

U.S.-Soviet Relations and the Spring Offensive in Vietnam, March 30–April 18, 1972

73. Editorial Note

On March 30, 1972, North Vietnam began its long-awaited spring offensive as regular army units steadily advanced into South Vietnam along three fronts: across the Demilitarized Zone toward Dong Ha and Quang Tri, from bases in Laos toward Dak To and Pleiku in the Central Highlands, and from bases in Cambodia toward Loc Ninh and An Loc northwest of Saigon. President Nixon and Assistant to the President Kissinger were meeting in the Oval Office from 9:58 to 10:45 a.m. when Kissinger received a note on the invasion. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary; Nixon, *RN: Memoirs*, page 586; and Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*) Nixon and Kissinger then discussed the news.

Kissinger: "It looks like they are attacking now in Vietnam."

Nixon: "The battle has begun."

Kissinger: "Yeah. Right at the DMZ. And [unclear] again. I made them check whether the, of course the weather is too bad for us to bomb. We must have the world's worst air force."

Nixon: "What's the situation? They, is this the, this is an attack on a broad front?"

Kissinger: "It looks that way. They have attacked eight fire-support bases, which is usually the way these things start. And they are attacking within range of the SAMs and all—"

Nixon: "How are they doing?"

Kissinger: "It appears they're doing fairly well, but, you know, the first six hours of an attack, you know, who can tell?"

Nixon: "How's the ARVN doing? Doing fairly well?"

Kissinger: "Yeah. That's what they say. They say it's really acting well but—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "—but you can't believe that. I think if this is a real attack, we should hit the SAMs in North Vietnam—"

Nixon: "Sure."

Kissinger: "—that are protecting—And we told them we were going to do it."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: “And—”

Nixon: “Well, I don’t see why we don’t do it right now.” [unclear]

Kissinger: “Well, let’s wait until the end of the day to see whether it’s a real attack or just a blip.”

After considering various diplomatic and military means to stop the invasion, the two men linked the war in Vietnam to relations with the Soviet Union. Kissinger mentioned that “Brezhnev wrote you a letter this week [Document 72] which is very, very conciliatory.” Nixon then raised Kissinger’s meeting that afternoon with Dobrynin, including plans to consult the Soviets on the President’s proposed trip to Warsaw.

Nixon: “First of all, do your best to cut the deal on Poland.”

Kissinger: “I think I can handle that.”

Nixon: “But the second thing—And then say, and you can point out that, he can have, he need to be not concerned about what I say on Poland. He can be very sure. There’s no problem on that. That we’ll be totally discrete. But that I think we’re going to be in a terrible position if we turn it down. Second point is, I think you should tell Dobrynin that, we’re rather surprised by this attack. I’d tell him [unclear], and you can say, ‘Look, you don’t know what—the President has said he wants to make the best possible arrangement with Brezhnev. We’re all on—we’re on the same track. But an attack on North Vietnam may make it impossible. It may spoil it.’”

Kissinger: “Well—”

Nixon: “I’d play it very hard.”

Kissinger: “In fact, at the end of his letter, he had a rather mild expression of hope that we wouldn’t bomb North Vietnam. And I can just take off from that and say—”

Nixon: “Sure.”

Kissinger: “—we have showed great restraint.”

Nixon: “Great restraint since this. Now, instead we’re going to have to do it. And it’s only because they’re attacking. And you’ve just got to keep, have them knock off this attack or we’re going to bomb them. But I’d tell him, ‘Now look, Mr. Ambassador, I cannot vouch for what he won’t do. I mean don’t think that it’s going to be limited to what we have done before.’ Throw that in again. ‘If these attacks continue, I believe I owe it to you to say that don’t assume that it will not be—that it will be limited to the kind of a bombing we’ve done before.’” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, March 30, 1972, 9:38–11:10 a.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 697–2) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

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

Washington, March 30, 1972.

SUBJECT

The Soviets and the Middle East Dilemma

On several recent occasions, Soviet diplomats, including Gromyko, have made it clear that the Middle East will be a "major item" on the Summit agenda. And they may be holding out to Sadat and possibly other Arabs the hope of significant movement toward a peace settlement resulting from the Summit. As long ago as November, Dobrynin speculated to Sisco that an agreement on a set of "principles" ought to come out of the summit,² and in the last weeks the Soviets have been actively probing what the US might have in mind.

There are some worrisome aspects in this situation. Some people, like the Israelis, believe that the Soviets are preparing to set us up for a diplomatic kill in Moscow by accepting the Rogers' Plan as a basis for an Arab-Israeli settlement. According to this theory, the Soviets, knowing that the Egyptians would settle on this basis and that the Israelis strongly oppose because of the provision for full withdrawal, would attempt to draw the President out by endorsing our earlier position. This would put us on the spot again because we could not produce the Israelis. If it worked, the Soviets would be seen as favoring an American plan but they could also pose as the champions of peace in the Middle East and demonstrate to their Arab clients that they are doing something useful in the diplomatic realm.

They may, of course, simply be interested in eliciting some sense of what could be the basis for negotiation now rather than in seriously embarrassing us. This would be more likely to be the case if they genuinely want (a) progress toward a settlement and (b) to avoid a situation where they would have to commit forces.

Nevertheless, the question arises, at least as a contingency in the Soviet view, of what their alternatives would be should it become clear that diplomacy had run its course. Could the Soviets contemplate military action; indeed, could they stop it even if they insisted? The Egyp-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 67, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Sonnenfeldt Papers [2 of 2]. Secret; Outside System. Sent for information.

² Sisco and Dobrynin discussed the Soviet proposal for a set of "principles" on the Middle East during a meeting on November 1; see footnote 2, Document 10.

tians seem generally to be waiting for the outcome of the summit before deciding on next steps, and the reaction could be sharp if they are disillusioned by its results. The Israelis, of course, hope that the Egyptians and Soviets would then conclude that they have no recourse but to negotiate with Israel. The Soviet-Arab alternative is to try to increase the threat of military action another notch.

Judging by the performance in the Indo-Pak confrontation, there comes a time when the Soviets realize that if military action cannot be avoided, they must have achieved some degree of influence over timing and tactics, and the outcome. In contrast to their political role at the UN in the Indian crisis, in the Middle East, their military presence almost ensures some direct involvement of their own personnel, at least in Egypt. If it is true that the present balance would guarantee a defeat for the Egyptians, then one line of Soviet action would be to use their own forces to redress the balance and guarantee at least a stand-off, or possibly some limited Egyptian gains. This, of course, would run a very high risk that we would enter into picture to “right the balance” in favor of the Israelis. Against this background, it is worth noting the rather extensive Soviet diplomatic activity in the past two months.

1. *Egypt*. The Soviets have long held the view (as we have) that Egypt’s basic military problem is not the quality and quantity of its equipment but the morale, technical capabilities and proficiency of its military personnel. Yet despite the fact that more advanced weaponry at this point only brings marginal improvement, the Soviets, in response to Egyptian pleas, keep introducing it. Thus when Sadat went to Moscow in February³ and made a strong pitch for more advanced equipment, they promised TU–22 supersonic bombers, more advanced versions of the MIG–21 and T–62 tanks. This followed the provision of a squadron of missile carrying T–16 bombers and several high-altitude FOXBAT reconnaissance aircraft with Soviet pilots and a training program as a result of Sadat’s visit to Moscow last October.⁴ The point is that in Egyptian hands this equipment will not significantly improve their offensive capability, although it will give them at least a temporary psychological boost and will maintain Soviet influence in Cairo.

Marshal Grechko visited Cairo soon after Sadat’s mission to Moscow,⁵ and brought with him a very high level military delegation, including the commander of the Soviet Air Force and the first deputy

³ See Document 43.

⁴ See Document 5.

⁵ Grechko visited Egypt from February 18 to 21, 1972. For a summary both of the visit and of the joint communiqué, see *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXIV, No. 8, March 22, 1972, p. 22.

commanders of the Soviet Navy and Air Defense and a first deputy Chief-of-Staff. The result was a cryptic announcement of an “exchange of views” on strengthening Egypt’s “defense capacity” but the Soviets must be reviewing their own military position.

2. *Iraq*. While Grechko was in Egypt, the Iraqi leader, Saddam Husayn, led a delegation to Moscow, apparently at Iraqi initiative.⁶ He made a speech about the need to develop relations to the level of a “firm strategic alliance.”

The final communiqué (February 17) referred to a “study of measures” that could be taken “in the near future” to consolidate relations in “treaties.” On March 12, Moscow radio predicted a new treaty. This is not a purely Arab-Israeli development, since Soviet interests in Iraq also relate to their ambitions in the Persian Gulf.

3. *Syria*. Almost immediately after the Iraqis departed from Moscow, a Soviet delegation, led by Politburo member Kiril Mazurov, arrived in Damascus.⁷ The first result was a “cooperation agreement” between the Baath party and the CPSU. A party-to-party agreement is something of an achievement in terms of Soviet efforts to exert influence in the Arab world through ruling parties, and to steer them toward national fronts that include the communists. The visit, however, had military aspects. The communiqué indicated that “possible” steps for promoting Syria “defense capability” had been discussed. And Mazurov in a speech referred to a “document” having been signed on this subject. There is also speculation that the question of a Soviet-Syrian treaty was discussed. It is also noteworthy, though not necessarily directly related, that the Syrians shortly after the visit publicly accepted Security Council Resolution 242—as interpreted by the Arabs—as a basis for a peace settlement.

4. *Libya, Algeria, Cyprus*. Despite the rather bitter Libyan denunciation of Moscow during the Indo-Pak war, Jallud⁸ came to Moscow in early March to discuss economic, political, and military relations—and speculation is that he bartered Libyan petroleum for Soviet military aid (which might be eventually destined for Egypt). Soviet relations with Algeria also took a small turn for the better as a result of Foreign Trade Minister Patolichev’s negotiation in Algiers for a new trade agreement.

⁶ Hussein visited the Soviet Union February 11–17. For a summary of the visit and a condensed text of the joint communiqué, see *ibid.*, vol. XXIV, No. 7, March 15, 1972, pp. 7–8, 32.

⁷ Mazurov visited Syria from February 21 to 26, 1972. For a condensed text of the joint communiqué, see *ibid.*, vol. XXIV, No. 8, pp. 20–21.

⁸ Major Abdul Salam Jalloud, member of the Libyan Revolutionary Command Council and Minister of the Economy and Industry.

Of course, the Soviets have been active in pressing their special claims in the Eastern Mediterranean, through warning against interference in Cyprus, protests against US homeporting in Greece, and in his March 20 speech Brezhnev characterized Soviet-Arab relations as broadening in “defense cooperation.”⁹

The conventional wisdom is that the Soviets are hedging against a deterioration of their relations with Egypt and, to this end, are consolidating their position in the Arab world generally. Moreover, it is still the standard estimate, based to some degree on Soviet reassurances, that the USSR is a force for moderation and restraint or at least is not willing to take actions which might risk a confrontation with us.

This is reasonable, but looks mainly to the past record and present situation. It is not inconceivable that the Soviets are toying with the notion of a deeper military involvement or at least trying to create the impression of a greater military threat to Israel. Certainly, signing treaties with the erratic regimes in Damascus and Baghdad would be a step toward a greater identification of Soviet power and prestige with governments they cannot control.

One can only wonder how the Soviets would honor whatever treaty obligations they undertake toward Syria. One possibility would be to tentative station Soviet forces there.

⁹ See Document 65.

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

Washington, March 30, 1972.

SUBJECT

Your Next Meeting with Dobrynin

Polish Trip. I don’t know where exactly this stands and whether you plan to take it up with Dobrynin. If you do, you can assume that

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 67, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Sonnenfeldt Papers [2 of 2]. Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information.

his response will be positive, or that he will refer the question home and then come back with a positive response. Although Gierek undoubtedly has particular objectives of his own in issuing the invitation, the idea was bound to have Soviet approval. It is almost certainly intended to help Brandt in the ratification debate and, in the longer term, to deflate Romania's special position. Both the Poles and Soviets presumably are prepared to run the risk of emotional demonstrations in the streets of Warsaw. (For us the question is whether the undoubted short-term spectacular that will occur is worth the fact that there will be few longer-term results and that we risk offending the West Europeans who have been told, via Luns,² that the President cannot stop for schedule reasons.)

*Brezhnev Letter.*³

1. It is generally positive in tone and you should tell Dobrynin that this is our reaction. You should also agree with him that this correspondence should now be held in abeyance until there is something specific to write about.

2. *SALT.*

a. As you know, Brezhnev offered a three-year freeze. I assume Semyonov will unveil this shortly. We, of course, will propose five years. You should note the Soviet move and point out that we will make our own proposal in Helsinki. Clearly, the final duration will have to depend on the contents of the agreement. You should not go beyond this with Dobrynin this time.

b. Brezhnev indicates some possible Soviet flexibility on SLBMs. In Helsinki, there have been similar signals, though nothing specific yet. You could see whether Dobrynin has something concrete to offer. Smith has hinted to Semyonov that we may be ready to accommodate the Soviet desire to defend ICBMs *if* the Soviets accommodate us on SLBMs. It is too early to unveil our two-for-two position but you should reinforce what Smith has said in general terms. If Dobrynin does have an SLBM proposal, you should still withhold our ABM position to give us time to examine the Soviet proposition.

3. *Europe.*

a. Brezhnev again picks up our readiness to talk confidentially about the conference⁴ (though, curiously, he does not actually mention the conference *per se*). He claims they have already made specific proposals and it is now our turn. You should avoid this for now and tell

² Joseph Luns, Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

³ Document 72.

⁴ Reference is to the proposed Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Dobrynin that we have never really had a persuasive private Soviet explanation of what they want to accomplish by a conference (i.e., stall).

b. Presumably; you will want to comment on Bahr.⁵ The point here is to keep the burden of promoting ratification on the Soviets. Hence you should *not* stress Bahr's optimism. You should also make the philosophical point that it is important that ratification is a *German* decision, rather than one *forced on* the Germans either by overt US pressure or by Soviet threats. We want German-Soviet reconciliation to be *lasting* and not vulnerable to a stab-in-the-back legend.

Other Issues.

If you review the status of other matters, the main one is trade. To avoid later misunderstandings, you should tell Dobrynin that Peterson has kept you informed of their exchanges,⁶ that we look forward to Patolichev's visit, but that the Soviets should not expect basic decisions on EXIM and MFN before the summit. (Avoid a specific commitment to do them at the summit.) The Patolichev visit should be seen as part of the preparations for the summit and should not preempt it. We should make progress on the simpler issues and agree on terms for a US-Soviet Commercial Commission to be set up at the summit.

Patolichev apart, we would hope to have an agreement by the time of the summit on (1) grain deal—Butz and (2) shipping, and substantial progress, if not agreement on lend-lease.

Trip Arrangements.

I am not up to date on what Chapin and Vorontsov have been doing. One idea that evidently has germinated is a Presidential radio-TV address in Moscow. (Eisenhower was to have done this: Khrushchev in 1959/60 and Kosygin in 1967 had televised press conferences.) If this has not yet been mentioned to the Soviets you should do so promptly since it undoubtedly requires Politbureau action.

If Dobrynin has a communiqué text or comments on ours, take them under advisement. It is probably too early to begin textual haggling with him.

Note: The Soviets have twice—including once at Kuznetsov–Beam level—suggested that summit preparations be carried on in Moscow

⁵ Bahr met Kissinger at the White House on March 28; see *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, vol. XL, Germany and Berlin, 1969–1972, Document 348.

⁶ In a March 28 memorandum to Kissinger, Peterson forwarded an account of his meeting with Dobrynin the previous day to discuss the proposed visit of Soviet Trade Minister Patolichev. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 718, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XX)

as well as Washington. You should tell Dobrynin to get this knocked off until further notice. It will only confuse.

Note: The Soviets jumped the gun by a day on the agreed announcement of the BW signature ceremony.⁷

⁷ At the end of the memorandum, Haig added the handwritten note: "You will wish to review Hal's think piece on ME [Document 74]."

76. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, March 30, 1972, 1:15–3 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin
Henry A. Kissinger

I had a luncheon meeting with Dobrynin during a hiatus in which he was still waiting for instructions on a number of issues.

I opened the conversation by discussing the possibility of a visit to Poland by the President. I told Dobrynin that I had mentioned the fact that the visit to Iran would be the last stop. However, we had now received a formal invitation to Poland; previously it had been only a feeler, but now it would be very difficult in an election year to turn it down. We would not go to Poland in order to embarrass the Soviet Union. When we went to Romania, we knew that it might create some difficulties but we were willing to pay the price, though it was not our intention even there deliberately to produce difficulties. In the case of Poland, our motives are quite different.

Dobrynin replied that he was very moved by the fact that I bothered to check with him. He recognized that we did not have to check our movements in eastern Europe with him, but it was an example of our goodwill. He was certain that Moscow would not object, but it

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held at the Soviet Embassy. No drafting information appears on the memorandum. Kissinger forwarded it and summarized its contents in an April 5 memorandum to the President. A notation on the April 5 memorandum indicates the President saw it. (Ibid.)

would make a very good impression in Moscow if we could hold up our decision until we got a formal answer.

We then turned to a number of the technical arrangements for the summit. There was a long discussion about the floor plan in the Kremlin and the possibility of housing the necessary number of members of the party in the Kremlin. Dobrynin said he hoped we would accept the offer of the Kremlin under all circumstances, because it was really an unusual honor and one which was above all designed to symbolize to the Soviet people that we were serious about establishing mutual ties. He said that the overflow could easily be housed in the Rossiya Hotel right across Red Square. I told him that I was sure we would be able to work out something that was mutually satisfactory. I suggested that Dobrynin send us a floor plan of what was available; then we could make much more reasonable decisions. I also told Dobrynin that we would accept 8 days and that Baku was a suitable third city [as they had suggested in their note of March 23, attached at Tab B].²

We then turned to a quick review of a number of issues. Dobrynin said he thought that the SLBM question was now being actively considered in the Soviet Union, though they still thought that even a limit on ICBMs would be major progress. I said that I hoped that the Soviet leaders would notify us in Washington before making any proposals in Helsinki. Dobrynin also said that they would make some proposals to us on the Middle East. He wondered how we should handle mutual force reductions in Europe. He said that he had thought we would make some specific proposals. He still thought it might be helpful if we suggested something before the summit, so that perhaps there could be a preliminary discussion of it at the summit.

I mentioned to Dobrynin that during the President's visit I would probably not go along to Leningrad but rather would work on the communiqué in Moscow. He said that would be a good idea. He could then have me to his house, and also Gromyko would no doubt want me at the Foreign Office Guest House for some time so that we could work on the communiqué there.

We briefly discussed the visit of the Soviet Minister of Trade. Dobrynin said that there had not yet been an official decision but he had had a private letter which made it appear very likely.

Dobrynin said that there was obviously a big push going on to put the State Department back on the map. He said that he was amazed. He had only talked to the Secretary of State about SALT for one minute when the Secretary had said submarines should be included one way or the other in the SALT agreement. When Dobrynin had asked which

² Brackets in the source text. Tab B was not attached, but see Document 69.

way, the Secretary said, well, he didn't know any of the details.³ The State Department then announced that a major discussion had taken place. I pointed out that it wasn't the Secretary's job to know all the details.

We had a general discussion then of Dobrynin's own views and background. He told me that his mother had been extremely religious, but his father was a factory worker and quite agnostic. He hoped that perhaps on one of my visits, either now or if I came back in September, I would meet his parents. I said I hoped so.⁴

³ Dobrynin met Rogers at the Department of State on March 22 for a review of outstanding bilateral issues; see Document 67. During a conversation with Nixon at 10:17 a.m. on March 31, Kissinger mentioned Dobrynin's comment on Rogers. Kissinger: "Dobrynin said to me yesterday, he said he went to see Rogers and they talked for thirty seconds about SALT and State put out a long blip of how Rogers had put it into him on SALT." Nixon: "Put it in to him? You mean—?" Kissinger: "You know Rogers. Rogers had said to him, 'We want SLBMs in SALT one way or the other.' So Dobrynin asked him, 'Well, what do you mean?' Rogers said, 'Well, I don't know all the details. I'm just telling you.' And—." Nixon: "That's the trouble. Dobrynin does know the details." Kissinger: "And Dobrynin does know the details. And I had told him our position. But at any rate they're playing it in such a way that it's all going to surface—." Nixon: "Yeah." Kissinger: "—at the summit." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Ziegler, March 31, 1972, 10:17–11:14 a.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 699–1)

⁴ Kissinger called Dobrynin at 2:45 p.m. on March 31 to continue their discussion of issues related to the summit. After an exchange on housing arrangements in Moscow, Kissinger mentioned a report that the Soviet side was confused "about whether anything should be settled before or whether the submarines should be left for the President and Mr. Brezhnev." "Now I don't care," he continued. "We won't give any formal answers there but our idea is to get more of the big issues settled and just leave some technical issues for Moscow. If we can get some things settled in principle we can work out the final details in Moscow. But you let me know your position before the people in Helsinki get it." Dobrynin agreed to call Kissinger as soon as he had anything to report on the matter. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

77. **Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹**

Washington, March 30, 1972.

Kissinger: Well, I had a long talk with Dobrynin. And I put the Polish proposition to him. And I said, "You know, the basic departure that we are doing here is that we want to build policy on the recognition of we're two superpowers and that we don't want to interfere in each other's basic concerns." And I took—I showed him the cable we had from Warsaw² and the reply we gave. I said, "This is the spirit which we would like to deal with you. We don't need to ask you whether we want to go there but we want to show you the President is particularly concerned in what your reaction is." So he was practically in tears. He said, "This is the most generous thing I've heard. You will—I cannot tell you, Henry, how much this will impress Mr. Brezhnev."

Nixon: That we asked because he knew what we did on Rumania.

Kissinger: Yeah. I said, "I want you to know, when we went to Rumania, we knew it would annoy you. We're going to Warsaw because, and if it raises any problems for you, we'll look [unclear]." And he was practically in tears. He said, "Speaking informally and as a member of the Central Committee, I am certain that they will say yes. But if you can wait 'til Monday,"³ he said—so that he is formally—"so that you get a formal reply from us, it would mean a great deal to us. But I can tell you now that it will be yes. It will almost certainly be yes." But he was practically in tears.

Nixon: You see, they, we have to realize we've got some chips to play too here.

Kissinger: Oh yeah.

Nixon: And they, they know we can just, that, but it does show we're trying to cooperate.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: And you told him that I would not embarrass them and that I—

Kissinger: I said you will say nothing that would embarrass, and I said it [unclear] to our support in domestic considerations.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 698-2. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 3:17 to 3:27 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² See Document 76.

³ April 3.

Nixon: He understood that?

Kissinger: Oh yeah. And I said, “We are not doing this for the same reason as we did Rumania, which wasn’t done to annoy you, but in which we were willing to pay the price.”

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: “In this case, we frankly want to stay on the same.”

Nixon: You told him that—did you reiterate that I felt that the importance of the summit was utmost on my mind?

Kissinger: Oh, well, that’s how I started.

Nixon: He liked that, didn’t he?

Kissinger: Oh God, yes. And then on Vietnam I said, “You know, you’ve been mentioning now two or three times that Vietnam may be discussed.” And I said, “First of all I want you to know what the President just said to me.” And I mentioned—

Nixon: That’s why I called you.⁴

Kissinger: That’s what—

Nixon: I didn’t know you were there. I called him here to talk about it. And then when I found you, I thought, what the hell, I’ll just call. That impresses the son-of-a-gun. He knows that we are in contact.

Kissinger: Secondly, he said, “Now let me make a proposal to you which just occurred to me.” He said, “It’s got no official standing; it’s just my own idea. But how would this be.” He said, “Why don’t you offer a withdrawal for a deadline?” I said, “Well, if we do that then they’ll say you have to stop military aid too and we can’t do that.” He said, “But maybe we can help there.” He said, “Supposing you made, this were the proposal: that you withdraw in return for a deadline: you give a deadline for withdrawal in return for prisoners, and you and we agree not to give any more military aid—we to North Vietnam and you to South Vietnam.” That wouldn’t be a bad deal.

Nixon: Ha. I’ll say.

Kissinger: So I said, “You know,” I said, “Frankly the President thinks he’s got this war won. You know I—.” I played it very tough. I said, “We feel that if we can last ‘til November, which I’m sure we can,

⁴ When he called Kissinger in the Map Room at 12:45 p.m., Nixon assumed that Kissinger was there for a meeting with Dobrynin. A tape of their brief telephone conversation on U.S.-Soviet relations is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, March 30, 1972, 12:45–12:47 p.m., White House Telephone, Conversation No. 22–53. According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger and Haig, however, met Israeli Ambassador Yitzhak Rabin in the Map Room from 12:29 to 1:15 p.m.; Kissinger then left for his luncheon with Dobrynin at the Soviet Embassy. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule)

that we have four years to settle accounts. So your, we don't feel any pressure. You stage an offensive, I'll tell you right now we're not going to have any secret or other meetings." [unclear]

Nixon: Yeah.

[Omitted here is discussion of the President's schedule.]

Kissinger: [I told Dobrynin] "That if you want to find out how Moscow reacts to this proposition, the President has always said that he'd be open-minded and I'll explore it in the meantime with the President." I frankly think if we could get that sort of a deal, it would be—

Nixon: What, you mean that they would stop their aid, we'd stop ours, we could agree to that?

Kissinger: Military aid. We can continue to give economic aid.

Nixon: Why the hell shouldn't we give military aid if the North—

Kissinger: I think if the North doesn't get military equipment, why should the South then get military equipment?

78. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, March 30, 1972.

Nixon: I was thinking more about your conversation with Dobrynin. Trying to look at it pragmatically, Henry, what the hell is in it for them pulling us off over in Vietnam?

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: I'm just being the devil's advocate. I don't know.

Kissinger: Well, I'm not sure they're going to do it. But—

Nixon: No, no. I'm just—that's what I mean. That's why we don't know whether it's worth exploring unless you think it's—

Kissinger: What's in it for them is as long as Vietnam goes on we have an additional incentive to play with the Chinese. Secondly, we—

Nixon: Also it avoids most favored nation and other little things.

Kissinger: We are setting up a lot of things now in the economic

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation Nos. 698–7 and 698–8. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 5:07 to 5:30 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

field. They're really moving massively with us, and I have every intention of let—And, well, at any rate it's so set up that we can control the delivery. And—

Nixon: I see.

Kissinger: —and I don't think we should deliver unless they do something.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Then they're really panting after the Middle East. Now—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: I—I haven't—

Nixon: [unclear] with respect to the Middle East—

Kissinger: I haven't bothered with all the details, but I've made some propositions to them on the Middle East, which they won't accept, but they have promised me a reaction, which is the first time they have moved off the position of just blanket endorsement of the Egyptian position. In turn—What I have to do with the Israelis, it's got to be very tricky. I told them they were such double-crossers that I was disengaging from the negotiations. That I did—

Nixon: And you told Mr. Dobrynin that?

Kissinger: I told Rabin that.²

Nixon: Ha.

Kissinger: And I told the Israelis this only in order to be able to stay in the negotiations, because if they think we're talking, we've got to be a little—I want to see first a little bit more of what's going on.

Nixon: I thought we might take a little walk . . .

[Omitted here is a brief exchange on the President's schedule. Nixon and Kissinger then walked through the South Grounds of the White House from 5:11 to 5:18 before returning to the Oval Office. Following their walk they discussed Vietnam and arrangements for the President's trip to the Soviet Union, Iran, and Poland.]

Kissinger: You'll have a tremendous one in Tehran. You'll have a big one in Warsaw. And my instinct tells me the Russians somewhere along the line are going to—

Nixon: Will let people out? If they do, they'll react. The Russian people are an emotional, strong people.

Kissinger: One thing he told me was that, you know, we're having a little problem of our space in the Kremlin. And he said, "For God's sakes, don't turn the Kremlin down. It's the biggest honor that Brezhnev could pay you."

² See footnote 4, Document 77.

Nixon: I won't turn it down. Space for what? For staff?

Kissinger: Yeah. And he said "Above all, the Russian people, that's for the Russian people that means that there's a solid basis for our relationship, and it's a tremendous signal to our people.

Nixon: Mmm.

Kissinger: To have the President in the Kremlin.

Nixon: Hm-mmm.

Kissinger: And I think that's right.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: But I think, if I may make a suggestion, I don't—I think we should play it very cool about the summit. We should give the impression that not much is going to happen at the summit.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: [unclear] Right now no one really expects much out of the Moscow summit and that's great. We've got the thing split up over the bureaucracy in such a way—

Nixon: That's good. Well, I think we can play the line that there are a number [of] things we're going to discuss, but some things that we're pretty far apart on too.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: That we're pretty far apart.

Kissinger: Yeah. They're going beautifully now on SALT.

Nixon: Is it?

Kissinger: Yeah. That's moving.

Nixon: Don't get—but Smith's not going to settle now?

Kissinger: Oh, no.

Nixon: Well, the Russians aren't, right?

Kissinger: No. I told Dobrynin again today.

Nixon: You did?

Kissinger: On the Middle East, if we could get an interim settlement—

Nixon: That's already—

Kissinger:—and defer the final settlement until, say, September. They are sort of counting on my going out, over there in September, because it's—

Nixon: It's done. We've got to do China too.

Kissinger: I've got to go there at the end of June.

Nixon: Incidentally, it's good to go to China and good to go to Russia, because we're going to have to use everybody in the campaign that can be used and you can come back from China and garble around a bit. Then, you see, you can do a television thing, and then after you

go to Russia you can do the same thing. You see, I want to be—we've got to really throw the big guns in.

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: We need foreign policy up front and center in that period too.

Kissinger: China, we now have scheduled for the end of June, just before the June Democratic Convention.

[Omitted here is brief discussion of plans to announce Rogers' trip to Europe.]

79. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 3, 1972.

[Omitted here is a brief exchange on political leadership in the Pentagon.]

Kissinger: It is clear that there is a massive attack.

Nixon: Oh, we know there is.

Kissinger: They've now got 50 tanks near Dong Ha.

Nixon: I noticed this morning, it says Abrams considers the situation is grim, which he, of course, shouldn't say.

Kissinger: Of course. I've asked him to—

Nixon: And, of course, the press is using these terms they did in Laos—rout, disarray, and so forth and so forth. I don't think it's that bad but nevertheless I don't know.

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: The GIs, they say, are voicing opposition to the war. And Abrams, or MACV, is saying that ARVN was taken by surprise. Now, for Christ's sakes, we're in charge of the goddamned intelligence up there. We can't—The military can't cop out on this one, Henry.

Kissinger: That's right.

[Omitted here is discussion of the military situation in Vietnam and of political leadership in the Pentagon.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 700–2. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 8:54 to 9:09 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

Kissinger: They're attacking close to the centers of, close to their own border, shows how far they've been pushed out. And I think we shouldn't panic now. What—In a way it's a godsend. We should give them a tremendous punishment.

Nixon: Yeah. Because—

Kissinger: I believe—

Nixon: It's a godsend because they could've done this. What they've done now they could do next October. Although the weather would still be bad, wouldn't be as good then as it now, would it?

Kissinger: Well, in October it will be about like now. It will be the end of the rain.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: They can—

Nixon: Same thing.

Kissinger: —do it in October.

Nixon: It's just as good, well to have it right now.

Kissinger: It's just as well. We can now precipitate. I'm going to get Dobrynin in and I'm going to tell him, I'm just going to threaten him with the non-ratification of the Berlin treaty.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: I'm going to say, "Now this is it."

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: And keep in mind the fact that you, that we still want to drive a hard bargain on the summit. Oh, they want that summit. [unclear]

Kissinger: Mr. President, they can no more afford to not have that summit.

Nixon: They can't trade Vietnam for this. The Chinese—You've already sent a message now?

Kissinger: No, that's going tonight. Or as soon as I get them on the phone, we'll get somebody up there to deliver it.²

Nixon: Oh, I see.

Kissinger: I think we could play this into an end of the war.

Nixon: I think you're right.

Kissinger: I think it's—

² Lord delivered the message to representatives of the People's Republic of China in New York that evening; for text, see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 219.

Nixon: I think you're right but, I'll tell you, it will provided this bombing attack that we put on is one of the, is the best, is the finest goddamn thing that's ever been, the military, that's ever been done.

[Omitted here is discussion of political leadership in the Pentagon and plans for handling the press on the North Vietnamese offensive.]

Kissinger: If the ARVN collapses, we've done everything we can, Mr. President.

Nixon: We will. If the ARVN collapses? Don't say—That's just a, that's a question that we can't even think about. If the ARVN collapses? A lot of other things will collapse around here. If they think we're going to collapse, we'd had to do it a year ago. We can't do it this year, Henry.

Kissinger: Right. They're not going to collapse. I know—

Nixon: You see what I mean? We can't take it.

Kissinger: I agree. That's why we've got to blast—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —the living bejeezus out of North Vietnam. We will gain nothing for restraint—

Nixon: That's right. That's right.

Kissinger: —and it would be—I think if we shock the bejeezus out of them, we can get Japan—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —Hell, we can get Russia and China to help us, because they cannot want to have this whole thing. But we've got to get them to move now.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And Laird is already saying the 48-hour strike won't be done now until Friday.³ We've got to hit fast.

Nixon: Why?

Kissinger: Well, partly weather, partly because he says he needs the air assets in the combat zone. But if we build enough of a fire under the Chiefs, they'll get it done. Maybe we can wait 'til Wednesday but we ought to hit soon.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I'll go and get that briefing now.⁴

Nixon: Well, well—

³ April 7.

⁴ Kissinger attended a briefing by JCS representatives from 9:16 to 9:40 a.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule)

Kissinger: And I'll report to you.⁵

Nixon: Like I say, let's don't talk about well if the ARVN collapses. That's something we can't have. That's fine with regard to this. But we're playing a much bigger game. We're playing a Russian game, a Chinese game, and an election game.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: And we're not going to have the ARVN collapse.

Kissinger: I agree.

Nixon: It isn't that urgent. This kind of an attack is not urgent provided, provided we fight back and the ARVN holds.

Kissinger: Mr. President, by May 1st we'll be through it. I think it will lead to negotiations.

[Omitted here is discussion of the President's schedule and of the military situation in Vietnam.]

⁵ Kissinger reported to Nixon on his JCS briefing from 9:49 to 9:59 a.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Haldeman, April 3, 1972, 9:18–9:59 a.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 700–3)

80. Editorial Note

On April 3, 1972, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger met Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin in the Map Room at the White House from 5:37 to 6:15 p.m. to discuss the impact of the North Vietnamese offensive on U.S.-Soviet relations. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule) In the Executive Office Building earlier that afternoon, Kissinger and President Nixon discussed their plans to enlist Soviet support in Vietnam during the meeting with the Soviet Ambassador:

Nixon: "When are you going to see Dobrynin?"

Kissinger: "5:30."

Nixon: "When are you, when are you—are you passing a message to the Chairman?"

Kissinger: "Right. Well, we've got the Russians really in a bad bind because they want the Berlin treaty ratified. And I'm going to tell Dobrynin, 'Russian tanks, Russian artillery, including [unclear], including in there, because of air strikes, because of Brezhnev's letter,' we can't do it [unclear], that's true, but I'll say—"

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "And I'd say, 'this is it now.' [unclear] Every time we've laid down the law to them—"

Nixon: "They've done something."

Kissinger: "—they've done something."

Nixon: "Whether they can do anything now with these people, I don't know. Because these people probably see [unclear] the thing that they can stroke with Russia and China. Well, maybe they can." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 3, 1972, 12:55–1:28 p.m., Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 328–25) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

Although no substantive record has been found of the 5:30 meeting, both Kissinger and Dobrynin later described the conversation in their memoirs. According to Dobrynin, Kissinger had requested the meeting on an urgent basis and was "unusually agitated."

"On behalf of the president, he [Kissinger] wanted to inform the Soviet leadership that North Vietnam had launched large-scale military operations across the demilitarized zone, penetrating ten to fifteen miles to the south. The president, Kissinger said, will therefore have to take military countermeasures, and he hoped that Moscow would not regard them as hostile to its own interests, nor would they affect our relations on the eve of the Moscow summit. Kissinger added that the advancing North Vietnamese troops were 'armed 90 percent with Soviet-made weapons,' and the North Vietnamese command had gambled nearly all its regular troops on the offensive." (Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, page 243)

According to his own account, Kissinger accused the Soviets of "complicity in Hanoi's attack." He also emphasized, however, the importance of linkage between North Vietnam and West Germany.

"If the offensive continued, we would be forced into measures certain to present Moscow with difficult choices before the summit. In the meantime we would have to call off some steps of special concern to Moscow. For example, Moscow had asked us to send a message to West German leaders to urge the ratification of the Eastern treaties, scheduled for a vote in about a month's time. We had been reluctant to intervene to such an extent in Germany's internal politics. We used the North Vietnamese offensive as a pretext to avoid what we were reluctant to do in any event. Under current conditions, I told Dobrynin, we could not be active in Bonn. Moscow could not ask for our assistance in Europe while undermining our position in Southeast Asia. The Kremlin was put on notice that North Vietnamese actions might jeopardize some fundamental Soviet goals." (*White House Years*, page 1114)

After Dobrynin left, Nixon telephoned Kissinger at 6:20 p.m. to review the meeting.

"P: Hi, Henry. You finished with your meeting?"

"K: Yes, are you in your office?"

"P: No, I'm over at the residence. I will be over there in a half hour or so if you want to wait until then.

"K: Well, no. I told him what you said and he said, 'Isn't it amazing what a little country can do to wreck well-laid plans.' I said, 'The President wants you to know we will under no circumstances accept a defeat there and we will do what is necessary not to.' He said, 'What do you want us to do?' I said, 'First to show restraint and secondly you have to ask yourselves whether this isn't the time to bring an end to the war. There is, after all, when I look around the world I see no areas where we should be in conflict.' He said he did not either—not even in Vietnam. Then I brought up the Berlin thing. I said, 'Look, here we are. We get the ratification thing coming up in Germany, the President has been asked to write to Brandt, but he can't under these circumstances and he wants you to know if we should lose in Vietnam that is the last concession we will make this year.' He said, 'You aren't going to lose. In our assessment you can't lose.'

"P: I think he's right.

"K: I think we are going to see this through." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

The two men continued to discuss Vietnam and the Soviet Union when Kissinger called Nixon at 7:10 p.m. After assessing the effect of weather conditions on American air and sea operations, the President underlined his determination to avoid defeat in Vietnam.

"P: I will do everything necessary including taking out Haiphong.

"K: The more we shock them the better.

"P: Is there anything we could do in the Haiphong area?

"K: I think it is still too early. I think the Russians will do something. They are not going to risk everything.

"P: They will [not] risk Summit, Berlin, German treaty—correct?

"K: That's right. I told Dobrynin. We can't consider sending a message to Brandt under these conditions.

"P: I won't.

"K: I don't think you should send it anyway—so any excuse. I think if we don't hear from them [the Soviets] about Poland tomorrow we should just do it.

"P: That I am sure about. Why do you think they delayed on it?

"K: They may not have had a chance to have everyone together—or they may just be cute. They may be going to Poland now.

"P: I don't think our going to Poland will change anything. Tell them tomorrow. We can't hold it any longer—it's starting to leak." (Ibid.)

81. Editorial Note

On April 4, 1972, the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), chaired by Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger, met in the White House Situation Room from 10:50 to 11:47 a.m. to discuss the North Vietnamese offensive, including the impact of Soviet military supplies. Kissinger emphasized that the U.S. response to the invasion must include a strategy to influence decision-making not only in Hanoi but also in Moscow and Beijing. “We have issued many warnings and said many times that we will not be run out of Vietnam,” he declared. “We want the Russians and Chinese to understand that we are serious. We want to jolt them. If we get run out of Vietnam, we won’t have a foreign policy. I don’t know if the Russians want to risk everything under these circumstances.” After considering the effect of weather conditions on military operations against North Vietnam, Kissinger advocated political pressure against the Soviet Union, issuing instructions for Robert McCloskey, the Department of State spokesman, to emphasize the role of Soviet equipment during his daily press briefing. “We want the Soviets to realize that they are involved—because the North Vietnamese are using Soviet tanks, trucks, and supplies,” he explained. “We don’t say the Soviets are directly responsible for the offensive, but they do have the supply responsibility.” (Minutes of WSAG Meeting, April 4; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Minutes, Originals)

During his briefing of the press that afternoon, McCloskey stated that North Vietnam had clearly diverged in military strategy from guerrilla to conventional warfare. The source of divergence was equally clear. “These units are supported,” he explained, “in a very large way by heavy military equipment from the Soviet Union.” Although determined to underscore its effect on Vietnam, McCloskey was reluctant to discuss the effect this equipment might have on Soviet relations with the United States.

“Q: Bob, in raising the Soviet supplies here it raises the question: Is there any consideration now to looking at our relationship with the Soviets—particularly, in light of the trip to Moscow that’s planned?”

“A: There is no reconsideration on the projected visit of the President to the Soviet Union, and I wouldn’t want anything I say to directly confirm an affirmative response to the other part of the question.

“Q: Bob, you said here that all options remain open. Now, is the option open of cancelling the trip to Moscow, or isn’t it?”

“A: No, no; And I don’t think that anyone in this room—I’d be surprised if they included that as one of the options that I’ve been talking about here for two days.” (Transcript of Press, Radio and Televi-

sion News Briefing, April 4; *ibid.*, RG 59, Records of the Office of News and Its Predecessors, Records Relating to Press Conferences, Transcripts of Daily News Conferences of the Department of State, Jan. 1946–Dec. 1980, Vol. 69 of 137, Mar.–Apr. 1972)

Kissinger later wrote, however, that McCloskey “carried off the assignment so well that he triggered a series of confirming comments from other agencies, raising speculation that the entire US-Soviet relationship, including the summit, was in jeopardy. This was a little more than we wanted, but it erred in the right direction.” (*White House Years*, page 1115)

The WSAG members continued to discuss the role of Soviet decision-making on Hanoi during its meeting at 10:08 a.m. the next day. Kissinger asked whether the Soviets might try to slow the North Vietnamese advance, particularly before the rainy season. Director of Central Intelligence Helms said that there was no evidence that the Soviets were trying “to control the North Vietnamese.” The discussion then proceeded as follows:

“Dr. Kissinger: Assuming Hanoi wins, we can’t make any concessions in Moscow. Therefore, I don’t see why these operations are in the Russian interest. If the situation is inconclusive and if we are popping North Vietnam while we are in Moscow, that won’t make Moscow look very good.

By the way, I want to mention that we have been handling the press and other aspects very well.

“Mr. Irwin: McCloskey, as you know, brought the Russians into this during his briefing yesterday. What should we say now?

“Dr. Kissinger: I talked to the President about this. He wanted to fire a shot across the bow, but we don’t [want] to say anything more now. We don’t want to keep escalating the situation.

“Mr. Irwin: I agree.

“Dr. Kissinger: If a question comes up, just say that we pointed out the facts and that we stand on what we said.” (Minutes of WSAG Meeting, April 5; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Minutes, Originals)

82. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 4, 1972.

[Omitted here is a discussion of the military situation in Vietnam and of political leadership in the Pentagon.]

Kissinger: Mr. President, our major thing now is to get across to the Russians, to the Chinese, and to Hanoi that we are on the verge of going crazy. This is how we broke the India-Pakistan situation last year.

Nixon: With nothing.

Kissinger: With nothing.

Nixon: With nothing.

Kissinger: By just giving the impression that you were just crazy enough to fight for West Pakistan. If we could make that one stick, we can make this one stick.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: And we'll, we'll escalate it. And that's why we've got to pour things in there.

[Omitted here is further discussion of the military situation in Vietnam and of political leadership in the Pentagon.]

Nixon: Have the Chinese and Russians warned us yet?

Kissinger: No

Nixon: Not to intervene, not to bomb?

Kissinger: Not yet.

Nixon: Well, they will. They would have to because the stories all indicate we're going to.

Kissinger: Well—

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: It's dangerous to warn them if you do so, then it is ineffective. I think, the wilder we look the better it is for us. We will get—The worst is to look hesitant because then they'll want to get a point for keeping us from doing what we might not want to do.

Nixon: Sure. We're not [unclear]

Kissinger: No, no. I mean we've done it in Jordan. We've done it now. We did it in India-Pakistan. And we've got to play it recklessly. That's the safest course.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 701–17. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 1:17 to 1:32 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

Nixon: Yeah, I see your point. Your idea, Henry, is the appearance of some recklessness here and the—

Kissinger: If—

Nixon: —the hell with the election and all the rest is the thing that's going to make these bastards, they—You see, that's the point I raised with you yesterday. Is there some possibility in the back of their mind, they might feel I was restrained—because of the damn election? You see my point? They might.

Kissinger: They, they might. You see, Mr. President, I think you will not trigger the Russians into this unless they think you might just blow the whole damn thing.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: They're not doing the summit to do you a favor.

Nixon: Oh, no.

Kissinger: In fact, when they thought the summit was doing you a favor, they played a damn tough game.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: They gave you an answer only—They started coming the other way only when they started needing you. They need you now on the Berlin ratification. They have a big crisis—

Nixon: Does that make any, any imprint—

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: —on Mr. Dobrynin's mind?

Kissinger: Well, and he knows it's a fact. "If you start raising hell with us, that strengthens the enemies of ratification in Germany." That's a fact.

Nixon: I see.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: You told him that?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: Good. So, so your view is, as far as the Russians are concerned, they'll—

Kissinger: In fact, I told State. State—

Nixon: Let me say, let me say, if the Russians, if the Russians knock off the summit as a result of this—

Kissinger: They won't.

Nixon: Well, let me say, if they do, I'm simply going to say I, that we are not going to have the Russ—, the Communists determine our foreign policy.

Kissinger: They won't.

Nixon: We'll hit them right in the nose.

Kissinger: Inconceivable, Mr. President. They will not do it.

Nixon: What did you say to State?

Kissinger: Well, State got a question yesterday about what do we think of the Russian military mission in Hanoi. And he avoided it. I told them today if the question comes to say, "Let's not forget, we're not saying the Russians are planning these operations. We are saying it's Russian equipment that's making them possible."²

Nixon: Well, be sure that that's in Mel Laird's statement: Russian equipment, Russian tanks, Russian planes.³

Kissinger: And Russian tanks—and Russian trucks.

Nixon: And jeopardizes, jeopardizes Soviet-American relations. That's—Isn't that a good idea?

Kissinger: Excellent.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger's meeting with Joe Alsop.]

² See Document 81.

³ During a news conference on April 7, Laird charged that the Soviet Union was a "major contributor" to the North Vietnamese offensive, providing military supplies rather than political restraint. Laird also promised that the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam would continue until Hanoi withdrew its regular troops from the South. (*The New York Times*, April 8, 1972, p. 1)

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

Washington, April 5, 1972.

SUBJECT

Your Next Meeting with Dobrynin, April 6, 1972

SALT

Their new ABM proposal (Tab A),² as you are aware, is their old two for one with a deferred three for two. The number 225 for inter-

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 67, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Sonnenfeldt Papers [1 of 2]. Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Haig also initialed the memorandum.

² The text of the Soviet note, Tab A, which Sokolov gave Hicks on April 5, reads: "The United States, besides ABM defense of one base of ICBM's, would have the right

ceptors is simply a straight line projection from their previous 150 for two for one, i.e., presumably 75 at each of their sites and 100+ at each of ours. This is, of course, the first time the Soviets have offered “deferral” (guess who taught them the idea).³ This proposal is, if anything, worse than the December 15 one,⁴ although having broached deferral it may be intended to carry some implication of one for one with eventual two for two. The three to *five* year period is also of some interest in view of Brezhnev’s shift to a three year offensive freeze. This has not yet surfaced in Helsinki.

You should tell Dobrynin that your *first reaction* is negative—no advance, in principle, over their previous position.

You should go on to stress the clear relationship in our view between what happens on ABMs and what happens on SLBMs. The present Soviet position means clear inequality in our disfavor in both defensive and offensive weapons. This may be a situation that cannot be avoided without an agreement but we certainly cannot accept it *as the result* of agreement.

It is in this context that Smith today is offering two for two on ABMs (instead of our present two for one) if the Soviets move on SLBMs.⁵ (Note: Smith has not made any new specific SLBM proposal, other than a straight freeze. But *you* have given Dobrynin a modified

to deploy ABM facilities for defense of Washington, D.C.; and the Soviet Union, besides ABM defense of the capital and of ICBM silo launchers amounting to 50% of the number of launchers at the abovementioned US base, would have the right to additionally deploy ABM facilities for the defense of yet other 50% of the same number of ICBM launchers in the United States. This right would not be used *by the sides* during an agreed period (for example, 3–5 years). The total number of ABM launchers, with due account of those which could be additionally deployed for the abovementioned purposes, should not exceed 225. The rest of the conditions for limitations should be similar to those which go with the version now under discussion.”

³ Reference is evidently to the oral note Kissinger gave Dobrynin on April 26, 1971, in which he suggested that “the decision on the nature of sites to be permitted in the ABM agreement be deferred to subsequent negotiations.” (Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 817)

⁴ In his statement at the conclusion of negotiations in Vienna on December 15, Semenov submitted the following proposal: “The U.S. would retain ABM system components at one ICBM base. In the USSR the ABM system would be limited to defense of the National Capital and also to protection of a number of ICBM silo launchers amounting to 50 percent of the number of launchers at the U.S. ICBM base which is protected by ABM systems components.” (Telegram 1134 from USDEL SALT VI, December 15; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 18–3 AUS(VI)) Odeen and Sonnenfeldt assessed the proposal in a December 16 memorandum to Kissinger. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 882, SALT, SALT (Helsinki), Sept.–Dec. 1971 (Memoranda & Misc.))

⁵ Semenov presented the Soviet ABM proposal (see footnote 2 above) during an informal meeting at Helsinki on April 6; Smith then outlined the U.S. position (see Document 66), linking inclusion of SLBM’s in the interim agreement and its “two-for-two” proposal on the number of sites allowed in the ABM treaty. (Telegram 1240 from USDEL SALT VII, April 6; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 18–3 FIN(HE))

freedom-to-mix, G and H to Yankee, proposition.⁶ There has been no Soviet response to either.)

I believe you should not today debate further the merits of either ABM proposal but *stress the need for basic decisions if we are to get anywhere near agreement by the summit*. We have made a basic decision—permitting the Soviets an ICBM defense which they do not now have. You hope the Politburo is addressing more fundamental matters than the tactical—and discouraging—revisions in the latest Soviet ABM proposal.

(*Note: We will do a more considered analysis with Odeen when the Soviets have tabled their proposal in Helsinki.*)⁷

Other Matters

A progress report on bilateral issues is at Tab B.⁸ (State does not know about Peterson's talks with Dobrynin about Patolichev⁹ and a Joint Commission.)

Matters Are Moving Too Slowly on Some Key Issues:

—On Lend-Lease, Dobrynin has just told State that the Soviets will not even make a decision until April 6. We have long since proposed April 7 as the *opening date*. (There is no point having Patolichev come if there has not at least been one round on lend-lease.)¹⁰

—On maritime relations, there is fencing about the date for round two (maybe April 17) and there has been no substantive Soviet response

⁶ Kissinger floated this proposal in his meeting with Dobrynin on March 9; see Document 56. Also see Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1131.

⁷ Although their analysis of the Soviet ABM proposal has not been found, Odeen and Sonnenfeldt gave Kissinger an April 17 memorandum, assessing SALT in light of evidence that previous estimates of the Soviet SLBM program had been "significantly inflated." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 5, Chronological File, 1969–75, 1972–April)

⁸ Attached at Tab B but not printed is a March 31 memorandum from Hillenbrand to Kissinger, providing a bi-weekly status report on negotiations with the Soviet Union, pursuant to NSDM 153 (Document 52).

⁹ See footnote 6, Document 75.

¹⁰ In a note to Haig on April 6, Sonnenfeldt forwarded a directive for the conduct of the lend-lease negotiations. "It has now become extremely urgent," he explained, "because following Henry's talk with D[obrynin] the Soviets have not informed us that their delegation will come next weekend and be ready to open talks April 10." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 718, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXI) The directive—issued on April 7 by Kissinger and Flanigan to Rogers and "his designee as lend-lease negotiator"—included the following instructions: "Our negotiator should *not* link a lend-lease settlement with other trade or credit matters. If the Soviets raise additional issues, we should indicate that we wish to settle the lend-lease issue first and that any trade and credit matters of interest to the Soviets will be considered apart from the lend-lease negotiations. If the foregoing is not negotiable, our negotiator should attempt to complete the lend-lease negotiations as a separate matter while informing the Soviets that, if they insist, the settlement will not come into force until a later date. If this proves unacceptable to the Soviets, our negotiator should seek further instructions." (Ibid.)

to our round one proposals (although there are preliminary indications of some give), thus preventing us from developing a round two position. You should impress on Dobrynin the importance of these talks and the importance we attach to our position.

—On incidents-at-sea we are in process of exploring a date for round two (the Soviets have made clear they will not complete the round one understandings without a second round and we have gone to our fallback of agreeing to it).

—The agricultural project seems on the rails. Butz and Palmby¹¹ are due in Moscow April 10.

—Health and Space are OK. On Environment, they owe Train a response to his illustrative umbrella agreement, David owes them something on science. (We are reviewing a US position paper looking toward some preliminary agreement at the summit.)¹²

Summit Arrangements

There appear to be no snags at this point. The advance is to get to Moscow by April 19—Embassy Moscow is exploring this date. (You may want to mention that Hyland is going from here.)

You have a separate memo to Chapin giving him the green light to raise the *radio-TV address* with Vorontsov on Friday.¹³ *You should mention this* to Dobrynin.¹⁴

General

There is no way of telling how the Soviets evaluate the McGovern victory in Wisconsin.¹⁵ You may want to give Dobrynin your judgment that it has improved further the President's chances because it has increased the uncertainty among the Democrats. (The Soviets may be estimating that they have some new leverage on the President because of Vietnam and the strength of protest votes.)

At Tab C, FYI, there is an interesting Soviet indoctrination lecture on the President's trip which you may want to look over.¹⁶

¹¹ Clarence D. Palmby, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for International Affairs and Commodity Programs.

¹² Not found.

¹³ Not found.

¹⁴ Kissinger wrote "Press" after this paragraph.

¹⁵ Senator George S. McGovern (D-South Dakota) won the Democratic primary in Wisconsin on April 4 with 30 percent of the vote.

¹⁶ Attached at Tab C but not printed is airgram A-249 from Moscow, in which the Embassy reported: "Judging from questions being asked at Leningrad lectures, President Nixon's forthcoming visit to the USSR is not popular with the local public." Also in the National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 7 US/NIXON.

84. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, April 6, 1972, 8:16–9:27 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, Ambassador of the USSR

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

I met with Dobrynin for breakfast in General Scowcroft's office for a quick roundup on where we stood prior to my departure for Key Biscayne with the President.²

Vietnam

I opened the meeting by pointing out to Dobrynin the inadmissibility of what was going on in Vietnam. I recalled a conversation in January³ in which I had indicated that we might have to take action to bring the war to a decisive conclusion. At that time Dobrynin had said that he could understand our taking action if there was an offensive, but that if the war just wound down he saw no reason why we should precipitate a showdown. I had been impressed with that argument, and as he knew we had shown enormous restraint.

I said now we were confronted with a situation in which there was an all-out attack on South Vietnam, putting in jeopardy the 69,000 Americans who were remaining. This was absolutely intolerable for us. Dobrynin said perhaps we took the situation too gravely, because after all the Soviets' estimate was that the situation was far from being out of hand, and the South Vietnamese probably would have a chance to defend themselves. I said I hoped so for their [the Soviets']⁴ sake.

Dobrynin asked whether I really thought that they had anything to do with planning it. I said there are only two possibilities, either they planned it or their negligence made it possible. In either event, it was an unpleasant eventuality.⁵

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the Military Aide's office at the White House.

² After a brief stop that morning for a Presidential address in Philadelphia, Kissinger accompanied Nixon at 12:58 p.m. for the flight to Key Biscayne. Kissinger returned to Washington the following afternoon; Nixon returned the evening of April 9. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary)

³ Reference is to the conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin on January 21; see Document 39.

⁴ Brackets in the source text.

⁵ During a conversation in the Executive Office Building at 9:16 a.m. on April 5, Nixon and Kissinger discussed the issue of Soviet complicity. Kissinger doubted that

SALT

We then turned to other matters. Dobrynin raised the issue of SALT. He said the matter had been carefully studied in Moscow and the conclusion had been reached that it would be very difficult to include submarines in the proposal. On the other hand, there was the conviction that if submarines were not included we would be able to come to a solution fairly rapidly. I told Dobrynin that the question of SLBMs was a very difficult one for us, and that I was not very optimistic that we could move on it. It was a point on which our military felt extremely strongly.

Dobrynin asked whether some progress could not be made by settling on land-based missiles plus the ABM agreement and agreeing to make SLBMs the first item on the agenda of the follow-on discussions. I told him that we would consider that and I would give him an answer at one of our next meetings. At the same time I said that our problem was extremely difficult. We were being asked to accept inferiority in land-based missiles as part of the freeze, and equality if not worse in the ABM agreement. That was an inequitable arrangement. Therefore if SLBMs were to be excluded one would have to find compensation elsewhere by having some slight ABM advantage on the side of the United States.

We agreed to consider that at a subsequent meeting.

Middle East

Dobrynin then turned to the Middle East. I said that there had to be some rectifications of the Israeli border in the direction of Sharm El-Sheikh and of the heights containing the airport near Eilat, but I could not go beyond that at the moment. Dobrynin said they were working on a reply and would let me have it.

Moscow had approved Hanoi's offensive. "They [the North Vietnamese] are putting it to Moscow," he explained, "the way China put it [to Moscow]." The two men then had the following exchange. HAK: "Because here, Moscow has to risk everything, all its relations. For what? I mean, what can Moscow possibly get out of it? If we get run out of South Vietnam and if—." RN: "Well, this will tell us a lot about Moscow." HAK: "That's right." RN: "Because if Moscow is willing to risk everything for a cheap little victory by liberating South Vietnam, then it means that ideology is going to override their pragmatic considerations." HAK: "But look at it from Moscow's point of view. Realistically, if we get run out of Vietnam and the summit goes on as it were, you will have to be tough as nails in Moscow. You couldn't possibly make any major concessions in Moscow. Having just been defeated in Vietnam, you can't come back from Moscow having made another deal." RN: "We won't go." HAK: "Whatever they wanted to get out of the summit they cannot have if Hanoi wins." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 5, 1972, 9:16–9:55 a.m., Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 330–7)

Dobrynin then asked me about Hussein's visit.⁶ Had we discussed a peace settlement with him? I said not in very specific terms, but it seemed to me there was some possibility of making progress there. Indeed if we could achieve agreement with respect to the Egyptian points I would be prepared to discuss with Dobrynin whether a Jordanian settlement should come before or after, and I could see advantages in both. Doing it before might help establish some principle such as Demilitarized Zones, which would otherwise be difficult for the Egyptians. Dobrynin asked, why not simultaneously? I said that was in no sense excluded.

Bilateral Issues

We discussed bilateral matters and agreed that they were in good shape. The visit of the Economic Minister was tentatively scheduled for April 27 and would proceed on that basis.

The conversation then ended.

⁶ King Hussein met Nixon and Kissinger at the White House on March 28. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule)

85. Editorial Note

On April 6, 1972, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger received memoranda from Secretary of Defense Laird and Deputy Assistant to the President Haig on contingency plans for military operations against North Vietnam. Laird explained in his memorandum that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, had developed "outlines" for two possible actions against Haiphong: a one-time air strike against military targets in the area; and a mining operation against shipping in the harbor. Laird doubted, however, that either plan would lead to any military advantage. Bombing would be largely ineffective, he argued, since North Vietnam not only operated an intricate distribution system but also received most of its military supplies from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Without an intensive air campaign, mining might also fail to interrupt the shipment of military supplies. Laird did not believe that the proposal to mine the harbor merited "serious consideration" at the time; he believed rather that political factors, both at home and abroad, should determine the American response. Laird emphasized this point in a handwritten postscript: "The political impact of these plans may be what is wanted by the President—The military impact would be minor and

the impact on present battle would be even less. If the Russians want an excuse to stop their present major (80% supplies) contribution to North Vietnam, mining might have that political impact but I would doubt it." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1079, Howe Chronological File's, Feb–Mar–April 1972)

Haig dismissed the "negative attitude" adopted by Laird on the issue of bombing and mining North Vietnam, noting that Kissinger was already considering "a directive for operations of much greater scope." (Memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, April 6; *ibid.*) In a separate, undated memorandum to Kissinger, Haig proposed "an intense no-holds barred air and naval campaign" to force Hanoi to retreat on the battlefield and return to the negotiating table. The campaign consisted of bombing every area in the country (except a buffer zone along the Chinese border); bombarding the entire coastline; mining and blockading every port. Haig further urged a political campaign of psychological warfare against North Vietnam and diplomatic pressure against its allies, including the Soviet Union. There was, however, a price to be paid: "It is recognized that these actions may force cancellation of the summit and it is assumed that the summit would be laid on the line as one of the early diplomatic steps in the preparatory phase." (*Ibid.*)

Although he admitted ignorance of these contingency plans, Winston Lord of the National Security Council staff also addressed the impact of air operations against North Vietnam in an April 8 memorandum to Kissinger. Lord made a distinction between "effective" and "harmful" bombing: the former, limited to the battle zone and direct support areas, was already justified by provocation from Hanoi; the latter, extended to the rear areas of North Vietnam, was likely to provoke an outcry not only in Washington but also from Moscow and Beijing. Lord assumed that Kissinger was actively considering punitive bombing on a short term basis "to show Hanoi (and Moscow and Peking) that we are capable of going bananas." The result of such action, however, would be "the worst of all worlds," doing more damage to U.S. policy than to the North Vietnamese military. "I agree that this is a decisive test for our Vietnam policy and for our global policy," Lord concluded. "I also believe we may pass the test with the help of effective bombing. More spectacular bombing cannot rescue us and indeed could wreck the chance we do have." (*Ibid.*, RG 59, S/P Files: Lot 77 D 112, Box 335, [Lord–Chron], April '72)

In spite of the reservations expressed by Lord and Laird, President Nixon decided that the contingency plan outlined by Haig would be implemented by May 8 if the South Vietnamese army proved unable to withstand the North Vietnamese assault. (Haig, *Inner Circles*, page 282; Kissinger, *White House Years*, page 1116)

86. Editorial Note

On April 8, 1972, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger called Deputy Secretary of Defense Rush at 12:43 p.m. to discuss linkage between Soviet policies on North Vietnam and West Germany. Ten days earlier, West German State Secretary Bahr had been in Washington to review the prospects for ratification of the Moscow and Warsaw treaties; on March 28, he met Kissinger and telephoned Rush—until recently the Ambassador in Bonn. (See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XL, Germany, 1969–1972, Document 348.) After returning to West Germany, Bahr sent a special channel message to Kissinger on April 1 requesting a memorandum of support for ratification talks between the government and the opposition, led by Rainer Barzel, chairman of the Christian Democratic Union. (Ibid., Document 349) Kissinger raised the issue of how to respond to such requests in his telephone conversation with Rush.

“K: I was calling you because [1 line of source text not declassified] you told Bahr you might write Barzel.

“R: Bahr wanted me to write Barzel.

“K: While this crisis goes on we have to be sure there is no move which gives aid and comfort to the Soviets. If you can tell Bahr we cannot consider it, it would be helpful.

“R: I don’t know how he got that.

“K: You know what an oily guy he is.

“R: I told [West German Ambassador] Pauls when he saw Barzel that he (Pauls) could say he was talking to me and I was worried about the image of the German people.

“K: Yes, you told this to me.

“R: Bahr called me and asked if I would write Barzel, and I said no.

“K: Can you get it across to the Germans—say to Bahr you and I have been talking and we are working in this direction. But we are confronted a second time in four months with an offensive backed by Soviet arms, and we have to reassess our whole situation.

“R: I can get word to him on that.

“K: How?

“R: I can think of four ways: (1) go through your backchannel; (2) go through the State Department; (3) go through Rolf Pauls . . .

“K: Why not go through Pauls. That is the most likely to leak. Do it in a way saying we are not going to do it because we have to reassess. Do it as an individual and not as a government. Can you do it this weekend?

“R: I will do it right now.

“K: Can you let me know after you do it?

“R: Certainly.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

Rush called Kissinger back at 1:05 p.m. to report on his conversation with Pauls.

“R: I got hold of Rolf and he has promised to send a message forthwith to Bahr.

“K: Under these conditions?

“R: I told him I told Bahr I would not write a letter. This was all we could do. However, there was no [reluctance?] on your part or on my part personally with regard to changing of position, but as of now we could do nothing with regard to approving something for the Russians. Rolf understood completely.

“K: Did you put it in the context of this offensive?

“R: I said in light of this heavy invasion with nothing but Russian equipment we obviously could not get behind something the Russians wanted.

“K: Okay, Ken; well done.” (Ibid.)

On April 8 Kissinger also responded to Bahr’s earlier request for a memorandum of support. “[W]e now confront the problems posed by a massive invasion of South Vietnam based on Soviet arms,” he stated. “We are undertaking an urgent review of the implications of that situation and will communicate with you after it is completed.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 424, Backchannel Files, Backchannel Messages, Europe, 1972) Kissinger later explained the tactical side of his response: “Bahr, with the ratification of Brandt’s Eastern treaties hanging in the balance, was certain to convey these sentiments to the Soviet Ambassador in Bonn. And Moscow would be reminded that we were not without means of pressure.” (*White House Years*, page 1117)

During a meeting with the President in the Old Executive Office Building at 3:10 p.m. on April 10, Kissinger read the text of his message to Bahr and reported on his conversation with Rush. Kissinger told Nixon that he would ask Bahr, who was already “running to the Soviet ambassador [Falin],” to forward the message. Kissinger also explained how the information, as passed by Rush to Pauls, would leak anyway: “The Ambassador has to report back through channels, so many people in the German Foreign Office will read it. It’s certain to be picked up.” Although the Soviets might think the summit was “something for us,” Nixon commented, “the German thing is something they apparently need.” Kissinger replied: “The summit, as long

as it was something for you, they were screwing you all over the place. The summit became something for them when we developed the Chinese option.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 10, 1972, 3:10–3:55 p.m., Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 330–31)

87. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

April 9, 1972, 10:45 a.m.

[Omitted here is discussion of the decision to have 12 B–52s bomb supply depots near Vinh, a port below the 19th Parallel in North Vietnam. The strike, which took place on the morning of April 10 (afternoon of April 9 in Washington), was the first time the long-range bombers were used north of the Demilitarized Zone by the Nixon administration.]

P: I think we have to go forward. We have to put the chips in the pot. The pot is too big now. We can't get out. This is something—many other things have been suggested: truck parks, Haiphong. Why not this?

K: Actually, we have a curious situation. Joe Kraft² called Haig the other day saying I was too soft on the Soviets. That is a new situation. He called again this morning and asked me some questions.

P: Soft how?

K: I told him it was not a conspiracy—but incompetency. He is going to write a column.

P: We all know what this is. It is a damn conspiracy. The Indian thing, the UAR and this is a massive attempt on the Soviet part to put it to us.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking. According to the President's Daily Diary, Kissinger placed the call. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) Nixon was in Key Biscayne, Florida; Kissinger was in Washington.

² Joseph Kraft, syndicated columnist with *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Daily News*, and other newspapers.

K: They haven't understood all the implications. I don't believe they would put the test to us into an area where their intelligence is so bad. They don't know how this can be going. I think they saw a chance of picking up a cheap trick against Peking and blundered into a confrontation with us again. That is more worrisome than the other. If it is a conspiracy, we could turn it off. I think they are to blame—no question.

P: We are coming to the point—with Safire working on the draft³—of knocking off of the Soviet Summit becomes more and more a possibility.

K: I am afraid so. I do not have another view. I do not think we can survive a Soviet Summit as a country if we are humiliated in Vietnam. Unless they accept rules of conduct, we may have to confront them. It is easy for me to say. But if one looks at an election on that platform . . .

P: The country would be done then.

K: I think our bargaining position in Moscow, if it came out of a position of total weakness, would be hopeless.

P: I have been arguing for sending more carriers, planes, etc. and taking the heat on it because I realize everything rides on this. If we lose this one, the other stuff won't hold up. Our great China initiative—we at least opened the door, and handle ourselves as gracefully as we can—and quietly leave the scene.

K: That is essentially it. It is easier for me to say how I feel.

P: With that much on the plate, we have to take whatever risks we can. I think we many times have done things like Menu⁴ which didn't have a psychological effect.

K: That had an effect but never decisive enough. And this won't be decisive.

P: But it will have some effect.

K: If we hadn't acted the way we have . . .

P: We have to look closely at our whole American purpose as to whether or not it is possible for one Communist country to defend itself and leave. We know it is possible for a Communist country to do that. I am not sure. We shall see. All right; we will go forward now.

³ On April 8 Nixon tentatively decided to explain his position on Vietnam to the public in a speech on April 12; Haldeman relayed the necessary instructions that afternoon to William Safire, a senior speechwriter at the White House. (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*) The President planned to emphasize in the speech the importance of using American air power to stop an invasion supported "with the most modern Soviet equipment." (Safire, *Before the Fall*, pp. 417–420; and Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1116–1117)

⁴ Reference is to the secret bombing from March 1969 to May 1970 of North Vietnamese bases areas in Cambodia, collectively called "Menu" after the code names for the individual missions, "Breakfast," "Lunch," "Dinner," etc.

K: It doesn't require an additional order.

P: We told them. Laird won't run out?

K: I have him on tape. I called him. He said if we want to get the message across, we do it.

P: All right. How is everything going? Are Safire and Lord working?

K: They are waiting for me now. [Omitted here is further discussion of the military situation in South Vietnam.]

P: As Al says, everybody gets alarmist when an offensive begins. Considering the South Vietnamese are fighting in all territories with American air support, they should be able to hold it. Is it still your view we should do it Wednesday night?⁵

K: Absolutely. It should be tough.

P: When I do it it will be tough.

K: I think I have found a way of mentioning the private things without blowing it. We have to shoot the works now. The main thing is to rally our people. If the North Vietnamese want to settle, they will.

P: We have to get the Goldwaters, Towers, Buckleys.⁶

K: We have those. We have to get the confused middle ground. We will get them. There's a different mood. Max Frankel with a little coaching from me has an article on the front page which is not bad at all.

P: You keep that up.

K: He printed it pretty much as I gave it to him.

P: Call Dobrynin in and tell him.

K: He is coming in to see the Chinese films this afternoon.

P: Tell him the summit is on the line now. I think he has to know with this going as it is that we are under enormous pressure. The whole Summit is being jeopardized. Our hole card is to play more with the Chinese.

K: I have talked to him sternly twice last week.⁷ I sent a message to Bahr.⁸ They requested a letter from you recommending ratification of the treaties. I was against it and sent a message saying under the circumstances—since this is the second time Soviet arms are engaged in an offensive—we are reassessing the whole policy. He will run to the Soviet Ambassador—we have some intelligence on him. He gave back exactly what we gave him here.

P: I wonder if I shouldn't send a message to Brezhnev.

⁵ See footnote 3 above.

⁶ Senators Barry M. Goldwater (R-Arizona) and John G. Tower (R-Texas) and William F. Buckley, Jr., editor-in-chief of the *National Review*.

⁷ April 3 and 6; see Documents 80 and 84.

⁸ See Document 86.

K: The danger is if they don't see a way out they may have to confront you. They got the message and I would save this. Let me work out a scenario for you.

P: We both agree to go ahead under those circumstances. I wondered if you could maybe on a line out there have a talk with . . . get a report directly from Bunker as to how the South Vietnamese are fighting and how their morale is.

K: It's better by backchannel. I will do it from here.⁹

P: In the meantime, we will keep our chins up and keep kicking them in the balls. I made a decision no summit if this thing goes. We have no other choices now. We can't be in a position of letting our whole policy be hostage to a couple of summits.

K: That's the difference between us and the Democrats.

P: Did anybody attack Teddy¹⁰ yet?

K: Agnew and Goldwater.

P: Okay, Henry.

K: Right, Mr. President.

⁹ Kissinger sent the backchannel message to Bunker that afternoon. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel Files, Backchannel Messages, 1972, To: ABM Bunker—Saigon)

¹⁰ Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D–Massachusetts).

88. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, April 9, 1972, 4:56–5:15 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, Ambassador of the USSR

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. No drafting information appears on the memorandum. The meeting was held in Haldeman's office at the White House.

I invited Dobrynin to the White House at his request to see the Chinese films of my Peking visits.² My parents and Mrs. Dobrynin were there also. At the end, he asked to see me alone for a minute.

Dobrynin told me that his military attaché thought our buildup in Asia was getting very ominous. I said “Anatol, we have been warning you for months that if there were an offensive we would take drastic measures to end the war once and for all. That situation has now arisen.”

Dobrynin said the question now was not the right or wrong of how we got there but what was needed to end it. He thought that the April 24 meeting would be extremely crucial, and he could tell me that his Government had been in touch with Hanoi to make sure that this meeting would take place. He said “Are you prepared to talk and fight at the same time?” I said no, there had to be a rapid end of the war now and it would not be acceptable to us any more to talk while the fighting was going on. Dobrynin said he would transmit this to Moscow. He was sure he would be in touch with me.

² Kissinger and Dobrynin met at 3:35 p.m. in Kissinger’s office before viewing the Chinese films at 4 p.m. in the White House Situation Room. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule) Dobrynin then gave Kissinger a copy of the floor plan to determine the housing arrangements for the American delegation at the summit in Moscow. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10) For Kissinger’s published account of the afternoon, which he described as “a unique exercise of triangular politics,” see *White House Years*, p. 1117.

89. Editorial Note

On the morning of April 10, 1972, President Nixon prepared for a televised address to the nation on the North Vietnamese offensive. In handwritten notes for the speech, Nixon emphasized that the “massive invasion”—supported by Soviet tanks and guns—was intended to impose a Communist government on South Vietnam. “If Soviet supported indirect aggression succeeds here,” he wrote, “it will be tried elsewhere, U.S. credibility will be mortally damaged and danger of more war increased.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President’s Personal Files, Box 74, President’s Speech File, Monday April 10, 1972, Vietnam) At 8:57 a.m. the President discussed the speech, and his efforts to influence Soviet strategy on Vietnam, with Assistant to the President Kissinger in the Oval Office. (*Ibid.*,

White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) The two men also reviewed the news, relayed by Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin the previous day, that Moscow had emphasized to Hanoi the importance of a private meeting in Paris on April 24. Although Kissinger was "very impressed by this Dobrynin move," Nixon adopted a more cautious approach.

Nixon: "The thing that concerns me about your talk with Dobrynin is that it may be the same malarkey that they've given you, Henry, and given us for, since we started private talks over 2 years ago. You've had 12. They use these damn talks for the purpose of sort of stringing us along."

Kissinger: "But stringing us along—"

Nixon: "[unclear] And on the private talk. And I would urge you, if you're going to see Dobrynin again, you've got to tell him that they've got—not that they've got to talk seriously, say they've got to settle now."

Kissinger: "Yeah, I told him."

Nixon: "You see, what I'm afraid of is that they're going to get into this thing again. We're going to haggle around again about 8 points, 10 points, 14 points, 6 points, and so forth, and we don't have time. We've got time for two more meetings and that's all."

After an exchange on reaction in the United States to developments in Vietnam, Kissinger reported: "I told Dobrynin yesterday. I said, 'The President is determined. We've withstood demonstrations here time and again. We'll withstand any demonstration and the more pressure is put on us, the faster we'll act because that just shifts the time. This is not President Johnson. Under no circumstance—.' I was brutal with him." The two men continued their discussion of domestic opinion on Vietnam, including the President's plans to emphasize the Soviet role in a televised address.

Nixon: "You understand that we're going to have to face something else. As a result of this we'll get attacks. And, you know, one of the things that helped us in China was that we had good polls before we went. We'll get attacks. We will suffer in public opinion. And that will hurt us on our Russian thing."

Kissinger: "No it won't."

Nixon: "I know it's just a small thing. On the other hand, we—it doesn't make a hell of a lot of difference due to fact that, as far as I am concerned, by the time the Russian summit comes off, we will know how this thing has come off one way or another. And if we've lost, the hell with it. If we win in Vietnam, I don't give a damn what the polls show."

Kissinger: "Mr. President."

Nixon: "The Russian summit [unclear]—"

Kissinger: "We are facing—"

Nixon: "I'm just pointing out what, that's the argument that Haldeman made to you."

Kissinger: "I know. But polls won't help you in Russia; only geopolitics will. The fact is, if this succeeds, that Soviet arms will have overturned the balance on the Indian subcontinent and will have run us out of Southeast Asia, I don't care what your polls show."

Nixon then rehearsed his draft of the speech, including the passage on Soviet assistance to North Vietnam.

Nixon: "'If, for example, a Communist country with the support, or any country with the support of Soviet arms is allowed to take over a neighboring country, to conquer a neighboring country, and is not stopped, then that tactic will be used all over the world. It will be used in the Mid-East. It will be used in the Americas. It could even be used in Europe.' Therefore, what we are talking about is the critical time, you know, to stop. Now that's what this game is about. You see the crap that Safire and all the rest of these people write, it's all too, it doesn't go to the heart; the State stuff has never gone to the heart of it. As Haig was saying to me yesterday, when I was talking to him along these lines. He said, 'The difficulty is you're the first one that's been President since this goddamn war started, who has seen it in the correct sense of it's being, of the Russian role.' 'You see,' he said, 'they all took the Harriman line, that the Russians—.' I remember Lodge. Henry, I was in Vietnam seven different times, since—more than you were, as a matter of fact."

Kissinger: "I know. Much more."

Nixon: "Lodge was there five of those different times and on five different occasions. And on the other case, the other occasion, Taylor told me; and on the other occasion, this fellow Porter told me because it was the line. He told me, 'Now the Russians really don't want this. The Russians really want peace out here. The Russians don't want the Chinese to move Vietnam.' I think that's all bullshit. I think the Russians—it isn't a question that the Russians aren't thinking that much. The Russians just want to win. They are supporting them and they'll go as far as they can go. The difficult—And that's what the Indian thing showed us. I mean, the reason that Rogers and all those State Department people made the mistake on India, Henry, was that they did not see, properly estimate what the Russians want to do. The Russians were willing to take great risks to knock over Pakistan and support India because it [unclear] around the world. The Russians are doing that every place. That's what was involved in Jordan. It was a Russian move, not a Syrian move. You knew that; I knew it. And this is a Russian move. Now what I'm really getting down, I've talked around a lot. If that

point were to be made, you're goddamn right. It would shake them to their eyeteeth. And that might mobilize American public opinion."

Kissinger: "Mr. President."

Nixon: "You see my point?"

Kissinger: "I believe it's premature to do this now."

Nixon: "You agree with my analysis?"

Kissinger: "I agree completely with your analysis."

Kissinger urged Nixon, however, to drop the televised address and instead send a signal to the Soviets at the signing ceremony for the Convention on Biological Weapons later that morning. Although Nixon thought his draft statement for the ceremony was "the most gooey, gooey shit I ever saw in my life," Kissinger recommended adding several sentences that the Soviets would understand "as being relevant to the situation." "What will help us with Hanoi and Russia," he explained, "is the feeling that, Jesus Christ, this guy is going crazy." After approving this recommendation, Nixon raised the Soviet response to U.S. military operations.

Nixon: "First, do you think the fleet movement had some effect on this with Dobrynin."

Kissinger: "Tremendously."

Nixon: "And he really thinks we're going to blockade?"

Kissinger: "That's right. I believe, Mr. President, that we on—Sure they're using these talks. But as long as we bomb the bejeezus out of them in the meantime, they're not keeping us from doing one thing that we should be doing. Not one. I'm not recommending that we stop one military operation. We now have to break their back. The only thing I've become very leery about is your speech—or any public appearance by you now."

Nixon: "Well, I'm not going to say anything about the war in any public appearances."

Kissinger: "No, no. I mean any public appearances about the war."

Nixon: "Oh, yeah."

Kissinger: "I mean, Philadelphia, Ottawa—that's all fine. I think, incidentally, I should cancel my trip to Japan for this reason."

Nixon: "I agree."

Kissinger: "The Russians will never believe that you are planning a blockade if I am in Japan."

Nixon: "That's right. Oh, hell yeah. Also your canceling the trip to Japan, that's a goddamn good signal to the Russians."

Kissinger: "That's what I mean."

Nixon: "That's a goddamn good signal. They'll think we're here plotting something."

Kissinger: "That's right."

Nixon: "What Dobrynin said to you was, whatever the hell he said, 'What do you want?'"

Kissinger: "No, no. But he didn't give me the usual malarkey you're not interested in."

Nixon: "Right."

Kissinger: "He said, 'Give me something concrete we can do.'"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "I said—"

Nixon: "[unclear] the bombing, but he said they can't do that."

Kissinger: "No, he didn't say that. He said, 'Can't you talk and fight at the same time.' I said, 'No.'"

Nixon: "You said, 'This President won't do that.'"

Kissinger: "I said, 'This President isn't Johnson. He won't do it. Now, it's got to be settled.' He said, 'Well, can't you wait to settle 'til the 24th? Must you take irrevocable steps before the 24th?' Well, Mr. President, since you and I know we're not doing, going to do any irrevocable steps before the 24th, but I didn't even promise him that."

Nixon: "No sir."

Kissinger: "I said, 'It depends entirely on what, how this develops. It is now going to end. We are not going to put up with any more. They have turned the screw one too many.'"

Nixon: "Good."

Kissinger: "'You have gone too far. And what you now have to decide is—.'"

Nixon: "You let him know that we were aware of the fact that they were putting in Russian tanks and Russian—Does he know that I, that that's what I'm looking at—the Russian role, Russian tanks and Russian guns?"

Kissinger: "And that's why I think just one or two sentences, which they'll understand in your speech because this is on worldwide, would help."

Nixon: "Good." (Ibid., White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 10, 1972, 8:57–9:55 a.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 705–2)

During a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group at 10:13 a.m., Kissinger reported that Nixon would "say a word about the Soviets" at the CBW ceremony. "The President is planning to say that this is a good agreement," Kissinger explained. "He will probably say something to the effect that the great powers should not do anything to encourage—either directly or indirectly—aggression. He won't refer specifically to Vietnam." (Minutes of WSAG Meeting, April 10; Ibid.,

NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals)

Shortly before noon, Nixon followed this script at the Department of State auditorium as Dobrynin listened from the audience. After stating the “enormous significance” of the agreement, the President declared that the goal of world peace depended on two propositions: 1) that every nation must renounce the use of force; and 2) that every great power “must follow the principle that it should not encourage directly or indirectly any other nation to use force or armed aggression against one of its neighbors.” (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, pages 525–526) Before returning to the White House, Nixon approached Dobrynin to deliver a more direct message in private. “Afterward Nixon took me aside to say that he stood behind what Kissinger had told me about Vietnam the day before,” Dobrynin later recalled. “He only wanted to add that in going through the crisis, he wanted our two governments to keep themselves under control so as to do the least possible damage to Soviet-American relations. Although the president was not specific, I came away with the feeling that the White House was preparing to launch dramatic new actions against North Vietnam.” (Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pages 243–244; see also Nixon, *Nixon: Memoirs*, page 589)

Kissinger elaborated on Nixon’s remarks in a telephone conversation with Dobrynin at 12:26 p.m.

“K: Anatol, one thing the President did ask me to tell you in answer to what it is that can be completely done. Our view is whatever is completely done must be done quietly. Any public pressure on us can only make matters worse. We don’t want a huge propaganda campaign started. One way we judge the seriousness is if they have something to say, say it on the 24th.

“Dobrynin: They come . . .

“K: I don’t see any chance in talking to them if they make a public proposal.

“D: I understand your point.

“K: No, this is in a friendly spirit as to what can be done. We want to find something you can reasonably say to them.

“D: I understand. And secondly can I receive word from you . . . on another matter about the American correspondents. We are prepared to accept up to 100 correspondents.

“K: Including television.

“D: They didn’t say anything about that. They just said to tell Dr. Kissinger we are prepared to receive 100 correspondents. So perhaps I have to check back with them.

“K: Good.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

According to his memoirs, Kissinger told Dobrynin that the United States “would not stand still for the tactic by which Hanoi had whipsawed us in the last two series of secret talks. If Hanoi once again published new proposals in the middle of negotiations, the secret channel would be at an end. Dobrynin used this occasion to mention that we could take a hundred reporters to the summit in Moscow. Clearly, nothing had yet happened to change the Kremlin’s priorities.” (*White House Years*, page 1118)

Nixon and Kissinger met again in the Oval Office at 12:44 to link decisions on the Soviet Union and Vietnam. Kissinger remarked that Dobrynin was “really slobbering,” satisfying the U.S. position on a number of bilateral issues, including the number of press representatives. Kissinger further reported that the Soviet Ambassador wanted a briefing on the President’s “personal likes and dislikes” and that Irina Dobrynin wanted to meet Pat Nixon. Nixon quickly called his wife to arrange a meeting for the following afternoon; Kissinger called Dobrynin to make the necessary arrangements. Kissinger then continued to report on his telephone conversation with Dobrynin.

Kissinger: “[I told him,] ‘One thing you can tell them [North Vietnamese] is if you, if they make a public proposal before the 24th, we’re assuming they’re not serious.’”

Nixon: “Yeah.”

Kissinger: “‘If they are serious, then they make it to us and we’ll treat them decently. But if they try to bring public pressure on us the only result will be that we will accelerate what we’re doing because it will foreshorten the time we have available. We will not hold still for these salami tactics.’ He said, ‘What if they want to do both?’ I said, ‘They can’t do both.’ Mr. President, we have—”

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: “Yeah, but I think we have a chance now. We really have a chance.”

After reviewing initial press coverage of the CBW ceremony, the two men discussed various signals to the Soviets, including military exercises in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Kissinger: “Another thing we’re doing now, Mr. President—”

Nixon: “Yeah.”

Kissinger: “—this is with your approval. We’re beginning to follow, not harass, every Soviet ship that approaches Hanoi. We’ll just fly over it—”

Nixon: “Correct.”

Kissinger: “—and occasionally send a destroyer after it as if we were practicing interceptions.”

Nixon: “Hm-hmm. Hm-hmm.”

Kissinger: "But we won't come close. I mean they can't object to it."

Nixon: "I know."

Kissinger: "And we're loading mines again."

Nixon: "I'll bet you, incidentally, that Smith, the disarmament boys at ACDA are probably just shitting their pants because of this thing today, because we should have kept the emphasis on peace and all that. The hell with them."

Kissinger: "Mr. President—"

Nixon: "What sense does it make to sit there with the Soviet Ambassador at a time they're raiding South Vietnam and say that they made a great contribution to peace by signing the silly biological warfare thing, which doesn't mean anything? Now, you know it and I know it."

Kissinger: "Mr. President, you're going to come out—You see, anything you do now—They made a horrible mistake. They should have done it after the Moscow summit. Because anything you do now, you can wipe away with the Moscow summit. The Soviets aren't going to cancel the summit. Inconceivable."

Nixon: "Well, if they do—We might cancel it. That's the other possibility."

Kissinger: "That's the other possibility."

Nixon: "You understand, as I told you—"

Kissinger: "If you come to Moscow, having stared down Hanoi—"

Nixon: "Yeah. But if we come to Moscow not having crushed South Vietnam, we can't go, Henry. There ain't no way."

Kissinger: "There's no way you can then go. But I—"

Nixon: "After that, the U.S. is finished as a—"

Kissinger: "If we can hold another—"

Nixon: "The U.S. will be finished as a world power. It's that bad."

Kissinger: "Well—"

Nixon: "It isn't like the British in the Boer War. People told me about that. And it isn't like the French and Algeria—"

Kissinger: "The British won the Boer—"

Nixon: "I know. But my point was that many said they shouldn't have fought so hard and all that sort of thing because it didn't make any difference. My point is though that they couldn't keep it up; maybe they could and maybe they didn't. But my point is, I don't think we've really ever had a situation where so much was on the line, because the credibility of U.S. foreign policy is on the line. It isn't the domino theory. It isn't anything else. It really is a test. It's a test like the Spanish civil war never was. And that's a different era, a different time. But it's really a test as to whether a nation supported by Soviet arms is allowed to get away with naked aggression."

Kissinger: "That's right."

Nixon: "And if they get away with naked aggression they're going to try it next in the Mid-East."

Kissinger: "That's right."

Nixon: "You know goddamn well they will."

Kissinger: "That's right. Of course, I told Dobrynin yesterday, 'If you're going to play this game, let me be honest with you. Supposing we started pouring weapons into Israel and told them there are no restrictions.'"

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "'How long do you think your friends could last? Then you would say our problem in the Middle East. Now that's the world we're going to be in.' Now, this is the best month for it to happen. The Soviets—If the Soviets start a major crisis with us, their Berlin treaties are down the drain."

Nixon: "And he knows that?"

Kissinger: "That's right. So this is the worst month—"

Nixon: "Does Dobrynin [know we could ruin] the Berlin treaties—"

Kissinger: "Two phone calls and I'll ruin them. Look, Ken Rush and I between us could ruin those treaties in one afternoon."

Nixon: "Could you really, Henry?"

Kissinger: "Oh yeah."

Nixon: "Great."

Kissinger: "So they just are in a hell of a spot." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 10, 1972, 12:44–1:06 p.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 705–13)

90. Intelligence Note Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research¹

RESN-42

Washington, April 10, 1972.

USSR/DRV: HANOI'S OFFENSIVE: IS MOSCOW HAPPY?

North Vietnam's action in undertaking the major offensive now underway raises questions about Moscow's role in the decision and its timing.

The Case for Soviet Complicity. The visit of a high-ranking Soviet military delegation headed by Marshal Batitskiy, chief of the Soviet air defense forces, on the very eve of the offensive² suggests the possibility that the Soviets participated in the decision to launch the offensive and in its timing, and that therefore Hanoi's action was designed to serve the interests not only of the DRV but of the USSR as well. Indeed, it is possible to argue that a successful offensive by the North Vietnamese at this time would strengthen Moscow's credentials in Hanoi over those of Peking, improve the position of the USSR in Asia in dealing with both China and the US, and strengthen the Soviet leadership's hand in negotiating with the President when he goes to Moscow in May. Under this argument, the failure of Soviet media to publicize the Batitskiy visit appears as a rather obvious attempt by Moscow not to make its complicity so blatant as to jeopardize the President's visit to the USSR.

The Argument to the Contrary. It is also possible to argue that the case for Soviet complicity is outweighed by evidence of more important Soviet considerations.

The case against using Batitskiy's visit as evidence of direct Soviet complicity in the offensive rests mainly on the logic of the situation—that the USSR would achieve only marginal advantages, or even

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 VIET S. Confidential; No Foreign Dissem. Drafted by Igor N. Belousovitch (INR/DRR/RES/FP), cleared by Director of INR/DRR/RES Martin Packman, and approved by Deputy Director of the Directorate for Regional Research David E. Mark. The following note appears on the first page: "This report was produced by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Aside from normal substantive exchange with other agencies at the working level, it has not been coordinated elsewhere."

² Batitskiy visited Hanoi March 16-27. *Pravda* published the following announcement on March 28: "The D.R.V. Ministry of National Defense reports that a Soviet military delegation, headed by Marshal of the Soviet Union P. F. Batitskiy, has arrived in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on a visit of friendship at the Ministry's invitation. Leaders of the Vietnamese People's Army and officers arranged a warm reception for the delegation, the Vietnamese News Agency reports." (*Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXIV, No. 13, April 26, 1972, p. 23)

disadvantages, to its own interests from the outcome of the offensive on the eve of the President's visit. At the same time, the USSR would see important Soviet interests threatened if the offensive were to jeopardize the President's trip.

Underneath Hanoi's frequent expressions of gratitude for Soviet aid (reiterated in DRV press treatment of the Batitskiy visit), and Moscow's frequent assurances of support for the DRV, there is a history of a more complex relationship between the USSR and the DRV. Over the years the Soviets have tended to hedge their bets by leaving open the option of a political settlement. There have been two recent instances of this tendency. Both showed Moscow and Hanoi to be in disagreement over the conduct of the war and the handling of peace negotiations, with the Soviets taking positions that favored a diplomatic rather than a military solution.

On February 11, TASS described an audience between Kosygin and the DRV Ambassador in Moscow as having involved a "frank" discussion. The latter evidently protested Moscow's slowness in condemning President Nixon's 8-point peace plan of January 25, although it is also possible that they were arguing over a Soviet effort to arrange an understanding between Hanoi and Phnom Penh. Subsequently, a DRV/FUNK communiqué of March 5 expressed Hanoi's public disapproval of the Soviet diplomatic initiative, labeling it as "foreign interference."

Effects of the Offensive on Moscow Visit. Given this background, it would appear unlikely that Moscow's failure to publicize Batitskiy's visit showed the Soviets to be engaged in a surreptitious effort to incite Hanoi to escalate the war in Indochina. To the contrary, the Soviets could well have had reservations about Hanoi's intentions, either because they regarded the timing of the offensive to be inappropriate, or perhaps because they had doubts about Hanoi's ability to score a significant military success. If Soviet leaders were hoping to discuss the possibility of a diplomatic settlement of the conflict with the President in Moscow on terms generally favorable to the DRV, any demonstration of military weakness by Hanoi at this time could significantly weaken Moscow's negotiating position and strengthen that of the US. And since the Soviets have matters to discuss with the President even more important than Vietnam, it seems hardly plausible that they would wish to jeopardize the visit by helping North Vietnam to press for a military victory at this time.

A senior Soviet official in the UN Secretariat told a former US diplomat on April 4³ that the timing of the offensive was "most un-

³ See footnote 2, Document 115.

fortunate” and expressed the hope that it would not interfere with the President’s trip. He stressed that Moscow was in no way involved in the planning of the attack. Such an approach, while clearly self-serving, gains in credibility when added to the record of discord in Soviet-DRV relations.

It is even possible to argue that in seeking an optimum posture for the Moscow talks, the Soviets would want to preserve a situation in Indochina which would allow them some flexibility to discuss a political settlement short of Hanoi’s maximum objectives. If Hanoi had just scored a significant military success, the Soviets would not have this latitude, for they would find themselves, as before, locked into a rigid posture of supporting the DRV while Hanoi continued to press for an unconditional victory.

By the same token, Hanoi is currently under great pressure to demonstrate its capability and determination to press the war to a successful conclusion. Given the fluid diplomatic situation in the wake of the Peking visit, the North Vietnamese are apprehensive that the great powers may seek understandings at their expense.

Recent statements from North Vietnam have clearly shown Hanoi’s awareness that both China and the USSR have matters to consider more important to them than the attainment by the DRV of its maximum objectives. Thus, Hanoi probably concluded that it must gamble in order to keep both locked into a posture of commitment to the achievement of victory.

Batitskiy Visit in Retrospect. In this context, the Batitskiy visit appears in an altogether different light. It would seem rather that Moscow knew about the imminence of the offensive but was concerned about Hanoi’s capability to limit the damage from the heavy US air raids, which were all but certain to be the US response to the offensive. This would explain the choice of the chief of the Soviet air defense forces to head a group of high-ranking air defense commanders to inspect North Vietnamese air defense capabilities.

If the Soviets have their fingers crossed over the current fighting, this is not to say that they are prepared to sell out Hanoi. After all, in the larger sense, the offensive was made possible by the USSR’s long-time supply of economic and military aid to North Vietnam. If the offensive succeeds, Soviet support of the DRV will continue as before, and with fewer qualifications. If it fails or the results are inconclusive, Moscow will assume the probability of a political settlement and trim its sails accordingly, while continuing to support North Vietnam in a measured way until such time as Hanoi comes around to a recognition of political realities.

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

Washington, April 10, 1972.

SUBJECT

The Soviets and Vietnam—Our Signals

If the situation in Vietnam should deteriorate and assuming we want to signal more explicitly to the Soviets, we need to select a set of actions that convey our meaning without prematurely jeopardizing the summit. This means either slowing down or freezing in discussions or contacts that are of substantial interest to the USSR.

As always in these situations, these things do not come free of charge since we—or important segments of our society—also have an interest in what is being done with the Soviets. The main object, however, would be to signal that we will not “do business as usual.” Consistency alone would seem to dictate some action comparable to what we did in the India-Pakistan crisis, the 1970 Middle East crisis and the 1970 Cuban fracas. Except possibly for the last, none of these involved Soviet actions—acts of commission and omission—quite as directly damaging to us as what is happening in Vietnam. I don't mean to draw simple analogies: there are many important differences cutting in different directions. In South Asia, the Middle East and Cuba there was a potential for direct US-Soviet confrontation. Soviet capacity to influence what was happening was considerable—in Cuba the Soviets could actually control events. In Vietnam, the Soviets' involvement is indirect (unless we moved against Haiphong) and their influence is more conjectural; yet Soviet support through matériel and advice is a crucially important asset to the DRV. It is killing Americans, could unhinge the Administration's whole policy line in Southeast Asia and could injure the President domestically.

I think we should operate on the broad hypothesis that whatever the precise Soviet motive and role in Vietnam, in the end the present

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 67, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Sonnenfeldt Papers [1 of 2]. Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for urgent action. The memorandum was forwarded through Haig, who initialed it. Kissinger wrote “OK” on the top of the first page. According to his memoirs, Kissinger requested the memorandum. “To keep up the pressure,” he explained, “I asked Hal Sonnenfeldt, my principal adviser on Soviet affairs, what negotiations with the USSR we could slow down that were of substantial interest to the Kremlin leaders.” (*White House Years*, p. 1118)

Soviet leaders probably have at least as large a stake as the President in not having the US-Soviet relationship degenerate. Consequently, the type of moves listed below should have the effect of inducing the Soviets to exert some pressure on Hanoi. Even if this judgment is wrong it is important to structure the situation in a way that brings home to Brezhnev that he, too, will have to bear some of the cost of what is happening in Vietnam; and that we are sufficiently serious and confident that we are prepared to pay a price ourselves in US-Soviet relations.

US Actions

(Note: 1. Public statements a la Laird and McCloskey² should be stopped for now.

2. You should background selected journalists on the meaning of the President's statement at the BW ceremony;³ also Dobrynin.)

The *grain sales talks* are underway; the key issue is credit. This is perhaps the area that we would be most vulnerable to charges of cynicism—extending credit to the USSR to buy grain while they ship heavy equipment to Hanoi. Unfortunately, it is also the area where we stand to make a commercial gain. Since no agreement is likely without credits, this should become for now our sticking point. In other words, *this affair should not reach agreement in the Moscow session* (see draft message to Butz, Tab A).⁴

The *maritime talks* open on April 17; we will have a rather high level delegation in Moscow (Samuels, Gibson, Dick Davies, Eagleburger).⁵ The unfortunate aspect will be the visibility—banquet toasts,

² Laird declared in a news conference on April 7 that the Soviet Union was “a major contributor” to the North Vietnamese offensive by failing to limit the use of its equipment to defensive purposes. (*The New York Times*, April 8, 1972, pp. 1, 11) For McCloskey's remarks on April 4, see Document 81.

³ See Document 89.

⁴ Kissinger approved the attached backchannel message, which was sent to Butz in Moscow on April 12. The text of the message reads: “Peter Flanigan has already told you of the President's wish not to have your current grain negotiations completed in Moscow. The President wishes to reinforce this directive in light of the Vietnam situation. Until that situation and Soviet role with respect to it are clarified the President must fully retain option not to proceed with the type of agreement you are negotiating. Tactical judgement as to which issues in your negotiation should be left unresolved is left to you and Palmby. In social and other contacts and particularly in any public statements you should avoid all optimistic language concerning overall US-Soviet relations. You should be aware that the President is deeply concerned about Vietnam and Soviet role relating thereto.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 718, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXI) The White House received a reply that afternoon, however, reporting that Butz had left Moscow before the message could be delivered to him. (*Ibid.*)

⁵ Nathaniel Samuels, Deputy Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs; Samuels, Andrew E. Gibson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Maritime Affairs; Richard T. Davies, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs; and Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy Plans and National Security Council Affairs.

etc. There is also the angle easing regulations for Soviet ships to enter our ports, which evokes images of Soviet shipping to North Vietnam. Because of the protocol sensitivities of Gibson and State, it may be difficult to change the composition of the delegation. But we can ensure that the talks do not yield agreements in this round, or we could postpone them by a week. At least, we should tell Samuels to avoid camaraderie and we could tell him like Butz, not to permit matters to reach completion.

Incidents at sea is still awaiting a Soviet response to beginning a second round. The Soviets will not agree to the first round understandings in any case, until there has been another round. Whenever they reply with a date we can decide at that time whether to let the timetable slide. High-level discussions with Soviet Admirals would be rather unseemly while we charge the Soviets with supporting the North Vietnamese offensive.

Health, Science, Environmental and Space Cooperation do not lend themselves very well to linkage or slowdowns since our rationale is that we and the Soviets benefit about equally and these are more or less in the interest of "mankind."

Lend-Lease is clearly in our interest and useful in linkage to the other economic questions. The talks start this week and we already have a tough, probably non-negotiable position.

The Exchanges Agreement will be signed on April 11. There is little purpose in stopping it, but we could get word to Beam to keep the rhetoric down.

The Patolichev Visit is the most highly visible project in the immediate future (April 27). He will receive considerable publicity as will the general topic of Soviet-American economic relations. *To call it off would be a strong signal, but should be considered if the situation in Vietnam continues.* If he does come, you might consider telling him that Vietnam could well set back economic relations since our public would not understand our moving on such things as credit under present circumstances.

SALT. A freeze in SALT would be a strong signal, of course, though this begs the question of who has the greatest interest in the agreement. These talks have remained fairly well insulated from other events, despite Smith's blunder in telling Semyonov of your message on India-Pakistan.⁶ Since the negotiations are now so tangled that a signal might not even get through, the best source is probably to continue without change for a week or two. By standing on our SLBM position, and our ABM proposals we, in effect, convey at least some firmness.

⁶ See Document 28.

Cuba. The Soviets still have a guided missile cruiser and an F-Class attack submarine in Cienfuegos. They have been at sea exercising with the Cubans. *If* we want to signal, then some more intensive surveillance and even harassment could be laid on. It has some merit in its own right since the prolonged stay of some Soviet naval vessels seems to be a violation, at least in spirit, of the “understanding.”

High-Level Diplomacy. You will recall that at the end of Brezhnev’s last letter⁷ he referred to the bombing. He brought it up in his March 20 speech,⁸ but this particular passage was censored out of the printed version. It is a peg for a Presidential message, but I would think that this should come later in the scenario. If we intended to engage the Soviets over North Vietnam directly at the Presidential level then we should have a clear message in mind. Do we want to tax the Soviets with their supplies? Do we want to threaten some action? Or are we going to press them to use their influence for negotiations? (If you wish, I could begin working on a draft.)⁹

The Summit. Whatever we decide on sending small signals or escalating our diplomacy, we have to consider that in the next two weeks or so the summit in its broadest outline and in some detail will be set (the advance Party arrives April 19). If we are concerned that by May 22 we may be in a difficult situation vis-à-vis bombing and the situation in the South, we might consider cutting back on the visit. For example, shortening it by a day or so, dropping off the third stop in Baku. This does not mean much but it might be prudent to begin thinking of what the visit would be like if the situation worsens.

We might consider dropping off the Polish visit, since it is marginal in any case. After all Poland does participate in the three power commission for Indochina, though retaliation against Warsaw is a rather cloudy signal.

We may of course find ourselves confronted by a Soviet decision to call off the summit or a threat to do so; and I note that for unexplained reasons the Poles have still not reacted to our acceptance of their invitation. For the moment, it would be imprudent for us to escalate the situation by tinkering with summit plans. That complex of decisions is at least as tough for the Soviets as it is for us and the best course for now is to wait. But we should *not* for now have Ziegler say anything on the itinerary, whatever the leaks.

⁷ Document 72.

⁸ See Document 65.

⁹ Kissinger wrote “Yes” in the margin near the end of this paragraph.

In sum, here is a modest game plan for gradualism:

—Ensure that the grain sales talks yield no results for now (message to Butz at Tab A).¹⁰

—Keep the maritime talks in low key and avoid final agreement; tell Samuels and Gibson.¹¹

—Hold off agreeing to date when Soviets propose one for the second round of incidents at sea.¹²

—Stay tough on lend-lease.¹³

—Leave other bilaterals alone for now, but tell Beam to keep rhetoric low when Exchanges Agreement is signed April 11.¹⁴

—Harassment of Soviet ships in Cuba.¹⁵

—Use Patolichev visit to take tough line, but *not* involve the President. Cancel, if situation deteriorates.¹⁶

—Letter to Brezhnev later this week.¹⁷

Could you let me know which, if any of these, you wish pursued, and how. The message to Butz for your approval is at Tab A.¹⁸

¹⁰ Kissinger initialed his approval of this recommendation.

¹¹ Kissinger initialed his approval of this recommendation and issued the following handwritten instruction: “Avoid excessively friendly toasts. Want to delay a week.”

¹² Kissinger wrote “want to think” next to this recommendation.

¹³ Kissinger initialed his approval of this recommendation.

¹⁴ Kissinger initialed his approval of this recommendation.

¹⁵ Kissinger wrote “no” next to this recommendation.

¹⁶ Kissinger initialed his approval of this recommendation.

¹⁷ Kissinger did not indicate a decision on this recommendation.

¹⁸ Attached but not printed.

92. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting¹

Washington, April 11, 1972, 10:11–11:42 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

John N. Irwin

William Sullivan

Defense

Kenneth Rush

Warren Nutter

Maj. Gen. Fred Karhos

JCS

Maj. Gen. Louis Seith

CIA

Richard Helms

[*name not declassified*] (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC

Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig

Richard Kennedy

John Negroponce

Mark Wandler

[Omitted here is a summary of conclusions from the meeting.]

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) What do you have today?²

Mr. Helms: There's not much to report on since the last sitrep. You are familiar with the Communist effort to reinforce in the DMZ and the A Shau Valley. The weather is lousy in most of South Vietnam. The Chinese have also issued a statement.³

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Minutes, Originals. Top Secret; Sensitive. No drafting information appears on the minutes. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room. According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, the meeting lasted from 10:12 to 10:41 a.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976)

² Attached to the minutes but not printed is a copy of Helms' briefing on the situation in South Vietnam.

³ Reference is to the Chinese statement of April 10, which expressed confidence that North Vietnam, and its allies in Laos and Cambodia, would "win complete victory in the war against U.S. imperialism and for national salvation." An April 13 memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, assessing this and a similar statement of April 12, is in

Mr. Kissinger: My experts claim the Chinese statement is mild. What do you think?

Mr. Helms: It is mild. They made one charge of aggression, but they didn't say anything about aiding Hanoi. And they didn't threaten to intervene. Our Consulate in Hong Kong also sent in a report,⁴ saying the statement was mild.

Mr. Kissinger: As long as they claim North Vietnam is winning, there is no need for them to do anything.

Mr. Irwin: I agree with Dick's [Helms]⁵ assessment. There is one small point, though. The Chinese claimed the right to go across the DMZ, but this conflicts with earlier statements which in effect recognized four states within three nations in Indochina and thus totally accepted South Vietnam. On the whole, their statement is mild.

Mr. Helms: It's very reserved, compared to previous statements. I think they were about as mild as they could be—and still stand up.

Mr. Kissinger: What about the Soviets?

Mr. Sullivan: I take it you saw the Brezhnev–Honecker statement?⁶

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Mr. Irwin: There was a radio commentary in the Soviet Union yesterday which tried to make it appear the President's trip was still on. The commentary took a positive approach, and it didn't mention the war.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, the Soviets surely must have known the offensive was coming. How do you explain their behavior?

Mr. Helms: I think it's their way of telling you not to pay that much attention to Vietnam. They are saying the war has been going on a long time—and they are not agitating it. We have much bigger matters to discuss, and Vietnam shouldn't get in the way. That's the real reason

the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 525, Country Files, Far East, PRC, Vol. IV.

⁴ Telegram 2447 from Hong Kong, April 11. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 VIET S)

⁵ Brackets in the source text.

⁶ Reference is to the communiqué issued at the conclusion of Honecker's visit to the Soviet Union, April 4–10, which stated: "Comrades L.I. Brezhnev and E. Honecker affirmed the fraternal solidarity of the Soviet Union and the G.D.R. with the heroic Vietnamese people and with the patriots of Laos and Cambodia. They expressed concern in connection with the recent expansion of U.S. aggression in Indochina. Following the boycott of the Paris talks, the U.S.A. embarked on a path of new bombings of D.R.V. territory. The peoples of the Soviet Union and the G.D.R. decisively condemn these aggressive actions of the U.S.A." (*Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXIV, No. 15, May 10, 1972, pp. 16–17)

for their restraint and the radio commentary. It's their way of keeping you from getting agitated at them.

Mr. Sullivan: Bui Diem told us that he thought the Soviets provided the equipment to the North Vietnamese with the hope that the offensive would be launched in February—to spoil the China trip. He said he thought the North Vietnamese delayed the offensive until now because they wanted to embarrass the Russians. I want to emphasize that this is strictly Bui Diem's view.

Mr. Helms: The timing of the offensive slipped because of military factors, not political factors.

Mr. Kissinger: From the Russian point of view, the worst thing that could happen would be for the offensive to succeed. If we are run out of Vietnam, the Moscow trip would be called off, or we would go there as tough as nails. We couldn't possibly make any concessions.

Mr. Rush: It would also have a bad effect on the ratification of the German treaties and CSCE.

Mr. Irwin: The Soviets are caught in a dilemma, unless they cut off the flow of supplies to North Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: Butz [Secretary of Agriculture]⁷ is in Moscow now. Can we send him a message, telling him not to offer any exalted toasts to eternal U.S.-Soviet friendship? He should be polite, of course. If need be, he can say something in one sentence, similar to the sentence the President used yesterday at the CBW treaty signing.⁸

Mr. Irwin: We can tell Butz not to propose any toasts, but he will have to drink in response to the Soviet toasts.

Mr. Kissinger: It's just that we don't want him to give the impression that everything is fine.

Mr. Irwin: We will send him a message.⁹

[Omitted here is a detailed discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

⁷ Brackets in the source text.

⁸ See Document 89.

⁹ In telegram 61093 to Moscow, April 11, Irwin informed Butz that the administration had decided that in any public statements he should "exercise restraint in referring to prospects for US-Soviet cooperation." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 7 US/BUTZ) Also see footnote 4, Document 91.

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

Washington, April 12, 1972.

SUBJECT

Your Next Meeting with Dobrynin

Vietnam/Summit. There is no evidence so far that the Soviets are actively considering dropping the summit. On the contrary, while Soviet propaganda and Brezhnev himself (publicly in a communiqué with Honecker² and privately to Butz³ and of course directly to the President)⁴ are critical of US bombing in Vietnam, they clearly talk of the summit as a fact. Arrangements for the advance are proceeding; Brezhnev was quite fulsome to Butz about the “big welcome” the President would get and the “new big step” the visit would represent. In other respects, too, the Soviets are proceeding in their dealings with us as before.

On our side the picture is of course a bit different. The Soviets will assume that columns like those by Kraft and Evans and Novak⁵ were officially inspired. And they have no doubt hoisted in what the President said at the BW ceremony⁶ together with the press play about it and the earlier public statements by Laird and McCloskey.⁷ (Only Secretary Rogers has been slightly off this pattern in making a broadly positive public statement on the new US-Soviet Exchange Agreement yesterday.)⁸

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 67, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Sonnenfeldt Papers [1 of 2]. Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Haig initialed the memorandum.

² See footnote 6, Document 92.

³ See Document 101.

⁴ See Document 72.

⁵ Joseph Kraft, syndicated columnist, and Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, co-authors of a syndicated column; both appeared in *The Washington Post* and other newspapers.

⁶ See Document 89.

⁷ See footnote 2, Document 91.

⁸ The exchange agreement was signed by Beam and Smirnov in Moscow on April 11. For text, see Department of State *Bulletin*, May 15, 1972, pp. 708–714. In a statement welcoming its signature, Rogers declared: “President Nixon has expressed this administration’s strong conviction that a sound relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union is an essential ingredient in our search for peace and security in the world today.” (*Ibid.*, p. 707) In an April 13 memorandum to the President, Kissinger also assessed the agreement in positive terms. “State is justifiably pleased with the Agreement,”

With the Canadian Parliament speech coming up,⁹ it is probably best for us to hold our fire now as regards the Vietnam/summit inter-relationship. While we want to keep the pressure on the Soviets to do something in Vietnam, we don't want to build pressure *on ourselves* to do something about the summit. We should remember (1) that Brezhnev obviously wants the summit and that he now knows we make a connection and (2) that if by the time of the summit the DRV has been fought to anywhere near a standstill the President will go to Moscow in a strong position. We can now afford to wait.

SALT. My reading of latest developments on SLBM is that the most that is obtainable now is some assurance that they will be taken up as the first order of business in the next SALT phase. Soviets at all levels have referred to the "complicated" problems involved and I would judge that this relates to the fact that the Soviets are busy bringing in a follow-on boat and the SS–NX–8. There may be genuine perplexity in the Politburo.

If you do pursue the idea of a follow-on negotiation you should nail down that this will not be tied to FBS. An agreement to SLBM follow-on negotiations may well be suitable for summit promulgation.

(*Note:* I personally have reservations about this course, but if we cannot get anything on SLBMs in this phase, it may be a lesser evil.)

At the same time you may want to go one more round with Dobrynin before in effect dropping SLBM for now.

As regards ABM, you and Smith have rejected the latest Soviet proposal.¹⁰ This ought to be made definitive so no more time is wasted on it.

Smith as you know has gone forward with our two for two proposal conditioned on SLBM inclusion. The delegation has also told the Soviets that we have no ABM position for the case that the Soviets do *not* agree to include SLBMs. This is strictly speaking true and it is tactically sound since we don't yet want to give up on SLBMs. But you and Dobrynin have already in effect begun to talk around

he explained, "which meets US objectives and is the best in the series going back to the fifties. The Soviets were very responsive during the negotiations—an encouraging and positive sign and probably attributable to the pre-Summit atmosphere." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 718, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXI)

⁹ See Document 100.

¹⁰ Although no record has been found of Kissinger's rejection, the Department informed Smith on April 10 that the President had decided that the "Soviet ABM proposal of April 6 is unacceptable in its present form." (Telegram 61537 to USDEL SALT VII (Helsinki), April 10; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 18–3 FIN(HE))

this possibility and you have, I think, made clear that if SLBMs are not included we need some advantage on ABMs.¹¹ (You have Odeen's and my paper on how to do this; see Tab A.)¹²

The situation is going to be complicated when Smith makes his "personal" inquiry about substituting NCA for the second US/ICBM site.¹³ (Incidentally, is this with SLBMs included or excluded? If the latter it would provide us with an advantage only by *Soviet definition*, i.e., that our ICBM site defense would "protect" more ICBMs than a single site Soviet ICBM defense.) *I think you should today establish the principle that if SLBMs are excluded we will need an ABM advantage. Next time you should make him a specific proposal. (Note: If Dobrynin is going to be in Moscow for an extended period, this may have to be done by Smith.)*

Other Issues

Bilateral matters seem to be under control.

Grain talks, despite some unnecessary public statements by Butz in Moscow, will probably deadlock on the credit issue. The Soviets want concessionary terms—up to ten years at low interest rates. We cannot, by law, go above three years at commercial rates. (Brezhnev told Butz he can survive without a deal.) I suggest you stay away from this one for now.

Lend-lease begins here this week.

Commercial Shipping. The Soviets have given us a forthcoming counterproposal but a good deal of work still needs to be done. The talks are scheduled for Monday April 17 in Moscow (Nat Samuels, Gibson, etc.). I got your word to postpone for a week too late to hold up on this. But I will tell Samuels to cool the rhetoric. Again, I think you can stay away from this one for now.

Incidents at Sea. Nothing needs to be said to Dobrynin.

Patolichev. You may want to hint that this visit may have to be postponed if Vietnam gets worse. (You may recall that this was to be the occasion when we would intimate that EXIM may be in the cards at

¹¹ See Document 84.

¹² Not attached. Reference may be to the briefing book Odeen and Sonnenfeldt prepared for Kissinger under cover of an April 15 memorandum. The briefing book contains a draft memorandum from Kissinger to the President, which addresses the SLBM issue in detail—including the proposal to seek an advantage in the ABM treaty if SLBMs were excluded from the interim agreement. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-011, SALT Briefing Book 4/15/72)

¹³ Smith made his "personal" inquiry in a meeting with Semenov on April 22; see Document 147.

the summit.) The precise state of play is that Dobrynin owes Peterson an answer to the invitation for the period between April 27 and May 10. Pete thinks he may get a response at a Valenti/Dobrynin affair Thursday night.¹⁴ (Incidentally, I told Peterson's man that if Pete goes he should keep it cool and correct.)

Exchanges Agreement. Signed.

Science: David has his marching orders and will be getting back to Dobrynin in the next several days.

Environment. Dobrynin told Hillenbrand he will be contacting Train with a Soviet reaction to our illustrative proposal.¹⁵

Space Docking. NASA says all issues are under control as directed by the SRG.

Summit Preparations. The advance is to leave early April 17. Practical arrangements for the group are in train. We will have a problem with Soviet insistence that the President fly in Soviet aircraft inside the USSR. Scowcroft is appalled at sloppy Soviet flight and safety practices, even for their VIPs. The Soviets maintain that if their top leaders are to accompany the President, as they did de Gaulle and others, it will have to be in one of their own planes. (They also refer to what happened in China.) We may have to consider a compromise by using a Soviet plane to Leningrad and ours to Baku.

(*Note:* I have the impression Chapin is not fully aware of your discussion of arrangements with Dobrynin. You should fill him in, if necessary.)¹⁶

The Soviets are apparently being tough on the press question (100 man limit). Unless this has already been settled it is worth trying to improve on.

MBFR. My recollection is that you owe some sort of a response. We now have a paper¹⁷ on principles which you will get shortly. It is based on what is already common ground with the allies. You may

¹⁴ Reference is presumably to a social event on April 13 hosted by Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America.

¹⁵ Hillenbrand invited Dobrynin to meet at the Department on April 10 for a review of outstanding bilateral issues, including Train's proposals for cooperation on the environment. An account of the discussion is in telegram 61736 to Moscow, April 10. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL US–USSR)

¹⁶ According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger met Chapin, Haig, and Hyland on April 13 at 4:05 p.m. for 20 minutes to discuss Moscow. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976) No other record of the discussion has been found.

¹⁷ Reference is to a memorandum Odeen and Sonnenfeldt gave Kissinger on MBFR principles for the summit on April 14. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 482, President's Trip Files, MBFR–CSCE Backup Book [Part 1])

want to indicate that the President will be prepared to discuss principles in Moscow. (The other two possibilities—an effort to agree on a “quick and dirty” reduction, and an understanding on negotiating procedures—have many problems and pitfalls.)¹⁸

¹⁸ Kissinger wrote “5%” in the margin next to this paragraph, an apparent reference to the proposed level of “quick and dirty” mutual and balanced force reductions.

94. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, April 12, 1972, 12:55–2:40 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, Ambassador of the USSR

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

It was one of our regularly scheduled weekly luncheons.

Dobrynin began the conversation by talking about Vietnam. He said that as of the day before, the April 24 meeting was still on. He considered the April 24 meeting very crucial and he hoped nothing would happen to interfere with it. I said we had cancelled the plenary sessions that were supposed to precede this meeting, and that maybe now the other side would cancel the meeting itself.

Dobrynin said that he could assure me that his leadership was not interested in this conflict. I said “Let’s be realistic. You are responsible for this conflict, either because you planned it or because you tried to score off the Chinese and as a result have put yourself into the position where a miserable little country can jeopardize everything that has been striven for for years.” This was essentially a Soviet decision to make, I continued. The Soviet Union must have known when it signed two supplementary agreements during the year that it was giving the North Vietnamese the wherewithal to launch an offensive. What did the Soviet leaders expect? Did they expect the President to wait while

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. No drafting information appears on the memorandum. The meeting was held in the Map Room at the White House. For Kissinger’s memoir account of the meeting—based largely on the memorandum of conversation—see *White House Years*, p. 1120.

the South Vietnamese army ran the risk of being defeated and 69,000 Americans were taken prisoner?

Dobrynin interjected by saying that the North Vietnamese had often offered to repatriate them immediately. I said "Anatol, this is not worthy of comment, and that situation will not arise. There must be a meeting this month. It must lead to concrete results, and if it does not there will be incalculable consequences. I might also point out that our whole attitude on a host of issues depends on it. How could the Soviet leaders ask us to proceed on the Middle East or to give support for the ratification of the [Moscow] Treaty while the war was taking this acute form? We were prepared to let it wind down. Why did the North Vietnamese not wait if they felt so confident? But now that the situation had arisen in which we were being challenged directly, we had no choice but to proceed."

I was also bound to tell Dobrynin that I was not authorized to discuss any of the other subjects with him.

Dobrynin replied that it seemed to him that a visit by me to Moscow was more urgent than ever. He thought that we should reconsider the decision for me not to go. He felt that I should go and discuss Vietnam with their leaders and at the same time accelerate preparations for the Summit. I told Dobrynin I would put this proposition to the President.²

Later on that afternoon I called him to tell him the result. [Telecon attached.]³

² Dobrynin later argued that Kissinger suggested the trip on his own initiative. According to Dobrynin, "Kissinger informed me that, in view of the dangerous aggravation of the situation in Vietnam, the president believed Kissinger should pay a short visit to Moscow to meet Gromyko and Brezhnev." (*In Confidence*, p. 244)

³ Brackets in the source text. Document 97.

95. **Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹**

Washington, April 12, 1972.

Kissinger: I think we're [unclear], to him, Mr. President.

Nixon: Dobrynin?

Kissinger: No. No, he's blubbering. He says Moscow can assure me—First of all, he's been told he can't go back to Moscow this week. They have a communication for him. The second thing he can assure me: they are in the most urgent touch with Hanoi. He said they have a terrible problem. For once I believe him, because—

Nixon: Yeah. What did he say?

Kissinger: He doesn't give me that bullshit about peace [unclear]. And he doesn't claim he's put upon when he's here. He said [unclear]. That's not your [unclear] what can be done. He says, "We can't turn, we can't turn them off from one day to the next, vis-à-vis when to get our military equipment"—which is very interesting. "It will take 3 months to take effect." He said, "We'll get them there on the 24th [of April], even though you canceled the plenary session." He said that he can assure me—or he thinks he can assure me.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But I told you that. He said, however, they have one problem. He said right now all they can say to Hanoi is that it hurts the summit but Hanoi doesn't give a damn about the summit.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: Therefore he cannot make some proposition, any proposition that they can transmit to Hanoi. I said, "Anatol, the President has set the eight points. We can't fool around." He said, "Can we at least tell them that you're willing to negotiate?" He said, "We, for the first time, are prepared to tell them you are serious and it's important." I said, "Anatol—." Frankly, I could have given him some garbage. I don't have—

Nixon: I know. I know.

Kissinger: I said, "I've got to talk to the President. He's very determined on this. The war has got to end."

Nixon: Yeah. Good.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 330–36. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger from 2:47 to 3:01 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files.) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

Kissinger: He said, I said, —He said, “Are you sure you can see me tomorrow?” I said, “I’ll talk to the President.” He said, “May I tell them you’ll give me something tomorrow?” I said, “I’ll tell you tomorrow what the President said. What he will decide I can’t promise you because he makes these decisions very much on his own. But, I can tell—we are involved in a crisis [unclear]. I can tell him you guys are serious.” Then he said something. It may look, sound wrong again but I must tell you that, all he said. [unclear]. He said he believes that if I could talk to Brezhnev, if I could go there secretly, [unclear] and could I go for a few days prior to the Paris meeting, they would guarantee total secrecy and they would let me fly in on military routes, you know, uncovered by European radar—

Nixon: Uh-huh.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: What do we tell him about—?

Kissinger: Well, I believe—

Nixon: That doesn’t give them [Soviets] anything to tell them [North Vietnamese].

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: Yeah. Why don’t they tell them? Why don’t they tell Hanoi that?

Kissinger: But you see, I believe, Mr. President—

Nixon: You see my point?

Kissinger: If it turns out—

Nixon: Rather than our giving anything to Hanoi now, why don’t we say that you’re going to go talk to Brezhnev?

Kissinger: Well, we can do two things, Mr. President.

Nixon: And the other thing I was thinking. It’s been doing a little [unclear] Do you, don’t you have to catch the plane?

Kissinger: I’m not going. I put off the meeting with the Chinese. But he was really serious. He said, “How about the Chinese? What if the Chinese turn against us if we do that?” I said, “Anatol, if you and we can pull off Vietnam, we don’t need the Chinese.” And—

Nixon: [laughter] That got him blubbering, didn’t it?

Kissinger: Yeah. But I can easily—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —give him a general formula tomorrow that doesn’t give him anything. Just—Plus if I said I’ll go there secretly before the 24th, provided there is a meeting on the 24th.

Nixon: How about this? How about telling them that you’ll go to Hanoi?

Kissinger: Well, that's too confusing.

Nixon: Well, let me see. You see, I'm trying to think of gimmicks now, for a minute, that don't—You know, I'm all for atmospherics and I'm not much for substance on a thing like this now but that is, giving them atmospherics is nothing.

Kissinger: Well, Mr. President—

Nixon: I just want—

Kissinger: For me to go to Hanoi, now—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: It looks like—

Nixon: We're hat in hand.

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: I think your going to Russia's fine.

Kissinger: Well, secretly.

Nixon: If they can guarantee secrecy to Russia, I think you should go to Russia.

Kissinger: But, you see, I believe, Mr. President—

Nixon: Also there's some advantage in your sort of finding out what Brezhnev is like for us.

Kissinger: You see, I could also set up the thing for you there in such a way that—The way we had the Chou thing set up.²

Nixon: If he'll guarantee secrecy, then you tell him, "Now look, You have to know the President says that he's got a hell of a problem to be quite frank, with Rogers [unclear] you've got to show him every courtesy [unclear] you can say that, that is, that you can go. The President says that you can go, and you think it would be a good chance for you to discuss the summit at the same time. That will—You see this will put more heat on the Russians.

Kissinger: We have to make two conditions. One is I can go only if they deliver the North Vietnamese in Paris on the 24th.

Nixon: Yeah. But it isn't just delivering them. They'll be there on the 24th. But, Henry, they've been delivered 12 times and they haven't done anything.

Kissinger: Well, they've never been delivered to me.

Nixon: Well, all right. OK.

Kissinger: This time I told them—

Nixon: You mean, delivered—well, I understand. They will talk maybe this time, but you understand we haven't got any more talk left.

² Reference is presumably to arrangements for Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1971.

Kissinger: Mr. President, if they see me—First of all, if Brezhnev sees me after what we are doing to Hanoi—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I said to him, for example, “Look, we are going to take increasingly strong military measures before the 24th. I just want you to know this so that your people don’t feel we are fooling them.” He said, “Are you going to attack our ships?” I said, “I can’t tell you anything—”

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: But until the 24th we will try to exercise as much restraint as the situation permits.” But, if these guys see me while we are clobbering Hanoi, either way, if they keep it secret—They have more of an incentive to keep it secret than we.

Nixon: Yeah. The Russians?

Kissinger: Yes. Because it—

Nixon: But I mean, what I’m getting at, I still get back to the fundamental thing. Now what, who’s going to, [unclear] what effect does it have on Hanoi?

Kissinger: On Hanoi it will have a disastrous effect.

Nixon: The fact that you’re going to Russia?

Kissinger: If I go to Russia before I see them?

Nixon: [unclear] want you to go.

Kissinger: I told him, again it puts us into, if it ever does come out, but it won’t come out. They have every—

Nixon: We don’t care. You understand?

Kissinger: But I think, Mr. President I’ve got—

Nixon: He’s got to worry about it.

Kissinger: I have a lot of experience with these guys now. And I can assure—I can tell you they are grappling. He said Mrs. Dobrynin was moved to tears by Mrs. Nixon³ and has written a personal letter to Mrs. Brezhnev. I told him, “Look, at this—.”

Nixon: I think the Russians want the summit, don’t you?

Kissinger: I think the Russians must. The whole position of Brezhnev depends on the goddamn summit. I told him, he asked me about SALT. I said, “I can’t make a new proposition to you. I can’t go to the Navy while we’re moving our fleet into—.”

³ Reference is to the meeting the previous afternoon between Irina Dobrynin and Pat Nixon; see Document 89.

Nixon: What you should have told him too, if you didn't, was how tough the Leaders were this morning.⁴

Kissinger: I told him that.

Nixon: They want to break off the summit and fight.

Kissinger: I told him. [unclear] But, well, he said that you are the greatest mind, one of the greatest psychologists he's ever seen. He said that he is in awe—We talked [unclear]. Well, I said to him, he said—Well, now, he asked me what I thought about this [unclear]. And I said, "Listen, Anatol, the thing that bothers me about you people is that you always pick up all the loose change that's lying around and you lose all your good will that way." He said, "Well—." And I said, "By contrast, frankly I will say this about the President: he never picks up loose change but when he moves, he moves for all the marbles. Remember that when you see our fleet moving out." I said, "Do you think—?" He said, "How about an armistice? Armistice for a month." I said, "Anatol, do you think you're going to keep our fleet sitting out there?"

Nixon: [When] the fleet moves, it means something. They even thought it meant something with India.

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: What do you think?

Kissinger: We have them bugged. And I believe really that a secret trip by me—

Nixon: That's right. I approve of that.

Kissinger: —has the advantage they're so panting after it that any slight chance there might be of their attacking us for what we're going to do will disappear.

Nixon: Right. For the secret trip to be taken, let's figure out what you can give to Hanoi.

Kissinger: Nothing.

Nixon: But this is before. What are you going to say to them? What are you going to say to him?

Kissinger: I'll just give them gobblygook—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Which restates my—

⁴ The President met 19 Republican congressmen, 9 senators, and 10 representatives, in the Cabinet Room from 8:05 to 10:14 a.m. After the meeting, Nixon met Senator Hugh Scott and Congressman Gerald R. Ford, minority leaders in the Senate and House, respectively, in the Oval Office until 10:26. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary)

Nixon: We'll be glad to discuss the eight points⁵ and the modalities of the elections.

Kissinger: Mr. President, it would be a mistake to give them anything this early.

Nixon: I agree.

Kissinger: We've got their knees shaking now.

Nixon: That's right. But the point is, what Dobrynin is saying, "Can't you give us anything?"

Kissinger: I'll say, "We'll go there—."

Nixon: I think giving, going to Russia is giving them something.

Kissinger: I'll say, "Tell them we will go there with an open mind, that our eight points are, of course, we are willing to negotiate about them—."

Nixon: But we're not going to negotiate a surrender.

Kissinger: And, "Of course, we won't ask you to surrender."

Nixon: Or we won't—

Kissinger: I'll just give him then general gobbledygook which commits us to nothing.

Nixon: But also that it has to be done now.

Kissinger: But we must now bring it to a conclusion.

Nixon: Before the summit.

Kissinger: And I tell you, Mr. President. Every instinct I—I have never said to you that we have a chance—at any particular time period. But we've never had the Russians begging us for specifics.

Nixon: Right. Well let's just keep in our Canadian speech [unclear].

Kissinger: Let me think. Let's wait until tomorrow. He may have a message. He said he was coming with a message. So—

Nixon: Well, the message will just be to give you a little crap.

Kissinger: Oh, no. No, no. Mr. President—

Nixon: But, on the other hand, what harm does it do to leave it in?

Kissinger: I would leave it in. My best instinct is to leave it in. But—

Nixon: What harm does it do to them? I mean—

Kissinger: But, what I think I would like to do now is to tell him that you are considering this trip idea, because when you hit them with B-52s they'll be under pressure to protest.

⁵ Reference is to the proposal for a peace settlement, which the United States first gave to North Vietnam in Paris on October 11, 1971. For text, released by the Department of State on February 1, 1972, see Department of State *Bulletin*, February 21, 1972, pp. 229–230.

Nixon: You'll tell him that way?

Kissinger: I won't tell him that you are, that you have approved it.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But I'll tell him you are actively considering it—

Nixon: Tell him that he can tell his government.

Kissinger: —that there is a chance—

Nixon: Tell him, "The President is going to Camp David tonight. And he says that he will, he thinks there's a, that he will, there's a chance that you should take the trip. But we'd like to see what, but he wants to see their message first." How's that?

Kissinger: But, they didn't say definitely that they'd leave a message.

Nixon: Well then tell him he—

Kissinger: Just say you want to think about it.

Nixon: I think we ought to still make the Canadian thing. I've got a domestic problem here too, you know.

Kissinger: Then make it.

Nixon: You see my point?—It's fine. Can you [unclear] It was decent language.

Kissinger: I read it. I'd make it—

Nixon: That ought to be said for the Chinese too.

Kissinger: Mr. President, if you pull this one off, I'll—I think we should spend the Fall killing the goddamn Democrats.

Nixon: I'm sick of them. I'll tell you one thing. If it does come off, what we have to do is to get them further out on the limb too. I think we ought to force Kennedy and the others—

Kissinger: Well let's wait until we get that meeting. I will guarantee you one thing, Mr. President. Not guarantee—I think there is a two chance out of three that we can stop the war for the rest of this year. That's the minimum I think we can get. But if we can stop it altogether, I don't know. But that I think we can get.

96. **Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, April 12, 1972, 3:10 p.m.

P: With the Chinese I think you probably ought to . . . no need to play too hard a game with them on the rhetoric side, do you think? Say we understand but please, as the President said to the Prime Minister Chou, anything we do here is not directed against you. We wouldn't want them to say Mansfield and Scott shouldn't come or something like that.²

K: No, Mr. President, I think exactly that's the right course to take and that's what I planned to do.

P: Also give them the idea we are playing them against the Russians. Have you got any ideas on that?

K: Tell them the same principle is involved here as in the India–Pakistan thing.

P: We are not getting along well with the Russians; say the President has indicated that to the Russians, and so told the legislators. Say we are not putting any pressure on them. Are you going to call Dobrynin and say we will consider the trip to Mr. Brezhnev? If you are

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking. A tape recording of Nixon's side of the conversation is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 330–37. Several substantive discrepancies between the transcript and the tape (as transcribed by the editors specifically for this volume) are noted in the footnotes below.

² According to the tape recording (see footnote 1 above), Nixon said: "we wouldn't want [them] to say they're excited Mansfield and Scott are coming or something like that sort of thing." Senators Mike Mansfield (D–Montana) and Hugh Scott (R–Pennsylvania), majority and minority leaders respectively, visited the People's Republic of China April 19–22. For documentation on their trip see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972.

going for this purpose anyway, we can say . . . this is the major concern.³ Incidentally, did any strike get off?

K: They are going off now Mr. President.

P: At 2:30 today. I wonder when I will have a chance to see Haig.

K: Tomorrow. . . . Mr. President I have a call coming in from Dobrynin now.

³ According to the tape recording, Nixon said: "Yeah, but I mean, I meant another way to indicate that we're not getting along very well with the Russians and that the President has directed his remarks to the Russians and so too the legislative leaders. Why don't you put it that way? And that he's not putting any responsibility on the Chinese. How's that? Now, you've got to call Mr. D[obrynin] and just tell him that we will consider a trip to Russia. I think that has great merit. If they'll do it secretly and provide also the opportunity we would like to have anyway of your taking a trip to prepare the summit, which you see, which we did, we couldn't with the bureaucracy for its purpose. Nobody can squeal at the end of the secret. See? So I think it has an advantage for us apart from this. On the other hand, this is the real, this is the major reason."

97. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and the Soviet Ambassador (Dobrynin)¹

Washington, April 12, 1972, 3:15 p.m.

D: Calling you from gas station.

K: I called you because I just talked to the President and I am leaving town for a couple of hours² and I wanted to get word to you. The President is inclined to approve the secret trip of mine to Moscow if we can do it in conjunction with the Paris thing, a week from Saturday and Sunday.

D: What date?

K: 22 and 23.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² Kissinger left his office at 3:30 p.m. for a meeting later that afternoon in New York with Huang Hua, the Chinese Permanent Representative to the United Nations. (Ibid., Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule) During the meeting, Kissinger briefed Huang on proposals for talks with the North Vietnamese and plans for the summit with the Soviets. The memorandum of conversation is in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 220.

D: I guess you are right. 22 and 23?

K: Right. Arrive in Moscow around the evening of the 21st.

D: 21.

K: Right. That would give us two evenings and two days there. It's not yet 100 percent sure.

D: Could I pass it?

K: Yes, you can. I think it would be useful for them to know it on the assumption that it would be done secretly.

D: You tell me reasons from your side. From our side it could be done easily. Direct flight from Washington to Moscow?

K: Yes. If you would like to send a navigator over here. . . .³ Like to take route outside the radar of Europe.

D: You tell me the route.

K: On this I will give you a recommendation and you specify the airfield. It's not yet 100 percent sure; the President is going to Camp David⁴—he wants to think about it overnight. Our assumption is it would be secret. I would talk to Mr. Brezhnev and we would do it in the spirit I described to you and because I am going over anyway.

D: I understand. I think it is very helpful. I will pass this information to Moscow.

K: Good, and also I will have some word for you tomorrow you can tell them definitely. It will not be very precise, but you can explore their attitude. The President is going to Camp David to think about it and will instruct me in the morning.

D: [Omitted here are comments about Dobrynin's schedule.] So your call was the only cheerful one. It lifts my spirits. So tomorrow you will give me a call?

K: Yes, and we will get together. I will call you first thing in the morning.⁵

³ On April 14 Vorontsov gave Haig a handwritten note on arrangements for the Soviet navigators first to arrive in Washington and then return, with Kissinger, to Moscow. "All measures are going to be taken by the Soviet side," the note concluded, "to ensure the full secrecy." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10)

⁴ The President flew by helicopter to Camp David late that afternoon and returned to Washington by car the next morning. While at Camp David, Nixon met Haig for dinner (6 p.m.) and called Kissinger in New York (7:25 p.m.). (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) No substantive record of either conversation has been found.

⁵ No record of a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin the morning of April 13 has been found.

98. **Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**¹

Washington, April 12, 1972, 3:22 p.m.

K: I wanted to give the word to Dobrynin. He said it's the most cheerful news he had all day. I didn't even say you had agreed, just you were considering it. He said he will pass it to Moscow right away.

P: I feel you ought to go, not only to discuss this but the Summit. Was he happy?

K: He was slobbering. Brezhnev saw the Hanoi Ambassador today and made a statement of support. I showed this to my Europe man [Sonnenfeldt] who doesn't know what the hell is going on and said what do you think. He said if we made a statement like that about an ally he would conclude we were getting ready to screw him, and he knows nothing.

P: That's why we must keep the Russian thing in in Canada.² Don't you think?

K: Yes.

P: Okay, you go up to New York.³ Is the weather improving any?

K: Yes.

P: You will be back from New York by . . . I won't get a chance to see Haig. I'm staying up there until noon. You want Haig to see me there or you and I see him together? Or maybe he doesn't need to, good God, I guess he knows.

K: He knows your thinking.

P: How about my taking him with me up to Camp David, seeing him there for an hour and then sending him back? Tell him to go with me at 4:30 and come back about 7:30.⁴

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking. According to the President's Daily Diary, Kissinger placed the call at Nixon's request. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

² Reference is to the President's address before a joint session of the Canadian Parliament on April 14; see Document 100.

³ See footnote 2, Document 97.

⁴ See footnote 3, Document 97.

99. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting¹

Washington, April 13, 1972, 10:06–10:58 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

U Alexis Johnson

William Sullivan

Defense

Kenneth Rush

Armistead Selden

Maj. Gen. Fred Karhos

JCS

Adm. Thomas Moorer

CIA

Richard Helms

[*name not declassified*] (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

[George Carver]

NSC

Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig

John Negroponte

Mark Wandler

[Omitted here is the Summary of Conclusions and a detailed discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

Mr. Kissinger: As I understand it, there are two factors which may cause the North Vietnamese to slow down their attacks; (1) the rainy season and (2) attrition due to combat.

Mr. Carver: That's true, but there is a parallel relationship between those two factors. Operations won't necessarily have to stop because of one of them. For example, they have pre-positioned men and supplies, in the hope that they won't have to break off contact when the rainy season begins. I think the two factors are timed to end at more or less the same time.

Mr. Kissinger: Would you say in about six weeks—starting two weeks ago?

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals. Top Secret; Sensitive. No drafting information appears on the minutes. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

Mr. Carver: You can figure on the end of May.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you think the enemy is bloody-minded enough to carry through while we are at the Summit in Moscow?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: You think the Russians will let them do that?

Mr. Carver: The Russians, I don't think, have any way of stopping them right now. Perhaps they can do it later on—by cutting off the POL flow, or something like that.

Mr. Sullivan: The North Vietnamese have shown before that they are sensitive about POL.

Mr. Carver: There's quite a bit of lead time involved with cutting of the POL. If the flow stopped tomorrow, they would still have enough to carry through the offensive in MR 3. It would be a different story, of course, in the next campaign cycle.

Mr. Helms: The Communists have everything they need down there.

Adm. Moorer: The Russians have stepped up the flow of fuel to Haiphong in recent months. If I recall correctly, the increase in recent months has been around 30 percent.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Can you give us a rundown of the Soviet supply effort to North Vietnam in the last year?

Adm. Moorer: I can give you that. It's been higher than 200,000 tons a month during recent months. Fuel used to be one-sixth of the total tonnage, but in recent months it has been about one-fourth of the total.

Mr. Kissinger: How does the 200,000 tons compare to earlier times?

Adm. Moorer: It's higher. The figures used to be about 160,000 or 175,000 tons a month.

Mr. Helms: (to Mr. Kissinger) I will do a paper for you. We were just talking about this at the Agency, and I understand that it is more difficult than you would think to come up with the correct figures. For one thing, you have to rate the different kinds of equipment.

Mr. Kissinger: Do the paper.² We want to get some kind of a judgment on whether the Soviets knew they were increasing the offensive capability of the North Vietnamese. They may just have been continuing the flow of supplies at the normal—or a slightly increased—rate. On the other hand, they may have known that the requests for additional supplies would result in increased offensive capabilities.

² Document 117.

Mr. Sullivan: You may be aware that the Soviets and North Vietnamese recently concluded a supplementary aid agreement which included such things as POL and food.

Adm. Moorer: I'm positive the increased POL shipments are even above what the North Vietnamese requested.

Mr. Kissinger: How do you know that?

Adm. Moorer: I believe that was the way it was worded in the intelligence reports. I'll have to go back and check on it.

Mr. Kissinger: We can say the Soviet supply effort was one of three things. First, it may have been a plot which was designed to weaken us. Second, it may not have been a plot. But they should have known, anyway, that the increased aid would give the North Vietnamese greater capabilities. It's sort of like a loaded revolver. Third, it may have been that the guy in the Politburo in charge of Vietnamese accounts decided for some reason just to keep on going—and no one paid any attention to what was going on.

Adm. Moorer: Are you saying the Soviets have no better control over their aid program than we have over our own?

Mr. Kissinger: It's not inconceivable to me that someone in the Politburo was anxious to goose us because of the China initiative and, without thinking, increased the aid to North Vietnam. If the aid to North Vietnam has increased 30 percent, it is due to criminal negligence or total irresponsibility.

Adm. Moorer: We certainly knew about the increase in POL shipments.

Mr. Kissinger: Were we able to deduce that the offensive was coming?

Adm. Moorer: I connected the POL increase with the movements of the various North Vietnamese divisions.

Mr. Carver: There's no doubt that the timing of the offensive was thrown off. It should have started in January or February—and been over before the Summit. By the time you went to Moscow, the North Vietnamese wanted to have defeated the South Vietnamese. They wanted the situation to still be in peril, but they wanted the major fighting to have ended.

[Omitted here is detailed discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

100. Editorial Note

On April 13, 1972, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger met Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin in the Map Room at the White House from 12:05 to 12:46 p.m. to discuss his upcoming trip to Moscow and proposals for talks with the North Vietnamese. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule) Although no substantive record has been found, Dobrynin described the meeting in his memoirs: “When I informed Kissinger on April 13 that we agreed to receive him on his secret mission, he said he was also willing to meet the North Vietnamese in Moscow if they wanted (they said they preferred Paris). He briefed me on the basic American position, but the leadership in Hanoi did not let us know where it stood.” (*In Confidence*, page 244) Kissinger then briefed President Nixon in the Executive Office Building at 2:16 p.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary)

Kissinger: “I had another talk—”

Nixon: “Right.”

Kissinger: “—with Dobrynin.”

Nixon: “Another talk?”

Kissinger: “He came in and said he’s already got a message back from Moscow saying that it’s very important I should come.”

Nixon: “Right.”

Kissinger: “They want me to come.”

Nixon: “Did you give him the answer then today and say it was OK?”

Kissinger: “I said you were not yet back, but I would give him the final answer. I just thought that we should—”

Nixon: “Right.”

Kissinger: “—wait for—”

Nixon: “Right. I’m waiting. Right.”

Kissinger: “Vietnam will be agenda item number one. And therefore they request that I get there a day earlier than I had suggested. And also they said the Vietnamese delegation for their talk with me is coming through Moscow on Sunday [April 23]. And they want to have completed their talks on Vietnam with me before Sunday.”

Although Kissinger commented that the Soviets were “really slobbering right now,” Nixon first wanted to discuss domestic politics and public relations, including his address the following day to a joint meeting of the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa (see below). Kissinger then continued to report on his meeting with Dobrynin.

Kissinger: "Now, one thing Dobrynin told me is that as of Tuesday night [April 11] the North Vietnamese were still coming on the 24th. And—"

Nixon: "Yeah. Well—"

Kissinger: "Well, but that's, they made three conditions: that we come on the 13th; the 20th, the plenary session; and that we stop the bombing of the north. We have not met any of these conditions. If they come under those circumstances, that in itself is an unbelievable confession of weakness."

Nixon: "I agree."

Kissinger: "Secondly, if they come after I've been in Moscow—and he told me that Moscow [unclear] my going there—which is fine. They won't leak it; they have no interest."

Nixon: "We don't care about the leak."

Kissinger: "But after that visit, now what Dobrynin said to me—You know, it's very different cycle now. None of this—"

Nixon: "I know he gets to the cold points. I know."

Kissinger: "It's now as cold—Now, it's like your conversation—"

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger:—"at the time you were building up the [unclear]. None of this baloney about what are we doing to us, how does this—"

Nixon: "Well he comes in and says, 'My government [unclear] that.' And then he talks just like it's straight out of the horse's mouth."

Kissinger: "He says, 'Look, we have this problem. Our national interest is against what's going on in Vietnam now.' He also—"

Nixon: "Yeah, they've been saying that. That's the Harriman line."

Kissinger: "Well, yeah but not—No, there's been no reply like this."

Nixon: "I know, I know. But, you know, that's, that is the Harriman line. Go ahead."

Kissinger: "No, but—"

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: "No, their line used to be that we were ruining the possibility of good relations with them."

Nixon: "Oh, I get it. Go ahead. But whatever it is—"

Kissinger: "He was saying their national interests. On the other hand, he said we shouldn't push them in a position where they seem to be selling out."

Nixon: "Right."

Kissinger: "But, he said, 'Let's be realists. What do you want?' I said, 'We want an end of military operations. That's the minimum. We are not going to sit there and talk and get ourselves chopped up over a period

of months. We've now got our forces together out there and we're going to use them.' He said, 'Can you, is that an irrevocable decision against us?' I said, 'We will do what is necessary but the war in Vietnam must stop.' He said, 'If we give, get you a guarantee that military action stops for a year, is that satisfactory?' Mr. President, frankly—"

Nixon: "If he needs it. Did you tell him that?"

Kissinger: "If these guys after this attack—"

Nixon: "Well, the point is that you could have a truce for the purpose of talks. That's what I have in mind. But go ahead."

Kissinger: "Well but we may even get peace, that's why I don't want to—"

Nixon: "Yeah, but don't give it away. Oh I know."

Kissinger: "Don't give it away yet. But, if after cranking up this operation, they stop—I said, 'Now the first thing, you have to remember, Anatol, is we don't believe a word Hanoi says. So Hanoi can offer us anything but you, you've got to guarantee it publicly before we can even con—, before I can even take it to the President. Because the President is in such a mood now that if I come to him and say Hanoi promises something he will throw me out of the room.'"

Nixon: "Good. What'd he say? Does he believe you?"

Kissinger: "Oh, yes."

After discussion of U.S. naval presence in the Gulf of Tonkin, Kissinger reported a Soviet proposal for negotiations on Vietnam.

Kissinger: "So he said, 'Are you prepared to do this?' He said, 'If we get military operations stopped, are you prepared to say to the North Vietnamese you have proposed a coalition government, we've proposed an election; We're willing to talk whether a compromise is possible between these two positions? Talk about a compromise we can do, Mr. President.'"

Nixon: "Sure."

Kissinger: "If they stop military operations for a year, they're finished."

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: "Because that would be interpreted all over Vietnam as a massive defeat for Hanoi."

Nixon: "Right."

Kissinger: "Then he said, 'Well, what about this limitation of military aid if both of us agree?' I said, 'All of your allies would have to agree too. We can't let you send stuff in through Czechoslovakia.'"

Nixon: "And your allies, the Chinese, have to agree too."

Kissinger: "Well—"

Nixon: [laughter]

Kissinger: "All I'm trying to say, Mr. President, is—You remember how many years we tried and they wouldn't even communicate our messages—"

Nixon: "I know."

Kissinger: "—to Hanoi."

Nixon: "I know."

Kissinger: "He tells me they're in active daily contact. He says, Vietnam is agenda item number one when I get there. He says—"

Nixon: "When you get there?"

Kissinger: "When I get there—"

Nixon: "Oh yeah. Hell yes."

Kissinger: "But they're trying to get the goddamn thing—They're not saying, 'If you blockade, you'll be in a confrontation with us.'"

Nixon: "Well, I hope that he doesn't feel, though, that he doesn't come out with coalition government concession from you."

Kissinger: "There's no chance of it, Mr. President. What he's looking for, as I understand it, is some face-saving formula that enables them to stop the war for a time—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "—in which we are committed to talk about something and they are committed to stop fighting. We will have achieved—If they stop fighting, Mr. President, it will be a bigger victory by far than the Cuban Missile Crisis."

Nixon: "Oh, shit, we didn't lose—The Cuban Missile? Christ, we didn't lose any Americans. The Cuban Missile didn't involve Americans; it involved a bunch of damn Cubans."

Kissinger: "Let's look at it another way. Supposing tomorrow morning Hanoi publicly said to you, 'We are willing to make a compromise on the political thing, are you willing to talk about a compromise without making a proposal?' We've got to say, 'Yes, we'll talk about it.'"

Nixon: "Basically what we'll have here is a bombing halt with, with action on their side rather than an understanding."

Kissinger: "But the ball is on their side."

Nixon: "On both sides."

Kissinger then recommended that Nixon approve plans for "some strikes on truck parts and POL depots around Haiphong and Hanoi this weekend." Kissinger argued that bombing in the North was more effective than fighting in the South, which "won't get the Russians in."

Kissinger: "Because if the battle is confined to the South—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: “—the Russians will believe that if Hanoi wins that’s good for us, for them because it weakens us; and if Hanoi loses, it’s good for them because it increases Hanoi’s dependence on them. So the southern battle they don’t mind. What’s panicking the Russians is that we will blockade or that we will so tear up North Vietnam that they will be forced to put in something in an area in which they have nothing to gain. And, therefore, risky as it is, we’ve got them to where we are in this game by running enormous risks.”

Nixon: “The Chinese raise hell about it. That’s what I would do.”

Kissinger: “Well they’ll all raise hell about it. I’ve already told Dobrynin we’re going to do something intensified. And he said, ‘Well, must you do it?’ I said, ‘Yeah.’ He said, ‘Well, as long as [unclear] but it won’t be a good [unclear].’”

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: “The point is, Mr. President, the extent of the damage.”

Nixon: “Yeah.”

Kissinger: “We don’t have to do it. But I think showing that we keep coming, that this thing is going to get worse and worse is helpful.”

Nixon: [unclear] “in my view—And of course we always run the risk of blowing the whole thing.” [unclear]

Kissinger: “Mr. President, I cannot believe that. I believe that the only thing that can blow this is if we blink now.”

Kissinger suggested another link between the military situation in Vietnam and political relations with the Soviet Union. Dobrynin had recently said that Moscow “very much appreciated” Nixon’s decision to avoid “ostentatious connections with the Catholic Church” during his trip to Poland. “What we have to show the Russians,” Kissinger told Nixon, “is that they are jeopardizing this sort of cooperation by horsing around in Vietnam.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 13, 1972, 2:16–2:50 p.m., Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 329–32)

During the meeting Kissinger also convinced the President, albeit temporarily, to delete a sentence from his Canadian speech. (Ibid., White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, Haldeman Files, Box 45, Haldeman Notes, April–June 1972, Part I) The sentence, which had been intended as one of a series of signals to the Soviets, reads: “The great powers cannot avoid responsibility for the aggressive actions of those to whom they give the means for embarking on such actions.” (President’s Reading Copy; *ibid.*, President’s Personal Files, Box 74, President’s Speech File, Friday, April 14, 1972, Canadian Parliament Speech) According to White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, who also attended the meeting, Kissinger insisted that the

United States should respond to but not initiate a public debate with North Vietnam. (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*) In his Ottawa address on April 14, the President delivered a clear message to Moscow on Vietnam—including the sentence previously deleted at Kissinger’s request. Although his visits to Beijing and Moscow were “for the peace of all mankind,” Nixon warned that summit meetings might create “unrealistic euphoria.”

“The responsibility for building peace rests with special weight upon the great powers. Whether the great powers fulfill that responsibility depends not on the atmospherics of their diplomacy, but on the realities of their behavior.

“Great powers must not treat a period of détente as an interlude between periods of tension. Better relations among all nations require restraint by great nations—both in dealing with each other and in dealing with the rest of the world.

“We can agree to limit arms. We can declare our peaceful purposes. But neither the limitation of arms nor the declaration of peaceful purposes will bring peace if directly or indirectly the aggressive use of existing weapons is encouraged.

“And great powers cannot avoid responsibility for the aggressive actions of those to whom they give the means for embarking on such actions.

“The great powers must use their influence to halt aggression—and not to encourage it.” (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, page 540)

101. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 14, 1972.

SUBJECT

Secretary Butz's Meeting with Brezhnev

Secretary Butz was received by Brezhnev on Tuesday² for an informal conversation on political subjects as well as on trade and the current grain negotiations. The fact that the Secretary was received—the first American official visitor Brezhnev has talked to since 1963³—was an unusual gesture, and received front page *Pravda* treatment. Though this was in part a courtesy in return for your having met with Agriculture Minister Matskevich,⁴ it is relevant to Vietnam and the summit; it may be a signal to us that the Soviets are apprehensive about Vietnam, and to the Soviet people (and Hanoi) that Brezhnev is interested in keeping our relations on an even keel.

In any case, *Brezhnev assured the Secretary that you would receive a "big welcome" and the visit would be a new, big step since he (Brezhnev) was sure that there would be many points in common.* Brezhnev referred to having been in touch with you recently,⁵ "answering" many of your questions. (This is a reference to his correspondence with you, which may arouse curiosity in our Embassy and the recipients of the reporting cable from Moscow.)

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 718, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXI. Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Sent for information. The memorandum is largely based on an attached report from Beam. (Telegram 3355 from Moscow, April 12; *ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 7 US/BUTZ) No drafting information appears on the memorandum. Sonnenfeldt forwarded it to Kissinger on April 12 under cover of a separate attached memorandum, in which he recommended a postponement of several days on Butz's request for an appointment with the President. "To receive him immediately," Sonnenfeldt explained, "would certainly play up the grain talks (which Butz already did for the press in Moscow) and undercut any other efforts to make a record on Vietnam."

² April 12. Kissinger briefed the President that afternoon on the meeting between Brezhnev and Butz. Haldeman noted in his diary: "K came in to report on Vietnam and said the Russians are falling all over us, that they had a glowing meeting with Butz and were in great praise to the P[resident] and so forth." (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*) A tape recording of the meeting is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 12, 1972, 12:41–12:55, Oval Office, Conversation No. 707–10.

³ Reference is to the meeting on May 29, 1963, between Brezhnev and Glenn Seaborg, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission; see *Foreign Relations, 1961–1963*, vol. V, Document 325.

⁴ See Document 23.

⁵ See Document 72.

Brezhnev said you would be invited to stay in the Kremlin, and a plane would be at your disposal to visit places you wish to go. He said, however, that more emphasis would be put on useful discussion than protocol. In a different context, Brezhnev stressed the US and Soviet people are genuinely for peace and the two greatest nations must live together in mutual respect and understanding. He was “pondering” ideas about new contacts which should be established. (This rather cryptic reference might be an allusion to establishing some sort of a permanent consultative mechanism, which the Soviets have in their agreement with France and Canada and which has been mentioned in my talks with Dobrynin.)⁶

Brezhnev referred to your trip in 1959, and seemed to criticize Khrushchev for initiating the Kitchen Debate.⁷ He added that he remembered you from that visit, since he was a member of the Politburo. (In fact, Brezhnev was present at Sokolniki Park during the debate.)

On Vietnam, Brezhnev said to bring to your attention the deep feeling of the Soviet people over the bombings—which he said was an unnecessary extension of the war. The Soviet people were saddened (by the bombing) because of their own experience in World War II. Secretary Butz and Ambassador Beam were unable to reply to this intervention because Brezhnev kept changing the subject. The Ambassador notes that though the remarks were gratuitous, they were not made in an offensive tone.⁸

Much of the conversation was about *US-Soviet trade*, in a very general fashion. Brezhnev called for increase on the basis of equality. He noted the grain talks and said he would be following them. Secretary Butz mentioned grain purchases of about \$200 million on terms as favorable as we give to any nation (this was also proposed in the talks). Brezhnev merely replied he wanted the talks to succeed, but that the USSR would need adequate credit terms. The Soviet Union could survive without such deals if necessary, he added. (In fact, in the negotiations the Soviets opened with a proposal for 10 year credits of 2 per cent interest, which was suggested only half jokingly. They later mentioned 6–8 years and wanted major concessions.)

⁶ Kissinger and Dobrynin discussed the issue during their meeting on March 9; see Document 56.

⁷ Reference is to the exchange between Vice President Nixon and Soviet Premier Khrushchev at the American National Exhibition in Moscow on July 24, 1959.

⁸ In addition to the telegram cited above, Beam later forwarded in a separate telegram his impressions of Brezhnev from the meeting. “Brezhnev struck me as crude but impressive,” the Ambassador reported. “He is a burly man and seems to move massively and fast in everything he does. Although mentally collected, he was physically nervous, like someone who has been ordered by his doctor to give up smoking and cannot do it. He smoked three cigarettes while we were there, and kept compulsively playing with a stack of pens on the table.” (Telegram 3463 from Moscow, April 14; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 7 US/BUTZ)

On other trade matters, the Secretary suggested the Soviets could expand their exports to repay credits by supplying natural gas since our energy needs were doubling within ten years. Brezhnev said they favored “big scale” trade, and he promised to send the Secretary a list of suitable Soviet exports.

The Secretary is returning to the US on Thursday, and will probably want to meet you after the Canadian trip.⁹

⁹ Butz met Nixon on April 18 from 3:12 to 3:37 p.m. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary) A tape of the conversation is ibid., White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Butz, April 18, 3:12–3:37 p.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 711–21. In an April 18 memorandum to the President, Kissinger briefed Nixon on the meeting with Butz, including “a Moscow press conference during which he made several remarks which Peter Flanigan has since pointed out to him when beyond the scope of his mission.” Kissinger suggested that the President “inform Secretary Butz that with regard to credits you are considering EXIM and Most Favored Nation treatment but that this is heavily related to the situation in Vietnam and to negotiations with the Soviets during your forthcoming visit to Moscow.” (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 196, Agency Files, Agriculture, 1971–[1974], Vol. II) On April 18 Sonnenfeldt also forwarded Flanigan’s account of his meeting with Butz on April 13 and a transcript of Butz’ press conference in Moscow the previous day. (Memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, April 18; ibid.)

102. Editorial Note

On April 15, 1972, North Vietnam cancelled the private meeting with Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger scheduled for Paris on April 24; later on the same day, the United States began a 2-day strike against military targets near Hanoi and Haiphong. Although coincidental, these two decisions on Vietnam directly affected relations between the Soviet Union and the United States. As he returned to Washington from Ottawa aboard the *Spirit of '76* that morning, President Nixon seriously considered canceling Kissinger’s trip to Moscow in response to North Vietnam’s refusal to meet in Paris immediately thereafter. White House Chief of Staff Haldeman recorded a discussion of the subject with Kissinger in his diary: “Henry told me on the plane that there’d been a problem in that the North Vietnamese now want to put off the April 24 talk and the question is whether he can go to Moscow or not. His inclination is to go anyway, and then just come back. He doesn’t feel he can go to Moscow in May when the Paris talk will be, because it’s too close to the P’s trip. He spent quite a little time on the plane with the P on that subject.” (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia*

Edition) Nixon also wrote a diary entry on the airborne debate of what, in his words, Kissinger deemed “a crisis of the first magnitude.”

“I laid down the law hard to him that under these circumstances he could not go to Moscow. I told him that what the Russians wanted to do was to get him to Moscow to discuss the summit. What we wanted to do was to get him to Moscow to discuss Vietnam. I can see that this shook him because he desperately wants to get to Moscow one way or the other. He took it in good grace. Then I told him that we had to consider our option with regard to imposing a blockade.” (*RN: Memoirs*, pages 590–591)

During an hour-long meeting in the Old Executive Office Building at 1 p.m., Nixon and Kissinger conducted a series of calculations between their military options in Vietnam and their diplomacy with the Soviet Union.

Nixon: “Now, let’s talk about the blockade a moment because that fits into what you say here.”

Kissinger: “Right.”

Nixon: “It might provide another way to go [unclear]. Let me tell you about the blockade. In my view, if we’re going to do it, we got to do it very soon or we will not have the support for it.”

Kissinger: “I agree.”

Nixon: “And that support runs out as time goes on. In fact, we probably should have done it this week, you know. I’m just saying, I’m just saying, I’m speaking in terms of having public support in the United States.”

Kissinger: “Right.”

Nixon: “The support can run out. If the blockade comes at a time that disaster is impending in the South, and people know it, or when riots are going on here, then it looks like an act of desperation. But if we can move before either of those things happen, then we might have a great deal of public support for it—for a while. You see that’s my reasoning for doing it sooner rather than later.”

Kissinger: “Right. I agree.”

Nixon: “The second point is that that could be an argument for your going to the Soviet even though there’s no meeting on the 24th. The idea being that you go [unclear] with the condition that the primary subject for discussion is Vietnam. Unless there’s something positive, tangible to offer that the President is going to take action. And at that time, you would tell them—”

Kissinger: “I wouldn’t tell them what action is planned [unclear]—”

Nixon: “[There will] be strong action. It will not be directed against you [Soviets].”

Kissinger: “The way to do that if I play out that scenario.”

Nixon: "All right, let's play that out."

Kissinger: "As I thought of it—it was one of the things I had in mind."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "What I would say then is, 'Vietnam is, must be the first agenda item. There must be concrete progress on this.'"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "If there is no concrete progress on it, I would refuse to go on to summit agenda items."

Nixon: "Right. Right."

Kissinger: "If there is concrete progress on it, I would be entitled—empowered to discuss summit agenda items."

Nixon: "Yeah. Right."

Kissinger: "But the progress cannot be an agreement to talk."

Nixon: "Yeah." [unclear]

Kissinger: "And it must be a precise description of how the war will come to an end."

Nixon: "How the war will come to an end. Yeah. Yeah. Not just an agreement that they will deliver the South Viet—, the North Vietnamese to a meeting. That isn't going to work."

Kissinger: "Right that's not going to work."

Nixon: "Second point."

Kissinger: "It will slightly affect the message we send to them [the Soviets] this afternoon, Mr. President."

Nixon: "That's what I'm thinking. The second point is—"

Kissinger: "It also has the advantage vis-à-vis our domestic opinion. That we have gone absolutely the extra mile."

Nixon: "Sure. Yeah. Well, that brings me to the second point: the reason for your going. Put on that basis, then you go. [unclear] have to figure that you've got to look at the hard place, which would be that if we don't get anything on Vietnam, except, you know, discussion or something of that sort and the South Vietnamese fold whether we really can still go to the summit. We're going to have to make, we're going to have to make an evaluation. It may be, it may be, that we may still go. In other words, let me put it this way. As I look at going to the summit, Henry, we cannot go—there are two extremes—we cannot go if the South Vietnamese are on the rocks."

Kissinger: "Impossible."

Nixon: "We could go, we could go, and I'll make this concession, if the situation is still in flux, with the understanding that we will discuss it at the summit and something is going to come out of it at the summit. But there's our problem there. Now, the point that I make is that your going—They want the summit. They want it badly. And

you're going to of course hold over their heads the—I don't know if the blockade is going to worry them, but the German thing is. And it's been a [unclear] thing but I'll sink that without any question. We'll just tell Barzel and the Russians now we're against it. Do you agree?"

Kissinger: "Right."

Nixon: "Now—"

Kissinger: "But that means we have to get across it soon."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: [unclear] "I told them May 4th."

Nixon: "[That's] another reason for going. [unclear] So as distinguished from this morning [unclear] I'm inclined to think that probably [our] message to them should be that, in view of this, the President has now changed [his] opinion. The directions are corrected as follows. That—"

Kissinger: "I should say this." [unclear]

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: [unclear] "they have turned us down now for the 24th."

Nixon: "Right."

Kissinger: "The—"

Nixon: "Would you tell them about this rigamarole with Porter?"

Kissinger: "Well, then there's the point that, look, they've turned us down for April 24th, which means they absolutely cannot deliver them—which raises then serious questions about the utility of my trip to Moscow. I should be very tough. Secondly, the President had turned down originally a meeting in Moscow simply to prepare the summit for reasons that he has explained to Dobrynin. [The reason that I'm] now going to Moscow is [unclear] to discuss Vietnam and in connection with that [I] also would be authorized to discuss the summit. Now we have offered the South Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese a meeting again [unclear] for the 24th, with a promise of coming on the 27th."

Nixon: "And an announcement."

Kissinger: "And we are prepared to make that announcement before the 24th. Secondly, we have to have a clear understanding before I come to Moscow that some concrete progress will be made towards a rapid end of the Vietnam War. And before the President can give his final approval to my trip, he would like to hear the Soviet response to this [message]."

Nixon: "Right. [And we need a] response immediately [because you've got to make your plans.]"

Kissinger: "That's right."

After discussing the details on the ground, the two men considered the global implications of their military options in Vietnam.

Kissinger: "And another problem, Mr. President. The Russians have two reasons why they don't want this. One is it would drive, it would force them into a confrontation with us."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "Second is, it would force Hanoi towards Peking. Because the only way that Hanoi could possibly be supplied is for Peking to supply the—"

Nixon: "Yeah. Yeah. And of course, well then that brings me to the point, the effect. The effect would be for Peking to have to get more deeply involved in the war, or get the hell out of the blockade."

Kissinger: "Right."

Nixon: "The effect also is it will brake our China initiative. The effect—Huh?"

Kissinger: "[It will] be tough on our China initiative."

Nixon: "Yeah. What would it do to the Russian initiative? If the Russians call off the summit, we blockade, [unclear] here you would, you would have—what we're doing is we're making ourselves hostage, putting it quite brutally, to the Soviet on Vietnam. On the other hand, the alternative is that the Soviet initiative and the China initiative [unclear] all that hangs on, isn't going to be worth a hell of a lot if Vietnam goes down the tubes. So—"

Kissinger: "If it doesn't go—"

Nixon: "We have no other choice."

Kissinger: "If it doesn't it would be the result of strength. You see what the Soviets want from us on the summit is in effect to screw us. Now, I know we're doing it because of long term interests and all of that."

Nixon: "I know."

Kissinger: "But after what we've done to Taiwan, Israel, Vietnam [unclear] its just not—then this policy that Trudeau described of throwing our weight to one side or the other. It doesn't work because we won't have any weight to throw."

Nixon: "If the Russians don't come up with anything here, we have no choice but to blockade. I really have no doubt about it."

Kissinger: "[unclear] recognition, Mr. President, that [unclear]"

Nixon: "Unless the battle in South Vietnam just goes a hell of lot better than we think it will." [unclear]

Kissinger: "That's right."

Nixon: "It could."

Kissinger: "It could."

Nixon: "[unclear] could be wrong, do you see what I mean? The forces of opposition in this country and around the world will begin

to build next week. If they build too great, the blockade then comes at the wrong time. The blockade could come right now. We could do it tomorrow. If we, you know, if we see, you know, action, we always say, stops the [unclear] debate—for a while. That's why I'm just wondering whether or not maybe our option isn't to blockade now."

Kissinger: "Well, Mr. President, with that people are just not—First of all we have to play the Russian string out here a bit."

Nixon: "Fine."

Kissinger: "I'll say this for the Russians. They are bloody-minded sons-of-bitches. But Hanoi hasn't fought for 35 years in order to be pushed around by the Russians either. So we have the problem that we must let Soviet pressure on Hanoi begin to operate, and we must bring home to the Soviet Union that you are really deadly serious about this. [unclear] And then we've got to give them some time. But not a hell of a lot of time."

Nixon: "Well, I'm just saying, the blockade option is going to run out, Henry."

Kissinger: "Two weeks."

Nixon: "I'm afraid—"

Kissinger: "We have to do it, if we do it, by the middle of—"

Nixon: "I'm afraid because I, I'm afraid basically our domestic support for a blockade, which is—I don't give a shit about the foreign support—but our domestic support for a blockade might erode in 2 weeks."

Kissinger: "Incidentally, I'm strongly in favor—I didn't want to leave, leave the wrong impression—any group that calls for [unclear] I'd be strongly in favor of."

Nixon: "Well, we're going to try." [unclear]

Kissinger: "You see if I go to Moscow, it's a hell of a—That's one of these confusing moves again."

Nixon: "I know."

Kissinger: "[unclear] the Communist groups would start screaming at us while I'm in Moscow."

Nixon: "I know the [unclear] will know you're in Moscow."

Kissinger: "Well, if the Communists [unclear], the Germans won't get their peace treaty."

Nixon: "We may have to reveal the Moscow trip, though, if you go. [unclear] I'd just reveal it, and say, 'Now, Dr. Kissinger went to Moscow at their suggestion and it didn't do a damn thing. Under the circumstances, I'm calling off the Russian summit and I'm blockading.' I wouldn't let them call off the summit. That's my point. Do you agree or not?"

Kissinger: "I agree completely. I would list all the sins."

Nixon: "Right. They're furnishing arms, they're doing this, they didn't help. We're not going to have it. A hell of a lot people would support calling off that summit. We're ready to talk tough."

Kissinger: "[unclear] give them all the initiative. I don't think they'll let it get to that point."

Nixon: "Well, based on your conversations this past week—"

Kissinger: "And Dobrynin is not [unclear]."

Nixon: "Not on this."

Kissinger: "Not on anything. I mean, he may say things that aren't true but they never said [unclear]"

Nixon: "Did you lie, [unclear]?"

Kissinger: "No."

Nixon: "I'm inclined to think, Henry, you ought to take the trip to Moscow. Couch the message in a way that you go."

Kissinger: "OK."

Nixon: "I'm changing my view on that."

Kissinger: "If you are inclined [unclear] that I would go to Moscow, then I have to couch the message somewhat less aggressively, because then I don't want to put ourselves in the position—I'd still have to say—"

Nixon: "Say that you're coming to Moscow on the condition the President has the clear understanding—what I would say, a clear understanding that Vietnam will be the first thing, first item of the agenda and unless progress is made on that you're not prepared to discuss the other items. I think you can say that."

Kissinger: "That's right. And I'd have to say that [unclear] understanding that this is one last effort."

Nixon: "That's right. You see what I mean? I'm sure that you could go to Moscow on that basis. Then they know they've got to fish or cut bait on Vietnam or you're not going to discuss the summit. They aren't going to—They're going to want you to come."

Kissinger: "Oh, yeah. That I can do. But the question is do I tell them you must come back with an answer by Monday that tells us how we're going to make progress? Or is it enough to say [unclear]."

Nixon: "They won't be ready."

Kissinger: "That's my concern."

Nixon: "They won't be ready—I wouldn't tell them that. I mean, I—Look—"

Kissinger: "I would say do you agree with this understanding. This I can say."

Nixon: "Yeah. There must be an understanding, and that there's not just to be a discussion, but they are to have a proposal at that time, which we can—a solid proposal—to discuss. That is our understanding; that's the basis. That lacking such a proposal you will return to Washington immediately without any further discussion as far as summit matters are concerned. [unclear] Well, in other words, you are giving them the fact that they don't have to tell you that something on Monday, they presented to you on Thursday. You're there. And if you don't get it, you get the hell out of there."

Kissinger: "Let me write something out."

Nixon: "Does that sound like a good deal to you?"

Kissinger: "Right. It sounds fine. And I should,—I think ought to write it out because this is an important message, Mr. President."

Nixon: "Oh, I know."

Kissinger: "[unclear]—I myself, my first instinct was that, playing it cold-bloodedly, what we get out of the trip is more than they get out of it."

Nixon: "Right. I agree. That's right."

Kissinger: "I mean the worst is they're suckering me along."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "And telling me nothing. But they have—"

Nixon: "We have then gone the extra mile."

Kissinger: "Then we've gone to Moscow."

Nixon: "We've gone the extra mile."

Kissinger: "And then all the little shit heads here—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "—who say, the man doesn't want to negotiate."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "Hell, you have me in Moscow."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "Then you surface my talk with Gromyko last September. All the overtures we've made through Moscow, because then we don't give a damn."

Nixon: "Right."

Kissinger: "And—"

Nixon: "Surface the Moscow overtures."

Kissinger: "And—"

Nixon: "And then on the basis of that—"

Kissinger: "If we lose, we—"

Nixon: "On the basis of that—We then have the basis for a very strong case for the blockade."

Kissinger: "That's right. And if we don't want a blockade then just use the Moscow trip for—"

Nixon: "For the purpose of flushing the summit?"

Kissinger: "Well, for the purpose—"

Nixon: "Of what?"

Kissinger: "I mean, supposing you then, supposing—"

Nixon: "You see, here is the question. Is there any way that we can—We just got to look at all of our cards here. Let me say, you have to realize, we have to realize that there's a lot more on the line here than simply a trip to Moscow, I mean, the war in Vietnam and so forth. Because then I've got to do some heavy, a lot of heavy thinking as to how we can do something about trying to get a candidate in this presidential race." [unclear]

Kissinger: "[You mean] who can be a candidate?"

Nixon: "[unclear] You get somebody else."

Kissinger: "Why?"

Nixon: "Because, you have to realize, you have to realize that the position that we have, if we fail, which we could well fail on all fronts, you know, the summit is canceled and the blockade does not succeed—you understand that we're putting everything on the line. That's my point."

Kissinger: "But, there's one other possibility, Mr. President. And this is another reason for going to Moscow. If I don't go to Moscow, then your time is foreshortened. If I do go to Moscow, we have the excuse that I'm going to Moscow and that is why we're not doing more right away."

Nixon: "Doing more what? You mean bombing?"

Kissinger: "Like blockade. If we don't start blockading by the end of the week—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "—without my going to Moscow, the question is why the hell not?"

Nixon: "Yeah. In other words—"

Kissinger: "I'm now looking at all things—"

Nixon: "Yeah, from the standpoint of the Russians."

Kissinger: "From the standpoint—"

Nixon: "It means we're not ferocious. If you're in Moscow, it buys time, I agree. Now understand that doesn't help us on this domestic front. This domestic—"

Kissinger: "No, no, but I'm back then [unclear] We've talked about the possibility of canceling the trip and going to a blockade."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: “Now, there are other variations on this. There is the variation that having been in Moscow, if the South Vietnamese fold, then we might still decide to bomb the shit out of them in the North and go to Moscow. Because if we can break—”

Nixon: “And not blockade.”

Kissinger: “And not blockade.”

Nixon: “My—On reconsideration I think the Moscow trip ought to be on. It helps the message in a way that, you agree to go and they’ll figure that they can sucker us in one way or another. But we’re going to be awfully hard to sucker.”

The President then began to assess how developments in foreign policy might affect his re-election campaign.

Nixon: “If there is a way really, Henry, to not allow Vietnam to sink the Soviet summit—That’s what I’m thinking about. If we can, we ought not to do it, having in mind the fact that the Soviet—Let’s face it. And here we look at the other side of it. If we can find a graceful way to let Thieu down the tubes, then maybe we’ll just have to die and live to fight another way—if we fight like hell before it happens. My point is—You see my point? But, on the other hand, if there is no graceful way then the summit goes out the window. That’s the problem here we’re confronted with.”

Kissinger: “It’s our long-term position as a people. It’s—”

Nixon: “That’s why I—well, understand, I’m only putting it up as what to me is a totally rhetorical matter. In my view, there is no graceful way you can let him go. Remember, you always say, let him go or something. How the Christ can you do it?”

Kissinger: “Exactly. It never was good. It never was—”

Nixon: “It would never work. It was never right.”

Kissinger: “Well some of it was a fleeting chance.”

Nixon: “Yeah. But now, I think what we have to do is this. I think what I have to do is to say in effect that we’re going to, everything is on the line. Let them cancel the summit—We have to realize that if the Russians cancel the summit or, as a matter of fact, if we cancel the summit because of the blockade, we are virtually assuring the certainty of a Democrat win unless I can find a way to—and I have been thinking about this too—of trying to move one of the other Republicans and there’s only—Well when you come down to it, you’ve got Rockefeller, who probably couldn’t get the nomination. You’ve got Reagan, who could.”

Kissinger: “Yeah.”

Nixon: “He couldn’t do—Another possibility, which never would have occurred to you, would be Burger, who has been suggested. And the other one, and this is really the only long shot that just might pull

the plug on the whole bunch, and help you get the whole South, is that I could have a talk with Connally before all this began. You know, and I'd say, 'Now look here, you've got to change your party.' And then I could bow out—"

Kissinger: "There's no way—"

Nixon: "And endorse Connally. And then Connally—I mean with what I had to go through—Connally without the scars could go on and win it."

Kissinger: "Mr. President—"

Nixon: "You see, there's your problem. But the point is, we have to realize that, we have to realize that if we lose Vietnam and the summit, there's no way that the election can be saved."

Kissinger: Mr. President, they are—"

Nixon: That's the problem."

Kissinger: "Mr. President, there's no way we can permit the Vietnamese to destroy two Presidents. That can't be permitted. Secondly—"

Nixon: "I don't know how you can avoid it. Maybe, you see, the blockade might work. That's my point."

Kissinger: "Secondly, there is no realistic alternative to you. Thirdly—"

Nixon: "Except Connally."

Kissinger: "No. In foreign policy—"

Nixon: "Well I know."

Kissinger: "That's the main thing."

Nixon: "Well, not really, Henry."

Kissinger: In all humility, Mr.—"

Nixon: You see it's something that you could be around with any of these people."

Kissinger: "I think—"

Nixon: "The only one you couldn't handle would be Reagan. I think he's too much of a lightweight."

Kissinger: "Mr. President—"

Nixon: "You could handle Rockefeller. You could handle Burger."

Kissinger: "Mr. President—"

Nixon: "You could —"

Kissinger: "It's very hard policy if one has worked as closely with a President as I have with you, to work in a similar position with his successor. That I would never do under no circumstances. And after—"

Nixon: "Well, then you realize what we look at. We're looking at Muskie, Humphrey, or Teddy. It's as cold as that. As President. That

you see is, that's why so much rides on this damn thing. Now you come around to this proposition that—"

Kissinger: "Absolutely."

Nixon: "—maybe the Soviets—Well look, my point is if we can we've got to handle this way to save the Soviet summit and mitigate Vietnam. What I'm getting at is that, I don't mean to sink Thieu. But I, if you get—Do you see what I'm getting at?"

Kissinger: "You see I don't think there's a way any more of mitigating Vietnam, Mr. President, because we'll either win or lose. I think your first analysis was right."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "If we lose, it doesn't matter how softly we've played it."

Nixon: "Yeah. If we lose then we're out."

Kissinger: "Well then you'd be under such violent domestic opposition."

Nixon: "Right."

Kissinger: "And you'd be under murderous pressure at the summit."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "If you win, now if—I think a blockade ought to be—"

Nixon: "You think the blockade is going to help?"

Kissinger: "No. I think, Mr. President, we, as far as anybody else is concerned, you must give the impression of being on the verge of going crazy."

Nixon: "Oh, absolutely. I've got everybody so scared then. Go berserk. Worry them. Why not [unclear]?"

Kissinger: "With all respect, you must forget any doubts of anyone—Between you and me I think a blockade should be very, very carefully considered."

Nixon: "I agree. And after you [unclear]—"

Kissinger: "But very prayerfully considered—I mean we shouldn't do it lightly. But I would like in Russia to act as if you just did not give a damn."

Nixon: "That's true. That's the way I feel."

Kissinger: "I would like to leave the impression—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "—that the hell with the summit; you'll go to, you're impressed by the Wallace vote."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "You're going to go to the solid South. You're going to go on an anti-Communist kick and by God you've had enough. That's what I've been telling Dobrynin."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "Now, I—In all of history, the Russians have always backed off when we've" [unclear]

Nixon: "Yeah, but I know. The Russians can back off but there's nothing—the North Vietnamese might not."

Kissinger: "Well, that is true. But if we can get the Russians to back off, then the question is can we buy the [unclear]."

Nixon: "Right."

Kissinger: "Even for my own selfish reasons. I'm not eager—we'd both be [unclear] in an unbelievable way."

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "And all the reputation that has been achieved for great foreign policy would be—"

Nixon: "Sure. Down the drain, we know that."

Kissinger: "So I have not as much of a stake but also—"

Nixon: "I know."

Kissinger: "—a stake in not having what I've worked on—[unclear]"

Nixon: "To go to Russia. I know. I know that. I know that. But we've got to play the Russian card out. I think that's why you have to go, Henry. So write your message that way."

Kissinger: "Let me write the message and bring it back."

Nixon: "[unclear] but I think that what I want—What I'm really trying to tell you is that I am prepared to go all the way. And that I am prepared to take all the consequences. But, and that means that you have the blockade as a card to play over there. You may not play it there. But I mean, you see if you know that's going to come, you could be a hell of a lot tougher than if you know it isn't going to come."

Kissinger: "Right."

Nixon: "If they think we've turned the last screw, there ain't much more to be done."

Kissinger: "You see we may not want to do a blockade; we may just bomb Haiphong [unclear]. In that case—"

Nixon: "Why would we do that?"

Kissinger: "Block every port. We just start bombing every port. So that it's unusable. And then—"

Nixon: "Why is it better to bomb them?"

Kissinger: "Because then the Russian ships will come in."

Nixon: "Now, they just hide them outside?"

Kissinger: "And we're not challenging the Russians directly."

Nixon: "You mean, bomb on the shipfront and the harbor? Is that what you mean?"

Kissinger: “No, just bomb the bridges. They had it pretty-well cut off.” [unclear]

Nixon: “All right.”

Kissinger: “Well, and it takes longer to do that.”

After a brief exchange on American support for the war in Vietnam, the two men discussed the text of a message, which Kissinger planned to give Ambassador Dobrynin later that afternoon, to elicit Soviet support for a settlement.

Kissinger: “So, all things considered, I would tend to go for the blockade. But my judgment is also that if we play the Russians calmly and flexibly, they’ll help us. It may not be enough, depending [on] what your bottom line is.”

Nixon: “I think you’ve got your message to—Do you want—?”

Kissinger: “Well—”

Nixon: “I have—”

Kissinger: “—you want to do something else?”

Nixon: “I do. I do but [unclear] do you want to bring it back? Is that all right? Going on, you say, 3:00 or what? When do you want to send it?”

Kissinger: “I’d like to send it as early as possible.”

Nixon: “But why don’t you [unclear].”

Kissinger: “With the eight hour time difference [unclear]”

Nixon: “We all understand that. We all understand that.” [unclear]

Kissinger: “I will say this. That when we accepted the trip to the Soviet Union—”

Nixon: “Yeah. Right.”

Kissinger: “—the principal purpose of it was to see whether the two great powers must now bring about a rapid end of the war in Vietnam. Also, whether on the basis of this, to speed up the preparation of the summit on the broadest possible basis. It now appears, despite some assurances by the Soviet Ambassador, that the—”

Nixon: “North Vietnamese are not going—”

Kissinger: “—North Vietnamese have refused to come on the 24th, and had asked us to come to a meeting on the 27th.”

Nixon: “Publicly.”

Kissinger: “Publicly. We have notified the North Vietnamese that we will come on the 27th [unclear]. The President wants to, is prepared to send Dr. Kissinger if, on the assumptions made here: he would likely hear an expression from the Soviet Government how it [unclear]. If the Soviet Government shares this view, then Dr. Kissinger is prepared to leave. And that would be [unclear].”

Nixon: “No. You’ve got to say, you know, that the first item on the agenda will be—”

Kissinger: “Vietnam.”

Nixon: “—that and a concrete proposal must be prepared for discussion and unless one is that we will not go—you are not authorized to go to other items on the agenda.”

Kissinger: “Well—”

Nixon: “Or do you want not to be that hard?”

Kissinger: “I think—That I’d rather do there.”

Nixon: “Oh, fine.”

Kissinger: “You can instruct me to do that, and I’ll do it.”

Nixon: “Do it there, fine. Okay. All right. The only thing is I want to be sure they are prepared to make a concrete proposal. Why don’t you say that you are coming with the understanding that they will have a concrete proposal?”

Kissinger: “That there will be—”

Nixon: “And then don’t say that—[unclear]”

Kissinger: “That the first item on the agenda will be—”

Nixon: “Will be that. And that they will have a concrete proposal. You can say that.”

Kissinger: “So each step for a rapid settlement of the war.”

Nixon: “Rapid. Right. And then when you’re there, you knock it off. You say, All right? ‘Right, I’m not going to discuss anything further.’”

Kissinger: “If we don’t make any progress. I will then say, ‘Gentlemen—’”

Nixon: “Right. Right.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 329–42)

As soon as Kissinger left, Nixon called Haldeman to report on the conversation. According to Haldeman: the “P called me at 2:00 after I got home, said that they worked out Henry’s problems and that he would probably still go ahead with the Moscow trip.” Nixon also reported that despite advice from General Abrams, the Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam—he was “going ahead with the strike tonight and that he’s seriously considering putting on a blockade later this week.” (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

103. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, April 15, 1972, 5–5:15 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Soviet Minister Counselor Vorontsov

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

I read the attached oral note to Vorontsov who took it down very carefully. I then added comments to the effect that we had exercised great restraint during March in order not to jeopardize the Soviet Summit. Our military leaders had watched this build-up and three times had recommended attacks on the North to prevent it. Each time it had been rejected by the President. Now we were in the position where we had jeopardized the whole security of South Vietnam and we were not prepared to take any further steps.

Vorontsov said that the reason the negotiations were so difficult now was our having gone public on the other channel. I told Vorontsov that this was an absurdity; he knew very well that the North Vietnamese had proposed the March 15 date because they had expected to launch their offensive before it, and they had pushed back the date consistently in order to gear it to the preparation of their offensive. If he wanted to talk to me in this channel there was no sense repeating all the things that were already said in propaganda.

Vorontsov said he knew the attack on Haiphong would raise the most serious problems in Moscow. I said we were aware of that. Vorontsov asked whether I was still coming under these conditions. I said "Let's hope that it is still possible, but the situation has greatly worsened."

The conversation then ended.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the Map Room at the White House. Before meeting Vorontsov, Kissinger conferred with Sonnenfeldt for 40 minutes. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule) Although no other record of their conversation has been found, the two men presumably drafted the oral note, which contains several of Kissinger's stylistic handwritten revisions.

Attachment

Oral Note From President Nixon to the Soviet Leadership

Washington, April 15, 1972.

In their discussions, Ambassador Dobrynin and Dr. Kissinger agreed that the private meeting scheduled between the North Vietnamese and the United States in Paris on April 24, 1972 could represent a decisive turning point.²

On April 15, 1972, the North Vietnamese informed the United States that Hanoi was calling off the April 24 meeting and made its attendance at a future private meeting conditional on a resumption of the public meetings on April 27, 1972.³

The President wants to emphasize to the Soviet leadership the extreme seriousness and urgency with which he views the current situation. The President agreed to send Dr. Kissinger secretly to Moscow to talk to the Soviet leaders in order to see whether the two great powers could bring about a rapid end of the war on a basis just to both sides before the great objectives they have set themselves are irrevocably damaged. Dr. Kissinger was also to be authorized to prepare for the Summit meeting on the most comprehensive possible basis and in the most generous spirit.

The North Vietnamese April 15, 1972 message cancelling the April 24, 1972 private meeting raises new obstacles to this proposed mission. The President questions what progress can be made in Moscow if the Soviet Union cannot assure even a meeting on an agreed date. The President remains prepared to send Dr. Kissinger to Moscow to see whether a basis can be found to bring the war in Vietnam to a rapid and just conclusion and to seek to prevent consequences which could jeopardize what both sides have worked so hard to accomplish and brought so near to fruition. Needless to say, Dr. Kissinger will be instructed to deal with the Summit agenda in a constructive, comprehensive, forthcoming and generous manner.

The President would appreciate the Soviet view on these considerations as soon as possible before proceeding further.

² Dobrynin and Kissinger reiterated this point in their meetings on April 9 and 12; see Documents 88 and 94.

³ A copy of the North Vietnamese message, forwarded to Haig by Guay on April 15, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1041, Files for the President, Vietnam, US–NVN Exchanges, January–October 5, 1972.

For the information of the Soviet Government:

The United States side is proposing to the North Vietnamese the following compromise: The United States is prepared to state that it will agree to resumption of the plenary sessions on April 27, 1972 if the North Vietnamese attend the private meeting agreed upon for April 24, 1972. The United States would be willing to announce publicly its agreement to a plenary session on April 27, 1972 as soon as the North Vietnamese indicate that they will attend the private meeting on April 24, 1972.⁴

⁴ In a backchannel message to Guay on April 16, Haig forwarded this proposal to the North Vietnamese. (Ibid.)

104. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, April 15, 1972, 9 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin

Dobrynin came over to discuss our oral note² with me.

He asked, "What exactly is your proposition? Could you have a plenary session take place the same day as the private meeting?" I said that was impossible, first of all because the plenary session on the same day meant that Xuan Thuy would not be able to attend the private meeting. Secondly, I could not wait in Europe until Thursday³ and the plenary sessions had never been held on another day except Thursday unless there was a holiday.

Dobrynin asked whether we could not resume this Thursday. I said it was now technically out of the question because we had already turned it down and because indeed the other side had not asked for

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held at Kissinger's residence. For their memoir accounts of the discussion, see Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1122; and Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 244.

² Printed as an attachment to Document 103.

³ April 20.

it. Dobrynin asked whether he could report then that simultaneous meetings were acceptable. I said that was the sense of our proposal. Dobrynin asked why we then did not accept the May 6 date. I said because it was too late; we wanted to see some progress before that. Dobrynin asked whether he should report then that May 1 was the outside deadline for a private meeting. I said yes.

Dobrynin said he could not tell from my note whether I was actually coming to Moscow. I said we wanted to make sure that there was some major progress toward a Vietnam settlement; this was the principal reason for my going. He said of course in Moscow they were rather looking at it the other way: The principal reason for my going was to prepare the Summit, and also to talk about Vietnam. I said there had to be some progress. He said they could not promise progress. I said, but Vietnam had to be the first item of the agenda, which would affect all others. Dobrynin said, well, we can agree on that; Vietnam will be the first item on the agenda. However, he said, what if General-Secretary Brezhnev wants to discuss another item first? He is after all the leader of the largest Communist Party. I said in that case I would be bound by instructions, without any disrespect to the General-Secretary.

Dobrynin was extremely friendly and suggested that, after all, great powers must be able to put local differences aside to settle fundamental issues. I said "Anatol, for us it isn't just an international problem; it has now become a major domestic problem. We cannot permit our domestic structure to be constantly tormented by this country 10,000 miles away. The war must now be brought to a conclusion, and we will do it either together with the other great powers or alone."

The meeting then ended.

105. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 15, 1972, 11:30 p.m.

[Omitted here is brief discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

P: Well, I'll tell you they [North Vietnamese] are being punished and they are taking heavy casualties. The bastards are—

K: Mr. President, if they don't make it this time, they are not going to come back for two years.

P: If they don't make it this time, we're out of the woods, but the point is that we have to realize though that our hole card is the blockade. However, that's why you've got to get it settled with the Russians now. I don't want a meeting—you see, when you meet with them it's either got to be on the way to settlement or we blockade. You see that's the one thing I'm concerned about, these bastards, that they will filibuster us.

K: They can't filibuster you beyond the 25th of April.

P: Right.

K: And on the other hand, Mr. President, the major thing now is to beat down these North Vietnamese. I told them that you could not have a reasonable summit meeting if there were major action going on in Vietnam.

P: Right. He [Dobrynin] understands that, doesn't he?

K: Oh, yes.

P: Good God, we can't go there with Russian tanks and Russian guns killing South Vietnamese and Americans. Hell, no, we're not going to go! We won't go. It isn't just a reasonable summit; it means there ain't going to be no meeting, that's what he's got to understand.

K: Right.

P: And you can—so you've got a few cards to play yourself on your trip.

K: Well, I think when I say if we keep our nerves, I don't mean you. I mean if as a country we keep our nerves, we are going to make it. Assuming the South Vietnamese don't collapse on us but there is no sign of this.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 397, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

P: They may be stronger than we think.

[Omitted here is detailed discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

K: Well. We've got a few hole cards.

P: I think we've got Bill [Rogers] on salvo; he'll take a hard line. I think he knows it.

K: I mean, Mr. President, even if some protests start next week, we've got a big hole card.

P: Well, the fact that you've been to Russia.

K: Exactly.

P: When we blow that one, that's going to really—of course, if we blow that one, you realize we will say then that we are not going to the summit. But that's—

K: Well, no, but there may be conditions which we may blow it—

P: And still go, huh?

K: And still go to the summit. For example, supposing we get a settlement which the Russians guarantee.

P: Oh, that! Oh, any settlement.

K: My assessment is that the chances are 50–50 that we may want to blow it at some point. But at any rate, it is a good hole card to have.

P: Well, we shall see. Oh, yes, that's the reason why you are going. It's a good thing to do. As I said, after reversing earlier the decision, I think it's right; you've just got to go. Whether they come or not, the Vietnamese—

K: You could even make a case if they come a week later, it gives them a better chance to work them over.

P: Yeah, yeah. Well, also, we've got a chance to work them over too. You understand if they don't show—I mean, after you meet the Russians—

K: Oh, we go right back to him.

P: Don't you agree.

K: Oh, yeah.

P: And the Russians have got to damn well understand that. And, also, they've got to understand—Well, I don't know, I just have a feeling, Henry, that the strategy, which you and I both agree on, is the right one.

K: No question.

P: Everybody thinks it's too hawkish; too unreasonable and so forth but what the hell else can you do?

K: Mr. President, if we had pursued the Laird strategy, we might have won in the South but the war would have dragged on and on

and on and winning in the South is no—doesn't bring the Russians in. What brings the Russians in—I mean, we wouldn't have won in the South, we could have held in the South and what brings the Russians in is the fact that the situation may get out of hand. Pouring that Fleet in there has made more of an impact on the Russians than the defense of An Loc which they don't understand.

P: Yeah. The Fleet shakes them because they think it's a blockade.

K: Of course.

P: And they're right.

[Omitted here is discussion of the military situation in Vietnam and of Rogers' upcoming testimony on Capitol Hill.]

106. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and the Soviet Minister Counselor (Vorontsov)¹

Washington, April 16, 1972, 11:40 a.m.

V: He [Dobrynin] is walking outside the Embassy but he will be back by 1:00 o'clock.

K: He ought to be in good condition.

V: I hope so.

K: I have three things. We would appreciate it if you would send the text over of what the Ambassador read to me² and could you deliver this to Colonel Kennedy. He is sitting in Haig's office.

V: I will do that.

K: Second, I wanted to confirm what I told the Ambassador last night,³ and what I also told you,⁴ that this operation is now completed.

V: I see. That's good.

K: And the assurance I gave is now in effect until we get a reply from the other side.

V: Good.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² See Document 110.

³ See Document 104.

⁴ See Document 103.

K: And finally just as he advised me yesterday about our actions—I do not think that it would be very conducive to the success of what you and I are planning. If your reactions could be as calm as the circumstances make possible. It would be very difficult for me to be there while protests and demonstrations are going on.

V: I understand your point.

K: Now, one final thing. Commander Howe will be ready to discuss technical things with you.

V: All right.

K: Should he call you?

V: Yes, he can call me. I will be here in the Embassy and he can come here or I will come to his office.

K: We will use your interpreters, is that all right?

V: Fine, we have very good ones.

K: All right. Then you will bring that over here.

V: I will take and get it to Colonel Kennedy.

K: I will be difficult to reach but I can be if necessary. I will be at a christening. My office knows where to reach me.

V: Good.

107. Note From the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 16, 1972.

1. In accordance with the wishes of the President we have brought to the attention of the leadership of the DRV the considerations on the Vietnam question expressed by the President and by Dr. Kissinger in their conversations with the Soviet Ambassador. The leadership of the

¹ National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. No classification marking. The note is handwritten. A notation on the first page indicates that Vorontsov handed the note to Kennedy in Kissinger's office at 1:30 p.m. Kissinger later recalled in his memoirs that "the next morning, April 16, Dobrynin read me a message from the Soviet leadership stating that they had brought my complaint about the aborted secret meeting to the attention of Hanoi." (Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1122) Kissinger met Nixon at the President's office in the Executive Office Building the morning of April 16 (10:20–10:55 a.m.). (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) No record of the conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, whether in person or by telephone, has been found.

DRV was in particular informed of the wishes of the American side in connection with the prospective confidential meeting on April 24 between Dr. Kissinger and representatives of the DRV in Paris.

In reply to this the Vietnamese side confirmed their position regarding the negotiations of four sides in Paris. They are ready to resume these negotiations—the arrival to Paris of Nguyen Thi Binh² testifies to that.

So far as confidential meetings between the representatives of the DRV and Dr. Kissinger are concerned, the Vietnamese side could agree to such meetings. An appropriate representative of the DRV would be ready to come to Paris to the agreed date—April 24. But these meetings should, as before, be conducted in parallel with the official four-sided negotiations, having in mind the fact that these two forms of negotiations should facilitate each other. That is why in the situation when the United States unilaterally suspended the official negotiations and during the time of the US continued refusal to renew these negotiations, the Vietnamese side does not deem it possible to conduct confidential meetings as well.

The Vietnamese side also stressed the dependence of the renewal of negotiations on the bombings of the DRV. The Vietnamese side considers it wrong to sit down at the negotiating table at a time when American aviation expands bombings and strafings of the DRV territory.

2. The leadership of the DRV were informed about a new approach of the American side on April 13 concerning a possibility of having a confidential meeting between Dr. Kissinger and representatives of the DRV in Moscow. In a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in Hanoi the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the DRV Nguen Fui Chin [Nguyen Duy Trinh] confirmed the principle position of the DRV on the question of confidential meetings as it is stated above. He promised to give later on a reply to the concrete suggestion of Dr. Kissinger.

As soon as the reply from Hanoi is received we shall inform the President through Dr. Kissinger.

² Chief delegate of the Provisional Revolutionary Government in South Vietnam.

108. Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State¹

Moscow, April 16, 1972, 2020Z.

3535. Subj: Soviet Protest re Bombing of Haiphong.

On half-hour notice I responded to summons of DepFonMin Kovalev to receive from him at 10:30 p.m. April 16 following protest:

Begin text:

As a result of the bombing and shelling of Haiphong in a raid by American aircraft on April 16, the Soviet merchant vessels *Simferopol'*, *Boris Lavrenev*, *Samuil Marshak*, and *Selemdzha* received damages, including numerous shell-holes, some of which were in the living quarters of the crews. The lives and safety of Soviet crewmen were threatened. There were dead and wounded among the workers of the port who were carrying out loading operations on the Soviet ships.

These gangster activities by American aircraft are flagrant violations of generally accepted norms of international law and of freedom of shipping. The US Government bears full responsibility for these provocative actions of the American armed forces and for the possible dangerous consequences of such activities.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR on instructions of the Soviet Government protests to the US Government this criminal act against Soviet merchant vessels in the port of Haiphong and insists that American authorities take strong measures to insure that similar provocations will not occur in the future. *End text.*

I replied I could not accept language of his message but I would transmit it to my government because of its important nature. He said statement corresponded to the facts.

Beam

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 VIET S. Confidential; Niact; Immediate. Repeated to Saigon. Another copy is *ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Received at the White House at 2041Z (3:41 p.m., EST).

109. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and Secretary of State Rogers¹

Washington, April 16, 1972, 4:30 p.m.

K: Bill.

R: You've seen this protest I guess that was delivered to Beam.²

K: No, I haven't.

R: Yeah, well, they've made a protest and they say that four of their ships were hit. They do not make any claim that there were dead or wounded among the Soviet employees; they say there were dead and wounded among the workers of the Port.

K: Yes, that's what intercepts indicate, yes.

R: The tone of the protest seems to me to be milder than the ones that they made in '67 and '68, and it's a lower level. In that case the protest was made to Rusk himself, I guess in both of those cases.³

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² See Document 108. During a telephone conversation at 3:10 p.m., Rogers asked Kissinger to inform him if Dobrynin wanted to deliver a formal protest. Kissinger replied: "If we get any word here we will send them over to you. I think the way to handle it [is] we should make a formal protest, admit it and apologize." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) Nixon and Kissinger discussed by telephone at 3:35 p.m. how to brief Rogers on the secret trip to Moscow. Nixon: "You would wait 'til you left before he [Rogers] was told." Kissinger: "Yes, because he's going to drive you crazy if it's done before. And he will go to Dobrynin before." Nixon: "Yeah." Kissinger: "He'll call him in. This way he can't reach Dobrynin." Nixon: "Yeah." Kissinger: "And he will be no madder one way or another." Kissinger thought that Haldeman and Haig should handle the assignment. Nixon agreed and suggested they tell Rogers that "the Russians have decided to get into the act; they've asked you [Kissinger] to come there and the idea is to discuss the matter and that the North Vietnamese may be there." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 16, 1972, 3:35–3:54 p.m., White House Telephone, Conversation No. 22–159) Haldeman himself followed this line in a visit to Rogers' house on the evening of April 19. "He took it extremely well," Haldeman wrote in his diary, "we didn't have any problem at all with him, which was kind of a surprise. So that worked out probably better than we expected." (*The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 442)

³ In June 1967 U.S. aircraft inadvertently hit two Soviet ships, the *Turkestan* and the *Mikhail Frunze*, in separate strikes near Haiphong. For texts of Soviet notes protesting each incident, both of which were delivered to the Embassy in Moscow, see *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents*, 1967, pp. 939–941, 945. For further background, see *Foreign Relations*, 1964–1968, vol. V, Document 188. On January 4, 1968, U.S. aircraft accidentally hit another Soviet ship, the *Pereyaslavl—Zaleskiy*, in Haiphong harbor. For further background on the incident and the subsequent exchange of notes, see *ibid.*, vol. VI, Document 10.

K: Yeah.

R: And this is a protest to Beam by their Deputy Foreign Minister, Kovalev.

K: That's pretty mild so we shouldn't be too provocative in our reply.

R: No, I think we've got to tone down our answer.

K: Right, I agree.

R: And I'm preparing one now to send over; I don't know as we have to rush getting it back.

K: I don't think we should reply until tomorrow, Bill.

R: I think that's right.

K: That's pretty encouraging, don't you think.

R: I think so, yeah. Just a minute here. TASS has also put out a statement.⁴ The statement TASS put out is a little tougher; it says the Soviet people wrathfully condemn these U.S. acts of aggression, and so forth.

K: Yeah, well of course they've got to do something like that.

R: But I think in reading, comparing this protest with the others it doesn't accuse us of intentionally and deliberately doing this as far as they're concerned. And the general rhetoric is somewhat softer, so . . .

K: I think we should give a fairly low-key reply, Bill. I don't think we should confront them that way when we are after all somewhat in the wrong in the actual act.

R: I agree. Well, I think what we can do is pretty much along the lines of the last one. We don't want to be more apologetic than the last time because I think that last time was a direct hit. I think we can . . . we're not sure of course whether these were hits by American planes or whether it was misfiring on the part of the North Vietnamese.

K: Yeah.

R: Well anyway, we'll have something drafted to send over.

K: Good, thank you Bill.

R: Right, bye.

⁴ Presumably a reference to the TASS statement, published in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* on April 17, which stated: "[The] Soviet people angrily condemn these acts of U.S. aggression in Vietnam." (*Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXIV, No. 16, May 17, 1972, p. 4)

110. Note From the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 16, 1972.

1. President Nixon and the U.S. Government are well aware of the USSR principled position with regard to the war being conducted by the United States in Vietnam.

On a number of occasions we called the attention of the President, including through the confidential channel, to serious consequences that an expansion of the U.S. military actions in Vietnam and bombings of the DRV's territory in particular could entail.

In L.I. Brezhnev's letter to President Nixon of March 27,² outlining considerations in connection with the Soviet-American summit meeting, our concern was expressed that bombings of the DRV push the developments in Vietnam in a direction opposite to peaceful settlement and can only complicate the situation.

But instead of stopping such bombings and other military actions against the DRV, the United States began to extend them—now to the areas of Hanoi and Haiphong.

This step by the United States seriously complicates the situation and not only in the South-East Asia.

We cannot qualify the motives, with which the American side tries to somehow justify further expansion of the bombings of the DRV's territory and to preserve a "free hand" in their resuming at any moment, otherwise but as clearly artificial and completely unacceptable.

But what's going on? The American side would like to dictate the DRV its schedule of holding private meetings and the whole procedure of Paris talks in general. If the DRV, being an equal participant of the talks, makes its own proposals on that matter, Washington responds to this by intensifying the bombings.

Thus, first come ultimatum demands and threats, and later—their implementation. Application of such a method against a people who steadfastly struggle for many years for their rights, does not promise anything good to those resorting to such methods. We would like to say that with all frankness to President Nixon.

There is also another serious aspect here. As a result of the American air raids against Haiphong a damage was also caused to some of

¹ National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret. The note is handwritten. A notation on the first page indicates that Vorontsov handed the note to Kennedy at the Soviet Embassy at 9:30 p.m.

² Document 72.

the Soviet ships in that port. Moreover, there are casualties on the Soviet ships—several persons were killed from among the Vietnamese workers. It should be absolutely clear to the President what all this means in the present circumstances. It also goes without saying that we shall be faced with the necessity of taking all appropriate steps to protect Soviet ships wherever they would be.

Taking into consideration the importance of all the circumstances arising in connection with the new bombings of the DRV's territory, we address President Nixon with an urgent appeal not only to suspend those bombings but to put an end to them. Depending on the President's reaction to this our appeal we shall determine our further line with regard to all abovementioned questions.

2. Contents of what Dr. Kissinger said during last talk with the Ambassador on April 15 is being brought to the attention of the DRV leadership.³

³ See Document 104.

111. Editorial Note

On April 16, 1972, Deputy Assistant to the President Alexander Haig arrived in Saigon to prepare a personal assessment of the military situation in Vietnam for President Nixon. During the 3-day visit, Haig focused not only on the North Vietnamese offensive but also on Soviet diplomacy, linking the two in meetings with General Abrams, the Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam (MACV), and Ambassador Bunker. Assistant to the President Kissinger informed Haig on April 15 that he had told the Soviets that his secret trip to Moscow was up in the air unless they played a "helpful role" on Vietnam. (Backchannel Message WHS 2045 from Kissinger to Haig, April 15; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel Files, Backchannel Messages, 1972 To: AMB Bunker—Saigon). Haig replied on April 17 that, while "the fat [was] in the fire" in Washington, Abrams had finally agreed to support the "diplomatic hand" against Moscow by diverting the necessary military resources—including long-range heavy bombers (B-52's)—to Hanoi. (Message 0065 from Haig to Kissinger; *ibid.*, From: AMB Bunker—Saigon [Part 2])

Haig further emphasized the Soviet side to U.S. strategy on Vietnam in talking points for a meeting with Bunker. Although no record has been found of the meeting, Haig's talking points reflect the con-

sideration of strategic issues within the White House at the time. “One of the prime reasons for massive movements of ships and planes and our gradually escalated bombing of the North,” Haig noted, “is to make the Russians think that we are capable of drastic actions. They are particularly sensitive about the possibility of blockading Haiphong and our movements are designed to spook them on that contingency as well.” After reviewing how Nixon and Kissinger had recently played the “Soviet card,” Haig outlined the linkage they made between the policies of the Soviet Union and North Vietnam. “We do have reason to believe that Moscow is genuinely concerned about the implications of the current military activity, and our strong response to the North Vietnamese offensive,” he explained. “They have great stakes in the Summit and in other areas such as the German Treaties, not only because of their relations with us and concern with the European front, but also because of the Chinese factor.” Haig also planned to inform Bunker of Kissinger’s secret trip, which—coming as the bombing of North Vietnam continued—would likely unsettle leaders in Moscow as well as Hanoi. According to Haig, Kissinger intended to remind the Soviet leadership of the “serious implications for their interests, both in terms of bilateral relations and their global perspective, of the North Vietnamese attempt to win a military victory.” In the process, Kissinger would probe Soviet willingness to encourage negotiations, and then guarantee an agreement, possibly by enforcing elements of the settlement or by agreeing to limit arms shipments in the future. (Ibid., Box 1014, Haig Special Files, Haig Trip Papers—4/14–4/19/72 [1 of 2])

In a message to Haig on April 17, Kissinger picked up on the latter issue, possibly in response to the discussion at a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group earlier in the day (see Document 118). After requesting an urgent assessment of the military equipment South Vietnam would require over the next year, Kissinger asked: “In light of those needs, could we accept some limitation on replacement deliveries if the Soviets agreed to a similar limitation for a like period[?]” (Backchannel Message WHS 2050 from Kissinger to Haig, April 17; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1014, Haig Special Files, Haig Trip Papers—4/14–4/19/72 [2 of 2]) Haig replied in detail on April 18, estimating that, although the data was still incomplete, “a moratorium would permit us to cash in on our decision to overstock [South Vietnam] and it would capitalize on [North Vietnamese] errors in becoming enmeshed in a war of attrition of the types of equipment with which they are most dependent on the Soviet Union.” (Backchannel Message 0069 from Haig to Kissinger, April 18; *ibid.*)

As soon as he returned to Washington on April 19, Haig delivered written and oral reports on his trip to the President: the former is *ibid.*; for a brief account of the latter, see Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, page 442. See also Haig, *Inner Circles*, pages 282–283.

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

Washington, April 17, 1972.

SUBJECT

Soviet Message of April 16 on Vietnam²

The Soviet message is in the first instance the minimal, required communication to the President. It makes a record of rejecting our present course of conduct and of avoiding any implication of Soviet collusion with us against the DRV.

Beyond that, it does two things:

1. It lays the basis for disrupting the Summit and the HAK mission if this layer becomes their choice. (Incidentally, while the note calls for a "reaction" from the President to the appeal to stop bombing it does not stipulate that this be in the form of explicit assurances.)
2. It threatens military responses by Soviet vessels (an unsurprising threat in these circumstances).

While the note seemingly rejects our manner of dealing with DRV maneuvers over the secret talks, it ends up by assuring us that Moscow has nevertheless transmitted our last proposal. The Soviets are thus in a position where the DRV has now explicitly made cessation of bombing a precondition to secret talks while the Soviets have *not* (except in the elliptical manner indicated above) made it a precondition either to the Wednesday³ mission or to acting as an intermediary with Hanoi.

With no further attacks against Hanoi and Haiphong now scheduled, the Soviets may try to hold to this position (despite the discrepancy with Hanoi). —but obviously one cannot be 100% certain that a demand to stop the bombing will not still be made. However, it is virtually certain that such a demand will be the Soviet starting position for the HAK mission. For us, this means countering with a *package* involving simultaneous obligations on both sides, with the Soviets using

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 11. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sonnenfeldt did not initial the memorandum.

² Document 110.

³ April 19.

their aid as leverage. (This is the gamble we are taking on the assumption that Brezhnev has so much riding on his relations with us that he will go to considerable lengths to save it).⁴

⁴ In his memoirs, Kissinger assessed the second Soviet note of April 16 as follows: "What was significant was not that the criticism stopped well short of a protest but that Moscow maintained its invitation even in the face of an unprecedented assault on its client. Moscow obviously would not lightly hazard the forthcoming summit after Nixon had already visited Peking." (*White House Years*, p. 1122)

113. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 17, 1972.

Kissinger: Good morning, Mr. President.

Nixon: Hi.

Kissinger: We had another cable from Haig.² It says, "Obviously the fat is on the fire at your end. We will need the coolest of nerves from here on in. From my perspective it is essential that we continue to play our hand with the utmost calm and confidence. As you know several occasions in the past have involved similar risk taking although there has been less opportunity for events to be influenced by spasms of uncertainty on the domestic scene. On balance the military situation here is now well under control. As I reported yesterday, in the near term the enemy will only suffer severe setbacks." And then the rest is all technical stuff. And he's discussed with Abrams this idea of a troop withdrawal of 20,000, of an announcement, which would get us down to 5 by July 3rd, which would get us down to, to where we could say that we've withdrawn 500,000 troops. And he thinks it can be done but he wants to let me know tomorrow. And that I would recommend you announce at your press conference, if you have one next week.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 709–8. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 8:58 to 9:24 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² Reference is to backchannel message 0065 from Haig in Saigon to Kissinger at the White House, April 17. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 1014, Haig Special Files, Haig Trip Papers—4/14–4/19/1972 [2 of 2]) The excerpt read by Kissinger is nearly identical to the corresponding text sent by Haig. Regarding Haig's trip to South Vietnam, see Document 111.

Nixon: Yeah. [unclear]

Kissinger: Now, last night, after you had retired, Dobrynin came in with a Russian message—³

Nixon: Hm-hmm.

Kissinger:—which he said, since they don't want to say too much publicly—It's rather tough; it doesn't have any concrete things. But after five pages of tough talk, which is standard tough talk, he said they'd transmitted our considerations to Hanoi and they'll give us a reply as soon as—which is amazing because in the past they always took the position that they weren't. Now my recommendation is that we say to this there will be no answer. They know what our policy is and we are just going to pursue it. And if that's going to be their attitude, I think, I can tell them now, nothing will come out of the discussion.

Nixon: He seems to understand. Dobrynin. Dobrynin must be certain that we'll go.

Kissinger: I think, I think it puts us domestically—The reasons you had for deciding to go: I don't agree that it's two for them and one for us; it's two for us and almost nothing for them.

Nixon: Hm-hmm.

Kissinger: And what do they get out of it? They receive me 3 days after we bomb Hanoi and Haiphong.

Nixon: Yeah. In any event, the, as far as, when Dobrynin came, comes in, your trip is still on?

Kissinger: Yeah. Oh, yeah. They didn't cancel it.

Nixon: Fine.

Kissinger: They didn't do anything. It's just—What I think they did, Mr. President, is to send this first part—

Nixon:—to Hanoi.

Kissinger:—to Hanoi to say, to show, because publicly they've been rather mild. The CIA has—

Nixon: The Chinese have been mild as well. Chou En-lai [unclear].

Kissinger: Very mild.

Nixon: Compared to what we're used to getting.

Kissinger: Now, let me read you this CIA analysis⁴—and the CIA is always alarmist. "Moscow has given its population only [unclear] of the U.S. air strikes on Hanoi and Haiphong. Publicly the Soviets have not acknowledged damage to their ships at Haiphong."

Nixon: How many were there? Were there 40?

³ Document 110.

⁴ Not found.

Kissinger: Yeah. Soviet—

Nixon: They were—

Kissinger: Poor things.

Nixon: That's not too damn bad.

Kissinger: That's good.

Nixon: I think it's good.

Kissinger: Yeah. The protest failed to mention the strikes on Hanoi or anywhere else in North Vietnam. Its concentration on the damage to Soviet shipping, its failure to mention any injury to Soviet personnel, and its delivery at the low level of deputy foreign minister, indicates that the Soviets did not want to over-stress the implications of the air strike on U.S.-Soviet relations. Maintaining Moscow's recent public reticence about aid commitments to North Vietnam, the TASS statement merely noted that the USSR met its international duties. The analysis of Chou's remarks is: "Chou's remarks add little more than a compendium of clichés used by the Chinese over the past year to describe the war. It makes no mention of Chinese assistance, of President Nixon, or of damage to the Soviet ships." Then Hanoi has made a public statement saying that their friends in the world would in time condemn the United States. In time. And the CIA says, "[unclear] appears to be another call for greater support from the USSR and China. In this connection, the North Vietnamese have been playing the Soviet aspect of the raid." And so forth. Now one problem we have, I hope Rogers goes in there determined and tough.⁵ This is the one—

Nixon: Huh. God only knows what he could do.

[Omitted here is discussion of Rogers' pending testimony that morning before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Nixon's side of a telephone conversation with Rogers on his testimony, and a brief exchange afterwards on Rogers and the proposal to blockade North Vietnamese ports.]

Nixon: When I say I'm for a blockade, you don't, you think I'm just gassing. But I—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: But I'm totally committed to a blockade—

Kissinger: Mr. President, I don't think you're gassing.

Nixon: —at the end of this week.

⁵ In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that morning, Rogers argued that the North Vietnamese attacks in the South "dropped the pretense that this war is in any sense a 'popular uprising' and have exposed it as a naked aggression of the most flagrant type." (Department of State *Bulletin*, May 8, 1972, pp. 668–671)

Kissinger: You've done—Well, we have to wait until I get back from Moscow but—

Nixon: That's what I meant. That's the end of this week.

Kissinger: No, I'll be back Sunday night.⁶

Nixon: That's the end of this week. Oh, the first of next week.

Kissinger: The first of next week.

Nixon: I mean, as soon as you get back from Moscow, if it's a hard line, rigid attitude, blockade them.

Kissinger: Mr. President, I think that you've always done what you said you would do. And I have every—No, I think that's what you will do and I think that's what you should do.

Nixon: You see, if you, when you really carry out, Henry, to your, to the extreme, your analysis, that you can't have the North Vietnamese destroy two Presidents. In that, it isn't really quite in all [unclear] because Johnson destroyed himself and in my case I will not do it that way. I will do it frankly for the good of the country. But nevertheless—

Kissinger: No. But that is for the good of the country. That's why I'm saying that, Mr. President, with all my loyalty—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I think we cannot have these miserable little bastards destroy confidence in our government.

Nixon: Well, anyway, I was going to tell you. I am convinced that this country—You see, for me, let me be quite—Kennedy, even leading a nation that was infinitely stronger than any potential enemy, was unable to conduct a very successful foreign policy because he lacked iron nerves—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon:—and lacked good advisers.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: All right. Johnson was in the same position for other reasons because he didn't have any experience. Now, I am quite aware of the fact that because of the, what is happening here and the rest, I mean, that, that there is a very good chance—and I don't, and it doesn't bother me one damn bit from a personal standpoint—that there is very good chance that sitting in this chair could be somebody else. It could be a Muskie; it could be a Humphrey; it could be a Teddy; one of those three on the Democratic side. Now on the Republican side it won't be Agnew or Reagan but it, Rockefeller probably couldn't get the nomination. I don't know who they would nominate, but nevertheless, but

⁶ April 23.

here's the point. I have, I know that, I have to leave this office in a position as strong as I possibly can because whoever succeeds me, either because of lack of experience or because of lack of character, guts, heading a weaker United States would surrender the whole thing. You understand?

Kissinger: I know.

Nixon: So that is why, that is why what I have to do—I have to do it not only to assure that if I am here we can conduct a successful foreign policy. I have to do it—and this is even more important—so that some poor, weak son-of-a-bitch is sitting here, with the best of intentions to conduct—It will be hard enough [unclear] next year. It will be hard not for him to conduct a foreign policy of the United States that's knocked the hell out of South Vietnam. It will be very hard because it is a jibbery nation at times; well intentioned but jibbery. Muskie has proved that he has no character. And Teddy is, well, unbelievable. [unclear] Now, what the hell can you do? So you cannot leave the, you just can't leave the thing. Now, under these circumstances, as I've often said that it may be that I am the last person in this office for some time, until somebody else is developing along the same lines, I mean who's tough and experienced, who will be able to conduct a strong, responsible foreign policy. So goddamn it, we're going to do it. And that means, that means, take every risk; lose every election. That's the way I look at it. Just pull the plug. Now people say well if you win or lose I'm not sure. But the main point is, we have no choice, you see?

Kissinger: That's my view.

Nixon: The foreign policy of the United States will not be viable if we are run out of Vietnam. That's all there is to it.

Kissinger: Mr. President, that is exactly my point of view, selfish, shortsighted, personal point of view.

Nixon: We shouldn't, we shouldn't—

Kissinger: Your incentive is not to do it.

Nixon: We shouldn't make a deal.

Kissinger: And my incentive is—I have less at stake but—

Nixon: I know. Your incentive is to not have all these great foreign policy initiatives flushed down the tubes.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: Which is exactly what's on the line.

Kissinger:—and is what we're concerned about. Public position, one would say—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger:—one could remain—

Nixon: The Man of Peace, the Generation of Peace all that stuff.

Kissinger: Although, Mr. President, I must say one thing. You are taking less heat this week than you would if Hue had fallen. The first week, the worst heat we took, it began to build up, was when all these little pip-squeaks were saying Vietnamization was a failure.

[Omitted here is discussion of domestic politics, press coverage, and the military situation in Vietnam.]

Nixon: I think you ought to tell Rabin you heard the President say it. I want you to get Rabin in and say you heard the President say it. To the leaders, he said, if he's said it a dozen times, he said it once, and I always start with Israel and then I go to Europe. But I say if the United States fails in Vietnam, if a Soviet-supported invasion succeeds there, it will inevitably be next tried in the Mid-East and the United States will not stand there either. That's what's on the line. And they should know that. And I think we should get some of our Israeli friends to start to support us.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: What do you think?

Kissinger: I think so.

Nixon: Don't you believe this is true?

Kissinger: I'll call Rabin. Now to go through—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger:—immediate tactical issues.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Do you agree, Mr. President, that I call in Dobrynin and say there is not going to be any reply to this?

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: "The President is determined. You know his course. There is no sense in engaging in rhetoric."

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: "And we will not reply to this. And I must tell you informally if this is what you are going to say to, in Moscow, my trip is going to be a waste of time."

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Because we will not be able to make progress—

Nixon: The point is, it's just the usual thing that we should stop the bombing of Hanoi.

Kissinger: Oh yeah. Yeah. It's—They had to do it, Mr. President, because—

Nixon: And just say, just say we did it. Why don't you put it more like I talked to Chou En-lai: "Look, the President read this and rather smiled." Look, just say, "He smiled and said, he said, 'They have to say this, he said, but,' and then he turned cold and said, 'There will be

no reply to this. If the Russians want to talk settlement, fine. But if they want talk to this way, there isn't going to be a summit.'"

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: I'd be very tough. 'Cause I'd very much like to see Johann [Franz Josef] Strauss. I like the old fart.

Kissinger: Right, right.

Nixon: You understand?

Kissinger: [laughter]

Nixon: Don't you think that's the way we play it?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: I think Dobrynin expects you to play that way, doesn't he?

Kissinger: Oh, Dobrynin. When he said, "I'll bring you this," he went on to say, "We have to do this in confidential channels because they're not saying much in public channels."

Nixon: Well, Bill asked me whether Humphrey responded. We have responded to the Russian note, haven't we?

Kissinger: No. He had sent over a cable for clearance.⁷ I held it last night because it was just too anxious, saying you had retired, which was true. And that you would clear it in the morning. And what you said was yes.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: I mean what you said was exactly that. You cleared it in the morning, this morning.

Nixon: Let me tell you about your trip. I realize it's not two for them and one for us in terms of cosmetics. It may be two for them and one for us in other terms. But, nevertheless. Basically because looking at their big game, the China game, what they want is Henry Kissinger in Moscow because you went to China.

Kissinger: Oh yes.

Nixon: You see? That's what's in it for them. And you've got to realize. Don't undersell what the hell we're giving those sons-of-bitches. Now, the other point I make, Henry, is, however, we're doing it for our own reasons. Our own reasons are, you're going to go and then we'll blow it.

Kissinger: Of course.

Nixon: And I'll blow it. Hell, maybe the day you come back; I might do it in the press conference.

[Omitted here is discussion of plans to announce Kissinger's trip to Moscow and of the President's schedule.]

⁷ Document 114.

Nixon: I think that with the Russians, there's one weakness in our game plan with Hanoi. We haven't got a goddamn thing we can do this week.

Kissinger: Oh, no. Well, first of all, we are holding in the South, Mr. President.

Nixon: You think we are holding?

Kissinger: Oh yeah. And that is the worst for them. And—

Nixon: But that's only temporary, you know, holding.

Kissinger: I don't know. I think it's, I think it isn't temporary.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: But secondly, we are bombing the southern part of North Vietnam intensively.

Nixon: Is there any bombing that you could do, changing even the pattern this week, so it looks like it's a different kind of strike? Is that something that could be done? Could we have another B-3 type strike? Just so it's—

Kissinger: In the South or in the North?

Nixon: In the South.

Kissinger: Oh, in the South. Easily.

Nixon: Yeah. I would like, I think what I meant is, I want something that can be described as a massive, different kind of a strike. Is there any place where you think we could do it?

Kissinger: I'll get off a message right off.

Nixon: Put it this way. That this week—You see what I mean?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: I don't want you to go over there—Well, frankly people won't know you're there. I don't want the people here to get the impression—You see what we're up against.

Kissinger: But next week they'll know why you did it.

Nixon: I know. But this week they'll be writing, because of Russian and Chinese protests, the United States didn't do it again. You see my point? We can't be in that position. Now, we can ride a week of it, I guess.

Kissinger: We can ride a week of it. If they accuse you of being both too tough and too soft at the same time—And then next week, I think if we can avoid—I mean, we've really put it brutally to them. It isn't—We haven't shown any softness. And they know, I mean, they know you now, Mr. President. They know when I come back without anything to show for it, we're going to blow the lid off, particularly having proved that we've made every effort.

Nixon: Hm-hmm. Now, the last thing to consider before we try to do a Wednesday thing. You see the deep-down decision you've got to

make is whether, do you want to conduct the Moscow talk in a way that will enable us to have a Moscow summit or in a way that will make it, leave us no choice but to blockade and flush the summit? Now there's one point that's very important. If the summit is canceled, I want to cancel it. I don't want them to.

Kissinger: Well, what I would like—

Nixon: That's got to be like the U-2. You understand?

Kissinger: What I would like to suggest, Mr. President, is this. I think we should conduct the summit part of the talks in a very conciliatory and forthcoming manner in such a way that they get a maximum panting after the—

Nixon: That, that I understand.

Kissinger:—after the summit.

Nixon: I understand all that. All of that.

Kissinger: On the Vietnam thing, on the other hand, we should be tough as nails, because the middle position, we will not impress these guys with conciliatoriness. They were not passing messages while Johnson was drooling all over them.

Nixon: Hm-hmm.

Kissinger: So I think we should do both simultaneously. On Vietnam, we should be very tough. What I'm playing with now—

Nixon: What do we get out—what do get out—what are we— Sorry.

Kissinger: Well, what I think, if we are—

Nixon: We certainly have got to have a cease-fire while we're in Moscow. That's my point.

Kissinger: Oh, one outcome, Mr. President, that I think we might get is to say, to offer to the Russians, we'll go back to the conditions of May, of March 29th. That is to say, the North Vietnamese withdraw the three divisions they put across the DMZ, north of the DMZ; they scale down their military actions to the levels they were on March 29th; this is guaranteed by the Soviets; we in turn stop the bombing of the North; and we resume plenary sessions in Paris.

Nixon: That's a good deal.

Kissinger: That would be a damn good deal, Mr. President.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: It would be such a defeat for the North Vietnamese, if they are to stop their offensive.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And it makes us look damn good in domestic opinion.

Nixon: Withdraw—

Kissinger: If we say—

Nixon: Withdraw across the DMZ, those forces across the DMZ. After all, we can't tell them to get out of everything.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: And we'll stop the bombing of the North in return. Because we will have—

Kissinger: But they have to scale down military actions—

Nixon: We will have shellacked the North by that time anyway.

Kissinger: That's right.

[Omitted here is further discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

114. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union¹

Washington, April 17, 1972, 1424Z.

65559. For Ambassador. Ref: Moscow 3535.² Subj: Reply to Soviet Protest Note.

Ambassador requested to deliver following reply to Soviet protest note to Kovalev or other appropriate senior official as soon as possible.

Begin Text:

Deputy Foreign Minister Kovalev on April 16 delivered a note to Ambassador Beam which contained a protest dealing with alleged acts against Soviet Merchant shipping in the port of Haiphong. The United

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 VIET S. Confidential; Flash; Exdis. Drafted by Green, Sullivan, and Matlock on April 16; cleared by Hillenbrand and Kissinger; and approved by Rogers. In an April 16 memorandum forwarding a copy of the draft telegram to Kissinger, Kennedy noted that Sonnenfeldt believed "it would be best to hold it up and not reply for a day or two to avoid getting into a further exchange before Wednesday [April 19]." "If you want to go ahead and release the cable tonight," Kennedy continued, "please just let me know and I will take care of it." According to Kennedy's notation on the memorandum, Kissinger cleared the telegram that evening and the President approved it the following morning. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10)

² Document 108.

States Government has considered this protest and makes the following points:

1. Every effort is made to limit air strikes to military targets used in direct support of aggression against South Viet-Nam. Consequently the air strikes were not aimed at or intended to affect third parties and precautions were taken to prevent this from occurring.

2. If damage to shipping has in fact occurred, it could well be the result of anti-aircraft fire or misfirings from the North Vietnamese side.

3. If any damage to international shipping in the Haiphong area was produced by ordnance dropped by U.S. aircraft it was inadvertent and regrettable.

4. In recent weeks the North Vietnamese forces have launched massive invasions across the Demilitarized Zone and from points in Laos and Cambodia against South Viet-Nam. Countries which supply offensive equipment to the North Vietnamese and enable them to mount an invasion of South Viet-Nam share responsibility.

5. Nevertheless the Soviet Government may be assured that U.S. authorities will continue to make every effort to avoid any damage to international shipping. *End Text.*³

Rogers

³ Beam delivered the note to Kovalev that afternoon. Kovalev, citing the point on the responsibility of military suppliers, declared that the Soviet Union "had rendered in the past and will continue to render all necessary support to the DRV in its struggle against outside aggression." Beam replied that the U.S. Government had given careful consideration to its response, including the point in question, which he believed "was critical and stated our case cogently." Beam later commented in his reporting telegram that the note had apparently "blunted current Soviet charges." (Telegram 3574 from Moscow, April 17; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 VIET S)

115. Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State¹

Moscow, April 17, 1972, 1515Z.

3568. Subj: Soviet Role in Vietnam Crisis. Ref: A. USUN 1242;² B. New Delhi 4551;³ C. Vientiane 2870.⁴

1. Summary: Embassy's assessment is that Soviet remarks contained in refelts are deliberately misleading. Moscow is fully committed to provide DRV with means to conduct military operations in Indochina under conditions of Hanoi's own choosing, including current offensive. Opening of Sino-US dialogue has if anything increased staunchness of Soviet support for Hanoi. High-level Soviet visitors to Hanoi in recent months provide further evidence of close Soviet-DRV ties at present, while recent Soviet lecturer described DRV as more independent from China than at any time in recent years. We have detected no wavering of Soviet support for Hanoi because of approaching Moscow summit. Moscow's personal preferences probably less important than other factors in determining timing of DRV offensive. While Soviets are carefully controlling their response to developments in Indochina, they are making clear their refusal to be deterred by summit considerations in accepting challenge posed by US countermeasures in Vietnam. End summary.

2. We have noted number of recent cables reporting conversations with Soviet diplomats or other officials in which Soviets have attempted to dissociate Moscow from planning role in current DRV offensive (refs A and C) and to lay blame at Chinese door (refs A and B).

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 VIET S. Confidential; Priority; Limdis. Repeated to Hong Kong, Saigon, and USDEL France.

² In telegram 1242 from USUN New York, April 6, the Embassy reported that Kalinkin, a key Soviet official in the UN Secretariat, had approached David Henry, a retired U.S. Foreign Service officer, to discuss the North Vietnamese offensive. According to Henry: "Kalinkin stated invasion most unfortunate, particularly coming at this time, and he hoped it would in no way interfere with President's forthcoming trip to USSR. Kalinkin stressed Soviets in no way involved in planning or coordination of invasion and exercised no control over North Vietnamese; control is effectively maintained by PRC over Hanoi, he added." (Ibid.)

³ In telegram 4551 from New Delhi, April 12, the Embassy reported that Ivan Shchedrov, a *Pravda* correspondent, noted in a conversation with a Soviet diplomat that the North Vietnamese offensive began shortly after Chinese Premier Chou En-lai visited Hanoi. The Embassy commented that this attempt to blame the Chinese appeared to parallel the previous report on Kalinkin. (Ibid.)

⁴ In telegram 2870 from Vientiane, April 12, the Embassy reported that the Soviet Military Attaché told an Embassy official that the North Vietnamese offensive obviously reflected "political decisions" related to the Moscow summit rather than careful military planning. (Ibid.)

We consider these to be disingenuous efforts to obscure Soviet intentions. They conflict with our own reading of Soviet policy and with other evidence available to us. Following represents our assessment of Soviet role at present.

3. In technical sense, Moscow is not the guiding hand behind DRV actions in South Vietnam and other parts of Indochina. Hanoi still gives every indication of being master of its own house. At same time, Moscow is fundamentally opposed to US goals in Vietnam and is fully committed to provide DRV with the wherewithal to conduct military operations in Indochina under conditions of Hanoi's own choosing, including current offensive. If at times Moscow has desired to lower threshold of risk in Indochina for its own reasons, we do not consider this to be decisive factor at present. Critical factor has been and remains Hanoi's will to continue struggle; availability of means to do so has thus far not been problem.

4. Aside from continuing factors underlying Soviet policy in Vietnam—e.g., Socialist solidarity, desire to destroy credibility of US defense commitment, sap US economic and military strength, and shake US willingness to assume similar responsibilities in future—opening of Sino-US dialogue has if anything increased staunchness of Soviet support for Hanoi. Soviets now have even greater interests in containing Chinese influence and in establishing their own credentials as country which can provide most reliable support and protection against "imperialist aggression."

5. Recent months have provided convincing evidence of close Soviet ties with Hanoi. Three Soviet ministers visited DRV during March and presence of Air Defense Chief Batitskiy⁵ in North Vietnam on eve of current offensive leaves little doubt that Soviets were fully aware of DRV plans and anticipated US reaction.

6. Only visible indication of Soviet-DRV differences that has occurred in recent months resulted from DRV Ambassador's call on Kosygin Feb 11, which was described as taking place in atmosphere of "friendly and comradely frankness" (Moscow 1322).⁶ We would guess that this "frank conversation" most likely concerned Sihanouk,⁷ who arrived in Hanoi the following day amid rumors that new Indochinese summit might take place (Hong Kong 943).⁸ We consider it highly unlikely on eve of President's China visit, when Soviets were going out of their way to demonstrate solidarity with Hanoi, that Soviets would

⁵ See Document 90.

⁶ Not found.

⁷ Prince Norodom Sihanouk, former President and Prime Minister of Cambodia.

⁸ Not found.

have openly disagreed with Hanoi on development related specifically with Vietnam.

7. As further factor, Soviet lectures in recent months have consistently played down Chinese influence in Hanoi and emphasized importance of Soviet aid, which described as amounting to 80 percent of external assistance to DRV. In latest example, Soviet lecturer April 13 claimed USSR has increased its military assistance to DRV in recent months so that Hanoi could better withstand both American and Chinese pressure. As result, he described DRV as being more independent from China than at any time in recent years.

8. We have detected no watering of Soviet support for Hanoi because of approaching Moscow summit. On the contrary, both before and after announcement of President's trip to Moscow, Soviets have clearly indicated that they had no intention of moderating their full backing for DRV. Short time before Moscow summit was announced, Podgorny signed major new economic and military aid agreements in Hanoi.⁹ Since then they have continued to pour supplies into DRV. Their heavy-handed exploitation of Vietnam issue against Peking in connection with President's China visit anticipated their current posture.

9. It is conceivable that Soviets considered test of strength in Vietnam desirable in advance of summit talks. Not only do they have less to lose than Washington, since US prestige is more heavily engaged in success or failure of Vietnamization than their own, but if Vietnamization program could be shown to have "feet of clay" prior to Moscow talks, general Soviet negotiating posture would be strengthened. At same time, given DRV offensive's potential for spoiling atmosphere of Moscow summit, to detriment of both sides, Soviets probably preferred that it occur sooner rather than later before Moscow talks. Hanoi, on other hand, may have seen advantages in having Vietnam issue on active irritant during summit, thus reducing likelihood of some "great power" understanding that would reduce level of Soviet support for Hanoi war effort. Political wishes of either Moscow or Hanoi with regard to summit, however, may well have been less decisive in timing of offensive than considerations of weather and increasing Saigon military strength.

10. Once offensive was unleashed, the die was cast and Moscow could only be expected to give full support to Hanoi, at same time resorting to "disinformation" maneuvers like those reported reftels to minimize US reaction in pre-summit period. In general Soviets have

⁹ Podgorny headed an official Soviet delegation to Hanoi October 3–8, 1971. For public documentation, including speeches delivered during the visit and the joint statement issued at its conclusion, see *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXIII, No. 40, November 12, 1971, pp. 1–2, 5–12, 16.

carefully controlled their response and have avoided striking more provocative posture than is inherent in fundamental nature of their differences with us over Vietnam. Thus, Brezhnev took care to frame his expression of support for Hanoi primarily in defensive terms.¹⁰

11. The Soviet leaders are obviously concerned that, if the scale of fighting and retaliatory bombing continues to mount, it could jeopardize not only the atmosphere of the summit but the visit itself. Nevertheless, Moscow appears to be signalling that it will not be deterred by summit considerations in accepting challenge posed by US countermeasures in Vietnam. This was forcefully stated in *Pravda* commentary by political observer Korionov Apr 15, which emphasized that Vietnamese people have faithful reliable allies and warned that “nothing” will prevent Soviet people from completely fulfilling their “sacred international duty” to aid patriots of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. With Soviet position laid on the line, commentary indicated in conclusion that crucial factor is how US itself chooses to resolve Vietnam problem.

Beam

¹⁰ Presumably a reference to the meeting between Brezhnev and the North Vietnamese Ambassador in Moscow on April 12; see Document 120.

116. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 17, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of Democratic criticism on the military situation in Vietnam.]

Kissinger: The Chinese statement is very mild, Mr. President. Mansfield made a statement saying this will prolong the war; it will make his task in China harder.² It just proves he doesn't know a goddamn thing.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 709–13. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 10:51 to 11:03 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² Senators Mike Mansfield (D–Montana) and Hugh Scott (R–Pennsylvania), majority and minority leaders respectively, visited the People's Republic of China April 19–22. For an account of their trip, see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 223.

Nixon: His task in China! You know, we've, we've allowed, we have given him really the extra bit of rope here, as if he had any god-damn special task commission—He doesn't have a thing. He's a pain in the ass.

Kissinger: Mr. President, when I tell the Chinese Ambassador tomorrow that I am going to Moscow³—We are now playing this reverse.

Nixon: Hm-hmm.

Kissinger: They are not going to look for trouble with us.

Nixon: That's right. That's right.

Kissinger: Because that shows them we have a—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: What we get out of the Moscow trip is pressure on Peking, pressure on Hanoi. What they get out of the Moscow trip is pressure on Peking. But that's—

Nixon: Right. We don't mind giving them pressure on Peking. But as far as Mansfield is concerned, let me say that when he returns, he's got to be savagely taken off too, because he has been, you want to remember, with his nice manner, he has been vicious in a way that he has—

Kissinger: You see what I think, Mr. President, is, I now think that deal that I suggested to you this morning⁴—I don't think the Russians could, if they wanted to, deliver a final settlement. What I should do—

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: —is pretend that that's what we want, and retreat to an interim solution, so that it looks reasonable.

Nixon: The interim solution being again?

Kissinger: The interim solution being, we say let's return to the status quo before the offensive.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: They withdraw the three divisions that came across the DMZ; we stop the bombing; they scale down their offensive actions in the South; Russia guarantees this and talks; Le Duc Tho returns to Paris; and talks start. Mr. President, if we deliver that, I think, first of all, we can murder our critics here. Second, I believe if talks start under those circumstances, Hanoi may negotiate seriously for this reason. They've thrown their Sunday punch this year; they were defeated on the ground and hit very hard in the North; if they do it again next year, after you've been re-elected, they'll be even worse off.

³ Kissinger met Huang Hua, Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, in New York on April 18 from 5:30 to 5:55 p.m. to report on his upcoming trip to Moscow; *ibid*.

⁴ See Document 113.

Nixon: I'd make one other condition. We'll stop the bombing in the North, provided they withdraw their three divisions across the DMZ and return the POWs. I think we've got to insist on that at this point.

Kissinger: Well, that they won't do.

Nixon: Try it.

Kissinger: I'll certainly try it.

Nixon: You understand? Or at least they've got to do something on POWs. You know, you see you can even retreat there. They've got to start with some token on the POWs, the sick and wounded, for example.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Doesn't that make sense?

Kissinger: That makes sense.

Nixon: But, let me say that I am not—

Kissinger: But, you see, then I would murder the Democrats. If that is done, I would—

Nixon: Well, we can murder them, except, you understand, Henry, they go into their convention, we go into the campaign, with the war still going on. That's our problem. You see the only way that we can get this thing out of the way—That's why we may have to go the harder line, the blockade and the rest, rather than taking the half-ass line like this. The only way we can get this out of the way is to get the war over with.

Kissinger: I think, Mr. President, we go this route and if we get the Russians involved getting it settled this far, we have a real chance of getting this settled well before the election, because then I do not see what Hanoi is going to wait for. What will be better for them next year than—?

Nixon: Well, it has to be tied in then with an announcement in June. And as I've said we've got to consider the May announcement as to whether or not that has got to be thrown now. I wonder if the May announcement—

Kissinger: I would not announce anything this week. Why not do it next week?

Nixon: That's what I mean, next week.

Kissinger: Oh yeah.

Nixon: The May announcement.

Kissinger: For your press conference.

Nixon: But the point is, whether that May announcement should simply be a reduction of forces or whether at that point we want to use the draft—

Kissinger: I would not, Mr. President.

Nixon: I agree.

Kissinger: To announce the reduction of forces in the middle of an offensive is such a show of confidence that I—Besides we have the Moscow thing next week too available.

Nixon: You mean maybe. You mean, you mean to surface it?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: But, I mean, but we wouldn't surface it if talks were going on, would we?

Kissinger: Why not? If we said it was arranged in Moscow.

Nixon: Well, you know, that might be an idea.

Kissinger: Supposing you—

Nixon: I might just open the press conference with that.

Kissinger: That's what I mean. You say—

Nixon: Kissinger's been to Moscow and talks are going to resume. And then—Boy and that would flabbergast those sons-of-bitches.

Kissinger: Well, that's what I mean. And then I would, sort of in a low-key way also get a few thousand troops out of there.

[Omitted here is a brief exchange on troop reductions.]

Kissinger: My instinct is, Mr. President, that next week I am going to—You know, the Russians are tough and I may not be able to get it done, but we should try—

Nixon: This talk with Dobrynin today, what's it about?

Kissinger: Nothing.

Nixon: Is he bringing a message?

Kissinger: No, he brought me the message.⁵ The talk with Dobrynin is just to show him we're tough. To say, you know, we won't reply to this—

Nixon: Oh, oh, he's going to reply to the message—

Kissinger: No, no. I'm going to reply to the message he brought last night.

Nixon: Oh, you're going to say, "We've received it. The President has noted it. We understand that's the position you have taken. And we—"

Kissinger: I won't even say that.

Nixon: Wait a minute. "But you've got to understand that we're taking the position that we're going to take and the President is not going to be deflected one bit and he has no answer to this."

Kissinger: Good.

Nixon: You see what I mean?

⁵ Document 110.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: “Not going to be deflected a bit. You’ve got to understand that and our talks as far as the summit are a separate matter, a separate matter from Vietnam.” You know what I mean. But then link your talks on Vietnam with mine. Stick it to them.

Kissinger: Right. I think—

Nixon: You know what worries them though—

Kissinger: Oh the blockade worries them.

[Omitted here is discussion of press reports on the military situation in Vietnam and on preparations for the Moscow summit.]

117. Intelligence Memorandum Prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency¹

Washington, April 17, 1972.

PATTERNS AND TRENDS IN SOVIET MILITARY AID TO NORTH VIETNAM

I. The Politics of Aid: Moscow, Hanoi’s Offensive, the Summit

1. Two basic factors must underly any analysis of Soviet involvement in Vietnam. First, the USSR would like to see an eventual Communist victory in Vietnam. Conversely, some decisive Southern victory in the conflict would be felt as an important setback to Soviet interests, given the high degree of Soviet commitment and support to Hanoi’s cause.

2. Yet this proposition must be qualified. The USSR certainly does not attach the same priority to the struggle that the DRV does. In 1954 the Soviets worked out a deal with the French that fell well short of North Vietnam’s objectives; by 1964 Khrushchev was all but ignoring the area. His successors have proven truer and more consistent allies to Hanoi, but—even given the interests shared on the two sides—Moscow can hardly be expected to subordinate all its international concerns to this single problem.

3. The second proposition is that Soviet room for maneuver is limited. It is dealing, not with a puppet, but with a distant, independent

¹ Source: National Security Council, Washington Special Actions Group Files, Meeting Files, 4-17-72. Secret; Spoke; Sensitive.

client to which, in the Communist context, it has obligations of some weight. Furthermore, this client has, in the People's Republic of China (PRC), another patron that is eager to pillory the Soviet Union for any faltering in its support to Hanoi's cause and that gives North Vietnam military and economic aid of its own. The Soviets should derive some leverage from their position as supplier of complex, advanced weapons, but even here the Chinese could confound their attempts to apply this leverage by replacing them in this function as well, albeit incompletely and with difficulty.²

4. Last, in this concrete situation theoretical leverage does not have much practical effect. The North Vietnamese themselves are immensely jealous of their independence, and they assiduously work their relations with their two big supporters not only to maximize the aid but also to minimize the influence of the donors.

5. We lack direct evidence of the real tone of the Soviet-North Vietnamese relationship, although we do occasionally receive indications, mostly indirect, on this matter. Relying on these and on deductions from the above propositions, we surmise that these relations are somewhat as follows. The Soviets feel a special obligation to help in the air defense of North Vietnam, as a socialist state under bombing by the imperialists. As for military supplies intended for use in the South, the bulk are by now routinely supplied; and, beyond this, Moscow is anxious to help the DRV overcome the advantage in modern weapons that the other side has enjoyed. Hanoi for its part probably submits its aid requests with a minimum of explanations. Hanoi's leaders have consistently said that they need no advice from outside strategists, and they have excoriated any North Vietnamese who seem to be coming too heavily under outside influence. Moreover, they are always wary of getting caught in a bargaining relationship with their patrons, and they thus almost certainly avoid being drawn into the kinds of consultations that might grow into joint planning. The Soviets can draw many conclusions from the kinds and volume of aid requested, as well as intelligence from their people in North Vietnam, but they have no apparent mechanism for advising on strategy and tactics—that is, on matters beyond those affecting training in and use of their equipment. They also recognize that, given Hanoi's sensitivities and its Peking option, they would be treading on delicate ground if they sought to intrude into this sphere.

² In terms of total value, Chinese military aid in 1965–71 was about 40% that of the USSR. In the last two years, however, the Chinese have supplied almost 95% as much military aid, by value, as the USSR. This is mainly because the DRV's air defense needs, met primarily by the USSR, declined for several years after the bombing halt of 1968. [Footnote in the source text.]

6. If these views are correct, then it is likely that over the last year or so, and particularly after the DRV's heavy losses of equipment in Lam Son 719,³ the Soviet Union has been delivering to North Vietnam large shipments of weapons and supplies, some of which are undoubtedly being used in the present offensive. The signing of a number of military aid agreements has been announced during this period, including one in August 1971, another in October, and the most recent in December (the Chinese have kept pace throughout with similar announcements of aid deals). We cannot associate Soviet decisions on particular weapons or volumes with individual agreements, but Moscow would clearly have been aware that Hanoi was building up large inventories of tanks, for example, and long-range artillery. This process almost certainly began before the Soviets were aware of President Nixon's planned visit to Peking and before their own summit was scheduled. The Soviets could easily infer that the North Vietnamese were preparing for large-scale conventional action, which would occur during a dry season. They may have been told as much, but they were probably not kept abreast of the details of Hanoi's evolving plans for a multi-front offensive.

7. When, with this buildup in process, summit diplomacy began to develop from July onward, first in Peking and then in Moscow, the Soviets must have had to consider the relationship between their diplomacy and the Vietnam war. By November, with the breakdown of secret US-North Vietnamese negotiations, their task had become how to relate what they knew of Hanoi's military plans to the May summit.

8. At least by the first of the year, Moscow almost certainly knew that an offensive was in the offing and could foresee several outcomes. First, a North Vietnamese offensive might score victories of a scope to have major repercussions on South Vietnam's stability. This would be welcome for its own sake and (the Soviets would reason) would put them at an advantage vis-à-vis President Nixon in Moscow. At the summit, in any discussion of a Vietnam settlement, it would require the United States to be the supplicant. This would be a desirable result unless the United States reacted so negatively as to postpone or cancel the summit. The Soviets would see some benefits even in this reaction, in that they would anticipate a weakening of the President's domestic political position.

9. It is possible to argue that these advantages are so great that the USSR hoped that a North Vietnamese offensive would provoke the

³ Reference is to South Vietnamese offensive of February and March 1971—supported by American advisers and aircraft—to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh Trail at Tchepone, Laos.

United States to put off the summit and even contrived to arrange matters to this end. Putting aside for the moment the question of its ability to control events in this fashion, it is doubtful that Moscow sees this as the preferred outcome. Its interests in a successful summit is substantial. It has a stake of some importance in certain bilateral matters, especially arms control and trade. It has an interest in improved US-Soviet relations as the centerpiece of a *détente* campaign, which is meant to forward its interests in Western Europe. Most important, it is a matter of deep concern not to encourage the rapprochement between its major antagonists (China and the United States) to proceed to a stage of active anti-Soviet cooperation, a contingency to which the Soviets have shown themselves acutely sensitive.

10. Second, the North Vietnamese might suffer a major defeat. This would clearly be a bad outcome from the Soviet standpoint. Its only virtue would be to deflate the importance of the Vietnam issue as a problem in Soviet-US relations, thus leaving more time for the bilateral matters that are Moscow's primary incentive for a summit. But if this defeat had been accompanied by heavy US bombing deep into North Vietnam, the Soviets would have a hard time justifying any summit at all.⁴ Thus this outcome could be a double defeat for the USSR.

11. Third, major action could have eased off with no decisive result. This would be, in terms of summit considerations alone, a manageable result, since Vietnam would then not play a critical role in the Soviet-US encounter.

12. Fourth, the outcome might be undecided and still hotly contested at the time of the summit itself. This would run the major risk of the first case—a US postponement or cancellation—and would put Moscow under pressure to do the same. If the summit nonetheless took place, this situation would almost guarantee that Vietnam would dominate the political atmosphere. Vietnam, to the Soviets, is the wrong issue for this meeting.

13. This review shows how hard it would have been for the Soviets to make confident calculations of the best way to relate the evolving conflict in Vietnam to their summit diplomacy. In fact, however, there was little they could do about Hanoi's plans. The Soviets have long been committed to the military support of North Vietnam, and

⁴ In this connection a Soviet KGB officer in Vientiane, evidently acting on instructions, told an Agency officer on 10 April of his concern that US bombing of North Vietnam could force Moscow to cancel the summit. This line, while obviously intended to persuade the United States to stay its hand, probably does reflect a genuine concern about the political damage to the USSR's position, *vis-à-vis* other Communist states, of summit negotiations under these conditions. [Footnote in the source text.]

they began to be committed to the aid that supports the present offensive before they arranged the Moscow summit. For the Politburo, it would have been a momentous decision to change course in the latter part of 1971. Supporters of a summit would have had the greatest difficulty in mustering a majority behind the proposition that North Vietnam should be pressed to call off its offensive plans. In fact, it is doubtful that they would have prevailed, especially since it would have been argued that Hanoi would not have turned aside from its plans in any event. No matter how the individual Soviet leaders appraised the situation, it would be uncharacteristic of the present leadership, which is closer to a collective than to the Khrushchevian model, to consider such radical alternatives.

14. In sum, the Soviets, through their long commitment to North Vietnam and the momentum of their military aid program, probably began to underwrite the expansion of North Vietnam's offensive capabilities before the summit was in view and without being fully consulted on Hanoi's specific intentions.⁵ They see dangers to their interests in the way in which Vietnam and the summit have become related, but the alternatives available to them as this relationship developed were even more unpalatable. As of now, they want both a North Vietnamese victory and a summit, but they find that the key choices are beyond their control.

[Omitted here is the remainder of the memorandum, including Appendix A on Soviet military visitors and the North Vietnamese Offensive, and Appendix B, which consists of statistical tables on military and economic assistance to North Vietnam from the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe.]

⁵ The visit of Marshal Batitskiy (16–27 March) came far too late to fit into any scenario of major decision-making. The composition of his delegation suggests that his purpose was to advise on the air defense of North Vietnam, probably in connection with renewed US bombing expected as a consequence of the North Vietnamese offensive. Batitskiy's and other recent Soviet visits are discussed in Appendix A. [Footnote in the source text. For further analysis of the Batitskiy visit, see Document 90.]

118. Minutes of Washington Special Action Group Meeting¹

Washington, April 17, 1972, 11:05–11:48 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

U Alexis Johnson

William Sullivan

Defense

Kenneth Rush

Armistead Selden

R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS

Adm. Thomas Moorer

CIA

Richard Helms

George Carver

[*name not declassified*] (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC

Richard Kennedy

Mark Wandler

[Omitted here is the Summary of Conclusions.]

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, do you have anything for us?

Mr. Helms: Yes, but first I want to mention that the study you asked for on Soviet assistance to North Vietnam is in front of you.²

Mr. Kissinger: Does the study prove what we wanted it to prove, or should it be withdrawn?

Mr. Helms: It's a little bit of both. [Reads attached briefing]³

[Omitted here is detailed discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals. Top Secret; Sensitive. No drafting information appears on the minutes. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

² Document 117.

³ Brackets in the source text. Not attached.

Mr. Sullivan: [Referring to Mr. Helms' briefing] You said the Soviet statement of protest to us mentioned damage to their ships.⁴ I don't think they said that in public, though.

Mr. Johnson: No, they haven't.

Mr. Sullivan: In the public statement, they just mentioned the barbarity of attacking Haiphong.⁵ I don't think our press statements should say anything about damage to Soviet ships.

Mr. Kennedy entered the room at this point.

Mr. Johnson: If the Soviets want to keep the ship business quiet, let's help them do it. The TASS statement said nothing about ship damage. The press here and in Moscow assumes Tass' statement contained the substance of the note to us. Let's let it ride.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree. But the press is getting leery. Joseph Kraft called over here this morning, and he was amazed that the Soviets seem to be ducking a confrontation.

Adm. Moorer: The skipper of one of the Soviet ships sent a message to Moscow, which we intercepted. The message described some of the damage.

Mr. Rush: I thought we were not sure that the damage was caused by us.

Mr. Johnson: That's right.

Adm. Moorer: The North Vietnamese fired over 200 missiles.

Mr. Johnson: There was a radio report this morning of an East German statement which said the Soviet ships were damaged as a result of our air attacks.

Adm. Moorer: That's correct. But the German report was based on the report of the Soviet skipper, who also said all crews are seeking safety—a wise move.

[Omitted here is detailed discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

[Kissinger:] I have not had time to read the paper on Soviet aid. Can you tell me what it proves?

Mr. Carver: It shows that there is a great deal of lead time between stockpiling aid and using this aid in tactical situations. It's obvious that the Soviets tried to make up the Lam Son 719 losses. They must have been aware, too, that they were augmenting the North Vietnamese offensive capabilities. I doubt, though, that there was an orchestration

⁴ Brackets in the source text. See Document 108. *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, however, published on April 18 the text of the protest note, which did mention the damage to their ships and personnel. (*Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXIV, No. 16, May 17, 1972, p. 4)

⁵ For text of the TASS statement, published by *Pravda* and *Izvestia* on April 17, see *ibid.*

between the step-up of aid and the launching of the offensive. The schedules indicate the aid requests were placed before Hanoi jelled its plans for the offensive.

Mr. Kissinger: When did Hanoi jell those plans?

Mr. Carver: The North Vietnamese probably decided late last summer to go to main force action in Vietnam this year. They probably decided in late September or October on the step-up of activity in Laos.

[Omitted here is detailed discussion of the military situation in Laos and Vietnam.]

[Kissinger:] (to Mr. Carver) You don't think, then, that the increased Soviet aid shipments and the launching of the North Vietnamese offensive were part of an orchestrated plot?

Mr. Carver: No, I don't.

Mr. Kissinger: But you think the Soviets knew they were increasing the North Vietnamese offensive capabilities.

Mr. Carver: Yes, I'm sure the Soviets knew.

Mr. Sullivan: The increased POL shipments alone should have told the Soviets that.

Mr. Carver: Of course. The Soviets knew the increased POL shipments had to augment the North Vietnamese capabilities.

Mr. Kissinger: We can say therefore one of three things: (1) that the Soviets didn't know anything—that this was really the normal flow of aid; (2) that the Soviets knew the specific target date of the attack; and (3) that the Soviets didn't know the specific date, but they did know they had given the North Vietnamese a considerable improvement of offensive capabilities.

Mr. Carver: I think number three is where we would come out. The supply shipments increased at the end of the summer, but Hanoi's plans had not yet jelled.

Mr. Kissinger: You mean the timing of the offensive, don't you?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: But the Soviets knew their increased aid would certainly make it easier for the North Vietnamese to launch an offensive.

Mr. Carver: Of course they did.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm not trying to put words into your mouth. I'm just trying to understand the situation. Would it be correct to say that a prudent Soviet Government from January on—knowing that the Summit was approaching in May—might have known with each passing month that the coincidence between the Summit and the North Vietnamese offensive was becoming much sharper?

Mr. Carver: That's correct. It's also inconceivable that when Marshall Batiskiy left North Vietnam the Soviets did not know what was

on Hanoi's mind. The main task of the Batskiy mission was to review the North Vietnamese air defenses—and they obviously did that because they knew they would have to use these defenses in the near future.

Mr. Rush: Let's assume for the sake of argument that the offensive was supposed to start in February and that all the supplies were in the pipeline. As the date slipped from February, could the Russians have done something to cut the pipeline—and stop the offensive, so that it would not interfere with the Summit?

Mr. Carver: It's not that neat. Even if the Soviets did that, Hanoi could drawdown on the existing stockpiles. You can't plot the movement of a particular shipment to the tactical situation. The supply system doesn't work like that.

Mr. Rush: Everything was all geared up for the February offensive, and the Russian and Chinese supplies were coming in. Did the supplies continue to come in when the offensive was delayed? The Russians could have been concerned about the delayed offensive coinciding with the Summit, and they may have cut the supply flow when they found out the offensive was delayed.

Mr. Carver: That didn't happen. Anyway, the supply system is not that responsive.

Mr. Kissinger: Since February, though, the Russians should have been expecting the offensive with each passing week.

Mr. Helms: It's interesting to look at the POL shipment line in our study.

Mr. Carver: You can see a very obvious surge in the line in the fourth quarter of 1971 and the first quarter of 1972.

Adm. Moorer: That's due to several reasons. First, the North Vietnamese are using more trucks to deploy men and supplies. Second, they are operating more tanks—a long way from home, too. Third, they are flying the MiGs more often, and the MiGs gobble up fuel.

Mr. Kissinger: Will our air strikes on Haiphong have much of an effect on POL distribution?

Adm. Moorer: The strikes won't have much of an effect on this offensive. But the effects will be felt later on.

Mr. Rush: Let me repeat the question I asked earlier. Seeing the delay in the offensive and not wanting it to coincide with the Summit, couldn't the Russians have cut the supply flow?

Mr. Carver: They could have done that. But if the cut had come after the first of the year, it would not have had any effect on Hanoi's stocks.

Mr. Kissinger: They may not have known the exact day the North Vietnamese planned to launch the offensive. But sending a military mission to Hanoi a week before the offensive was no sign that they wanted Hanoi to call it off.

Mr. Carver: Even if the Soviets wanted Hanoi to call the offensive off, they would have taken much criticism from the North Vietnamese and the Chinese. There is simply no evidence that Batiskiy told the North Vietnamese to call it off—because of the Summit or any other reason.

Mr. Sullivan: The Soviets may have known the offensive was laid on for February, in the hope that it would cause us a maximum embarrassment during the China visit. Then, although the offensive was delayed, they were committed—and they couldn't turn it around.

Mr. Kissinger: They wouldn't tell Hanoi to let the offensive run to May 5, would they? They would have to let the offensive run its course.

Mr. Helms: That's right. Once they are locked into something, they take their losses to the bitter end. They have to go all the way with the North Vietnamese. Otherwise, as the leading Communist power, they would be open for a great deal of criticism. When we went into Cambodia, we had a time limit for getting out. On the other hand, if the Russians had been in our place, they would have let the operation run its course. They are not subject to domestic pressures.

Adm. Moorer: The North Vietnamese are now shooting the works. They can go all out, and when they are finished they can be refurbished by the Soviets and the Chinese. They are not gambling because they know they won't be invaded.

Mr. Kissinger: Assuming the North Vietnamese are defeated in the South, there is nothing the Russians could do in time for the Summit, even if they quadrupled their aid.

Mr. Rush: Is there anything the Russians could do to make the North Vietnamese disengage before the Summit?

Mr. Carver: No.

Adm. Moorer: George is right. But the Soviets could make sure the North Vietnamese don't launch another offensive.

Mr. Johnson: Won't the Chinese pick up the shortfall in supplies if the Soviets let up?

Mr. Carver: The Chinese will pick up some of the shortfall.

Mr. Sullivan: I'm not sure the Chinese are totally behind what the North Vietnamese are doing. They support a protracted war strategy.

Mr. Carver: I don't think the Chinese are anxious to see a big North Vietnamese victory.

Mr. Kissinger: You think the Chinese interest is to keep the war going?

Mr. Carver: The Chinese will not welcome a big North Vietnamese victory in the near future. If the war continues and the North Vietnamese are kept occupied on their southern borders, that will be okay with the Chinese.

Mr. Kissinger: Otherwise?

Mr. Carver: Otherwise, Hanoi might start flexing its muscles—in Thailand, for example. I’m not suggesting that Peking doesn’t want the North Vietnamese to win. It’s just that continued North Vietnamese concern for problems closer to home will not be a bad thing for Peking.

Mr. Kissinger: We’ll meet tomorrow at 10:00.

119. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 17, 1972.

Kissinger: I was talking with Dobrynin.² Bill has done very well, Mr. President.³

Nixon: That’s the report we get. I’ve been thinking that I don’t—What’s your, what’s the purpose of your conversation with Dobrynin? Just to go about getting this message?

Kissinger: Yes. And just to keep the—

Nixon: And you’ve done that—

Kissinger: I’m not finished yet because he—

Nixon: Well, I don’t want you to offer this or even suggest that there is a chance that we might go on this interim idea—

Kissinger: Oh, no.

Nixon: — that an exchange for a—Let me tell you the weakness in that. I’ve written it out here.⁴ The weakness in that, in view of Haig’s report, is that it sees it tactically in the short run, but does not

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 709–19. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 12:15 to 12:28 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger met Dobrynin in the Map Room at the White House from 12:07 to 12:15 p.m. and—following his conversation with the President in the Oval Office—from 12:30 to 1:24 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976) No substantive record of the meeting has been found.

³ See footnote 5, Document 113. Haldeman wrote in his diary entry for April 17: “He [Nixon] is very pleased with Rogers testimony on the Hill today. He did a good job, took a hard line, although before he went up, the P was very concerned about whether he would do so. As it turned out, he was really very good.” (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

⁴ Not found.

adequately look, in my opinion, at the long run, the risks. In the short run, it would be a great gesture and we could punish our critics very, very heavily, if we could get them to withdraw from I-Corps across the DMZ. Then we would give up the bombing of North Vietnam and there would be some reduction in fighting and we would go back to the conference tables. All right. The difficulty is that the enemy's capability still to launch significant offensive action is there. That, you know, it doesn't much matter how much time you've got. The difficulty is too that the pressure on the Russians is enormously lifted as far as this confrontation is concerned. Oh sure, we can go to Moscow and we can agree on SALT and a lot of other things. But the point that I make is that having taken the heat that we have already taken for escalation, I think what we have to do is to escalate all the way.

Kissinger: Well, Mr.—

Nixon: Unless, what I'm saying is, that I think the position that you're going to have to be in in Moscow is not the one being willing to back down. In other words, let us sell them, let us sell—Let them sell to us talks for halting the bombing, which is what this really gets down to.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: After all—Now wait a minute. They invaded; that's true. We bombed them; that's true. But when you finally get down to it, we're giving up the bombing and we go back to talks; and pressuring the Russians is not going to be very great. And my view is, what I really want, you know, I want to caution you with Dobrynin: it's going to be, it's going to have to be tougher than that, Henry. At least, right now, the time, you can't let the time flee by, Henry. We have to have the blockade. I don't give a goddamn about the election. We'll blockade those sons-of-bitches and starve them out. And that's what we're going to do.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: I'd rather do that than have any talks going on this summer. Talks this summer are not going to help us.

Kissinger: Well, you have to make this judgment, Mr. President. If—First of all, I agree with you that nothing should be said about this interim solution to the Russians now. That should be the result of a stalemate.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And I'm not going to make any proposition to the Russians now.

Nixon: Sure. I understand. But I just don't think that—

Kissinger: But that should be said in Moscow if it's said anywhere. But, if I may make this suggestion, Mr. President: if we convince the Russians that they, that we are asking something that they cannot in the best

will in the world deliver, then we may force them into brutal preemptive action to bring you down this year. That may be their only hope.

Nixon: I know that.

Kissinger: No, no, but—

Nixon: Meanwhile, we've lost the war.

Kissinger: Well, if they think they can bring you down—I'm just giving you the case for the other side—then all they have to do is endure 6 months of a blockade. That they can probably do.

Nixon: Hm-hmm.

Kissinger: So, what, that interim solution has this advantage, Mr. President. First, it will be seen as a clear defeat for them.

Nixon: You see, that's temporary. Go ahead.

Kissinger: I know it's temporary. Secondly, it gets us through the Russian summit. After all, the reason you can do this now is because of the China summit. And it's just awfully hard to paint you into the position of a warmonger. It gets us through the Russian summit with some notable successes. We can build into the Russian summit a lot of things, like a Middle East settlement, that we have to deliver next year, which they'll be just as reluctant to break next year.

Nixon: Hm-hmm.

Kissinger: Then, Mr. President, after your election, I'd go all out with the North Vietnamese.

Nixon: Yeah, but the point is, we'd still have the war on our hands all summer long. As Haig says, which is the disturbing thing in his memorandum; you read it to me yesterday and I quite agree with him. He says, well, after, we'll hold now; and then we've got to get ready for another offensive in July. We're not going to take any offensive in July.

Kissinger: No, no. No, no, no, no.

Nixon: [unclear] no offensive in July.

Kissinger: No, no. Part of this deal would have to be a reduction in Soviet deliveries and a guarantee that there would be no offensives this year. All of this year. We're not talking about now.

Nixon: If we get that, fine.

Kissinger: We're talking about the rest of—

Nixon: [unclear] I don't mind having a little [unclear] out there [unclear]—

Kissinger: No, no.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: Oh, Mr. President, if we can only get this offensive called off with no promise about July. Nor can we accept—I'd go a step further. We cannot accept a Hanoi comment either; we have to get a Soviet public assurance. Now then this would also change the negotiating

position. Because then I believe, Mr. President, Hanoi would feel that by its own actions—maybe you'll be brought down, but you cannot be brought down by Hanoi's actions. Therefore it is probable that you'll be President after November; that having acted this violently now, there is no telling what you will do in November. And—

Nixon: You know, their gamble is that they can have the war going on and they'll still have the POWs up until November. And that under those circumstances the possibility of our surviving the election is very, very low. You see my point?

Kissinger: I think if they are pulled off this attack now, they, particularly if they get ground down more as they do every day—I mean this deal couldn't happen before May 5 to 10 anyway, in which case much of their offensive would have broken its back anyhow. So I, so I think that for you to do—The reason a blockade will work is if you can endure it. If they think they need only to wait 6 months, they might just stick it out until November. This is what worries me about the blockade, Mr. President. And, you remember, I had some dealing toward it in '69. You weren't postured well diplomatically to do it in '69. And I strongly supported your not doing it. But this is the reason why I think an interim solution in which—But we should throw in the prisoners anyway.

[Omitted here is discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

Kissinger: But I frankly believe, Mr. President, that your enormous skill has been that you have been extraordinarily tough. That if—You walked up to all the tough ones but at the same time maintained a peace posture so that they couldn't put you into the position of just chopping away at you. The reason that people trust you is because they know that you have done everything. And therefore, all things considered, I think it is in our interest not to get the Russian summit knocked off as long as we can do it while preserving our essential integrity in Vietnam. That is the major thing.

Nixon: Yeah. I agree.

Kissinger: And if this Moscow meeting does not work at all—

Nixon: Or maybe we'll blockade in September, you mean?

Kissinger: No. I would think if the Moscow meeting doesn't work then I think we—No, I mean, [if] mining doesn't work, then you might want to go to a blockade.

Nixon: We might have to, you see.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: You can't hold the card.

Kissinger: That's right. I'm not—We certainly should keep the posture that you will go to a blockade. I think we've really got their attention.

Nixon: That's for sure.

Kissinger: But I—

Nixon: Maybe that's all I want you to get back from Dobrynin. And—

Kissinger: We've brought this thing a hell of a long way—

Nixon: I had a very nice visit with the Polish Ambassador. And I appreciate what he's worked out in that respect, but we—

Kissinger: Mr. President.

Nixon: To bring that fucking, for that little ass-hole to come in here, this Polish Ambassador, not that he's a strong man, but for him to come in here this day is fine.⁵ Now they may knock it off, but I don't want to let them.

Kissinger: They won't knock it off.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: The Russians may knock it off but the Poles will do it only if the Russians do. And I don't think the Russians will right away. I think we've got the Russians concerned.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I can tell him, Dobrynin—

Nixon: Is Dobrynin talking about knocking it off now?

Kissinger: No, no.

Nixon: Better not.

Kissinger: No, no.

Nixon: Because if he could get any deal with this, remember I'll move first.

Kissinger: Yeah, but, Mr. President, for me to be received in Moscow 3 days—

Nixon: I agree but—

Kissinger: — after the bombing of Haiphong is unbelievable.

Nixon: Yeah, well, of course, some of the papers this morning were saying that the Russian leaders were out of town over the weekend and that's why they didn't react to the bombing. So, they don't—

Kissinger: Baloney.

Nixon: They know.

Kissinger: We've got this Brezhnev message.⁶ They just don't know anything in our papers.

⁵ Nixon met Polish Ambassador Trampczynski in the Oval Office on April 17 from 10:34 to 10:45 a.m. During the meeting, Nixon formally received and accepted the Polish invitation to visit Warsaw after the Moscow summit. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary)

⁶ Document 110.

Nixon: Thank God. I'll see you later.

Kissinger: Right.⁷

⁷ At 2:15 p.m. Kissinger went to the Old Executive Office Building to brief Nixon on his meeting with Dobrynin. In spite of his hard-line stance on Vietnam, Kissinger reported that Dobrynin was "slobbering all over me" and had "conceded all the agenda items for the summit." According to Kissinger, the damage to Soviet shipping in the Gulf of Tonkin was, in fact, "worse than they're admitting," including the apparent deaths of two Soviet citizens. Nixon: "What about this business about the two Soviet citizens? Look, now if they want to have a reason to break off the summit—" Kissinger: "Mr. President—" Nixon: "—they can use any goddamn line they want." Kissinger: "Mr. President—" Nixon: "If they use it now, then we do have to go hard. You realize then we have no choice." Kissinger: "Mr. President, we've given them so many reasons to break off the summit. If they were looking for a reason—They are in the worst possible position to have a confrontation with us." Nixon: "Why?" Kissinger: "If they [unclear] now, they lose the German treaties, European security conference, they lose the credits, they lose—" Nixon: "Maybe they'd lose the possibility of a Mid-East settlement." Kissinger: "They lose the possibility of a Mid-East settlement. They lose [unclear] the Chinese. And for what? We will never have them in such a position again." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 17, 1972, 2:15–2:28 p.m., Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 331–2)

120. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, April 18, 1972.

SUBJECT

Soviet Reaction to the Vietnamese Situation

From the beginning of Hanoi's offensive until April 10, the Soviets dealt with the military situation in a guarded, reserved manner. Reporting in the Soviet press and in Soviet broadcasts was not extensive, and confined to news report from Hanoi, Paris or Washington. The impression created was one of a limited military operation that was succeeding. Much more emphasis was on US unwillingness to continue the Paris talks and the US bombings. There were no "official" government statements or TASS statements, even though Moscow usually

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 718, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXI. Secret. Sent for information. A notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. Sonnenfeldt forwarded the memorandum, and the texts of Soviet statements analyzed in the memorandum, to Kissinger on April 13. (Ibid.) According to an attached routing form, the memorandum was "noted by Pres" on April 20.

endorses various North Vietnamese protests. The DRV statements were reported but no authoritative announcements were forthcoming from Moscow, although one Soviet official claimed a TASS statement was to have been released on April 8.

The Soviets have been careful to avoid reporting or commenting on any statement concerning the role of Soviet equipment. Though they reported Secretary Laird's statement, they cut out all references to the USSR.²

The first major pronouncement came on April 10 in the communiqué signed by Brezhnev and Erich Honecker as the East German Party Leader was ending his unofficial visit to the USSR.³ In this document the people of the USSR and the GDR (i.e., not the governments) "decisively condemned" US aggressive acts, and there was an expression of "concern" over the situation and solidarity with the Vietnamese, the Laotians and the Cambodians. By Soviet standards, this was not a major statement even though in Brezhnev's name. Considering the situation it was a minimal effort.

Two days later on April 12, the Soviets finally went on the record more definitively in a report issued after the DRV Ambassador called on Brezhnev (somewhat unusual in itself).⁴ The Ambassador thanked Brezhnev for the "large, valuable assistance" to the DRV "for the construction of socialism" (that is, not military aid), and for Soviet support for the struggle of the people of Vietnam.

Brezhnev is reported to have extended "wishes for further success in defending the freedom and independence of their (the Vietnamese) motherland and the construction of socialism" (i.e., only the DRV). *The key passages from Brezhnev*, however, were to "continue to give assistance and support" to "all patriots" of Indochina, and to "resolutely condemn" US aggression in Indochina and "demand an immediate end to the bombing of the DRV."

² As reported by the Embassy in telegram 3265 from Moscow, April 10. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files, 1970–73, POL 27 VIET S)

³ See footnote 6, Document 92.

⁴ On April 13 *Pravda* published the text of the joint statement on the meeting the previous day between Brezhnev and Ambassador Vo Thuc Dong. (*Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXIV, No. 15, May 10, 1972, p. 16) In its analysis of the meeting on April 13, the Office of Current Intelligence (CIA) pointed out that the Soviets had deleted from the public statement any reference to the North Vietnamese request for more aid. "It is uncertain how far this will develop," the analysis concluded, "but authoritative Soviet comment thus far suggest to us that Moscow does feel somewhat constrained by the need to take into account US sensitivities on the eve of the summit. We believe Secretary Butz' unprecedented meeting with Brezhnev was laid on in anticipation of the meeting with the North Vietnamese. The Soviets probably realized that they could not continue to temporize with the North Vietnamese and wished to soften the impact of what the Soviets felt compelled to say on Hanoi's behalf." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 718, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXI)

This seems a rather limited statement that might have been issued any time in the past years. The only slight escalation is the demand for an immediate end to the bombing. Among the omissions in the statement that are perhaps most significant, there are no references to: the Paris talks, halting the war, a political settlement or American withdrawal, and DRV plans to end the war. Considering that this meeting occurred almost two weeks after the offensive began, it would seem a very cool Soviet treatment.

However, on his Turkish visit,⁵ President Podgorny on the same day went beyond Brezhnev in bringing up the question of negotiations. Podgorny criticized Vietnamization and “hypocritical phrases” such as our “love of peace.” He said “one cannot fail to note that the US is actually evading talks in Paris and is expanding its air war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.”

Perhaps more significant, he stated flatly: “*The Soviet Union believes that a political settlement of the problem of Indochina* (based on) the proposals of the DRV offer a reliable and constructive basis.” He added that the “interventionists should leave and allow the people to shape their destiny.” He claimed that support (undefined) for the “just struggle of the people of Indochina promotes international détente . . .” (a rather odd formulation).

In other words, Podgorny and Brezhnev have both generalized their support, and Podgorny emphasized a political settlement.

Other Soviet Moves

This rather careful reaction must be viewed against the background of Soviet policy moves in the past few weeks.

It is a reasonable assumption that Moscow would have had a fairly good notion of what Hanoi planned. And Soviet actions in the period preceding and during the offensive take on a certain significance. Two events are worth noting: the Brezhnev speech of March 20 and Soviet Marshal Batitskiy’s mission to Hanoi just prior to the offensive.⁶

The most important fact of Marshal Batitskiy’s mission is the contrast between the emphasis given by Hanoi to his presence and Moscow’s deemphasis. This suggests a political decision in advance of the offensive to disassociate the USSR from it. Brezhnev, in his March 20 speech, said the USSR “wrathfully condemns the bandit bombings of DRV territory and demands an end to them.” *This passage was cut out*

⁵ Podgorny visited Turkey April 11–17; for text of the joint communiqué, in which the two sides expressed “serious concern” on the situation in Vietnam, see *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXIV, No. 16, May 17, 1972, pp. 8–9 and 32.

⁶ For discussion of Brezhnev’s speech, see Document 65; for an analysis of the Batitskiy visit, see Document 90.

of the printed version. The censoring of the General Secretary suggests that he or his aides knew he would look silly calling for an end to bombing that was not taking place but that later his “demand” to end DRV bombing might look weak.

It is doubtful that the Soviets had any control over the scope or timing of the North Vietnamese offensive. Aware of the general nature, however, they took precautionary measures to limit its damage to the summit prospects. Thus Brezhnev’s optimistic appraisal of the summit in his March 20 speech was reinsurance, as is Soviet agreement to begin the grain talks, lend-lease talks, and to receive in Moscow an American delegation for a second round of the maritime talks. In addition, the Soviets have agreed to resume the talks on incidents at sea, and have proposed moving up the date from May 1 to April 24.

Brezhnev’s reception of Secretary Butz was an unusual gesture in itself (and publicized). He was very general on Vietnam, and he pointed up the warm welcome awaiting you in Moscow.⁷

This does not mean that the Soviets see no gains in the offensive, but the game they may be playing is an intricate and delicate one. To the extent that the bombings of the North increase and are prolonged, the Soviets have to react politically much as they did before the China trip. This risks deterioration of relations with the US. On the other hand, if the American-South Vietnamese position is badly damaged then the Soviets might believe you would be in a weak position at the summit. However, the Soviets have to allow for failure. In this case, by limiting their own political support to Hanoi they might count on escaping without severe consequences for their relations with the US. And should Hanoi intend to resume “serious” negotiations, the Soviets would want to play a diplomatic role, now or at the summit.

Summing up, it seems from the overt evidence that the Soviets held their fire until the military situation began to clarify and, once it became apparent that the offensive had not scored major success, began to ensure that their relations with us would not be damaged, and their association with Hanoi would be limited.

⁷ See Document 101.

121. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 18, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of the military situation in Vietnam, including worldwide reaction to the U.S. bombing campaign.]

Kissinger: Maybe something will come out on the Vietnam side on this trip. I'm not optimistic but, hell, you'll destroy them.

Nixon: Let's talk just a bit about the, before your conversation tomorrow which you will have.² The more I think about it incidentally that—You know Scali's³ getting so concerned about the Chinese, ping-pong team, he and others [are] worrying about whether Moscow is going to get mad and so forth. If they do, we better learn it now.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I mean, if they're going to use this as provocation—The other thing I think we ought, we have to know, is this. That you mustn't have, as I told you, any doubts about the Haiphong strike because we would have been in too weak a position with your going to Moscow if we did not have the strike.

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: You remember—

Kissinger: That's what [unclear]

Nixon: [unclear] why we ordered the goddamn thing.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: We had it in mind, but you remember, we wanted to give them a pop in order to convince Dobrynin—

Kissinger: —that you were out of control.

Nixon: That's right. You told him that last week, is that not true?

Kissinger: Yeah, but—

Nixon: Now, if you had just continued the Laird–Abrams thing, of pounding the South when the weather was good, you realize that wouldn't have scared them at all.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 711–3. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 9:22 to 10 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² Reference may be to Kissinger's meeting with Dobrynin the following afternoon; see Document 126.

³ John Scali, Senior Consultant on Foreign Affairs.

Kissinger: On the contrary, it gives them an incentive to stay in because it makes Hanoi more dependent on them, which is what they want.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: They run no risk whatsoever, because if Hanoi wins they will get the credit and if—

Nixon: And we'll be embarrassed.

Kissinger: That's right. And if Hanoi loses—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —it will become more dependent—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —on them.

Nixon: Having said that, Henry, the—I've been trying to take a longer view too. It seems to me that your position in going to Moscow is very strong. I mean it's strong because of Haiphong. It scares them.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: It scares them that we might do something more.

Kissinger: And because I told them we'd do something by May 1st now—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —if they didn't. So we've got—If I come back without anything, we've got to do something wild next week.

Nixon: Hit them again.

Kissinger: Wild.

Nixon: Hit the same thing.

Kissinger: For several days.

Nixon: That's right. Now, having said that, you know, the problem is that—but I'm trying to keep a broader perspective. There is the chance that we cannot get that. First, that, even if we enlist them, that they will not be able to do enough to get Hanoi to negotiate seriously before November. Let's say we play that game out. All right. Then the real question is what do we do about the summit? Is there something in it for us still? The answer would have to be yes. We would have to go back to our line that the war has to be settled in Hanoi, not in Moscow or Peking. In other words, putting all the pressure we can on Moscow and Peking, but knowing that we have very little. But then we could go back to Moscow in a reasonably strong position due to the fact that we would in the meantime have been goddamn tough on Hanoi and would have beaten their offensive. You see, that's the way the game plan would have to come out. We will have to beat their offensive before we go to Moscow. Let me put it this way. Either out of your trip Moscow begins to help us on the war, or, or we will have had to give Hanoi a hell of a shock in terms of beating their offensive so that I don't

go there hat in hand. Because if we go there—But assuming that that, assuming that game plan, which is possible, assuming that the offensive has been petering out, assuming that we have continued and [are] cracking pretty good. I mean, you see, you've got two, you've got the idea that Moscow, as a result of what we've done, will be triggered into trying to get something under the conference table. I hope so. It might happen. On the other hand, it might not happen. If it might not happen, I think that's what we've got to look at to see what our option is because this will, also [has] got to do a great deal. It seems to me that if it doesn't happen with great reluctance I would have to say we still have to play the Moscow string out. I think we should play it as if we would not go to Moscow unless they give help on Vietnam, openly, publicly.

Kissinger: But that won't be our position next week. Our position next week will have to be, if I come back from Moscow without anything, which the odds favor, that I won't get anything, then—

Nixon: Then what do we do?

Kissinger: Are we just going to subside?

Nixon: Oh, no.

Kissinger: Or are we just going to bomb or blockade, or something like that, them to smithereens? Now, I believe, Mr. President, after what we've cranked up, if we simply back off—

Nixon: We won't. No, no, no. I see, I see what you mean.

Kissinger: I mean, that's the big question. Now, if they give us—As you remember, yesterday I told you we should not lightly knock off the Russian summit.

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: But—

Nixon: We could.

Kissinger: No, I don't think we should do it.

Nixon: The only thing is, I'm thinking that, I'm thinking that the Russian summit may have something in it for us, provided we have given Hanoi a hell of a good bang. That's what I mean.

Kissinger: Yeah, but we haven't given Hanoi a good bang yet.

Nixon: Not yet. Not yet. We've given them enough of a bang for your trip, but not for mine.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: [unclear] That's the magnitude.

Kissinger: Now, for my trip, we're in good shape.

Nixon: Well, you have two choices then. We either have the choice of what we call a 3-day strike kind of an operation, which could be a hell of a thing, you know. Let everything that flies knock the bejeezus out of the things up there. Or we have the choice of a blockade. Now if we have

a blockade, we've got to look down the road and see what the Russians and—What do they have to do? What do they say? Of course, these are the things that you'll have down on your paper, you know.⁴

Kissinger: Well, what I have to do, Mr. President, in Moscow though is to give them the impression that you may well have a blockade.

Nixon: Yeah, I know. I'm just trying to think though—

Kissinger: You'll never get as much—

Nixon: I thoroughly intend to do either the blockade or the strike, you know. We're, you, we were between the two. Yesterday, you were raising the point that the blockade would take too long and we'd be—

Kissinger: You see the trouble—

Nixon: —in confrontation and all that sort of stuff.

Kissinger: You see the trouble—but so would they. You see the trouble is right now we have a plausible force out there.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: If we don't do something with it for 2 months—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —we'll have to start pulling them out again. And—

Nixon: Well, let me tell you what my feeling is, the reason I've gone through this exercise with you. You see what we really confront is if you don't get something out of Moscow probably our only choice is a blockade.

Kissinger: I'm afraid there may be a lot in that.

Nixon: And—but it's a, so maybe it would go on for 6 months. I think the American people would rather have a blockade going on for 6 months than—but with the blockade, would the things give us our prisoners? Or would we have to set it up for free? By the way, I mean, in a clever way. Well, we'll have to see.

[Omitted here is discussion of a meeting that afternoon in the Rose Garden with the table tennis team from the People's Republic of China and public demonstrations against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.]

Nixon: You see, on the blockade, Henry, we've got the force out there to do it. I guess, you know, I can't get over this Laird—⁵

⁴ Document 125.

⁵ Nixon met Laird and Moorer in the Oval Office on April 17 from 5:13 to 5:50 p.m.; Kissinger also attended the meeting. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) A memorandum of conversation, in which Nixon urged Laird to "keep hammering away at the fact of the massive invasion by North Vietnam backed by heavy Soviet equipment," is *ibid.*, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 88, Memoranda for the President, Beginning March 19 [1972]. A tape of the conversation is also *ibid.*, White House Tapes, Conversation among Nixon, Laird, and Moorer, April 17, 1972, 5:13–5:50 p.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 710–4.

Kissinger: You see they [the Soviets] are leery of a confrontation, Mr. President. They ordered all the ships that are coming into Haiphong to slow up.

Nixon: I heard that from Moorer.

Kissinger: I saw—

Nixon: I wonder if that is true.

Kissinger: No, I saw the intercept. I saw the order they sent to their merchant ships not to proceed very—

Nixon: They must be afraid of a blockade.

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: Or mining.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Do you agree with—this is only a technical matter with Moorer. He seemed to favor mining over a blockade.

Kissinger: Well, if you mine, then you may have the problem that they'll send minesweepers down.

Nixon: Then you have to bomb them.

Kissinger: And you have to police them. Mining avoids the problem of daily—

Nixon: —confrontation.

Kissinger: —of daily confrontation with the Russians. That takes care of shipping also with a lot of other countries.

Nixon: Well, mining plus bombing. Blockade. Blockade sounds better diplomatically. You know what I mean. It sounds stronger.

Kissinger: The advantage of—If you blockade, there ought to be, you know, a week of heavy raids to run down their supplies and to reduce, 5 days, 3 days of heavy raids. God, a few more days of raids like we had yesterday and they'd be in, they really hurt.

Nixon: Well, we're prepared to give it to them.

[Omitted here is discussion of political leadership in the Pentagon and of press coverage on the military situation in Vietnam.]

Kissinger: I don't know what the Russians are going to do and indeed I don't know what the Russians can do.

Nixon: Well, look, they desperately, I think, want you, you in, you, I mean, in Moscow.

Kissinger: That's for sure. And they—

Nixon: It's fine if Dobrynin's going with you in that plane. It's just as well.

Kissinger: And they eagerly want the summit. Those—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —three things we know.

Nixon: We've got the one thing. The one thing, let me say, that you can do while you're in Moscow, if you could, the very least you can get out of it is this. All right, the President will come to the summit. You understand? But he wants you to know that before he comes to the summit [phone rings] we are going to blast the living bejeezus out of them and we don't want to hear anything but the most mild [unclear]. Is that clear? You see what I mean?

Kissinger: I don't think I should tell them what we're going to do.

[Omitted here is Nixon's side of a telephone conversation with Laird and further discussion of the meeting with table tennis team from the People's Republic of China and the military situation in Vietnam.]

122. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting¹

Washington, April 18, 1972, 10:01–10:29 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

U Alexis Johnson

William Sullivan

Defense

Kenneth Rush

R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS

Lt. Gen. Richard Knowles

CIA

Richard Helms

George Carver

[*name not declassified*] (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC

Richard Kennedy

John Holdridge

Mark Wandler

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-115, WSAG Minutes, Originals. Top Secret; Sensitive. No drafting information appears on the minutes. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

[Omitted here is the Summary of Conclusions and discussion of newspaper and intelligence reports on the military situation in Vietnam.]

Mr. Kissinger: What about the report about the Russians intensifying their airlift of supplies to North Vietnam via India?² Has that been confirmed?

Mr. Carver: No. We are still checking on this. However, there doesn't seem to be any indication that Soviet planes have been airlifting supplies through India. [2 lines of source text not declassified] As I said before, though, the Soviet flight patterns don't indicate they are moving supplies through India.

Mr. Johnson: (to Mr. Kissinger) Have you seen Moscow's 3568?³ It is consistent with the paper CIA prepared.⁴

Mr. Kissinger: Yes, I've seen that message. It says that Soviets are prepared to give the North Vietnamese all-out support, although they will use muted language.

[Omitted here is discussion of a North Vietnamese statement on negotiations and an Indian statement on the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong.]

Mr. Johnson: You may know that Hogen [Japanese Vice-Foreign Minister]⁵ was in to see me yesterday. He brought up an interesting point—that the Indians had asked the Japanese and Indonesians to conclude a treaty with them—similar to their treaty with the Soviets.⁶

Mr. Helms: This would be a treaty of friendship, wouldn't it?

Mr. Johnson: Yes. The Japanese point was that they thought the Indians were acting as the cat's-paw for the Soviets.

Mr. Kissinger: Isn't it also a consultation treaty?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Helms: It's interesting that the Soviets are going flat-out, trying to conclude as many friendship treaties as possible.

Mr. Johnson: Brezhnev recently called for a non-aggression conference, sort of an Asian Security Conference.⁷ Hogen thinks this subject may come up in Moscow, too.

² In an April 15 memorandum to Kissinger, John Holdridge of the NSC staff summarized an unconfirmed report from the U.S. Defense Attaché in New Delhi that the Soviet Union was transporting military equipment, particularly surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), to North Vietnam via India. (Ibid., Box H-085, WSAG Meeting, Vietnam, 4/17/72)

³ Document 115.

⁴ Document 117.

⁵ Brackets in the source text.

⁶ Reference is to the 20-year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and India signed in New Delhi on August 9, 1971.

⁷ Brezhnev issued an appeal for a conference on collective security in Asia during his address to the trade unions in Moscow on March 20; see Document 65.

Mr. Kissinger: Would the Japanese want to sign a treaty of friendship with us?

Mr. Johnson: They don't know. Right now they see the Soviets trying to use them in Asia.

Mr. Kissinger: Didn't Brezhnev suggest an Asian Security Conference in 1969?⁸

Mr. Johnson: Yes. The Soviets asked Asian countries for their opinions of the idea. Most countries went back to the Soviets, asking them to flesh out the idea a little more, but the Soviets never did that.

Mr. Kissinger: Isn't the real Soviet aim to encircle China?

Mr. Johnson: Of course.

Mr. Kissinger: An encirclement of China would certainly be the result of Indian consultation treaties with other Asian countries.

Mr. Johnson: The Soviets are clearly trying to encircle China, and India is acting as the Soviet cat's-paw. Hogen said the Japanese gave the Indians a flat turndown. They want nothing to do with the Indians in their part of the world.

Mr. Sullivan: The British put out a good statement yesterday.⁹

Mr. Kissinger: I know. Secretary Rogers laid down the line perfectly on negotiations.¹⁰ I don't think we need any further guidance. We should just follow the Secretary's line.

Mr. Johnson: We sent out some guidance, based on the Secretary's testimony yesterday, to the field.

Mr. Kissinger: The President was delighted with the Secretary's performance. Does anyone have objections to what the Secretary said?

No objections.

Mr. Kissinger: We should just follow his line.

Mr. Rush: Right.

Mr. Sullivan: What should Bob [McCloskey]¹¹ say? Should he say there is no truth to the stories in the papers today?

Mr. Kissinger: There is no truth to them. He should say we will not comment on tactical operations.

Mr. Johnson: The Secretary made a point yesterday of saying that we will not say what we will not do, with two exceptions. We will not

⁸ Brezhnev also advocated the establishment of "a system of collective security in Asia" during an address before the international conference of Communist parties in Moscow on June 8, 1969. For text of the speech, see *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, July 2, 1969, vol. XXI, No. 23, pp. 3–17.

⁹ Not found.

¹⁰ See footnote 5, Document 113.

¹¹ Brackets in the source text.

send ground forces back to Vietnam, and we will not use nuclear weapons.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. That's a good line, and we should follow it. Has CIA made an analysis of how far the Soviets will really push in Vietnam?

Mr. Helms: No.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we get that tomorrow?

Mr. Helms: Yes. We've tried to handle this in a roundabout way, but we haven't addressed ourselves to that one simple point.

Mr. Kissinger: The Soviets would like to pay no price in Vietnam and they would also like the offensive to succeed. The question is how far are they willing to go? So far, we have only engaged in some preliminary sparring, and we shouldn't expect them to indicate doubt at this point. They followed a hard line well into the Cuban missile crisis.

Mr. Helms: Do you want us to estimate how far they see us going?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. We also want an estimate of how far they will go in backing Hanoi. And how far could we go, for example, within limits, before there would be a conflict? I realize this is conjectural, but I think we need these estimates.¹² We'll meet tomorrow at 10:00 a.m.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger's plans to visit Tokyo and of Japanese politics.]

¹² The minutes summarized the conclusion on this point as follows: "CIA should continue to check on reports that the Soviets are airlifting supplies to North Vietnam, via India. CIA should also provide an estimate tomorrow of how far we and the Soviets can go in Vietnam before we risk a confrontation." For the estimate, see Document 124.

123. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 18, 1972.

Nixon: What I am concerned about is something you talked about [unclear]. I thought that when you talked to Dobrynin, you told me,

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 711–5. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 11 to 11:24 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

you gave him assurance that we would not hit the Hanoi–Haiphong area—

Kissinger: That is correct.

Nixon:—while you’re there. Well, the feeling that we’re going to sort of keep to the level relatively and then down, let me tell you, that we have a desperately difficult problem with our domestic situation if there is any indication—

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon:—that we aren’t bombing the hell out of them now.

Kissinger: No, no.

Nixon: It would be just—You see, what ruined Johnson was to start and stop; You remember how many bombing halts he had. Now we cannot be in that position, even though you’re going, because you don’t know what you’re going to, what we’ll be doing here. What I’d like to see is in this next week, I mean this week while you’re gone, I think on the battlefield, I think everything that can fly should be hitting the whole battlefield, including the stuff up to the 19th Parallel.

Kissinger: Of course.

[Omitted here is discussion of the military situation in Vietnam.]

Nixon: I don’t want anybody in the Haiphong–Hanoi. I think that’s a fair deal with the Russians. Incidentally, you’ve got to pick up on the point that Bob [Haldeman] told me that Butz feels he’s got to report to me on his trip.² So has he reported to you?

Kissinger: No, I’ll talk to him today.

Nixon: Well, no, I’ll see him say around 3:30. He’ll be in here to finish it up because—

Kissinger: At 3:30 I’m—

Nixon: Well—

Kissinger:—going to be—³

Nixon: Well, you talk to Bob. You talk to Bob. I want you to be there because he’s becoming a great problem—I told Bob that the great problem in sending anybody abroad is, if it’s Romney, or Butz, or [unclear], or anyone they let him come in to report—

Kissinger: Well, and also—

² For discussion of Butz’ trip to Moscow, including the meeting among Butz, Nixon, and Kissinger that afternoon, see Document 101.

³ Kissinger left the White House at 3:45 p.m. to meet Huang Hua, Permanent Representative of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations, in New York. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule) For information on the meeting that evening between Kissinger and Huang, see footnote 3, Document 116.

Nixon: They should report to you; they shouldn't report to me. But they don't know it. But anyway, look it's an interesting little flap. Beam thinks that Brezhnev is personally not hostile to the President; and he, Butz, is convinced that Brezhnev is personally hostile to the President, says that he didn't like the way that the President conducted himself officially. Well, now it doesn't mean anything. Goddamn it. Beam doesn't—Beam's evaluation I don't give one shit about. He doesn't know anything. Or Butz's even less.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: I mean Brezhnev—You see these people are all, they're all confusing this business of personal hostility. Who in the hell cares? I don't make decisions based on whether a person is still hostile or not. He is an enemy. I know that. Isn't that the silliest—What, why does Beam—? Oh, Christ. What gets me now though is how our people are so goddamned naïve.

Kissinger: He had—

Nixon: Brezhnev. Brezhnev is, he might, if he would—Whether Butz is right or Beam is right is irrelevant. And anyhow we'll have to listen respectfully to him because he's a nice fellow and he's trying to do well. But, goddamn, why do they have to get into this?

Kissinger: Well, Butz is a bit of an egomaniac. He goes there. We told him before he went that this was to be the President's show. He doesn't know the big game.

Nixon: Yeah. He wants to [unclear] a press conference and announce the grain deal?

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Well, he's not going to do that. He didn't do it, did he?

Kissinger: He didn't do it but it was very good. We had to let a lot of blood—

Nixon: Did we?

Kissinger: —to get it done.

Nixon: Well, you see, Henry, isn't it amusing when, when I'm going to see Butz because [unclear] that he and Beam disagree as to whether Brezhnev is personally hostile to the President? The point is that has nothing to do with it.

Kissinger: I believe that Brezhnev has committed his whole prestige to this, to this policy. And to see what—

Nixon: As a Communist, Dobrynin is personally hostile to the President. You know that.

Kissinger: Oh, personally—

Nixon: Totally. Totally.

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: And I am personally hostile to him. But in a, but in a social way, we get along fine.

Kissinger: The vitality of your foreign policy is shown—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger:—by the fact that you could knock off, you could attack Hanoi and Haiphong and get really only the most mild, mumbling—

Nixon: To this point.

Kissinger: No, now it's not going to happen anymore. Because today in China—for 2 days they didn't cover it in the press at all. Today they have an editorial in the *People's Daily* which was so mild. And then when they protest about over-flying them, instead of making it public they send it through the secret channel,⁴ and they say one plane violated, they give the time and they don't say you must stop the bombing of Haiphong.

[Omitted here is a brief exchange on Democratic criticism of the bombing campaign in Vietnam.]

Nixon: The timing basically was: we didn't pick the time. Son-of-a-bitch. They attacked. That is the provocation.

Kissinger: Mr. President, I must tell you I know no President who would have had the guts to do it now.

Nixon: That's what Laird thinks.

Kissinger: To do it with a—

Nixon: They think it's wrong to do it politically. Or isn't that really what they're—?

Kissinger: To do it with an invitation to Moscow for you in the pocket, and a secret invitation to me, it really shows a lot of gall. They invite us on Thursday⁵—I mean on Thursday they make it definite and on Saturday we clobber Haiphong to tell them, "All right, you bastards."

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: "This is the game that's going to be played in Moscow." But it so strengthens my hand in Moscow. That it was a risk that had to be taken.

Nixon: You couldn't have gone.

Kissinger: I could've gone but in a very weak position.

Nixon: Well, in a position of only talking about the summit.

⁴ That afternoon Huang Hua met Peter Rodman in New York to deliver a note protesting the recent entry of a U.S. aircraft into Chinese airspace over Hainan Island.

⁵ April 13.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Now we're in the position of talking about Vietnam. Oh, the only other thing I wanted to tell you. It seems to me, Henry, that the least you should get out of your game with the Russians is that when we return, that the President should be able to announce that Vietnam would be first on the agenda at the Moscow summit. You get my point? That would put it to them hard. Why not? Just—understand, I'm not, I'm not concluding this. Let's discuss this tomorrow. But, you see, anything like that that would come out of your trip—

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon:—that even if you would get only that, even though you don't get a settlement, if we could say, "Vietnam would be on the agenda of our discussion." Now that, of course, makes it necessary for us to get something out of Vietnam in the summit.

Kissinger: It would be—The only hesitation I have, Mr. President—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger:—is we, they are now scared. They have to be.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: You've got a massive armada there. We have to make sure they're not just playing for time.

Nixon: Yeah. So maybe they would agree to that.

Kissinger: Well no, this is playing for time; this gives them 5 weeks.

Nixon: Yeah, yeah. Oh, no, no. I'm just thinking though—

Kissinger: No, no. We—

Nixon: I think, I'm thinking that when you return, if you've got nothing, we've got to bomb the hell out of them.

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: Or blockade.

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: One of the two.

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: If we blockade them, do you think there'll be a summit?

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: Well, then do you think we should take that risk? That's the real danger.

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: We may have to.

Kissinger: You and I should act towards everybody—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger:—as if we were going right off the cliff.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: That's the only way we can make it work.

[Omitted here is discussion of political leadership in the Pentagon and of the military situation in Vietnam.]

Kissinger: Joe Kraft has an article this morning. Considering that he's violently opposed to everything we're doing, it's very mild. Of course, he's saying again that we should knock off the summit. Oh yeah. The Democrats would like nothing better.

Nixon: He's so desperate to want to knock off the summit.

Kissinger: Of course.

Nixon: Isn't he—

Kissinger: But it's helped our game with—

Nixon: The Chinese summit killed him.

Kissinger: Yeah. But it helped us with the Russians.

Nixon: Yeah. The Chinese summit killed him. He knows the Russian summit will help us. He's desperately trying to knock it off, isn't he?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Isn't that what Kraft is trying to do?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Son-of-a-bitch. Wouldn't he die if he—? Well, anyway, we'll see. The Russians are going to have to have this summit, Henry. They are, because [unclear] I think that we must have no illusions after your conversation yesterday that if they don't have the summit, we have no other choice than to blockade. I don't really see any other choice.

Kissinger: That isn't going to be part—oh no, that's clear but what isn't clear is what—

Nixon: If you don't get anything, what—

Kissinger: If we don't get anything, whether we then blockade—and we can directly knock off the summit.

Nixon: If we knock off the summit. That's right.

Kissinger: That's the question.

Nixon: That's the tough one. Well, we may. We may. Because we sure aren't going to let them knock it off if we can help it.

Kissinger: Well, we'll know by Sunday what there is.

Nixon: Do you have that note [unclear] North Vietnamese?

Kissinger: No, but that I wouldn't expect. If you think about it, Mr. President, I gave Dobrynin a note—⁶

Nixon: Yeah.

⁶ See Document 103.

Kissinger: —for the North Vietnamese between our first and second wave—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —of attacks. That note must have reached Hanoi the day that Haiphong was burning. And for Russia to transmit a note to them is, in itself must be, an unsettling experience for them because—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —up to now Russia has taken—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —that they wouldn't, that they wouldn't [unclear] while the bombing was going on. But they never—You remember that for 3 years we tried to get them engaged and they never did it.

Nixon: Well, we shall see. I'm not sure it will go to that. It seems to me though if you don't get—Well, we'll have to judge it by what you get. But I think that the credibility of our position if you come back with nothing, that the mountain [unclear] produces a mouse, would be totally impaired. If only the—only alternate to blockade was the massive bombing—

Kissinger: I agree.

Nixon: That we might do.

Kissinger: That is better than a blockade, because with massive bombing we might still have the summit.

Kissinger: Exactly. Exactly.

Nixon: They have got to know if you come back with nothing that the man in the White House is going to go berserk.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: Is that what you're going to do?

Kissinger: Yes.⁷

⁷ Kissinger called Dobrynin at 2:48 p.m. on April 18 to discuss the handling of lend-lease negotiations. Kissinger: "On the lend lease negotiations you people are linking the two—financial and MFN which our delegation is not authorized to do at this point. Our original proposal shows you combine it to the sums and so forth. You and I understand that when Patolichev come here you will link them together . . ." Dobrynin: "You see, Henry, while in Moscow they give it as a matter of principle to link it in a way . . . what you mention. And I am prepared to tell them once more. Patolichev will be here on the 7th of May so I am sure he will discuss it privately with [Nixon?]." Kissinger: "I am trying to get these present discussions off a stalemate course. Look, here we are prepared to look at this matter with an understanding rather than say, 'No, we are not going to discuss it.'" (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 371, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

124. Intelligence Memorandum Prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency¹

No. 0856/72

Washington, April 18, 1972.

SUBJECT

Moscow's Position in the Current Vietnam Situation

1. Soviet military aid has been indispensable in arming North Vietnam with the capability of mounting its present offensive. Yet we think it wrong to conclude from this that Moscow has conspired with Hanoi over the last year to bring about exactly the present state of affairs. In fact, in their strategic planning the North Vietnamese have taken pains to keep both the Soviets and the Chinese at arms length, fearing to be drawn into a bargaining relationship which would invite the use of foreign leverage and compromise the integrity of their national policy-making. Instead, they have relied upon the obligations of Communist solidarity, and even more upon the rivalry between Moscow and Peking, to assure the necessary flow of supplies while keeping major decisions about the war in their own hands.

2. The Soviets clearly have not been unwitting of the buildup of North Vietnamese strength over the past year. But they have long been committed to military support of the DRV, and at least some of the aid agreements covering Soviet-supplied matériel being used in the present offensive were almost certainly made before the Soviets arranged the Moscow summit. In the event, the precise timing of the North Vietnamese offensive has highlighted the contradiction in Soviet policy between the desire to support its ally and the desire to engage the US in a summit meeting. But it would have been extremely difficult in the second half of 1971, as a summit began to take shape, to muster a majority of the Soviet collective leadership behind the proposition that North Vietnam should be pressed to stand down, particularly since there could have been no assurance that Hanoi would comply, or that Peking would not increase its aid to fill the gap. At the same time, the improvement in Sino-US relations was increasing the Soviet stake in its own summit policy.

Present Soviet Objectives

3. The Soviets still deem it essential to maintain, both in posture and in reality, their support of North Vietnam. Their commitment of

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-085, WSAG Meeting, Vietnam, 4/17/72. Secret; Sensitive. According to the minutes of the WSAG meeting on April 19, the participants all agreed that the memorandum was "very good" but failed to discuss its conclusions in detail. (Ibid., Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals)

prestige is heavy and long-standing. To break ranks now would expose them to telling criticism from Peking and Hanoi, arouse contempt and misgivings among other Communist states, and risk their prospects for a substantial future role in Southeast Asia. Further, they believe that, if they drew back now, the US would conclude that it had bested the Soviet Union in an important contest of will, and that they would in consequence be at a considerable disadvantage in the summit bargaining. All these concerns will be weighing upon the Soviets as they canvass ways to contain the Vietnamese situation in order to permit the summit meeting to go forward. In the process, however, they will want to preserve the chances for eventual success of Hanoi's cause, even though they do not wish that cause to be pushed, at the present juncture, to limits which jeopardize larger Soviet interests.

Present Soviet Options

4. One Soviet option is to wait—to hope that the US will forebear from further strikes in the deep north, that the fighting will slow down in the South, and that by mid-May Vietnam will have receded sufficiently into the background to permit the summit to take place in the atmosphere originally intended. This is in fact what the Soviets are doing now, with their restrained public statements, their protest carefully confined to the fate of their ships in Haiphong, and their willingness to continue ongoing bilateral talks. But this is probably no more than a holding action as the Soviet leaders debate their future course; they probably do not expect that either Hanoi or Washington will back down of its own volition. Thus they will be considering how they might work on both parties to bring the situation under control.

5. With respect to Hanoi, interrupting military shipments is not a realistic Soviet option. Moscow knows that even an immediate and total cut-off would not affect North Vietnamese capabilities on the southern battlefields during the next five weeks. It almost certainly calculates that Hanoi would fight on, and that Moscow would have to suffer all the consequences described above in paragraph 3. In fact, Hanoi may choose the present occasion to ask for additional assistance, in part intending to put Soviet support to the test, and the USSR would probably feel compelled to meet the request.

6. From the viewpoint of its relations with Hanoi, the USSR's best option is to encourage any interest which might appear in a new start on negotiations. This is a delicate matter. Moscow will be acutely aware that pressure on North Vietnam to alter its negotiating position is likely to be both dangerous and futile. While the Soviets might try delicately to put any proposals passing from Washington to Hanoi in a positive light, we do not believe that they would press their ally to accept terms which the North Vietnamese considered a compromise of their basic position.

7. With respect to the US, the USSR will not have similar inhibitions about commending DRV negotiating proposals. But it will not have much expectation that any proposals from either side will resolve the crisis soon. It will therefore be searching for ways to generate additional pressures on the US to de-escalate its attacks upon the North within a negotiating framework acceptable to Hanoi.

8. The means of pressure available to them are limited. They could quickly insert limited air or naval forces into the area, thereby posing the threat of a Soviet-US military confrontation. But this would be a highly risky move, leaving to the US the initiative of whether to engage inferior Soviet forces. We think that these risks would, in the Soviet view, exceed their stakes. Thus they would probably choose instead to create a political linkage between Vietnam and other problems of priority interest to the US, threatening that the US will suffer in other ways if it persists in unacceptable attacks upon North Vietnam. Moscow would calculate that this course would have the advantage of mobilizing domestic US opinion against the President's Vietnam policy.

9. At some point, therefore, we expect the Soviets to begin to intimate to the US that bilateral US-USSR relations will be deeply affected by further such US attacks. They will start to do this when they conclude that the US intends, not merely to make a limited manifestation of its willingness to bomb the populated north, but to persist in this course. They have a variety of ways to pursue this tactic. They might gradually introduce a more threatening tenor into their public statements; they might pass private statements through intelligence or other channels; they might begin to drag their feet in SALT or other negotiating forums; they might make a blunt, high-level approach. Whatever the tactics, the message they would be seeking to convey would be that, if deep bombing raids on North Vietnam were to continue, the USSR could not receive the US President on 22 May.

10. In our judgment, this would be a serious message, not a bluff. We believe that in fact the collective leadership would find it both easier and preferable *not* to receive the President while the US is attacking the DRV on the scale of the past weekend.

11. If matters came to this pass, there would probably be considerable debate among the Soviet leaders as to whether they should confine themselves to postponing the summit (and other bilateral talks), in order to limit the damage, or convert their frustration into a general recasting of their policy toward the US in the direction of invective and hostility. Proponents of the former course would argue that Soviet interests of real import—primarily arms control and increased trade—were worth salvaging, and that it would be fruitless as well as demeaning to defer to anticipated Chinese criticism. Opponents of this view, perhaps including some who harbored earlier reservations about

summitry, would argue for a sharp reversal on the grounds that this would fortify the USSR's position in the Communist world, would not seriously damage the Soviet position in Europe, and might even improve it in the Middle East and South Asia. They would further argue that this course would strengthen domestic US criticism of an American Vietnam policy which could be represented as having sabotaged the summit. We are inclined to think that the former view would prevail, but the issue might become entwined in factional struggle, with unpredictable results.

A Special Contingency

12. A US attempt to close the port of Haiphong, by mining or blockade, would pose an issue of a different order. The Soviets would perceive this as a direct challenge to themselves. To the rest of the world, it would appear in much the same light (during the missile crisis of 1962, once the US announced a naval quarantine, Cuba became incidental).

13. We see little likelihood that the Soviets would contest such a measure with force, say, by providing naval escorts for their Haiphong-bound ships. The local military balance overwhelmingly favors the US. The issue would not be so grave as to lead the Soviets to run the risks of provoking a military counter-confrontation elsewhere in the world. Instead, we believe that they would withdraw the invitation to the President, probably in a hostile and acrimonious manner. Thereafter, they would take other retaliatory steps, perhaps including a controlled testing of any blockade. Whatever the specific measures they attempted, the Soviets would almost certainly issue grave warnings and attempt to create the impression that a major world crisis could soon result from the US action.

Conclusions

14. In sum, we believe that the USSR will continue its political support to North Vietnam in the present situation. It will probably feel compelled to meet new requests for military aid. It will wish to contain tensions so that the May summit can take place, and to this end it will want to facilitate any US-North Vietnamese negotiations which might promise an early resolution. But it will not push Hanoi to alter its negotiating position substantially, fearing to forfeit its position in Vietnam in a futile effort. If US bombing continues deep inside North Vietnam, the Soviets will warn that they cannot hold the summit meeting as scheduled. If the bombing continues in the face of these warnings, they are likely to postpone the summit and might turn to a hostile line vis-à-vis the US across the board. If Haiphong is mined or blockaded, the more extreme of these reactions is likely, and a major Soviet-American crisis would be at hand.