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Meeting Between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin

MAY 5, 1972

323. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)¹

Washington, May 5, 1972.

I met with Kissinger at the White House.

1. He again started the conversation with matters related to Vietnam. Kissinger basically made the same arguments on this occasion as he had in the past.

This time, however, after I refused to engage in a repetition of the debates on this subject and firmly turned to further discussion of topics for the summit itself, their position on the interrelationship between the Moscow summit and the events in Vietnam became clearer.

Although he did not lay out this position in any clear-cut and consistent form and was cautious in his remarks, the overall impression from this part of today's discussion with Kissinger can be summarized roughly as follows.

President Nixon—apparently—has now clearly given up any firm linkage between these two issues. He is prepared for, and wants to have, the Moscow summit, even though the Vietnam situation will probably have an unfavorable impact on the meeting in some respects. The main thing was evident from Kissinger's comments, however, and that is that Nixon has made a fairly firm decision to go to the meeting.

This decision and the desire to have productive talks in Moscow are, by all indications, having a restraining influence on Nixon in terms of taking any particularly serious military measures against the DRV. From Kissinger's remarks one sensed that, even though the White House is continuing to build up its air and naval strength around Vietnam and

in this connection is waging an intensive psychological offensive against Hanoi, right now Nixon is wavering somewhat about further military actions against the DRV. (Kissinger remarked during the conversation that no final decision in this regard had been made yet, although the Pentagon has already submitted "quite a few recommendations.")

By all indications, until the Moscow summit the White House will try to refrain from making particularly major decisions on far-reaching military measures against the DRV, so as not to come into conflict with us and not to jeopardize the Moscow meeting, as long as the situation in South Vietnam does not turn into a disaster during this interval. If it does, Nixon will probably nevertheless be prepared to take military steps that involve a risk to the summit (but even in that case leaving it to us to decide for ourselves whether or not the meeting takes place). But that is only in the most extreme case; right now, however, it looks like the White House will seek to avoid such major steps, although the administration may still undertake certain military measures in the near future to "pressure" the DRV.

Needless to say, during the conversation I again very strongly emphasized to Kissinger our warning to the White House on this score—in the context of the topic of the summit meeting—along the lines of L.I. Brezhnev's last letter to President Nixon, of April 30.²

During the conversation Kissinger did not make any new suggestions about our exerting some sort of influence on the DRV, although he did complain about the behavior of the North Vietnamese at the negotiations and especially about Le Duc Tho, who, according to Kissinger, did not say anything new at the meeting with him, but merely reread all the DRV's old, public proposals, which "have already been printed in all the newspapers in the world."

Kissinger said there was no agreement with Le Duc Tho about another private meeting between them and he did not know whether one would take place at all in the foreseeable future.

Kissinger asked during the conversation whether there was any truth to the unverified reports they have received that Le Duan is supposedly coming to Moscow several days before President Nixon ar-

¹ Source: AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 56, p. 418, d. 6, l. 16–20. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger met Dobrynin for lunch on May 5 at "1125 16th Street"—i.e., the Soviet Embassy—from 1:25 to 3:08 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) No American record of the conversation has been found.

² Document 320.

rives there.³ I replied that I did not know anything about that.⁴

2. During the conversation Kissinger confirmed that they had discussed the events in Vietnam with the Chinese. According to him, the latter declared that it was not Peking but Moscow which was interested in the current military operations in Vietnam, so as to put pressure on Nixon in its own interests at the upcoming summit and obtain concessions in return, mainly in Europe and the Middle East. It was Moscow that had supplied the DRV with most of its weaponry. China, however, knows that the U.S. is withdrawing its troops from Vietnam, they believe the President's assurances in this regard, and therefore they see no present need for military operations against the U.S., which could only delay the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces. And for China that is the most important thing.

3. Kissinger denied the American wire-service report which appeared here today that Secretary of State Rogers had stated before a meeting of the NATO Council on May 5 that President Nixon intends to tell the Soviet leaders in Moscow that he is opposed to an all-European conference.

Kissinger stressed that there was some kind of mix-up in the wire-service report; at any rate, he can state firmly that Rogers has no authority to say anything of the kind. He, Kissinger, can reiterate what he already told L.I. Brezhnev in Moscow, on the President's instructions, namely, that as a result of the upcoming talks in Moscow the President is prepared to include in the text of the agreed communiqué some agreed formula on holding such a conference. He, Kissinger, can now reaffirm this once again.

³ Although no evidence has been found that Le Duan visited Moscow before the summit, Xuan Thuy, the head of the North Vietnamese delegation to the Paris Peace Talks, met with Kosygin in the Kremlin on May 11.

⁴ Two hours after the meeting, Kissinger called Dobrynin to raise another concern about Vietnam: "K: Anatol, there was just one point about our conversation that I didn't want to mislead your people about. D: Yeah. K: That had to do with your comment that the President was angry when he sent that letter [Document 321]. D: Yeah. K: Well, he may—you ought to treat this letter as a cold deliberate one. D: Cold, yeah. I see. K: Now it's up to you what you do with it and we're not asking for any particular—D: This was my personal comment. I didn't really mention to Moscow—K: Okay. Well, you're free to have any judgment you want; I'm not going to debate it. D: I just mentioned it to you really. This was my impression; I didn't make any comment on this because it's really subjective, you see, and I don't like to make a very personal subjective feeling." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 27, Dobrynin File)

4. Kissinger said that President Nixon had received an answer from Brandt regarding Barzel's appeal to him, the President. Brandt asks that Nixon not get into any detailed discussion with Barzel for the time being, because the opposition could use this to delay ratification of the FRG's treaties with the USSR and Poland and gain time to consolidate the opposition forces.

Kissinger also said that through their ties with West Germany they are continuing to exert a restraining influence on Barzel regarding ratification of the treaties and are strongly advising him that he should now separate this issue from the other problems on which the opposition intends to do battle with Brandt in the power struggle that has now developed in the FRG.

5. On the Middle East, Kissinger expressed a desire to receive from us—as a follow-up to the discussions he had in Moscow—the basic principles (provisions) of a Soviet-U.S. confidential understanding on that region. The President, he added, feels that this is now perhaps the only issue, apart from Vietnam, that remains up in the air, as it were, right before the meeting, and he would still like, if possible, to have in advance some kind of confidential document on this subject that "has been discussed at least in rough form."

6. Kissinger asked that we expedite submission of our draft of the final communiqué to them. They are prepared to consider it in the same constructive spirit that they displayed in Moscow in considering the "Basic Principles of Relations."

Kissinger added that he had reported to the President on the latter document immediately after returning from his Moscow trip. Nixon agreed with him, merely confirming the minor comments that he, Kissinger, had made in Moscow regarding this text. The President had no other comments.

7. Kissinger reported that because he was occupied with Vietnam and with preparing for the President's trip to Moscow, he, Kissinger, had postponed his trip to Japan a second time, until after the Moscow summit.

8. Kissinger promised to continue efforts toward closing the "Markelov affair" (the Soviet employee of the UN Secretariat who is now on trial) before Nixon's trip to Moscow.

A. Dobrynin