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Meeting Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

DECEMBER 22, 1970

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

Washington, December 22, 1970, 1:19–4:05 p.m.

The lunch lasted about three and a half hours and took place in an extremely cordial atmosphere. During the course of the luncheon the discussion covered the general state of U.S.-Soviet relations as well as a number of specific topics including the Middle East, Vietnam, SALT and Cuba.

Khrushchev's Memoirs. I began the conversation by asking Dobrynin on a personal level what he thought of the Khrushchev Memoirs. Were they authentic? He replied, "It depends on what one means by authenticity." It is clear that Khrushchev never wrote anything in his life. He remembered when Khrushchev was First Party Secretary that he would call in Dobrynin who was then head of the American section and start saying, "Now, please write the following letter to Mr. President. Dear Mr. President:" And then he would start pacing up and down the room and talk as if he were confronting the President personally oblivious to anyone else in the room.

This procedure finally reached the point where Dobrynin always brought a secretary along and put her into a corner to take things down. So it was clear that Khrushchev had not written the Memoirs. On the other hand, it was also probable that they were dictated in some form and were therefore quite authentic. He thought that either Khrushchev had dictated some of it or, alternatively, some Westerners whom Khrushchev had permitted to call on him had brought tape recorders in their pockets and got the Memoirs on that basis.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 3. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the Map Room at the White House. The time of the meeting is taken from Kissinger's Record of Schedule. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76)

I asked him about Kennan's theory that the KGB may have put these out in order to prevent more damaging Memoirs from appearing. Dobrynin said this struck him as absurd. The KGB would not operate independently. It would have to be the Politburo and the Politburo would have no interest in doing a thing like this.

I then asked Dobrynin about an aspect of the section in the Memoirs where Dobrynin, during the Cuban missile crisis, is reported to have quoted Robert Kennedy as saying that there was danger of a military coup in the United States. Dobrynin said we had to remember, first, that whenever Khrushchev made these observations was long after the event and that he would not have had the reports in front of him. Secondly, I could be certain that when Dobrynin reported a conversation with a very senior official such as the brother of the President, the report would be an exact quotation. What Khrushchev would do with it in reporting to the Politburo was less certain, and what Khrushchev would remember was even less certain. It was a fact Kennedy had said to him that if things continued much longer, the military dominance would become so great that there would be no choice except to invade Cuba. But he obviously never said anything about a coup.

Ivanov. I then turned the conversation to Ivanov, and commented that the procedures to release Ivanov would start early in January and that the Secretary of State would call him in within the next few days to inform him of that fact.²

Summit. I then raised the Semenov conversation with Smith in which Semenov allegedly remarked that this would be a hot, political summer, and that SALT would have to mark time while the principals were negotiating. I wanted Dobrynin to understand that Smith did not know about our Summit discussions and that I really had to be sure Soviet diplomats would not speak to other Americans about the content of our conversations.

² Dobrynin called Kissinger at 4:17 p.m. on December 17 and complained that the Department of State was trying to place conditions on Ivanov's release. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 8, Chronological File) Kissinger called Dobrynin back at 6:10 and relayed Nixon's decision: "We are releasing Ivanov without conditions except for the arrangement you and I have made which was already agreed upon." (Ibid.) During a telephone conversation with Kissinger at 7:25 p.m. on December 21, Nixon reported: "I talked with Rogers on this Ivanov case and I have worked it out. He said Dobrynin asked to see him. I said tell him President made a commitment and we will carry it out but it's technical and we will do it early in January." (Ibid.)

Dobrynin replied that he had read Semenov's reporting cable and it contained no such references. He wondered whether Smith might have made it up. I said it seemed unlikely since it was too circumstantial. But whether or not it happened exactly as reported by either side, special care should be taken that our channel would not be played back into any American net.

Cuba. I then mentioned to him that I had just spent 15 minutes with the President and that the thrust of the conversation had been on Cuba. I wanted Dobrynin to understand that to a feeling of general concern which we had already expressed, there was now added a growing personal irritation. I did not want to go through the whole exercise again, but I wanted him to understand our position exactly. If nuclear submarines were being serviced in or from Cuban ports, it would lead to the most grave situation between the United States and the Soviet Union. If, on the other hand, nuclear submarines were not to be serviced in or from Cuban ports, then constant needling with the submarine tender and other ships could only complicate our relations without leading to anything very productive.

I further stated that I understood the port visits were going to conclude on December 23rd and that we would watch matters attentively. Dobrynin responded, "Well, we will see... Why don't you wait till the 23rd and then we can talk again."

I then made a little speech to Dobrynin on worsening U.S.-Soviet relations and where we should go from here along the following lines:

Worsening U.S.-Soviet Relations

—We both know that relations between our two countries have worsened in the past couple of months.

—We seemed to be making some progress earlier this year, but since the summer a series of incidents has served to cloud our relationship.

—I can assure you that the President continues to seek better relations and concrete results—negotiation instead of confrontation is no idle phrase. Perhaps in some cases, we have failed to communicate.

—I am willing to grant that from *your* perspective you might misread certain moves; e. g.

- The timing of our restriction on attendance at Soviet National Day receptions in relation to your release of our generals.

- The holding of a Soviet ship in the Panama Canal.
- The refusal of entry into Boston Harbor of a Soviet oceanographic vessel.
- Secretary Rogers' attempt to bargain an exchange in the Ivanov case.

—We had a good reason for our actions in most of these cases; in a few, faulty coordination may have been the problem. But I recognize that your version of some incidents could lead you to misinterpretations of our motives.

—On the other hand I must state emphatically that your government has pursued some policies that we just cannot reconcile with a building of constructive relations.

—To name only the more serious.

- The continued flaunting of at least the spirit of our understandings on Cienfuegos despite our conversations and the explosiveness of this issue.
- Your moves in the Middle East, in particular the ceasefire violations.
- The harassment of Berlin corridors while negotiations are going on.
- Your failure to observe the provisions of the U.S.-Soviet Consular Convention, and in particular your dragging out of the case of the generals.

—I do not cite these today to get into a debate. I only wish to give you examples of actions which from *our* perspective have unfortunate motives and threaten seriously to damage our relationship.

—You probably believe that these actions are justifiable. Perhaps some are subject to clarification.

—The basic point is that distrust has begun to set in on both sides and a dangerous momentum and interaction seems to be occurring.

Where Do We Go From There

—We are at a crossroads in our bilateral relationship. We have the choice between letting this chain of events continue and making a fundamental attempt to set a new course.

—Unless we make a mutual and sustained effort to reverse recent trends, the pinpricks in our relations could continue and feed on each other. We could slide into a serious deterioration.

—Such a deterioration would mean not only that we would lose the benefit of possible agreements and understandings. It could also mean that

suspicion between us could grow to the point that a minor incident could develop into a major one because of a failure in communication.

—The President has asked me to reaffirm to you his desire to improve our relations. His October UN speech purposely emphasized this subject and spelled out his views—e.g., we have serious differences that atmospherics can't remove; we also have overriding common interests which require that we forego tactical maneuvering for immediate gains, etc.

—Let us make an effort to begin shaping more constructive bilateral relations.

—Frankly this will require a serious attempt by your leadership to refrain from making moves that appear provocative to us.

—We, in turn, will try to avoid actions that could contribute to misunderstanding.

—I suggest we both agree to use this channel whenever we see problems developing in our relations. We will, of course, continue to have basic policy differences. But frank exchanges between us can help to remove imagined differences based on misunderstanding as well as to make progress on the real issues.

Soviet View of US–USSR Relations

The Middle East. Dobrynin responded with a very lengthy exposition on Soviet-American relations. The gist of his remarks was as follows: Dobrynin said that when the Administration came in there was the profoundest suspicion of the President. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union had attempted to establish normal relations. After about six to nine months, the idea had grown that perhaps responsibility in office had made the President more conciliatory and an attempt was made to enter serious negotiations. However, there were a whole host of issues that in the Soviet Union had created the worst possible impression.

Outstanding among those issues was the Middle East. The Soviet Union had engaged in months of negotiations with Sisco which on our side concentrated in effect on legalistic quibbling and never seemed to come to any particular point. Finally, the Soviet Union accepted two major American proposals early in June.³ He could assure me that it was done with the greatest difficulty—that Nasser

did not want to go along with it, and that there were many in the Politburo who were of the view that the tactic was entirely wrong. Nevertheless, the two propositions were made.⁴

Dobrynin continued that up to this time, the Soviet Union has not received a reply to these two propositions. Sisco and Rogers point out periodically that there will be a reply, but there has never been a formal reply. Indeed, no sooner had these proposals been made than the United States decided to go unilateral. Now, this had to create the impression in Moscow that the United States was trying to push Moscow out of the Middle East, and it stood to reason that Moscow could not look at this favorably. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union had looked at the Rogers plan as an essentially procedural scheme and therefore had endorsed the ceasefire. He could assure me that Nasser was enormously reluctant but the Soviet Union had insisted on it.

Dobrynin then repeated his well-known argument that the Soviet Union was not part of the ceasefire agreement. It had only been notified of the conditions afterwards. It could hardly be accused of violating an agreement that it did not negotiate and the contents of which were unknown to it when made. Dobrynin said he spent August in a dacha area near Moscow where the major Soviet leaders have houses. When the first claims of violation arrived there, no one believed them, and no one believed that the United States could be serious. He wanted to give me his word, whether I believed it or not, that the violations had not been ordered from Moscow but involved the execution of plans that had been made largely by the military. The Soviet leaders therefore thought that we were deliberately provoking them and starting a deliberate press campaign. Even today, the Soviet Union has not had a reply to its June proposal in the face of a clear hint to the President by Gromyko.⁵

What Dobrynin wanted to know was whether we were prepared to settle the Middle East and,

³ See footnote 7, Document 62.

⁴ These two propositions modified or extended two formulations in a Soviet paper of June 17, 1969. The first point advanced the time when peace would become effective, accepting that a state of peace would begin at the same time as completion of the first stage of withdrawal of Israeli troops. The second formulation conceded Arab responsibility for control of the fedayeen, by accepting that the parties would agree to undertake everything necessary so that any hostile or military acts with the presence or use of force against the other side will not originate from and not be committed from within their respective territories. [Footnote in the original. See footnote 4, Document 24.]

⁵ October 22.

if we were, was there anything that I could tell him that the people in Moscow could use in their current negotiations with the Egyptians. I had to recognize that this was an extremely difficult matter for them. They were constantly being pressed to supply offensive weapons which they so far had refused. What exactly did we visualize would happen after the Jarring talks started? Would we be prepared to give joint recommendations to Jarring. These and similar questions required an answer. They would affect U.S.-Soviet relations for the future.

SALT. Dobrynin then turned to SALT. He said there, too, the Soviet Union had made an offer on ABM, and the impression had been created not only that it was unacceptable but that direct White House intervention stopped it. For example, when Gerry Smith turned down the offer he said he had just talked to Kissinger and had received personal instructions from Kissinger not to proceed with an ABM limitation alone, leaving the impression that he personally might be quite willing to proceed.

Other Irritants. Dobrynin then mentioned the Soviet irritation at a number of other things; for example, the refusal of American personnel to attend the National Holiday which was a very emotional matter, and then the treatment of the defecting incident of the Soviet sailor.⁶ He said he could not understand the American performance. If we had given asylum to the Soviet sailor, he would have had to make a protest, and the matter would have been forgotten within 24 hours. But, first, to return him to the Soviet ship, and then to announce daily how profoundly concerned the President was had filled Moscow with outrage. For all these reasons, there was now profound distrust in the Soviet Union.

After Dobrynin ended his presentation, I told him that without wanting to argue details, it was important for Moscow to understand how certain things appeared in Washington. For example, Dobrynin had told me for months that he wanted the White House to play a more active role in our Middle East negotiations. The fact of the matter was, however, that when we did so, we confronted a very ambiguous situation. If the negotiations which

he and I had started in March had borne fruit, we could perhaps have made progress. Dobrynin remembered that he had offered a ceasefire in Egypt in March. I had used our influence with the Israelis to get them to agree to a ceasefire. We had even delayed the delivery of airplanes. It therefore seemed to us that that would have been the right moment for a ceasefire without any of the difficulties that later arose. However, in the precise week that the ceasefire was agreed upon, indeed on the day⁷ when I wanted to inform him of it, Soviet SA-3 missiles appeared in Egypt, together with Soviet personnel. Therefore, the arrangement failed.

Similarly, during the Middle East crisis in September the Soviet role was ambiguous. No one in Washington thought that the Soviets started it, but at the same time no pressure was put on Syria until it was nearly too late. I wanted Dobrynin to reflect on what would have happened if the Syrians had been more effective and had broken through; whether this would not have brought the world to the edge of war. Equally on Berlin, I did not know a single proposal that we had held up, and the constant accusations that we did so could only produce irritation.

Dobrynin replied that in March the SA-3 deliveries were made by the Defense Ministry and were handled in a completely different channel from the ceasefire proposal. I might not believe that, but he wanted to assure me that this was true. I said that either explanation was worrisome; the explanation that the Soviet Union is not in control of its government, or the explanation that the Soviet leaders are deliberately deceiving us.

Dobrynin then said that with respect to Berlin, he was only repeating what our allies told him. Both the French and the Germans constantly told the Soviet Ambassadors that the United States was holding up progress. He admitted that the British were in a different category, but then the British are almost a sub-organ of the U.S. State Department.

I then commented that we had tried to show great restraint during the Polish affair of last week,⁸ and that perhaps this might be an example of the restraint which they should exercise. He called my attention to a very tough speech by Frank Shakespeare⁹

⁶ On November 23, Simas Kudirka, a Lithuanian sailor aboard a Soviet fishing vessel, attempted to defect after jumping on a U.S. Coast Guard cutter operating in U.S. territorial waters off Martha's Vineyard. Later that evening, the American captain allowed Soviet naval personnel to board his ship and to use force in regaining custody of the defector.

⁷ March 20, 1970.

⁸ Reference is to riots against cost of living increases, which began on December 13 in Gdansk and quickly spread to other Polish cities. One week later Edward Gierek replaced Władysław Gomułka as de facto leader of the Polish government.

⁹ Director of the United States Information Agency.

and also to the fact that the Voice of America had more than quintupled its broadcasting into Poland. He said he knew there was a quarrel between Shakespeare and Rogers, but it was hard to convince people in Moscow that these decisions were made in such a haphazard way.

Areas For Further Discussion

The main problem, Dobrynin said, was to get beyond the immediate irritations. He wanted to assure me that there was great eagerness in Moscow to come to an understanding with the United States. Why couldn't we break out of the various impasses? Why couldn't we make progress somewhere? For example, why didn't we start talking on something on the Middle East? Could I not go through the record of negotiations and see whether there was anything at all that he and I could talk about? Why not take an issue which even Israel said it wanted such as guarantees?

The same principles applied to SALT. I had to understand that any agreement would be a major political step and that once the principle had been decided to have a limited agreement, one could go on to more comprehensive issues. This would enable the Politburo to give clear instructions to technical staffs.

The same was true of Berlin. The Soviet Union thought it had made a major concession on December 10th by speaking of preferential, uninterrupted access. On the other hand, the American Ambassador seemed totally unprepared and had to ask for a recess twice. And when Abrasimov wanted to continue the meeting, he said he had personal business. This was unheard of in the Soviet Union. Soviet Ambassadors have the idea that they're serving their government—not that private business has precedence. I told Dobrynin that there was no sense in continuing an exchange of recriminations—that we should concentrate on the future. Dobrynin said he agreed and he recognized that this might be the last moment where we could have fruitful discussions.

Middle East. I said that, as far as the Middle East was concerned, I could assure him that the President knew that there was no settlement possible that excluded the Soviet Union. We had always recognized that a settlement in the Middle East had to get the cooperation of the Soviet Union and we would, therefore, be prepared to discuss it with them. However, I would have to find out

from the President whether I should participate in any of these discussions, or whether they should be handled at the Sisco level. Dobrynin said it would be best if he and I had some discussions and then shifted the technical points to the Sisco level.

SALT. On SALT, he said if we didn't like their proposal, maybe I could offer some compromise; but the major concern was to have some progress. Then, the Summit meeting in September would make real sense. I pointed out that it was essential, however, that we keep our channels straight. I had to tell him in all candor that when we proposed a Summit meeting in the summer and then never received an answer for six weeks, that this made an extremely painful impression in Washington. Dobrynin commented that this was based on a misunderstanding and that they had never grasped we had made a concrete proposal. (This remark, of course, was patently absurd because when he came back from the Soviet Union, he gave an answer to the concrete proposal.)

Vietnam. Finally Dobrynin turned to Vietnam. He said he had always criticized me for the linkage theory, but he was beginning to think that there was something to it. He then read me the attached statement on Vietnam, which he said was in response to the President's Press Conference.¹⁰ The statement which was very conciliatory in tone read as follows:

"The events of the last few weeks in the area of Indochina as well as some statements by US leaders can hardly be viewed other than as an evidence that the Nixon Administration is going back on the course it earlier proclaimed, for a settlement of the Vietnam problem by political means. To embark on the path leading to a new expansion of military actions in Indochina means to ignore the entire record of that war as well as to throw far behind the attainment of a settlement in Vietnam.

"Negotiations alone, searching for mutually acceptable solutions on the basis of respect for lawful rights of the people of that country are, in the profound conviction of the Soviet leaders, the only thing that can put an end to the conflict in Vietnam. We have reasons to believe that similar views are shared also by our Vietnamese friends. But no progress whatsoever in the negotiations

¹⁰ For the text of Nixon's press conference on December 10, see *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1970*, pp. 1101–1111.

may be counted upon when one side is trying to impose on the other participants its will with the help of military ultimatums.

“Clear also is the fact that such course of actions by the US, violation by them of the assumed obligations, in this case—with regard to stopping the bombings and other military actions against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam—can in no way facilitate trust in international relations. Quite the contrary, in view of the idea repeatedly expressed by US officials about a global linkage of problems, it is hard to avoid asking oneself the following question: if the US are leading the way toward complication in the area of Indochina does it not mean that for some reasons they want an aggravation of the international situation as a whole.

“The Soviet Government is of the view that the efforts of our countries should be aimed at peaceful solution of disputes and removal of sources of international tension. Our relations cannot but be affected by whether there is progress in peaceful settlement of existing conflicts or this cause is going backward. The Soviet Union will not remain indifferent to whatever attempts are made to implement the threats against the fraternal Socialist country.”

I replied that, first, in the recent communication from Moscow after the bombing of North Vietnam,¹¹ there seemed to be a misunderstanding about what the President had told Gromyko. The President had not said that he would not let Vietnam interfere with Soviet/American relations. The President had clearly pointed out that if the North Vietnamese continued to press military actions, we would have no choice except to react very strongly, and he hoped that, in that case, the Soviet Union would recognize that the action was not directed against it.

Dobrynin then commented that the Soviet Government hoped we understood the limits of their influence in Hanoi, given the whole combination of circumstances. I said the tragedy was that there was no possibility for military victory

anymore by North Vietnam—that if the war went on another two or three years, the outcome would still be essentially the same as it is now. If the Soviet Union wanted to use its influence for negotiations, now was the time. This was the best way to prevent a deterioration of US/Soviet relationships. I would have to tell him, without a threat but in all fairness, that we would simply not sit by while the North Vietnamese were building up for an offensive. On the other hand, the second paragraph of his statement seemed to me perfectly appropriate, and we could agree to it completely as a statement of our principles.

Dobrynin then asked me whether we would agree to a coalition government. I replied that North Vietnam had not asked for a coalition government. It had asked for a government in which they nominated a third, and vetoed the other two-thirds. Dobrynin asked me whether we would accept a coalition government in which we could nominate a third and the other side could nominate a third. I said it seemed to me that the issue was wrongly approached in this manner. We had made clear that we were prepared to accept the solution that reflected the real balance of forces, and we had made some proposals along this line. We would certainly listen to counterproposals, but they had to be realistic and not be a subterfuge for a Communist take-over. If the Soviet Union would be prepared to enter the negotiating process seriously, I could promise them that (1) we would not embarrass them, and (2) that we would make serious replies to serious proposals.

Dobrynin concluded with an eloquent speech on the need to make some progress in our bilateral channel. He said he was ready to meet as frequently as possible. It would be very helpful if I could give him some indication of our general thinking on the Middle East as quickly as possible. He reiterated that we should review the negotiating positions of both sides, and he invited me to dinner on some evening the week of my return from California, though he said he would be prepared to meet earlier.

We finally settled on January 7th for dinner at the Soviet Embassy and agreed that we would both review our negotiating positions on Berlin, the Middle East and SALT, and see whether there were any points in which we might usefully make progress.

¹¹ During a meeting on November 24, Dobrynin gave Kissinger a Soviet note protesting an extensive U.S. air strike over North Vietnam three days earlier. In a November 28 memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger noted that “our very brief meeting adjourned without discussion of any other subjects.” According to Dobrynin’s memorandum of conversation, however, Kissinger also reported that, despite delays in the case, the President stood by his confidential decision to deport Ivanov to the Soviet Union. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 3; and AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 198–200)

105. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)¹

Washington, December 22, 1970.

1. I met with Kissinger and, citing instructions, told him the following for transmittal to President Nixon:²

Kissinger listened carefully and said that he would brief the President on my communication.

After discussing a number of other issues, however, he himself returned to this subject and, having stipulated that he was speaking in a purely personal capacity, said that the U.S. is not planning to undertake “any rash or hasty actions” against the DRV that could complicate Soviet-U.S. relations and the international situation in general. The administration currently has no plans whatsoever for any actions specifically against the DRV.

However—and this is the point of the President’s public statements—the U.S. Government will not be able to sit idly by if the DRV mounts major offensive operations in South Vietnam itself in order to try to derail the process of “Vietnamization.”

Currently there are indications that the DRV is gradually preparing to do this, although it will apparently still require some time to organize such offensive operations on a large scale. Given the ongoing cutbacks in the number of American forces in South Vietnam, the U.S. Government would then be forced to resort to greater use of its airpower not only on the battlefield but also against the rear, directly in the enemy’s own territory.

In response to my strong criticism (using the main arguments from the statement we had just made for transmittal to Nixon), Kissinger steered the conversation towards Nixon’s remarks on the Vietnam issue during his meeting with A.A. Gromyko³ and then repeated that he would brief the President on the statement we had made today.

2. *On the subject of West Berlin* he gave me every assurance that President Nixon wants a compromise with the Soviet Union but “on a reasonable basis.” In the course of the conversation, however, it

soon became apparent that he did not know the specifics of the proposals we had submitted at the last meeting of the four ambassadors in Berlin. He had seen “only a summary” prepared by the U.S. Ambassador, from which it followed that the Soviet side continues to hold an “uncompromising position.”

After I set forth our proposals, he was silent for a while and then said that evidently he should review all the materials himself.

He added that he had just given Assistant Secretary of State Hillenbrand instructions from the President to look into the progress of the negotiations on Berlin and to present his proposals to the White House by the beginning of January.

3. *On the Middle East* Kissinger expressed his conviction that negotiations through Jarring would soon begin. When I pressed him on the substance of the settlement itself, however, he said nothing new. He also said nothing specific about when they would finally respond to our settlement proposals that were submitted as far back as the beginning of last summer. At the same time, he emphasized several times that the President “is well aware” that the Middle East conflict cannot be resolved without the USSR and that “after a while” they would resume bilateral Soviet-U.S. contacts on Middle Eastern affairs.

4. *On strategic arms* he defended the well-known U.S. position. He was about to go on speaking in the same vein regarding conclusion of a separate, narrower agreement on ABM defense (i.e., in opposition to such a separate agreement). However when I told him from a personal perspective, citing several examples, that I was getting the impression that the main obstacle to such an agreement—which would be easier to reach and which could be a positive step towards a broader strategic arms agreement—was Kissinger himself with his beloved global linkage theory, Kissinger began to make all sorts of excuses. He stated that even now he himself is considering whether it would not in fact be possible to enter into such an agreement. For the time being, however, “he cannot say anything more specific.”

During the conversation I gave a highly critical analysis of the current state of Soviet-U.S. relations, which had arisen through the fault of the Nixon administration.

Kissinger, who was clearly on the defensive during the conversation, suggested I meet with him in a few days for further in-depth discussion of all these issues.

¹ Source: AVP RF, f. 0129, op., 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 205–210. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal.

² Omitted here is the Russian text of the Soviet note on Vietnam. The original English text that Dobrynin gave Kissinger is printed in Document 104.

³ October 22.

For my part, I told him that frankly speaking, I did not see much point in having such a meeting so soon if he, Kissinger, was going to continue to limit himself to general observations without going into the specific substance of the issues. The two of us talk a lot, Mr. Kissinger, but to be honest, we're not getting anywhere.

Kissinger immediately asked whether this was my personal view or whether this was the thinking in Moscow.

I replied that I had just expressed my purely personal point of view, but I thought it was also shared by Moscow.

Kissinger became noticeably agitated. He said he understood my dissatisfaction with the tenor of his remarks. He suggested that I meet with him on January 7. By that time he will try, following a discussion with the President, to set forth in more specific terms the U.S. position on the following topics: strategic arms, the Berlin question, and the Middle East.

I limited myself to saying that I do not object to the date he proposed for the meeting if he will be prepared for a substantive discussion.

He said that he would be ready for this.

During the conversation about the talks in Helsinki, Kissinger said that he was very surprised to read in one of Smith's latest coded messages his report about the comments made by the head of the Soviet delegation in a one-on-one conversation.

According to Smith, when the conversation turned to the two delegations' preliminary work plan for the summer of 1971, the Soviet representative allegedly said that they, the heads of the delegations, should not count on getting any work done during that period, because that will be the very time when the leaders of both governments will be actively preparing for a summit meeting, which is planned for precisely that time.

Smith, who knew nothing about the agreement on such a meeting, transmitted these comments by the Soviet representative directly to the White House and to President Nixon personally as some earth-shaking news. After receiving this telegram he, Kissinger, even before showing it to the President, had attempted to keep it from falling into anyone else's hands. At the same time, the appropriate strict orders were sent to Smith to keep quiet about this matter.

I decided to inform you of this, Kissinger said in conclusion, because I recalled Moscow's strict

warning which said that besides the leaders themselves, only three other people know about the summit meeting: on the Soviet side—the Minister and the Ambassador, on the U.S. side—only Kissinger. It turns out that now other people have learned of it as well.⁴

A. Dobrynin

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Telephone Call Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

DECEMBER 24, 1970

106. Transcript of Telephone Conversation (U.S.)¹

Washington, December 24, 1970, 4:15 p.m.

K: I take it the Ivanov thing is on the track.

D: The man I spoke about² does not know the details because about that last assurance given from your side it doesn't matter what kind of decision taken by the court.

K: What do you mean?

D: You were obligated to take a [omission in transcript] but a final stage.

K: He doesn't know that but I will make it a matter of record. The State Dept. has just to work

⁴ In a separate memorandum of conversation, Dobrynin added that Kissinger also unofficially stated his "surprise" that, despite its decision against establishing a submarine base, the Soviet Union continued to engage in suspicious naval activities near Cuba. (AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 211–212)

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 27, Dobrynin File. No classification marking.

² Secretary of State Rogers. Before the call from Kissinger, Dobrynin visited Rogers, who had suggested a meeting to survey the "most important issues" in Soviet-American relations, including the Middle East, European security, Berlin, and SALT. According to Dobrynin, Rogers not only began by reporting Nixon's decision to arrange for Ivanov's release but also ended by raising Nixon's concern about possible visits of Democratic presidential candidates to Moscow. "The conversation with Rogers was almost verbatim the same as the corresponding conversation with Kissinger," Dobrynin noted in his report on the meeting. "Apparently, Nixon spoke with each of them separately on this matter." (AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 54, p. 405, d. 6, l. 179–190)