

I will have gone over your Vietnam speech<sup>3</sup> with him in some detail, so I suggest that you keep your meeting brief and tough, avoiding any discussion of the particulars of the speech. Nor do I think you should give him any opportunity for rebuttal remarks. If you fail to reply to his arguments, he will take it as acquiescence; if you do reply, you will be drawn into unnecessary disputation. I would *not* thank him for anything the Soviet Union did in Vietnam. Their contribution is too nebulous.

The following are suggested talking points:

—As you know, I will make a Vietnam speech tonight. The speech has been painstakingly prepared, and is the product of many months of intensive personal study and thought.

—The proposals I will make tonight set forth what I consider to be the general principles of a settlement that both sides can accept.

—If we can end this war, it will encourage friendly cooperation between our two countries. I am willing to move forward on a broad front including talks at the highest levels and expansion of trade. But an end of the war in Vietnam is the key.

—If we cannot end this war, we will continue to maintain as close relations with the Soviet Union as possible, but clearly the ending of the Vietnamese war will be our overriding concern.

—As Henry told you earlier, a failure to achieve a reasonable Vietnam settlement can only mean that we will have to take whatever steps are necessary to bring it to a successful conclusion. We are determined to end this war one way or another.

—We both know how this would affect relations between our two countries.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For the text of the speech, see *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1969*, pp. 369–375.

<sup>4</sup> During a telephone conversation with Kissinger at 9:35 a.m. on May 14, Nixon decided to receive Dobrynin in the Lincoln Sitting Room at 11:30 a.m. The two men then discussed the upcoming meeting: “K said he would send talking paper right up. K said his suggestion would be that Pres be very brief and not get drawn into any discussion. K said Pres should just tell him he is terribly serious and one way or the other will end the war and he is doing personally so there will be no misunderstanding. Pres thought Lincoln Room would impress Dobrynin since no one usually gets in there. Pres said he would put in one pleasantry about party on 10th anniversary of his trip to Moscow and that they are looking forward to having Amb and Mrs. Dobrynin present.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 1, Chronological File)

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

Washington, May 14, 1969.

At Kissinger’s invitation, I visited him in his office at the White House on the morning of May 14.

Kissinger said that, as I was aware, President Nixon was to deliver a televised address to the nation on Vietnam at 10 p.m. tonight. Nixon had expressed the wish that the text of his speech be provided to the Soviet Ambassador in advance so that it could then be transmitted to Moscow for the Soviet Government.

Noting that the speech was being printed even as we spoke and would be ready in a few minutes, Kissinger began commenting on the main substance of the speech and the thoughts that had guided the President in preparing it. Kissinger’s comments were interrupted by a call from Nixon, who suggested that Kissinger bring me in to see him, the President.

*First.* President Nixon received me upstairs in a small office in his apartment, rather than in his regular, official office. Nixon explained that he “locks himself in this small room when he needs to think and work in private, without interference.” He was holding pages from his speech, which he was correcting while sitting by the burning fireplace.

Nixon began the conversation by remarking that he greatly appreciates the confidential contacts which have been established with the Soviet leadership through the private Soviet Ambassador/Kissinger channel, and that he intends to continue utilizing this “channel, which is operating successfully and has proven its effectiveness,” to exchange views with the Soviet Government on issues requiring particular secrecy and confidentiality.

Nixon emphasized again, as he had during our first meeting, the significance he attaches to Soviet-U.S. relations, which, he is convinced, are of decisive importance for the entire international situation, for the fate of war and peace. Despite different approaches to various problems, he, the President, is confident that the two governments are united in their desire to search for solutions to complex and contentious issues not through confrontation but through negotiation, by seeking

<sup>1</sup> Source: AVPRF, f. 0129, op. 53, p. 399, d. 6, l. 44–50. Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. No American record of Dobrynin’s conversation with either Kissinger or Nixon has been found.

peaceful settlement of these issues. That was the main thing.

Nixon went on to say that he hopes to begin strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union soon. The fact that there had been some delay in beginning the talks, he added, was not due to an unwillingness to hold such talks, but to a desire to thoroughly prepare for them, taking into account the range of issues involved, which is important for the security of both countries.

He, the President, intends to continue the bilateral exchange of views with the Soviet Government on Middle East issues, with a view to searching for ways to reach a settlement, even though, he had to admit, this was very difficult, considering the profound differences between the parties in the region that have a direct interest in this.

At present he is also thinking about issues related to expanding trade between the United States and the Soviet Union. In all likelihood, he, the President, will send a message to Congress on this matter in the not too distant future.

The President also asked to convey to Moscow his thanks not only for the Soviet Union's assistance in searching for the crew of the U.S. aircraft that was shot down by DPRK fighter planes,<sup>2</sup> but also for the fact that the Soviet Union had exhibited certain public restraint, because this, in turn, had helped him, the President, to withstand pressure from the "hotheads," who are, regrettably, fairly numerous in the U.S. The relevant, confidential communication from the Government of the USSR regarding the U.S. fleet had met with understanding on his part, and he had given the order to recall the fleet.

Nixon then turned to the issue of Vietnam. After saying that he understands the position of the Soviet Union as the main socialist power providing assistance to the DRV and that he does not intend to ask for anything that would be incompatible with that status, Nixon emphasized that, at the same time, he is aware of the Soviet Government's constructive role, which is aimed at peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict.

In this connection, he had decided, even before today's address to the nation on Vietnam—and he himself regards this as a very important speech—to personally provide advance comments on it to the

Soviet Ambassador for transmission to the Soviet Government. You, he added, are the only ambassador who is being given the text of the speech in advance, not to mention the fact that I will not be receiving any other ambassadors in connection with this (towards evening the State Department informed all the embassies, including ours, that Embassy representatives could get copies of Nixon's speech in the State Department reception area at 9 p.m.—i.e., an hour before the speech).

Returning to his upcoming speech, Nixon asked me to convey the following to the Soviet Government:

This speech is a sincere attempt by him, the President, to get out of the current impasse with regard to a Vietnam peace settlement. This is not propaganda, it is not a clever trick, nor is it a political or military trap. He, Nixon, has personally been examining all the details of this complex issue (Vietnam) for a long time. Today's speech represents a fairly detailed program that, given good will on both sides, can be used to find an equitable political solution.

He went on to say that the speech sets forth some basic principles that guide the U.S. in its approach to the Vietnam problem. At the same time, the U.S. Government is prepared to be flexible regarding ways and methods of attaining the ultimate objectives. It is prepared, if the DRV and NLF insist, to participate in four-party meetings that would consider not only military issues (the withdrawal of troops, the demilitarized zone, etc.), but also political issues related to a settlement, even though he himself remains convinced that it would be best if such issues were discussed by the South Vietnamese themselves—the NLF and Saigon.

He, Nixon, was prepared to discuss any "four," "five" or "ten" points from Hanoi<sup>3</sup> and the NLF if the latter were, in turn, prepared to also discuss the U.S. proposals, rather than just dismissing them out of hand with corresponding "abusive epithets." Lodge will have appropriate instructions for the Paris negotiations.

Nixon stated further that they are prepared to undertake not to seek military bases for them-

<sup>2</sup> See Document 20.

<sup>3</sup> The delegation of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam to the Paris Peace Talks presented a Ten-Point Peace Program on May 8. For the text, see *Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1968–1969*, pp. 249–252.

selves in South Vietnam and not to have any future military ties with the South Vietnamese government that will ultimately be formed; the U.S. accepts South Vietnam's neutrality "if that is what the South Vietnamese themselves want"; they (the Americans) are also prepared to accept any government in South Vietnam that might be established there "by the will of the South Vietnamese themselves."

Nixon went on to say that his speech today will evoke a certain amount of dissatisfaction among some influential circles in the U.S. who feel it is necessary to take a harder line in Vietnam, seeing this as a guarantee of ultimate success. He is seeking mutually acceptable ways to reach a peace settlement, even though he is well aware that such a process inevitably involves considerable difficulties and delays.

At the same time, he would like Hanoi to know that their approach is quite clear to Washington and that it will not bring them success. Nixon is firmly convinced that the strategy and tactics of the North Vietnamese leaders now basically come down to the following: not engaging in any serious negotiations in Paris, anticipating that time will work against him, i.e. against Nixon, and that he will ultimately have to give in, mainly owing to pressure from public opinion in his own country. These calculations are clearly based on a lack of understanding of the true state of affairs in the U.S. and the way most Americans view the world, although outwardly the above line of reasoning may seem most correct to Hanoi. The U.S. President has the ability to convince the country of the need for "other measures and support for those measures" if the nation sees that all the government's attempts to reach an honorable settlement are being blocked by the other side, which is in fact seeking "total capitulation by the U.S." "Neither the President nor the people of the U.S. will accept" that. Nor can they wait forever until the other side finally decides to begin serious negotiations. The U.S. is a great power that cannot allow itself to be tied down in Vietnam indefinitely by what amounts to a boycott of serious settlement talks. The Hanoi leadership must be clear on that.

That is why, Nixon continued, the U.S. Government, and he personally, would hope that both Hanoi and the NLF will pay close attention to what will be said today and subsequently proposed for discussion in Paris. They (the U.S.) are prepared to

wait "a reasonable amount of time" to determine the reaction of the DRV and NLF leadership "to the current message of the U.S. Government, which is genuinely important and serious and which could become a turning point in the further development of events."

After listening to the President, I reminded him of our principled position on the Vietnam issue. I noted further the positive significance of the recent "10 Points" that the NLF delegation had presented in Paris as a basis for resolving the Vietnam problem. I stressed that, in our view, this is an important document that merits the most careful study and discussion during further negotiations in Paris. I also expressed my firm belief that, as experience has convincingly demonstrated, a solution to the Vietnam issue cannot be sought through military means. Such a course is inevitably doomed to failure. What is needed is a political solution based on consideration of the legitimate rights of the Vietnamese people themselves.

I concluded by saying that the views expressed by the President would be reported to the Soviet Government.

In connection with my remarks, Nixon said that he "could assure" the Soviet Government that he is not seeking a military solution to the Vietnam problem; that is precisely why he decided to present "important political proposals" today. However, he added, the U.S. "cannot wait forever for Hanoi and the NLF to finally decide to begin real negotiations" and, for that eventuality, he, as President, also has to think "about alternatives."

I replied that if one takes a realistic approach, in resolving the Vietnam problem there can be no alternatives to a political settlement.

Nixon, clearly not wanting the conversation to become contentious, said that his message on Vietnam today is based precisely on the assumption that a political settlement is needed, and he asks that that be conveyed to the Soviet Government. In conclusion, he asked [me] to convey his personal greetings to L.I. Brezhnev, A.N. Kosygin, and N.V. Podgorny.

I replied that that would be done.

Before I left, Nixon invited my wife and me to lunch at the White House on July 26, when he wished to mark the tenth anniversary of his first official visit to the Soviet Union. Then Nixon showed me his personal apartments, where he lives with

his family. He also asked whether any of the Soviet leaders live in the Kremlin.

During my conversation with Nixon, I did not yet have the text of his speech, and therefore, I was unable to comment in any way on its substance. Kissinger handed me the text right before I left the White House, when the meeting was over.

*Second.* Kissinger's remarks during his conversation with me before we went in to see Nixon were basically a repetition of what the President said. One might note only his comment that Nixon's speech today is not, in fact, a response to the NLF's "10 Points," since it was prepared long before that, and, in this sense, the NLF's initiative had put them "somewhat at a disadvantage."

To a question as to how, in fact, they envision the transitional, interim political system in South Vietnam, in light of the most recent NLF proposals, and how this issue is treated in Nixon's upcoming speech, Kissinger thought for a moment and then said that this is a complex question, and it is difficult to provide an immediate answer. He added that the speech makes no attempt to answer all the questions; to some extent that is deliberate, in order to maintain flexibility. Some of the most sensitive issues will have to "be clarified" during further negotiations or contacts in Paris. In this connection, he repeated their latest confidential proposal to the effect that they are also prepared to meet with representatives of the other side in a different location, for confidential talks.

To a question as to what he, Kissinger, sees as the difference between the position of the current administration and the position of the Johnson Administration on the Vietnam issue, he asserted that there is indeed a definite difference.

He stated that prior to March–April 1968 Johnson had, in general, believed only in a military solution; therefore, he had made virtually no effort to think about the substance of the political problems. However, after he stopped the bombing of the DRV, he had rather naively hoped for a fairly quick settlement—as the other side's response. In the face of unyielding tactics by the Vietnamese at the negotiations, he was somewhat at a loss, and until the end of his presidency he essentially had no clear political views as to what more to do and how to deal with the other side.

Nixon, on the other hand, takes a realistic approach, according to Kissinger. He recognizes de facto Hanoi's interest in the further development of

events in South Vietnam. He recognizes the NLF as a reality that exists and operates in South Vietnam. He is prepared to accept South Vietnam's neutrality. He is prepared to accept whatever the South Vietnamese themselves agree on. In the final analysis, he is even prepared to accept any political system in South Vietnam, "provided there is a fairly reasonable interval between conclusion of an agreement and [the establishment of] such a system."

At this point my conversation with Kissinger was interrupted, since we were invited to join Nixon upstairs.

On the whole, it was evident from the conversations with President Nixon and his assistant Kissinger that they are under the distinct impression that the NLF's recent proposals, which met with certain interest in the U.S., are the result of Nixon's latest message to the Soviet Government (my conversation with Kissinger on April 14 of this year). Nixon's view that Moscow is playing a constructive role in this whole matter has been noticeably reinforced.

*A. Dobrynin*

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## Meeting Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

JUNE 11, 1969

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### 23. Memorandum From Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>

Washington, June 13, 1969.

SUBJECT: Memorandum of Conversation with  
Ambassador Dobrynin, June 11, 1969

Dobrynin had requested the appointment to inform me that he had been recalled to Moscow for consultations.<sup>2</sup> Dobrynin opened the conversation

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

<sup>2</sup> During a telephone conversation at 3:55 p.m. on June 11, Dobrynin reported that he had received instructions to return to Moscow the