

grasping its meaning—although they have become quite skilled in conducting a policy of selective tension and selective accommodation.

I believe the current Soviet line of conciliation and interest in negotiations, especially on arms control but also on the Middle East, stems in large measure from their uncertainty about the plans of this Administration. They are clearly concerned that you may elect to undertake new weapons programs which would require new and costly decisions in Moscow; they hope that early negotiations would at least counteract such tendencies in Washington. (I doubt that there is much division on this point in the Kremlin, though there may well be substantial ones over the actual terms of an agreement with us.) In a nutshell, I think that at this moment of uncertainty about our intentions (the Soviets see it as a moment of contention between “reasonable” and “adventurous” forces here), Moscow wants to engage us. Some would argue that regardless of motive, we should not let this moment of Soviet interest pass, lest Moscow swing back to total hostility. My own view is that we should seek to utilize this Soviet interest, stemming as I think it does from anxiety, to induce them to come to grips with the real sources of tension, notably in the Middle East, but also in Vietnam. This approach also would require continued firmness on our part in Berlin.



## Meeting Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

FEBRUARY 21, 1969

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### 8. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, February 21, 1969.

I met one-on-one with Henry Kissinger over lunch at our Embassy on February 21.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 53, p. 399, d. 5, l. 75–86. Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. No American record of the conversation has been found.

He said that President Nixon had carefully studied the views expressed to him by the Soviet Ambassador on instructions from the Soviet Government<sup>2</sup> and in that connection he, Kissinger, was authorized to present some of President Nixon’s views in response.

(He then took out of his pocket an English translation of the text of our views and presented the President’s views, checking from time to time against our text, in the margins of which he had notes for the conversation with me.)

*The Middle East.* Kissinger said that the President regards a bilateral exchange of views with the Soviet Government on the issue of the Middle East as important and he is prepared for such an exchange.

I told Kissinger that, as far as I know, there has not been much progress made as yet in New York with respect to the exchange of views on the substance of a Middle East settlement, and that the U.S. position there, unfortunately, boils down to introducing a brief declaration by the four powers concerning the Middle East. To be frank, such a declaration is of little use, and Ambassador Yost for some reason is obviously unprepared to discuss specific issues relating to the settlement. In that connection, referring to what Kissinger had just said, I asked if the U.S. Government was prepared for bilateral exchanges of views with the Soviet side, apart from the current type of “consultations” in New York.

Kissinger said that, yes, they are prepared for confidential bilateral exchanges of views with us on the substance of the issues, they regard that as important, and in this connection they would like to know the Soviet side’s opinion on where they could best be held—in Moscow, Washington, or New York.

He added that this question of theirs also stems in part from the fact that I, the Soviet Ambassador, had mentioned Moscow as one of the possibilities, in a conversation with Secretary of State Rogers. Therefore, they would like to clarify the opinion of the Soviet Government on this matter.

I said that the main thing is to begin a serious exchange of views on the substance of the settlement, provided that the United States is genuinely prepared to do that. As for the venue, it is unlikely that there will be any difficulties in that regard.

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<sup>2</sup> Printed as an attachment to Document 5.

Repeating that they are prepared to exchange views with us, Kissinger requested that, if possible, we give him an answer immediately upon his return to Washington after his trip with the President to Western Europe, i.e., in a week (apparently Nixon hopes to define his position in more specific terms by that time, after conversations with de Gaulle and Wilson).<sup>3</sup>

In that connection, Kissinger said that, on instructions from Nixon, he would in fact like to make a request—if that is acceptable to the Soviet side—in regard to the mechanism for the exchange of opinions between the two governments: namely, that the most fundamental issues requiring a high degree of confidentiality (“which the State Department cannot always ensure”), as well as issues pertaining to the initiation of an exchange between the Soviet Government and the new Nixon Administration on various political problems (i.e., the initial determination of the basic objectives, venue, and level of the talks), be addressed by the Governments of the United States and the USSR through the confidential Kissinger/Soviet Ambassador channel.

Then, after all those issues have been agreed upon in principle, the problem would be transferred to the official, diplomatic level for a detailed working review—whether through the State Department in Washington, or in Moscow with the USSR MFA, or in some appropriate international body. Then, as difficulties arise, or when the most difficult and delicate points are being discussed, we could again activate the confidential Kissinger/Soviet Ambassador channel from time to time.

This “mechanism for approaching” the review of various complex international problems between the Government of the USSR and the Nixon Administration would, according to Kissinger, best suit the U.S. President, allowing him to personally exercise more direct leadership and observe the exchange of opinions on the aforementioned problems.

*European Problems.* Kissinger stated that President Nixon agrees with the Soviet Government that the foundations of the postwar order in Europe should not be changed, since this might re-

sult in major upheavals and the danger of a need-less confrontation between the great powers.

He, the President, would like to assure the Soviet Government that, for example, he does not have the slightest intention of intervening in the affairs of Eastern Europe. “You will not hear any statements from us about the need to ‘liberate’ Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union, and we, in all likelihood, will stop using even such expressions as ‘building bridges,’ since we understand the actual situation.”

We, continued Kissinger, expect that the Soviet Union, for its part, will also take into account the relations the United States has developed with the countries of Western Europe. We have no intention of fomenting war hysteria in Western Europe against the Soviet Union, nor do we intend to incite hostile feelings among Western Europeans against you.

But we, of course, will pursue the policy of strengthening our ties with Western Europe, not in order to pit one part of Europe against another, but taking into account the historically established relations of various parts of Europe with the United States as well as with the Soviet Union.

Speaking of the need to preserve the status quo in Europe, Kissinger in fact intimated—although he did not say so outright—that they favor maintaining the postwar borders in Europe. At one point he remarked that, on the whole, it was his understanding that we, i.e., the United States and the USSR, have an identical approach to the question of what constitutes the status quo or respect for the foundations of the postwar order in Europe; apparently the only exception, Kissinger said, is differences on the issue of West Berlin.

With respect to West Berlin, Kissinger remarked, we, the United States, understand maintaining the status quo, taking into account certain ties that have developed during the postwar period between West Berlin and the FRG. Our position remains the same: we are not prepared to accept your formula of a “free city of West Berlin,” but neither do we intend to undertake or support anything new in the relationship between West Berlin and the FRG beyond what has actually developed and exists.

I told Kissinger that I was pleased by President Nixon’s agreement with the Soviet Government’s views on the need for our two countries to base their practical policies on respect for the foundations of

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<sup>3</sup> President Nixon left Washington on February 22 and returned on March 2. During his eight-day tour of Western Europe, Nixon met with leaders in the United Kingdom, West Germany, West Berlin, Italy, France, and Vatican City.

the postwar order in Europe, which came about as a result of the Second World War, postwar developments, and agreements between allies.

At the same time, I reaffirmed the Soviet Union's position regarding West Berlin and gave appropriate explanations.

Kissinger again noted that apparently West Berlin is the only issue over which there is an appreciable difference of opinion between us at this time. Kissinger went on to say that the President and he himself were somewhat intrigued by the reference, made in the Soviet Government's views presented to Nixon by the Soviet Ambassador, to the effect that "at one time, specifically in 1959–1963, when the Governments of the USSR and the United States were discussing the range of German issues, we were not very far apart on some important questions."

In that connection, Kissinger requested that, if possible, when he returns from the trip to Western Europe, Moscow provide him on an unofficial basis with a somewhat more detailed explanation of what, specifically, the Soviet side has in mind now, because a rather wide range of issues was being considered during the period we had indicated.

The U.S. side, Kissinger said, is prepared to give careful consideration to these views.

Kissinger indicated, as Nixon had earlier in his conversation with me, that our governments must maintain the utmost composure in order to prevent any confrontation between us at this juncture over *West Berlin*.

According to Kissinger, Nixon, for his part, had asked him to convey again that he does not intend to do or say anything that might look like a provocative act on his part during his trip to West Berlin, or that could be interpreted by us in that way. Kissinger added that Nixon will also be circumspect in his public statements, although he will reaffirm the U.S. position in regard to maintaining the existing, de facto ties that have developed between the FRG and West Berlin over decades.

He then said that he would like to discuss a certain confidential matter that "affects the President personally." According to him [Kissinger], one of the staff members at our Embassy allegedly told a State Department employee that the Soviet side de facto accepts that Nixon is to fly to West Berlin, but "categorically objects and warns the President" not to take West German representatives to West Berlin aboard his personal aircraft.

That warning by a Soviet staff member (Kissinger was in fact unable to tell me exactly who said that, or when, or where) caused great uneasiness in the U.S. Government, Kissinger said, because the security of the U.S. President was involved. He went on to say that in this connection, the military had suggested to the President that, for the sake of protection, his plane be escorted by a strong contingent of U.S. fighters, etc., during his flight to West Berlin. And in general, an unnecessary, albeit unpublicized, hullabaloo about all this has begun among the Americans who are going to accompany Nixon on this trip.

Kissinger then said that this was a thorny issue for another reason as well: although they do not intend to take any large group of government officials from the FRG aboard the aircraft, Chancellor Kiesinger and Brandt will most likely fly to West Berlin with President Nixon, in keeping with the past practice of other U.S. presidents.

I confined myself to remarking to Kissinger that I was unaware of any such statement by any of the Soviet personnel and had not authorized anyone to discuss such things.

(The possibility cannot be ruled out that this whole story was slipped to Nixon by the West Germans to "play on the nerves of" the new President and, if possible, induce him to make some "hard-line" statements during his stay in Bonn and West Berlin.)

Then, touching on Nixon's trip to Western Europe, Kissinger said that its main purpose is to hear what the Allies have to say ("the times are such that the great powers need to show some signs of attention to their smaller allies"). The trip is intended not for making any major decisions (there was no time to prepare them) but for enhancing ties, strengthening the mechanism for consultations, and establishing personal, businesslike relations between Nixon himself and the Western European leaders.

The most "difficult place" will be Paris, Kissinger remarked, although de Gaulle is much more favorably disposed to Nixon than to his predecessor; at least that is the impression one has from the exchange of letters that has already taken place between the two presidents.

*Vietnam.* This issue was raised by Kissinger, who said that the President attaches great importance to settlement of the Vietnam conflict. The present impasse in the Paris negotiations, Kissinger continued, cannot go on forever, and in a few months the President will evidently face the need to make an ap-

appropriate decision regarding the subsequent course of U.S. actions in Vietnam.

I said that a solution to the Vietnam conflict must be sought through peaceful means—through recognition of and respect for the legitimate rights of the Vietnamese people themselves. There is no other way. At the same time, I remarked, the views of those who would like to continue talking in terms of ultimatums and who would like to re-escalate the war in Vietnam in the vain hope of a “military victory” still enjoy currency in Washington. What such views have led to is well known from the experience of the previous administration. I would like to express the hope, I remarked to Kissinger, that the new administration would not pay much heed to the advice of such people, but would seek a genuine peace settlement based on sober consideration of the actual situation in Vietnam.

Kissinger said that they themselves, of course, are by no means presenting any ultimatums, that they favor a peaceful settlement in Vietnam, but the meaning of his words boiled down to the following: progress still must be made at the Paris talks and, for domestic political reasons, Nixon “simply cannot wait a year for Hanoi to decide to take some new step and take a more flexible position.”

In connection with the situation at the Paris talks, I said that in order to make progress, it is necessary that the U.S. side itself take a more flexible, realistic position, and, in particular, that it give up its attempts to divide the talks into two parts: discussion of military issues between the U.S. and the DRV, and, secondly, resolution of political issues by placing them, for all practical purposes, entirely in the hands of Saigon, which does not want to resolve them and is unable to do so, since it is unable to soberly assess the situation and the alignment of forces in South Vietnam.

Kissinger remarked on a personal basis that, to a large extent, the U.S. side’s current position in Paris reflects “unavoidable propaganda elements,” but that it does not define President Nixon’s actual practical policy and that he will be “fairly flexible” on how to conduct the Paris talks.

In that connection, Kissinger then recalled that in the views I had presented on instructions from Moscow during my conversation with Nixon, there was one point where I said that the Soviet side would support the Paris talks in every possible way if they go in the right direction, and, citing

Nixon’s instructions, he said that the President would very much like to maintain close, confidential contacts with the Soviet Government on matters relating to settlement of the Vietnam conflict and that he is seriously seeking a “settlement that is honorable for all sides.”

At this time, Kissinger continued, the President does not have yet a detailed program worked out in regard to all the points of such a settlement, but after returning from Europe he will carefully study the U.S. position at the Paris talks and define his own program more precisely in all its main details.

However, knowing the President’s overall approach to this problem, he, Kissinger, can say right now that the new U.S. Government is prepared to resolve the Vietnam issue on the basis of two main principles, which, if correctly understood, would make it possible to work out all the subsequent concrete details:

—First, the U.S. cannot accept a settlement that would look to Americans and to the rest of the world like an outright military defeat for the United States. The President is in fact prepared to withdraw U.S. troops from South Vietnam, but there must be some sort of linkage here with the withdrawal of DRV troops.

—Second, the Nixon Administration cannot accept a settlement that would be followed immediately (Kissinger stressed the word “immediately”) by a replacement of the South Vietnamese Government and a drastic change in the entire policy of South Vietnam, for that would be regarded in the United States and throughout the world as an outright defeat of the United States or as a backroom deal by Nixon—the United States “handing over” the Saigon Government to the tender mercies of its enemy.

However, the United States would have no objections if, after an agreement is reached, events in Vietnam were to take their own “purely Vietnamese” course and develop “in keeping with the historical traditions and experience of the Vietnamese people.”

In general, one could conclude from Kissinger’s remarks that Nixon is primarily concerned about his own political reputation and how the settlement in Vietnam might affect his political future. In all likelihood, that will be the main yardstick he will use in his approach to matters of war and peace in Vietnam.

*China.* Touching upon the recent failed attempt at talks between the United States and the People’s Republic of China in Warsaw, Kissinger said that

they believe the refusal of the Chinese to hold talks, on the pretext that the U.S. had been involved in the case of a Chinese diplomat who had defected, is actually due to the fact that Mao and his colleagues are not prepared at the present time—for one reason or another—to enter into a dialogue with the Nixon Administration. Evidently we shall have to wait.

For our part, Kissinger continued, we are prepared to conduct an exchange of views with Peking for the purpose of promoting U.S.-Chinese relations at least to some extent, and in this regard the new U.S. Government is more objective and unbiased in its approach than were previous administrations. On the question of Taiwan, however, we cannot accommodate the position on which the PRC has insisted all these years. As for the rest, the United States is “keeping the doors open.”

On his own initiative, Kissinger emphasized that the Nixon Administration’s China policy “is not based on any unfriendly designs” against the Soviet Union but is dictated by a “natural desire” to improve its relations with the PRC as a nation that plays a major role in Asia, where the United States has considerable interests.

However, a comment that Kissinger made during the conversation is worth noting: namely, that in his personal opinion, “from the purely geopolitical viewpoint” the USSR, as China’s next-door neighbor, has more reason to fear her than does the United States, and that 750 million Chinese, who “need space,” may be more easily enticed by the prospects of expansion toward the Soviet Far East.

Kissinger was told in response that such “geopolitical theories” had currency back before the Second World War and that it is common knowledge now what they had in fact led to. It would only be sensible for the new U.S. Administration to build its policy (including its Asia policy) on a more realistic basis.

Kissinger immediately replied that he would ask that his remark be regarded as the “remark of a professor, not of an assistant to the President,” and that he had basically not dealt at all with Chinese matters yet.

*The Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons.* Kissinger said that the U.S. Government agrees to continue consultations with the Soviet side to develop coordinated measures to ensure that the treaty is signed by the broadest pos-

sible number of states and that it enters into force as soon as possible.

Concerning individual countries, he said that cooperation in this area would be required primarily with regard to India. It would evidently be necessary to return to this issue somewhat later.

Kissinger then said that Nixon firmly intends to tell Israel in no uncertain terms that Tel Aviv must sign the treaty and that this is in its own interests, otherwise the Arabs will also refuse to comply with the provisions of the treaty, and all this will further complicate a Middle East settlement.

But the main question now, as we understand it, is the attitude of the FRG toward the treaty, Kissinger emphasized. During his trip, the President intends to use, in Bonn, all his influence to prevail upon the FRG Government to sign the treaty.

However, the President’s message, Kissinger continued, would have greater success if the Soviet Government were to consider it possible to provide, in the near future, an explanation that would eliminate in some way the contentious issue of the possibility of applying to the FRG the provisions stipulated in articles 53 and 107 of the UN Charter.

Kissinger was told in response (citing our arguments on the substance of the matter) that this is an artificial framing of the question, deliberately concocted by those in Bonn who do not want to sign the treaty. The Soviet Foreign Minister had already spoken about this matter with Brandt in New York during the last session of the UN General Assembly. In addition, the Soviet Ambassador in Bonn, on instructions from the Soviet Government, had once more made an exhaustive statement as recently as February 6, which Brandt received favorably.

Kissinger remarked half-jokingly that the Germans are telling them something totally different, but added at once that Nixon himself does not intend to raise the issue of those UN Charter articles in Bonn on his own initiative.

I said that it is time for Washington to take a sufficiently clear and firm position toward Bonn on the issue of the treaty.

*Curbing the Strategic Arms Race.* During the conversation I called Kissinger’s attention to the recently observed inconsistency in the statements of U.S. Government officials (Rogers and Laird)

with respect to the time frame for beginning talks between the USSR and the United States on limiting the strategic arms race. I asked what President Nixon's own position is on this issue.

Kissinger replied that, frankly speaking, there are certain disagreements within the government regarding that issue at the present time. Everyone, from the President on down, believes in principle that such talks with the Soviet Union are necessary. There are no arguments on that score. The arguments revolve around the connection between the beginning of the talks and the deployment of the U.S. Sentinel ABM system.

Rogers and certain others, for purely political reasons, believe that it is necessary to begin the talks without complicating them by hastily making far-reaching decisions on relevant military matters, which, moreover, need to be studied thoroughly from the standpoint of their practical feasibility.

Laird and the military think that a decision on practical deployment of a limited Sentinel system should not be made contingent upon the talks, the outcome of which is still far from clear and which will inevitably last a long time.

President Nixon himself, according to Kissinger, has not yet taken a definite position in this whole controversy. Apparently his decision will be made in March or April. In principle, however—and he, Kissinger, can repeat this with full responsibility—Nixon favors strategic arms talks with the Soviet Union and will pursue precisely that goal.

It seems to Kissinger that official Soviet-U.S. talks at the level of specially designated representatives will begin within 5–6 months, “speaking realistically and given the situation.” Before that time they hope there will be a basically private exchange of views between the sides on issues related to beginning such talks.

*Bilateral Soviet-U.S. Relations.* Kissinger said that the President had instructed him to convey, in connection with the views expressed to him by the Soviet Ambassador on instructions from Moscow, that he is prepared to look specifically at the opportunities that are presently available for further development of bilateral relations, including in the areas mentioned by the Soviet side.

The President has now instructed that appropriate U.S. proposals be prepared. Afterwards, this entire matter can be examined on a more practical plane. They would like to make one additional

request in this regard. Cooperation in certain areas of science, technology, or medicine could be carried out not only on a bilateral, but also on a multilateral basis with the participation of other countries, so as to avoid accusations that the two great powers want to deal only with each other and do not wish to share with others their successes in science, technology, economics, and other areas.

During the conversation, Kissinger stated, on his own initiative, that President Nixon would like to reiterate that in his foreign policy plans he is proceeding on the assumption that a meeting with the Soviet leadership is useful and appropriate, although he thinks some preparatory work will be needed so that such a meeting will be sufficiently successful and live up to the hopes that will undoubtedly be placed in it.

Since the subject of a summit meeting in the above-mentioned form had already been raised with me by President Nixon himself, and then by Kissinger in our previous meetings, I, in order not to emphasize any special interest of ours in this matter, limited myself to a remark that the question of such a meeting will, naturally, have to be resolved by the two sides on the basis of the specific situation.

Kissinger proposed that I meet with him over lunch in his office at the White House on March 3, immediately upon his return from the trip with Nixon to Western Europe, for a further exchange of views.

I agreed.<sup>4</sup>

A. Dobrynin

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<sup>4</sup> During a telephone call at 2:45 p.m. on February 22, Kissinger told Dobrynin that Nixon thought “HAK and Dobrynin had a good conversation yesterday.” Dobrynin dictated the text of a Soviet note, which suggested that, if the United States asked, West Germany would “gladly” reverse its decision to hold the Bundesversammlung in West Berlin. Although he promised to relay the note to the President, Kissinger thought that there was “not a great deal” that the United States could do “at this time.” Kissinger also warned Dobrynin that “if the situation in Vietnam should turn into a general offensive or attack on major population centers, we would have to respond very strongly. We would consider it very unfortunate.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 1, Chronological File; and AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 53, p. 399, d. 5, l. 87–89)