

Dr. Kissinger: We will have to make up a checklist for the President so that he gets all these things into his mind.

Dr. David: I will start working with John Walsh on the joint science and technology commission.

Dr. Kissinger: You won't work with the Soviets?

Dr. David: No.⁶

⁶ In a March 31 memorandum for Kissinger entitled "Review of U.S.-Soviet Negotiations," Sonnenfeldt noted that responses had been received from the Departments of State, Interior, and Defense on these various bilateral negotiations. He noted that Irwin had a priority list of issues in terms of whether agreements on them could be ready for signature at the summit, that Laird had suggested maritime-related talks "should proceed on their merits without linkage to the Moscow visit," and that Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton had suggested that an agreement for bilateral cooperation in an additional technical research field could be signed at Moscow. (Ibid., NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 67, Country Files, Europe, U.S.S.R., Sonnenfeldt Papers [2 of 2])

49. Editorial Note

On February 14, 1972, President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger discussed the impact of the upcoming historic visit to Peking on U.S.-Soviet relations:

Kissinger: "Well, you remember, Mr. President, before this—before this move, I said that I figured that they would make a move between the Peking, and the Moscow summit, that they didn't want to settle this before the Peking summit, which would have given the impression that the Peking, that the Peking move did it for her."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "And they probably don't want to be in the position at Moscow—in the Moscow summit where you and Brezhnev conceivably pressure them. That Brezhnev letter to you last week was extraordinarily mild."

Nixon: "Umh."

Kissinger: "In fact, it didn't give them any support. It just quoted what the North Vietnamese were saying but it didn't say that the Soviets endorsed it. You remember, I said that before this. And therefore my calculation has always been: one, that they'd make a move between the two summits. Secondly, that there was something like a 50–50 chance that they'd settle before the election. In fact the way I put it to myself was if it looked as if you would probably win or possibly win, they'll settle before November. If it looked as if the other side would probably or possibly win, they'd certainly not settle before November."

If it was a stalemate, then I would guess they'd still try to settle before November because it's too risky to have you back in office unconstrained.

"But what you've done in the last few weeks is strip away the secret negotiations, to attack your domestic problems. In this respect, what Bob did was tremendously helpful with Hanoi because it showed that we are going for broke at home. That we are not just going to sit there and let ourselves be chopped—"

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: "—and this massive movement of airpower."

Nixon: "Yes, and that helped. I know."

Kissinger: "We've moved 35 B-52s to Guam. We've taken—"

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: "Yep. Yep, we've put two more aircraft carriers on station. We only moved one out there, but they've always had one on leave. We've cancelled all leave. That's how the news hit about the one coming back from Hong Kong."

Nixon: "We've only had one out there?"

Kissinger: "Well we had—Actually, we had one on stage, one being repaired, and one on leave."

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: "And there will be another one in San Diego. Now we have four on station."

Nixon: "Well not yet"

Kissinger: "Well we will have on March 1st. But we have three on station within another week. So I think this whole combination of events—their fear of the pressure. It isn't just that for the first time our dealings with them, in two administrations, that they have asked for a meeting. All previous meetings we've asked for. But also that they have asked for lunch. I mean, I know, Mr. President—I'm not saying they're going to settle. I'm saying if nothing else happens except that they've invited me to lunch. It means we have a month of no offensive, almost certainly. It means that they—"

Nixon: "You'll get a hell of a tip against—"

Kissinger: "The probability is, Mr. President, that this is not going to be the only meeting. We have never had just one meeting with them."

Nixon: "But the thing I'm thinking, though, Henry is that they may be willing for other reasons"

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: "—with the hope that we will lay off our preemptive air strikes."

Kissinger: "They think you are getting ready to club the North Vietnamese. There's no question about that."

Nixon: "That's right. But now I'm not sure we want to wait."

Kissinger: "Oh, I wouldn't—we can wait 'till the 8th."

Nixon: "Well I—you can't wait too late because then you'll have it just before the Russian [unclear]—"

Kissinger: "Mr. President, you're coming back on March 1. Presumably you'll report to the nation on the second or third."

Nixon: "Is that right? I don't know."

Kissinger: "I don't know what the date is. But you wouldn't want to divert everybody that week anyway."

Nixon: "No."

Kissinger: "So we're talking about a week or two."

Nixon: "Right."

Kissinger: "That is—"

Nixon: "All right. Understand, I'm just trying to see what would go through their minds if they're trying to screw us."

Kissinger: "Well I think, Mr. President—"

Nixon: "[unclear] The second thing it made me think of was that—they must, in other words, you've got to assume that their purpose is not to invite you to talk. Their purpose is to keep us from doing something else. One is that they're afraid that we're going to hit the North. Fine, they've accomplished that purpose."

Kissinger: "Yeah, but we won't do more than 24 or 48 hours anyway."

Nixon: "What? I know that. But what I mean is, what I mean is if that occurs—now that's interesting. The other thing is, if you put it to them on this offensive thing—I can't believe that they would tell you on the other side of the coin, now I might be wrong, but they would have you for a private meeting and then proceed to kick the hell out of us."

Kissinger: "It's almost inconceivable."

Nixon: "How could they? Because that's why [unclear]."

Kissinger: "Absolutely."

Nixon: "Because if, for example, let's put it another way. If you accepted the meeting and then they kicked the hell out of us and then we cancelled we're in a [unclear] if you warn them in advance. Right?"

Kissinger: "That's right. Mr. President, you've been very tough with them. You know, we cancelled this Thursday's meeting because of the Versailles conference. I mean, we're just—we have to look at it through their eyes. They must think we are looking for an excuse to kill them in the North."

Nixon: "You think so?"

Kissinger: "Oh, yeah. The last few times we cancelled meetings we've then hit them for 5 days. I believe that our December strikes did a hell of a lot more damage to them than our idiotic Air Force will admit."

Nixon: [laughter]

Kissinger: "Because if they hadn't they would have had people there looking at their holes."

Nixon: "Yeah. That they didn't amount to anything?"

Kissinger: "That they didn't amount to anything. That they hit the open fields. That they hit peasant houses. That they wanted the French to protect them and the French said let's look at where the damage is, they refused to show them. And we've had another report that has been particularly—they inflicted enormous casualties on some troop barracks. Now, I wouldn't place this report in the absolute context that it is, I didn't put it in here—"

Nixon: "Sure."

Kissinger: "Because you don't want to bother with these things."

Nixon: "I know."

Kissinger: "So they are worried that you may go for broke against them in the North."

Nixon: "Um-hmm."

Kissinger: "And that they want to stop. On the other hand, you and I know that you were going to go for broke against the North. So that what they're going to stop is not something we wanted to do."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "Secondly, they are terrified that when all is said and done, Peking and Moscow are not going to let them screw up the whole détente."

Nixon: "You think so?"

Kissinger: "Yeah. After all—"

Nixon: "I must say, when you read though, totally all the records of Chou En-lai's comments and so forth [unclear], it's a hard-line goddamn thing."

Kissinger: "Well it's hard-line. But in practice—"

Nixon: "On the other hand, they show that they are susceptible to [unclear]. They always show that we make big promises that we can't keep, and we never do this. And yet, their behavior in the India-Pakistan thing was goddamn timid."

Kissinger: "That's right."

Nixon: "They talked about the Russians being timid. They were timid. Chou En-lai told you in July that they would not stand idly by. And then he went on and [unclear]. And then afterwards admitted Bhutto let you down. Now they know what the hell they did."

Kissinger: "Oh, exactly. So—but also the North, actually with respect to the North Vietnamese, you'd have to read the whole record."

What they do is they're asking for, cuddling for, the things we are going to do anyway. Like troop withdrawal."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "They've never done much about the political conditions."

Nixon: "Yeah, I noticed that. I noticed that."

Kissinger: "So the Chinese are building up a fierce record on those issues, which are not contested, and they have been no help to the North Vietnamese. They killed their seven points by having the announcement of your July—of your visit of July 15. So that the North Vietnamese will not forgive. I believe that they did make an effort to get them to negotiate because for about 6 weeks after you were there—after your announcement of July 15, the North Vietnamese press were beside themselves. Then in November after I was there for another 6 weeks the North Vietnamese press was yelling at them. Then [North Vietnamese Premier] Pham Van Dong went to Peking and in public speeches never declared complete identity of interest between the two countries. It's only in the last few weeks as we are going there that Peking has been making some noises. But even so when I proposed that if Le Duc Tho was in Peking that I was prepared to meet with him there, they sent back a very mild reply saying we are not going to meddle in the Vietnamese war but you could read it both ways. And the reason I sent that message was so that if the Russians came through with an invitation to meet in Moscow, we could then go to Peking and say we offered it to you first. On the other hand, I believe the more we can get the Russians to press for a meeting in Moscow, which they want for their reasons, the more eager Hanoi will be to have the meeting in Paris because Hanoi will under no circumstances in my view settle in either of the other Communist capitals."

Nixon: "I see."

Kissinger: "So the reason I'm going—I'm going to see Dobrynin tomorrow and I'm going to put it to him again that I'm eager to meet them in Moscow. And I'll bet it's a poker game. It's a way of—I already know they proposed a meeting in Paris."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "There isn't a chance of a snowball in hell that they will accept a meeting in Moscow. They've already objected in October so they—"

Nixon: "Did it work?"

Kissinger: "But if Moscow proposes a meeting, it's to them a sign that Moscow is eager to settle. I'm certain that Moscow is playing such a big game that they are not going to let Hanoi screw it up in May. So they're up against a whole series of deadlines. Then they see you—if you look at the press, say look at *Time* and *Newsweek* this week, it's

a little play of the State of the World report, which is on the whole positive. But above all it's China. So they know for the next 3 weeks." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 670–13) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

50. **Memorandum From Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, undated.

Soviet Policy and Vietnam July–November 1971

There is some evidence that in the period between the announcement of the President's visit to China and the North Vietnamese refusal to continue the secret talks, Soviet policy toward a peaceful settlement in Vietnam significantly hardened. While the exact advice they gave to Hanoi is not clear, the thrust of the Soviet position in this period was that Hanoi should persevere with the military struggle, lest the United States succeed in promoting a solution through its contacts with Peking.

The shift in the Soviet attitude must be viewed in the context of the Soviet diplomatic counteroffensive which was activated in July–September in the wake of the President's announcement of the Peking visit.

—In the West, the Soviets accelerated the negotiations over Berlin; in late July they urged an end to the negotiations at the secondary levels and that the Ambassadors go into almost continuous sessions, which, in fact, led to the agreement of August 28;²

—In the SALT talks, after rigidly insisting on one ABM proposal for almost a year, in early August the Soviets offered three new alternatives, and in September a still further variant;

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 146, 1972 Offensive—Miscellaneous. Secret. In an attached February 15 covering memorandum to Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt wrote: "We discussed this last week and you asked for a paper that you might use in Peking. It is attached. Although slightly tailored for the purpose envisaged, I consider this a plausible piece of analysis which fits the evidence as we know it." A notation by Kissinger on the covering memorandum reads: "Take on trip."

² The agreement which led to the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin, signed on September 3, 1971.



**Foreign Relations of the
United States, 1969–1976**

Volume XIV

**Soviet Union
October 1971–
May 1972**

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United States Government Printing Office
Washington
2006

DEPARTMENT OF STATE PUBLICATION 11355

OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

BUREAU OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office
Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328