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Meeting Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

FEBRUARY 3, 1972

257. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)¹

Washington, February 4, 1972.

Kissinger invited me to the White House regarding the following matter.

Two days ago Secretary of State Rogers suggested I meet with him on Friday² to review the current state of affairs in Soviet-U.S. relations. I agreed to such a meeting.

In this connection, Kissinger told me today the Secretary of State had notified the President that he intends to meet with the Soviet Ambassador for the above-mentioned discussion.

In this connection, Kissinger continued, he would like, with the President's approval, to speak with me on a very sensitive issue.

He would like to bring me up to date, on a strictly confidential basis, about what specifically the Secretary of State knows concerning the state of Soviet-U.S. relations, which have been discussed with me at the White House level (by the President and Kissinger), since the Secretary of State does not know everything.

In this connection, he requests that I, the Soviet Ambassador, keep in mind during the upcoming conversation with the Secretary of State the special circumstances mentioned above and not touch on issues he knows nothing about. The current state of affairs in this regard, Kissinger said, is the following:

The President passed on to Rogers for his information the text of L.I. Brezhnev's latest letter

¹ Source: AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 56, p. 418, d. 5, l. 39–42. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger met Dobrynin in the Map Room on February 3 from 12:05 to 12:22 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) No American record of the conversation has been found.

² February 4. A memorandum of the conversation is in National Archives, RG 59, Central Files, 1970–73, POL US–USSR.

to Nixon,³ which I had brought with me after my recent return from Moscow.

This text, however, had first been shortened somewhat, Kissinger added.

1. Kissinger then showed me the text the White House had passed on to Rogers.⁴ All reference to confidential contacts or confidential proposals by Nixon (on the issue of strategic arms in particular) had been removed from the original text of the letter. The rest of the text was unchanged.

2. Kissinger asked me not to discuss the agenda of the upcoming summit with Rogers in detail or, more specifically, to avoid having this agenda formally recorded in any way through State Department channels.

Of course, Kissinger said, the White House assumes the matter of the President's upcoming trip to Moscow will inevitably figure in one way or another in the conversation between the Secretary of State and the Soviet Ambassador. There can be no objections to this; they only ask that everything that was said above be kept in mind.

3. Kissinger cautioned that Rogers has no knowledge of the confidential conversations on the Middle East, beginning with A.A. Gromyko's conversation with Nixon in September of last year and up to and including my conversation with him, Kissinger, on the same subject at the end of last week.

4. Concerning the strategic arms limitation talks in Vienna, Kissinger said he had informed Rogers that in one of the latest conversations with me, the issue arose of three possible versions of an agreement on offensive types of strategic weapons. However, Kissinger continued, the Secretary of State was told that this issue had been discussed with the Soviet Ambassador only as a theoretical possibility, "thinking out loud," and not as an official U.S. proposal. Kissinger particularly stressed that Rogers knows nothing about the strictly confidential proposal that President Nixon made some time ago to the Soviet leaders, namely, to limit the number of modern missile-carrying nuclear submarines to the same number for both sides—41.

5. As for the Vietnam issue, Kissinger said, Rogers is generally aware of the President's

³ Document 249.

⁴ A copy of the sanitized letter is in National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 9 [Pt. 2].

actions on this issue (he also knew about Kissinger's trips to Paris, although not about all of them right away). At the same time, Rogers was not told that Nixon, prior to his last televised address on Vietnam, had notified us in advance of its contents and asked us to convey his proposal to the Vietnamese in Hanoi.

6. The White House has no objections, Kissinger said, to discussing with Rogers issues pertaining to Soviet-U.S. bilateral relations that were mentioned in the letter of the General Secretary of the CC CPSU (cooperation in science and technology and cooperation in the field of health). Moreover, the State Department has now been assigned to handle these issues in the context of preparing for the President's trip to Moscow.

In this connection, Kissinger added that overseeing this discussion, and possibly influencing other U.S. agencies—in the sense of prodding them to move forward—continues to be the prerogative of the White House. From time to time he, Kissinger, will privately discuss with me the movement of these issues through the State Department and take necessary measures as the situation dictates.

Kissinger concluded by repeating in strict confidence that he asks that I keep all these things in mind during my upcoming conversation with Rogers.

Kissinger's request on the eve of my discussion with the Secretary of State is one more typical illustration of the unusual way important foreign policy matters are handled under the Nixon administration.

In fact, it is a unique situation when the Special Assistant to the President secretly informs a foreign ambassador about what the Secretary of State knows and does not know concerning relations between two states at the level of the President of the U.S. and leaders of the other state—the Soviet Union.

All of this once more goes to show that discussion of and decision-making on the main, most sensitive issues are now being carried out primarily by two individuals: Nixon and Kissinger. On occasion Attorney General Mitchell is brought in on this (the President has sought his advice on various issues for a long time), and only then comes Secretary of State Rogers. The latter has long had good, even friendly personal relations with Nixon, but his role in formulating U.S. foreign policy cannot even be compared with the enormous influence

on the President in these matters wielded by his Special Assistant for foreign policy issues.

A. Dobrynin

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Meeting Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

FEBRUARY 7, 1972

258. Letter From General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon¹

Moscow, February 5, 1972.

Dear Mr. President,

I received your letter of January 25.² I also went through the text of your speech of the same date, in which the U.S. proposals on Vietnam, earlier transmitted to the DRV Government in a confidential manner, were made public.

You are undoubtedly aware of the reaction of the Vietnamese side to those proposals. The Vietnamese side notes that the proposals leave unsolved, as before, the question of complete withdrawal without conditions of U.S. troops from Vietnam, since this question is tied together with a number of terms of political and military nature. It is also emphasized that the U.S. proposals avoid the question of establishing in South Vietnam a broad government of national accord which would organize free and democratic elections. The idea of holding elections which would in fact be prepared by the hands of the present Saigon administration and be held in the conditions when U.S. troops still remained in South Vietnam, is viewed by the Vietnamese, as you know, as incompatible with the genuinely expressed free will of the people.

I will tell you frankly, Mr. President: such reaction of the Vietnamese to the U.S. proposals is

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 9 [Pt. 2]. No classification marking. A copy of the original letter in Russian is in AP RF, f. 80, op. 1, d. 815. According to a handwritten note, Dobrynin gave Kissinger the English translation on February 7.

² Document 252.