

Washington has not been informed of the matter at this stage, but in the future—if the situation develops—he will be notified.

The U.S. Ambassador concluded his telegram by expressing his own view that the Polish Minister's comments clearly sounded like an invitation to President Nixon to visit Warsaw and that the Polish Government expects a clear reply from Washington in this regard. In the U.S. Ambassador's opinion, the Polish Government presumably contacted Moscow before making the proposal, especially considering the fact that it coincides with Nixon's trip to Moscow.

Kissinger also showed me the encrypted telegram Washington had sent the U.S. Ambassador in Warsaw in reply. Signed by Deputy Secretary of State Irwin, it said that the Ambassador's telegram had attracted President Nixon's personal attention and its substance was now being actively discussed. At the same time, the response telegram indicates that the Ambassador should expect further instructions very soon.

In our view, for the White House the main factors in this whole matter are unquestionably Nixon's election considerations.

However, this trip is apparently also useful to the Polish comrades in terms of bolstering their authority in the international arena, "reinforcing" their treaty with the FRG and the related de facto acceptance by the Americans of Poland's western borders.

Another by-product of such a trip could be the loss by the Romanians of their "special" status, which they seek to use to set themselves apart from the other socialist countries, namely, the fact that they are the only ones the U.S. President has visited.

A. Dobrynin

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Meeting Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

APRIL 3, 1972

279. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)¹

Washington, April 3, 1972.

At Kissinger's urgent invitation, I went to see him at the White House on the evening of April 3.²

1. Citing the President's instructions, Kissinger asked me to convey the following to the Soviet leaders in connection with the events of the past few days in Vietnam.

As you know, he said, a few days ago the DRV launched a large-scale military offensive across the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

The North Vietnamese have now invaded South Vietnamese territory and in a number of places have penetrated as far as 10–15 miles south of the DMZ. The offensive across the DMZ is massive. According to U.S. intelligence, yesterday alone more than 50 North Vietnamese tanks crossed the zone.

In short, Kissinger said, we are talking about a large-scale armed invasion of South Vietnam. That is the only way to characterize the current situation.

Hanoi's actions, Kissinger continued, flagrantly violate the 1968 agreement that was the basis for halting large-scale U.S. bombing of DRV territory and starting the talks in Paris. Moreover, this agreement specifically stipulated that DRV troops would not cross the demilitarized zone.

¹ Source: AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 56, p. 418, d. 5, l. 153–159. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger met Dobrynin in the Map Room on April 3 from 5:37 to 6:15 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) No American record of the conversation has been found.

² Dobrynin called Kissinger at 12:15 p.m. on April 3 to discuss lodging arrangements for the summit. When Kissinger asked about the "other thing" he mentioned on March 30—presumably referring to a Soviet proposal on SALT—Dobrynin replied: "This I receive yesterday. I don't want to call you because it was a Sunday. I will call you by tomorrow evening." "I wanted to see you on another matter," Kissinger interjected. "Could you come over at 5:30?" Dobrynin agreed to meet at the "usual place." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 13, Chronological File)

Kissinger went on to say that the North Vietnamese actions are all the more provocative, because just the day before it became known that this North Vietnamese offensive had begun, the U.S. side had secretly informed DRV representatives of its willingness to resume talks in Paris on April 11 and had reaffirmed that he, Kissinger, was prepared to meet secretly with the Vietnamese in Paris on April 24.

The DRV responded by agreeing to all this, and then it started the offensive.

In general, Kissinger continued, the White House views these actions by Hanoi not only as an attempt to inflict a military defeat on Saigon's troops in that area, but above all as an attempt to put President Nixon personally in a difficult position, especially during the U.S. election campaign.

Hanoi could have achieved almost all of its objectives if it had agreed to wait a little. This was fairly clearly intimated directly to Hanoi and also through some of its allies. But that is not enough for the DRV leadership; it wants to publicly humiliate the U.S. and to humiliate President Nixon. The White House will not allow that.

Nor is it out of the question, he added, that these North Vietnamese actions are also directed against the President's trip to Moscow. Of course, they, the Americans, do not have precise information in this regard, but from an objective standpoint, Hanoi's actions are unquestionably aimed at complicating the situation on the eve of the Soviet-U.S. summit. That is the only possible conclusion.

Kissinger went on to say that considering the complicated military situation that is developing in the area of the DMZ, and the aforementioned actions by the DRV Government, which are clearly politically motivated against the U.S. President, the U.S. side will very shortly be forced to take countermeasures in connection with the offensive by DRV forces.

The President realizes that North Vietnam is an ally of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the President is also well aware that Moscow did not perform any planning or encourage Hanoi at this particular time to carry out the current offensive by North Vietnamese troops against South Vietnam; rather it is an independent action by the DRV Government itself, which is pursuing its own military and political objectives in this regard.

In connection with all of the above, Kissinger stated, President Nixon expresses the hope that the

military response he is forced to undertake will not be viewed in Moscow as being deliberately directed against the interests of the Soviet Union and that all this will not negatively impact Soviet-U.S. relations in other fields and in other parts of the world, such as Europe, where a certain amount of progress in Soviet-U.S. relations is being made.

Kissinger concluded that the President leaves entirely to the discretion of the Soviet Government which views or recommendations it could or would convey to Hanoi in the present situation. The President recognizes that the USSR and the DRV are allies, so of course he cannot make any direct requests to Moscow in this regard.

I responded to all this by telling Kissinger that the White House is undoubtedly well aware of our fundamental assessment of the overall U.S. policy in Indochina; it remains unchanged.

Nor has there been any change in our assessment of the situation in South Vietnam itself, where the Saigon puppet regime exists only thanks to direct U.S. backing. The events of the past few days have eloquently confirmed that yet again. I also stressed that the only realistic solution to the Vietnam issue is the complete, unconditional withdrawal of U.S. troops from Indochina and an end to all U.S. interference in the affairs of the nations of that region.

I also particularly directed Kissinger's attention to the final paragraph of L.I. Brezhnev's recent letter to President Nixon³ (regarding the fact that the bombing of the DRV can only complicate the situation and, consequently, the atmosphere leading up to and during the Soviet-U.S. talks in Moscow). I stressed that in the present situation the President should bear in mind, above all, this thought from the General Secretary of the CC CPSU.

Kissinger said the President is well aware of this. That is precisely the reason for his confidential message to the Soviet leadership today.

He went on to refer to my previous conversation with him⁴ and said (this time more directly) that after receiving L.I. Brezhnev's letter and appropriately weighing the General Secretary's words, President Nixon had been prepared to scale back all bombing of the DRV so that there would be no U.S. raids against North Vietnamese

³ Document 276.

⁴ March 30.

territory at all during the meeting in Moscow, since he, the President, realizes the importance of this factor for the Soviet Union.

However, Kissinger continued, the new offensive by DRV forces against South Vietnam compels the United States to proceed differently now, at least at this stage.

But even now the President, bearing in mind L.I. Brezhnev's words, has ordered that during the initial stage U.S. retaliatory actions should be fairly limited in scope. In the longer term, though, there can be no guarantees, because everything will specifically depend on how things develop militarily.

Kissinger went on to say that the President very much regrets that now, during preparations for the Moscow meeting, when both sides have already invested so much effort in improving Soviet-U.S. relations, once again events in another context and in another part of the world are fatalistically interfering in the important process that has begun. Apparently we will have to go through yet another crisis that neither of us precipitated. But we would very much like to hope that this crisis will not seriously affect the incipient process of visible improvement in Soviet-U.S. relations and will not get in the way of a constructive outcome to the meeting in Moscow.

I again stated our fundamental view.

During the discussion of the situation in Vietnam, Kissinger also made the following comments of interest:

—According to the U.S. command's assessment, the current offensive by DRV forces across the demilitarized zone is only one important element of a general, large-scale North Vietnamese offensive. The second important element will be a major offensive by DRV troops in the area of the Central Plateau; according to U.S. information, it is precisely the combination of these two directions of attack that comprise the strategic concept of the current DRV offensive.

At this stage the attacking Vietnamese troops "are 90–95% equipped with Soviet-made weapons."

—In the view of the U.S. military, the North Vietnamese command is now "taking a gamble" by throwing virtually all of its regular troops into the offensive. According to U.S. information, of the regular combat units—not counting reserve units and the people's militia—only one regiment is now left in North Vietnam; all the remaining units have been sent to carry out the offensive in South Viet-

nam. "If a fairly large assault force were to land in North Vietnam right now," Kissinger said, "it could reach Hanoi without major difficulties."

—If the DRV's present capabilities for carrying out major offensive combat operations are evaluated based on the availability of ammunition and the number of troops that are attacking and massed for that purpose, then according to U.S. assessments, the DRV can carry on offensive operations at the current intensity for about a month or a month-and-a-half.

But if the North Vietnamese command deems that more protracted (but in that case less intensive) military actions are politically advisable, then such offensive operations could drag on as long as several months.

—So far the Americans have no information indicating that in launching the current offensive the DRV was influenced by the Chinese, although, as we know, China has recently become more vociferous in its public statements regarding the war in Indochina.

2. During the conversation, when Kissinger expressed the hope that the events in Vietnam would not affect other issues, he also briefly touched on Bahr's recent visit to Washington.

According to him, both Strauss and Barzel have already expressed to the White House their displeasure over the fact that Bahr had been received, and have asked that their representatives also be received at the White House in order to "balance out the impression in the FRG." However, according to Kissinger, President Nixon does not intend to grant this request.

3. Citing instructions, I informed Kissinger that in connection with President Nixon's message to us about the possibility of his visiting Poland after the visit to the Soviet Union, Moscow proceeds from the premise that this is an issue that should be decided by the President and the Polish leaders. Naturally, we appreciate the fact that the President consulted the Soviet leaders about this matter.

Kissinger said he is sure the President will be pleased with the Soviet leadership's response.

4. During the meeting with Kissinger I again raised the issue of dropping the criminal case in the U.S. against Markelov, a Soviet employee of the UN Secretariat, and permitting him to depart for the USSR.

I stressed the idea that delaying closure of this whole matter is not in the interests of either side.

The decision by the U.S. court to begin its “proceedings” in early May, i.e. two weeks before the prominent meeting in Moscow, once again underscores the need for the White House to take appropriate measures. I concluded by expressing the hope that Kissinger would personally intervene in this matter and that, as in the past, a mutually acceptable solution that is satisfactory to both sides would be found. In this context I also alluded in the appropriate manner to the case of the American, Kappel, who was arrested in the GDR.

Kissinger said he remembered our previous conversations about Markelov. He also understood the undesirability of any legal proceedings right before the President’s visit to Moscow. However, he, Kissinger, has a personal difficulty in that FBI Director Hoover vigorously opposes dropping Markelov’s court case.

In response I expressed confidence that the White House, and not Hoover, still has the last word.

Kissinger thought for a moment and then promised that he would again report this matter to President Nixon personally. He will need another two or three weeks to properly prepare the report.

He added that he does not know what the President’s final decision will be, but if it is favorable, then they “will not link it in any way” to the case of the American, Kappel, because these two matters are “completely different,” although that does not mean they are not interested in Kappel’s fate.

In reply I pointed out to him that there is good reason for him to expect that if the President’s decision is favorable, then the Soviet side can, at its own initiative, provide assistance in obtaining Kappel’s release.

Kissinger nodded to indicate he understood and added that he would be prepared to come back to an additional discussion of this whole subject with me after the timeframe he had mentioned above.⁵

A. Dobrynin

⁵ When Nixon called at 6:20 p.m., Kissinger reported: “I told him [Dobrynin] what you said and he said, ‘Isn’t it amazing what a little country can do to wreck well-laid plans.’ I said, ‘The President wants you to know we will under no circumstances accept a defeat there and we will do what is necessary not to.’ He said, ‘What do you want us to do?’ I said, ‘First to show restraint and secondly you have to ask yourselves whether this isn’t the time to bring an end to the war. There is, after all, when I look around the world I see no areas where we should be in conflict.’ He said he did not either—not even in Vietnam. Then I brought up the Berlin thing. I said, ‘Look, here we are. We get the ratification thing coming up in Germany, the President has been asked to write to Brandt, but he can’t under these circumstances and

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Meeting Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

APRIL 6, 1972

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

Washington, April 6, 1972, 8:16–9:27 a.m.

I met with Dobrynin for breakfast in General Scowcroft’s office for a quick roundup on where we stood prior to my departure for Key Biscayne with the President.²

Vietnam

I opened the meeting by pointing out to Dobrynin the inadmissibility of what was going on in Vietnam. I recalled a conversation in January³ in which I had indicated that we might have to take action to bring the war to a decisive conclusion. At that time Dobrynin had said that he could understand our taking action if there was an offensive, but that if the war just wound down he saw no reason why we should precipitate a show-down. I had been impressed with that argument, and as he knew we had shown enormous restraint.

I said now we were confronted with a situation in which there was an all-out attack on South

he wants you to know if we should lose in Vietnam that is the last concession we will make this year.’ He said, ‘You aren’t going to lose. In our assessment you can’t lose.’” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 13, Chronological File) During a telephone conversation at 7:10, Nixon and Kissinger discussed their strategy: “K: I think the Russians will do something. They are not going to risk everything. P: They will [not] risk Summit, Berlin, German treaty—correct. K: That’s right. I told Dobrynin. We can’t consider sending a message to Brandt under these circumstances. P: I won’t. K: I don’t think you should send it anyway—so any excuse.” (Ibid.)

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The breakfast meeting was held in the Military Aide’s (Scowcroft) Office at the White House.

² Dobrynin called Kissinger at 11:10 a.m. on April 5 to arrange for the delivery of a new Soviet proposal on ABMs. The two men agreed to discuss it over breakfast the next morning. (Ibid., Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 13, Chronological File) The Soviet Embassy delivered the English text of the proposal to the White House on April 5 (printed in Document 281); Semenov tabled it in Helsinki the next day.

³ January 21.