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**Document 49. Editorial Note**

On February 14, 1972, President Nixon, Assistant to the President H.R. ("Bob") Haldeman, and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, discussed the impact of the upcoming historic visit to Peking on U.S.-Soviet relations ~~670-13 DECLASS, 25:42~~:

**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 summits, that they didn't want to settle this before the Peking [unclear] because it would have given the impression that Peking—that the Peking move did it for us."

**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:** "Hmm."

**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. [Page 168; Start p.169] 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—"

**Nixon:** "Yeah."

**Kissinger:** "—unconstrained. And what you've done in the last few weeks to strip away the secret negotiations, to attack your domestic opponents. In this respect,

**Comment:** This volume notwithstanding, it is standard practice for *FRUS* compilers to list every participant in a conversation, especially when one of those participants, the White House Chief of Staff no less, actually contributes to the conversation

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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:** “And we’ve moved 35 B-52s to Guam. We’ve taken off—”

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**Nixon:** [unclear]

**Kissinger:** “Yep. Yep, we’ve put two more aircraft carriers on station. I mean, we only moved one out there, but we pulled—they always had one on leave. And we’ve cancelled all leave. That’s how the news hit about the one coming back from Hong Kong—”

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**Nixon:** “Oh! So, we only had one out there?”

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**Kissinger:** “Well we had—Actually, we had one on station, one being repaired, and one on leave. And—”

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**Nixon:** [unclear]—

**Kissinger:** “—then we had another one in San Diego. Now we have four on station.”

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**Nixon:** “Well [unclear] not yet. I mean, they didn’t start [unclear]—”

**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 in 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, my—I’m not saying they’re going to settle. I’m saying if nothing else happens except that they invited me to lunch—”

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**Nixon:** Yeah?

**Kissinger:** “—it means we have a month of no offensive, almost certainly. It means that—”

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[unclear exchange]

**Haldeman:** “You got a hell of a tip against [unclear]—”

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**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. So, it's—"

**Nixon:** "Well, the thing I'm thinking, though, Henry is that they may be doing it for other reasons."

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**Kissinger:** "They've —"

**Nixon:** "Maybe's they invited you for lunch, with the hope that we will lay off of our preempt—our preemptive air strikes."

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**Kissinger:** "They think you are getting ready to clobber North Vietnam."

**Nixon:** "That's right."

**Kissinger:** "There's no question about that."

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

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[End of p.169; start of p.170]

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

**Nixon:** "Well I—you can't wait too late because then you'll have this before Russia like we had just before China—"

**Kissinger:** "No, No. But, Mr. President, you—you're coming back on March 1st.

Presumably you'll report to the nation on the 2nd or 3rd, or something—"

**Nixon:** "Right. Right. Right."

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

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**Nixon:** "No."

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

**Nixon:** "Right."

**Kissinger:** "That is —that is a big deal—"

**Nixon:** "All right. Now, I'm—Understand, I'm just trying to see it all, and plot what would go through their minds if they were trying to screw us —"

**Kissinger:** "No, I think, Mr. President—"

**Nixon:** "[U]nclear]. The second thing it may be, Henry, the second thing they make be thinking of is that they're inviting you in, 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

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from doing something else. One is that they're afraid we're going to hit the North.

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Fine, they accomplished that purpose."

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**Kissinger:** "Yeah, but weren't going to do more than 24, 48 hours anyway—"

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**Nixon:** "[Unclear]. I know that. But what I mean is, what I mean is if that's the

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purpose, then—Now that's interesting.

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**Kissinger:** "I—"

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**Nixon:** "The other thing is, if you put it to them on this offensive thing—I can't

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believe that they would tell you, on the other side of the coin—and I might be

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wrong—that they would have you for a private meeting and then proceed to kick

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the hell out of us prior to that time."

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**Kissinger:** "Almost inconceivable."

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**Nixon:** "How could they? Because that's why I need you to put the condition—stick

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with the condition."

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**Kissinger:** "Absolutely."

**Nixon:** "Because if, for example, let's put it another way, now. If you accepted the

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meeting, and then they kicked the hell out of us, and then we cancel, we're in a bad

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way. We should warn them in advance that—right?"

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**Kissinger:** "That's right. Mr. President, you've been very tough with them. You

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know, we cancelled that, this Thursday's meeting—

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**Nixon:** "Did we?"

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**Kissinger:** "—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 then hit them for

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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."

[End of p.170; start of p.171]

[laughter]

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**Nixon:** Yeah.

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

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**Nixon:** "Yeah—"

**Kissinger:** "And—"

**Nixon:** "—and showing that they didn't amount to anything."

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**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 protest, and then the French said, 'Let's look at where the damage is.' They [the North Vietnamese] refused to show them [the French]. And we've had another report that in Vinh, particularly, they inflicted enormous casualties on some troop barracks. Now, I wouldn't place this report in the absolute confidence as it is. I didn't put it in here—"

**Nixon:** "Sure. I know."

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**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 weren't going to go for broke against the North. So that what they're going to stop—"

**Nixon:** "Yeah."

**Kissinger:** "—is not something we wanted to do."

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**Nixon:** "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, the—all the records of Chou En-lai's comments and so forth—I mean, you can read into the little innuendo and nuance, and all the rest, that—it's a hard-line goddamn thing."

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

**Nixon:** "Yeah. On the other hand, they show [that] they are susceptible to being—  
now, what was that—huffing and puffing, too, You know, they always say, 'We don't  
make promises 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, and they were timid.  
Afterwards, they had this—Chou En-lai told you in July that they would not stand  
idly by. And then he went on. And then Mao Tse-tung then, afterwards, admitted to  
Bhutto that, "We [the Chinese] 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. [End of p.171; start of p.172] What  
they do is they're asking toughly for the things they know we're going to do anyway.  
like troop withdrawals."

**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 on July 15. So,  
that, the North Vietnamese will never forgive them. I believe that they did make an  
effort to get them to negotiate because for about 6 weeks after you were there on  
[July]—after your announcement of July 15, the North Vietnamese press was, beside  
themselves. Then in November after I was there for another 6 weeks the North

Vietnamese press—

**Nixon:** "Um-hmm?"

**Kissinger:** "—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

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back a very mild reply saying, "~~We~~ are not going to meddle in the Vietnamese war," ~~which~~ you ~~can really~~ read 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."

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**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. ~~I~~—And I'll bet it's a poker game."

**Nixon:** "Yeah."

**Kissinger:** "It's a way of ~~pressure~~—~~Since~~ I already know they proposed a meeting in Paris—"

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**Nixon:** "Yeah."

**Kissinger:** "~~—~~there isn't a chance of a snowball in hell—"

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**Nixon:** Um-hmm?

**Kissinger:** "~~—~~that they will accept a meeting in Moscow."

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**Nixon:** [Unclear]—

**Kissinger:** "They've already ~~rejected it~~ in October, so ~~that~~—"

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**Nixon:** [Unclear],

**Kissinger:** "But if Moscow proposes ~~the~~ 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 ~~the~~—Hanoi screw it up in May. So they're up against a whole series of deadlines. Then they see you—~~I mean, they're—they—Uh, I mean,~~ if you look at the press, say look at *Time* and *Newsweek* this week, ~~there's~~ [End of p.172; start of p.173] a little play ~~on~~ 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,

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Conversation No. 670-13) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.