements is not the FRG, not Japan, but China. Therefore, the governments of the USSR and the United States must strive together to seek solutions to the difficult problems facing them, such as a Middle East settlement, European issues, and issues pertaining to bilateral relations, including trade. To bring this about, however, we must first resolve the main issue hindering the development of re-

lations between our countries—the issue of Vietnam—and the Soviet Union must play a more active role in that.

Thus, during the conversation Nixon kept returning time and again to the Vietnam issue, regardless of what other issue or problem we were discussing.

In setting forth our position on the Vietnam issue per my instructions, I said that Moscow is continuing to closely watch the development of events surrounding Vietnam. As in the past, the Soviet Union is interested in a speedy, peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict through negotiations and on the basis of respect for the rights and aspirations of the Vietnamese people. We can state with full responsibility that the position of our Vietnamese friends is the same.

Recalling the concrete program for a just and peaceful settlement put forward by the DRV Government and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, I emphasized at the same time that the U.S. side’s stubborn resistance to establishing a coalition government in South Vietnam based on consideration of the actual alignment of political forces there cannot but give rise to questions regarding statements about the U.S. desire to end the war in Vietnam and achieve a political settlement of that conflict. These questions also arise because the United States is simultaneously conducting negotiations in Paris and making extensive preparations to continue the war in Vietnam.

I went on to say that Moscow has, of course, taken note of hints by U.S. representatives about the possibility the United States will use some sort of “alternative” methods to resolve the Vietnam issue. Such hints can only be perceived as a rather overt threat against the DRV and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam.

If that is the case, then Moscow would like to tell the President frankly that the policy of resolving the Vietnam issue through the use of military force is not only futile but extremely dangerous.

We hope, I said in conclusion, that the United States will soberly weigh all the factors connected with continuation of the Vietnam conflict and display a constructive approach to its settlement through negotiations, based on recognition of the inalienable right of the Vietnamese people to conduct their affairs independently and on the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam.

I must say that Nixon was displeased and agitated by our position on Vietnam as set forth above, and he did not try to hide that. He reacted very nervously and went into a long-winded monologue.

Even before the United States ended the bombing of North Vietnam, he began—and the [first] anniversary of that event is in November—Ambassadors Bohlen, Thompson, and Harriman had told President Johnson they were deeply convinced that the Soviet Union would not be able to exert its influence and would not be able to do anything in the search for a peace settlement as long as the United States continued bombing another socialist country, the DRV. They stressed that if the United States ended the bombing, then the main obstacle blocking the USSR's participation in seeking ways out of the Vietnam crisis would be removed, and then the Soviet Union would be able to start working quite actively in this area. The Soviet Government also persistently spoke out in favor of ending the bombing.

The U.S. Government took this step and stopped the bombing. A year has gone by, and what has happened? The Soviet Union has not done a thing. Of course, Nixon said with a tinge of sarcasm, we now have an oblong negotiating table in Paris, to which the Soviet Union contributed to a certain extent. But he, the President, does not consider the agreement on the shape of that table to be a great accomplishment. For an entire year, all the compromises have been made and all the conciliatory steps have been taken only by the United States, which was reflected in particular in his, the President's, May 13 speech setting forth a broad program for a Vietnam peace settlement;⁶ at the same time, the U.S. Government expressed willingness to begin discussion of all proposals in Paris, regardless of who makes them. Instead, what we have is a total impasse and the other side's unwillingness to even talk until its peremptory demands are accepted.

The Soviet Union, Nixon continued, also prefers to remain silent, even though its leaders have been sent several personal confidential messages from him, the President, in a spirit of goodwill. However, the Soviet Union continues to support Hanoi 100 percent in all of its demands and to provide North Vietnam very substantial assistance.

All this, Nixon went on, has led him to conclude that to all appearances, the Soviet Union does not want the war in Vietnam to end. I know the Soviet leaders tell me the opposite. I don't question their sincerity. But if they were in my shoes, they too would probably come to the same conclusion.

Nixon went on to say that they (the Soviet leaders) might think they will be able to break the U.S. President. They may believe the domestic political situation in the U.S. is becoming unmanageable for the President, although the Soviet Ambassador undoubtedly has the opportunity to see for himself here, on the spot, that that is not the case. They may think the war in Vietnam is costing the Soviet Union relatively little money, while it is taking a heavy toll of human lives for the United States.

He, the President, does not intend to argue with this Soviet assessment of the situation. The Soviet Union is a great power, and its leaders have every right to hold any view they want. But on the other hand, the Soviet leaders should bear in mind that the Soviet Union will still be dealing with him, President Nixon, for at least three more years until the next election and in his policy he, the President, will inevitably take into account everything that is being done and that is happening at this particular moment. The Soviet Union, of course, has the right to do everything it considers necessary. But if it doesn't assist us in reaching a Vietnam peace settlement, the United States reserves the right to go its own way and use its own methods to end the war in Vietnam. We simply cannot afford to permit the other side to keep imposing its strategy on us—"talks with simultaneous continuation of the armed struggle"—when no concrete results in the peace settlement are in sight. We cannot endlessly bear the burden of lost American lives and wait until the North Vietnamese finally deign to begin serious negotiations with us. As it is, we have been sitting with them in Paris for almost a whole year and getting nowhere, and they make virtually no attempt to hide the fact that they want to wear us down without any efforts to start a serious dialogue in which we could try to feel our way towards a compromise.

Nixon reiterated that if the Soviet Union does not want to provide any assistance now in settling the Vietnam conflict, the United States will go its own way, using its own methods and taking the appropriate steps. He, the President, must say that those steps will not be directed against the Soviet

⁶ Reference is in error; Nixon delivered the speech on May 14. See Document 21.

Union. He would like to make that perfectly clear to the Soviet leadership.

However, those measures will be required in order to protect American lives and attain peace as quickly as possible, which is what the U.S. is interested in. I share the Soviet view that the settlement should reflect the actual situation in South Vietnam. I agree that South Vietnam and its people have the right of self-determination and the right to establish a government that would enjoy the support of the majority of the population. We are prepared to discuss, in a businesslike manner, all practical ways to uphold these rights of the South Vietnamese population, including the 10 Points of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam.⁷ But we are not prepared for, and will never accept, Hanoi's peremptory demand—which is repeated at every meeting in Paris—to proceed solely on the basis of these 10 Points, and moreover without any detailed explanation of the substance of those points.

He, the President, must say frankly that he is quite surprised that the Soviet Ambassador, on the instructions of the Soviet leadership, restated to him in a personal meeting the same old slogans that Hanoi had presented six months ago and that, as Moscow knows, cannot lead to anything. He, President Nixon, did not start the war in Vietnam and bears no responsibility for it. But he will never (Nixon twice emphasized that word) accept a humiliating defeat or humiliating terms. The United States, like the USSR, is a great nation, and he is its president. The Soviet leaders are determined persons, but he, the President, is the same. He, Nixon, is saying all this bluntly and hopes the Soviet leadership will not object to such a frank conversation.

Here the President paused as if to catch his breath after this lengthy speech, which he had delivered emotionally and without stopping.

I told the President that to be frank, I did not understand one of the main thoughts in his remarks. The impression is that the Soviet Union or the Soviet Government almost gets the blame for the fact that the United States invaded Vietnam and now finds itself in the current serious predicament. Following this rather strange logic, it seems that even now we are being accused of not doing enough to help the United States get out of the war. But are

we really the main problem here, I asked Nixon. After all, it is your troops, Mr. President, who are many thousands of miles away from their own country in foreign territory, sowing death, destruction, famine, and illness there. You are evidently offended that we reiterated what we also told you earlier about how to end the war in Vietnam while respecting all the rights of the Vietnamese people to decide their fate independently. But that, after all, is the realistic way and basically the only way to achieve a genuine, equitable settlement. How is that humiliating for the United States?

I then re-emphasized that the Soviet Union remains interested in a speedy settlement of the Vietnam conflict through negotiations and on the basis of respect for the rights and aspirations of the Vietnamese people. He, the President, can rest assured that the Soviet Government, proceeding from those principles, has played and will play an active role in ending the war in Vietnam expeditiously.

With respect to Nixon's hints that the United States may resort to some "other measures" to resolve the Vietnam issue, I said Moscow would like to tell the President bluntly that the policy of settling the Vietnam issue through military force is not only futile but extremely dangerous. We hope, I added, that the U.S. Government will soberly weigh all the factors associated with continuation of the Vietnam conflict and take a constructive approach to resolving it through negotiations.

Given the fact that our Embassy has already received reports that some of the people closest to Nixon—those who are most hostile to us—have long been whispering to him that the Soviet leadership wants nothing to do with Nixon and therefore does not respond to the President's personal messages to it regarding the Vietnam issue, and that these attitudes in the White House were clearly articulated by Nixon himself when he thought it possible to openly assert in his remarks that the Soviet leadership is apparently trying to "break" him, I expressed surprise over such a statement by the President. I cited specific examples to demonstrate the constructive approach of the Soviet leadership to normalizing and developing relations with the United States, which of course presupposes, as part of the overall process, the establishment of proper, businesslike personal relations between the leaders of the two countries. I then told Nixon it was precisely in this vein, and in a spirit of candor, that the present message for him was written. It stated

⁷ See footnote 3, Document 22.

explicitly that the Soviet leadership, attaching great significance to improving relations with the United States, would like to hear the President's personal opinion on the issues that have been raised, with a view to jointly seeking solutions that would serve the interests not just of the two countries but of others as well.

Nixon, having cooled off a bit, began saying he should not be taken literally. Not everything, he said, looks only negative in our relations. I, for example, greatly appreciate and value the fact that a kind of mutual understanding has developed between the Soviet leadership and myself on not bringing personal polemics into our public remarks. In my speeches I never forget that, even when I get carried away by rhetoric. I am pleased to note that the Soviet side reciprocates. We must continue to follow this policy, bearing in mind that it can lay a foundation for the future, when the conditions for progress in our relations will become more suitable.

However, Nixon continued, while I wish to maintain personal, confidential contacts with the Soviet leadership, I fail to understand it when Moscow bypasses diplomatic channels and directly sends me a message in which there is absolutely nothing new, just reiteration, in particular, of the long-familiar Soviet expression of full support for North Vietnam. That could be also done through the State Department if the USSR absolutely has to say that again. In any case, I don't favor that sort of personal diplomacy.

Thereupon Nixon got excited again (although this time his comments were more guarded) and began enumerating once more what he had done to start a constructive dialogue in Paris and how North Vietnam and the NLF SV refuse to talk with the Americans, obviously hoping that U.S. public opinion will force Nixon to give in. He repeated that they cannot allow Hanoi to drag out the negotiations forever. He began to complain again that we are taking a wait-and-see position, watching the war go on in Vietnam, and that this position of ours cannot but have a direct impact on the state of affairs in other matters bearing on Soviet-U.S. relations.

Since he repeated this last thought of his several times in different variations in the context of his remarks, I asked Nixon if he should be understood to mean that until the Vietnam issue is resolved, no genuine progress can be expected on other issues relating to U.S.-Soviet relations.

After a moment's pause, Nixon stated the following: I must state plainly, and in all candor, that the war in Vietnam is the main obstacle to enhancing and developing Soviet-U.S. relations. I am not saying we cannot or should not seek ways to resolve other issues. That has to be done, but through normal diplomatic channels with their attendant procedures, which will take a great deal of time and effort. Progress here is not out of the question, but it is fundamentally limited by the framework and capabilities of such channels. Until the war is over, those are, in fact, the only channels that can be used (the implication being that it is hard to count on a quick agreement, which is possible only at a high level).

It is another thing, Nixon continued, if the Soviet Union considers it possible to do something in Vietnam and the Vietnam War ends. The United States will then be able to take dramatic steps to improve and develop Soviet-U.S. relations; in fact, they (the United States) will even be able to take far more dramatic steps than the Soviet leaders now can imagine. They will find him, Nixon, the most conciliatory U.S. President of the entire postwar period. He personally will engage in many matters bearing on relations with the USSR instead of delegating them to the diplomatic service. But before then, before the end of the war in Vietnam, genuine progress in the relations between the U.S. and the USSR will be difficult, although the U.S. Government does not refuse to discuss all other issues and will seek mutually acceptable solutions to them.

I said that both sides must be equally interested in developing Soviet-U.S. relations. If the U.S. Government is not interested in this at present, we can just as well wait. We have never kowtowed to anyone, and we never will.

Nixon quickly replied that he personally is very interested in this and is seeking this, but the war in Vietnam is still a serious obstacle to well-developed relations with the Soviet Union, which is precisely what he, as well as the American people, would like to have.

The subsequent conversation did not produce anything particularly new. The only thing noteworthy was the interest shown by Nixon in the fact that recent U.S. losses in Vietnam were the lowest in three years. If that is the manifestation of some sort of policy on Hanoi's part, he remarked, it merits attention. If it is a coincidence and the Vietnamese resume large-scale military operations,

the United States will be forced to take counter-measures. In this connection, Nixon advised me to pay close attention to his upcoming "important speech" on television about the Vietnam issue on November 3. However, he did not go into the details of that speech; he just added that in contrast to the existing practice, the text of the speech would not be handed out in advance.

Towards the end of the conversation Nixon evidently felt he had gotten too worked up, and he clearly tried to avoid any harsh or far-reaching comments. He became amiable again, but the recurring theme underlying all his remarks was still the same: the main thing now for him, Nixon, is to end the war in Vietnam, everything else is secondary.

For my part, I conversed with Nixon in a calm, business-like tone without unnecessary complications, but I took a firm stance when our interests were involved. At the same time, I sought to leave Nixon with the impression that we have considerable influence in Hanoi and can still make full use of this influence if the Americans adopt a more reasonable position regarding a peace settlement in Vietnam.

In general, I have to say that, perhaps for the first time, it was perfectly clear from the conversation with Nixon that events surrounding the Vietnam crisis now wholly preoccupy the U.S. President, and that to all appearances the fate of his predecessor, Lyndon Johnson, is beginning to really worry him. Apparently, this is taking on such an emotional coloration that Nixon is unable to control himself even in a conversation with a foreign ambassador.

The conversation, which took place in Nixon's personal office in the White House, lasted about two hours. The only other person present was Kissinger, who, however, remained silent throughout.

A typical detail: Kissinger asked Nixon in an undertone if the State Department ought to know about our conversation today on a wide range of issues. Nixon turned to me and requested that I not refer to the discussion of all these matters in conversations with Rogers. "I will tell him myself about our discussion, and nobody else should know about it," Nixon added.

Attachment: Unclassified, 5 pages.

A. Dobrynin

35. Memorandum From Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon¹

Washington, October 21, 1969.

SUBJECT: Dobrynin's Message

Taken as a whole, Dobrynin's presentation was a rather standard Soviet indictment, although moderate in tone. Most of the points in the Soviet complaint against us have recently been made by other Soviet officials and in the Soviet press. It may well be that this is how the Soviet leaders in fact see our conduct; and they are partly correct: we have by and large kept aloof and held our ground on such issues as the Middle East (Golda Meir to the contrary notwithstanding) and Europe. But we have probably not done as well as we should in communicating to the Soviets that their behavior in Vietnam stands in the way of better relations. Your presentation may help to get this message across more clearly.

I suspect Dobrynin's basic mission was to test the seriousness of the threat element in our current posture and to throw out enough inducements (SALT, Berlin, direct informal contact with you) to make it politically and psychologically difficult for you to play it rough over Vietnam.

Even though some of Dobrynin's points are valid in the sense that they reflect understanding of our cool attitude, many others are pure Soviet propaganda fare. I doubt that we need to pay attention to complaints about NATO or about our failure to act in accordance with World War II "obligations." By the same token, it is curious that certain of our alleged "sins" were omitted, e.g. our supposed arms buildup as reflected in the Safeguard decision. It may be that having agreed to SALT, the Soviets considered it inexpedient to get into polemics in this field.

Specific Points of Interest

1. *Vietnam.* The main point here is Soviet acknowledgement of our allusions to possible military actions. Their response was relatively mild ("shortsighted . . . extremely dangerous.") But there is no doubt they are concerned and your comments

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1969, Pt. 1. Secret; Nodis.