

Summit in the Balance: U.S.-Soviet Relations and the Decision to Mine Haiphong, April 26–May 12, 1972

171. Editorial Note

At 10 p.m. on April 26, 1972, President Nixon addressed the nation in a televised speech on Vietnam. Nixon announced that withdrawals of American troops from Vietnam would continue, formal peace negotiations in Paris would resume, and air and naval attacks on North Vietnam would not cease while North Vietnamese forces remained engaged in offensive action in South Vietnam. Although written by his speechwriters, Nixon personally revised the text of the speech and included the following passage tying the North Vietnamese Spring Offensive to other global issues:

“Let us look at what the stakes are—not just for South Vietnam, but for the United States and for the cause of peace in the world. If one country, armed with the most modern weapons by major powers, can invade another nation and succeed in conquering it, other countries will be encouraged to do exactly the same thing—in the Mideast, in Europe, and in other international danger spots. If the Communists win militarily in Vietnam, the risk of war in other parts of the world would be enormously increased. But if, on the other hand, Communist aggression fails in Vietnam, it will be discouraged elsewhere, and the chance for peace will be increased.”

Towards the end of the speech, the President commented on the prospects for the Moscow summit:

“Earlier this year I traveled to Peking on an historic journey for peace. Next month I shall travel to Moscow on what I hope will also be a journey for peace. In the 18 countries I have visited as President I have found great respect for the Office of the President of the United States. I have reason to expect, based upon Dr. Kissinger’s report, that I shall find that same respect for the office I hold when I visit Moscow.”

The full text of the speech is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, pages 550–554. Drafts of earlier versions of the speech containing Nixon’s handwritten modifications are in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President’s Personal Files, Box 74, President’s Speech File, Wednesday, April 26, 1972, Vietnam Report. In his memoirs Nixon described his address in the following manner: “It was a tough speech, and afterward I wished that I had made it even tougher.” See *RN: Memoirs*, page 593.

172. Editorial Note

On April 27, 1972, the Washington Special Actions Group, chaired by Deputy Assistant to the President Alexander Haig, met in the White House Situation Room from 11:30 a.m. to 12:26 p.m. to discuss the impact on East-West relations of the domestic political crisis in West Germany. Four hours earlier, Chancellor Willy Brandt narrowly fended off by two votes a motion of “no confidence” submitted by opposition leader Rainer Barzel. However, this margin had left the Brandt government in a precarious position in the Bundestag, particularly on the pending vote for ratification of the Moscow and Warsaw treaties. At their April 27 meeting, WSAG members assessed the prospects for mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR), a Conference of European Security, and the upcoming Moscow summit in light of these developments:

“Mr. Johnson: We haven’t had any time to get the reaction from abroad.

“Mr. Rush: The best news the President could have gotten was the vote in the Bundestag.

“Gen. Haig: In a sense, though, the vote could encourage the Soviets to get tougher.

“Mr. Rush: All this is part of the East-West fabric. The situation could have taken a serious turn for the worse if Brandt’s government had fallen. And that in turn would have serious implications on such things as CES and MBFR. It would all be reflected in the Summit, which would undoubtedly not turn out well.

“Gen. Haig: It’s a question of how you assess the Soviets’ confidence. Is it better that they be worried at the time of the Summit, or is it better that they be confident?

“Mr. Rush: The Soviets made major concessions in order to have the Brandt government stay in power and in order to get the treaties ratified. If things were to turn sour with a Barzel government, there would be no ratification. And there would be serious implications with other things, such as CES. In fact, there could very well be a serious revanchist attack on Germany. I’m sure the President’s trip to Moscow would be affected.

“Mr. Johnson: I agree.

“Mr. Sullivan: Murrey Marder of *The Washington Post* picked up the Katushev story in the late edition today. He says he got it from diplomatic sources. I wonder where.

“Gen. Haig: From the Soviets, perhaps?

“Mr. Sullivan: I don’t think so. Besides the U.S., who else knows about this? Marder was doing a story on Henry’s press conference. Citing this as a diplomatic straw in the wind, he said that Katushev left

Moscow at generally the same time as Henry did. I wonder where he got this information.

“Mr. Carver: We’ve had a very tight distribution.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals)

Assistant to the President Kissinger telephoned Dobrynin twice on April 29 regarding the German matter. The transcript of the first conversation at 11:55 a.m. included the following exchange:

“K: Anatoliy, we have the German problem I want to discuss. Our information is that the CDU may be looking for a way out of the German treaties.

“D: Barzel?

“K: If we can get the votes delayed a little bit. One way is by looking for a face-saving formula by which there can be a minor concession. They want language from us asking for the restoration of bipartisanship in Germany. We are asking Brandt if he wants us to do it. We are also asking you.

“D: I will have to check.

“K: We have not answered the communications from Barzel. He is proposing that we in some form write him and say we hope he restores the spirit of bipartisanship.

“D: Not any specific question mentioned, but bipartisanship on treaties?

“K: Then he would ask for some additional minor concession about ratification. Then he will make a very reasonable proposal and that enables the treaties to go through. On the other hand, we have not replied. If we reply now, it may delay the vote on May 4. When you are in direct communication with Brezhnev you can ask what he wants—say I have just gotten a message to check Gromyko or Brezhnev’s judgment in Moscow. We want to work cooperatively with you.

“D: It is very important now.

“K: None of this is known to our people. Keep this in mind. You understand the problem.

“D: I understand; it is clear. They will appreciate your call in Moscow.

“K: I would like Mr. Brezhnev to know that we sent yesterday a message to Brandt congratulating him on [avoiding passage of] a vote of “no confidence”. He can use that.

“D: From the President?

“K: Yes. Our people will recognize that as positive.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

At 12:15 p.m. on April 29, Kissinger telephoned Dobrynin again. According to the transcript, they again discussed Germany:

“K: You see, we are practically going to do . . .

“D: What?

“K: One other thing we want Gromyko’s judgment on. We were prepared to say something in general along lines we discussed yesterday, on Monday. Under these conditions it may precipitate a vote. Brandt may lose.

“D: You mean before?

“K: If he wants us to follow Barzel’s suggestion, this may mean delays in the vote. We will hold that with a statement until we hear reply from Brandt.

“D: You will ask him about statement from White House—Barzel—you are going to ask him too?

“K: No. I just want to explain to Gromyko the reason we are holding up on statement until we have the reply from Brandt [is] because practical consequences of our making statement might be to precipitate vote on Thursday and it may not be desirable. If we get reply from Brandt before Monday, we will make it Monday.

“D: I understand. You will just await the reply from Brandt. You will give this to Barzel. And second, you will make a statement.

“K: If we write this for Barzel, we wouldn’t make a public statement.

“D: Yes. If he says he doesn’t like Barzel, you will not make a public statement.

“K: We will not get into position that we are—in way of preliminary agreement—and we want it to go into effect—or something like that.

“D: Thank you. I will send a telegram.

“K: Good.” (Ibid.)

During a May 9 telephone conversation with Dobrynin, Kissinger stated: “I have just talked to Bahr and we’ve also been in touch with Barzel, and I think we can assure now that the treaty will be ratified by tomorrow evening.” (Ibid.) On May 9 representatives from both the West German Cabinet and the principal opposition party did submit a resolution on the Eastern treaties. The vote in the Bundestag was postponed until May 17, at which time the treaty was approved. For further documentation on U.S.-German relations during this period, see *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume XL, Germany and Berlin, 1969–1972.

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

Washington, April 27, 1972.

SUBJECT

US-Soviet Bilateral Negotiations—Next Steps on 1) Science and Technology and 2) Environment

As I mentioned to you, we are now confronted with some urgent operational decisions on the science and technology and environmental negotiations with the Soviets if agreements are to be completed for the Moscow visit. We can always drag our feet later, if necessary.

Science and Technology. OST and its Soviet counterparts would appear to be ready to reach agreement on necessary language for an Agreement in Principle to be announced during the Summit on the US-Soviet decision to establish a Joint Commission on Science and Technology. The Soviets have given us a draft agreement; David's people have given the Soviet Embassy their technical comments; and David has a draft statement he is ready to negotiate with the Soviets.

David and his principal staffer on this issue depart tomorrow on a two-week swing through Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. Dobrynin has now suggested to them that they stop in Moscow on the way back to tie up loose ends on a science and technology agreement in principle.

It should be kept in mind that we are faced with the bureaucratic problem of State's non-involvement at this point. State's lawyers will have to look over any language before it is actually agreed to at the Summit. Perhaps the best way to handle this at this point would be to have David stop in Moscow, negotiate draft ad referendum language, and, upon his return to the US coordinate approval of the language with State and the White House.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 718, Country Files, Europe, USSR, XXI-A, April 1972 (continued). Secret; Eyes Only; Outside the System. Sent for immediate action. Kissinger initialed approval of both decisions. Attached to an April 29 memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, was David's statement as approved on April 29 and text of a statement authorizing Science Adviser to the President Edward David to engage in discussion in Moscow. (Ibid.) Other bilateral issues are assessed in memoranda from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger of April 26 (on natural gas) and of April 29 (on Lend-Lease repayment). (Both *ibid.*) Attached to a memorandum from NSC staff secretary Jeanne Davis to Eliot, May 23, is an April 27 memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, on nuclear fuel supply policy. (Ibid., Box 719, Country File, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXII, May 1972)

Environment. As you know, Train² and State have worked together on an exchange of environmental draft agreements with the Soviets, and the Soviets have suggested that 3 or 4 technical people come to Moscow to work out a pre-Summit draft for approval and implementation at the Summit. (*Note:* The suggestion is that an environmental agreement—not agreement in principle—be signed at the Summit.) State and CEQ agree with the Soviet suggestion, and CEQ member Gordon MacDonald is ready to lead a US negotiating team. I understand that he has called you; he has called me at least three times asking for a decision. Again, since State and CEQ are agreed, perhaps MacDonald should be given the OK to go to Moscow.

² Russell Train, chairman, Council on Environmental Quality.

174. Editorial Note

From 1:10 to 2:45 p.m. on April 28, 1972, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger, met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin for lunch in the Map Room at the White House to discuss several issues, including the tentative verbal agreement on submarine-based launched missiles. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule) No substantive record of the meeting has been found. Kissinger discussed the meeting in a telephone call later that day with Chief of Staff H.R. Halde- man. Kissinger suggested that the Soviets, through Dobrynin, had made a major move on the issue of submarine-launched ballistic mis- siles (SLBMs):

“HAK: The President is in the Bahamas and I am having a prob- lem. We have the SALT thing, and I had everybody in position. Every- one is for it. At the end of the Verification Panel meeting, Smith was opposing to come up with the Soviets. He comes out with a totally dif- ferent proposal which he works out with Rogers. If we surface this, the Soviets will know we are [bluffing] and the President called off the deadlock. This puts [Admiral] Moorer in a bad position because he has to go for the stronger position because he can’t be on the record as go- ing for the softer side. The President must get credit for it and we have to get this agreement. If there is some bleeding coming into Key Bis- cayne, I wanted to tell you why. This is exactly like the Berlin deal. This is a very good deal.

“BH: No question the President is sold on it, too.

“HAK: If you can keep Rogers from getting to him before I explain it to him.

“BH: If Bill calls, I will say that I have to get to him first and that the President said that we shouldn’t budge on it.” (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Haldeman, April 28, 6:30 p.m.; *ibid.*, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

Immediately following the conversation with Haldeman, Kissinger telephoned Ambassador Gerard Smith. As the response from the American side on the SLBM issue, Smith suggested: “We can agree in principle to a five-year SLBM freeze under which additional launchers could be built as replacements for SLBM’s and old ICBM’s.” (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Smith, April 28, 6:40 p.m.; *ibid.*) The next morning Kissinger and Smith again discussed the issue and Kissinger promised to gain the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the new position on SLBMs. (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Smith, April 29, 11:20 a.m.; *ibid.*)

President Nixon was on holiday in Key Biscayne, Florida, and flew to Grand Cay, the Bahamas, the afternoon of April 28. He returned to Key Biscayne the next day. On April 30 he flew to Texas for a brief stay at the ranch of Secretary of the Treasury John Connally and arrived back in Washington on May 2. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary) On the morning of April 29 the President and Kissinger discussed SALT on the telephone. An excerpt of the conversation reads:

“RN: Did you get the message?

“HAK: Yes, and we sent one back. It is being implemented with one minor qualification. Should maintain a little effort in the other area so there isn’t a lot of bad coverage when we start up again. I gave Moorer it during the Verification Panel meeting.

“RN: How was your host?

“HAK: Bubbling. His boss is all out and all of that is on course. We got all that settled. There is one technical problem that I will discuss with you when you get back to Key Biscayne. Went very well and they are acting positively. (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Nixon, April 29, 10:15 a.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

Notes of the meetings of the Verification Panel for April 28 and April 29 are in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-108, Verification Panel Minutes, Originals. Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs Ronald Spiers prepared an assessment of the SLBM proposals and attached it to an April 27 memorandum to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Johnson. (*Ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 18–4 US–USSR)

175. Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, April 30, 1972.

I have some later views on the strike on Haiphong–Hanoi which you should have in mind prior to your meeting Tuesday.²

Looking at our long-range goal of giving the South Vietnamese a reasonable chance to meet attacks that may be launched next year or the year afterwards, as well as the subsidiary reasons of the possible effect in getting faster action on negotiation, as well as the effect on the American public opinion, I believe it is essential that a major strike for three days, rather than two, involving a minimum of 100 B–52s, as well as as much TAC Air as can be spared, should be planned starting Friday³ of this week.

The only factor that would change my decision on this is a definite conclusion after your meeting Tuesday that the North Vietnamese are ready to make a settlement now, prior to the Soviet Summit.

By settlement, I do not mean, of course, accepting all our eight points, but a very minimum, something like a cease fire, a withdrawal of all their forces to the pre-Easter lines and the return of all POWs.

We have to recognize the hard fact—unless we hit the Hanoi–Haiphong complex this weekend, we probably are not going to be able to hit it at all before the election. After this weekend, we will be too close to the Russian Summit. During the Summit and for a couple of weeks afterwards, our hands will be tied for the very same good reasons that they were tied during and after the Chinese Summit. Then we will be in the middle of June with the Democratic Convention only three to four weeks away and it would be a mistake to have the strike at that time. Another factor is that the more time that passes there is a possibility that the Congress will act to tie our hands. Finally, support for taking a hard line, while relatively strong now, will erode day by day, particularly as the news from the battle area is so viciously distorted by the press so that people get a sense of hopelessness, and then would assume that we were only striking out in desperation.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 3, Memoranda from the President, Memos—April 1972. No classification marking. The memorandum is unsigned. A notation in Nixon's handwriting on a draft of this memorandum reads: "OK. Retype as modified & send to Kissinger today. RN." (Ibid.)

² Kissinger's scheduled meeting with Le Duc Tho on May 2; see Document 183.

³ May 5.

On Tuesday, the tactics of your host will be to try desperately to give us some hope that we are going to get a settlement in order to keep us from making a strike on the Hanoi–Haiphong complex. They will offer to discuss the eight points, they will offer to discuss the cease fire, they will offer to discuss POWs. All of this you must flatly reject. They may say that they have to report to the politburo. This you should also reject on the ground that they have had our eight points for seven months and our latest offer for three weeks. It is time for them to fish or cut bait on Tuesday with some very substantial action looking toward an immediate settlement.

Incidentally, as I have already told you, you ought to withdraw our proposal of release of only those POWs who have been held for four years or more on the ground that their stepped-up attacks now make it necessary for us to demand the total release of all POWs as a minimum condition. I am not suggesting that they will agree to this but that is the position you must go into the talks with.

Under no circumstances in talking with them is the term “reduction of the level of violence” to be used. I saw it in one of the papers which someone on your staff prepared prior to your trip to Moscow.⁴

This is the kind of gobbledygook that Johnson used at Manila and also that was talked about it at the time of the 1968 bombing halt.⁵ It means absolutely nothing at all and is too imprecise to give us a yard stick for enforcement.

What you must have in mind, is that if they get a delay as a result of their talk with you, we shall lose the best chance we will ever have to give them a very damaging blow where it hurts, not just now, but particularly for the future.

Forget the domestic reaction. Now is the best time to hit them. Every day we delay reduces support for such strong action.

Our desire to have the Soviet Summit, of course, enters into this, but you have prepared the way very well on that score, and, in any event we cannot let the Soviet Summit be the primary consideration in making this decision. As I told you on the phone this morning. I intend to cancel the Summit unless the situation militarily and diplomatically substantially improves by May 15 at the latest or unless we get a firm commitment from the Russians to announce a joint agreement at the Summit to use our influence to end the war.

⁴ Reference is to a memorandum on Vietnam by Negroponce, April 17, in the briefing book for Kissinger’s trip to Moscow; see footnote 2, Document 125.

⁵ Reference to language used in former President Lyndon Johnson’s declaration following the Manila Summit of October 1966 and during the Paris negotiations conducted by the Johnson administration in 1968. For the former, see *Foreign Relations, 1964–1968*, vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966, Document 281; for the latter, see *ibid.*, vol. VII.

In effect we have crossed the Rubicon and now we must win—not just a temporary respite from this battle, but if possible, tip the balance in favor of the South Vietnamese for battles to come when we no longer will be able to help them with major air strikes.

We know from experience, based on their record in 1968 that they will break every understanding. We know from their twelve secret talks with you that they talk in order to gain time. Another factor is that as we get closer to the Democratic Convention, the Democratic candidates and the supporters of Hanoi in the Congress, will increasingly give them an incentive to press on and not make a deal with us with the hope that they can make a deal with the Democrats after the election.

I will be talking with you about the statement you will make when you see them, but my present intuition is that you should be brutally frank from the beginning—particularly in tone. Naturally you should have a few conciliatory words in for the record because the record of this meeting will without question be put out at some time in the future and possibly in the very near future. In a nutshell you should tell them that they have violated all understandings, they stepped up the way, they have refused to negotiate seriously. As a result, the President has had enough and now you have only one message to give them—Settle or else!

176. Editorial Note

On April 30, 1972, President Nixon, who was on vacation in Key Biscayne, Florida, spoke by telephone to his Assistant Henry Kissinger in Washington from 10:39 a.m. to 11:04 a.m. to discuss the impact of the continuing North Vietnamese offensive upon the prospects for the upcoming summit in Moscow. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) A relevant excerpt of the transcript of this conversation reads:

"P: Wonder if you ought not to cancel your trip over there. I have decided to cancel the Summit unless we get a settlement. Can't go to Russians with our tails between our legs. We get a settlement or the Russians agree they are going to do something.

"K: We can't go if we are totally on the defensive as a result of Russian arms.

"P: No way. Wonder if I ought to do the SALT thing in light of all this.

"K: Think so. Could do it in low key way.

"P: The image of our putting our arms around the Russians at the time their equipment is knocking the hell out of Vietnam—

“K: It gives the Russians a stake. Here is the man of peace who has done everything—rather than be truculent to the Russians.

“P: On public relations it may be a very dangerous line.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

Nixon and Kissinger spoke again from 1:23 p.m. to 1:32 p.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary) A transcript of this conversation reads:

“K: Moscow Summit is confusing people here.

“P: Agree. If by 15th of May we are where we are now. Time is on our side this time. If on the other hand we are in a very weak position, we are in a hell of a position to go to the Summit.

“K: Go only two days. Don’t say that we can take three days. Or we can go four or five days if Summit has gone.” (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 999, Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons[–]1972 [2 of 2])

On May 1 President Nixon, who then traveled to the Texas ranch of Secretary of the Treasury Connally, called Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs Haig at 8:37 a.m. to discuss the military situation in Vietnam, including the option of responding with intensive bombing strikes against North Vietnam. The President stated: “The problem is that he [Kissinger] is so desperate . . . anxious about the talks. He doesn’t want to hurt them. He doesn’t realize that what hurts us most is to appear like little puppy dogs when they are launching these attacks. What really gets to them is to hit in the Hanoi–Haiphong area. That gets at the heartland. I think we made a mistake not doing it sooner. We may have to update that strike. There’s a good reason to do it for American public opinion. I feel there is much to be said for hitting them now. You are to ride herd to see that we get all the positive things out of this we can.” Nixon later added: “And you tell Henry I think we have got to step these up and to hell with the negotiations, and he may have to reconsider going there at all.” (Ibid.)

According to his Daily Diary, the President called Haig 20 minutes later. (Ibid., White House Central Files) Haldeman recorded the following notation in his diary: “[Nixon] said he had just talked to Haig, and QuangTri, Vietnam, is still going to pieces, and that we should let it drop. Problem is that K is so interested in his talk in Paris that he’s delaying the plane raids, and keeps arguing that we need to set up public opinion in order to go ahead with the raids. The answer, of course, being that we’ll lose public opinion if we delay the raids; it’s the raids that they want, not the talks. He says he shook K about the Summit and made it clear that we won’t go into a Summit if we’re in a bad position on Vietnam at the time, so he’s got to get Vietnam worked out.” (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*) The President arrived back in Washington at 1:06 p.m. that afternoon. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary)

177. Memorandum From Winston Lord of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, May 1, 1972.

SUBJECT

Haiphong & Hanoi

We may well face a watershed decision on May 3 whether or not to resume bombing of the Haiphong and Hanoi areas. Put more directly, it is essentially a decision whether to play summit chips in the Vietnam game. Obviously, you have thought through the implications ad nauseam, and I am fully aware of the tremendous pressures on you coming from various quarters. I believe I understand the strategic rationale for bombing in these areas and I acknowledge some valid arguments. But nevertheless the risks seem to me heavy and the possible benefits unlikely.

The decision revolves crucially around Moscow's reaction. The other factors are as follows:

—*Presidential credibility* with various audiences argues in favor of the bombing. He has said he would do whatever is required, and our position is in effect that all options are open, save nuclear weapons and the use of U.S. ground forces. Failure to hit the H–H areas could look like a deal with Moscow, a failure of Presidential determination, a nervousness about domestic political considerations, etc. *However*, the overall question of credibility is pegged to whether he will permit South Vietnam to “lose.” If that happens, the fact that he bombed Hanoi–Haiphong won’t help him very much, if at all. And my view is that if the South Vietnamese are destined to “lose,” bombing the H–H areas is not going to make a difference.

—*The military arguments* cut both ways. Raids could have some impact on operations a few months hence, but they take away assets from more urgent and lucrative targets in the battle zone. The longer the raids in the H–H areas, the greater the longer run impact, but past experience should convince us that it will not be decisive, and meanwhile this means longer run diversion from the pressing requirements further south.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 74, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Moscow Summit 1972 [2 of 2]. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. The city of Quang Tri, the capital of South Vietnam’s northernmost province by the same name, fell to the NVA on May 1. The deliberations on the ramifications of this defeat are in the minutes of the May 1 WSAG meeting. (Ibid., NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals)

—The *psychological impact* on our *South Vietnamese* friends would certainly be a plus. *However*, it cannot by itself make the difference in morale—the ground battles and the urban situations will do that.

—The *psychological impact* on the *North Vietnamese* is difficult to judge. There is some evidence that the one-day raids shook up the North Vietnamese. *However*, the past record certainly suggests that the net effect will be merely to rally the population, not discourage it.

—*Chinese reaction* does not seem a decisive factor. They have been restrained to date, are probably somewhat impressed by strong actions, and in any event, know that it is Moscow, not Peking, that is involved at this juncture. *However*, a certain risk persists. And certainly a souring of US–USSR relations cannot but hurt us in Peking.

—There is no question that there will be significant *civilian casualties*, an unalloyed argument against the bombing.

—The U.S. *domestic scene* has to be an argument against the bombing. The right might be given a temporary lift, and the left will be critical no matter what the President does. But the decisive weight of American opinion would shift against the President if the bombing did not bring rapid results on the ground or diplomatically. The negative shift would be even more pronounced if the bombing is seen to be the cause of sinking the Moscow summit and an historic SALT agreement. And since one can agree that bombing the H–H area won't directly affect the ground situation, we come back to the crucial diplomatic factor of Moscow's reaction.

The Moscow Role

Arguments for the bombing because of the impact in Moscow rest on two assumptions:

—That Moscow, getting the dangerous message, *will* choose to pressure Hanoi rather than scuttle the Summit, SALT, etc.

—That having chosen to pressure Hanoi, it *can* do so effectively and quickly.

Neither assumption looks very plausible to me. We know, from the Moscow trip, that the Soviets (or at least Brezhnev) are panting for the summit. But we have no assurance whatsoever that this takes such precedence that Moscow will really lean on its difficult ally. They may find Hanoi's timing awkward and hope to muddle through the summit period with the offensive and our reaction manageable as background music. *However*, if we press them to chose between the summit and their ally, we can have little confidence how Brezhnev will come out, and even less confidence how the Politburo as a whole will allow him to come out.

Furthermore, even assuming that Moscow does want to be helpful in order to salvage US–USSR relations, what precisely is it to do

over the next crucial several weeks? How does it go about blowing the whistle on Hanoi? The North Vietnamese have the equipment they need to carry on the current offensive and they have momentum going. Can the Russians really make them desist, particularly with the Chinese looking over their shoulders? I just don't see Hanoi—when it may think it has victory in its grasp—doing what big brother wants it to do.

Thus there are these two doubtful propositions that Moscow will choose, and that Moscow will be able, to pressure Hanoi. The more likely choice is for them to sacrifice the summit if that is the only alternative. We will then have the worst of both worlds—no help on Vietnam and all the setbacks of fractured U.S.-Soviet relations, including:

—The loss of an historic SALT agreement whose long range significance is momentous indeed. Instead of the most important arms control agreement ever, we will face a heightened arms race, in which the Soviets will have a decided edge, given our domestic mood on defense spending.

—The aborting of all the other specific areas of agreement with Moscow that have been ripening. The whole concept of interlocking interests preventing future confrontations would be lost—the loss of our major leverage on Peking. Our China initiative could well be jeopardized. Less likely, but conceivable, would be stirrings toward some improvement in Sino-Soviet relations.

—A strongly negative U.S. domestic reaction to the crumbling of the President's foreign policy achievements and vistas.

In short, I believe we are much better off refraining from bombing the H-H areas and using our military assets where they count, pocketing a SALT agreement that is in our interest irrespective of what happens in Vietnam, and muddling through the summit as best we can. It is not a particularly attractive prospect. But the alternative is almost certainly not going to be decisive in Vietnam and very likely will cost us heavily in other areas.²

This begs the question of what the Soviet Union will think of us as a partner (or adversary) when we have supposedly “flinched” on the bombing question. I know this is at the heart of your concern about the decision. It is, of course, a dilemma we have created for ourselves. But again whether we flinch or not is subordinate to whether or not

² In a May 1 memorandum on “short-term actions” to Kissinger, Haig wrote: “A range of options should be considered which run the gamut from doing nothing and proceeding with the Summit to a series of escalating military actions culminating with mobilization and threatened, if not actual, invasion of North Vietnam.” (Ibid., Box 993, Haig Chronological Files, May 1–20, 1972 [2 of 2])

we let South Vietnam “lose,” and again, I don’t think the bombing will be decisive diplomatically (i.e. Moscow wants to and can pressure Hanoi) or militarily.³

³ As cited in a May 1 memorandum from Laird to Nixon, Abrams reported that the situation in the northern part of South Vietnam would depend upon the ARVN will to halt the North Vietnamese offensive and thus to generate “lucrative targets” for aerial assault. “In summary of all that has happened here since 30 March 1972, I must report that as the pressure has mounted and the battle has become brutal, the senior leadership has begun to bend and in some areas to break,” Abrams concluded. “In adversity it is losing its will and cannot be depended on to take the measures necessary to stand and fight.” (Ibid., White House Special Files, President’s Personal Files, Box 75, President’s Speech File, Monday, May 8, 1972 Vietnam Speech [1 of 2]) A May 2 Intelligence Note reported on the apparently contradictory Soviet response to the events of the past month in light of the upcoming summit: “In the aftermath of the Communist offensive in Vietnam and the U.S. retaliatory bombing of the Haiphong environs, Moscow tried to have the best of both worlds. It publicly supported Hanoi and condemned the US while continuing preparations for the President’s visit and conducting business as usual in Soviet-US bilateral relations.” (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 1 USSR)

178. Editorial Note

The Department of State offered preparatory advice for the upcoming Moscow summit talks. In a memorandum to the President on May 1 Secretary of State William Rogers stressed the significance of the summit’s culminating communiqué, which he described as “the major vehicle for informing the world of the results of your Moscow meetings.” He described the Soviets as being intent upon demonstrating through the document their primacy in the world order and would explicitly avoid incorporating statements of disagreement within the formal communiqué. Rogers therefore recommended:

“The communiqué should set forth in a matter-of-fact way the concrete agreements reached at the summit. It should say that progress was made toward less tension and more cooperation in certain specific areas.

“Ideally, the document should be a concise, straightforward communiqué, not signed by the principals. If ancillary agreements are to be announced, for example, a joint space mission project, a new environmental agreement, or an agreement in the field of trade, they should be referred to in the communiqué in a brief paragraph. The communiqué need not attempt to cover all areas of the world, as the Soviets like to do. Unless we have something specific to announce, the communiqué need say nothing about any particular area.” (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL US–USSR)

Attached to this memorandum was a draft communiqué and, for comparison, previous Soviet international communiqués on various issues and the Shanghai communiqué resulting from the President's trip to Peking 2 months earlier.

Also on May 1, Rogers sent to the President a 7-page memorandum entitled "The Middle East at the Summit." He noted that the "one principal short-run parallel interest" in the region shared by both the United States and the Soviet Union was "to discourage a renewal of Arab-Israeli hostilities." He then outlined objectives to be pursued at Moscow on this issue:

"Our task at the Summit, therefore, is to exploit the parallelism of US-USSR interests in the ceasefire, while at the same time insisting that the focus of negotiations must remain with the parties and not with the major powers. In this latter respect, this means in effect a standoff; that we and the Soviets continue to disagree not only on the substance of the overall settlement but even more fundamentally on ways to achieve it. Our counter to any Soviet pressure to renew bilateral or Four Power talks should be to keep the focus on the need for Egypt to face up to the necessity of negotiating a settlement with Israel instead of looking to others to do the job for it. The Arab, and specifically Egyptian inhibition about negotiating with Israel is their most vulnerable point, and we should use this to our advantage with the Soviets. We could make the point that, if the Egyptians remain unrealistically adamant about not negotiating directly, Jarring is there and we remain available if Egypt wants to pick up this diplomatic option in relation to an interim Suez Canal agreement. We will need to make these latter points in low key, however, given the fact that Israel itself is taking a very tough position in the Jarring talks and delayed for some months its agreement to enter Suez Canal talks at a time when Sadat was ready to do so.

"Finally, we must face the fact that a standoff on the Middle East in Moscow will leave a very unpredictable situation in the post-Summit period when all concerned will be reassessing their positions in the light of what does or does not happen there. The fact of your forthcoming Moscow trip has in itself had a somewhat calming effect. The Soviets can be expected to argue, however, that they cannot guarantee Sadat will go on being patient in the absence of negotiating progress. While this will be in part a Soviet pressure tactic, it could very well prove true. Egypt is the most unpredictable factor in the Middle East equation and will become increasingly so as time goes by. Sadat is frustrated at the lack of stronger Soviet military and political support, at United States failure to produce any softening of Israel's positions while strengthening Israel militarily, at his own military weakness and at his inability to mobilize the Arab world against Israel and the U.S. He could strike out, directly or indirectly (for example, through Libya) at American interests; he could initiate at least limited military action; or

he could be overthrown, with consequences in Egypt and the Arab world that are difficult to foresee. Any of these developments would complicate our position in the area generally. Additionally, a renewal of fighting would be a new complicating factor in U.S.-Soviet relations, and the Soviets may seek to raise this possibility as a means of persuading us to put pressure on Israel." (Ibid.)

179. Editorial Note

According to his Record of Schedule, from 12:15 p.m. to 12:40 p.m. on May 1, 1972, the Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger met with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin in the White House Map Room. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976) No substantive record of the meeting has been found. Kissinger passed to Dobrynin the following note at the meeting:

"While we cannot agree with certain considerations expressed in the paper given Henry Kissinger in Moscow, we can agree in principle to the general approach suggested in that paper. It is the understanding of the U.S. government that under the proposed SLBM freeze, additional SLBM launchers, beyond those existing on the freeze date, could be built in replacement for certain existing strategic launchers. Such a freeze would last five years if an agreement on more comprehensive limitations on strategic offensive arms was not reached in the meantime. We are prepared at Helsinki to negotiate equitable provisions to cover this kind of arrangement with the aim of concluding an offensive interim agreement, together with ABM Treaty, for signature during the forthcoming meeting in Moscow." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip File, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2)

At 12:50 p.m. the same day, Haig called Dobrynin to inform him of revisions to the note:

"H: Henry just rushed out to lunch. He asked me to call you and ask you to delete the first phrase before sending the note to Moscow—that phrase which starts 'While we can.'

"D: The whole phrase? Just wait a minute. Let me get it. Do you mean take out the whole first sentence?

"H: No. The note would begin 'We can agree.'

"D: So it is half the first phrase? Then we will translate this one and we will be in touch with you in 30 or 35 minutes.

"H: Fine, sir. Henry said with regard to the statement we have deleted that it should be transmitted as an oral phrase at the time it is delivered.

“D: I understand—yes.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) During a conversation with President Nixon in the Old Executive Office Building at 2:40 p.m., Kissinger reported on his meeting with Dobrynin, noting that he had told Dobrynin, “After tomorrow, all bets are off.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, May 1, 1972, 2:40–2:55 p.m., Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 335–3)

At 7:35 p.m. Kissinger informed Secretary of State Rogers of the oral message passed to Dobrynin. The transcript of the telephone conversation reads:

“R: I want to ask you whether you notified the Russians about the SALT thing. The impression Gerry [Smith] got from what you said—changes the position.

“K: I gave them the piece of paper Gerry gave me.

“R: In other words, he gave you a piece of paper to give to the Russians?

“K: Yes.

“R: He didn’t understand that.

“K: That’s what all the discussions were about.

“R: The same piece of paper?

“K: The same piece of paper. Only the part which referred to me being given a paper in Moscow—this was made oral instead of in writing. The first part which the President reacted to so sharply. Everything was the same except the first part which was a commentary.

“R: Can I get a copy of it?

“K: Certainly, but Gerry has it.

“R: When did you give it to him? Because you heard what he said, that it was just handed to him before the meeting.

“K: What was handed to him was the correct version. It was exactly the same as the piece of paper Gerry gave me only the reference to Henry Kissinger was made a comment by the President. This part was given to them as an oral comment but the whole document was given to them.

“R: Really, we’ve got to be a little careful on cooperation. Gerry has just about had it. It is just too ticklish a situation not to cooperate a little bit better.

“K: Alex Johnson was present at all the meetings where this was discussed.

“R: Did you deliver it to Dobrynin?

“K: I just sent it over to Dobrynin. That was the purpose of that paper. Smith was the one that wanted it so there would be something in writing that was handled in the Verification Group. That has been around since Friday [April 28].

“R: I wonder if I could straighten it out. If you could send me what you sent to Dobrynin—but if it has gone I couldn’t change that.

“K: Your suggestions can still be carried out because it goes to detail. The only minor point being that the first part was a commentary.” (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

In a May 2 memorandum to Rogers, to which he attached the text of the note, Kissinger wrote:

“Attached per our phone conversation is a copy of the text given to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin yesterday.

“Subsequently, the President directed that the phrase, ‘While we cannot agree with certain considerations expressed in the paper given Henry Kissinger in Moscow,’ should be deleted from the formal text. Ambassador Dobrynin was told that the text less this phrase should be forwarded to Moscow and the foregoing phrase should be portrayed as an oral comment by the President at the time the formal note was delivered.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President’s Trip File, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2)

180. Conversation Among President Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, May 1, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion on SALT, Germany, Vietnam, and the summit, and Secretary of State Rogers’ upcoming trip to Europe.]

Nixon: On this thing too, I would take every opportunity to level them hard on Vietnam. I’d hit the Vietnam issue extremely hard, and say that we’re prepared—that for emphasis this is actually true—as far as I’m concerned, we’ll do what’s necessary to carry it out, that their interests are deeply involved. And if they say well it risks the summit, say that we’re prepared to risk it. I think there should be no—our best bet, particularly when you talk to Brandt, it’ll get right back to them.

Rogers: What’s your—do you have your positions made on the next week or so? Are you going to play—I’m assuming—

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 716–2. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Rogers and Kissinger in the Oval Office from 4:11 to 5:29 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

Nixon: Oh, while you're gone?

Rogers: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, as you know, Henry's going tomorrow, and I suppose that—

Kissinger: I'll get word to Berlin.

Nixon: He'll get word to you. My inclination—my—well, who's going to get what. My feeling is that we're going to get nothing out of it. And unless its very substantial, very substantial, we'll go with what we have in mind, is to hit, is to hit the Haiphong–Hanoi complex on Thursday and Friday—a 48-hour strike—en lieu of their offensive, not because of the failure of this. So that's where it stands. Now, actually where will you be those days? You see, it'll be Thursday or Friday, or Saturday or Sunday,² dependent upon weather—

Rogers: I'll be—

Nixon: But of course it won't be over. It's not going to be longer than 48 hours. But it'll be big. It'll be the biggest we've had. It'll be—Abrams has got it at a 100 minimum B-52s, and of course all of the naval gunfire we've got up there. The [U.S.S.] *Newport News* will be up there by the time with 8-inch guns. And, in addition to that, of course, about 400 TacAir. So, it'll be by far the biggest strike on the Hanoi–Haiphong area. It will be limited to military targets, of course, to the extent we can. It will hit some new things, like there's a big troop training area that Moorer and Abrams has selected; we'll try to clean it out. That's about where it stands. Now, that whole regime could change in the event—but only in the event there is something really done on this occasion. Henry's prepared to talk very directly. Is that right, Henry?

Rogers: Will you stay more than 1 day, Henry, or will you—

Nixon: Oh, no.

Kissinger: Well, you know, if they come with this spectacular proposal, conceivably—

Nixon: Oh sure, [unclear exchange] I think you might remember raising your earlier—I think this meeting will blow quickly. And I think, therefore, that upon his return, it should be announced that it has been held.

Rogers: Oh, sure. [unclear] Nobody knows about it.

Nixon: Well, the [unclear] would know. I don't think we should announce it in advance, because then all the press will be there and want comments by the two. But if you could meet without having to go out and face the television cameras. But I think immediately upon

² May 4, 5, 6, or 7.

your return we announce, so have it in mind. And I think you need to cable to Bill, of course—

Kissinger: Tomorrow night—

Nixon: Tomorrow night at 10 o'clock. Well, wait a minute, he'll be there. He's going to be in Europe the same time you are.

Kissinger: Yeah, but he'll be in England and—

Rogers: I'll be in England.

Kissinger: England. So I'll backchannel him tomorrow night.

Nixon: All right. So we will announce the meeting. And—

Rogers: I think the real question that I'm going to be faced with is, is the summit—

Nixon: Yeah, of course, they'll be—what'll they want to know?

Rogers: Well, they'll want to know what we think the chances are for a summit meeting. And the President said while you were out, Henry, that it was all right for me to say that it's possible the summit meeting might be canceled and he was prepared for that.

Nixon: But we don't think so.

Rogers: We don't think so?

Nixon: I'd play it in the terms that the plans for the summit are going on on-schedule; that nothing we have done so far has affected it detrimentally. And that is totally true. As a matter of fact, it's affected it positively. But on the other hand, that we cannot anticipate what the Soviet reaction will be in the event that the North Vietnamese continue their offensive and we react, as we will react with strong attacks on the North. And if strong attacks on the North bring a reaction from the Soviets, then it will happen that way. It is our judgment, I might say, it is my judgment, and you can say—and you can very well say that it is my judgment that the summit will move forward because I think that they—that they aren't going to like it—but I think they're going to go forward. But I don't want the Europeans to get the feeling any more than the American people to have the feeling that we will pay any price in order to sit down with the Russians. And, I would say also that if the situation in Vietnam is seriously deteriorating with no—nothing by the time we get closer to the summit, there isn't going to be any—we aren't going to go to the summit there. Because you can't put your arms around the Russians at a time when they're kicking the hell out of us in Vietnam. I don't think its going to happen, from all—did we get Abrams report today—

Kissinger: We haven't gotten that yet, but he, of course, he probably is—

Rogers: I think, Mr. President, the best thing for me to do is to stick with the position that I talked to you and you feel the summit will go ahead—

Nixon: Right.

Rogers: That there's always [unclear exchange]. You know it's a possibility, but you feel confident that it will go ahead on schedule.

Nixon: Well, I think so. What do you think, Henry?

Kissinger: I think, yes, of course—

Nixon: It depends on various people. Certainly the British, with Pompidou—Brandt is the key one, don't you think? Is there any difference there?

Kissinger: No. I think Brandt has to take advantage and he'll go right back to the Soviets.

Nixon: Yeah. That we expect it to go forward. And I think you might say this: We believe, and we think the Soviets also believe, based on things that have happened up to this point, that there are major concerns at the summit that completely override the Vietnam issue, and that Vietnam should not be an issue that should stop the summit. But that on the other hand, that as far as we're concerned, we have to take the actions necessary to defend our interests in Vietnam, and we'll do so with the thought that the Soviets will go forward with the summit. And we're prepared to if they don't react to it. With Brandt you can't talk nearly as frankly as you can with Heath, naturally.

Rogers: As for the SALT talks, I thought that on the SALT talks I would give them sort of a general path, but say that Gerry [Smith] would come and give them any specifics after the discussions he's had in Helsinki, because we don't want to get into this.

[Omitted here is further discussion on SALT and the enemy offensive in Vietnam.]

181. Letter From Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon¹

Moscow, undated.

Dear Mr. President,

I have learned with satisfaction from your letter of April 25 that you also evaluate positively the conversations in Moscow with Dr. Kissinger. The exchange of opinion that took place was, undoubtedly, useful both from the viewpoint of deeper understanding of our respective positions and for the practical preparations of the forthcoming summit meeting.

As a result of those conversations and taking into account also the other negotiations underway, it can be definitely said—quite a bit has been done to ensure the success of the Moscow meeting.

However—and I want to be equally frank here too—today both you and we cannot have 100-percent assurance that everything will go just the way it is desired.

The matter, as you, Mr. President, realize, is that of Vietnam. This question is, of course, not a simple one. As I already told Dr. Kissinger, on the turn that the developments in Vietnam will take, very much will depend, even irrespective of our wishes.

You are undoubtedly aware that a delegation headed by a Secretary of our Party's Central Committee has recently visited Hanoi.

In the talk with the DRV's leaders the delegation also touched upon the questions, related to the political settlement in Vietnam.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 485, President's Trip Files, Issues/Papers, USSR IV, (Part I)—The President. No classification marking. A notation on the letter reads: "Handed to Gen. Haig by Minister Voronstov, 4:15 p.m., 5/1/72." In his memoirs Nixon wrote: "On May 1, the day Kissinger was to leave for Paris, I received a letter from Brezhnev that increased my fear that we had failed to impress upon the Soviet leadership my unshakable determination to stand up in Vietnam. Brezhnev bluntly asked me to refrain from further actions there because they hurt the chances of a successful summit." See *RN: Memoirs*, p. 594. Kissinger also commented upon the message in his memoirs: "On May 1, Brezhnev wrote to Nixon suggesting that prospects for negotiations would improve if we exercised restraint. This was damaged merchandise, it was exactly the same argument used to obtain the bombing halt in 1968, but a bit shopworn after 147 fruitless plenary sessions. Brezhnev, trying a little linkage in reverse, suggested that such a course would also enhance the prospects for the summit. "Nixon saw in the letter a confirmation of all his suspicions that Hanoi and Moscow were in collusion. To me, however, Brezhnev's intervention seemed no more than standard rhetoric. His letter made no threat; it spoke of the impact of bombing on the 'atmosphere' of the summit; it made no hint at cancellation. Since I was leaving that evening for Paris, it was idle to speculate. Our course would have to turn on Le Duc Tho's attitude, not on what the Soviets said." (*White House Years*, pp. 1168–1169)

On the part of the DRV a readiness to solve the problems by negotiations was in principle confirmed. At the same time it is also clear that the U.S. military actions against the DRV only strengthen the determination of the Vietnamese to continue the struggle for their rights by every means. Therefore of decisive importance for the way, in which the situation in Vietnam would develop, will be the course of the U.S. conduct—whether they would be able to display a necessary restraint in their actions and a readiness to search at the negotiations for solutions really acceptable for both sides.

This, in our view, is the main thing now. To prevent a new aggravation of the situation around Vietnam with the ensuing consequences would be all the more important since on the whole, it seems, a genuine prospect emerges to achieve substantial results at the Moscow meeting which would have a major significance both for advancing the relations between our countries and for improving the entire international situation.

I would like in this connection to note specifically the importance of the emerging agreement on questions of strategic arms limitations.

By all appearances, a suitable basis is shaping up for concluding an appropriate agreement between the USSR and the U.S. at the May meeting.

True, we still have to receive from you a message in connection with our specific proposals transmitted for you several days back.

According to our understanding, we both have the same view that one of the tangible results of our meeting can be the adoption of a good political document regarding the basic principles of the relations between the USSR and the U.S. We hope to provide soon our additional considerations on certain wording that was proposed by the American side to the text of that document.

As for the Middle East, I would not conceal our concern over the general state of affairs with regard to this question. The ARE President Sadat has just visited us. The evaluation, that we got on the basis of the talks with him, is that due to Israel's position the number of uncertain moments in the situation there is greater today than before, and that is fraught with serious consequences. Preservation of those uncertain moments and dangers is hardly in the interests of our countries.

Some time ago it looked as if the USSR and the US were approaching a greater understanding on the ways which could ultimately lead to the Middle East settlement. Unfortunately, there is no certainty as yet in this question. In our conviction, it would be very useful if in the days and weeks to come an intensive exchange of opinion be held through the confidential channel to find a mutually acceptable approach toward the question of the Middle East settlement. This seems to correspond also to the idea expressed in your letter, that it is desir-

able to work toward *completion* of what has been started on those questions which will be discussed at the meeting.

In conclusion I would like to emphasize, Mr. President, that I and my colleagues intend, so far as we are concerned, to constructively continue the preparation for the Soviet-American summit meeting, in view of its significance from the point of view both of immediate results and of long-term perspectives. It seems all the more important to us that in the period left before the meeting, nothing be permitted to happen of the kind that would undermine its chances of success.

Sincerely,

L. Brezhnev²

² Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

182. Conversation Among President Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, May 1, 1972.

Kissinger: Got a letter from Brezhnev.²

Nixon: Another one? What is it this time? Is he raising hell?

Kissinger: Oh, he's thanking you for sending me, and as a result of these conversations—

Nixon: That's probably in response to my letter.

Kissinger: Yeah. And taking into account all of the other negotiations underway, it can be definitely said that quite a bit has been done [to] ensure the success of the meeting.

Nixon: Yeah.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 716-4. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Rogers, Kissinger, and Haldeman in the Oval Office from 6:01 to 6:47 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² See Document 181.

Kissinger: The matter as you—Then he goes into Vietnam. And he says: [At this point, Kissinger reads most of the passage on Vietnam from the letter. (Document 181)] And the rest is just garbage.

Nixon: Who did they say will undertake the military action? That we were?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, they're going to get it—they're going to find out. That's why we pop them. And Haiphong's going to be made.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: There's not going to be any of this business of who the hell is attacking.

Kissinger: On—and also, what Dobrynin told me, they're willing to agree to everything on the technical arrangements—

Nixon: Except the plane?

Kissinger: Except the plane.

Nixon: [unclear exchange]

Kissinger: They'll let you go on Saturday³ to Leningrad. They'll let you go live on television, although they've never done that before. The only thing they ask is if you go on live is to give them the text an hour in advance so that their interpreter can do a good job.

Nixon: Oh, we'll do it more than that.

Haldeman: We told them we'd give them the text well in advance.

Kissinger: All right. Well, I'm just telling you what their reply was. And, every other technical issue, I forget now what it was, I told him to get in touch with Chapin.

Nixon: He told you about church?

Kissinger: Church is okay. So Brezhnev—

Nixon: Really?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, don't tell anybody, though. I don't want—now, that's one thing I don't want Scali or any of those people to know a thing about. I want to go low-key—much the better way. I'll just go that day to church, not with a great big hullabaloo, because after all, I am a—I mean that's what I do on Sunday, not if I can help it.

Haldeman: [laughter]

Nixon: But that's what I'm going to do in Moscow. So, I go to church. And they'll be one hell of a play, right?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

³ May 27.

Nixon: And it will help us here with, you know, with the Billy Graham types.

Kissinger: It will be great symbolism. But—so they gave you a favorable answer on all of that.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But on the [use in Soviet domestic airspace of an American] plane, they say—

Nixon: I understand—

Kissinger: —the humiliation to them that we—

Nixon: Yeah. I told Bob we're going to do it, so we're going to do it. Let me ask you something else.

Kissinger: So, if I may call him tonight and say the [Soviet] plane is okay.

Nixon: Yes. Yes.

Kissinger: Then they will call Chapin tomorrow and confirm it.

Haldeman: Is the plane for Leningrad and Kiev, or just Leningrad?

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: Leningrad and Kiev.

Haldeman: You sure? Because they said Kiev would—

Kissinger: No. That's what he mentioned to me.

Nixon: I don't really give a damn. It's perfectly all right. Go ahead. So then, on the other one, it's done now. I don't want to argue about the plane. This is a small thing. There are other things—I've ridden their planes many times before. If you could get the—they don't want to cancel this summit, Henry?

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: I think that's why the Hanoi–Haiphong things just got to be—

Kissinger: But they may have no choice.

Nixon: All right. Fine. So we—

Kissinger: But neither do we.

Nixon: I'd sure as hell rather cancel ourselves.

Kissinger: But you can't go to Moscow anyway if you've just being run out of Vietnam.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: So, it's —

Nixon: Well, get the point that if we're run out of Vietnam, we will then blockade North Vietnam to get our prisoners back. Let's face it. We're not going to run out on anything. That's further down the road. Hell, this battle has taken 4 weeks to get Quang Tri.

[Omitted here is additional discussion on the North Vietnamese Spring Offensive.]

Nixon: I wonder if we don't really have to go to the blockade, Henry. Not now, but I mean if this thing collapses [unclear] then you do.

Kissinger: If this thing collapses, we have no choice except to go to the blockade—say our prisoners must come back and blockade them.

Nixon: That would be the basis for it, wouldn't it?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: We get our prisoners back? But then we're defeated, aren't we?

Kissinger: Yeah. Then we have to tighten our belt.

Nixon: Tighten our belt?

Kissinger: Then we should make the goddamn Soviets—

Nixon: Huh?

Kissinger: Then we should make the Soviets pay for it.

Nixon: Yeah. Got much to do with it?

Kissinger: Oh, yes. They made it possible, Mr. President.

Nixon: [unclear] We wouldn't have any bargaining position with the Soviets.

Kissinger: No, no, no. Pay for it—I don't think you could go to the summit then.

Nixon: Oh, sure you could. Blockade cancels the summit.

Kissinger: That's what I mean.

[Omitted here is further discussion on the North Vietnamese offensive and SALT.]

Nixon: What you'll find out more from your meeting tomorrow is just how strong they are.

Kissinger: What I'll find out tomorrow—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: They will certainly not make an acceptable proposition.

Nixon: Oh, I know that. But you're going to find out—if they think they've got the South Vietnamese by the balls. You know damn well they've got them heavily infiltrated. If they think they've got them by the balls—they're probably getting everything from a lot of our Americans over there as well—then, they'll just be as tough as hell, and tell us to go to hell. That is why we'll have to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. If they are taking that attitude, you've got to get right to the heart of it. Right [unclear]. If, on the other hand, they're taking the attitude, which I have [unclear] of trying to buy time, bomb anyway, because we can't accept it.

Kissinger: Well, I think we can give them time as long as we bomb them.

Nixon: Oh, give them time. I meant that they must not by promising to discuss things, keep us from bombing.

Kissinger: Exactly.

Nixon: Now, the other thing is that I think that only bombing that really seems to affect these sons-of-bitches is the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong.

Kissinger: That's correct.

Nixon: You think that's true?

Kissinger: The only thing that will—

Nixon: Don't you think that's true? They don't think they're going to win the battle anyway.

Kissinger: The thing that I must warn you, in all fairness, is that it is very conceivable to me that the Russians will cancel the summit after your next bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong. I'm still in favor of doing it. And then you will unleash—right now we are in the position—the reason we are doing not as badly in the press as we might is because the pro-Soviet guys are buffaloed by this, by the Moscow maneuver, and that will be then unleashed. I am still strongly in favor of bombing Hanoi and Haiphong, and really wrapping it up.

Nixon: If they cancel it, I only hope we can get a little advance information so we can cancel it first. Is there any way we can? How will they cancel?

Kissinger: I can say under these conditions.

Nixon: How will they cancel? I mean is there any way we can [find out]? Yeah, we can find out. You've got to keep in very close session with Dobrynin so you can sense one word, and if he ever raises the subject of cancellation, we'll just have to go out and say that the President has cancelled the summit. Not let those sons-of-bitches say that they did.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: See my point?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: We're not going to let them cancel first if we can possibly have helped it.

Kissinger: Well, if they—you know—they might start a press campaign, and if they do, we can cancel it. That would be a pretty good tip-off. And—

Nixon: We have a little problem [unclear].

Kissinger: Ah, we may bring it all off, Mr. President. We've gone through other periods before. We've sat in this office—

Nixon: Well this is [unclear], in a sense, because all the chips are on the line; they weren't in Cambodia, and they weren't in Laos.

Kissinger: And we are winning

Nixon: Now, it's win or lose. And frankly, it's better that way. It's better to get the son-of-a-bitch war over with.

Kissinger: In Cambodia, we were winning,

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: In Cambodia we were winning, and then Laos, we weren't losing.

Nixon: Well—

Kissinger: This time, it's got to be over now by summer.

Nixon: The war will be over?

Kissinger: By July–August. It's going to be one way or the other now. I mean, clearly, the South Vietnamese can't keep this up for another 3 months.

Nixon: And the North?

Kissinger: Well that's the question. I doubt it.

Nixon: Oh, I don't think they can at all.

[Omitted here is additional discussion on Vietnam and SALT.]

183. Editorial Note

On May 2, 1972, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger met privately with North Vietnamese delegation leaders Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho in Paris. In a memorandum to President Nixon that day, Kissinger reported that the meeting “was thoroughly unproductive on substance but served to bolster further our negotiating record. I laid out various approaches for discussion, all of which they rejected. They made very clear that they were not prepared either to deescalate the fighting or offer anything new concerning a settlement. In light of their intransigence, which is almost certainly keyed to the fluid military situation and possibly the expectation of further unilateral concessions on our part, I broke off the private talks until either side has something new to say or their offensive stops.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 854, Files for the President—Lord—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive—Camp David—Vol. XIII) A full transcript of Kissinger's meeting with the North Vietnamese is *ibid.* In his diary, the President recorded his reaction: “I have sent Henry a message indicating that I thought he should think seriously on the plane on the way back about our breaking off the summit before the Russians make that move.” (For this diary excerpt, see Nixon, *RN: Memoirs*, page 600)

En route to Washington from Paris on May 2, Kissinger received from his deputy, Alexander Haig, the following message:

"I have just had third meeting with the President this morning. He has asked me to set up a helicopter to meet you at Andrews [Air Force Base] and bring you to Navy Yard where he can discuss results of your meeting over dinner aboard the *Sequoia*. He has added Halde- man and myself to party. Unless he insists otherwise, I will be at Andrews upon your arrival to give you some personal insights on his at- titude as of the time of your arrival.

"During meeting which was just concluded (1:30 p.m. Washing- ton time), the President asked that you think carefully about where we stand on the way back. He is adamant that there must be a two-day strike starting Friday [May 5]. He insists this is necessary for the fol- lowing three reasons:

"(1) It is essential for public opinion here so that he and the ex- ecutive do not look like pitiful giants when all the news is recounting ARVN losses. He is also convinced as a result of polls that the Amer- ican people favor strong bombing actions against Hanoi/Haiphong.

"(2) He is convinced that the strongest message must be conveyed to Hanoi and the Soviet leadership, especially in the face of the in- transigence which you met in Paris.

"(3) He believes that our carrying the war to the North Vietnamese heartland cannot but help reassure what may become a sagging South Vietnamese morale.

"The President asked me to convey to you that the political ques- tion at this point is his growing conviction that we should move to can- cel the summit now. He is beginning to believe that there will be no letup in the enemy offensive before the Moscow summit, and he stated that while he recognizes the argument that it keeps the critics off bal- ance to proceed with the summit, on the other hand, toasting Soviet leaders and arriving at agreements while Soviet tanks and wea- pons are fueling a massive offensive against our allies is ludicrous and unthinkable.

"I pointed out to him that while Vietnam remains a crucial issue, it is not an overriding one and that, above all, he must think in terms of assessing the weekend's activity together with your response from the North Vietnamese today. There is some logic to the view that to- day's rigid intransigence is more a reflection of weakness than of strength. I also pointed out that we need to carefully assess all options and not to proceed down a course which will cost us both the summit and not achieve what we are seeking with respect to Southeast Asia. I do not find that the President is rigid in his view as was the case dur- ing your trip to Moscow. He seems much more serious and calculat- ing in assessing the options. I am sure that the thesis which he has out- lined above is not a conviction but rather a 'devil's advocate' position which you will wish to consider most carefully between now and tonight's dinner." (Backchannel message TOHAK 2, May 2; National

Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 22, HAK Trip Files, HAK's Secret Paris Trip, 2 May 72—To/From)

Back in Washington, Kissinger drafted a memorandum to the President on May 2 entitled "Our Options with Moscow in Light of Vietnam." (Ibid., Box 74, Country Files, Europe, U.S.S.R., Moscow Summit 1972 (2 of 2)) This memorandum was not sent to Nixon, presumably because Kissinger discussed his recommendations regarding the summit during dinner that evening from 6:35 p.m. to 8:58 p.m. with the President and Haig on the Presidential yacht *Sequoia*. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Notes of the meeting have not been found, but it is described in Kissinger's memoirs. Kissinger noted the course of the discussion following his report on his meeting with the North Vietnamese:

"Nixon was still eager for B-52 strikes against Hanoi and Haiphong starting Friday, May 5. I did not believe a one-shot operation would meet our needs; I urged Nixon to wait until Monday and to give me forty-eight hours to develop some plans for sustained operations. In addition, I knew that General [Creighton] Abrams was opposed: As usual, he wanted to throw all B-52s into the ground battle in the South. How specifically to react was primarily a tactical question. But Nixon, Haig, and I were all agreed that a major military move was called for and that we would decide on its nature within forty-eight hours.

"What concerned Nixon most was the imminent Moscow summit. Haunted by the memory of [former President Dwight] Eisenhower's experience in 1960, he was determined that any cancellation or postponement should come at his initiative. My view was that we had no choice; we would have to run whatever risk was necessary. If Le Duc Tho was right and the collapse was at hand, we would not be able to go to Moscow anyway. We could not fraternize with Soviet leaders while Soviet-made tanks were rolling through the streets of South Vietnamese cities and when Soviet arms had been used decisively against our interests for the second time in six months. I had sought to give Hanoi every opportunity for compromise and the Soviets the maximum incentive to dissociate from Hanoi. That strategy would now have to be put to the test. We would have to break the back of Hanoi's offensive, to re-establish the psychological equilibrium in Indochina. Whether to pre-empt the expected cancellation or leave the decision to the Soviets seemed to me a matter for Nixon's political judgment.

"He was adamant that a cancellation by Moscow would be humiliating for him and politically disastrous; if it had to be, we must cancel the summit ourselves. He ordered preparation of a set of severe retaliatory military measures against the North Vietnamese; since I told him that these could well cause the Soviets to cancel, he instructed me to plan on the assumption that he would preempt Moscow. He would

address the nation early the following week to explain whatever military moves he finally decided on, and announce his cancellation of the summit. SALT would go forward, however; it could be signed in a low-key way at a lower level. And so the fateful *Sequoia* meeting ended.” (Kissinger, *White House Years*, page 1176)

In his diary entry for May 2, White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman also noted a conversation he had had with Nixon that day: “We then got into the problem of the Summit. The P[resident] feeling that because of the Paris problem Henry got into yesterday and Henry’s recommendation now, which is that we cancel the Summit, that we’ve got to at least consider doing so.” (*The Haldeman Diaries*, page 451)

184. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, May 2, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion on Kissinger’s trip to Paris wherein Haig noted that Kissinger had described his meeting with North Vietnamese negotiators as “the least productive on record.” Haig noted that Kissinger would return by 6 p.m. that evening.]

Nixon: Looks like our views and my expectations are a bit different from his. Henry said he thought they’d kill the summit. Not when they’re on the offensive.

Haig: No. When they’re making—

Nixon: No. That’s shows that we’ve got the goddamn Russians—either didn’t try or have no interest. What do you think?

Haig: Well, my view is, sir, that—

Nixon: The Russians aren’t going to help?

Haig: They’re not going to help a goddamn bit.

Nixon: Is that what you felt all along?

Haig: All along.

Nixon: See, that’s been my view. That’s why I was so bearish on Henry’s trip to Moscow. Oh, Henry, despite what he really felt, we’ve

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 717–10. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Haig in the Oval Office from 11:27 a.m. to 12:08 p.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

got them coming now, they've got their attention, you know, and now, they're going to do something, and so forth.

Haig: I—why the hell should they?

Nixon: I think we've got to take a hard look against the summit right now. What do you think?

Haig: Well, I think we have to rack 'em, and rack 'em good. Then see what the reaction is after the 2-day strike. I don't think they'll cancel it based on this, especially when I—

Nixon: [unclear] wouldn't let them cancel it first?

Haig: No, and then I think if they don't, then we make an assessment in what it's going to take militarily to continue on more slaps up there.

Nixon: Why do you feel that we shouldn't really impose the blockade? [unclear]

Haig: Well, my view is, sir, is that I don't discount the blockade, but I think—

Nixon: You see, assume you've got to break it off with the Russians, Al. The blockade doesn't matter.

Haig: Oh, if you decide to cancel the summit—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —and to go to the limit on this thing in terms of a confrontation, then that's fine, that's one thing. You can risk both at the same time.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: Or announce one and do the other concurrently. But I think there's a good chance with the kind of bombing that we're going to do in there, that we may get that port closed without that kind of direct confrontation with them. That you can only assess after we see what happens. We can't bomb their ships, obviously, but we can come pretty close to making that a scary place for them to be. And then see what they do. On the other hand, if after assessing that, we may want to mine it. We may even want to let the South Vietnamese do it. After all—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —they're mining all over the Mekong River and every thing else, and there are U.S. ships and friendly ships that are being menaced by that kind of activity.

Nixon: It will be a big disappointment to Henry if this trip [is cancelled].

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: It's so shocking. See, it really is. Al, I've always had the fear that the Russians would help us, you know, because of something, you know. I had the uneasy feeling, despite what he says, and I'm sure

he was pretty tough and everything, that they still come away with the feeling that, by God, they invite Henry to Moscow [unclear]. So that's why I was,—and I frankly didn't pick out half a loaf. I didn't want to go out and announce the SALT thing myself. I think I was very organized about it myself.

Haig: True.

Nixon: Don't you think so?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: And I just—it had to be played in a lower key way, as you know. We didn't say that all these things and so forth. We just sent him back with new instructions. But my point is that—my assessment of the Communists is different than Henry's. I do not believe that they will ever react to anything unless there's very, very powerful incentives. I don't think the incentives are powerful enough now. I think they see those sons-of-bitches succeeding.

Haig: That's right. And that's the incentive. And that incentive, in the short-term—

Nixon: That is why Henry was wrong in not wanting the strikes before he went. You don't agree with that? See my point? I think for Henry's meeting to be any success at all, we had to hit those sons-of-bitches before he went. I know what he would say. He'd say, "Well, then, that will risk the meeting." The point is he went there in the end.

Haig: Oh, he had no cards to play at all—

Nixon: He had no cards.

Haig: Short of a collapse.

Nixon: Huh?

Haig: Short of a collapse, and they didn't even give him a chance to do that.

[Omitted here is discussion on likely offensive actions in North Vietnam.]

185. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, May 2, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of press criticism and initial discussion of the Moscow summit.]

Nixon: Well, Henry got nothing out of them over there² as he expected. I expected it. I understand he's terribly disappointed.

Haldeman: I'm not surprised—

Nixon: Why would he—

Haldeman: —but I think poor old Henry, I think he really thought he was going to get something.

Nixon: Well, he found [unclear exchange] and this and that. I'm going to talk with Haig this afternoon.³ He's quite—

Haldeman: It really did do nothing?

Nixon: He said it was the most unproductive of all meetings he's had. I demanded we overthrow Thieu.

Haldeman: They didn't even serve warm tea.

Nixon: No. But the point is, Bob, we have got to realize that on this whole business of negotiating with North Vietnam, Henry has never been right. Now, I just can't help it, but just have to say that, just a straight out flat conclusion.

Haldeman: Well, Al never thought he was going to get anything.

Nixon: Well, I didn't either.

Haldeman: Al told me before Henry left, he said, "It's probably a good exercise, but I don't think he's—

Nixon: And he's not going to put it out this time, naturally, he—because it would raise hopes that things were going on. We don't want to raise any hopes. You know, that's the line, as I said, that the P.R. types around here. Thank God I talked to Al about it, but I didn't take that line in Dallas. I mean, in San Antonio.

Haldeman: Yeah.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 717–19. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Haldeman in the Oval Office from 12:08 to 12:42 p.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² Reference to Kissinger's meeting with Le Duc Tho in Paris that day; see Document 183.

³ See Document 186.

Nixon: Because we have, we have to take the hard line now [unclear]. That's all we can do. We have no other choice. And if you start indicating anything about ceasefire or coalition government or anything like that, we're not going to go down that course. Good God almighty, you realize what happens to your negotiating position, the peaceniks and all the rest. They'll be in there harder than anyone. But we'll just keep crackin' in there.

Haldeman: Go ahead with your big ones now?

Nixon: We'll have to. What the hell else do you do?

Haldeman: You've got to.

Nixon: What the hell else do you do? You've got to do it for American public opinion. You've got to do it for South Vietnamese, keep their morale from dropping. And you've got to do it in order to have some bargaining position with the enemy. And also, the thing [unclear] feel strongly about it, I think we better cancel the Russian summit. Now this is the one that just breaks Henry's heart, because—

Haldeman: What about postponing?

Nixon: Well, then they'd cancel.

Haldeman: You could make it look like you were—if you postpone indefinitely, just announce that you will not go to the summit under these conditions.

Nixon: Yeah, yeah.

Haldeman: Don't say, "I'm canceling it." Don't say, "I'll never go." But say, "Under the present conditions I will not go, and therefore I have canceled my plans for the May 27th departure, or whatever it is, May 20th departure, and what becomes of the summit depends on what happens in other places." Then they can come back and say, "We cancel the summit," but you've still taken the initiative.

Nixon: Oh, I have. You see, all of this is very painful, I know, to all of our people around here. It's terribly painful to Henry, because he sees basically our whole foreign thing in great jeopardy; I mean, all of our seeds, and this and that. But, on the other hand, we've got to look at what else we should do. And what else do you do is to, you know, continue to just to whack them out there and have the Russians cancel the summit—that's the worst of both worlds.

Haldeman: If you cancel the summit, you gain something from them. If they cancel it, it hurts you.

Nixon: If they cancel it, it looks like we—peace has suffered a great blow because of our failure in Vietnam, the President's stubbornness and smallness. If, on the other hand, I say I will not go to the summit so long as there is any—so long as we have a massive offensive being supported by the Soviet Union.

Haldeman: And the Shah [of Iran] and all of those other folks too.

Nixon: Well, that's [unclear]—

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, Henry has a point—and Al thinks there's something to this point, he sees more to it than I do—that maybe he's right that to a certain extent you keep the critics off balance as long as they think we may be up to something in the negotiating realm.

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: He may be right.

Haldeman: Well, I think that's right. But I don't—it keeps that narrow fringe of critics off balance, and it's important to keep them off balance.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: But that doesn't buy you public support. Your general—

Nixon: I don't think so either.

Haldeman: Your general public support is so—of course, the public wants peace. And that's one problem you've got with canceling the summit—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haldeman: —is that they—

Nixon: Is that they want the Soviet summit.

Haldeman: Because they think that's a peace—not just Vietnam, but other areas. [unclear exchange]

Nixon: They want—they're mixed, they're ambivalent about it, they want peace on the one hand—

Haldeman: That's why postponing it rather than canceling it might put you in a better posture too. If they cancel it, it's they who've destroyed it as part of the peace thing. But you've taken a strong position in saying "I won't sit down with them under the present conditions." Well, the other side of that is what's happening on the military side.

Nixon: Well, I got [unclear]. It's, as usual, it's not—its hairy, but not nearly as frightening as the press indicates. You get the whole thing under Al's—Al, whose great business [unclear], he says just keep it up, that's all. Thieu's going to stand. See, the point of the military thing is this. What the hell else do you do? Get out? Overthrow Thieu? Jesus Christ, you can't do that.

Haldeman: We can't. He can.

Nixon: Oh, yes, as part of the South. But, you know if he just runs out now, suppose he goes off and says I resign, perhaps the whole thing collapses. Your men are in great, great danger to the remaining Americans. No, we'll just hold tight, don't get panicked, you know what I mean?

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: Our people shouldn't be so panicky. These are the way wars are. They go up and down. It's tough; damn hard. And you can't make good news, whatever it is, on the other hand. But there's one thing I'm sure of we need: that strike on the Hanoi–Haiphong area. I think that just adds up on all scores. They don't negotiate now, Christ, how are you going to improve your negotiating position. How are you going to get the—So, we'll work on it.

Haldeman: [unclear]

Nixon: Well, it's my job. But look, we have to face it. Henry's judgment has not been good on this. His judgment has been terrific on most things. He thought he was going to get something out of the Russians when he went over, you know that.

Haldeman: And he didn't get a drop.

Nixon: You remember? And I kept—that's why I sent those god-damned cables. I knew he wasn't getting anything. I said, "For Christ sakes, don't give them what they want unless you get something that we want." Well, it was all right. So, second point, he's—and I told Al this morning, I said, "Al, aren't you glad I didn't make that SALT announcement?" And I sure am. Never wanted to anyway—making the SALT announcement.

Haldeman: Did Henry want you to make it—was he the one that was—

Nixon: Oh, yes.

Haldeman: Wanted you to go on—

Nixon: [unclear] he finally agreed yesterday morning.

Haldeman: [unclear]

Nixon: Yes. Oh, I hit him on the ground that—

Haldeman: Keep it away from Gerry Smith?

Nixon: Oh, also, yeah. I think here he was very personally involved because he wants to be sure that the White House gets the credit and so forth. My point is, Bob, that I don't think there's a hell of a lot of credit in it. I don't think people give much of a shit about SALT. Do you?

Haldeman: Well, it's a plus, but it isn't a—

Nixon: It didn't get any play last [unclear]—

Haldeman: Ron calls it a [unclear]. Nobody's going to change their votes because of it.

Nixon: Yeah, it didn't get much. Particularly when the enemy's not knocking ground over there. No, the press is a big deal here, they're just trying the usual thing, to divide the President from, you know, his hard-line soft-line. And also, they're trying another one to build Henry as the peacemaker if we get it, you see? [unclear] At any rate, it isn't going to come. And the reason they're selecting Henry to beat Bill now is that they've given up on Rogers. That's really what it gets down to.

They know that they can't go to him. They know that Henry isn't going to be able to come. They know that Henry's spoken. That's why—

Haldeman: Henry's so visible.

Nixon: Henry's got to be able to understand this, that when he was—he didn't I must say, to his credit, he didn't talk to the press he wasn't inciting them. But the purpose of raising Kissinger isn't to help us, it's to screw us. Right?

Haldeman: Absolutely.

Nixon: I'd keep Scali going on the other line—that the President's in charge.

[Omitted here is discussion of press criticism. Haldeman and Nixon then discussed draft wording for a statement that unless the offensive was discontinued, the President would delay opening of summit with Soviets. Nixon then suggested that while there was interest in the summit, the American people did not want their President to go to Moscow while South Vietnam was under assault by the North Vietnamese using Soviet supplied guns and tanks.]

Nixon: I can't see, I just can't see—it's just been hard for me to get this through to Henry—I just can't see myself being in Moscow toasting the goddamn Russians, signing the SALT Treaty in the Hall of St. Peter, when Vietnam is under serious attack. Do you agree or not?

Haldeman: I think I do. My basic—I very, totally do.

Nixon: [unclear exchange]

Haldeman: I'm just trying to raise the other side of this. I don't know how you argue the other side. I don't see how you can argue—

Nixon: Well, can you compose the question, or a quick 500-word—500-sample—that we can run with immediately. You can do that, can't you?

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: What I'd like to do is to say is that "in view of the continued Communist invasion of South Vietnam, which is supported by massive Soviet aid and military equipment, some," and I'm not thinking how to word it, some, or do you believe the President should—no, as you know, the President is scheduled go to the Soviet Union for a summit meeting. So, did you get that—but should he postpone the—his—meeting with the Soviet leaders until after the offensive—unless the offensive is discontinued. In other words, try to get it in the way, unless the offensive is discontinued, there are some that say that unless the offensive is discontinued, the President should refuse—should cancel—don't say postpone or postponed, don't give them several, don't give them 18 questions, in other words make it one—his visit to the Soviet Union, or should not go forward with or should delay—to postpone his visit to the Soviet Union until the summit is—You're go-

ing to word those things—will you try to get some wording out like that? Let's just get a feeling of what kind of public opinion we're faced with on that, see? I have a feeling myself that despite their great interest in having a summit, the people still don't want their President to go there when we're under a hell of an assault from Soviet guns and tanks. See my point?

Haldeman: Yup.

Nixon: Now, you just put it very succinctly. Do you believe the President should cancel his—postpone—his meeting with the Soviets, cancel it until—

Haldeman: That's it. Cancel until the offensive—

Nixon: Cancel it until the offensive is discontinued. The summit meeting with the Soviet leaders—until the offensive in Vietnam is stopped or discontinued or something like that. Or, do you believe he should go forward with his meeting with the Soviet leaders, regardless of the fact that even as the offensive in Vietnam continues. We're going to be in the position, in my view—this is the second week, we don't get there until the 22nd—in other words, we've got 3 weeks; we're going to be in a position then when the offensive will have frankly run its course, and they will not have succeeded. I still think that's the case. When I say not succeeded, they will have succeeded in the public's mind in many ways, and part of the Second Corps. But any person that knows that a goddamn thing about the country knows that all that matters in Vietnam are Third and Fourth Corps. That's where the people are. Anyway, that's the way it is. You did get your poll off, didn't you—the poll up to the Congress, and so forth?

Haldeman: Yes, sure did. With a lot of background.

Nixon: [unclear]

Haldeman: I didn't see any. Well that's what I wanted. We got it out yesterday. [unclear] I did that.

Nixon: [unclear] The purpose of this is really to affect our own people's morale, and so forth. You see? I certainly would like to have some public record but I don't think we're going to get it. But everyone—Colson's group knows the importance of it. Now that's something that should be played, you understand? That's not Polyannish.

Haldeman: That's right. That's public opinion. That's what people—

Nixon: That's right. You see, putting out the polls, it's not taking the Pollyannaish line. It's should we kick these bastards or not.

Haldeman: That's right.

Nixon: So that's a pretty good one.

[Omitted here is a discussion of SALT and Vietnam.]

186. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)¹

Washington, May 2, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger's impending return from meeting with the North Vietnamese in Paris and of the battle for the city of Hue in South Vietnam.]

Nixon: The thing that I'm—I think Al we've got to just awfully toughen up to, is this summit thing.

Haig: I see.

Nixon: You see we only have about 2 weeks before we have to leave, right?

Haig: And also, I, I don't share Henry's judgment that the Hue battle is going to be 10 days before it develops. I think it is going to develop very quickly.

Nixon: Um-hmm. You think we're going to have a battle for Hue?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Do you think—Well, it may be held, don't you think? Or it may be lost, what do you think?

Haig: If they have the forces to do it—

Nixon: To hold it?

Haig: To hold—

Nixon: To hold it or to lose it, or both?

Haig: Well, to hold it. I don't know whether they have the will to hold it. That's the big question. If the enemy follows up very, very quickly, and puts a lot of pressure on them.

Nixon: Well, one thing about Hue, I know that it is a hell of a symbol because of being the old capital and all that sort of thing. But we have to remember, the damn place was half taken over in '68. In other words, it's been fought over before.

Haig: Oh, yes, it has.

Nixon: I'm not trying to be Pollyannaish about it—[unclear exchange]

Haig: No, it wouldn't be a strategic tragedy.

Nixon: That's about what I mean. What is really the place is the Third and Fourth Corps. But then you come to this. How can you

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 717–20. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Haig in the Oval Office from 12:42 to 1:20 p.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

possibly, how can you possibly go to the Soviet Union and toast to Brezhnev and Kosygin and sign a SALT agreement in the Great Hall of St. Peter when Russian tanks and guns are kicking the hell out of our allies in Vietnam? Now that's—I ask you, how in the hell can you do it?

Haig: It's impossible to do if there's that kind of a decisive battle still underway.

Nixon: Well, shouldn't we then—Frankly, I think we should tell Henry tonight that—I don't know, just mention the fact that I want him to think about this on the way back, that I have a view of the reaction he's had that we will of course go through, go forward with a strike. It will be a 2-day strike however, not—rather than, rather than one on Friday and rather than one on Monday. Second, that I think the strike is necessary for three reasons: they issued a memo a month earlier by the domestic opinion in the United States—to have to, at least, to have some bargaining position with the Vietnamese and to a lesser extent the Soviets. And also for the giving the South Vietnamese some—a shot in the arm at a time when their morale desperately needs it. However, the critical question that we must discuss tonight is my growing conviction—use those terms—that we should move to cancel the summit. Now, I do not anticipate that there will be any significant change at any level in the enemy's activities before going to Moscow. And I cannot—and while I recognize the argument that going to the summit keeps the, keeps our critics off balance, and that canceling it will give them ammunition, on the other side of the coin, going to the summit, toasting the Russians, having signed an agreement with them at a time that they are, that their tanks and weapons are fueling a massive offensive against our allies, our ally, I think is simply unthinkable. There's no good choice, I realize. But I just wonder what you think, Al. I mean, I think that what we have to realize is that Henry's judgment has been really fantastically good on so many things—I mean, the China initiative, playing of China against the Soviet Union, and so many other things—but I think we have to realize that his judgment with regard to negotiations with the North Vietnamese has been faulty. Throughout he's always been hopeful, and he's always read more into it than was there. A lot of people have been wrong about it. In any event, it's his folly. Now, I don't think we have any good choice, and I, and the only choice we've got is to frankly see it through on the military side. Now, of course, seeing it through on the military side assumes that if we are to be successful and that the South Vietnamese will not collapse. But also, in order that—so we agree. But on the other hand—what we do can perhaps make the difference in determining whether they do collapse or not, because the will—I really think they get a hell of a shot in the arm by our stronger position against the enemy, in the enemy's heartland. And that brings me to

the blockade thing. I mean, we'll blockade the sons-of-bitches, and that'll be—it's a terrible risk, I know.

Haig: It's a risk. It's a terrible risk in two senses. One is it's going to be a political price—

Nixon: Sure.

Haig: And two is, is it going to be decisive?

Nixon: Two—if it will work. If it's going to work, to hell with the political price. You know what I mean? That's all, that's all it is. If it isn't going to work, it isn't worth doing. We can huff and puff all we want, but goddamn it, if its going to fail, that's what I mean.

Haig: Well, that's what I'm afraid of. That's my major concern.

Nixon: What you mean is, your concern is that we'll fail not because we fail in our blockade or our air but because the South Vietnamese will go out from under us. Is that it?

Haig: Well, a combination of two things. One is, that they have enough supplies there to keep them going through a critical period. It may be necessary to get these [unclear]

Nixon: In the end. Right.

Haig: And that there are alternative means for them, if the Chinese want to step in.

Nixon: All right, that's the argument against the blockade. What is the argument against the bombing? Not the same, is it?

Haig: No, I—

Nixon: That should be—

Haig: I don't have one there. I think, I think the bombing is not going to be decisive. But it plays another card in terms of Soviet risks in involvement, which they must take seriously. And then we'll have to assess their reaction. It's quite obvious that they've had no luck with Hanoi, if they've tried, and I'm not sure that they did.

Nixon: You're really not sure that they did or not?

Haig: No.

Nixon: I, I've never—I think that they said, in that wire to Henry. I'll never forget what Brosio said to me 20 years ago, he said that the Russians are the biggest liars, the best actors.

Haig: It's a simple calculus to me. What is worth more to them? To humiliate the United States? To risk your re-election—a man that they know is tough and is not going to be taken in by them? Or to go on and quote "save Brezhnev's policies first in Europe"—the Berlin treaties and all that go with it? And—

Nixon: And the SALT agreement. [unclear exchange] And all that with China—that they, rather than China, have the—the China thing is in the background [unclear exchange]. But all of those are basically intangibles, aren't they, comparatively?

Haig: Well, they're not necessarily sacrificed as a result of going the route that they're going. They're all reconstructable within a 2- or 3-year period.

Nixon: Somebody else. And much easier.

Haig: And much easier. [pause] Well, quite frankly, if I were in Moscow, and I were driven by the convictions that I think they're driven by, I'd screw us. [pause] That tells you what [unclear] I think, but that's the inclination I have. I think we've seen nothing new to cause us to think otherwise. I think we have to—Then you've got another set of circumstances that follow that is do you, do we believe that the whole thing is that important to them that they'll stand up and break the summit and try to squeeze us in other places if we take this strong stand. That's even a cloudier picture.

Nixon: You mean like Berlin?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Or Cuba?

Haig: Cuba, which they've already started.

Nixon: What are they doing there?

Haig: They've got a nuclear-capable submarine in Cuban waters now. So they've started there. Their [unclear]—

Nixon: Of course the other side of the coin which Henry will argue very strongly is that we shouldn't sink our whole foreign policy because of Vietnam.

Haig: That's right. And it's a good argument.

Nixon: It is a good argument.

Haig: It's an argument that oughtn't to be taken lightly.

Nixon: But how in the hell, how in the hell can you avoid it? How in the hell—

Haig: The question is—

Nixon: I don't see any way out.

Haig: The question is what will sink it more decisively.

Nixon: Yeah, but let's look at Vietnam for just a moment. How in the hell, how do you see any other way out? I mean, Christ, they've surrendered. We can't go in [unclear]. What did you have in mind on that?

Haig: I don't see any solution, unfortunately. If they hold the adamant position to overthrow Thieu, set a date, it just seems to me that that's something that would kill them here, domestically, internationally—

Nixon: Oh, internationally too. Forget the goddamn domestic thing. We'll handle that. I mean, that, that is the most important thing anyway. But internationally, Al, what the hell would the United States be if we overthrow Thieu and set a date? What in the hell would we be?

Haig: You know, they [unclear] about the dominoes. But Thailand would be gone in 6 months to a year, Cambodia, Laos.

Nixon: Indonesia.

Haig: Indonesia would be next.

Nixon: Yeah. No question. And Singapore, Malaysia, the [Taiwan] Straits, you're goddamn right it would go. It would strike terror in the hearts of the Koreans. And frankly, let's face it, in the Mid-East, things would heat up.

Haig: Well, I think that's liable to happen in any event. That's another thing we better keep our eye on. Then again, the kind of stand we take here is going to have an impact on that. It certainly requires, in the short term, a strong, solid crack.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: Which may or may not be enough.

Nixon: Yeah, which may—that's right, maybe not.

Haig: I think we'd be deluding ourselves if we think a 2-day strike on Hanoi and Haiphong is going to change their determination.

Nixon: I agree. I agree. On the other hand, it does, to a certain extent, help us in all of these three areas. But I think—

Haig: It does.

Nixon: And particularly on the bargaining position. You've got none now; you might have some later. I don't know. I don't know, but you might. That's the point, right?

Haig: That's exactly right. But you can't afford not to do it. It will help, but it's not going to be decisive. Now, it just might be, but my judgment would be no, especially if they continue to maintain momentum here and knock off Hue. If that happens, I'm more inclined to think they are going to keep trying to press at any cost while they've got the enemy—their enemy—reeling a bit.

Nixon: Right. Well, the thing—The difference between the two armies is quite clear. They're willing to do by whatever means to sacrifice every goddamned North Vietnamese, and the South Vietnamese just don't want to pay the price.

Haig: They don't want to pay the price. [long pause] See, I think that if they would just stand there and fight, and bring this air in, I know damn well they could hold.

Nixon: Sure.

Haig: I just know it.

[Omitted here is discussion regarding tactical operations and the bombing in Vietnam.]

Haig: We've got to have a greater sense of urgency to bolster these little guys up. They need that bolstering.

Nixon: Well, I still come back to the fact that this goddamn strike will help in that respect, too.

Haig: It will help.

Nixon: I mean, their morale [unclear] this massive strike on the North. [unclear] The first one did. Yeah.

Haig: It was very evident to me, every place I went, they were riding high. And it helped the central government, because Thieu must now be at the point where he is going to start unraveling.

Nixon: Sure.

[long pause]

Haig: I think Henry does have to think about this very, very carefully.

Nixon: The summit?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Yeah, yeah.

Haig: I don't think we should do it precipitously, because—

Nixon: Oh no, no, no—

Haig: —I think we won't know for a few days.

Nixon: But I think we need to think about it because we can't—shit, we can't just—

Haig: If you do it, it ought to be in terms of just leveling Hanoi and Haiphong and not just stopping with 2 days.

Nixon: Just continue it?

Haig: No. Make an assessment of the 2 days and then start.

Nixon: Right.

Haig: And then just keep digging on. As long as they're keeping the heat on, we keep it on.

Nixon: Yeah. In other words, we continue to hammer that area.

Haig: And if you ever make that decision, I think you have to have a concurrent decision that the summit is off, because I don't think that they can take that head in terms of summitry.

[Omitted here is additional discussion on bombing in North Vietnam.]

Haig: So there is considerable Soviet restraint—fear of you; fear of what you might do.

Nixon: I think that may be so—that Henry may be right. It may be that Brezhnev does want the summit.

Haig: I think he does. I don't think that they meant leaving out one. They've done things there like—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: They've taken a lot from us.

Haig: They really have in the last 3 months.

Nixon: We have hit them, hit their—the fact that they are supplying, and I hit them publicly in the Canadian Congress, and Parliament, and a hell of a lot of other places, you know. We did it in our speeches—Rogers, Laird, and all the rest.

Haig: And they've been extremely restrained about building up international opinion against the bombing of the North. They just haven't said very much. So there's no question that's where they're going, and that's the way they'd like to go, and we can't take that lightly. That's why I think we have to plan worst case/best case/medium case, having to go through it, assess it as we can very, very carefully, because they'll scream, and we may get some reaction there that will be indicative of what we should do next. [pause] In the final analysis, it's really to keep these little guys on the ground there standing and fighting—

Nixon: That's right. It always is; it's always that way. We know that. [unclear] somewhere or others, as they get to the wall—their backs to the wall, I just think that they're going to face a hell of a choice themselves. If they fight, they're going to be taken over, and there will be a hell of a bloodbath, correct?

Haig: Oh, I don't doubt that. It's started in every area they've taken over.

Nixon: Has it?

Haig: And it's [unclear]—the shooting of, you know, like public officials. I mean police RF/PF [Regional Forces/Provincial Forces] units just go. And that's the way they operate.

Nixon: Well, they operate through terror. All the Communists do, for Christ's sake. They've done it in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, East Germany, right? Goddamn it, how the hell do these bastards get in charge in the world, or the world they have? The Chinese have done it. It's brutality, fear—it's why so much is on the line.

Haig: Well, I don't know.

Nixon: Oh, Henry can make a powerful case. Well we just can't let Vietnam bring down a second President. But there are worse things, worse things.

Haig: Well, what you've got to do is what's needed, because there isn't very much worse, given the options.

Nixon: There is what?

Haig: There isn't much worse than that—in this country.

Nixon: Much worse, what do you mean?

Haig: Than the thought of your not being here.

Nixon: You mean that's worse?

Haig: That is. That, to me, is a vital national interest when you consider the alternative.

Nixon: So, you say that you'd find a graceful way to get out of Vietnam. Win the election. You'd do it? Is that what you'd say? And live to fight another day?

Haig: Mm-hmm.

Nixon: Well that's true. We can't find a graceful way out. That's the point.

Haig: [unclear exchange] the difference.

Nixon: Hell—

Haig: [unclear]

Nixon: [unclear exchange] this trip. Hell, Christ, after he went there, we should just tell them to kiss our ass—kiss their ass, right? [pause] After the Soviet [pause] Do you think Porter should walk out Thursday?² Is that the plan?

Haig: If he just walks out he makes a blast. He's got—Henry's given him talking points, we've sent him through the Department. He doesn't need too much urging anyhow. He's very good. He'll walk out, and then on Friday afternoon—it's good that we do it that way, otherwise it would look loaded if we had gone Thursday.

[Omitted here is further discussion on the enemy offensive inside Vietnam and the South Vietnamese response to it and Kissinger's return to Washington.]

² May 4.

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

Washington, May 3, 1972.

[Omitted here is a discussion between the President and Kissinger regarding what they perceived as Secretary of State Rogers' efforts to get credit for SALT, especially his effort to assert that there was a freeze on nuclear submarines. Both participants assessed that Rogers was trying possibly to derail the negotiations. Regarding the talks with the

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 718–9. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 10:59 to 12:11 p.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

North Vietnamese, Kissinger recommended to the President a walk-out in protest. He contended that the North Vietnamese had given him a weak proposal in Paris the day before in order to prolong the negotiating process. Kissinger noted that he had told them to stop playing games and asserted the U.S. Government's right to defend its position. Kissinger concluded that continuing with the plenary meetings would be interpreted as "a very weak move."]

Nixon: Let me analyze this thing on the summit, and so forth, and particularly in view of the Porter thing. You're absolutely right that anything less than walking out is a weak move. What I would like to see is and we can say, which does not indicate the total breakdown and thereby lack of hope on the negotiating front. Now, you and I know there's no hope at all for tomorrow.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: On the other hand, we have a hell of a lot of people being used on this particular point. You've made this point often.

[Omitted here is further discussion where Nixon noted that such a walkout would be met with great enthusiasm by the hawks, but would turn loose critics in the Senate and other matters.]

Nixon: Now, what we have to realize is that in terms of the domestic front, that this kind of a move, and I want to put it in the context of the bombing and the summit thing, this kind of a move can have a good short-range effect—the walkout. In the long-range, we have to consider it in the context with what our plans are and what effect it'll have. Now let's look at the summit. As I see the summit, and of course I'm the strongest proponent of not making the summit hostage to Vietnam or Vietnam to the summit, anyway, the cancellation of the summit, and incidentally, there can't be any halfway. We can say that we are going to postpone or that we aren't going to go at this time or that we'll be glad to go at a later time when the offensive is stopped, or this, that, or the other thing, and so forth—I'm just trying to think of all of the language that we could work up. First, analyzing it from the foreign standpoint, it will have a beneficial impact, as you pointed out last night on Thieu. It will have a—certainly some shock effect on Hanoi. It will have some effect on the Russians, and more on that in a moment.

The question arises, what effect does it have here? The initial effect would be, in my opinion, extremely favorable. The greatest President puts everything on the line, stands up to the Russians, and so forth. However, in getting the domestic thing out of the way first, because it does have some bearing, we have to realize, that once we have canceled the summit, that then we will unleash without any question, not simply to cause, but we will unleash again particularly our attacks on Senators and Congressmen who are presently off-balance; one,

because the summit is coming, and two, because they think that something is going on, which you and I know is poppycock. And you are correct, certainly, in your suggestion to the Soviets, [that] if we cancel the summit, then we get turned around. Their reaction could be one of two things. It could present a problem. Their reaction, however, might be to say, "Well, the conference got thrown down, something was lost, in spite of the fact that the President said we'll negotiate on bilateral issues and so forth." That could come at a later time. They could unleash their rather massive propaganda efforts abroad and here in this country. And so, what would happen is that over a period of time, the time that this action were taken, that the immediate—I'm speaking now of the effect at home—the immediate effect at home would very substantially erode. It would be favorable, very favorable, at the beginning, and then it would erode, and it would erode for a variety of reasons. It would erode because of course the attack on our enemies which we must expect, which would be unleashed [unclear] would be off balance. It would erode because the hopes for, you know, peace and so forth, would be knocked down. And it would erode also because there would be—we would have to participate in massive attack [unclear] on the ground on the idea that the so-called Nixon foreign policy had collapsed and collapsed because of our insistence on seeing the Vietnam war through to an honorable conclusion. That would be the argument that they would make. And, we on our side, that of course it would be argued tremendously that what they were doing, as I found out last night, that we have to put them right into the arms of the Soviets, the Soviets responsible for this war, who continues to supply them arms and supplies at the present time.

Now, let's come to the other point. At the heart of the matter is what effect the cancellation of the summit would have on the outcome of the war itself. If the cancellation of the summit very substantially improves a chance for a favorable outcome in Vietnam, that is a decisive factor. If, on the other hand, the cancellation of the summit has only a marginal effect in that respect, and would of course [mean] the bombing has a marginal effect, then we have to look at it another way, and that way would be along this line. If we are looking at a situation here where over a period of three years we have built in a masterful way a new foreign policy. The China game, the Soviet game, its a very big game. You and I both know that it's a very difficult operation. The Soviets have been liars and bastards and thugs, and so forth and so on. We also know that at the present time we've got some American public opinion developing along that line.

However, if we put it in perspective, I think we have to realize that if we're looking at the effect, the effect on the Democratic Convention coming up July, and we're looking at the election coming up in November, at the effect on the election, I think that cold-bloodedly

we have to say this. First, the heart of the matter is Vietnam and how it comes out. If Vietnam comes out badly, the election is very seriously jeopardized anyway. However, if Vietnam comes out badly, then we also cancel the summit. In other words, if we cancel the summit and if it still comes out badly, the election would certainly be down the tube, something which Haig and yourself would say would be a very tragic thing. Because it would mean we would not live to fight another day. God knows it, we need to, there's so much that needs to be done. You hear this military briefing and you realize that our military has let us down—and that's just one. But you need a new foreign policy, and you need a new military policy, and so forth, and it's not going to be done by any successor, but so much for that.

If, on the other hand, canceling the summit is the only and critical factor, which may save the situation in Vietnam [unclear], because if the situation in Vietnam is saved, then canceling the summit will look good. I mean, [unclear] even though we will after our first [unclear] and then our erosion will come back up again. Now, there's one other equation to throw into this. If canceling of the summit, now if we see that the South Vietnamese situation is—if our cold-blooded analysis is, and we cannot make that now, I realize that you use the term "50-50", that's my guess. I mean it's half and half, maybe a little better than that, that they'll survive, because I think they're suffering a hell of a lot more than we have any reason to believe, but we shall see. If the South Vietnamese survive, then—I mean do not survive—then having the summit, even under very difficult circumstances, but having it where we say Vietnam will be at the top of the agenda, will have a bad effect.

Kissinger: That is not a possibility to put Vietnam on the top of the agenda. I mean, there'll be many issues we'll have to juggle.

Nixon: All right. But having a summit without Vietnam at least as a marginal, is a marginal plus, instead of being a very substantial thing in the long run. That's what we'll have to face—I'm speaking now of the domestic side. So that brings me back to the other option. The other option is to react as we had originally planned, with our 2-day strike, and see whether the Russians go forward, whether they stress—they may move to cancel, which they might. The 2-day strike thing certainly would have at first great support in this country. Again, it would give some encouragement to the South Vietnamese, give some pause to the Russians, and some pause to Hanoi. The argument you made last night is a very strong one, to the effect that, well, it would look like an act of desperation, to the effect that Hue is being threatened, and so forth and so on. Well, maybe so, maybe the first strike will look that way too. But we all know at the present time the public temper will support that kind of a strike we want to look at. So we have to weigh that. So it really comes down to this. Whether we really honestly feel that canceling the summit could have—could be—a decisive factor or even

a substantial factor in resolving the situation in Vietnam. On that point, I have grave doubts. And if that is true, then the case for it isn't as strong as we thought it was last night. As far as the strike in the North is concerned, I have serious doubts whether that will have great effect on the situation in Vietnam. It will have some. But we all know that we know it's a choice between one of two things: either we hit the North for 2 days or we cancel the summit. We have no other options. [unclear exchange]

Kissinger: And hitting the [unclear] of the North for 2 days may cancel the summit.

Nixon: Oh, I understand that.

Kissinger: And they may cancel it.

Nixon: I know, I know.

Kissinger: And then all of the crap that you mentioned, maybe even more—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Coming against you. I mean every argument that you made on canceling the summit wouldn't fly then even more because it would tie Vietnam even more intricately to it, and you wouldn't be able to get your story out.

Nixon: It's a risk, it's a risk.

Kissinger: That's right. And I think there'd be a slightly better than 50–50 chance that they would cancel the summit, which is why I moved to the point that we should postpone it now. Nobody can present any of these positions to you with the argument that they will save the situation in South Vietnam, because I can't say that they will. Nothing may. Canceling the summit may not, certainly may not. But in this situation, I'm thinking of the Presidency, thinking of your position in history, and of the position of the country in the long-term. If you go to Moscow without having done anything, it will be a total disaster. We can make it look good, we can put on an act, but all the things that will be needed to be put on, that the Russians will then despise us. We will have lost all credibility.

Nixon: Not doing anything. Will—[unclear]

Kissinger: No, I know. I just keep going up the ladder.

Nixon: Yeah. Fine. So that's out of the question?

Kissinger: That I don't see how we can do. And the cramming of all that machinery, after reading them your dispatches. But even without it—secondly, for the United States, I mean, what the Russians have done systematically since last October is put it to us. And they've said you can have your summit, and at the same time we're going to screw you. Now we go in on great principles of coexistence. And I think the feeling of uneasiness among—I'm not even worried now about Vietnam,

the fact that Russian arms have run us out of Vietnam and the President goes to Moscow and signs principles of coexistence, gives them credit, and agrees with them to screw one of his allies in the Middle East. Now, you know that I'm in favor, hell, we've got the principles all negotiated, and the trade is all done, and the Middle East one we can do, and in fact we're prepared to do that too. But suppose you do all these three things after India–Pakistan and Southeast Asia, and the fact that the bastards have not done one goddamn thing for us ever.

Nixon: They have not.

Kissinger: And I must say objectively that this is a sign of great weakness, which will encourage them. Your great strength in foreign policy is your toughness. And your great standing abroad is due to the fact that you've gone your way. Now you could say you could go to the summit, go through with it, don't sign these principles, don't give them credit, and don't make a deal on the Middle East. Well, then, we'll have a pretty lousy summit. Now to get out of the summit what you want, you have to come back and be able to talk about peace. And about having made tremendous strides towards peace, in other words, you give the Soviets a certificate of good conduct. Now, if we can limit South Vietnam while doing all of this that would be great. That'd be the best of all the worlds.

Nixon: But that you can't unfortunately know in time.

Kissinger: Well if you are in Russia miles away and everything is integrated, there's just no way of making it look good.

Nixon: Correct. Our problem, of course. I just wanted to be sure you considered all those.

Kissinger: I, Mr. President, I—God, we suffered and anguished to get to this point. So they may give us an answer that enables us to do it.

Nixon: Are you going to get an answer?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah, there'll be an answer. But they may give us a very threatening answer because in a way they're cornered too. This letter is couched in terms that suggests we're going to attack North Vietnam but there's no threat to the Soviet summit involved here. But they may figure that since that what we may do they may pre-empt us and cancel it.

Nixon: Okay. If we cancel the summit, then follow with massive attacks on the North occur.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Am I right?

Kissinger: That would be my view. And we'd have to go right to the country and we'd have to put it to the presses.

[Omitted here is discussion of press reaction and Kissinger's media contacts and briefings.]

Kissinger: As between whether we postpone the summit or do the 2-day strike, we don't have to decide that.

Nixon: Well, can we, I mean, have we got 24 hours for them to come back?

Kissinger: Oh, yes. We have more than that.

Nixon: Oh, that much? Oh, yes, yes. They won't pull the 2-day strike off until Saturday.²

Kissinger: I don't think—I have never had the same sense of urgency about the 2-day strike that others have had because Hanoi and Haiphong aren't going to go away. You—

Nixon: Then, in other words, we shouldn't do it over the weekend anyway.

Kissinger: Well, I think we should do it fairly soon if we're going to do it. There's something to be said for not doing it on Saturday, so that it doesn't catch the weekly news magazines. But we can do it Sunday, Sunday and Monday.

Nixon: Why don't you analyze for me what you think of it so that I get—just take a minute as to what you think, we've gone through the summit thing, what the 2-day strike thing does. First, I don't need to go in—I know, for instance the Soviets canceling the summit. Fine. Let's get that out of the way. What does it do in terms of the war? It has some benefits.

Kissinger: Well, the 2-day strike has a number of military benefits. They're not in themselves decisive but when a country, especially as thin as they are now, anything can impede—they have, for example, changed their whole pattern of unloading gasoline in Haiphong as a result of the other strikes. Secondly, it helps Hanoi that you may just go crazy and press too hard. Thirdly, it really puts it to the Russians in the sense that you are saying all right, you cancel the summit if you want to and leave the choice up to them. Now there's a certain—so, in other words, you shouldn't leave the decision of canceling the summit to them, which isn't easy for them. We had an intercept of a Brezhnev conversation with Gus Hall in which he praises to Hall that he admires you very much and in fact gives a pretty objective account of—but, I repeat how eager they are for the summit; that they are under a lot of pressure from other Communist parties to cancel it. Now they'd love to—the closer to your arrival in Moscow that you do the 2-day strike the tougher it is for them. And, you see, the thing that worries me so much about the visit is for you to give them credit while their trucks and guns—

Nixon: Never.

² May 6

Kissinger: But if you don't give them credit—

Nixon: [unclear] the summit.

Kissinger: They're going to go—

Nixon: And also let's face it, even signing the SALT agreement is goddamn tough in the light of this—or any agreement with them of—I don't understand it. I'm the one who had grave doubts about the summit—

Kissinger: And to sign the common principles—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: God. You know it's a tragedy. We had a tremendous breakthrough all along this front. We worked 3 years to get it. And next to you, I'm the one most reluctant to give it up. And to give us a month of relative peace and quiet. But—

Nixon: Which it would—

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: —add to the summit.

Kissinger: No question. Would do what—

Nixon: While we're there, and for a week afterwards or 2 weeks afterwards. And also it would calm me. I have to realize the end of the summit comes at a time when the fighting in South Vietnam, one way or another, it's going to be escalating. I mean weather or a lot of other factors. Well, can we take our 24 hours now?

Kissinger: That we can, but we don't have to make a decision.

[Omitted here is discussion relating to Vietnam and measures to counteract enemy offensive, as well as wording for a speech on Vietnam, summit cancellation and strikes in North Vietnam.]

Kissinger: See, these principles, and trade, and Middle East, from a strong President will be—China was great, because no one questioned that you were tough and strong.

Nixon: Correct.

Kissinger: But you weren't getting run out of Vietnam at that time. And not by Chinese equipment.

Nixon: Yeah. The other thing I was going to say. Look, Henry, that argument has sold me a thousand percent. I'm just trying to think of—I'm trying to think of this. I'm trying to think also that really the argument that is made that [unclear] the canceling of the summit in and of itself would be a good thing clearly apart from its effect on Vietnam. So, basically, what we have to realize is if we get run out of Vietnam, we're down the tubes. Let's face it. You understand?

Kissinger: With or without the summit?

Nixon: A chance to save it if we have the summit. A little marginal, but it's so marginal it doesn't make any difference to me. But my

point is, though, that the—with the summit, by canceling the summit, you could [unclear] effect on keeping the morale in Vietnam, which I gather you don't think it really has. Don't know it. But I think the main point—what you're really getting to—is that the summit in-and-of itself now isn't a good idea in view of the situation in Vietnam.

Kissinger: That's right. I think it's very dangerous.

Nixon: That's the point. That's the thing that's worried me. Like I've said, the tipping of glasses and that sort of thing, at this point, with Russian tanks in there.

Kissinger: It's not a strong sign, tipping of glasses, and I look at this hall, and all this while Russian tanks are running around in Vietnam. I would say that—

Nixon: Well, let's take a minute before you [unclear]. So the scenario goes like this. We cancel the summit. And then, Henry, we do these bombings on Hanoi and Haiphong.

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. That we do anyway.

Nixon: Right. And then Thieu still loses, and what happens? Well, it's just one of those things, isn't it?

Kissinger: We'll then we take it the other way. Supposing you bomb Hanoi and Haiphong and they cancel the summit.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Then at least you've maintained your position and you just keep going anti-Communist and accuse your opponents of first having screwed up the peace talks.

Nixon: Yeah, I set that in motion with the [leadership] today. I said that the responsibility—

Kissinger: And they made it inevitable that the thing collapsed and now they want to sell out to the Russians. I mean, you'll probably lose—you may well lose the election then.

Nixon: But I might not.

Kissinger: But you might not.

Nixon: Well, I just think we have to see what we're up to. So you get back to Vietnam, again, don't you, and their—could I ask one other thing? The situation in the South—generally speaking, there is not a very substantial opposition to Thieu and [unclear]. Moorer says, said something about Big Minh.³

Kissinger: Oh, yeah, Big Minh is trying to organize and get himself into a reserve position. And they'll all begin to do it if the situation gets worse.

³ Duong Van Minh, retired ARVN General and former South Vietnamese leader.

Nixon: What does that do to us? Well—

Kissinger: Well, I consider—I tell you, if they had made any sort of proposition yesterday, I don't—I consider Thieu expendable.

Nixon: I agree.

Kissinger: That isn't the problem.

Nixon: No, what they're asking for is to—is to not just replace him. They want to impose conditions that would lead to a Communist government.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: I don't know.

Kissinger: That's the game plan they're playing.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: They want to—

Nixon: Can I ask this question on the timing of the cancellation of the summit. Is it worth considering risk taking and all that—to have him do this then have the bombing go forward—no, no, not have the bombing to go forward; I mean, I think it's contingent to fight the battle in the South, and we're very best to—and to have the summit cancellation at the end of next week rather than at the beginning. Just think of that.

Kissinger: What's the advantage of that?

Nixon: The advantage of it is it gives us more time to assess whether Vietnam might survive. Maybe we won't know any more than now. You see my point? I am greatly affected by—if we have some feelers.

Kissinger: The other problem though is supposing Hue has fallen by the end of next week, then it will look like especially a reaction to a defeat.

Nixon: I think it's going to look that way anyway. I mean, they have played the [unclear] so heavily, Henry, that I mean we didn't have any illusions about the perpetual reaction to a defeat. So, the fall of Hue I don't think is going to make much difference. Would you not agree?

Kissinger: I think, you know, it doesn't have to be Monday. It can be Tuesday. I think that if we're going to cancel that we better do it early rather than late. And we won't know a hell of a lot.

Nixon: Well, that's the answer then. We won't know a hell of a lot.

Kissinger: We know we'll lose Kontum. See, supposing it gets all unstuck, I don't see how you can go to Russia then, in my view. But I—

Nixon: I couldn't agree more.

Kissinger: But, you know, the other argument you could use it to divert attention from the defeat.

Nixon: You go to Russia then, what the hell can you agree on? That's the point. You can't agree to give credits; you can't agree to—

Kissinger: See, the whole idea, see, of agreeing, of having you sign health agreements, science agreements—what do the Russians want at the summit? They want to show that you and Brezhnev are ordering the world. Now, when you do it as equals, it's risky enough because it's going to hurt us enormously in Europe, it's going to hurt us with the Chinese. But the risk is worth taking under the assumption that you can recover from it in the next election—after the next election.

Nixon: By turning hard.

Kissinger: By turning hard. And that's how I'd justify it. But basically Shakespeare isn't wrong in his assessment of what this *détente* is doing to our allies. Now, there's strong sentiment that somebody to whom you can say look how you stood in all these crises. But its somebody who's been humiliated or at least can be challenged in South Asia by the Russians, and then the most vital area where we have 50,000—I mean vital from the point of view of national sensitivities, not about strategic interest—and he still does it.

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

Kissinger: That's something I think, Mr. President, that's going to be hard to recover from.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And who is then going to be left to respect you? I mean, I shouldn't talk this way, but I mean, the hawks?

Nixon: Not likely.

Kissinger: The doves?

Nixon: Nah.

Kissinger: A strong President—the reason—

Nixon: The real heart of the question, and it's good to talk it out this way, the real heart of the question is what I'm getting at really isn't about Vietnam, because if it were, we'd have to realize—

Kissinger: It's about what you said at the end. It's about the Presidency.

Nixon: That's right. The real point here is that the canceling of the summit or the bombing—neither may prove to have too much of an effect on the outcome of Vietnam. So scrub both of those things. The real reason we have to cancel the summit, if we do cancel the summit, is that we cannot go to the summit while Russian tanks and guns are kicking the shit out of us in Vietnam.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: We cannot make an agreement with people that are doing that. We don't meet with a bunch of outlaws. It's like when Rockefeller

going to the prison at Attica to meet with those goddamn people.⁴ Right?

Kissinger: That's my sense, Mr. President, with great reluctance, and knowing how we may get a turn in the situation; we may get an answer from Brezhnev that we can live with. I doubt it.

Nixon: Well, our answer—our decision on the speech, and so forth, should be made, it seems to me.

Kissinger: You don't have to make it before Friday or Saturday.

Nixon: The decision to go on—let's get the speech ready.

Kissinger: I'll get the speech done.

Nixon: You get the speech ready, and I'll work on it, and I can make a decision as to whether to give it or not Monday, and then give it Monday night or Tuesday night.

Kissinger: Yeah. There's no—

Nixon: And have in mind the fact—and then we can have the strike, in the case I don't make the speech, we can have the strike go Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday of next week.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: See my point?

Kissinger: There's no incentive

Nixon: I think in any event that we should tell Abrams—see this fits into the other point, that you can have these assets.

Kissinger: Don't worry about this Abrams baloney. I talked to Moorer. We can wait for that 'til tomorrow morning. He has got his execute order.

Nixon: Okay. What I'm getting at is this. I don't think we should do it over the weekend. Let's make the final decision with regard to canceling the summit really Monday.⁵ I want the speech, however. I'm going to prepare the speech, because getting the speech and writing it will help me get my own thinking and the right kind of thing.⁶ So I want the speech, a copy of it by—well, can they—when can they have it, Henry?

Kissinger: Tomorrow noon.

⁴ A reference to Attica State Prison in New York State where a hostage stand-off and riot occurred in 1969.

⁵ May 8.

⁶ Later, the President and Haldeman discussed the possible cancellation of the Soviet trip. The President noted that he could not "go to Moscow when Russian tanks were in the streets of Hue." He also added that the American people admired his courage on initiatives like the recent trip to China, and therefore he did not want to fail and appear to be helpless like his predecessor. "Keep in mind US is still a pretty damn strong country," he proclaimed. But the President added that cancellation was "almost a sure way to lose the election." However, he contended that even if canceling the summit had a marginal impact on the war in Vietnam, then it would have been worth it. Nixon had

Nixon: But that's too much for them.

Kissinger: Well, I think they can do it by tomorrow noon.

Nixon: Well, let's say, let's say, could we have a copy of the speech rather than tomorrow noon, could we have it tomorrow say, after dinner, 7 o'clock? That gives all day tomorrow. Fair enough?

Kissinger: Good.

Nixon: And you just put it there and we'll [unclear]. I'll say really one thing, [unclear] that the speech will be a real shocker, won't it? It will be one of the real surprises. Incidentally, there will be absolutely no agreement.

Kissinger: It will make you look very strong.

Nixon: For a moment. For a while. Grandstanding with a temper.

Kissinger: But—

Nixon: But on the other hand, on the other hand, we will definitely say, and frankly, that's the only choice that we have. See that's the way you have to look at it. If we had a better choice we'd make it, wouldn't we?

Kissinger: Well, you can do the 2-day strike. I think that if we wait for that too long—if we wait they'll think we're blinking. I mean, we can't—

Nixon: A 2-day strike could still go. It could land by Tuesday. We wouldn't be waiting too long, would it?

Kissinger: No, but, no, but that's the problem. By Tuesday we've got to go one way or the other

Nixon: That's what I meant. So that's why we've got to decide. We've got to decide to go on this thing.

Kissinger: If you cancel the summit, you can do without the 2-day strike for awhile.

Nixon: Well, why hold back?

Haldeman call Kissinger during this meeting, and Haldeman reported on Kissinger's comments. Kissinger noted his opposition against "cancellation outright" and instead argued for "postponement." Kissinger added that the President could not go to Russia under these circumstances, and thus was in a position where options were lacking. Haldeman noted that Kissinger had not wanted to bomb the Hanoi-Haiphong area before the Paris meeting. Kissinger also believed that the President could bomb and still retain a "50% chance of having the Summit." Haldeman described postponement as "rather intriguing." Kissinger added, "I am convinced that the President will not cancel the Summit." Haldeman told the President that he had to order the bombing, and that Kissinger said it would be over by June. However, the worst possible thing to happen would be if the Soviets canceled the summit first. If Nixon canceled it prior to that point, then it would put the blame on the Soviets for the Summit's failure to convene. (Conversation between Haldeman and Nixon, May 3, 1972; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, May 3, 1972, 2:50–3:35 p.m., Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 335–17)

Kissinger: Okay, I'll get that done. But in my view, you can hold up the decision until we get the thing.

Nixon: All right.

188. Editorial Note

In his diary entry of May 3, 1972, White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman wrote accounts of several discussions on the possible cancellation of the Moscow summit:

“Principle discussion today was again on the Summit cancellation. The P was tied up all morning with leadership meeting, the briefing by Moorer, some other things of that sort. He had me over first thing in the morning to set those up, to make the point that he wanted to postpone Annapolis for a week, keep the weekend clear, because if he does cancel the Summit, he's going to do it Monday night on TV. Then he makes the point of whether there's a real question of what we get out of canceling the Summit, and whether that's the key to winning the war, and that's what he's got to weigh.

“Later in the morning he was going over the thing again. Made the point that the loss of the Summit would result in a massive Soviet propaganda war worldwide, the charges that we've crumbled Nixon foreign policy, and that the costs there are too high to pay for the short term gain that we get for taking the positive action.

“Then later in the afternoon I talked to Henry. He makes the point that there's no choice on the Summit, that we have to drop it, or else the Russians will, but we can't both bomb the North and have the Summit. That's Henry's strong feeling. And he feels it's essential that we bomb the North, now that we've told the Russians that we're going to take a hard line with them and with the Vietnamese. If we don't get any action in Paris—and we haven't gotten any action. We tried to develop the arguments, and the main thing is we have to get a message to the Soviets and to Hanoi, anything here will be marginal in its effect on the war, but still could be psychologically important. The real question is how can we have a Summit meeting and be drinking toasts to Brezhnev while Soviet tanks are crumbling Hue? How can you have the P signing agreements for trade, arms, toasting peace and friendship and all that? It would be a very bad picture, and will display great weakness after the warning.

“On the other side is, that canceling the Summit is going to shatter the Nixon foreign policy, people don't like to see the government helpless. P came up with the line that going to the Soviet Union in the cause of peace while they're waging war would not serve the cause of

peace. K makes the point that we have too weak a hand to go to Russia now, but on the other side the people want hope, not just blood, sweat, and tears all the time. So P told me to make the strongest case for going ahead, and to talk to Henry about it, that he'll make no decision till Monday, and make the speech Monday night. My argument was that we should go ahead and bomb and see what happens. That we don't have to cancel the Summit, we can take the chance that they won't cancel it even if we do bomb, and then we have the best of both worlds. Henry's argument is, that creates a terrible problem for us, because the worst possible thing would be for the Russians to cancel the Summit, blaming it on the Nixon bombings, which would make it look like we had really blown the chances for world peace.

"I had quite a long anguished talk with Henry, who is obviously deeply disturbed by this whole thing. He makes the point that we have done a number of things wrong in this thing and he feels that he handled the Moscow meeting and the Paris meeting wrong in the sense that he didn't leave any flexibility. He put the issue to them solidly as the P told him to, and they didn't back down, so now we're in a bad spot. He feels that because of that, we can't back down now, but it will leave the P in such a position of weakness that he wouldn't be able to govern even if he survived it. P feels on the other hand, that he can very well lose the election by what comes out of this and that it, therefore, becomes of vital importance. In any event, he decided not to make any decision today and continue to ponder the thing. It turns out that Henry has sent a very strong letter from the P to Brezhnev, and there should be a reply on that tomorrow or the next day, and that will show the Russian attitude, which will be another factor in deciding what we do.

"The other thing was our poll results last night showed that 60 percent of the people feel that the P should go ahead with the Summit in spite of the invasion of Vietnam. In other words, there's strong popular demand here for the Summit, and that makes it even harder to figure out how to cancel it." (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

Kissinger's Record of Schedule for May 3 shows that he met with Haldeman three times: from 9:59 a.m. to 10:05 a.m., from 3:45 p.m. to 4:55 p.m., and for 5 minutes beginning at 5:40 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers) No other record of these meetings has been found.

Commenting on the possible cancellation of the summit in a meeting with Congressional leaders on May 3, Nixon stated: "Nobody makes a deal when the battle is at its height." (Memorandum for the President's Files by Patrick J. Buchanan, May 11; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 88, Memoranda for the President, Beginning April 30 1972)

189. Conversation Between President Nixon and his Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, May 3, 1972.

Nixon: Looking at the last point first,² because it could turn out to be the most important. He's certainly right in the short run. In the short run, if I go on television and say there's Soviet tanks and guns and they're shooting on civilians and the rest, people will say a damn courageous act.³ We need to mobilize our hawks.

Haldeman: Hell, Eisenhower gained points on the U-2 summit cancellation when they canceled out. [unclear exchange]

Nixon: In the long run, what we've got to look at is what happens. Now, if canceling the summit, and nothing's sure, would substantially increase the chances of bringing the Vietnam thing to a successful conclusion, I would do it in a minute. If, on the other hand, canceling the summit is only marginal in terms of bringing it to a successful conclusion, then—

Haldeman: Then you're losing a lot of long-range pluses.

Nixon: What?

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 718-4. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Haldeman in the Oval Office from 10:02 to 10:50 a.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

² Reference is to a memorandum from Kissinger concerning options regarding the summit; see Document 183.

³ In a conversation earlier that day, Nixon told Haldeman that: "Kissinger has reached the conclusion, which we all knew, is to rather than to bomb is to announce that we are not going to this Summit. Now, that's a tentative conclusion at this point." Haldeman asked "And not bomb?" Nixon responded: "But not bomb after that. I tended to agree certainly with that last night. However, I wanted to see this poll. Here's the whole point. Why then if not going to the Summit is going to be a plus, it is worth doing? I mean, my point, is, if people still want you to go, in spite of things in South Vietnam. See what I mean? And with the accomplishment of it all, Henry is obviously very disappointed at what happened, in looking at things, he can't go. He's unhappy that he can't go. That's his position." Haldeman answered "There is a counter-argument which is that not going is going to be played as the collapse of the Nixon foreign policy." Nixon agreed: "Exactly. Well, that's the point—the point is, I'm sorry, I was noting last night, trying to get Kissinger, and the point is, what would we get for canceling? Canceling the Summit certainly looses the doves, it hardens the opposition on the war in Congress. Frankly, it's the hook that prepares the way for bombing. But the key is what happens then. I mean, if we lose—if canceling the Summit, then we go off and bomb, and then we win the war, then if that's the key winning the war, we'd do it in a minute. The key question is are there going to be—that canceling the Summit, of course, would have an immediate reaction, very courageous and would be the right thing to do, wouldn't—not playing around. On the other hand, in the final analysis, all that really matters is the failure or success of the policy." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, May 3, 1972, 7:58–8:09 a.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 718-1)

Haldeman: Then you're losing a lot of long-range pluses.

Nixon: Well, not too big pluses, except you're buying a lot of long-range negatives.

Haldeman: Okay.

Nixon: The long-range negatives being that—

Haldeman: A collapse of the Nixon foreign policy.

Nixon: A collapse in foreign policy, but also, a massive, when you cancel the summit, upgrading of some [unclear] and all those—the Soviet propaganda force I'm not referring to the shitasses that Henry talks to, but I'm referring to all over the world, demonstrations and so forth and so forth—would unleash enormous tensions. You'd have embassies and, well you know what I mean, they'd really start raising holy hell with us because they'd figure, "What the Christ? Nixon has drawn the sword; we have no interest in whatever." So we'd have meetings. That's the point that I think we have to have in mind.

Haldeman: Is a postponement of the summit not a possibility?

Nixon: A postponement or if you cancel it you fundamentally postpone it too. You can postpone the agreement.

Haldeman: Postpone it to June?

Nixon: You see? No. You could say I'm postponing the trip until after the offensive is over. So what would the Russians say—you don't want to come now, screw you. Do you see my point? Either you do it or—you can only postpone it to a degree.

Haldeman: So they say screw you. There's a chance that they don't.

Nixon: No. I think that if we cancel the summit or postpone the summit, which I think any way you call it, it's a dodge, it's going to lead to—

Haldeman: Massive Soviet propaganda.

Nixon: Massive propaganda. It also bears on the failure or success of our Nixon foreign policy. Now the whole policy comes down through channels as a result of his insistence on fighting this terrible war in Vietnam. Now—

Haldeman: That's the line.

Nixon: In a sense, that cost is too high to pay, in a sense. It's too high to pay, because you can confuse the Vietnam thing to an extent.

[Omitted here is discussion of personal items and Kissinger's analysis.]

Nixon: At first blush you make the announcement, you're going to have a hell of a lot of hawkish sentiment in this country. Say—

Haldeman: It won't last—that won't hold very long. That'll give you a blip.

Nixon: What the hell has happened to the Nixon foreign policy.

Haldeman: But you then get the erosion. The press will just, they're already trying to set it up that you gambled all the neat pieces that you were putting together are in grave danger coming apart. The cancellation of the summit would be the maximum signal that they have come apart, and they, to them, that would give them a rallying point to build that case on. And they are so—you know, they leap on anything they get; anything they can get their foot in at all.

Nixon: Sure.

Haldeman: That—so it would erode over—you'd get a good blip. I think you would get a hell of a bounce at first—a strong move by the President—

Nixon: Courageous.

Haldeman: Not going to kick us around and that kind of stuff. But then, you have to do that in early May.

Nixon: Second thoughts would be very, very difficult.

Haldeman: Would build up, and then the Democrats at the convention in July would say, "Here we are, a President who was going to go to Moscow and bring us a generation of peace has now bogged us down in an unwinnable, desperate war in Vietnam."

Nixon: See, Henry is, if I can analyze it correctly, he doesn't even know this, but put yourself in his position. He feels, and he says as well, and I've tried to explain this to Henry, that it's U.S. policy too; I think that he's, because he failed, I mean because they did not come true as he had hoped they would in both Moscow and Vietnam, he wants to say in effect "goddamn you, you can't do this to us," get my point? So it's a bravado act basically. So we say we're going to cancel the summit.

Haldeman: It's a good, short-term bravado act.

Nixon: Now, on the other hand, let's look at it this way. Assuming the situation in Vietnam, assuming if we don't go to the summit, we've got to hit the Hanoi-Haiphong area as sure as hell, then goddamn Laird is playing his usual games, saying we can't find targets and so forth. He is a miserable bastard, really.

190. Letter From President Nixon to Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev¹

Washington, May 3, 1972.

Dear Mr. General Secretary:

I wish to inform you promptly about the outcome of the private talks with the North Vietnamese. They were deeply disappointing, the more so since there had been reason to believe, as the result of Dr. Kissinger's exchanges with you and Foreign Minister Gromyko, that progress would occur not only on the procedure of the talks but on their substance.

In the private meeting of May 2,² the North Vietnamese adhered literally to their public position. They added nothing whatsoever to considerations they advanced months ago in the abortive plenary sessions. They displayed no interest in dealing with questions of ending hostilities or reducing the violence on both sides. Their sole proposal was their reiterated demand for what is in effect the overthrow of the Government of South Vietnam. They refused to discuss your suggestion to Dr. Kissinger that fighting cease as a first order of business and insisted on their right to continue the offensive. Based on your comments and those of Foreign Minister Gromyko to Dr. Kissinger, I had taken for granted that you had transmitted our proposals in this regard to Hanoi when your high-level delegation was there. So there was ample time for a considered reaction. But there was none—not even in the terms which you yourself outlined to Dr. Kissinger in Moscow. In the meantime, of course, and especially since Dr. Kissinger's meetings with you, the DRV's aggression has intensified, both in northern South Vietnam and in the center. Since Dr. Kissinger's visit to Moscow and our agreement to resume talks, the DRV has started offensive actions in Kontum, Quang Tri and in the direction of Hue.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2. Top Secret. The letter is unsigned. An attached covering note, May 25, reads: "Peter—Did the attached letter to Brezhnev from the President go in the attached form (as a double-spaced draft with no signature)? HAK met with Dobrynin from 9:45 to 9:57 a.m. on May 3, in the White House Map Room. [No Memcon]—Wilma." The word "yes" in an unknown hand is written on this covering note. An attached note at the top of the letter reads: "Handed to D. by K., 5-3-72, 9:45 a.m. Map Room." No other record of this meeting has been found. In his memoirs Kissinger noted: "Our first move was to warn the Soviet leaders that grave decisions were impending. On May 3 a Presidential letter, drafted by Sonnenfeldt, Lord, and me, was sent to Brezhnev informing him of my fruitless meeting with Le Duc Tho. It seemed to us, the letter told Brezhnev, that Hanoi was attempting to force us to accept terms tantamount to surrender. We would not permit this." (*White House Years*, p. 1176)

² See Document 183.

In sum, after the protracted delaying tactics employed by Hanoi in regard to secret talks, it now turns out that our acceptance of the procedural compromise that was discussed in Moscow has simply led to a total deadlock after only one private meeting and to intensified North Vietnamese military action. Hanoi obviously hopes that the pressure of its offensive will force us to accept terms tantamount to surrender.

But this, Mr. General Secretary, will not happen, and I must now decide on the next steps in the situation that has been created. In the light of recent events, there does not seem much promise in communicating to you additional substantive considerations; there is now no basis for believing that this will have a positive effect on the situation. As Mr. Le Duc Tho made clear, Hanoi is contemptuous of communications transmitted by a third party. The fact remains that Soviet military supplies provide the means for the DRV's actions and promised Soviet influence if it has been exercised at all has proved unavailing.

Mr. General Secretary, as I consider the decisions that have to be taken in the present context, I would welcome having on an urgent basis, your own assessment of the situation.³

³ Kissinger called Dobrynin 2 days later to rebut Dobrynin's charge made during the May 3 meeting that Nixon was "angry" when he sent the letter. "You ought to treat this letter as a cold deliberate one," Kissinger told Dobrynin. (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, May 5, 4:53 p.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

191. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and President Nixon¹

Washington, May 3, 1972, 6:25 p.m.

P: Well, you got to see Riland,² he told me.

K: That's right; yes.

P: Help out?

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² Dr. W. Kenneth Riland, Nixon's personal physician.

K: Oh, yeah; he's great. He's very good.

P: What is your schedule for dinner now? Are you going out?

K: I was going to give a talk at the Metropolitan Club for Gordon Gray³ [who] has been bugging me for months.

P: Fine, fine. Go ahead.

K: But I'm free until then.

P: When was that—what time?

K: About 7:30.

P: Well, listen—why don't you go ahead. That will go till?

K: About 9:30 or 10:00.

P: Well, why don't we get together tomorrow. I've got to get finished on this eulogy for Hoover tomorrow to deliver it at 11:00–11:45, looking at my schedule here.⁴ Well, anyway, what would be your thinking as to when the Brezhnev answer would come in?

K: Oh, Friday⁵ morning.

P: Um-humm. You think we'll get it that soon?

K: Yeah.

P: Because it required an answer.

K: Oh, it's got to have an answer.

P: Was it phrased that way?

K: Oh, yes; and it sort of said we're holding up action.

P: I see.

K: Of course, it was written based on the strategy that we'd cancel.

P: Yeah, I know.

K: And therefore it was trying to lead him to believe that we were going ahead.

P: Of course.

K: So he's probably going to give a tough reply.

P: Well, that gives us a—well, we can find out. That's a good way to test what he's going to do.

K: Actually, I think it's easier for him to acquiesce after we've done something than to put something in writing that we can use as an excuse. And then hang him with it.

P: Um-humm.

³ Former Assistant for National Security Affairs to President Dwight Eisenhower.

⁴ Nixon delivered the eulogy at funeral services for former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

⁵ May 5.

K: So what he says is apt to be tougher than what—not inevitably a clue to what he would have not otherwise.

P: Um-humm, Um-humm.

K: Otherwise their actions—you know, on Monday I called Dobrynin in and raised hell about a submarine tender and that missile-carrying submarine.⁶

P: Yeah.

K: Today he called me and said both ships will be pulled out on Saturday.⁷ From Cuba.

P: Yeah. That's one place we always seem to come out pretty well, don't we?

K: Well, because we have the horses.

P: Sure, sure.

K: But that's the shortest they've ever been there.

P: Well, I'll tell you, if you think you'll be back around 9:30, I may give you a call then.

K: Well, why don't I—it's just at the Metropolitan Club, why don't I come over—it may run until 10:00.

P: Oh, I see.

K: I'll come over here and see whether you're still up. And if you want to talk.

P: I'll be up—it's a question of whether I can—Let me think—You'll probably be till 10:00 though, won't you?

K: I would guess so, yeah.

P: Well, don't rush back. If you come back—I'll call around 10:00 and see if you're there, see. If I'm all finished with my other little—

K: Of course, Mr. President. And then, of course, we don't really need to make a decision—

P: No, no; I know that. It just sometimes helps to talk about it. Let me ask you, what is the late report today. I see another scary headline in the *Star* about losing in Hue.

K: Well, I've seen that story. We haven't gotten in our intelligence reports and it's probably partially true.

⁶ No record of a May 1 telephone conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin has been found.

⁷ According to the transcript of a telephone conversation beginning at 5:32 p.m. on May 3, Kissinger and Dobrynin discussed the issue of the tender, a training ship for Soviet cadets that had put into port in Cuba. This vessel was at first thought to be a submarine. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

P: Uh-huh.

K: The thing that worries me—you know, you remember when I talked to you at Camp David, I said to you what worries me is not the loss of this or that time but the whole eyelet may come apart, where they lose enough units. That's the thing that worries me.

P: In that respect, I think that my feeling that we probably should have hit them before you went was probably right.

K: You know, you're right.

P: You would have been in a little stronger position over there. You know what I mean, they might have cancelled but on the other hand—

K: You mean, hit them over the weekend?

P: Yeah.

K: Well, I wasn't against it. What stopped it over—I was in favor of it after the Quang Tri attack started. What stopped it over the weekend was that Abrams was screaming for the planes for himself.

P: I know, I know. But we run into that everytime though, Henry.

K: Well, at that time with everything coming apart—

P: It would have been rather critical.

K: Since that guy is dying to find an alibi.

P: Well, he sure does on that one. None of us are going to second-guess on the alibi business now. We're going to do the best we can and keep our cool; that's the main thing.

K: I think the problem with Abrams was—the problem with Le Duc Tho yesterday was he wants to see how far this offensive goes and he wasn't going to settle in mid-stream and he wasn't going to give me something we were going to use domestically to give our people hope. So that was the basic problem and whether we hit over the weekend or not, I don't think made a hell of a lot of difference.

P: Right. Well, look, we didn't so that's that. The important thing now is to it seems to me that we have to set this up so we can—I mean the cancellation, which of course seems to me inevitable at this point. I'm thinking that we might have to move it up to Friday.

K: No, I think that would be a little early.

P: Do you?

K: The one thing we might consider, and I'd like to think about it, with your considered judgment, is whether one way of scaring the Russians with it is to say—you know, I'm having lunch with Dobrynin on Friday—I could say, "Now, look, Anatol, we're realists. There just can't be a summit with a President sitting in the Kremlin while Hue falls."

P: That's right.

K: Why don't we agree now on postponing it for two months.

P: Or one month.

K: Or one month.

P: There's some advantage, in my view, to have it one month.

K: That's right.

P: Obviously before the nominations. You could say we're just postponing it one month. We know damn well that the thing will have creamed out one way or another, won't it?

K: That's right.

P: And we could just say we're going to postpone it for one month. If we could get a mutual agreement, that would be the best of both worlds. But then on the other hand, of course,—Aren't you convinced that we do have to hit Hanoi/Haiphong once—

K: Mr. President, I believe that if—your real choice is between postponing and hitting—I mean, it's an immediate decision. If you postpone, you'll also want to hit afterwards.

P: Yeah.

K: But I do not see how you can do nothing.

P: Oh, Christ, my view is—I think that the [best option?] might be hitting and running the risk of their postponing.

K: That's right.

P: Which I think is a very real option.

K: That is a real option.

P: A real option.

K: But then it is better to do it earlier than later.

P: That would be this weekend.

K: If you're going to hit without and not postpone, it would be better to do that as early as you can but not before you have the Russian reply. There is no sense—

P: Yeah, yeah; I agree.

K: In playing that one without having the cards. But another option we can consider is my telling Dobrynin—first of all, that makes it look serious. If we are thinking about talking about postponing.

P: Yeah. We'll lay the foundation for it too.

K: Right.

P: No, I've concluded that we can't—I mean, we're probably inevitably—Well, we go in with one proposition—we have to hit; the sooner, the better. Right?

K: If we are not going to postpone, we have to hit. If you are going to play the hitting game, it's better to do it with as much time between it and the summit as possible.

P: The difficulty with however postponing and then waiting for a week to hit. I just don't think the postponing is going to have that much effect on the situation in the South. If we're going to have any marginal effect in the South—

K: Mr. President, the point may be that nothing is going to have any effect on the situation in the South.

P: I couldn't agree more.

K: That's the tragedy of this situation.

P: Right.

K: In fact, if we were confident, we could hold the situation. If Laird had been telling us the truth, we could play it very cool. You could go to Moscow in a very strong position and say, "All right, we are licking your sons-of-bitches." Then you could have the best of both worlds.

P: Um-humm, um-humm.

P: We're going to keep our cool and do what has to be done. We have to realize that there aren't any good choices but we'll make them. But you had no idea that anybody would consider doing nothing; good God, the only one that would do that would be Laird.

K: That's right.

P: Laird and Abrams. And I don't know why the hell they would be for that. Then they'd have no scapegoat at all. Anybody else suggesting that we do nothing?

K: Well, I guess Rogers probably would be in favor of doing it.

P: Well, we're not going to ask him.

K: Well, I think the choices are between hitting over this weekend and there is something about delaying the attack until Sunday.

P: Um-humm; I agree.

K: Well, I don't know with all these stories of disaster; they have plenty of unfavorable news with it.

P: I'm inclined to think that as far as weekly news magazines, I'd rather hit and have that in it.

K: On Saturday?

P: Yep. You've got to remember that's our story. You see, you change the story when you hit.

K: There's a lot to be said for that.

P: You change the story; you change the headline, Henry. You know, that's why I've been a very strong opponent. I guess Friday won't work; that's too soon but boy!

K: I don't think we can—we have to wait for the Russian answer unless the answer doesn't come on Friday. Then we can say we gave them 48 hours.

P: Um-humm. Well, I'm inclined to think we have to wait for the answer; I agree.

K: But I think if we don't have it by Friday noon; we should just order whatever we want to order.

P: Let me ask you this, what is your schedule tomorrow? Do you have another engagement tomorrow night or a dinner, I suppose, of some sort.

K: Well, I was going to go to New York actually to speak to a group about the Russian Summit.⁹

P: I wonder if you could cancel that. Do you think you could? Or put it off?

K: I suppose I could, yes.

P: Well, I think we ought to have—wait a minute, I don't think you need to. Say from about 3 o'clock on tomorrow—

K: Oh, that's easy.

P: You clear your schedule and what time would you have to leave to go to New York? 5:00?

K: 4:30.

P: Um-humm.

K: I could save from 2:30 on.

P: Um-humm; I'll see what I can do. Well, let's have a good talk tomorrow. Let me ask you to do this—

K: I'll cancel this thing too but I think there's an advantage in being cool.

P: Oh, no, no; I wouldn't cancel. Let me ask you to do this—why don't you in the thing—I'd like for you to run down in your own mind and sort of put it on paper what happens as we cancel the Russian Summit.¹⁰ Do you get my point?

K: Yeah.

P: I mean, so we can't pull the summit, then what are the consequences and so forth having in mind the fact that certainly as I pointed out that we have drawn the sword on them; they will have to respond.

K: Well, maybe not necessarily.

P: I agree; I know. Let's assume the worst. Do it like you do your usual thing, it could be this way or it could be the other thing; this would be very helpful to me in making the decisions, see.

⁹ In an address to the *Time-Life* dinner in New York City, May 4, Kissinger publicly discussed the scheduled summit with the Soviet Union. (Memorandum of conversation, May 4; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1026, HAK Memcons, Memcon—Henry Kissinger, *Time-Life* Dinner, May 4, 1972)

¹⁰ See Document 193.

K: Right.

P: And the idea is so—the way I look at it, you could cancel. And so the Russians gin up their opposition and, of course, the Democrats will go wild; the candidates, so forth and so on. I guess Bob told you about his poll; he brought it in to me tonight.

K: Yes, yes; we had a good talk this afternoon.

P: I told him to pass it over. I said it wasn't going to affect me but I'm glad he did it because—

K: Oh, I think it's important.

P: It tells you what we're up against; public opinion wise. I was rather surprised frankly that, you know, they would, despite the Hawks and so forth, that so many people—sort of like China in a way, you know, the damn China Summit, the people wanted it even though they knew—so they're sort of big news. I guess we've talked ourselves into this with the idea that talking is a good thing, Henry. That's our problem isn't it?

K: The last thing we did from a situation of strength.

P: I know—you and I know that the Russian thing, however, is one where we can't possibly be there in a position of weakness and I'm just not going to be there.

K: I'm wondering about so many things. If you're there when Hue falls—

P: It may fall before we get there.

K: Well, that's possible but supposing you're there while 10,000 Americans are captured in Binh Long? I mean this thing could turn into a horrible debacle. Under what conditions will you be there in general? After having made all these threats?

P: No way, no way. No, we've got to start the hitting of the North but let's—even the hitting of the North, what does that—we've got to do it in any event so let's be strength in whatever position we have and perhaps provide something—Incidentally, I was somewhat encouraged by the actions that Thieu had taken and changed the command and the rest. That seemed to be rather good.

K: They are good.

P: Then also they apparently have a pretty good order of battle up there in the Hue area, have they not?

K: They do if they fight. The problem, Mr. President, is—here I'm trying to be realistic and I was talking to Haig about it—there just isn't any ARVN offensive action, they are just not fighting.

P: Anyplace, huh?

K: Right.

P: Only defensive.

K: Only defensive and then only sporadically. And there is just too much unraveling in too many places.

P: Well, maybe we have to make a big play. Maybe we have to go to Thieu and say, "Look, here, boy." Get my point? You know, I don't believe in just letting what seems to be a disaster develop without going to the heart of the matter.

K: Before we do that, I think we ought to go to the North Vietnamese. Well, even then you shouldn't do that in Moscow.

P: Oh, hell, no. No, we go to the North Vietnamese first by hitting them. Hitting them goddamn hard!

K: Well, there's no sense in going to Thieu and asking him to resign unless you have a prior deal with the North Vietnamese.

P: Um-humm. Yeah, but look in any event, you've got to go first. You've got to go first, Henry, with a—you've got to have a damn good strike in the North. That is absolutely indispensable to our policy. Would you agree?

K: Right.

P: And soon, huh? Unless we cancel. Of course I agree the cancellation has a psychological effect but what more I don't know. And then you've got to look down the road to what is the Russian reaction; that's what I want to see if we cancel, what will they do. You see, that's the kind of thing I want to go over with you to see what you think we're going to do. We have to look down the road to see whether we basically want—what happens if they see McGovern and Humphrey are there to deal with them, what happens if we are there in a position of—I don't mean now at the summit but later—you see, you have the proposition where you cancel the summit—here's as I see it, you lose in Vietnam, all right. And [we?] survive the election, who knows; things are very strange at the present time in this country. But then where are you?

K: If you cancel the summit and survive the election?

P: Yeah.

K: Oh, then you are in a very strong position.

P: That's a very, very big risk but if you cancel the summit and lose in Vietnam, winning the election is going to be a hell of a tough thing to do unless we are able to lose in Vietnam and do something about the POWs and so forth.

K: Right.

P: And, of course, then we are going to have turn very hard on the critics and blame them for the failure of negotiations. As you well know, we can make a hell of a case.

K: Right.

P: So these are some of the things we should think about but let's look down the road as to how it's going to—put your mind to that, which you like to do anyway. And when you are in New York, over there at the Metropolitan Club—

K: I'll be very confident.

P: Be confident as hell. I mean, I think the way I did the Leaders today¹¹ was the right way. Look, this is a tough damn battle and you're up against enormous odds and they're fighting, you know. We all know they're not fighting too well in some places but they've got to be doing something, Henry, good God, unless Abrams has been lying to us.

K: He admits he has.

P: He admits he has, huh?

K: Yeah.

P: Well, they've done something, Henry. Good, God, at An Loc, don't you think they did something there?

K: They were encircled; they had no place to run to.

P: Um-humm. And Hue? Does Haig have any information on that? I'll call him and get it from him?

K: I've just reviewed it with him. About the looting, we don't have any information.

P: The looting and the—this and that. I have a sort of a feeling that that may be an exaggeration, you know what I mean? We've had that sort of thing before, haven't we?

K: Right. And that wouldn't be decisive in itself.

P: No.

K: But it's a tough situation.

P: I have a gut reaction that we've got to give them one good belt.

K: So do I.

P: Come hell or high water, you know.

K: There's no question about that.

P: And Laird is to the contrary. Not withstanding, it's got to be for two good solid days; just belt the hell out of them.

K: I agree.

P: That's one thing we've got to do. Because at least we have indicated—After all, I've built the whole thing on we're not going to go out there without doing our best, everything we can.

¹¹ Nixon met with the Congressional leadership from 8:09 to 10:01 a.m. that morning. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Notes of this meeting have not been found.

K: That's right.

P: If we do everything we can and they still can't make it, then it's not our fault.

K: And I'm going to have some contingency plans made here for that eventuality, Mr. President, because we can't have to do it in panic. I'll just get Haig and one other person working on that.

P: On what?

K: On what happens if the whole thing unravels.

P: Oh, hell, yes; hell, yes. You have to leave for New York tomorrow at what, 4:30?

K: Right, but I'll cancel that thing if necessary.

P: No, no, no.

K: But it may give an impression of a great crisis.

P: Well, to an extent it is, isn't it?

K: Oh, yeah; it would be clearly understood. Or I can set my remarks for later and go down on a later plane and tell them to do the dinner without me.

P: You might say that you have a meeting that will not finish till 5 o'clock. Could you do that?

K: Sure. And then take a plane and still get there by 8:00; we can do that.

P: Why don't we do that then? We will plan to meet between 3:00 and 5:00 and sit down and talk this thing over a little more.

K: Good.

P: In the meantime, do your thinking about the whole thing. And get off to your dinner tonight and as I say, By God, play it like I did with the Leaders today.

K: Absolutely, Mr. President.

P: Cold and tough. We haven't gotten anything—what about that poor Bunker, has he sent us anything in yet or any of his evaluations? I suppose he is probably just about dying, huh?

K: I'll ask him tonight for his evaluation.

P: Yeah. If you would get his evaluation. I don't think Abrams' evaluation is worth a tinker's damn.

K: I'll get his evaluation.

P: Particularly with regard to the South Vietnamese—will they survive; that's really what it boils down to.

K: Right, right.

P: If you could get that for us, that would be helpful.

K: I'll get that in the meantime.

P: Enjoy your dinner.

K: I'll be speaking.¹²

P: Uh-huh.

¹² According to a transcript, Kissinger called Nixon back at 10:20 p.m. that evening and reported on the strong defense he made of the administration's position on Vietnam during his speech at the Metropolitan Club Dinner. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

192. Editorial Note

White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman's diary entry for May 4, 1972, indicates that the issue of the possible cancellation of the Moscow summit in light of the deteriorating military situation in Vietnam continued to dominate President Nixon's thinking:

"Hoover funeral this morning. P did the eulogy and did an extremely good job. Rest of the day was devoted to the debate over the point of the Summit cancellation. P called me in first thing this morning, said he had just gone over things with Haig, he's concerned about the public information operation in Vietnam, feels we have to ride Laird harder on watching the news reports, that they're letting incorrect things get out and not correcting them. Then he said he wanted K and me to see Connally, give him a cold turkey briefing on the Summit situation, get his judgment, says the other possibility for conferring would be Mitchell. In any event I called Connally from his office and set up an appointment for right after the funeral, and then the P said he had added an extra ingredient in the whole thing that he had thought of last night, which is that if we cancel the Summit, we go for all the marbles, including a blockade. Then he deplored again the problem of the military being so completely unimaginative.

"He said that I should try to get Connally to stay till June 1, that he can't leave in the middle of the Soviet flap, and the war will also be in better shape by then. He's concerned that if we cancel the Soviet thing, we'll dash the hopes that we've created in the minds of people by the Soviet trip, that we'll get a very big bang against us with the Democrats on the warpath with Soviet support.

"He said he wanted me to run another poll, saying that the North Vietnamese hold 400 Americans as POW's, some for as long as five years, and they refuse to release them. Would you favor the P imposing a naval blockade on North Vietnam to be lifted only when all POW's are returned and there's a cease-fire obtained in South Vietnam? Then

to add, even though this would mean United States naval ships stopping Russian ships delivering arms to North Vietnam.

“Henry and I went over and had a one and a half hour meeting with Connally. Henry spent most of the time giving him the background and making the case that we were now faced with three alternatives: one, was to do nothing, and in effect back down on our bluff; second, would be to bomb the North, and Hanoi and Haiphong, with the attendant risks, including the great risk of the cancellation of the Summit; and the third, would be to cancel the Summit ourselves and then follow it up by bombing the North. Before I could make the case for the other side, Connally leaped in and said he felt very strongly that under no circumstances should we cancel and then bomb the North, that people want the Soviet Summit, and we should not be in the position to cancel it, if it’s going to be canceled we should let the Soviets cancel it. He says you’ve got to start with the basic premise, however, that the P cannot take a military defeat in Vietnam, it’s absolutely imperative that we not let this offensive succeed, so we have to do anything and everything necessary in order to deal with that. On that basis he also feels that the P is now in a very good position in this country in that he’s got to have the guts to meet this situation, and that we’ve got to make it clear to the Russians that we are not going to be defeated, and we are not going to surrender, as the P has said. In other words, the P has got to back up his public posture.

“I came back. Henry had to go on to the luncheon. I reported this to the P and he was inclined to agree with the Connally view, saying that’s basically the conclusion he had already come to and that this confirmed it, that he, therefore, wanted to meet with Henry and me at 3:00 and go over the thing, so we went over to the EOB then and P made the point that he had made up his mind, that he can’t lose the war, that the only real mistakes he had made in his Administration were the times when he had not followed his own instincts. On the EC-121 situation with North Korea, he knew we should move in and hit all their air bases but he let himself be talked out of it because Rogers and Laird both threatened to quit if he went ahead with it. After the November 3 speech, when he swung the nation behind him, we should’ve gone ahead and bombed the North at the time, although we didn’t. If we had moved on that kind of move then, we wouldn’t have these problems now. Same with Laos, that although Henry did basically follow his instincts on this thing, it worked as well as it could have. He said that he had been thinking it over, and that he’d decided that we can’t lose the war, that we’re going to hit hard, that we’re going to move in. The Summit is not important in this context, and that going to the Summit and paying the price of losing in Vietnam would not be satisfactory.

“He put it very toughly to Henry. He said he’s made up his mind, didn’t want to get into a discussion about it, didn’t want to be talked out of it. Henry kept trying to interrupt, but the P went on very strongly in this vein. He obviously sensed something of the drama of the moment and he was pushing his position very hard. When Henry finally did get to talk, he said that he, too, had been thinking about it, that the objectives that he came up with were the same as the P’s, that he agreed that we couldn’t lose the war and that we had to do something. His difference, however, was that we should not move ahead with the bombing, as the P thought we should, but rather should first move to blockade Haiphong. The point being that bombing was what they were expecting and it’s better to do the unexpected, first of all. Second, the blockade would in some ways be a less aggressive move than the bombing, although it would be a stronger signal to them and would do us more good. Henry’s opposed to just a symbolic bombing, he feels that if we bomb we should do it totally, and that it would be better to blockade first and then on a continuing basis. Also by blockading it gives us a little more time to keep the bombers in the South, where the military wants them during the current tough action.

“The more the P thought about it, the more he liked Henry’s ideas as long as it was followed up with continued bombing, so that became his conclusion.

“He then had Connally and Haig come over and join the meeting. When they got there he reviewed the history again about not following his instincts and so forth, the point that he can’t lose the war. He said that we won’t lose the country if we lose the Summit meeting, but we will lose the country if we lose the war. Then he said what he had decided was a blockade of Haiphong plus bombing. There was a question as to whether this would work, and there’s a greater risk to the Summit than just bombing, but those are problems we’re going to deal with.

“He then got Connally to agree with him, gave him strong support on it. He then got into the question of whether Abrams was to be replaced, and felt that he had to be, that he was not following orders, that he lost his steam and so on. The decision was to replace him by sending Haig to Vietnam. Then decided that it wasn’t such a good idea, that we’d lose Abrams there, but send Haig out for a couple of weeks as an observer for the P. Also decided to call Rogers back Sunday, since the P will announce this Monday night on television.

“After an hour and a half with that group we added Moorer, and the P very strongly put the thing to Moorer that this was his decision, that it was to be discussed with no one, especially not the Secretaries or anybody at State, or anybody over in Vietnam, but that Moorer was to put the blockade plan together, get everything ready to pull it into

motion so that it would take effect Tuesday morning after the P's address Monday night. He hit Moorer on that this is a chance to save the military's honor and to save the country. Moorer said he could do it; he also suggested that there ought to be some offensive action on the part of the South Vietnamese, and it was agreed they would try to mobilize enough troops, 2,000 or 3,000 for an amphibious landing north of the DMZ by South Vietnamese using all our support and troop capability.

"K had to leave for dinner. The P talked a few minutes more and then Moorer and Haig left and we kind of wrapped it up with Connally. Then the P talked with me a bit about the whole thing, feeling that he's done the right thing, that we justify the blockade as a means of keeping lethal weapons from the hands of murderers and international outlaws, and along that line. I think he feels good that he's made a decision and that he feels it's the right one. He also feels that it's quite a dramatic step, because it is a basic decision to go all out to win the war now, under, of course, totally different circumstances than Johnson was faced with, because we've got all our troops out, we've made the peace overtures, we've made the China trip and laid a lot of other groundwork that should make it possible for us to do this.

"My feeling is that the public reaction is not going to be so great on the blockade, even though it is a big move, because it's not aggressive, but the bombing that goes with it will, over a period of time, scare some people up. Some questions as to what the quid pro quo will be on this, probably something to the effect that the blockade will stay on until there's a cease-fire, all POW's released. When that takes place, we'll lift the blockade and we'll remove all of our troops from South Vietnam within some time period.

"Connally was absolutely astounded at the P's description of the problems he'd gone through and the other things, especially the lack of support and the lack of loyalty on the part of Laird and Rogers. I think he can't even understand why the P would even keep them around and thinks it's a sign of weakness that he hadn't fired them long ago, and that he doesn't fire them now. He also strongly feels that he should pull Abrams back. The P backed off on that, and I think rightly so. Haig called me later this evening and said he thought it was a very bad idea for him to go out to Vietnam for any extended period because with a tight crunch around here he's needed to keep Henry in tow, which I totally agree with." (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

According to Kissinger's Record of Schedule for May 4, both he and Haldeman met with Connally from 12:05 to 1:20 p.m. They then met with the President from 3:05 to 5:25 p.m. (*Ibid.*) No other records of these meetings have been found.

193. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, May 4, 1972.

Henry:

Attached is Hal's Summit options paper. There are several other possibilities that are worth considering.

First, as the President mentioned last night, we might wish to consider a blockade of North Vietnamese ports without bombing the Hanoi/Haiphong complex, but by expanding our bombing efforts to include interdiction as far south as possible of the rail lines from China. We might inform the Soviets that this is the only way—given North Vietnamese intransigence—that a Summit would be possible and point out to them that our only other alternative would be the cancellation of the Summit, or a postponement of the Summit and the most stringent aerial activity.

If Hal's assumptions are right, it is conceivable that a deal of this kind could be worked out which the Soviets would live with, assuming, of course, they could make all the tough noises they wanted about continued support through land-lines.

The second would be a tougher version of the first option, but this would cost us the Summit. It would be premised on the theory that we want to apply maximum conceivable military pressure on Hanoi in an effort to break their back. This would involve announcement of the postponement of the Summit in softest terms, announcement of the establishment of a blockade while avoiding bombing the Hanoi/Haiphong area, but at the same time to extend our bombing to interdict to the degree possible the communication routes leading from China to North Vietnam.

AI

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1330, NSC Unfiled Material, 1972, 5 of 8. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

Attachment

Memorandum From Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)²

Washington, May 4, 1972.

SUBJECT

Summit Options

The attached paper, as you requested, examines probable Soviet reactions to a unilateral postponement by us of the summit as well as the considerations, pro and con, of an agreed postponement. I have set it up as a memorandum from you to the President,³ in case you want to forward it.

Meanwhile, I have also thought of some ways of going through with the summit. The underlying assumption for all options—postponement as well as going ahead—is that the trend in the fighting in the South has not been fundamentally reversed by the time of the summit and that we are engaged in major air and naval actions against the North, perhaps including strikes against Haiphong and Hanoi. *This last assumption is, in my view, crucial to all options, but especially to those that involve going through with the summit.*

All options carry the risk that the Soviets will pre-empt with a postponement or even cancellation of their own. It is hard to judge whether this risk is greater for the postponement options or for the going-ahead options. In the former cases, Brezhnev may want to grab the initiative to demonstrate his “control” of events to all his various audiences. In the latter cases, given heavy US attacks on the North, he may find the situation “morally” tolerable—again, partly for domestic reasons and partly for international communist and prestige reasons.

My *net judgment*, however, remains that Brezhnev has so much riding on the summit—and on the German treaties, which would almost certainly go down the drain with the summit—that he will *prefer* to keep the summit alive. From his side this argues for (1) accepting postponement, if proposed by us, or (2) going ahead, if we are prepared to do so.

² Sent for information.

³ Attached but not printed is a 6-page memorandum drafted for Kissinger to send to Nixon entitled “Soviet Reaction to the Postponement of the Summit.” This memorandum is unsigned and undated; presumably it was not sent to the President.

Analytically, we must distinguish in our minds between on the one hand the maneuvering in the pre-summit period and around a postponement effort and, on the other, the situation that exists if a summit is actually held.

I will now briefly discuss two ways of holding the summit, *assuming we get that far*. I repeat, the underlying assumption is that we are acting vigorously against the North. *That is the only way we can go to Moscow from strength.*

1. *A Stripped-Down Summit.*

Here we would cut down the length of the visit, say to three days; we would reduce all ceremony to an absolute minimum; we would make it a working visit, with the entourage stripped down accordingly (no wives, for example).

This would be a sort of deglamorized, crisis summit, where two great powers would work responsibly on those areas that are clearly of mutual interest (pre-eminently, SALT). At the same time, based on his strong military actions against the North, then in progress, the President would turn the heat on Brezhnev in regard to Vietnam. He would withhold affirmative action on economic concessions on the grounds that these would not be understood (or, in the case of MFN pass through Congress) while Soviet arms fuel the DRV offensive.

A stripped-down summit would lessen some of the elements of incongruity, indeed hypocrisy, of having the President cavort with the Soviet leaders, toast friendship, issue joint principles, etc. while the war goes on in Vietnam. These aspects might also make such a summit more appealing to the Soviets.

To have a determined, business-like President go to Moscow in the midst of crisis would make him look less like going there at any price. The fact that some important business had been transacted would act as a regulator of domestic US reactions to what is happening in Vietnam—perhaps more than a postponement which could become a cancellation. It may also act as a regulator on wild Soviet responses to our actions in Vietnam.

The major risk is that Brezhnev would try to humiliate the President (true under any going-ahead option). He could send the President packing after three or four days with no or only a few accomplishments, while the Vietnam situation deteriorates and the Soviets continue doing their “socialist duty” to the DRV.

Even if Brezhnev did not take this course, the difficulties could come later, as the situation deteriorates in Vietnam and we may find “compromises” (involving withdrawal and a coalition in Saigon) more attractive. At that point, the Moscow trip will look at best futile and at worst like a deal wherein we agreed to get out of Vietnam for the sake

of good US-Soviet relations. The Soviets would claim part of the credit for Communist victory in Vietnam and on top of it have the benefits of US-Soviet détente.

2. *A “Cynical” Summit.*

Here we would go ahead as planned. We would say that we accept the Soviet position that disturbances like Vietnam (and India–Pakistan) should not get in the way of better US-Soviet relations, which are fundamental to the peace of the world.

But we would still try to go from strength, accentuating this point by, in effect, having the President run the war against the DRV from Moscow for eight days. (A couple of generals in the entourage and a command-post aircraft at the airfield would underline the point.)

The image that we would project would be one of having cool nerves, of being reasonable in regard to anything bearing on US-Soviet relations but wild when it comes to Vietnam. The President would trade on his reputation of “unpredictability”: showing Saigon that he is not selling it out; implying to Hanoi that Moscow is colluding in our assault against the North; telling Moscow that we can play the same game of “compartmentalization” as the Soviets, when it suits our purposes.

The *risks* here are much as in the previous case. Moreover, the problem of the disparity between the symbolism of US-Soviet cooperation and the reality of proxy-war in Vietnam would be even greater than in the “stripped-down” case.

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

Washington, May 4, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion between President Nixon and Kissinger about discussions he had with Secretary of the Treasury Connally concerning what to do about the Vietnam peace effort. The President noted that he thought Connally’s “first judgment” was rarely accurate but that if they “let him sleep on it” Connally then could offer useful commentary.]

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 719–4. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 9:35 to 9:59 a.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

Kissinger: Well, I think, Mr. President, what we ought to consider is just, they have put it to us, that it's just no good way of losing it. Your first instinct was right. I asked myself, well, maybe I should have offered to Le Duc Tho to throw Thieu to the wolves. But it wouldn't have done us any good, because these guys—

Nixon: Well, then he'd say, open the prisons. I know. Henry, I told you your negotiating record was brilliant in the last meeting.² You asked all the questions and you got the son-of-a-bitch on the record.

Kissinger: That I did achieve, and we got—

Nixon: Now, can I run over a couple of things with you to think about before our noon meeting. I have a couple thoughts. Thinking back on the issues, the only backup position that you could take with the Soviets would be—I mean, I'm just thinking of something that the enemy certainly would do, I don't know whether it'll work—is to say that we have to have a—that we cannot have an enemy offensive between now and the end of summit. If they'll stop they're going to see we'll stop bombing in the North. Now, that's probably an unanswerable question for them. I'm not just thinking of the Soviets, but for the North Vietnamese. For us, it gives us what we would need—the idea that being that right after the summit we blast the shit out of them. And of course the weather's worse then.

Kissinger: Not in [Military] Region One. But—

Nixon: I don't care where. But I mean—and then we don't have to concentrate in other regions—we just throw it all into Region One.

Kissinger: Well, that's a possibility.

Nixon: You see my point? See, I look back to what I think Laird is setting us up for in terms of the recrimination. He's going to set us up for the fact that before China, and during China, and for 3 weeks after China, that we, the hawks, were insisting that we bomb these things, you know—

Kissinger: No, no. Mr. President, we have a good record on that because all he recommended was that we bomb the missile sites. The missile sites are a waste of effort. That was the basis of our rejecting it.

Nixon: Yeah, I know.

Kissinger: No, before China, he didn't recommend anything. After China, he recommended that we hit the missile sites. The missile sites don't affect the operations in the south. We wanted to hit the supply dumps.

Nixon: Yeah. I'm just telling you what I think he's going to do.

² See Document 183.

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. We have him on record that that isn't what he recommended.

[Omitted here is discussion whereby the President then argued, and Kissinger agreed, that Secretary of Defense Laird was allowing Nixon and Kissinger to be subject to "recrimination" for the bombings. Kissinger added that the U.S. Government should have bombed the supply depots in February and not the missile sites as Laird wanted. But the 3-day strike did not make any difference. Kissinger, in noting further bureaucratic interference, that the strikes did not harm Hanoi and Haiphong last weekend because Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer said that air assets were needed to be held in reserve in defense of Quang Tri. A frustrated Nixon and Kissinger discussed support for a temporary South Vietnamese invasion of North Vietnam. Kissinger also mentioned his belief that the North Vietnamese would not negotiate until the offensive had run its course. In a related move, Nixon recommended deploying F-4 fighter aircraft to Israel in order to irritate the Soviets. Kissinger advised caution, as Israel was like North Vietnam in that it was an ally that a superpower could not control.]

Nixon: I had another point. I think you should get Rabin in.³ See what they could use. I have an idea that might kick the Russians pretty good—if we could get some more F-4s or something into there. I don't know if I understand, I'm just thinking.

Kissinger: Well, let's take it easy on that, because the Israelis are pretty wild and if they get it—I mean, they may be like Hanoi, as far as we're concerned. We may not be able to hold them. But—

Nixon: That bad?

Kissinger: No. But we should do it after the things get a little worse. The way to play the Russians is if we break the summit is to give—keep holding out a lot of the things they want from the summit as a possibility. In bilateral relationships, it's in our interests to avoid—to keep them from going ape, and only after they've gone ape should we play the Israeli card. I mean, it's not in our interests to have the Russians go ape against us. And if—I think if we cancel the summit it should be in a very gentle way—I mean, a very gentlemanly way—that says [unclear exchange] all of the leaders will meet when—that we cannot meet while Russian tanks and Russian guns are shooting and annihilating us.

Nixon: Sit down here. We're gonna—it seems to me that before canceling, the one you should inform is the Chinese.

³ See footnote 3, Document 198.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I mean, let's make it a point to write direct letter, a message from me to Chou En-lai, saying [why we're] doing this; that the Russians have been—not—say not only in this but in other areas have proved to be not trustworthy. See what I mean? Actually, [unclear] in Vietnam. And what we do now in Vietnam is not directed against them but against the Russians. We can make some awful good points.

Kissinger: Oh, yes. Mr. President, we have come back from every crisis stronger, and I think we're going to become stronger because of this one.

Nixon: Well, we have to be quite aware of the fact, Henry, that there's one difference. In the other crisis, there was always beneath the surface a majority would be for us. This time, if they're canceling the Russian summit, there isn't any way that I can do it. I could make the greatest goddamn speech that has ever been made in the history of this office, and the people are going to be terribly, terribly put down because of this. So, let's face that. That is all right with me. I mean, I think in the long run what counts is what happens. I think we have to realize though in canceling that people are going to be disappointed, a few hawks will [unclear] that'll be hawk-wire, which is not a majority. In the meantime, it will unleash our political enemies on the Hill, who will have—will then pass probably resolutions that will just knock the hell out of us and make fund cut-offs and everything else. Got to figure that will happen. You've got to figure—this is what I mean, when you figure consequences, you've got to figure that the Russians, of course, will unleash their worldwide propaganda. They'll go all out in their propaganda here. If you think Joe Kraft has been bad to this point, if he gets orders from the Russian Embassy to beat Nixon, he will plant things, lie, steal, anything. I remember this in '60, you see? Perhaps you may not remember.

Kissinger: I remember that.

Nixon: Khrushchev very deliberately helped [John] Kennedy. He did it the last 2 weeks. And he helped him all the way. It's all right. And the Russians will do the same on me.

Kissinger: Well, they may or may not. It depends on—

Nixon: Well, they will for the reason that we will take a bad offing public opinion-wise. We're going to get squeals, and this and that and the other thing. And as they see then the possibility of a Democrat winning, they'll say, no, we'll push this son-of-a-bitch right down the tubes. I mean, I'm just looking at the worst of both worlds.

Kissinger: That's one of the things, in my judgment.

Nixon: And let's not have any illusions about that. I—you see, you and I talk—we talk about those things—the government—Hoover today, patriotism, loyalty, principle, and the rest, and that we say we hope

to God that there's enough of that in the country. Well, there certainly is enough to support the bombing in the North in order to avoid a disaster. Whether there is enough to support bombing of the North and then give up all hope of peace. You see, it's the hope thing.

Kissinger: Yeah, but I'm not sure—

Nixon: The hope thing. The China thing was important from one standpoint only—hope. The American people are suckers. Getting to know you—all that bullshit. They're for people to people.

Kissinger: Yeah, but it's for precisely that reason to go there under these circumstances and to cater to that group, it's just—

Nixon: It's not—it isn't that group—I don't mean [unclear] The gray, middle America—they're suckers.

Kissinger: But therefore, to bring it off, you would have to do it, not to bomb there, to have a plausible case—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —that you brought peace, which means that you'll have to give credit and you have to sign the joint statement of principles, to which I've already agreed, more or less. I mean, such a correct—

Nixon: Well the joint statement, in fairness, and I'm just being the devil's advocate, the joint statement of principles might well be interpreted by some as leaning to the Russians, and we have agreed we're going to quit this kind of adventurism like Vietnam.

Kissinger: Only when we are strong. Not in the present context. If we go over to Vietnam, sure.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: That's—I think we will pay—

Nixon: When will you get your speech ready by?

Kissinger: My speech? Oh, the speech for you.

Nixon: Tomorrow?

Kissinger: No, no, by this afternoon. By noon.

Nixon: Okay. Don't say that, because you and I are going to meet at 3 o'clock, so give until this evening, 'til 7 o'clock.

Kissinger: I have a WSAG meeting.⁴

Nixon: Get that out of the way.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Is there anything you can tell that you need help on?

⁴ The meeting was held on May 5 to discuss Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals)

Kissinger: Just about Rogers, otherwise I'll get into that same situation.

Nixon: Remember, we're making a perception that—we've got a lot of possibilities to use.

Kissinger: No, I—

Nixon: Tell the Russians we'll only—that a minimum condition for a summit is basically, is that, as there was for the Chinese trip, there must not be an offensive while we're in Moscow, for 10 days before and during the period. After that, do what they damn please. It probably won't sell.

Kissinger: That's a good—that's a possibility. Of course, it [unclear] if they cancel the summit. But then so be it. We will have the record of having tried.

Nixon: Okay.

195. Editorial Note

From 3:04 to 5:35 p.m. on May 4, 1972, President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger and Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman—joined by the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs Haig a half hour after the conversation began—discussed the impact of the war in Vietnam upon the upcoming Moscow summit. Nixon contended that either side would cancel the summit in light of the air strikes being ordered against North Vietnamese Army units. He noted:

“That strike should have gone off last week. It didn't go. But it's got to go. Now I want to tell you what I have in mind; it is to go. I don't care what the Russian answer is, it is to go. Then it is to go for two days, but not for two days and then wait to see if they negotiate. It is to go for two days, and then we will wait a little, but we've got to get back to the battle [Hue]. I realize that. And then, if the Russians cancel, we'll blockade. We will blockade and continue to bomb. But we are now going to win the war, and that's my position . . . If it costs the election, I don't give a shit. But we are going to win the war.”

The President added that he could not allow the war to be lost. “We are going to cream those bastards, and we're going to cream them good,” he proclaimed.

The conversation then turned to the domestic and international impacts that a cancellation of the summit would wrought. Kissinger noted that the Soviets were out to destroy Nixon. He believed that the situation in Vietnam would bring this intended consequence about. The

discussion then turned to Kissinger's meeting with the North Vietnamese. "Their strategy is to deprive the American people of any hope," Kissinger stated. But Kissinger recommended that the administration first blockade, since, as he put it, "You can say that the Russians might accept the likelihood of a blockade." Being "leery" of an air strike, Kissinger added: "What I would do—What I am now, at least, putting to you for your consideration is do a blockade. That is at least something totally different . . . Then you still have to bomb." Nixon responded, "I know." Kissinger believed that with a blockade first the President would not run up against a "massive emotional reaction" that would be generated by the bombing.

Later in the conversation Nixon expressed regret that he did not follow his instincts and order extensive bombing in the past, but he did see some merit to the proposal of the blockade. "You see, Henry, this appeals to me so much more than breaking off the summit and then doing it," he related. "The reason is that, goddammit, we're just not using rhetoric this time." Kissinger replied: "My worry about the 2-day bombing strike was, whether you let—The first strike you did on Hanoi and Haiphong was to get their attention. You've given them 3 weeks to get their attention. They haven't delivered. If now we do a 2-day strike, and then they say, 'all right, you've got our attention again,' and sucker us through a summit, then we are in June and we are still in an inconclusive situation."

Nixon thought that the summit would inevitably be canceled, and thus the U.S. Government had to do it before the Soviets did. He contended that he could not go to the summit when the Communists were in positions of strength, especially in Vietnam. "I'm putting it quite bluntly now; I'm being quite precise," he remonstrated. "South Vietnam may lose, but the United States cannot lose. Which means that basically I have made the decision that whatever happens in South Vietnam, we are going to cream North Vietnam." Since the bombing was essential for taking out roads, rail lines into China, and petroleum stockpiles, a blockade would not work without consequent bombing. Nixon noted his position: "We know that we can lose the summit, and still not lose the country. But we cannot lose this war without losing the country. Now, I'm not thinking of myself but I'm thinking of the country. So I return, we cannot lose the war. Having started on that proposition, what do you have to do? For once, we've got to use the maximum power of this country against a shit-ass little country to win the war. We can't use the word 'win' though, though others can, but we're going to use it for the purpose." The blockade would be the key to a positive outcome. Noting that the North Vietnamese had consistently rejected "every offer of peace possible," Nixon related that there was little choice other than all-out bombing. He was aware of the results of the bombing, which included that "the Russians would cancel

the summit. [The] Russians could get very tough with Berlin,” and that “they might fart around in Cuba.”

In response to Kissinger’s prediction that the Soviets would cancel the summit at the inception of air strikes in Vietnam, the following discussion ensued:

Nixon: “Now you see the problem is, it is true we’re risking the summit for a blockade. But, on the other hand, on balance, I think if we have the blockade, we have a plan which we know militarily will accomplish our goal which is not losing this damn war.”

Kissinger: “Mr. President, I am not even sure—my Soviet expert thinks that a blockade is somewhat less risky than bombing because the Soviets don’t have to challenge it. But probably it risks certain—I would agree with my Soviet guys—that the trouble with the bombing and that sort of thing is that the North Vietnamese are practically asking us to bomb.”

Nixon: [unclear exchange] “The trouble’s with the bombing first and the blockade second, because you’re for bombing if we blockade.”

Kissinger: “Oh, yeah.”

Nixon: “The trouble’s with the bombing first, go ahead.”

Kissinger: “The trouble with the bombing first is that the North Vietnamese are practically asking us to bomb them. There must be some collusion between them and the Soviets at this—at this point, even if there wasn’t any earlier. They must have the whole propaganda machine revved up. But leaving that aside, you bomb for 2 days and then stop, or bomb for 3 days and then stop, then the North Vietnamese—then the Russians say all right, we’ve got the word and will discuss it with you at the summit. Then we’re again, if they don’t cancel, then we’re in the same box we were at the beginning.”

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: “You can’t bomb again until after the summit they launch another series of offensives. That’s the box I was in, in Moscow. What else? They say nothing, and then you keep bombing, and they’ll cancel the summit because of the bombing, which is the most neuralgic form of behavior. And on top of that—”

Nixon: “See, it was the bombing, you’ll recall, that brought Johnson down.”

Kissinger: “—So, I think that if you blockade first—I think the basic decision you have to make, which is also the one John Connally mentioned to us, is are you going to win this war and are you going to do whatever is necessary not to lose the war? Once you’ve made that decision, the rest is tactics, which works better. I think the blockade gives you a chance to state your case. It gives the Soviets a minor opportunity to back off it, if they want to. After all, they did back off

in Cuba when challenged with a blockade. It—And then you start bombing systematically, just running down their supplies, you don't have to do a horrendous strike because you can operate like a surgeon. We just put one aircraft carrier out there with no other job but to take out the POL first. If we mine the harbor and, say, arm the mines in such a way that they are set for 4 days from now, that forces the ships out of there, because if they are not they are going to be bottled up in the harbor now. Then we go after the docks. And—So we can reduce Haiphong to a shell and we can systematically destroy their war manufacturing capacity. The thing that killed Johnson was that they were pumping in stuff faster than he could destroy it, and that they were fighting a guerilla war, so they didn't have to keep large amounts of supplies flowing south, and because Sihanoukville was open, so they didn't have to—"

Nixon: "We've cut a lot of that out."

Kissinger: "With Sihanoukville closed, with all of their stuff having to come down the rails, or the roads, and with Haiphong closed, and with their reserves being systematically destroyed, something's got to give. Now, that's the argument for the blockade. And I think if we go tough, we've got to give the maximum shock effect and get it over with."

Nixon: "Now, just one question. What do the Chinese do?"

Kissinger: "Well, the blockade incidentally has the additional advantage that it forces Hanoi closer to the Chinese. And therefore, what will happen? The Chinese will scream. The Chinese may even open up their southern ports as a replacement for Haiphong and permit stuff to come in at that port. That will take months, however, to bring [unclear]. But there's a good chance that they would—"

Nixon: "You don't see the Chinese moving manpower in there? I didn't think so either."

Kissinger: "No, besides it wouldn't make any difference. They wouldn't get enough of them down. But I don't think they'd do manpower. They would open, in my judgment, one of their southern ports as a replacement for Haiphong." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 334–44)

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

Washington, May 5, 1972.

[Omitted here is a discussion of Kissinger's speech to the Asia Society in New York City the previous evening.]

Nixon: I was going to ask you to do something today that is very important. I want you to be rather cool, particularly outgoing with Dobrynin. I want you to play them like they play us, and be very, very nice. Act as if everything was going ahead on schedule. But act very, very nice. Say how gracious we are—how pleased Mrs. Nixon is with the graciousness of Mrs. Dobrynin, and all that. Because now that the die is cast, we are going to play this in the most vicious way that we can with those bastards.

[Omitted here is Kissinger's discussion of going ahead on all planning for military action in Vietnam, especially urging the President to be wary of "some leaks in the White House." H.R. Haldeman entered at 9:21 a.m. to join the discussion regarding the blockade in Vietnam and left at 9:30 a.m.]

Kissinger: Now I feel I must put before you this consideration, Mr. President. We must do something drastic, there's no question about it. The advantage of a blockade is that it commits us irrevocably, that after that we've crossed and there's no turning back. It's a great advantage. And the other side must then do something. The disadvantage is that it confronts the Soviets most directly.

Nixon: They might [unclear].

Kissinger: They can hardly step back from that. They may, but my Soviet expert thinks that it's more likely that they'll step back from a blockade than from a bombing, but—

Nixon: Well, the disadvantage of the bombing is, as you put it so effectively yesterday, is that they expect it, and therefore it's already been discounted.

Kissinger: The disadvantage of the bombing is that it will trigger every goddamn peace group in this country.

Nixon: So will a blockade.

Kissinger: And—

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 720–4. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger in the Oval Office from 9:14 to 10:09 a.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

Nixon: Either does that. It's the line—the major escalation—that they're all talking about. Either the blockade or the bombing—they're going to trigger the peace groups. So have no doubts about that.

Kissinger: But it's hard to turn off a blockade.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: I mean, for you to turn off—you can always stop bombing for a day or two or a week or—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: Or 2 weeks, and therefore—

Nixon: So that would be ineffective.

Kissinger: The bombing?

Nixon: We cannot have a stop and start things again. We've been around and around and around. I understand the problems with the blockade.

Kissinger: No, I just wanted to put it—

Nixon: Not only theirs—that problem confronts a lot of them in the Soviet Union, the Indians, and the Chinese.

Kissinger: Those are no problem. But the Chinese are a problem too.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But in a way, of course, it's all a question of degree. A prolonged bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong—

Nixon: They have to react.

Kissinger: Will do the same thing. It will send the question—

Nixon: The other thing is that the bombing has been done before. It's the same old routine. We're back to bombing, bombing, bombing, stop the bombing, stop the bombing. So they're going to say lift the blockade, lift the blockade. On that point it isn't as strong a case for it. The blockade is not as good a target as the bombing in terms of riots.

Kissinger: You can, well, of course there's got to be bombing too with a blockade.

Nixon: Oh, I understand. But the people are going to look at the blockade. The blockade is going to be so overwhelming in terms of its public relations impact.

Kissinger: And you—

Nixon: I understand. Look, Henry, the main point is that when you raise these points which you've got to raise, there are no good choices.

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: There are no good choices. Sure, there's a choice of a 2-day pop, and then go back and then hope to Christ they'll want to negotiate about something. And it isn't going to happen.

Kissinger: That's right.

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

Kissinger: Another advantage of the blockade is that you can go to the American people where you can't go to the American people—

Nixon: About bombing I've already presented that to the American people on April 26th.²

Kissinger: And you can rally the American people for a blockade while you cannot rally them—

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

Kissinger: And that's not an inconsiderable—

Nixon: It's a helluva considerable thing. The blockade has the advantage that it's—first, it's a total commitment; it's decisive. And in the end, let's face it, in the end, we've got to figure, Henry, we may lose the election, and so forth and so on. But in the end, the blockade will end the war.

Kissinger: Yup.

Nixon: And, by God—

Kissinger: Well, if you win the war you won't lose the election.

Nixon: If you win it soon enough. And see that's the problem. The blockade, we know damn well that in 8 months we'll have them at their knees.

Kissinger: Oh, I think that with bombing we'll have them quicker—with bombing, before they can get alternative routes organized.

Nixon: So, my view is that the blockade rallies the people; it puts it to the Russians. I mean, the only advantage, as I told you earlier, as I said earlier, is the line that Connally came up with is to start bombing again. And then, if the Russians still do not break off the summit—you see, the bombing-blockade thing has this possible advantage, which I ran by you yesterday. You bomb. After bombing, the Russians bitch but they do not break off the summit. Then we continue bombing. Then I suppose, we can go to the summit.

Kissinger: Well, if you bomb enough, they'll break off the summit. There's no question about it.

Nixon: Well then, that perhaps is the mess we're in because we can't bomb unless we bomb now. We can't bomb and then have—you can't bomb and then have them kicking us around while we're in Moscow. You see, that's the point Thieu made which is tremendously compelling. I cannot be in Moscow at a time when the North Vietnamese are rampaging through the streets of Hue or for that matter through the streets of Kontum.

² See Document 171.

[Omitted here is discussion of Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird's opposing position on the blockade.]

Kissinger: We should go on this as if we were going all out on it, and I'm saying this to you—I am not saying it to Haig, or to Moorer, or to Connally, or to anyone else. I mean, we still have a few pieces that have got to come in. We still have got to get the Russian reply. If it doesn't come by the end of the day, it's too late. But I'm sure it will come today.

Nixon: Yes.

Kissinger: See, another problem you face is you bomb Hanoi and Haiphong, and then the Russians do to you what they did to me. They come and we'll talk about it. And then you've got to stop again. Of course, you could say fine, but "I won't stop it now until—"

Nixon: You could—well, putting that case at its best, you bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. And the Russians will say, "Look, you come and will have sort of a pause while we have the summit, as we did at the Chinese summit." And you remember, I said that it's a possibility; that's one thing that could happen.

Kissinger: Of course. We shouldn't look back to the Chinese summit. We weren't bombing the North then, Mr. President.

Nixon: Let's suppose—let's look at this, and leave that out of it.

Kissinger: Everything the—

Nixon: The Russians still might say, "Well, during this period of time we'll cool it." That'd be the condition of our going, and we go and we come back, and we start bombing again. The problem is will bombing Hanoi and Haiphong do the trick, Henry?

Kissinger: Well, Hanoi isn't so important except for these rail lines.

Nixon: I know. But Haiphong or the bombing of Hanoi—will it do the trick?

Kissinger: The great—the conclusive argument to me in favor of the blockade is that you cross the Rubicon.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: That what they're trying to do to you, it's obvious, they're trying to kill you now. And I'm not sure—I said this to this group last night, they said what are the Russians [unclear]? And I said, "There's nothing the Russians would rather do than to get rid of the President. He's the only thing that stands between them and dominating the world." I said, "Now—"

Nixon: Now that's quite true.

Kissinger: That is true. But I was amazed by that group because now—

Nixon: You said that's why they're shooting all of a sudden while we were [unclear].

Kissinger: So, I think the only thing now—I don't believe they started out trying to overthrow the President. But if he gets too vulnerable at home, then you people are—and whoever starts nagging at him—is responsible. But what I think the—

Nixon: Those people are sensible enough, for Christ's sake, to know that Humphrey or McGovern or Teddy would be pacifists with the Russians, aren't they?

Kissinger: Oh yeah.

Nixon: Aren't they?

Kissinger: Oh yeah.

Nixon: Okay.

Kissinger: It was—I must tell you, I had—these last two evenings have been amazing in this respect because usually I get nagged at.

Nixon: Oh, Connally's point, of course, he's from Texas, but Connally talks to other people, apart from the polls and everything, he thinks that we got—he says you've got support in the country now and now's the time to do something.

Kissinger: You see, I don't—I never actually—One question was, how do you defend escalation? I said I'm not going to defend escalation. I said—

Nixon: Who escalated it?

Kissinger: I said, that's not the issue. There are only two issues. One is does the United States put a Communist government into power and allow itself and its enemies to defeat its friends? The second issue is do we—can any President permit 60,000 Americans to be made hostages, and will be shame and indignity, not wreck our whole domestic structure. Those are the only two.

Nixon: Also, I think the issue that how can the United States stand by after offering peace in every quarter and do nothing in response to an enormous enemy escalation—we're only responding to an enemy escalation. That's the real point here.

Kissinger: See, I think what the North Vietnamese are saying to themselves is all right, they know we're going to bomb. I mean, they know. And they say to themselves, "All right, they're going to take it." And—

Nixon: I think they are prepared to take the bombing, Henry—

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: You see—look, Henry, there's nobody that's more aware, because I, like you, one of the reasons we're both in here, is that we both take a long view, which goddamn few Americans do. That's why I said that we put out a little game plan if we wanted to cancel the summit first and then going after them, which I think we're absolutely right in not doing that.

Kissinger: Now that is something—

Nixon: That's good advice, because it's something I've seen. I led you into that—I led you out of that, yes I did. Because I remember what Eisenhower did. But I had really forgotten it didn't hurt Eisenhower when the Russians canceled the summit. It didn't hurt him. Goddammit, the American people don't like to be kicked—It didn't hurt Eisenhower when the goddamn Japanese canceled his trip.³ Remember?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: All right, now, it didn't hurt me, as Vice President. I'll never forget when I got stoned in Caracas.⁴ It helped me. People thought it was great. Now, it depends on how you react to it. Here's the problem. Looking at the long view, bombing might turn it around. It runs a better chance of keeping the summit alive. The Russians can live with the bombing or might be able to live with a blockade. All right, that's the advantage of that. But we constantly come back to the, basically, Henry, to the fundamental problem. And Connally, with his, you know, with his animal-like decisiveness, and which I also have, except I—

Kissinger: You're much more subtle.

Nixon: Through many years I've put much more layers of subtlety on it. But anyhow, Connally runs quickly to the point. He says, look, the summit is great; I hope you don't knock it off. I think you can do both. And I hope you can do both; I think you will do both. But, he says, even if you don't, if you're going to do the first things first, you've got to remember, you can do without the summit, but you cannot live with a defeat in Vietnam. You must win the war in Vietnam. Or, to put it another way, you must not lose in Vietnam. That's crystal clear. So, everything's got to be measured against what wins or loses in Vietnam. And here is the weakness of the bombing. Bombing might turn the war in Vietnam around. The blockade certainly will turn it around. Now, here, the blockade plus, you understand—what I'm really saying here is, I think, that's what'll convince me to, say, win the war.

Kissinger: The blockade gets you across the Rubicon. There's no way it can't be ended without the blockade.

Nixon: Well, everybody knows then, that I've thrown down the goddamn gauntlet, and there it is. Do you want to pick it up? And, you see, I'm going to lift the blockade as I've said. It's not over yet—the bombing's not over yet.

³ Reference is to President Eisenhower's official trip to Japan in 1960 that was canceled due to riots; see *Foreign Relations, 1958–1960*, vol. XVIII, pp. 329–356.

⁴ Reference is to Nixon's 1958 trip to South America; see *ibid.*, vol. V, pp. 477–483.

Kissinger: The bombing—they cannot do it. This is the argument for the blockade now. It heightens the chance of a confrontation with the Russians.

Nixon: That's correct.

Kissinger: It will start the Chinese screaming.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And you'll be accused of having blown up everything of your foreign policy, which is on the other hand a disadvantage.

Nixon: A great sadness to me. A great sadness to me. We've had a damn good foreign policy.

Kissinger: You have—

Nixon: Even if it all goes down the tubes, we will be remembered as the ones who went to China. And in the future, that'll work out.

Kissinger: Mr. President, actually, if you get re-elected, it will make your foreign policy. It's the same as the Laos operation. Everyone said that you now have broken it with the Chinese, and 3 months later we were there. And a year later, you were there. So, I think it will—

Nixon: Henry, if you come back to the fundamental point, as I took you up on that map yesterday. I showed you that little place, and we looked at it, and we think that this whole big wide world, everything rides on it. If there were a way, believe me, if there were a way that we could flush Vietnam down, flush it, and get out of it in any way possible and conduct a sensible foreign policy with the Russians and with the Chinese—

Kissinger: We'd do it.

Nixon: We ought to do it. We ought to do it. Because there's so much at stake. There's nobody else in this country at the present time with the exception of Connally in the next 4 years that can handle the Russians and the Chinese and the big game in Europe and the big game in Southeast Asia. You know it and I know it. And the big game with the Japanese 5 years from now. Who could help us to do—all right? So that's the stakes. That's why I—the only reason I had any doubts earlier in the week was that I had to face up to the fact 'cause I saw the inevitability of McGovern, or Humphrey, or the only other possibility is Teddy,⁵ who might be the worst of the three.

Kissinger: Certainly. No, McGovern's the worst.

Nixon: But anyway, as I saw that—McGovern would be the worst of the three for sure, but Teddy would be so stop-and-start that he

⁵ Reference is to Senator George McGovern (D–South Dakota), former Vice President and Senator Hubert Humphrey (D–Minnesota), and Senator Edward Kennedy (D–Massachusetts).

might get us into worse trouble. Anyway, if you're going to go for peace, you might as well surrender right off the bat rather than cost it all and slaughter. But my point is, Henry, that I had to put that in to the equation. And therefore, I had to go down the line and say how in the hell can we save, how the hell can we save, you know, the Presidency, and frankly, the present occupant, and that meant saving the summit. All right, I'm considering going, and I don't think there's any way you can do it—I don't think there's any way you can do it and at the same time temporize in Vietnam. I've reached the conclusion that we're in the situation where Vietnam is here and I assured Rogers and Laird, [unclear] let's make another offer, and have we agreed to offer this, and well, I don't know if we have, and they're wining and bitching about it. Well, Henry, you know and I know this is not true.

Kissinger: Mr. President, you and I know, perhaps as the only ones, if they had given us a face-saving way out, I was prepared to take it.

Nixon: I told you before you left.

Kissinger: You told me—because you told me that. They want us out in a humiliating way. They want us to put a Communist government into power. Goddamnit, let's face it, if they had accepted our May 31st proposal last year, they would have taken over Vietnam within a year or two.

Nixon: Oh, I'll say. God, I know. I still wish they had, nevertheless.

Kissinger: Of course. But it isn't as if we've been intransigent in our offers. Not at all.

Nixon: See, if we can survive past the election, Henry, and then Vietnam goes down the tubes, it really doesn't make any difference.

Kissinger: I agree with you. That's seems the whole—

Nixon: But we have no way to survive past the election.

Kissinger: Right. I think—

Nixon: There's no other way to go, given their other argument for bombing. Maybe we could bomb but not blockade, and still have the summit, and might last the election.

Kissinger: But, Mr. President, I think they're going to kill you. They're going to put you into the Johnson position. This is the other argument for the blockade.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: They're going to have you as the bomber. The guy—when I looked at the DRV position, they wanted you to break off the peace talks, Mr. President.

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

Kissinger: So you're the guy who doesn't talk.

Nixon: Oh, I hope they know, the guy across from me helped to break them off—did you get that across?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah, that got across. But all of this is minor because the peace groups are going to keep backing—

Nixon: The headlines are that we broke off the talks.

Kissinger: So that 6 months from now, 3 months from now—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —it's forgotten that there was an invasion, and therefore—

Nixon: Henry, let me put it this way. I know that you've been thinking about this during the night as I have. But I come back to the fundamental point, leaving the president out and so forth. Who knows, something could happen—the Democrats could get smart and draft Connally and I could be defeated.

Kissinger: That's impossible; inconceivable.

Nixon: Well, if they did, it could save the country.

Kissinger: But Mr. President, they're more likely to draft you. They will not draft Connally.

Nixon: But anyway, my point is, we have to face this fact: leave me out and leave McGovern out and all others. The United States of America at this point cannot have a viable foreign policy if we are humiliated in Vietnam. We must not lose in Vietnam. It's as cold as that. Right?

Kissinger: I agree.

Nixon: And they have not given us any way to avoid being humiliated. And since they have not, we must draw the swords. So the blockade is on. And I must say, and incidentally, but I want one thing understood, you said bombing—Moorer is right, the surgical operation theory is all right—but I want that place, whenever the planes are available, bombed to smithereens during the blockade. If we draw the swords out, we're going to bomb those bastards all over the place.

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: And let it fly. Let it fly.

Kissinger: The only point I disagree is we can do all of this without killing too many civilians. I said, no way.

Nixon: I don't want to kill civilians; you know that I don't want to. I don't try to kill any. But goddammit, don't be so careful that you don't knock out the oil for their tanks. See my point?

Kissinger: Oh, God no. God no. Those have to go.

[Omitted here is further discussion on the impact of intended military actions in Vietnam.]

197. Editorial Note

On May 5, 1972, President Nixon met with his Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board from 10:11 to 11:37 a.m. In attendance were Chairman of the Board Admiral George Anderson and board members William Baker, Gordon Gray, Franklin Lincoln, Frank Pace, Franklin Murphy, Nelson Rockefeller, and Gerald Burke, and National Security Council staff member Thomas Latimer. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) The meeting began as follows:

"The Chairman, Admiral Anderson, stated that the Board was grateful for the opportunity to meet with the President, especially during this very critical and busy period. The members hoped to be able to discuss certain matters that might be helpful to the President in preparing for his forthcoming trip to Moscow. The Board has followed closely the developments in Soviet strategic weaponry as a result of the President's specific charge upon it three years ago to monitor and assess the Soviet capabilities in this field. The Chairman said that the members were impressed with the continuing, across-the-board growth of Soviet forces in ICBMs, in SLBMs, in various defensive weapons, and, most recently, in the emphasis that the Soviets are placing on improving their command and control systems. This emphasis is illustrated by their efforts in hardening command and control facilities, in creating redundant communications, and in conducting live exercises of the system which involve direct participation by the top leaders of the Soviet Union. The Chairman went on to point out that it was not, however, the intention of the Board at this meeting to summarize intelligence on the Soviet strategic threat but rather to discuss the adequacy of the intelligence on the threat and to offer individual comments on related matters which could be useful to the President in the course of his visit to the Soviet Union.

"Admiral Anderson characterized U.S. intelligence on Soviet strategic capabilities as being generally good insofar as it pertains to field testing of new weapons systems and to strategic weapons deployment. He commented that the community has done a highly commendable job in improving the report formats in which this intelligence is presented. On the other hand, intelligence on laboratory research and development of Soviet weapons systems is inadequate, as is hard information on Soviet strategy, doctrine plans, and intentions. The Chairman reminded the President that last November he had directed the establishment of a Net Assessments group within the NSC staff. This staff, he said, is now being established under Andrew Marshall and, because of the importance of net assessments, warrants the President's strong support.

“The President expressed his appreciation for the Board’s continuing efforts in monitoring the adequacy of intelligence on the strategic threat and, in this connection, said that he hoped the Board would get together with John McCloy and the members of the President’s Advisory Board on Disarmament. But the President then enjoined the Board to begin to give equal emphasis to non-nuclear warfare capabilities. Citing the recent introduction into South Vietnam of additional Soviet tactical weapons, the President stated that he was concerned with the adequacy of U.S. conventional weapons, and more particularly with the quality of the weapons we have been providing to our allies. The success of the Nixon Doctrine is largely dependent upon our capability to supply these countries with proper military equipment. He directed the Board to examine very carefully the effectiveness of U.S. conventional weapons systems in comparison with Soviet weapons.”

Thereafter followed reports and discussion on reconnaissance collection capabilities, human clandestine intelligence, economic intelligence utilization, and relative U.S.-Soviet nuclear capabilities in the near-term future. The President concluded the meeting with the following remarks:

“The President commented at length upon the need for the leaders throughout American society to maintain their moral strength and courage in the face of the corrosive attitudes which seem to be pervading many segments of our culture. He made reference to this need in the business community, in the universities, in the communications media, and among those other elements of our society who, by virtue of education and other good fortune, have been given the opportunity to influence heavily the outlook and attitude of their fellow citizens. The President noted that the real strength of America inevitably resides in the average citizen; whether this strength, in turn, becomes greater or lesser is dependent to a critical degree on the ability and willingness of leaders of our society in discharging the moral obligations which have been placed upon their shoulders. The President expressed the hope that the members of the Board, who have such a unique vantage point from which to view the external threats of the United States, will seek in their daily contacts to remind American leaders in all walks of life of the enormous responsibilities they carry, especially in impressing youth on the need to preserve the nation’s strength and moral fiber.” (Memorandum for the record by Burke, May 12; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 277, Agency Files, PFIAB, Vol. VI, Jan.–June (1972)) In an attached May 12 memorandum to Haig that was forwarded to Kissinger, Latimer summarized the meeting. A recording of the meeting is *ibid*, White House Tapes, Cabinet Room, Conversation No. 100–1.

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

May 6, 1972, 12:13 p.m.

K: Mr. President.

P: You are not meeting with Dobrynin are you?

K: As it happened I have just been talking to him because there have been some clarifications on the SALT point to move into our direction.²

P: I just don't want you to do it too much right now Henry.

K: No, no he called me.

P: Well, I know I know. But—I think you have been gracious to them and everything but you understand what I mean. I don't give a damn about SALT. I just couldn't care less about it and I just think right now we better get all of our troops together and pull ourselves together—but have you finished with him—or are you still meeting.

K: No, I am not meeting with him. He called me on the telephone. It was just a three minute conversation.

P: Well, they said you were in the Map Room. I just . . .

K: Oh, no, no. I was in the Map Room because the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister.³

P: Oh, I see.

K: Who was a former student of mine.

P: Oh that is great. I hope he [likes?] the Israelis.

K: Oh no, I wasn't meeting with Dobrynin.

P: Not your office, but the operators thought you were. I said I suppose he is with the Ambassador—and he said yes.

K: No, no. I was with Yigal Alon who is Deputy Prime Minister and it was really 50 percent social—he was a former student of mine but also to take their temperature.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking. The President was at Camp David; Kissinger was in Washington.

² According to a transcript of a telephone conversation with Kissinger later that day, Dobrynin disclosed that the Soviet leadership had decided not to insist upon mention of certain intractable issues in any agreement arising out of Moscow. (Ibid.)

³ Kissinger met with Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Alon, Ambassador Rabin, Minister Idan, and Haig in the White House Map Room from 10:55 to 11:53 a.m. that day. (Ibid., Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule)

P: Do any of the Israelis except Mrs. Meir realize the importance of the United States not being humiliated in Vietnam?

K: Oh yes, he does. Absolutely.

P: None of the Jewish Community here that does except for you and Taft Schreiber.

K: I don't consider myself part of the Jewish community.

P: Oh, I know you don't. I am kidding. And I don't say that in anger or anything. It is just sad isn't it.

K: Well, he says that—I made that point to him—and he said—I said to him look, if McGovern becomes President and even if he gives you a hundred more phantoms, you are dead. Because America won't be strong enough to do anything.

P: We won't be prepared to seal it(?) Henry—you remember the big decision at the time of Jordan—it was not the Phantoms it was the ring. Who provided the ring?

K: And he said that he agreed with that and he claims that they are working to get you a much larger Jewish vote than you have ever had.

P: Well, not that I am impressed. But let me say this. I don't think you understood. Maybe they will go wild over us. Let me say that if the Soviet reaction is too tough—we will let them go. [Omission in the source text] the trouble in that part of the world. Don't you agree.

K: I agree.

P: Now the second point is, how are you going to handle, Henry, the briefing of Dobrynin? Are you just going to do it an hour before? How about the Chinese. I think that is terribly important.

K: We will send Haig or somebody up [to New York City].

P: Yes.

K: I think you should have a letter to Brezhnev and Chou En-lai. And they should both be very conciliatory.

P: Right. Now with Dobrynin, there is one point which I am sure you had in mind is that the President is taking this move—has thought a great deal about the summit and one of the reasons we did it this way was because we didn't want to risk hitting Soviet ships. Nice slick way to do it(?)

K: Right.

P: Can I say one other thing. I don't know whether you have done this when you talked to Dobrynin. You just said that the President is very interested in knowing what Brezhnev and Kosygin would like as gifts. Have you gone through that one with them? Did they ask us what we want.

K: No, I haven't asked him yet.

P: I think that—you can tell them that Mrs. Nixon is picking the gifts and that you know we have everything from green birds(?)—we can give them some beautiful [transistor?] radios, there are all sorts of things we can give them. I mean . . . I want to give them two or three different things. But say the President wants to know how generous they are and that we would like to know what they would like. And that the President and Mrs. Nixon would like to know what they would like—and also what the ladies would like.

K: Right.

P: You might call them that in a conciliatory way.

K: Right.

P: I had a real tragedy here. You just couldn't believe it. I just dictated this damn thing—and these son-of-a-bitch dictaphones—these fellows up here. The power had gone out and I put a whole damn tape on and there wasn't a thing on it.

K: Isn't that tragic?

P: Can you imagine it? You know it is like getting up and making a speech and the public address is not working. All of the people we got.

K: And it is hard to ever repeat it exactly the same way again.

P: I know. Well, anything I have redone it again now.

K: That is a God-damn tragedy.

P: Well don't worry about it. I am getting it in some sort of form and getting Andrews over here now. You can send up any of your ideas you would like. When do you and I meet again?

K: I am at your disposal this whole weekend.⁴

P: No. Listen the main thing is you see that that blockade goes well.

K: Well I would have done whatever needs to be done by late this afternoon. So I could come up in the evening or in the morning. Whichever you want.

P: Well, you don't need to come up again—unless I feel that I need to talk to you about something. But I do feel that probably you should come up when we get going on the speech.

[Omitted here is further discussion on military operations in Vietnam.]

⁴ Nixon was at Camp David May 5–7. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary)

199. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, May 6, 1972, 2:45–4:30 p.m.

SUBJECT

Contingency Plan for Operations Against North Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Major General Alexander M. Haig, Jr.
George C. Carver, Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs, CIA
Helmut Sonnenfeldt
John Holdridge
Richard Kennedy
John Negroponte
Winston Lord
Jonathan T. Howe

Dr. Kissinger assembled a group of NSC staff members plus a CIA official, who had just completed a study of the impact of a blockade, to discuss the effects of and possible international reactions to various contingency actions which were under serious consideration by the President. These actions included mining of North Vietnamese ports and interdiction by air of rail lines and other logistics targets throughout North Vietnam.

The meeting began with a presentation by Mr. Carver on the impact of closing off supplies to the port of Haiphong. (A copy of the report is at Tab A.)² The paper did not consider the effects of parallel steps which might be taken to interdict the logistics flow. After intensive discussion of various aspects of the supply problem, including differences in the situation in 1969 from those at present, Dr. Kissinger asked various staff experts for their assessment.

Hal Sonnenfeldt expressed the view that it was probable that the Soviet Union would cancel the Summit. However, he did not believe that the contemplated action would lead to a war. A variety of possible Soviet reactions were discussed. Sonnenfeldt felt that a paper he had prepared in 1969 concerning possible contingency actions³ was still valid with the exception that the United States was now better postured in its relations with the Soviet Union.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Office Files, Box 146, 1972 Offensive—Misc. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

² Attached but not printed.

³ Not found.

John Negroponte stated that the actions would have a major impact on ARVN morale and thereby greatly increase their fighting effectiveness. He stressed that the Government of North Vietnam was in a fairly precarious position and that mining and all out bombing could result in a shakeup of the current power structure.

John Holdridge outlined various options for the PRC and indicated that they might feel obliged to provide some manpower, allow use of Chinese air fields as a safehaven for North Vietnamese planes and open ports in South China. He felt the actions would cool relations with the United States and that the emphasis in U.S./PRC relations would focus almost exclusively on people to people contacts for a while. However, he did not believe these actions would lead to a major confrontation with the PRC. Holdridge also pointed out that relations with China were much better and our understanding of them had increased since earlier years when there was great concern about the intervention of Chinese forces in Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger made the point that if the decision were made to carry out these operations, they must be done brutally and could not be restricted to halfway measures. A discussion ensued as to whether it would be better to carry out these operations before or after the Summit and before or after the battle of Hue. Most present agreed that the time for the operations, if they were to be conducted at all, was then—before the battle of Hue commenced and before the Summit.

George Carver raised the possibility that the North Vietnamese might harm our prisoners but several in the group, including Dr. Kissinger, disagreed, believing that there would be a major upswelling of indignation in this country and that the enemy would not do such a foolish thing.

Dr. Kissinger then pointed out that in analyzing the supply situation, consideration should be given to the technical possibility and probability that the North Vietnamese would shift to other means of supply before resources in the South were entirely depleted. In other words, in order to protect their forces they would have to take action before they ran completely out of supplies. All emphasized the importance of the ground battle in South Vietnam to the success of the plan. It was essential that the South Vietnamese go all out and win some battles.

Dr. Kissinger then summed up some of the arguments which had been presented:

—The North Vietnamese have manpower constraints. This would be the most severe test that they had faced and would undoubtedly affect their morale and cause strains in their own fabric. There were limits to what they could ask their people to endure.

—In 1965 the North Vietnamese felt that time was on their side. Now it was eight years later and they were faced with a blockade and a stronger South Vietnamese army in the South. It was possible that the blockade might affect their calculations in their convulsive and all out effort in the South. (Mr. Carver indicated that he felt there would be a change in the people sitting around the table. By that he meant Le Duan would not survive and there would be a new leadership alignment.)

—Morale in the South would be favorably affected and the operation might result in silencing President Thieu's opposition. This would dispel any doubt that the United States had worked a deal behind the back of the South Vietnamese and indicate that President Thieu was the man who had delivered the Americans. It would strengthen Thieu's hand politically. We in turn could say to the South Vietnamese that it was essential that they make a maximum all out effort. (Carver pointed out that there was a tendency to let the Americans do the job for them and we would have to be careful to ensure that this feeling did not prevail.)

—It would give us something to bargain with for our prisoners which we would not have had otherwise.

—There was a small chance that the actions would produce, after a period of delay, a more rapid negotiation to the end of the war. In the first weeks following the announcement, the North Vietnamese would want to maintain a tough position in order to see how the battle went in South Vietnam and whether there was major domestic opposition in the United States to the bargain. They obviously would not go immediately to the bargaining table.

On the other hand there were a number of disadvantages:

—With the U.S. having further invested its prestige, the defeat would be greater if the operations failed.

—The loss of the Summit was almost a foregone conclusion and could have a very negative effect on SALT and other important negotiations with the Soviet Union.

—There was likely to be a cooling of relations with the PRC.

Mr. Carver pointed out that the North Vietnamese had been lucky in Tet of 1968 in bringing the U.S. Government around to their position even though the North Vietnamese had suffered a serious defeat. If the North Vietnamese were checked on the ground in the South, they would be in a serious situation when faced with renewed bombing and mining.

Dr. Kissinger then asked each person present whether he was for or against putting the contingency plans into effect:

—Mr. Carver said that he would do it but do it thoroughly and do it soon.

—Mr. Holdridge said that he would favor the operation if we had enough resources to carry the day. If there were sufficient military resources, his vote was yes.

—Mr. Negroponte said he felt that he was more optimistic about the chances for success of the operation than others present and that he favored it without reservation. He felt the result would be quicker and more decisive than others anticipated. The morale factor would be a key to the success of the ARVN.

—Mr. Sonnenfeldt said that he favored it and that we should do it soon and sustain it.

—Mr. Lord said that Dr. Kissinger knew that he was against it. First, he didn't think it would work. Second, he thought our losses would exceed our gains and third if it didn't work, it would be throwing good money after bad and would compound our losses.

—Mr. Kennedy said that he would favor doing it but with the same reservation expressed by Mr. Holdridge concerning resources. His second reservation would be with regard to the possible negative domestic reaction. If we started the operation, we must be willing to pay the price and recognize that the other side might simply wait out the President's tenure. On balance, however, he was in favor of it.

—Commander Howe said that he would favor the operation provided it was done thoroughly and intensively.

—General Haig indicated that it was a tough decision and his major concern was on the domestic front but that on balance he favored it.

Dr. Kissinger then thanked all those for attending the meeting and expressing their views frankly.

200. Letter From Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon¹

Moscow, May 6, 1972.

Dear Mr. President,

I received your letter of May 3² and I wish to say frankly that to my colleagues and myself the pessimism of your conclusions from the Paris meeting of Dr. Kissinger with the representatives of the DRV seems unjustified.

In our deep conviction—and the recent trip of the Soviet delegation to Hanoi made this conviction of ours still firmer—the DRV leadership is ready, if the same readiness is displayed by the American side, to seek mutually acceptable decisions for a political settlement of the conflict. The Vietnamese want to see South Vietnam as an independent, neutral state free of any influence and interference from the outside. To come to such a status of South Vietnam they believe possible through the creation of a true coalition government consisting of representatives of the three main political forces, the Saigon regime included. This political question is one of the key issues of the whole Vietnam problem; its solution requires display of realism also on your part, it requires giving up the attempts to keep at any cost the existing power structure in South Vietnam rejected by the people.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2. No classification marking. Translated by the Soviet Embassy from a Russian version, also attached but not printed. Also attached is a reworking of specific points in a redraft of the Basic Principles. Notations on both the letter and the attachment read: "Handed to Dr. Kissinger by Amb. D, 5/6/72, 5:30 p.m." Dobrynin called Kissinger at 4:05 p.m. that day to inform him of receipt of this letter and to schedule an appointment with Kissinger. (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, May 6, 4:05 p.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) According to the transcript of a telephone conversation at 5:05 p.m. on May 6, Nixon instructed Kissinger to "be just cold turkey"; to simply receive the message and not engage in any discussion about it or related issues with Dobrynin. (Ibid.) As noted in his Record of Schedule, Kissinger met with Dobrynin in the Map Room of the White House from 5:20 to 5:45 p.m. (Ibid., Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976) According to the transcript of a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Nixon at 5:45 p.m. that evening, Kissinger made the following report on the meeting: "Now, I got that message from Dobrynin and it's nothing. It is a very friendly letter to you from Brezhnev." Kissinger further described this note from Brezhnev as being "a good reply" and "a soft reply." (Ibid., Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) In his memoirs Kissinger described the letter as "a letter distinguished by its near irrelevance to the real situation." He also noted that "Brezhnev's letter served only to reinforce our determination." (*White House Years*, p. 1182)

² Document 190.

We do not find any desire on the part of the Vietnamese leaders to “bring disgrace” to the U.S. or to “humiliate” the President. But it is quite clear that they still have great mistrust for the actions and intentions of the American side. And to be just, the history of the Vietnam conflict—including that known from American documents themselves—gives them ground for such mistrust. Any unbiased person who would place himself in their place, must recognize that.

Therefore it would be hard to expect that the talks resumed after a long interval will yield results immediately. Clearly, to find common language and to work out mutually acceptable solutions, some time, patience and self-restraint will be required.

The attempts to step up military pressure on the Vietnamese side, as we already told you, Mr. President, can only cause further aggravation of the situation and an increase, in return, of the military actions by the Vietnamese side. There should be no doubt about it—the Vietnamese have proved their determination and ability to withstand military pressure.

Military pressure on the DRV would not only complicate the search for a political settlement of the conflict, but it could—even irrespective of our wishes as was said in my previous letter—entail serious consequences for peace in Asia, for general peace and for the Soviet-American relations.

Another thing. In telling all this to you, Mr. President, I want that there be absolute clarity that both before and in this case, we set forth with all frankness our understanding of the situation and opinion about ways out of it. As regards settlement itself of the conflict in Vietnam, that question can and must be solved in the talks between the Vietnamese side and the U.S.

We would like to express the hope that the American side will display at this moment restraint and political courage in its approach to the present-day situation and will not miss the opportunities opening up for a political settlement of the conflict and for an end to the Vietnam war. Such an approach would, no doubt, be welcomed throughout the world and would in many ways clear the road for a serious progress in the relations between our countries.

Those are the considerations which I believed necessary to express in connection with your last letter.

Sincerely,

L. Brezhnev³

³ This translation bears Brezhnev’s typed signature.

201. Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency¹

Washington, May 6, 1972.

SUBJECT

Soviet, Chinese, Free World Reactions to a US Attempt To Deny Sea Access to North Vietnam

Assumption: The measures that the US might take in an attempt to deny sea-borne imports to North Vietnam could include (a) mining the approaches to ports; (b) bombing of ports to destroy unloading and storage facilities; (c) naval blockade.

1. These measures vary in the sharpness of confrontation they would produce and therefore in the degree of tension and risk which might result. The reactions of the various parties would also vary accordingly.

2. For the Soviets and Chinese, the key questions posed would be the following:

(a) Would Hanoi's capacity to carry on its war effort be significantly reduced?

(b) Would the US actions be sustained for a considerable period?

(c) Would these portend other US escalatory steps?

(d) Would the countermeasures which might be envisioned carry tolerable risks and be sufficient to uphold the prestige of the Communist powers?

3. It is conceivable, but we judge extremely unlikely, that Moscow and Peking or one of them would respond to the US show of determination by moving to place Hanoi under genuine pressure to reach a compromise settlement. While neither of the Communist great powers has a vital interest in the success of Hanoi's campaign in South Vietnam, they almost certainly could not agree on this course and each would fear to act unilaterally because of reactions anticipated in other Communist states and parties. Moreover, neither would wish, because

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 160, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam–May 1972. Top Secret. In a May 6 memorandum to Kissinger entitled "Planned Actions," Lord offered a scenario for and discussed a broad range of reactions that could unfold from the impending decisions on Vietnam, and posited: "No matter what we achieve we nevertheless certainly *will* suffer some of the losses suggested in the scenario: Summit, SALT, other agreements, at least some cooling with Peking, civilian casualties, etc. We *could* have other losses: a more serious break with Peking, some Moscow-Peking rapprochement, etc. *In short, even if we 'succeed,' would there be a net gain?*" (Ibid., Box 1330, NSC Unfiled Material, 1972, 5 of 8, Vietnam—Sensitive 1972 USSR Summit)

of concern for its own standing as a great power, to bear the onus of yielding obviously under US pressure.

4. Thus we believe that Moscow and Peking would respond initially by joint measures to increase supplies to Hanoi via China's land routes. The capacity of the land routes from China into North Vietnam is adequate to supply Hanoi's needs over an indefinite period, and we have no doubt that the Soviets and Chinese could agree to cooperate in carrying out supply by these routes if they judged that necessary to sustain Hanoi. Finally, the ability to keep Hanoi going by land supply would give time to consider other measures, and the broader costs and risks which might emerge more clearly as the crisis developed.

USSR Reactions

5. Having decided on these measures to continue support for Hanoi, the Soviets would be primarily concerned to contain the crisis, and to limit the costs to Soviet-American relations generally. Nevertheless, they would consider that their standing as a great power had been directly challenged and would want to act to uphold their prestige.

6. On the political level, Moscow would feel that it had no choice but to react sharply. The machinery of propaganda would be employed with high intensity in order to maximize the pressure of world and domestic US opinion against the US administration. Unless the US desisted and the crisis seemed on the way to resolution within a few days or so, the effect would be to make the May Summit impossible. The Soviets would almost certainly move to cancel it. This step might be delayed somewhat if the US measures were limited to mining, which would pose a less direct challenge to the USSR, but would come in any case if the US persisted.

7. The Soviets would be aware that the damage to the climate of Soviet-American relations generally—to the SALT agreement, to trade prospects, and to détente in Europe—would be severe. But we believe that the Kremlin consensus would come down on the side of paying this price rather than seeming to bow under US pressure. In doing so, there would probably be the intention to return to present lines of policy toward the US as soon as circumstances permitted.

8. There would remain in the question of what specific steps the USSR should take to counter the US moves. While considering these, the Soviets would probably order their ships out of North Vietnamese waters. If the US limited itself to mining North Vietnam's sea approaches, the Soviets would probably give Hanoi technical assistance in sweeping operations. To bombing attacks on ports they would reply with additional measures to strengthen North Vietnam's air defenses, but would probably not take overt measures such as sending Soviet aircraft and crews. (Sinking of Soviet ships during such attacks

would obviously place the Soviets under great pressure to react more sharply.) A blockade would pose a more direct challenge than bombing or mining. We believe that the Soviets would judge that the risks of an attempt to defy a blockade would be too great, and would avoid doing so. Before the world, they would make a virtue of their restraint and point to their continuing support to Hanoi in other ways.

9. Throughout, the Soviets would be concerned to *show* an adequate response in support of North Vietnam and in defense of their own prestige. They would be equally concerned to keep the crisis under control and to limit its damage to their wider interests, but would find this increasingly difficult if the crisis was prolonged. They would count heavily on mounting pressures on the US administration at home and abroad to deter further escalation and to force Washington to desist eventually. And they would be prepared at a suitable moment to sponsor a new formula for resumption of negotiations, though still not on terms which Hanoi would judge prejudicial to its interests.

[Omitted here is further discussion on Chinese and world-wide reaction to the blockading of North Vietnamese ports.]

202. Editorial Note

On May 7, 1972, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger spent much of the day at Camp David helping President Nixon prepare for his televised address on Vietnam the following evening. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule) In his diary entry for this date, White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman recalled:

“I went to Camp David from Williamsburg by chopper this morning. Met with the P and Henry at 4:00 over at Birch. Henry was analyzing things; says he thinks the Soviets will definitely cancel the Summit [omission in the source text]. There’s no question but that they will launch a venomous attack on Nixon on the basis that he sabotaged the last chance for peace in the world. The P agreed that this was the line he would undoubtedly take. We had considerable discussion about follow-up and planning on the speech. The P wanted me to spend a lot of time on the use of K[issinger] and his time.” (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

A sentence in Haldeman’s handwritten notes for this date on which his diary was based reads: “K thinks Sov[iets] will cancel summit &/or take adverse action—Cuba, MidEast.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, Staff Members and

Office Files, Haldeman Files, Box 45, Haldeman Notes, April–June 1972 [Part I])

In an extract from his diary for May 7 included in his memoirs, Nixon recorded:

“I discussed with Kissinger the necessity to prepare a contingency plan for summit cancellation. As of this morning, he had raised his 20 percent possibility of a noncancellation to 25 percent, although he still cannot see how the Russians can react otherwise. I constantly bring him back to the point that Connally had made when we reached the decision: we can lose the summit and a number of other battles but we cannot lose in Vietnam. Not only the election, but even more important, the country, requires that the United States not lose in Vietnam. Everything is to be concentrated toward the goal now of seeing that we do not lose now that we have crossed the Rubicon.

“The drafts we went through on the speech will tell the story of how it developed. Perhaps the most important section was that on the Soviet Union, and Henry was very impressed with what I finally came up with on my own. It had to be done with great subtlety and I think we have stated the case as well as we possibly can to give them a way out if they want to find one.” (RN: *Memoirs*, page 603)

At 6:05 p.m. that day, Kissinger’s deputy, Alexander Haig, called Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin to discuss summit-related issues. According to a transcript of the conversation, Dobrynin posed the following request: “This is not urgent. About question that I need an answer on the strategic talk. He [Kissinger] mentioned several points in addition to what he will give me on paper. In light of the conversation he had in Moscow it could really help.” Haig agreed to contact Kissinger and have him call Dobrynin early the next day. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) No record of a call from Kissinger to Dobrynin the next morning has been found.

Haig called the President at 6:10 p.m. to report on his conversation with Dobrynin. The transcript of the conversation reads:

“GH: I talked to Dobrynin. What he had was a response to the SALT piece and it was just a technical thing. He was very forthcoming.

“RN: There may be a chance—Henry is very bearish—the Russians may go to the summit with the blockade.

“GH: They may do it.

“RN: Is Lord starting on the speech? You might tell him to say, ‘Look, the President decided on the blockade because he didn’t want to risk hitting Soviet ships.’ The speech should be conciliatory. We don’t want to hit Soviet ships or any others that may be there.” (Ibid.)

203. Memorandum From President Nixon to Secretary of State Rogers¹

Washington, May 8, 1972.

In connection with my decisions concerning Vietnam, I request that you inform all United States representatives engaged in negotiations with the USSR as follows:

All U.S. negotiators should be aware that my purpose is to end the conflict in Vietnam so that its disruptive and diversionary effect on international relations will be ended.

All U.S. negotiators should proceed on the basis of existing instructions.

If their Soviet counterparts should comment on our actions with respect to Vietnam, our representatives should note them and not engage in debate but proceed with the business at hand.

If Soviet representatives should walk out of negotiations or otherwise attempt to disrupt them, American representatives should express regret and emphasize that as far as we are concerned we are ready to proceed with negotiations on their merit.

American representatives concerned with commercial matters should state that it has been my intention, in the context of broadly improving U.S.-Soviet relations, to authorize major steps designed greatly to increase the volume of trade and other types of mutually beneficial cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Richard Nixon

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL US–USSR. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis.

204. Memorandum for the President's Files¹

Washington, May 8, 1972, 9:00 a.m.–12:20 p.m.

SUBJECT

National Security Council Meeting

PARTICIPANTS

President Nixon
Vice President Agnew
Secretary of State Rogers
Secretary of Defense Laird
Secretary of Treasury Connally
Director of Central Intelligence Helms
Director of Office of Emergency Preparedness, Lincoln
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Kissinger
President's Press Secretary Ziegler
Mr. John Negroponte, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

President Nixon: As you are all aware we have an important decision to make today on Vietnam. The current situation which is certainly not as critical as portrayed by the press is nevertheless in the balance. There are serious questions as to Vietnam's equipment and will. General Abrams needs more assets. We've sent air primarily. The Soviet summit is jeopardized by each option open to us:

- Doing nothing
- Only bombing the North
- Blockading or mining and bombing

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-110, NSC Minutes, Originals. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. According to Nixon's Daily Diary, the meeting lasted from 9:10 a.m. to 12:07 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) That same morning, Kissinger sent the President a memorandum briefing him for this meeting and a proposed scenario for announcing the intended military actions. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 128, Subject Files, Vietnam, President's May 8, 1972 Speech) In his memoirs Nixon prints his diary entry, which reads: "Monday was a pretty tough day because the NSC meeting ran over three hours, with Laird opposing the decision and Rogers saying he would be for it if it worked. Connally and Agnew predictably took a very strong position for it. The record will speak for itself. Of course, in fairness to Laird and Rogers, both of their reputations are on the line, and I think they will have very serious doubts about whether the action will succeed. The real test, of course, will be whether they support once the decision is made and on that I have no doubt." (RN: *Memoirs*, pp. 603–604) In his memoirs Kissinger also described the meeting: "The NSC met next day, Monday, May 8, in the unreal atmosphere that Nixon's procedures generated. All present knew that he had almost certainly arrived at his final decision. They therefore had much less interest in considering the issues than in positioning themselves for the certain public uproar. Nixon, with his back to the wall, was at his best: direct, to the point, with none of the evasions that often characterized his style when facing opposition." (*White House Years*, p. 1184) A tape recording of the meeting is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Cabinet Room, Conversation No. 100–17.

Thus today we need a cold-blooded analysis.

Regardless of how we have helped the South Vietnamese, we have done reasonably well in some places and poorly in others. I am surprised at the fact that we have provided inferior equipment to that furnished by the Soviets. They have provided 13 new weapon systems, big tanks-big guns; this shows what the South Vietnamese are up against. The South Vietnamese fighting performance is a mixed bag. Even by the most optimistic assessment there is a substantial danger that South Vietnam may not be able to hold up particularly in Hue; but in Military Regions III and IV where most of the population lives they are doing quite well.

Hue is of symbolic importance and they may attack within the next few days.

Putting it in those terms the real question is not what will happen to South Vietnam but what we have to do to affect the situation. We could wait the situation out. This is a tempting course. If the South Vietnamese can't do the job on the ground it would be tempting for political reasons. We could blame the opposition for getting us into the war and then for not letting us out. Congress undermined us at the negotiating table and we could tell the U.S. people let's flush it because South Vietnam couldn't hack it. This is a tempting proposition. It could be sold. Our Democratic friends would buy it and a great number of Republican friends would buy it as well.

But there are problems. The major one is that, if in the future after all the effort in South Vietnam, a Soviet-supported opponent succeeds over a U.S.-supported opponent this could have considerable effect on our allies and on the United States. Our ability to conduct a credible foreign policy could be imperiled. This leaves out the domino theory; but if you talk to the Thai, the Cambodians, the Indonesians and the Filipinos, as I have, the fact of a U.S. failure and a Communist success would be considered a failure of U.S. policy.

Secondly, the diplomatic track is totally blocked. The public sessions have been unproductive. Henry was in Paris last week² and made every offer we had made previously and even more. They flatly refused and insisted on our getting rid of Thieu, releasing everybody from prison and so forth making a Communist takeover inevitable. The Communists now think they're winning and they're getting tougher at the bargaining table.

Thirdly, there is a considerable body of military opinion, not a majority, that we should put more air strikes into Hanoi and Haiphong. The difficulty with this course is, first the DRV will be better prepared,

² See Document 183.

second General Abrams needs assets for the battle in the South and third, there is the serious question of effectiveness of resuming bombings on a regular basis. This raises problems similar to those previously faced and the question of what would be accomplished.

The fourth and final course would be to adopt a program of cutting off the flow of supplies by sea and rail. The effect of cutting off supplies by sea can be conclusive but the question of rail is in doubt because of our experience from 1965–68.

Whatever we do it won't affect the battle immediately in the South except perhaps the psychological effect. The real effect will be three of four months from now for sure.

As regards the summit, this latter course might jeopardize the summit. I think we have to realize that if the situation in Vietnam is as it is today there can't be a summit. The summit is jeopardized by all these courses of action. That consideration we have to assume. There will be no summit.

There is no good choice. The bug-out choice is a good political one but I am not sure what this office would be worth after doing that. The other military choices would have grave foreign policy consequences and political consequences at home. Nothing we can say is sure and all have serious risks regarding the summit, public opinion and Congress.

Anyone who raises a question of risk must look at the choices. We face a situation where nothing is sure. There are grave political risks and risks to the country if we try one of these policies and fail.

I believe the first course of action is the least viable. It is the best politically, but it is the least viable for our foreign policy. Escalation in the bombing or a naval and air cutoff have questionable value. Neither will surely tip the balance to the side of success. It is only a question of degree. The only question in regard to increased bombing or a cutoff is whether this provides South Vietnam with a better chance of success.

[Omitted here is discussion on the mechanics of and logistical considerations inherent in mining Haiphong's harbor and bombing in other areas of North Vietnam.]

President Nixon: Suppose we are wrong? Suppose Vietnam fails? How do we handle it? You don't assess the risks for our policy?

Secretary Laird: We must hedge on equipment. We have given them everything they have asked for and will continue. If they don't have enough incentive, then all the equipment in the world won't save them.

Secretary Connally: Why do you use the argument that cost is too great? You aren't going to save any money.

Secretary Laird: The military equipment route is the cheaper route.

Secretary Connally: Explain that to me. Haven't all the assets already been sent there?

Secretary Laird: We are conducting a massive air campaign in the DRV and in South Vietnam. It runs up into tremendous amounts of money. Just to give you an example, one B-52 strike costs 40,000 dollars in ammunition.

Dr. Kissinger: What you are doing is arguing against the present scale of air effort.

Vice President Agnew: I don't think, if we just let things go, we can afford to let South Vietnam slide. When South Vietnam goes it will be utter collapse if something isn't done. It will be a complete loss of U.S. diplomatic credibility around the world. We must move the Soviets off center. We must move off gradualism. We should stop saying what we are not going to do. We are not in a confrontation with the Soviets. There is still the possibility of a face-saving solution in Paris. Before a confrontation with the Soviets they could go to the DRV and say let's find a solution. What will happen if we let South Vietnam slide into defeat?

President Nixon: These are all things we don't know.

Vice President Agnew: If there is a collapse, the Soviets will be encouraged in the Middle East, in the Indian Ocean. It will be a green flag for wars of national liberation anywhere. I personally believe in the domino theory.

President Nixon: We could do this and still fail. Mel (Laird) is aware of this. The South Vietnamese could still collapse. Then it would only be a chip for our Prisoners of War.

Vice President Agnew: By not doing anything more we would be giving testimony to our weakness. The Europeans have let us be out in front of every fight they have. If something happens with the Soviets then let the Soviets be nervous. Politically and domestically I think it will be vicious for the Administration but, Mr. President, if I were sitting where you are I would say we have got to do something. We're the greatest people in the world for handcuffing ourselves. We are compulsive talkers. I don't think you have any option. The effect could be great in South Vietnam. It could stop the erosion of the internal structure and beat DRV morale.

Mr. Lincoln: I believe the domino theory.

President Nixon: I think we all do. The real question is whether the Americans give a damn any more. Americans don't care about Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Philippines. No President could risk New York to save Tel Aviv or Bonn. We have to say it—our responsibility is to say it—because we must play a role of leadership. A lot of people say we shouldn't be a great power. That is all well and good if there were not another couple of predatory powers on the scene. The Soviets already have a tremendous capability and the Chinese are developing one.

If you follow *Time*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and the three networks, you could say that the U.S. has done enough. Let's get out; let's make a deal with the Russians and pull in our horns. The U.S. would cease to be a military and diplomatic power. If that happened, then the U.S. would look inward towards itself and would remove itself from the world. Every non-Communist nation in the world would live in terror. If the U.S. is strong enough and willing to use its strength, then the world will remain half-Communist rather than becoming entirely Communist.

Mr. Lincoln: We really have to hedge against a failure in South Vietnam even if the chance of failure is only ten percent. Those who criticize us will say why didn't we do it sooner. This action hedges against it. Four or five months from now it is likely to be of some help. It is a less inflammatory step than just actually bombing.

I have one technical concern and that is the question of availability of air power. In the short run can it be better used in support of our air mission in South Vietnam than in this interdiction?

President Nixon: I understand the problem. Hue is a little bit like Verdun. The Germans and the French decided it was important and fought for it. Three million men were killed as a result. Hue is a hell of a symbol. General Abrams is using as much as he can.

Secretary Laird: Abrams is dividing up his planes between MRs 1, 2 and 3.

President Nixon: Abrams has 35 B-52s which he does not allocate every day. They are used for targets of opportunity.

Admiral Moorer: He also has a call on the resources operating north of the DMZ.

President Nixon: One advantage of this operation as distinct from bombing more is that, if we bombed more, our credibility will be diminished. If we do this option it will be with the assumption that Abrams will have all the resources he needs. The main battle is in the South. The reason there was no second strike on Hanoi and Haiphong was because General Abrams did not want to divert the resources. I was much persuaded by the needs that he expressed and if the military commander says what he needs, we will support him.

Vice President Agnew: Whatever we do, we should do it all. First, we should free up the air. Second, we should surprise them and third, we should lessen the domestic impact. The docks are part of this. We should go the whole route.

Secretary Connally: I couldn't agree more. It is not only a question of Vietnam but Laos, Cambodia and all of Southeast Asia. Mr. President, you say United States people are sick of it. You said we will withdraw. If Vietnam is defeated, Mr. President, you won't have anything.

I agree it won't happen in three weeks but it is a mistake to tie our hands as we did in the mid-1960's. At that time many Americans thought we were doing this on a no-win basis. If we move we ought to blockade, we ought to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. It is inconceivable to me that we have fought this war without inflicting damage on the aggressor. The aggressor has a sanctuary. If Russia gets away with it here like it did in Bangla Desh then it will be all of Southeast Asia. Where next? The Middle East? We must think about these things. The other problem is South Vietnam's ability to survive.

President Nixon: Then you would approve this operation.

Secretary Connally: Don't let them nibble you to death on this. You've got to make a conscious decision one way or another. What the people want is leadership.

President Nixon: There is no sure choice. I will have to decide before 2 o'clock. Everything you say will have to be weighed. Secretary Rogers will evaluate the world aspect. We see risks of confrontation. We must have in mind the fact that the USSR, with so much on the plate, might move to cool it rather than heat it up; so there is a question about the USSR there. I think we have to bear in mind that they expressed concern about the problem. They expressed an interest in getting Hanoi back to the conference table. I don't know whether they can influence Hanoi to do something. But as far as the USSR is concerned this course may be an incentive or disincentive.

Secretary Rogers: If there is a failure in South Vietnam that is disastrous for our policies.

President Nixon: Even if we try?

Secretary Rogers: Secondly, we shouldn't be carried away. I think the U.S. people think you have done enough and that you have done very well. The question, therefore, is whether there is something more you can do to be effective. I agree with Dick's (Helms) paper.³ It is a good one. We assume the effect will be good. LBJ said that it didn't work. Do we think it will work? It is clear that it won't have the effect militarily in the short term and maybe it won't have any effect at all. It could have a psychological effect on both South Vietnam and North Vietnam and, if so, that would be worthwhile.

³ Appended to this meeting record as Tab A, but not printed, is the prepared briefing by Helms, May 8, entitled "The Effect of a U.S. Policy to Interdict Land and Sea Imports to North Vietnam." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-110, NSC Minutes, Originals, 1972) The attached covering note from Negroponete to Haig, May 9, reads: "The attached should be appended to the draft minutes of the May 8 NSC meeting which I provided to you earlier this afternoon."

But it could have the opposite effect both on the battlefield and domestically. I think it's going to be a tough one with our people and with our allies. We will have some help from the British and a few others.

As for Congress and public opinion, I think they will charge that this will have no military effect. It looks from Dick's (Helms) paper that most supplies can come by rail. Maybe they can't but I'm assuming that the CIA paper is right on this.

If we do this and fail, I think that would be worse and more damaging to our prestige. I don't know whether it will be effective or not. We must rely on the military. If this will strengthen the military hand and the hand of the South Vietnamese, I think we should support it. Could we wait? Perhaps a week? Is there a time factor? I learned in my discussions from the Europeans that the DRV wants to destroy the summit.

Secretary Connally: This will put the summit in jeopardy but I don't think it is certain that they will cancel it.

Dr. Kissinger: I think that if we do this there is a better than even chance that the Soviets will cancel the summit.

President Nixon: I couldn't go to the summit if conditions in South Vietnam are the same as now or worse.

Secretary Connally: It is better for the Soviets to cancel the summit than us.

Secretary Rogers: The question is is it going to work or is it going to hurt us?

Vice President Agnew: I think we are better off if we do it even if we lose Hue.

Secretary Laird: Let's not make so much out of Hue. We lost it in 1968.

Vice President Agnew: The media are making a big thing out of Hue. That is something we cannot help.

Secretary Laird: The problem is one of assets.

Dr. Kissinger: The problem with all these figures is that one cannot construct a program analysis approach type model. The fact of the matter is that they would have to redirect 2.2 million tons of seaborne imports. At present they are only importing 300,000 tons by rail. We did not stop all of their rail transport in 1965–68.

President Nixon: It is very different now. Sihanoukville is cut. Now we will cut off the port.

Dr. Kissinger: They have a theoretical capacity but they can't use trains by day and if you analyze every segment of the railroad in China you will find that one segment of the railroad is apt to get overloaded. You can't throw these figures around without a better analysis. It is

easy to say that they have four months' capacity and could go all out and end the war but they would end with zero capacity. Another possibility is that they would try everything in one month or alternately cut way down on their activities. One thing is certain they will not draw their supplies down to zero.

President Nixon: The key point is if it is militarily effective. Looking to the future we have to think about whoever sits in this chair after the election. We must consider the long term advantages as well as the short term. If South Vietnam goes and we have done this, Bill's (Secretary Rogers) view is that we are worse off. John's (Secretary Connally) and the Vice President's view is different.

My view is that either way, if South Vietnam goes, as far as the political situation is concerned we are done. What is on the line is an election. The only effective thing is to decide now that, if South Vietnam isn't going to succeed, then we should withdraw before the debacle, blame it on the Senate and pull out. I could make the goddamnest speech to this effect and win the election, but I couldn't bring myself to do that because I know too much. I'm not sure that U.S. training is equal to Communist style training. This is no discredit to us. We are different and we believe in permissiveness. The North Vietnamese fight because they're afraid of what will happen to them if they don't.

My main point is that I will consider the possibility of simply chucking it now, blaming the doves for sabotaging the negotiating track and encouraging the enemy and telling the North Vietnamese we'll do everything they want to get back our prisoners of war.

The price they are demanding for our prisoners of war is not just a deadline for the withdrawal of our forces. We've tried that. They won't give back those prisoners of war until we get out of Southeast Asia totally. At least with this option we have something to bargain for POWs. We certainly can't pay the price that they have demanded.

Vice President Agnew: I disagree that this is a viable political alternative. I don't think we can sell it.

President Nixon: We have several choices. The first is a bug-out. The second is the choice of continuing to do what we're doing. The risk of this course is failure. In any event we are not going to Moscow. When I came back from Communist China I didn't get a damn thing on Vietnam.

We go to the Soviet Union, we agree on principles, credits, and we toast each other at a time when Soviet tanks are kicking hell out of our allies. If we act and then we have a summit, perhaps we can do that. The real proposition is, are we better off letting the dust settle or will more drastic action tip the balance in a decisive way? I will have to weigh these. All of you come down on these matters in varying degrees and shades. It comes down not to whether we lose in Vietnam

but first what can we do to prevent that and second what should we do to make the losses palatable if we do in fact lose.

Secretary Connally: One option was negotiations and last fall and spring there was hope for negotiations but that hope is down the drain. We have lost the negotiating option. At the moment our country's future is in the hands of the South Vietnamese and whether they stand and fight. We cannot allow this situation to continue.

Secretary Laird: I am limited to 2.4 billion dollars annually. I have put in 2.9 billion dollars already, hiding it under the table. I am taking it out of the hide of the Services.

Secretary Connally: You're already pregnant.

Secretary Laird: It's a question of where you are next year. If you are to have a viable policy, you can't break down your whole force posture. You've got to have the support of the people and the Congress.

Vice President Agnew: If we don't get anywhere on the Vietnam question, then we won't be anywhere anyway.

Secretary Connally: We can't make this decision on the basis of cost. You can't convince me that if you bomb the railroads, the ports of Haiphong and Hanoi, you can't persuade me that it won't affect the psychology both in South and North Vietnam.

Secretary Laird: I agree.

Secretary Connally: Maybe you can give the South Vietnamese the necessary will by doing this.

President Nixon: The U.S. way of training may not be the most effective.

[Omitted here is further discussion on the tactical military situation in South Vietnam.]

205. Editorial Note

From 12:13 to 1:15 p.m. on May 8, 1972, Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger, Secretary of the Treasury Connally, and President Nixon met in the Oval Office to discuss Vietnam and U.S.-Soviet relations. Connally entered the room as Nixon and Kissinger were discussing United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim's efforts to put a resolution on Vietnam before the Security Council. Kissinger speculated that actually the Soviets had put forward this resolution. "The Russians want it to keep you from acting, clearly, or to put the maximum obstacles against you," he noted. "Now, we can easily handle the Security Council today." Kissinger then added: "The only mar-

ginal utility of delaying 24 hours is to pull the teeth of your Cabinet members who were going against our plan. You know, the way your position is now that Rogers is saying he was for it if it succeeds and against it if it fails." He also noted that both Secretary of Defense Laird and Director of Central Intelligence Helms opposed the action.

The President then requested Connally's evaluation of the situation. Connally noted: "The safest thing is always to basically to let the status quo remain the status quo of whatever the hell develops. That's the safest thing. That's your basic bureaucratic approach that you never want to disturb that. That somewhat is reflected in both [Secretary of Defense] Mel[vin] [Laird] and [Secretary of State] Bill [Rogers]'s attitude. Secondly, I think you have to assume that Bill really would not like to see the summit come off, the Russian summit—he'd like to see it postponed, for whatever reason, but he'd just like to see it go by the boards. Third, I think there's some argument to be made on behalf of Mel's argument that it would cost us a hell of a lot. But, dear God, this doesn't make a lot of sense to me." Both Kissinger and Nixon agreed that this course of action would be less costly. Connally underscored that 90 percent of the matériel coming into North Vietnam actually came through the ports. Thus, bombing damage in fact was minimal and consequently a blockade just might work.

Connally noted that he could not support the continued degradation of the U.S. and GVN military position. Nixon then asked Connally whether it would have been better to enact the bombings even if "South Vietnam goes down anyway." In response, Connally said: "Well, the argument is that at least we send a message to other aggressor nations that they're going to suffer some damage." Kissinger agreed that it was better off to do it anyway, as it would prevent American troops from being caught by the North Vietnamese. Nixon added that the bombing would be a card to get back U.S. POWs. Kissinger, arguing for the importance of the blockade in addition to the bombing, noted: "Well, Mr. President, if you do the blockade and the ARVN still collapses, then you trade the blockade for the prisoners, and at least you've got a half-way reasonable negotiation." He added that the blockade may in fact mitigate a GVN collapse as it would be a "shot in the arm." The conversation continued:

Connally: "There's another advantage. This way, if Russia wants to help, and I really believe they want to help, I just believe that, this gives them an argument to say to Hanoi, now, we told you, we knew you, we just say you've got to come to grips with us now. And it seems to me it gives them a powerful argument to use with Hanoi."

Nixon: "It's a possibility. Now, let me put it this way. As far as the Russians helping, we know that given the course—the present course of events they aren't going to help."

Connally: "Of course they're not."

Nixon: "Now, our doing this may make them more difficult. But that's almost impossible for them to be much more difficult. If there's at least a chance that it does allow them to do something, would you agree, Henry?"

Kissinger: "That's right—what—they will cancel the summit, in my judgment, although it's not totally excluded."

Nixon: "That's 40–60, 30–70?"

Kissinger: "I would rate it higher—I'd rate it 80–20. But they may then say that now they've done their duty, that that's the only thing they're going to do to us, and continue bilateral relations with Hanoi."

Nixon: "You have here—you should have the contingency plan ready for what we say when they cancel the summit."

Kissinger: "I've got a statement already."

President: You should have a statement ready, and so forth."

Kissinger: "It's ready."

Nixon: "I should not have to make it."

Kissinger: "No. These literally are statements I can brief on it."

Nixon: "You should read from it, exactly. Exactly. Because I think John's smelled a rat pretty clearly, and Bill, he's not interested in that Soviet summit."

Kissinger: "Well, because he knows we've got it all settled and he doesn't want to be in the position of Peking. Because actually the fact is we've got—"

Nixon: "We've got a hell of a summit."

Kissinger: "We can announce two agreements every night."

Nixon then noted that there was in fact a 40–50 percent chance that the South Vietnamese would collapse in the absence of military action. However, on the diplomatic side, if the blockade was enacted, then he obtained some leverage with which to use to obtain POWs. Also, on the military side, a blockade would hamper Hanoi's military operations and be an immediate encouragement to the South Vietnamese. "Better off for having tried," he believed.

Connally said that the administration might be accused of ruining its new Soviet and Chinese policies, but that accusation was untrue. He believed that the American people wanted an end to the war, and especially to get out by November, and thus would support even the bombing. The Nixon administration could no longer look toward a peaceful resolution with Hanoi, as North Vietnam had virtually humiliated the United States. Only "military pressure" would work at this point, Connally asserted. He advised the President to inform the American people that he would not permit the humiliation and defeat of this nation, an action the public would then understand. Nixon thus

decided to render his speech at 9 p.m. that evening. He promised to show it to Rogers and Laird prior to its televised broadcast.

Connally left the meeting at 12:59, and Kissinger a few minutes later; Haldeman entered at 1 p.m. Nixon discussed Connally's views with Haldeman. Haldeman agreed that it was better to end up in a stronger position. He also complained about efforts by Rogers to forestall Kissinger getting credit for the summit, and even argued that Rogers would try to have it canceled on this basis. Nixon added that he thought that Laird opposed the summit as well. Nixon noted the advice of Kissinger not to go to the summit when the Soviets were aiding the enemy offensive in Vietnam. But Nixon thought that it might be okay to go and talk anyway, as Vietnam and the summit were inseparable. However, it was not apparent that South Vietnam would hold out through the opening of the summit. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, May 8, 1972, 12:13–1:15 p.m., Oval Office, Conversation No. 721–11)

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

Washington, May 8, 1972, 5:30 p.m.

K: Mr. President.

P: Henry, another point that I just wanted to mention briefly. Do you know where we say "throughout the war in Vietnam, the United States has exercised a degree of restraint unprecedented in the annals of war?"²

K: Yeah.

P: Cause it was right for us to exercise that restraint. I just wonder if we believe that. You know what I mean, I wonder in view of some of the things perhaps I have said in the past about gradual escalation.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² Drafts of the President's speech on Vietnam are in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2; *ibid.*, Box 127, Vietnam Country File, President's May 8, 1972 Speech; and *ibid.*, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 75, President's Speech File, Monday, May 8, 1972 Vietnam Speech [1 of 2].

K: Yeah, let me find that. I remember very well.

P: Keeping escalation. I think what I'll do is just strike "it was right for us to exercise that restraint which . . ." and just say, "a degree of restraint unprecedented in the annals of war."

K: That was—

P: That was our responsibility as a great nation.

K: Right. I think that's better.

P: Then we don't stick it to the people that say, "You dumb—". You see what I mean?

K: Exactly.

P: Don't you think that's—

K: I think that's a great improvement.

P: It's a small one at least.

K: No, no; but it's important.

P: Small one, yeah. One other thing I was going to ask you about—POWs. I've got a copy like you've got—just a second. Oh, on page 8. Have you got page 8 of Draft #7?

K: Yeah.

P: Do you think I should take out the sentence "The actions I've ordered tonight would be justified if their purpose is to win the freedom of these men."? What I'm concerned about there is that they might come up with an offer.

K: Yeah, I'd take that sentence out.

P: Yeah. But I think it's strong enough just to say "over [4]³ years in violation and so on." I don't think we need that, don't you agree?

K: I'd take it out; I think that's sensitive.

P: Otherwise, good. We'd let other people say that, okay?

K: Right, Mr. President.

P: How are you coming on the other technical things?

K: They're all done.

P: Fine. Everybody on board?

K: Everyone is on salvo.

P: (laughter) Good, good.

K: I can't say they are all throwing their hat in the air but they are all disciplined. [Watson?] all with us.

P: Does he—Is he really with us?

K: Oh, yes, completely; totally.

³ All brackets in the source text.

P: Yeah. Do you think you can do anything about the Germans?

K: Well, I'm getting Rush to call Bahr⁴ as soon as your speech is finished and say they cannot use the argument that you need this for your trip to Moscow.

P: Who—the Germans?

K: Brandt is using the argument that the reason they must ratify it is because you need it for your trip to Moscow.

P: Um-humm. What is your view as to what that does then?

K: That may delay it.

P: Um-humm. Well, that'll put a little pressure on the Russians wouldn't it?

K: That's right.

P: Um-humm. Good, good. Okay. Well, I'll go ahead and get this done, thank you.

K: Right, Mr. President.

⁴ See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, vol. XL, Germany, 1969–1972, Document 366.

207. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, May 8, 1972, 8:20–8:55 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin

Henry A. Kissinger

When Dobrynin entered the office, I told him that I regretted taking him away from dinner. Dobrynin said that he knew my habits by now. He knew that when I called him before a speech it would not be

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Kissinger's Record of Schedule indicates that the meeting lasted until 9 p.m. but that Kissinger stepped out from 8:50 to 8:55 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976) According to Nixon's Daily Diary, the President and Kissinger met from 8:50 to 8:55 p.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) The meeting was held in Kissinger's office. Kissinger described both his meeting with Dobrynin and the brief exchange with Nixon in his memoirs. (*White House Years*, pp. 1187–1189) Dobrynin also discussed his meeting with Kissinger in his memoirs. (*In Confidence*, pp. 246–247)

good news. I said that the best way to handle the matter was for me to show him a copy of the letter which the President was writing to Brezhnev (attached).² He asked whether I had a text of the speech.³ I said no, I wouldn't have it, but I would send it to his office just before 9:00. He said it was odd that I didn't trust him to keep it secret for even 15 minutes.

Dobrynin then read the President's letter. He said there were many ambiguities in it; for example, what did we mean by stopping seaborne supplies? Did we really mean interference with Soviet ships? That, of course, would be an act of war. He said he could almost certainly predict what the reaction in Moscow would be and it would be very unfortunate. It had taken him years to get matters to the present point, and now all was being jeopardized. And what was worse, he said, once Soviet policy got set in a certain way it was likely to stay that way for quite a long time. He asked whether there really was no alternative.

I told him that if he read the records of my conversations with Brezhnev he would find that I had told them and told them that we were going to do something drastic. Dobrynin said he wasn't surprised, although the particular action was perhaps one that would not have occurred to him, but it would be much harder to understand in Moscow. He said that if he could explain American conditions in Moscow, it might be easier, but he was far away. He seemed very resigned to a drastic Soviet response.

He asked why we were turning against them when Hanoi was challenging us. I replied that he should put himself into our position. What would the Soviet Union do if we armed Israel two months before a Soviet Summit and encouraged an attack or at least tolerated an attack which would threaten the Soviet force in Egypt. Dobrynin became uncharacteristically vehement. He said, "First of all, we never put forces somewhere who can't defend themselves. Second, if the Israelis threaten us, we will wipe them out within two days. I can assure you our plans are made for this eventuality." He then relapsed into a more diplomatic attitude again, and said that now matters would take a rather bad turn.

At this point, we received a text of the President's speech and I showed it to Dobrynin. He read it through and asked for clarification, specifically on what we meant by stopping seaborne supplies. I told

² Similar letters were sent on the same date to French President Georges Pompidou, Premier Chou En-lai of the People's Republic of China, British Prime Minister Edward Heath, and German Chancellor Willy Brandt and are in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2.

³ See Document 208.

him we would take all measures but that we would confine our actions initially to territorial waters. Dobrynin also pointed out that a phrase which was in the speech at that point, according to which I was sent to Paris to meet with Le Duc Tho on May 2nd⁴ based on Soviet assurances, was very strong and would be taken very ill in Moscow. I told him I would see whether I could still get it taken out and left him for a few minutes to go into the President's office. The President agreed to delete the phrase, and we also had it taken out of the press copy. Dobrynin said that, well, at least we had achieved a minor success, and we had come closer to getting somewhere than we had in the entire period that he had served as Ambassador in Washington.

At this point the meeting broke up.

Attachment

Letter From President Nixon to Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev⁵

Moscow, May 8, 1972.

Dear Mr. General Secretary:

Since my message to you of May 3,⁶ there has been no change in the grave situation in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese offensive is continuing and their preparations for new offensive actions, especially in the northern part of South Vietnam, are moving ahead intensively. Because of Hanoi's total intransigence, negotiations are blocked in all channels, private and plenary. Your message of May 6,⁷ which I have read with the greatest attention, unfortunately does not change this situation; it confirms it. The issue was not, as you suggest in your message, whether the resumed negotiations would "yield results immediately." The issue was whether there would be any indication, however minimal, of a North Vietnamese willingness to halt the offensive and to resume negotiations. In all respects, Hanoi has maintained its maximum demands and, as noted above, nothing has changed on the battlefield. It is clear that Hanoi wants the present government of South Vietnam overthrown and replaced by one subject to its own dictates. It is asking us to collude in this endeavor and, failing that, seeks to accomplish the same end by military action.

⁴ See Document 183.

⁵ Top Secret.

⁶ Document 190.

⁷ Document 200.

But, as I have made clear to you earlier, Mr. General Secretary, this will not happen.

In this situation, I have now determined upon a course of action. It is intended to end the aggression and to permit political processes to operate in South Vietnam so that its people can freely determine their own future.

To this end, I am today taking actions that will deprive the aggressor of the means to wage aggression, of the means to disrupt the peace of the world. I am announcing a series of measures which will effectively preclude further supplies of aggression from reaching North Vietnam. These measures include the mining of the approaches to North Vietnamese ports and action by U.S. naval forces to prevent seaborne delivery of supplies to North Vietnam. Additional action will be taken to interdict rail and other means of transportation in North Vietnam.

Since these measures are directed solely at the ability of the aggressor to continue his offensive actions and are in no way directed at third countries, special care has been taken that all foreign vessels currently in North Vietnamese ports will be able to depart in safety within three daylight periods. Thereafter, ships remaining in North Vietnamese ports or attempting to approach them will do so at their own risk. It is my hope, Mr. General Secretary, that incidents involving third countries will be avoided.

The actions that are being implemented will end as soon as an internationally supervised cease-fire is in effect throughout Indochina and prisoners held by both sides are released. In addition, when these steps have been taken, all U.S. military acts of force throughout Indochina will end and all U.S. forces will be withdrawn from South Vietnam within four months.

These are our terms for an end of the war. They would permit the United States to withdraw with honor. They would end the killing and bring prisoners home. They would not require surrender and humiliation on the part of anybody. They would permit all the nations which have suffered in this long war to turn at last to the urgent works of healing and peace. They deserve immediate acceptance by North Vietnam.

Mr. General Secretary, the actions of which I am informing you by this message are not taken to impose defeat upon North Vietnam but to end the conflict and thus permit a settlement through negotiations. I know that these are objectives which our two countries share, because, as they are reached, a cloud will be removed from our relations.

These relations have, by our joint efforts in recent months, reached the threshold of a new era, an era of cooperation for the benefit of our two peoples and for peoples everywhere. Mutually advantageous programs have been or are being worked out in a wide range of cooperative ventures; the prospect for greatly increased commercial relations,

including necessary credits, is bright. An unprecedented agreement to curb the competition in strategic arms is within reach as a result of the spirit of compromise displayed by both sides. A significant set of principles providing a positive and constructive framework for our relations has been worked out. Our forthcoming meeting will serve not only to complete successfully the efforts now in progress but to give impetus to even more far-reaching programs of cooperation in many areas and even more intensive efforts to bring about a peaceful world.

Let me repeat here what I am saying in my speech: Our two nations have made significant progress. Let us not slide back toward the dark shadows of a previous age. We do not ask you to sacrifice your principles or your friends. But neither should you permit Hanoi's intransigence to blot out the prospects we together have so patiently prepared. We can build a new relationship that can serve not only the interests of our two countries but the cause of world peace. Let us continue building it.

With these hopeful and broad vistas before us, I do not intend to let the situation forced upon us by the actions of the leaders in Hanoi divert us from the path upon which our two countries have embarked. And it is precisely for this reason that I am determined to end the disruptive and wasteful conflict in Vietnam.

In conclusion, Mr. General Secretary, let me say to you that this is a moment for statesmanship. It is a moment when, by joint efforts, we can end the malignant effects on our relations and on the peace of the world which the conflict in Vietnam has so long produced. I am ready to join with you at once to bring about a peace that humiliates neither side and serves the interests of all the people involved. I know that together we have the capacity to do this.

Sincerely,

Richard Nixon

208. Editorial Note

At 9 p.m. on May 8, 1972, President Nixon addressed the nation in a televised speech on the situation in Southeast Asia. Nixon noted the efforts his administration had taken to secure a peaceful resolution in Vietnam and included the following description of the Kissinger secret trip to Moscow the previous month:

“On April 20, I sent Dr. Kissinger to Moscow for 4 days of meetings with General Secretary Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders. I

instructed him to emphasize our desire for a rapid solution to the war and our willingness to look at all possible approaches. At that time, the Soviet leaders showed an interest in bringing the war to an end on a basis just to both sides. They urged resumption of negotiations in Paris, and they indicated they would use their constructive influence."

However, Nixon added, the North Vietnamese subsequently had refused to entertain any approach from the American side and in fact had launched three military offensives in South Vietnam within a 2-week period. Given that the only way to "stop the killing" was for the United States to act "to keep the weapons of war out of the hands of the international outlaws of North Vietnam," Nixon declared:

"I therefore concluded that Hanoi must be denied the weapons and supplies it needs to continue the aggression. In full coordination with the Republic of Vietnam, I have ordered the following measures which are being implemented as I am speaking with you.

"All entrances to North Vietnamese ports will be mined to prevent access to these ports and North Vietnamese naval operations from these ports. United States forces have been directed to take appropriate measures within the internal and claimed territorial waters of North Vietnam to interdict the delivery of any supplies. Rail and all other communications will be cut off to the maximum extent possible. Air and naval strikes against military targets in North Vietnam will continue.

"These actions are not directed against any other nation. Countries with ships presently in North Vietnamese ports have already been notified that their ships will have three daylight periods to leave in safety. After that time, the mines will become active and any ships attempting to leave or enter these ports will do so at their own risk."

Nixon also ensured that the implications of his actions especially bore significance for the Soviet Government:

"I particularly direct my comments tonight to the Soviet Union. We respect the Soviet Union as a great power. We recognize the right of the Soviet Union to defend its interests when they are threatened. The Soviet Union in turn must recognize our right to defend our interests.

"No Soviet soldiers are threatened in Vietnam. Sixty thousand Americans are threatened. We expect you to help your allies, and you cannot expect us to do other than to continue to help our allies. But let us, and let all great powers, help our allies only for the purpose of their defense, not for the purpose of launching invasions against their neighbors.

"Otherwise, the cause of peace, the cause in which we both have so great a stake, will be seriously jeopardized.

"Our two nations have made significant progress in our negotiations in recent months. We are near major agreements on nuclear arms limitation, on trade, on a host of other issues.

“Let us not slide back toward the dark shadows of a previous age. We do not ask you to sacrifice your principles, or your friends, but neither should you permit Hanoi’s intransigence to blot out the prospects we together have so patiently prepared.

“We, the United States and the Soviet Union, are on the threshold of a new relationship that can serve not only the interests of our two countries, but the cause of world peace. We are prepared to continue to build this relationship. The responsibility is yours if we fail to do so.”

The full text of the speech is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, pages 583–587. Earlier drafts of the speech containing Nixon’s handwritten revisions are in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2; *ibid.*, Box 127, Country File, Vietnam, President’s May 8, 1972 Speech; and *ibid.*, White House Special Files, President’s Personal Files, Box 75, President’s Speech File, Monday, May 8, 1972 Vietnam Speech [1 of 2].

Nixon carefully cultivated the support of Congress on this move. Immediately prior to the speech, in a meeting with the Congressional leadership held in the Roosevelt Room of the White House that lasted from 8:11 to 8:28 p.m., Nixon discussed the actions he was embarking upon in Vietnam. (*Ibid.*, White House Central Files, President’s Daily Diary) According to notes of the meeting contained in a May 8 memorandum for the President’s files from speechwriter William Safire, Nixon stressed that he would “continue to pursue” diplomatic options and indicated “the Russians and North Vietnamese are aware of this, and they can choose to use it.” (*Ibid.*, White House Special Files, President’s Office Files, Box 88, Memoranda for the President, Beginning May 7, 1972) A May 8 memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs Kissinger to the President contained a briefing for this meeting and an attached decision-making sequence. “The Soviet Union has been completely unhelpful as an intermediary,” Kissinger asserted. He also made the following recommendation: “After the discussion is completed you will want to emphasize that you intend to stand absolutely firm and that we need the unified support of the Congress and American people in our resolve to end the conflict on an honorable basis.” (*Ibid.*, NSC Files, Subject Files, Box 128, Vietnam, President’s May 8, 1972 Speech)

In a plan for the public framing of the speech outlined in a May 7 memorandum sent to Haldeman, Nixon noted that “the most important assignment you and every member of the staff have for the next two or three weeks is to go all out presenting and defending the line I will be taking on Monday night and attacking the attackers in an effective way.” (*Ibid.*, White House Special Files, President’s Personal Files, Box 75, President’s Speech File, Monday, May 8, 1972 Vietnam Speech [1 of 2]) Kissinger endeavored to explain the speech in a press

briefing on May 9. A paper entitled “Themes for HAK Presentation,” May 8, set guidelines for the “basic posture” of the briefing as “cool, firm, patience exhausted, determined, not at all defensive.” (Ibid., NSC Files, Subject Files, Box 127, Vietnam, President’s May 8, 1972, Speech) Kissinger described the press briefing in his memoirs:

“I briefed the press the next morning in the East room of the White House. Important though explanations to our public were, they also served a vital diplomatic function. Every statement was part of an effort to persuade Moscow and Peking to acquiesce in our course and thus to move Hanoi, by isolating it, to meaningful negotiations. Our most important concern, of course, was the summit, now less than two weeks away. I adopted a posture of ‘business as usual.’ I explained that we had not heard from Moscow—nor could we have—but that we were ‘proceeding with the summit preparations, and we see at this moment no reason from our side to postpone the summit meeting.’ We recognized that the Soviet leaders would face ‘some short-term difficulties’ in making their decision, but we, for our part, still believed that a new era in East-West relations was possible. Because I did not want to embarrass the Soviets I sidestepped a question about whether on my visit I had forewarned Brezhnev of our intended actions. I simply stated that after my visit the Soviet leaders could not have been ‘under any misapprehension of how seriously it would be viewed if this offensive continued.’” (*White House Years*, page 1190)

The full text of Kissinger’s press briefing is in Department of State *Bulletin*, May 29, 1972, pages 752–760.

209. Minutes of Cabinet Meeting¹

Washington, May 8, 1972, 8:55–9:44 p.m.

This was a day of intense activity and rife speculation throughout the White House. With the newspapers filled with ominous battlefield reports from Vietnam, Secretary Rogers had been hurriedly and

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President’s Office Files, Box 88, Memoranda for the President, Beginning May 7, 1972. Confidential. Drafted by R.K. Price, Jr., a Nixon speechwriter. The time is from the President’s Daily Diary, which indicates that the President met with Cabinet and White House officials only from 9:28 to 9:44 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) In his diary Haldeman provides a long account of the meeting. (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

publicly called back from Europe, and the NSC had been called into a session this morning which lasted three hours.² Late in the afternoon the President requested television time at 9 o'clock EST to address the Nation on Vietnam.³ The Cabinet was assembled for 8:55 p.m. in the Cabinet Room, to watch the address on two television sets especially set up for the purpose—one in the northeast corner and the other in the southwest corner, of the room. The President had indicated that he would join the meeting after the conclusion of his speech.

Before the speech, the members of the Cabinet and the senior staff present milled about, talking, joking, but with somewhat more of an air of apprehension than usual. Both sets were tuned to NBC, and if it was a precedent to have a Cabinet meeting with two TV sets in the Cabinet Room, it must have been even more so—in these few minutes before the President started—to have them tuned to “Laugh In.” Ollie Atkins,⁴ with a still camera, and another photographer with a movie camera, took pictures before and during the President’s address.

A moment before 9 o'clock, the Vice President suggested we all take our seats—and all promptly did so. A sort of invisible diagonal line drew itself across the Cabinet table, with those on one side watching the northeast set and those on the other side watching the southwest set. The President came on, and complete silence fell over all in the room as he spoke, with each face turned intently toward one of the screens. When the speech was over the mood loosened somewhat, but all continued to watch the NBC commentary that followed—including an unsuccessful effort by anchor man John Chancellor to make intelligible contact with NBC correspondent Ed Stevens who had been watching in Moscow.

After only a few minutes the President was announced—and he bounced into the room, still made up for television, looking cheerful and ebullient, and he was greeted by loud applause.

Seated in his chair, alternately smiling and serious, but looking quite at ease, he motioned silently for the TV sets to be turned off, and then expressed his regret that it had been impossible to fill all of the Cabinet members in on what he was going to say in advance. He noted that this was an occasion in which “everything was on the line—it was a close call.” But now the decision has been made, the action has been taken, and it is essential that we have a unanimity of support within the Administration—that we speak with one voice, and not indicate any turning away from the hard line that has been taken. He noted that this was a hard line with a *very* forthcoming peace offer—if the

² See Document 204.

³ See Document 208.

⁴ Oliver Atkins, the official White House photographer.

enemy will accept a cease-fire and return the POWs we'll stop *all* offensive action and get out in four months. The only thing we don't offer is to impose a Communist government on the South Vietnamese ("They phrase it differently, but it comes down to that.").

"There's one other thing I'd mention," he said, "in terms of the speculation about the Summit. We're aware of the risks. We also must realize that an American President couldn't be in Moscow when Soviet tanks were rumbling through the streets of Hue—unless he could do something about it."

He added that we have put the proposition to the Soviets very directly: we are prepared to go forward and to negotiate on SALT, etc., and even with the Summit—so the responsibility is their's as to whether it goes forward or is postponed. "There will be a Summit someday. We'll see."

He explained that like all important things, this was not easy. Also, we couldn't be sure. We had to weigh everything. It finally came down to a decision that this was the best course of action at this time—to protect our national interests, to get back the POWs, to have some leverage, and to prevent the imposition of a Communist government.⁵

At this point the Vice President broke in to say: "You can depend on the Cabinet for support absolutely. You have been careful to give adequate notice of every step that you contemplated. I thought your appeal to the Soviets was particularly brilliantly phrased."

The President seemed pleased at this comment, and noted: "I wrote every word of that in Camp David myself Saturday night."⁶

He also noted, referring back to a point he had made in the speech, that "when you stop to think of it, there are no Soviet soldiers in Vietnam—there are 60,000 Americans—so it's our ox that is being gored."

[Omitted here is further discussion of the speech.]

⁵ In his diary entry for May 8, Haldeman recorded: "At the Cabinet meeting, the P explained the background, said that as far as the speculation on the Summit was concerned, we were aware of the worst there, that an American P couldn't be in Moscow while the Soviet guns and tanks were in Hue and we should say we're prepared to go forward and negotiate or to continue with the Summit or whatever, and the responsibility now is with the Russians. The decision wasn't easy, you can never be sure. The case for bombing, or doing nothing at all, all had to be weighed, but this is the best course at this time. To defend our interests, to get the POW's and to put an end to the war." (*The Haldeman Diaries*, pp. 456–457) In a May 9 memorandum to Kissinger, Nixon wrote: "Now that I have made this very tough watershed decision I intend to stop at nothing to bring the enemy to his knees. I want you to get this spirit inculcated in all hands and particularly I want the military to get off its backside and give me some recommendations as to how we can accomplish this goal." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 3, Memoranda from the President, Memos—May 1972)

⁶ May 6.

210. Editorial Note

President Nixon's May 8, 1972, speech generated a mixed response. "Initial reaction to the President's speech from the communist world has been fairly cautious, except for Hanoi which immediately and vigorously denounced it," Deputy Assistant to the President Alexander Haig noted in a May 9 memorandum to Vice President Agnew. "The Hanoi reaction was notable primarily for its hint that it wanted a strong and swift expression of support from both Moscow and Peking." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Subject Files, Box 127, Vietnam, President's May 8, 1972 Speech) In a May 17 intelligence memorandum, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research suggested: "In private, Hanoi is probably seriously concerned about the weak tone of statements issued in Moscow and Peking." (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–14 VIET) In an undated memorandum (I–35473/72) to Secretary of Defense Laird, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs G. Warren Nutter assessed the areas of the world where the Soviet Union would react to the mining of North Vietnam. "In sum, the Soviets may decide that the only course to follow is confrontation because the costs of doing anything else are too great in terms of their world position," he concluded. "Or, they could try to have it both ways—reacting in a seemingly tough manner, but keeping that reaction within limits." (Attached to memorandum from Haig to Howe, May 23; *ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 160, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, May 1972)

The Soviet Government adopted a mild if ambiguous response. In a note to Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger, May 9, 10:30 a.m., Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council staff wrote: "Soviet reactions thus far are quite inconclusive. The incidents at sea talks were postponed by the Soviets for two hours this morning but are now in progress at the Soviet Embassy; the maritime talks have been postponed by the Soviets for a day. The head of their delegation refused to tell State whether this was on instructions [or] are his own decision; SALT proceeded this morning; the commercial talks at Commerce are in progress this morning; [Soviet Minister of Defense] Grechko has left Moscow for Syria; Tass has briefly reported the President's speech in a Washington dispatch; it is nasty but not excessively so." (Ibid., Box 1086, Howe Vietnam Chronology, May 9, 1972) In a May 9 memorandum to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Johnson entitled "Possible Soviet and Chinese Reactions to our Vietnam Program," William I. Cargo of the Policy Planning Council staff noted actions that the Soviets might take in Vietnam but also pointed out that "they could react in other areas of the world, including canceling Moscow summit, suspending SALT and other bilateral negotiations, blockading Berlin,

assuming an increased role in Cuba, and supporting of North Korean harassment and incursions across the demilitarized zone.” (Ibid., NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-088, WSAG Meeting) In his diary entry for May 9, White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman recorded a more optimistic perception of the Soviet reaction from Nixon, who insisted on the position that “if the Russians cancel, we should say we expected it, we can’t endanger American lives and sacrifice America’s interests for the sake of the Summit with the Soviets,” but also recognized that the garnering of extensive domestic support for the military actions in Vietnam might help to convince the Soviets to avoid cancellation. (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

211. Memorandum From Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon¹

Washington, May 9, 1972.

SUBJECT

U.S.-Soviet Negotiations

There are distinct, though preliminary, signs that the Soviets have decided to continue negotiating the various matters on the pre-Summit agenda in businesslike fashion. The most striking indication came today in the talks Secretary Warner is conducting with Admiral Kasatonov on avoiding incidents at sea between our navies. Working group meetings were scheduled at 9:00 A.M. The Soviets requested a delay, but appeared at 11:00 and negotiated in straightforward fashion, without mentioning Vietnam. In the afternoon, the Soviet Embassy confirmed that Ambassador Dobrynin would host a dinner for Secretary Warner and the U.S. delegation on May 11, and invitations were issued for a reception hosted by Admiral Kasatonov on May 15. It thus

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL US–USSR. Confidential. Drafted by Matlock and cleared by Davies and Springsteen. An attached covering note from Richardson to Rogers, May 9, reads: “Attached is a Memorandum for the President on today’s Soviet conduct at our various bilateral negotiations, which you asked EUR to prepare. It has been cleared by George Springsteen. Recommendation: that you sign the attached memorandum.” In a May 10 memorandum to Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt discussed successful U.S.-Soviet negotiations conducted in Moscow. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 719, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXII, May 1972) Kissinger also discussed various trade negotiations in an undated memorandum sent to the President on May 8. (Ibid.)

appears that Moscow has made an explicit decision to continue these negotiations as planned.

As you know, the SALT talks took place today as scheduled, though this may have occurred too soon after your announcement to allow for a possible Soviet reaction. Other talks scheduled for today, with one exception, also proceeded as scheduled. These include the meeting held by Secretary Peterson and Soviet Minister of Trade Patolichev, the exploratory talks at Commerce and Agriculture with members of Patolichev's party, and technical talks in Houston between NASA and Soviet representatives. The only exception to this pattern of normality was the postponement, at Soviet request, of a meeting scheduled on maritime matters today. This postponement could have been motivated to some extent by considerations having nothing to do with Vietnam, since a problem involving freight rates developed in the negotiations yesterday.

William P. Rogers

212. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and his Chief of Staff (Haldeman)¹

Washington, May 9, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion on the political ramifications of blockading North Vietnam.]

Kissinger: The Russians apparently have ordered their ships to stay in port.

Nixon: In Hanoi?

Kissinger: In Haiphong.

Nixon: Why do you think they've done that?

Haldeman: So we can't blow up the docks.

Kissinger: So we can't blow up the docks. Well I've never been all that sure that we should blow up the docks, because if we do, we are really taking away an asset. As long as the harbor is mined, they can't go in anyway. So it doesn't make any difference.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 722-14. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger and Haldeman in the Oval Office from 5:57 to 6:13 p.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume.

Nixon: They're not going to have anything to do—that's the main thing. I wouldn't blow up their docks when their ships are there anyway.

Kissinger: No, I'd leave it alone. We're going tonight after that railway bridge in Hanoi and after the—tonight we're taking out the POL around Hanoi and the railway bridge and the marshaling yards. They think they got about a thousand trucks in the strike the other day. And they're just going to grind them down now. Tomorrow they go after the Haiphong POL and other railways and marshaling yards.

[Omitted here is discussion of the domestic political impact of the blockade.]

Kissinger: I think the Soviet Union has one problem only, which is how can they maintain their Communist virginity in the face of this challenge. That's—they'd like to get out of it. They don't want to confront us over this.

[Omitted here is discussion of briefings by Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Moorer.]

Kissinger: Well our real trouble will start when the Russians cancel the summit.

Haldeman: You'll get another psychological—it isn't going to be as bad—that's not going to be as bad as you think 'cause it still will be discounted.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, when you say our real trouble starts, Henry, we have to realize, not only do we have it this time, but we thoroughly expected it. In other words, we had no doubts about the damn thing.

Kissinger: No. The North Vietnamese, they'll be getting [unclear] an attack on Hue. If we can knock that okay, if we can defeat that I think—

Haldeman: [unclear]

Nixon: They are.

Kissinger: Well, he's now—finally Abrams is doing what the President has been wanting. Because he's got 30 B-52s he's using like tactical air. He doesn't give them targets. He just keeps them and they can go in when something develops. They're now systematically leveling the area between on the north of Hue right on up to the DMZ. They threw in 10,000 rounds of artillery into it—our people—yesterday.

Nixon: That's great.

Kissinger: And 30 B-52 strikes. Now, if there's any living thing left in there, it's just hard to imagine.

Nixon: What is the—, looking at the situation with regard to the cancellation of the summit. Is there anything you think we can do, Bob, to handle that problem?

Haldeman: No, I think you just say that's—it's—you—that's the position he's knocked you out now. It's on the Russians' hands if they cancel the summit. You stated your position.

Kissinger: You stated it very well.

Haldeman: You moved for peace. I don't think you're going to have any problem with it. We'll give it a squeaker some more.

Kissinger: The goddamn Chinese put out a statement today saying that it's a challenge to Moscow, saying that—

Nixon: They're trying to break up the summit.

Haldeman: [unclear exchange]

Nixon: Well, they know, they can see the speech didn't mention them.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Kissinger: Well, what they put out was the speech didn't mention them because they know it doesn't do any good to appeal to them when we saw this in Moscow.

[Omitted here is discussion of a vote in the Senate regarding actions in Southeast Asia.]

Nixon: Should the Russians move on Thursday,² I then think that our best reaction to that, in addition to a statement, is for Abrams to divert a helluva strike the very next day. What do you think?

Kissinger: I think we should not gear anything particularly to that.

Nixon: Maybe not. Well—

Kissinger: Because they have a lot of options. They can cancel. At some point, if you're just canceling the summit it's a softer option if they keep everything else going. Supposing we get SALT and all the other things anyway. Hold the statement of principles for another occasion.

Nixon: They can cancel, then, or they can postpone.

Kissinger: They can cancel. They can postpone. They can cut all relations with us. I mean—

Nixon: Can they withdraw diplomatic recognition?

Kissinger: Oh, no, no, no. But they could just knock off all negotiations.

Nixon: It doesn't bother me a damn bit.

Kissinger: Mr. President.

Nixon: It doesn't bother me a damn bit.

² May 11.

Kissinger: They'll be back. They've got to be back. We've gone through these periods, up and down, and they'll be back. The next significant question is whether my June 21 visit to China is still on.

Nixon: Has that been announced?

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: You just let it play? Was that going to be public?

Kissinger: We were going to do that during [unclear] on Sunday.³

Nixon: Well, we'll just play it if it isn't. I'm sorry too. My own view is this. I think we have seen the issue clearly. I mean, we'd like to keep the Chinese game going; we'd like to keep the Russian game going. But if we get socked in Vietnam, both games will collapse at this point.

Kissinger: No question. Now, what would be sort of a good move is if the Russians postponed the summit and I wound up in Peking again.

Nixon: Oh, boy.

Kissinger: That would sort of put it to them. After this thing settles down in 2 or 3 weeks, we can ask the Chinese. Well, if the Russians aren't going through, then certainly Peking can go through. If the Russian summit gets postponed—

Nixon: Then the question is whether they'll—

Kissinger: Then I'll just ask whether there's still [unclear]

Nixon: I'd put it like the basis such that if they cancel, you're still willing to come. But if you don't want to cause any embarrassment to them, you know, you just might—a number of things we could talk about.

Kissinger: You know, we've got a lot of money in the bank with the Chinese. That was really a devilish statement. It was put out as a common [unclear] article. Of course, this makes Hanoi much more dependent on China. And a lot depends on whether Russia will accept the blockade. If Russia accepts the blockade, of course China will fulfill its duty and ship more supplies.

Nixon: Do they mean the Russians should try to run it?

Kissinger: Well, they can afford to be tough at Russia's expense.

Nixon: Yeah, of course they want to bust the summit.

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

³ Apparently May 7.

213. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, May 10, 1972, 3:30–4 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin
Henry A. Kissinger

The meeting took place at Dobrynin's request.

Dobrynin opened the meeting by handing me a note which protested the bombing of Soviet shipping in the harbor of Cam Pha in North Vietnam.² I told Dobrynin that it was interesting that there had been a protest note in a private channel; could I interpret this as a desire to keep matters at low key? Dobrynin said that was not sure yet, because the decisions had been difficult due to the fact that May 9th was a national holiday, namely, V–E Day in the Soviet Union. However, he thought it was a somewhat encouraging sign as far as future relations were concerned. I said I hoped that Moscow took seriously what the President said about bilateral US-Soviet relations. The real problem was whether we were going to concentrate on a new era in

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The conversation was held in the Map Room at the White House. The closing time of the meeting is from the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule. In his diary entry for May 10 Haldeman recorded: "Henry reported to us on his meeting with Dobrynin. He had told me earlier that he had to see him at 3:00. He was quite excited but it turned out that all Dobrynin had was a protest on the ship we had sunk (accidentally in Haiphong Harbor) rather than any answer from the Russians on their reaction, particularly regarding the Summit." (*The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 458) Nixon briefly mentions the meeting in *RN: Memoirs*, p. 607.

² In his memoirs Kissinger pointed out that the significance of the Soviet note was that it made no protest against the mining of North Vietnam. Instead, Kissinger recalled: "Dobrynin asked detailed questions about our cease-fire proposal. We both spoke delicately about the discussions that would take place 'if' the two leaders met. Dobrynin was a good chess player. At the end of the meeting, out of the blue, he asked whether the President had as yet decided on receiving Trade Minister Patolichev. I was not a little startled by the request; it could only mean that the Soviet leaders had decided to fall in with our approach of business as usual. Trying to match the Ambassador's studied casualness, I allowed that I probably would be able to arrange a meeting in the Oval Office. Playing a little chess myself, I mentioned that it was customary on these occasions to invite press photographers. Dobrynin thought this highly appropriate. In every crisis tension builds steadily, sometimes nearly unbearably, until some decisive turning point. The conversation with Dobrynin, if not yet the turning point, deflated the pressure. We knew that the summit was still on. Every day that passed without the cancellation made it more likely that it would take place. In that case Hanoi would be isolated; we would have won our gamble." (*White House Years*, p. 1193)

our relationship or whether we were going to permit an issue which was in any event on the way to a solution to cloud this.

Dobrynin began asking me questions about the ceasefire. How long did the ceasefire have to last? I said we, of course, were not putting a time limit on it, but we were hoping that it would be for the longest possible time, such as two years. Dobrynin said jokingly that I always raised my sights—at one point, I had mentioned 18 months to him. I said we would like to leave this for negotiations.

Dobrynin then said that if our leaders met, it would be helpful if the President could advance some precise propositions. I said if our leaders met, he would.

Dobrynin then asked about the meeting between the President and Patolichev that had been requested several weeks ago. I told him that if Patolichev still wanted a meeting, I could probably arrange it. Dobrynin said he thought it would be very good to have such a meeting. I told Dobrynin that we generally have press pictures on such occasions. Dobrynin thought that that would be highly appropriate now.

At this point, the meeting broke up.

Attachment

Note From the Soviet Leadership

Washington, May 10, 1972.

Information was just received in Moscow that today, on May 10, the Soviet motorship *Grisha Akopyan*, being in the North Vietnam port Kampha, was bombed and strafed by the American planes. There are killed and wounded among the crew of the motorship. A fire broke out on board of ship. Earlier, on May 9, the Soviet tanker *Pevek*, being in the port of Haiphong, was strafed by the American planes. There also are wounded among the crew of that ship.

It is felt necessary in Moscow to bring to the personal knowledge of the President our resolute protest against these criminal actions by American aviation which have caused death of the Soviet citizens. All this arouses lawful indignation in the Soviet people. The President must be aware of the consequences of such actions if they are left without punishment.

Moscow awaits from the President not only a prompt reply, but also a communication to the effect that the security of Soviet ships and life of the Soviet people will be guaranteed from hostile provocative actions by the US air and naval forces.

We do not touch now upon the qualification of the situation and actions of the United States in Vietnam in general. We have repeatedly told this to the President. And to this question we shall yet return in L.I. Brezhnev's reply to the last letter of the President.³

³ Document 207.

214. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, May 11, 1972, 1:15 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin
Henry A. Kissinger

The lunch had been arranged at Dobrynin's request as part of our regular series of meeting prior to the Summit. I had suggested to Dobrynin that perhaps this was not the best time, but Dobrynin felt that we should go ahead as if nothing were happening.

Vietnam

We began the meeting by reviewing the Vietnam situation. Dobrynin suggested that we were making too much of the Soviet role. No matter how many arms the Soviet Union had given, it was considerably less than the American arming of South Vietnam. The fact of the matter was that we were backing the wrong horse in South Vietnam and that if it weren't for American air power the North Vietnamese would have won long ago. He asked again about the specific terms. He wanted to know whether the ceasefire was in place or whether there were some additional aspects to it. I said that these were matters that we wanted to leave for negotiations, and that I was not prepared to discuss them now.

Dobrynin asked whether the North Vietnamese could maintain the territory they now had. I said the important thing was to make a prior determination whether we wanted to make peace. Specifically, we needed to get some perspective on the long-term evolution. We had no intention of maintaining a position in South Vietnam for all eternity.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

We did have the intention, however, to bring about conditions which permitted a fair political contest. There were only two roads to a solution. Either we would settle all military questions separately, or we would include the political issues—which, however, were too complex to permit a rapid conclusion. We were prepared to go either way, though our preference was the military route.

If Dobrynin looked at our formulation carefully, he would see that it incorporated exactly what Brezhnev had told us and therefore it was a fair and useful approach. As far as the great powers were concerned, it was essential for them not to permit their overriding interests to be submerged by the monomania of smaller countries.

Dobrynin said we had put their leaders into an extremely difficult position. He expected an answer fairly soon and perhaps if we waited together in the Map Room, it would arrive.

Bilateral Issues; SALT

We then reviewed a number of the bilateral issues, all of which were in rather good shape.

With respect to SALT, I told him we were opposed to deferral. He said if there were any new SALT proposals, they would be submitted to me first.²

Vietnam

At this point, his assistant brought the Soviet note [Brezhnev letter, attached]³ which was still in Russian, and his assistant translated it to me. I asked Dobrynin whether the phrase about damage to Soviet-

² In a May 11 memorandum to Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt summarized the current status of all of the outstanding bilateral issues. (Ibid., Kissinger Office Files, Box 67, Country Files, Europe, U.S.S.R., Sonnenfeldt Papers [1 of 2]) A May 6 memorandum from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger also lists a tentative schedule for the announcing of agreements of these various issues while at the Moscow summit. (Ibid.)

³ Brackets in the source text. A notation on the attached note reads: "Handed to Gen. Haig by 1st Secy. Sokolov, 4:45 p.m., May 11, 1972." In his memoirs Kissinger described the meeting and the note passed during it as removing "the last remaining uncertainty" over the summit: "Usually the Soviet Embassy supplied a written translation. In this case Dobrynin's assistant did the honors in a way which, had the meaning of the letter depended on precision, might well have defeated its purpose. But even a rough oral translation left no doubt that Brezhnev was avoiding any hint of confrontation, despite the letter's conventional bluster warning against the consequences of our actions. I asked innocently whether Brezhnev's warning referred to any new actions or to steps that had already been taken. Obviously, replied Dobrynin, his patience seemingly tried by my denseness, the General Secretary could only have meant *additional* measures to those announced on May 8. Since it clearly pleased Dobrynin to play the professor, I asked why the letter had not referred to the summit. Dobrynin answered that since we had not asked about it in our communication of May 8, the Politburo had seen no need for a response. (For anyone familiar with Soviet diplomatic tactics such delicacy was a novel experience.) I asked whether we should have asked a question about the summit. 'No,' said Dobrynin, 'you have handled a difficult situation uncommonly well.'" (*White House Years*, p. 1194)

American relations meant that new activities could threaten them or whether it meant that a continuation of the old ones would threaten them. If the latter, then I could tell him the existing activities would be continued; if the former, I thought I could assure him that there would be no new activities beyond those that were now being contemplated. Dobrynin said the former interpretation was the correct one. Dobrynin asked me whether he could report to his government that I had given him two assurances: (1) that the scale of operations would not escalate beyond the present level for the time being, (2) that we would not interfere with Soviet ships on the high seas, and (3) that we would take precautions against the bombing of Soviet ships in Vietnamese harbors. I told him he could give all these assurances, and I would confirm it with the President.

I then asked Dobrynin why the note had been silent on the question of the Summit. Dobrynin said that was because we had not asked any questions about the Summit, and therefore the Soviet Government saw no need to make a new decision. I asked whether we should have asked the question about the Summit. Dobrynin said, "No, you have handled a difficult situation uncommonly well." Dobrynin then said that, as the Summit was still continuing, could we accept some restrictions on our military operations while we were in the Soviet Union? I told Dobrynin I would let him know about those on Monday.⁴

At this point the meeting broke up.

Attachment

Letter From Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon

Moscow, May 11, 1972.

Dear. Mr. President:

We have carefully read your letter of May 8⁵ as well as the text of your statement made on the same day,⁶ in which you announce new measures of military escalation in Vietnam.

⁴ May 15; see Document 226. According to a transcript of a telephone conversation at 5 p.m. on May 11, Kissinger called Dobrynin "to officially confirm on behalf of the President what I told you about our actions" and added he would give to Dobrynin "on Monday certain limitations we will observe during the meeting." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

⁵ See the attachment to Document 207.

⁶ See Document 208.

The Soviet Government has expressed its attitude toward those steps in an official statement which is published. I must say frankly that possible consequences of the decision taken by you, the worst from our standpoint, cause our most serious concern.

I have already written to you that, in our conviction, the only possible way of solving the Vietnam problem is a peaceful political settlement reached at a negotiation table. To count on a military solution of the Vietnam conflict is without perspective. To continue this line means to deliberately lead to a still greater hardening of the armed fighting which will put away and reduce chances for attaining an acceptable settlement.

To stake on increasing the military pressure is only capable of producing opposite results as was the case in the past. It is to be assumed that in reply to that the Vietnamese inevitably will be forced to step up their resistance. As a result, the acuteness of the conflict not only does not diminish but, rather, increases.

It is especially important to dwell on such an action by the U.S. as mining the ports and the approaches to the ports of the DRV. It must be clear that this constitutes the most flagrant violation of the generally accepted norms of international law and the freedom of navigation. By this measure the U.S. considerably complicates the entire situation in connection with Vietnam. Directly jeopardised are the safety and the lives of crew members of the ships of third countries, including those of the Soviet Union. We have already addressed you on the two specific cases when as a result of the attack by U.S. air force one ship had been damaged while another completely destroyed and there is a loss of human lives among Soviet seamen. These acts subject Soviet-American relation to a severe test, and this you have to well understand.

It would be very dangerous, Mr. President, not to see the consequences which may entail this course of action by the U.S.

You say that the ships which are now in the DRV ports or en route there, will do so "on their own risk". I must emphasize that this risk is being made by the unlawful actions by the U.S., and the entire responsibility for attempts to prevent Soviet ships from exercising their right to freedom of navigation and anything that may occur in connection with this will, naturally, be borne by the American side and by it alone.

In your letter, Mr. President, you speak about the progress in Soviet-American relations and about the undesirability for these relations to be thrown back to the "dark shadows of the previous age." But, indeed, are those actions by the U.S. air force taken in the wake of that letter, not a denial of what had been said several hours ago? In any case, the one and the other are hard to reconcile.

My colleagues and I expect, Mr. President, that at this moment of responsibility for Soviet-American relations and for the world situation as a whole everything will be done on the American side so that an irrevocable damage not be done to the present and to the future of these relations and to the broad interests of international security.

Sincerely,

L. Brezhnev⁷

⁷ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

Memorandum for the President's Files From the President's Assistant and Director of the Council on International Economic Policy (Flanigan)¹

Washington, May 11, 1972, 10:08–11:01 a.m.

At 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, May 11, 1972, the President met in the Oval Office with Minister Patolichev and Ambassador Dobrynin of the Soviet Union and Messrs. Kissinger, Peterson and Flanigan.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 88, Memoranda for the President, Beginning May 7, 1972. Secret. The time of the meeting and the fact that members of the press and an unnamed White House photographer were present for short periods are in the President's Daily Diary. (Ibid., White House Central Files) An undated memorandum for the President's files outlines the key points for the President to make during his meeting. (Ibid., White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 88, Memoranda for the President, Beginning May 7, 1972) Kissinger's May 11 memorandum to the President provided a background briefing for the meeting. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 719, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. XXII, May 1972) A May 11 memorandum from Peterson to Nixon contained talking points. (Ibid.) Kissinger briefly describes the meeting in his memoirs. (*White House Years*, p. 1194) A recording of this meeting is *ibid.*, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 723–5. Kissinger's comments to Nixon immediately following this meeting also appear on a tape recording. (Ibid., Conversation No. 723–7)

Minister Patolichev began by stating that he had had numerous discussions with Secretary Peterson over the preceding days.² The President indicated that Peterson had reported on these discussions and also noted that Dr. Kissinger had reported fully on his talk in Moscow with Brezhnev and Kosygin.

Patolichev said that Secretary Peterson's statement of the President's position, e.g. that (a) the President wanted an expansion of economic and trade relations, (b) that within the framework of political relations, trade relations should be expanded first, and (c) that a new era of U.S.–USSR relations might appear, was accepted by the Soviet Union and was the basis for discussions. He further indicated that the Peterson meetings and the earlier meetings with Stans in Moscow³ had been positive, covering a wide range of problems, and that he had established warm relations with both Stans and Peterson. The President responded that Peterson had his full confidence and affirmed that anything offered by Secretaries Stans, Peterson and Butz and by Dr. Kissinger had been done with full Presidential knowledge and approval.

On substance, Patolichev indicated that the Soviets foresaw the potential for broad economic relations, in excess of hundreds of millions of dollars, between the two powers. Though many hurdles remained, the Soviets saw favorable perspectives. Regarding specific problems, the Soviets felt MFN status of primary importance although they recognized the difficulties this posed for the U.S. Also specifically mentioned was the credit problem, which the Soviets hoped could be resolved on the basis of reciprocity.

Particularly mentioned were credits for the Kama River project, which an American firm is designing, with contracts for \$200 million

² According to a transcript of a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Flanigan, May 4, 2:38 p.m., they discussed the approach Peterson was taking in his talks with Patolichev. Kissinger argued that several tentative agreements on substantive trade issues should be put into place for the summit whereas Peterson wanted to limit what would be decided at Moscow. In these dealings with the Soviets, Kissinger offered Flanigan the following direction: "We're in a very tough position with them so what I'd like you to do is to dangle perhaps a fatter carrot in front of them than your commercial instincts would dictate but on the other hand, give them less than is attainable." This incentive involved "some rather dramatic prospects of trade if our general relationships were good," he added, and needed to be put forth "even if you lie a little bit." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) According to a transcript of a telephone conversation, Kissinger called Peterson at 4:49 p.m. on May 10 and advised him of the meeting: "Now I have arranged a meeting for Patolichev with the President for 10 o'clock tomorrow and we'd like you to be there but we don't want to announce it ahead of time in case the goddamn thing blows up. You know, the summit blows up before then." (Ibid.)

³ See Document 14.

due to be signed in May. If the U.S. extends a few hundred million dollars in credit, the Soviet Union will place orders in the U.S. Regarding the financing of a grain agreement, Patolichev indicated awareness that the credit terms required by the Soviets were not possible for the U.S. and understood our necessity to limit credit to three years and market interest rate. At the same time, since the Soviets export grain in some years, they thought favorable credit terms were necessary for a long-term purchase agreement. In any event, Patolichev said he would report to his government what terms are possible and stated his personal opinion that a "one-year deal", with the re-opening next year of the purchase agreement on a revised PL 480 basis, might be possible.

The President responded to the specific points by saying that the U.S. would be prepared to move in the direction of MFN subject to Congressional approval, and that Export-Import Bank credit would be possible along the lines discussed by Secretary Peterson. More broadly, however, the President observed that while these matters and those discussed by the Secretaries and Dr. Kissinger were important details, he thought it desirable to view these discussions in a larger framework. The U.S. and the USSR are, both militarily and economically, the two most powerful countries on earth. The differences in philosophy and on local problems throughout the world, though important, are not crucial; they should not distract the two nations' attentions from greater goals. As Allies in World War II, the two nations were able to look beyond smaller difficulties to solve overriding problems; the President expressed hope that the U.S. and USSR could transcend current problems and help the peoples of both countries through trade.

The President observed that a meeting between himself and Chairman Brezhnev was, by its nature, truly at the Summit, and that at such a meeting, "the mountains must not labor and produce a mouse". The President stated he will be prepared to consider large goals to serve long-range purposes and expressed the hope that Brezhnev would deal on this basis. Patolichev indicated that Brezhnev would be a partner on a large scale.

The meeting concluded at 11:05 a.m.

216. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting¹

Washington, May 11, 1972, 11:21–11:59 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

U. Alexis Johnson

William Sullivan

Defense

Kenneth Rush

G. Warren Nutter

R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS

Adm. Thomas Moorer

Capt. Kinniard McKee

CIA

George Carver

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

NSC

Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig

Richard Kennedy

John Holdridge

Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

—Concerning the Soviet statement,² our spokesmen should just say we are studying the statement with the care it deserves. The spokesmen should not make any comments about the on-going U.S.-Soviet negotiations in Washington or about the summit.

—The White House will see that the Soviets are again notified about the mines at Cam Pha.

—We will go ahead with the transfer of two additional squadrons of C-130s to Taiwan.

—The Defense Department should provide a plan on augmentation of fixed wing gunships. It should also provide the Vietnamese Air Force study by next Tuesday morning.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals. Sensitive. Transmitted to Kissinger under cover of an attached May 11 memorandum from Davis.

² Reference is to a public Soviet protest released that day by the official Soviet news agency. An assessment of the statement in CIA Intelligence Information Memorandum SC No. 00915/72, May 11, termed it "a relatively temperate document designed to preserve Moscow's freedom of maneuver." (Ibid., Box 1087, Howe Vietnam Chronology, 5-11-72) In a Spot Report, May 11, the DIA concurred with the CIA's assessment. (Ibid.)

—We will see what can be done to satisfy the ROK requests for more equipment and support.

—We will proceed with the leaflet drops and develop an active psywar campaign in both North and South Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm sorry I'm late. I was in with the President and the Soviet Trade Minister.³

Mr. Johnson: Did the Soviet Minister deliver the message to you?

Mr. Kissinger: No. In fact, he talked about the great relations—especially in trade—we can have.

Mr. Johnson: Has the Soviet message been officially transmitted to you?

Mr. Kissinger: No.

Mr. Johnson: You haven't received any amplification of the message?

Mr. Kissinger: No. The Soviet note doesn't seem too tough to me. What do you people think?

Mr. Johnson: It isn't very tough. They talk about interference on the high seas and about the 1958 Law of the Sea convention.⁴ The question is why have they put up this windmill about the high seas?

Mr. Kissinger: So that they can claim they stopped us from doing something we never intended to do. Then they will be able to claim a tremendous victory. Have you seen the message from Poland?

Mr. Sullivan: You mean from the Vice Foreign Minister?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. He told us the Poles will put out a fairly moderate statement and that we should go ahead with planning the trip to Poland. I can't imagine that Moscow wouldn't know about this message.

Mr. Sullivan: There's been another interesting development, too. Neil Gallagher, the Congressman from New Jersey, called me last night and said that the Far East expert in the Soviet Embassy came to see him yesterday. The essence of the Russian's remarks, according to Gallagher, was that: (1) the Soviets have made their decision and are now implementing it, and (2) there will be an escalation of the rhetoric, but the professional people will be able to discern that this does not translate into escalated actions. I don't know how much credence we can put into this, but that's what Gallagher told me.

Mr. Kissinger: I have somewhat the same impression. The Soviets are putting forth a straw man so that they can condemn us for something which will not happen.

³ See Document 215.

⁴ Reference is to the Convention of the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization, entered into force March 17, 1958. (*United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, vol. 9, 1958 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1959), pp. 621–646)

Mr. Johnson: This is a very deliberate action on their part. They could have cited the 1907 Hague Convention on Mining⁵—and raised some legal questions about our actions. Instead, they chose to refer to the 1958 convention.

Mr. Kissinger: The Soviets also said in their statement that they will continue to support North Vietnam, but they didn't say they would try to break the blockade.

Mr. Johnson: On the whole, it's a mild statement.

Mr. Sullivan: Should our spokesmen make any comment on it?

Mr. Kissinger: No. They should just say we will study the statement with the care it deserves.

Mr. Rush: It's interesting to note, too, that the statement made no attack on the President.

Mr. Kissinger: If asked, our spokesmen should just say we are studying the statement. I talked to the Secretary about another straw in the wind. Dobrynin called me and said that it was not helpful for us to call attention to the negotiations. He said we should keep quiet about them.

Mr. Sullivan: You mean the Paris negotiations?

Mr. Kissinger: No. He was referring to the negotiations being conducted here by the Soviet missions. We should say nothing about these negotiations. And we should also say we have nothing new to add about the summit. Let's just keep quiet about these things for the time being.

Mr. Johnson: (to Mr. Sullivan) Bill, will you make sure Bob [McCloskey]⁶ gets these instructions?

Gen. Haig: We've already spoken to Bob about this.

Mr. Johnson: Good.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Rush) The same thing goes for Defense. Can you instruct your people? We should play these things low-key.

Adm. Flanagan: I'll speak to Henkin⁷ when I get back to the office.

Gen. Haig: I've called Henkin, too.

Mr. Kissinger: It's important that we stay low-key. Let's not make any comments on these things.

⁵ Reference is to the Laying of Automatic Submarine Contact Mines, October 18, 1907. (*Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776–1949*, vol. I, Multilateral, 1776–1917 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 669–680)

⁶ Brackets in the source text.

⁷ Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Daniel Z. Henkin.

Mr. Rush: The next to the last paragraph of the Soviet statement is interesting. It in effect dilutes the action statement made higher up by saying that the Soviet views are shared by other peoples as well.

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

Mr. Kissinger: By next week, we should know where we stand with Moscow. The Democratic caucus will not take a harder line than the Soviets.

Gen. Haig: It's been suggested that Secretary Rogers should hold a press conference, but I don't think it is needed at this time.

Mr. Kissinger: You're right. We should hold off on that. If the summit is still on, that will be all to the good. If the summit is cancelled, that will be another matter.

Mr. Sullivan: How is the advance party making out?

Mr. Kissinger: I'm amazed that they are being treated so royally.

Mr. Nutter: Perhaps the Soviets are waiting for the summit to get a little closer before they cancel.

Mr. Carver: The Soviets may be waiting to see the outcome of vote on the German treaties, too.

Mr. Sullivan: When is the vote?

Mr. Rush: It's on May 17. The longer the Soviets wait to cancel the summit—if that is what they are doing—the more danger they run of being accused of deception.

Mr. Kissinger: In order to get the German treaties ratified, they have to act as though the summit is still on. But if they do that, it will have a bad effect on Hanoi.

Mr. Carver: Unless there are private communications we don't know about, Hanoi has to be uncomfortable with the rather mild Soviet and Chinese responses.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes, I think so. The people who met Xuan Thuy in Moscow weren't even high-ranking officials.⁸

Mr. Carver: They were at the right level for Xuan Thuy. The Soviets did not bend over backwards to greet him.

Mr. Kissinger: That's what I mean. It's funny that Xuan Thuy is there.

Mr. Carver: Will we meet tomorrow?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

⁸ On May 11, Thuy met with Kosygin; see *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, XXIV: 17, pp. 5, 10.

217. Conversation Among President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman), and Secretary of State Rogers¹

Washington, May 11, 1972.

[Omitted here is unrelated discussion of the President's meeting that day with Soviet Minister Patolichev.]

Kissinger: He [Patolichev] came in for what was supposed to be a courtesy visit and he literally talked for 45 minutes.²

Nixon: Forty-five minutes about every little thing, that you know, he'd talked about, this fellow, with Peterson and Stans.

[Omitted here is further discussion about the same meeting.]

Nixon: The Russian response was not an official response yet, as I understand they have delivered through Patolichev.

Kissinger: It was an official response.

Rogers: It was a government—[unclear exchange]

Nixon: I think we should say, see, they took 3 days to respond to us, and I think we will take 3 days.

Rogers: I think really the question is whether we should give them a quick and sort of noncommittal response, which we can do. [unclear]. Or just delay. I think maybe a delay will make it look as if we are thinking of something. There isn't a hell of a lot to say, because their statement was fairly mild.

Nixon: Well, didn't you think it was?

Rogers: Yeah.

Nixon: As did all the people around here—Helms thought it was mild, too—the whole bunch.

Rogers: Well, I think what we ought to do, Mr. President, I'll have Atherton send over to you a response, which is quite appropriate, and

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 723–16. No classification marking. According to his Daily Diary, Nixon met with Kissinger, Haldeman, and Rogers in the Oval Office from 3:51 to 4:44 p.m. The editors transcribed the portion of the conversation printed here specifically for this volume. In his diary Haldeman recorded that Rogers asked for this meeting to show that he “is not cut out” of decisions in Vietnam. “We set up the Rogers meeting. The P had me sit in and we didn't really accomplish much. The P told Rogers not to have a press conference this week, emphasize that we have to turn off all of our PR apparatus on any comment on the Soviet answer or any interpretation of the Soviet attitude.” Haldeman continued: “The general feeling now, even on Henry's part, is that the Summit is going to be on rather than off, and so there's a level of optimism on that part.” (*The Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*)

² See Document 215.

decide that issue. And then just have Ron hand it out, and Bob McCloskey hand it out, or wait 'til later.

Nixon: Your feeling is that it should not be—

Kissinger: It's the right level—

Nixon: Henry had the feeling that you should because [unclear]—

Rogers: I don't—

Nixon: They didn't do it at their high level. [unclear]

Rogers: Oh, they just made an announcement—a government announcement, that's all, and that appeared in TASS.

Nixon: I think that maybe you and Henry can work out the drill there as to what level and when.

Kissinger: I think we could wait until they hand it to us officially and then in a low-key way reply to that.

Rogers: Yeah. I don't understand why didn't they hand it to us before they published it. That's sort of interesting.

Kissinger: I think, frankly, they're not eager for a reply. I don't think they want a long debate with us on it.

Rogers: I don't know.

Kissinger: That's my impression.

Nixon: You think they may—

Rogers: I really just don't know. It's mild enough in one way. On the other hand, it would be a perfectly good way to delay if they're going to take some other action. In other words, they can play it both ways, so—

Kissinger: It's a holding action.

Nixon: They can't. We'll soon know. They have a—I will say this, my guess is they would consider it a rather risky business, I mean, in terms of their own interest, to wait until, say Tuesday³ or Wednesday of next week to cancel the summit. I think they're going to do it. I think they have to do it tomorrow or Saturday.

Rogers: Well, they could provoke something. They could send mine sweepers down, and challenge us. And I suppose, we challenge them. And they could call it off, or if they're committed to go ahead with the minesweepers, then we'll look as if we backed down. I think one of the things that we've got to be sure about—and I spoke to Henry about it earlier—if we're not going to answer, then I think we've got to get all our people to keep quiet because there's going to be a hell of a temptation to say, they blinked, this is the winner, or something like that.

³ May 16.

Nixon: We won't comment on it at all.

[Omitted here is further discussion of the media.]

Rogers: There are two or three specific things I'd like to talk to you about today. One is, the Security Council has turned off—that doesn't have a chance. It never did. And the Russians are against it. The Chinese are against it. And it doesn't make any sense to begin with. I think we shouldn't appear to be thinking negative on it. I mean, we've got to make it clear that somebody else has turned it down. But I don't think you have to worry about that as even a possibility.

On the Incidents at Sea negotiations,⁴ they've come to an impasse based on the Russian position that we've got to talk about fixed distances. This is something you decided some time back. The Defense Department has been against it for reasons I don't think are very good. The Russians say they've got to know by 6 o'clock whether we talked about it or not. My own recommendation is that we ought to talk about it. We have our own—

Nixon: Hasn't [Secretary of the Navy] John Warner?

Rogers: Yeah. We have our own. Mr. President, it's really a matter of what we—how close we can come to their ships with our planes and how close we can come to their ships with our ships. Now what we've suggested, the position of the State Department is that we had at least a discussion about that and not have any limitations that are not already imposed by ourselves on ourselves. In other words, we have limitations, I know, I think, on overflights.

Kissinger: The problem is that this was looked at very carefully, and the problem with it is that the intelligence people, for reasons which may or may not be good, are violently opposed to these—to fixed limitations, partly because of some penetrations of the waters which are, in any event, illegal. And, I mean—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: Well, ah, it—

Nixon: You say by 6 o'clock tonight?

Rogers: Henry, my intelligence people say that that's exaggerated. In the first place, I think we have rules ourselves—you can't have planes that fly closer than within 300 feet to another ship—it's just dangerous as hell. And I thought it was that why not at least talk to them about the restrictions that we have on ourselves, not by disclosing anything? Well, if don't—don't have—

Nixon: Could we—

Kissinger: Could we get—

⁴ See Document 214.

Nixon: Could we talk about it? That's what I mean. Let's talk to them about it.

Kissinger: I think the view is, really, that if you talk to them about it you've already have given it in. Could we get a position within our government and get a good paper to you, which gives the arguments in a more systematic way because I'm not in detail up on it and I'm not sure whether Bill is.

Nixon: Well, what is that—intelligence, you mean military intelligence and so forth?

Kissinger: I think that they'll agree to extend it 24 hours.

Rogers: I think they would if we say we'd let them know tomorrow.

Kissinger: If we tell them we'll let them know by tomorrow.

Nixon: Let me just see if I—because my main problem is going to be keeping the military happy, the military intelligence people, and so get me something so that I can say that at least I put it there.

Rogers: I think that the Russians have a good point, because they say well, if we're not going to talk about it, then there's no point of having the rule of reason. Hell, that's what we have now. Why not have some limitation, at least talk about how many feet we should separate from each other. All right, let's do that.

[Omitted here is discussion of a possible cease-fire in Indochina, including a proposal for a "Geneva-like convention."]

Nixon: When would that convene?

Rogers: Well, it would be any time you wanted it to. I'm just thinking of form. Now, the British have already posed it. The Russians have resisted it. Although Alec Home has just made this proposal to the Russian Ambassador, who says he wants to think it over and get instructions from his government. The British are also talking to the Chinese about it. Now, I think, we don't have a problem publicly. I think the real problem is, is this something we would like to do to accomplish is this—

Nixon: Tell you what I'd like to do. I'd like to—I think a lot depends upon, in my view, as to what does happen, and we should know within 3 days certainly on the Russian thing—if the Russian thing goes forward, then I think we might have a few things which tentatively might be under consideration. I just have a feeling that we should not move over the next 3 or 4 days in any of those directions. I think, I think what I'd like to do, if we can, is to keep, at all, to keep a posture where we're taking a very strong position. We've made a very forthcoming offer for a negotiated settlement. And I would not try to spell it out too much at this point—like they say, well, what is a cease-fire? Is it in place; is a withdrawal, and all the rest? And that's why

it's so important from our point of view that we get them into this conference business, because I think they caught Mel on that a little.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Rogers: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, anyway, what we want to do, I'd rather just leave them, because that's going to be, if they do fight—

Rogers: Well, Mr. President, I wasn't really talking about making any public comments about it or anything of that kind. I'm really talking about whether it's a possibility even when you go to the Soviet Union. If, of course, if there's something else that you're working on, then—

Nixon: No. We don't even know if we're going.

Kissinger: There's nothing's going on that I know of.

Nixon: Out there. Out there.

Rogers: It seems to me that this is something we ought to think about is the possibility for you to discuss, it seems to me—

Nixon: At the summit?

Rogers: Yeah. At the summit. Or it might be that something will come out of the summit. You see, the conference in '54 dealt, in a sense, with the same issues. It dealt with the issue of cease-fire, and they discussed the matter for 4 or 5 months, and then there was a cease-fire. Then they add the problem of regrouping, and whether it would be in place or not, and that type of thing. Now, if we were looking for a device to gain some time, and somewhat of a face-saving device particularly for the Russians in lieu of your statement because that does put them on the spot—if they do anything now, it's going to appear that they did it as a result of your strong stance. Probably from this standpoint, it looks as if there'd be nothing down. If they're looking for some kind of a device to get a little time and go ahead with the acceptance of your proposal—which is certainly fair, I don't know how anybody could expect you to do more—then the Geneva-type conference, not necessarily exactly that, but the Geneva-type conference makes some sense. Furthermore, the Paris negotiations is a forum not very appropriate because Laos and Cambodia are not involved at all. So that a Geneva-type conference, which included both Laos and Cambodia, and in a sense turned out pretty well because they even permitted French troops to stay in Laos and Cambodia and South Vietnam.

Nixon: Mm-hmn.

Rogers: Small contingents, but still some troops, which—so that there's a lot of analogies which would be appropriate for this type of thing. And my suggestion merely is that we think about—not say anything about it—as far as the British, we'll be asked about that—I'm sure I'll be asked Monday about it—and there I just think we can say, "Well,

the President's made it clear that he's prepared to take part in a conference, and he said so in his speech." And not get tied down exactly to any—

Nixon: I actually haven't given it any thought. You've got any reactions to it? As I say, I'd look at any proposal.

Kissinger: I think we ought to think about it.

Nixon: I personally—there's only one reason I'd like to get a little thought because the British have been damn good, you know.

Kissinger: It's still different from '54, because the French, for example, at that time, they were a principal. Now they are sort of secondary as far as we are concerned. But I think we ought to study it, and have another opinion on it.

Nixon: On a total in-house basis. [unclear]

Rogers: Well, I think it's worth considering because if could let the British take the lead they could talk to the French. If we propose it to the French, they'll be negative, because they want to have the damn thing in Paris. But the British are quite—you know, we couldn't have a better ally. And if we indicated to them that this was something we thought was desirable.

Nixon: I would say that this, to a certain extent, would indicate that we're not thinking negatively. Start with that proposition. Second, that we have doubtless been negotiating for so long, and for so long that we've got blinkers on and might have missed something.

Kissinger: I think we ought to look at it.

Nixon: I'll look at it.

[Omitted here is discussion on the war in Vietnam, including strikes on POL and railroad targets in North Vietnam.]

Nixon: The main thing, it seems to me, is that we must use ultimate power at the time that we have most support because support erodes as time goes on, and before the Senate or somebody does cut us off. And, also, because the psychological impact on the North Vietnamese may be a hell of a lot greater if they think maybe we'll do it.

Rogers: What do you think about on Monday putting the bead on the Congress for endangering the summit in case they take some action. That's not a bad thing to say, "Look, why don't you lay off now that everything seems to be moving along all right." If Congress acts adversely, it may have some effect, not really low key it.

Nixon: Well, I think you can say, you know, the way I think about it is this. You can put it in a rather general sense. You can say that the President has gone to China under restrictions, he's attempted to—we're breaking our backs negotiating with the North Vietnamese, he's negotiating—this is the series of negotiations with Hanoi we prefer. But the Senate must think very, very carefully—or the Congress—before

taking any action which undercuts the President's ability to negotiate. We're willing to negotiate. And whenever the Congress acts, all it does is an incentive for the enemy not to negotiate, and therefore, about anything. And on the summit, it's just unconscionable for these people to be undercutting—the Russian thing is still not on.

[At this point, the President is interrupted and asked to sign a document by an aide.]

Kissinger: All the newsmen have their teeth practically dropping out of their mouths with the Russian bite. Next week, you, everyday, are more visibly preparing for the summit. Who in God's name is going to pass a resolution? I can't believe it.

[Omitted here is discussion in which Kissinger recommends that "next week I would hard-line it," because there were 10 days until Moscow and notes that Dobrynin told reporters that he didn't need to discuss the summit and there was no question that the summit was going ahead.]

Nixon: What about Bill's point about Dobrynin lying to Kennedy [in 1962]?

Kissinger: Mr. President, first of all, I'm not sure that—well, Dobrynin is perfectly capable of lying.

Nixon: Oh, sure. So am I.

Kissinger: And he's perfectly capable of saying if they want to cancel the summit. Now, you can say the German treaties are ransomed in that circumstance. If that's so, they can't cancel it before the 19th.

Nixon: It's too late.

Kissinger: Now, then, supposing they cancel you on the 20th, while you're on the way. What have they then gained by it? I think the whole American people, if you then turn around and come back and turn on them, you'll have everybody with you. It's one thing if they had turned on you this week, they could say Vietnam. But next week, when you have done nothing in additional, when you can tell them you can give them these assurances they've received it all, we've planned on it and are preparing it, for them to flush our whole policies down the drain and make you a hero in the process is almost inconceivable to me. This week they had a good possibility of doing it. Next week they would pay an additional price, which isn't worth it. Moreover, they—

Nixon: Well actually, Henry, I think they've got to cancel it and then move on it tomorrow or the next day.

Kissinger: If they haven't canceled it by Monday, and I don't see how they can now cancel it before Monday because they—we got the Brezhnev answer,⁵ which is a—he read it to them.

⁵ See attachment to Document 214.

Nixon: He doesn't know that.

Kissinger: No, he doesn't need to know there was a letter.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: So, we've got the Brezhnev answer. It's mild. I've worked out with Dobrynin three principles, which he's accepted: we won't do anything other than what we're already doing. We won't attack Soviet ships.

Nixon: Did he mark that down?

Kissinger: We won't attack Soviet ships and we won't interfere—in ports—and we won't interfere with Soviet ships on the high seas. I said to Dobrynin this letter can be interpreted in two ways. That we can't do anything, that we have to stop what we are doing or that we shouldn't do anything additional. The first we can't do, the second we can do. He said, "I interpret it the second way." Now this is a record of total treachery if they—

Nixon: But also being totally treacherous with me is a hell of a lot more dangerous than being totally treacherous with you.

Kissinger: Yes, but what's in it for them, Mr. President? With the case of Kennedy, they were sneaking missiles into Cuba. In this case, they're just cutting off a summit, and what do they gain by waiting 10 days? Well, you can say they are gaining the German treaty.

Haldeman: Getting the German treaty, and they could get propaganda from going to go to the maximum humiliation of the President, which would be to cut him off while he's en route. Actually—

Kissinger: But I think that would help. If, on Wednesday morning, the Russians had put out a statement saying we were preparing in good faith for the summit—

Haldeman: That would've hurt us.

Kissinger: The Vietnamese people are an oppressed people, that the Americans are bombing it and we will not receive the raper of American—of Vietnamese—you know.

Haldeman: [unclear]

Kissinger: They haven't done that. They have not started a press campaign against you. No meetings of indignation. And that's a—

Haldeman: That's another thing we knew was going to happen. They have stirred up demonstrations in this country.

Kissinger: Sure. You'd expect them to do that. Oh, no, you'd expect them.

Haldeman: You would have expected it, that's right, but they haven't been terribly effective in doing that. And that must have registered on them to—to attempt to see whether they could do it.

Kissinger: But they haven't done a big thing in Russia. They haven't attacked you in their press. And, in other words, they've been

in a very low gear. Now, you know, I expected them to cancel the summit, so I'm not—but I expected them to do it in direct relation to your actions.

[Omitted here is discussion of the day's press reports, leaks to the media, and Secretary of the Treasury Connally's position.]

Kissinger: It is not inconceivable, Mr. President, that next Friday they're going to cancel the summit. But it would be such a mean, petty move. So inconsistent. Another thing Dobrynin says, he says, "of course you didn't ask us the question, so we saw no reason to give you the answer." So I said, "well, Anatoly, we'll be glad to ask the question." He said, "No, why make us make a formal decision in response. You have said publicly you are continuing your preparation for the summit. Our leaders know you have said this, our leaders haven't canceled it—why raise the issue?" And I think that's right.

Haldeman: And their guys, for sure at the bureaucratic level, are going ahead, because our advance—we have an advance team in Moscow. They've been there for a week now. And they're going over every kind of minute [detail.] They're arguing over where the car can drive, going through what rooms are going to be assigned to who, and where the security can set up. We can set up—we've got complete—we got a hotline right now in the White House boardroom to Moscow—I can get them faster than I can get my office.

Kissinger: It's conceivable that they will cancel you on Monday. I would say, after Monday, the chances go from 70 percent by 5 to 10 percent every day.

Nixon: Anyway, we're not going to worry about it. In the meantime, the strategy over the weekend will be for everybody to pipe down if they can.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: And you, incidentally, you can go over and—you've got to have your talk with Connally. But other than that—

Haldeman: Sure.

Nixon: Just so you can have my analysis. And, I think in the meantime, both you and Henry keep the lid on everybody here. I'd also suggest that with congressional people, that Henry spend some time tomorrow with [Senator John] Stennis.

Kissinger: I'll call Stennis. I'll talk to him. I'll meet him.

Nixon: And just say, say, "Senator, let me just tell you right now that there's a lot going on and it would be terribly helpful if you would just pipe down."

[Omitted here is further discussion on the situation in Vietnam.]

218. Editorial Note

In three telephone conversations on May 12, 1972, President Nixon and his assistant Henry Kissinger discussed the possibility of Soviet cancellation of the summit as well as Kissinger's scheduled meeting with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin that day. An excerpt from the first conversation at 8:40 a.m. reads:

"K: I think it's slightly better than 50–50 now that they won't.

"P: Yes.

"K: And in fact with every passing day it's more probable that they won't.

"P: Well, we have to remember that it poses awfully serious problems for them to cancel it at this point.

"K: Not just immediate problems, but also long-term problems. If they cancel this it will take them 18 months under the best conditions to get back to this position.

"P: With us?

"K: With us, yes.

"P: If they cancel this they're gambling on somebody else winning the election. And that's a helluva tough gamble right now because they know that we're going to put it to them. If they cancel, then they know we are then going to play it much harder militarily with the Vietnamese too.

"K: Right. I don't believe they'll cancel, Mr. President, for the reasons I gave you yesterday. If they were going to cancel this was the week to do it. There's almost no percentage in it for them to cancel it next week." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

In the second conversation at 3:50 p.m., Kissinger informed Nixon that he would be meeting with Dobrynin at 4:30 p.m. that afternoon. Kissinger noted that during the meeting Dobrynin would probably deliver a message from the Soviet leadership. Kissinger also speculated that the message would refer to plans and agenda items for the summit conference. (Ibid.) The third conversation took place at 4 p.m. when Nixon and Kissinger talked briefly on the telephone.

"K: Mr. President.

"P: Oh, Henry, one thing I just wanted to be sure that we have on the line. In the unlikely event that they move in the other direction, I think it's extremely important to be awfully cold about it.

"K: Oh yes.

"P: I don't think they're going to, but, I mean, I don't think he would have approached it this way. He probably knows what the message is already.

“K: He may not—well, he certainly has some idea of the content. There may have been a change of mind but it’s just unlikely.

“P: Yes. He has to deliver it to you personally, eh?

“K: Yes, but that’s normal. All of the messages for you get delivered to me personally.

“P: Right. I see. But my point is that that isn’t the way they would do it if they were going to bust it off. I think they wouldn’t have let it go along so long.

“P: I would be amazed, but they might have had a change, but it’s unlikely.” (Ibid.)

219. Editorial Note

On May 12, 1972, the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), chaired by Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger and including Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William Sullivan, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kenneth Rush, and Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson, met from 10:05 to 10:30 a.m. in the White House Situation Room to discuss the U.S. response to a published Soviet statement on Vietnam:

“Mr. Kissinger: The President and the Secretary were talking about a reply to the Soviet statement. They want to keep it low-key, and they were thinking about saying something Monday [May 14] or Tuesday. Has the statement been officially transmitted to the Department?

“Mr. Johnson: No. The Secretary told me that he didn’t think it was necessary to reply—as long as we haven’t officially received it. In my mind, the issue was still open.

“Mr. Sullivan: The Secretary is testifying on the Hill on Monday. Perhaps he can say something about the statement.

“Mr. Kissinger: If it isn’t actually handed to us, is there a need to reply?

“Mr. Johnson: No, not unless we think it would be useful.

“Mr. Kissinger: We could send the Soviets a reply if the whole situation becomes more active. At the moment, though, I agree with the Secretary’s view.

“Mr. Johnson: In any case, we have prepared a draft reply.

“Mr. Rush: As long as the Soviets have not given us a copy of the statement, they may be implying that they don’t expect a reply.

“Mr. Johnson: That’s not necessarily the case. We and the Soviets very often do business in strange ways. During the Cuban missile crisis, for example, there were a few statements like this.

“Mr. Rush: But if they haven’t given us a copy, they may not want a reply. If they desired a reply, I think they would have given us the statement.

“Mr. Kissinger: We will have to say something, though.

“Mr. Johnson: The Secretary could do that during his appearance on the Hill on Monday.

“Mr. Kissinger: Okay. But let us see the text first.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files) Box H-116, WSAG Minutes, Originals) For Rogers’ testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on May 16, see Department of State *Bulletin*, June 5, 1972, pages 790–792.

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

Washington, May 12, 1972, 11:15 a.m.

K: Hello.

D: Hello, Henry.

K: Anatol.

D: What was the result of yesterday’s game?²

K: Oh, New York lost 3–0.

D: Were you there?

K: Yeah, I went there.

D: So you didn’t really support them very much. I watched you on the television.

K: Was I on television?

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² At 8:30 p.m. the previous evening, Kissinger attended a professional hockey game between the New York Rangers and the Boston Bruins. (Ibid., Miscellany, 1968–1976, Record of Schedule).

D: Of course, you were. And you were sitting rather passively without running out and so on. Usually, the fans jump out and show their emotions. But even on the game, you don't want to show any emotions.

K: Well, not at the game—afterwards.

D: Well, I think during the game radio fans show their emotions.

K: Well, I really didn't have a team, I was vaguely for New York but not wildly so.

D: Oh, if was vaguely, then I understand. So you were just looking for the winner.

K: Besides, my team was losing, so there wasn't much occasion to show emotion.

D: So, you are looking for winners is my impression.

K: Yeah, well, it's always better to win than to lose.

D: Yes, exactly. Well, Henry, I received this telegram from Moscow.³ Very shortly we will give you some drafts of papers, so to speak, on certain question of Summit.

K: Like what?

D: I don't have it here yet. I would like you to know today or Saturday;⁴ otherwise, you will go somewhere very far.

K: Are they substantive or technical?

D: No, I think they are on substance.

K: On substance.

D: It says here in the telegram to tell you that what we will send draft on certain questions or problems. Problems which are really on agenda.

K: Oh, I see, okay. Good.

D: This is the point. The only thing I would like you to know—one additional point, we would like and expect that you will not really use it as a publicity stunt. Just in a serious way for preparation for the Summit.

K: Use what as a publicity stunt.

D: Well, the very fact that I will give you some drafts and so on.

K: Yeah, but, Anatoliy, I have never discussed anything you discuss with me.

D: No, no, no—I know but this really is from Moscow. It does not come from me. You understand what I mean.

³ See footnote 4, Document 221.

⁴ May 13.

K: You can be absolutely sure, Anatol, I don't think anybody even knows . . .

D: You see, this was sent straight to me. I do understand that, but . . .

K: I have told nobody that we have had a response from Brezhnev.⁵

D: I think that this is a point.

K: Because I then have to explain, if there is a response, whether . . . that it isn't strong or it is strong.

D: Sometimes the White House has [omission in the source text]

K: But, Anatol, in our relationship I have never made the slightest leak.

D: Agreed. This is really what I am telling because they sent it to me from Moscow.

K: You tell your people in Moscow that anything that comes through your channel we need no special admonition on. We have never . . . there will never be the slightest hint that something is coming. In fact, no one even knows what I get or that I get anything.

D: I understand. But I am telling you what they asked me to tell. I don't need any specific assurances but they asked me to do so. They want me to do it, so I'm telling you.

K: All right. You give them the assurance, but you tell them it was an unnecessary admonition.

D: No, no. I did what I was told, but they would like me just to mention that this is coming; it's not yet come here, but I want you to know beforehand. They don't say anything about the document itself, on this they absolutely do not worry, but the general effect . . .

K: Look how we handled the SALT announcement.⁶ You would have thought there was practically nothing going on.

D: Henry, I repeat it's not—

K: All right, I understand. At any rate, neither the fact of the communication nor the contents will be revealed to anybody except the President.

D: Yes, this is it . . . the effect of the communication not the substance because on this they are sure from Moscow definitely.

K: Yeah, but they can also be sure about the facts.

D: Okay. I will mention . . . I have your assurances. I do not need myself but—

⁵ Document 214.

⁶ Reference is to Nixon's May 20, 1971, public announcement of a breakthrough in the SALT negotiations; see Department of State *Bulletin*, June 7, 1971, pp. 741–742.

K: You give them immediate assurances and tell them that no communication through your channel is ever revealed to anybody.

D: Okay, Henry. Will you be tomorrow or day after tomorrow just for me where I could reach you?

K: I'll be here in Washington.

D: In Washington. You won't go anywhere?

K: No.

D: Through your telephone.

K: But you can reach me through my telephone anyway even if I were away but I will be here.

D: Within the Washington area.

K: In Washington itself.

D: Itself, fine.

K: But that message will come today, won't it?

D: Maybe today, maybe tomorrow. They didn't say—they used a Russian word which could be translated either today or tomorrow.

K: Right.

D: This is so confusing . . . it could be today or tomorrow.

K: Yeah. And what it is is concerning some substantive or other aspects of the Summit?

D: Yes. This is only on our drafts on certain problems . . . Summit.

K: Oh, fine, good.

D: You understand that's your message in general. (laughter)

K: Oh, Anatol, I'm not totally stupid.

D: No, you are not. This is a well-known fact not only to me it was long ago known but I speak about the general public.

K: Two other things, Anatol, the first is we are—this is a minor thing—you remember we talked about press announcements of the various agreements?

D: Yes.

K: I gave you that schedule yesterday.

D: Yes. I already sent it to Moscow.

K: No, no; fine. I just want you to know what I forgot to tell you yesterday. We agreed to joint briefings.

D: Oh, to the joint briefings. Yes, I will put this on.

K: So that we could do it jointly and the way we do it, except for the very important ones,—

D: Yes.

K: Ziegler would brief on our side and whoever on your side—

D: I don't know yet.

K: But at any rate, the way we should do that, Anatol, is for you and me to get together.

D: Okay.

K: And we will then agree. Ziegler will say exactly what we tell him.

D: Okay, I understand.

K: So you and I can work it out and there will be no problem.

D: Okay.

K: On SALT and on the final principles, I would do the briefing.

D: Okay. I think it is most important.

K: Those two, on the principles and on the communiqué⁷ and on SALT, I will do the briefing.

D: So I will say either Ziegler or you on most important items.

K: Right. And in any event, if it's Ziegler, you and I will work out ahead of time what he will say. He never deviates from it.

D: Okay.

K: Now one more thing, Anatol, on this. We are thinking now very seriously of a public statement on Monday.

D: On what?

K: On the German thing.

D: Oh, I think it's—

K: That will have the maximum effect.

D: Oh, I think it's very [omission in the source text]. Could I send this or are you just thinking? Better not to make disappointment. Sorry I really ask you blunt question. If you are really so, I will send them but if you change your mind—

K: Let me say, you know, if there is no, which I don't anticipate, no stop aggravation of this situation.

D: Oh, I don't think—I think for our part could say this, whether you do or not. Don't you think so?

K: What?

D: About whether it will be an aggravation or not.

K: What do you mean we can say?

D: No, I think we could judge—I think you and me could fairly say whether there would be aggravation or will not be before Monday.

K: Yeah. My impression is there will not be.

⁷ In a May 10 memorandum to Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt assessed specific changes on the Basic Principles statement desired by the Soviets. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 67, Country Files, Europe, U.S.S.R., Sonnenfeldt Papers [1 of 2])

D: You mean about [Israel]⁸ and Bonn?

K: No, no; I mean in the overall world situation.

D: Oh, well, this is what I think is my impression. . . . So if your impression is the same, so I think we are on the same ground.

K: Right. So I just wanted to tell you that. In that framework I think you are pretty safe in assuming it.

D: Yeah. It would be White House statement?

K: A White House statement.

D: A special statement.

K: Well, we've planned it in answer to a question.

D: Okay, an answer to a question.

K: And I will work that out and give it to you Monday morning.

D: Okay. I think it's fair enough and good enough.

K: Okay.

D: Okay, I'll be in touch with you. Please don't go too far.

K: No, I'll be here.

D: (laughter)

K: Anatol, how can you and I be separated?

D: No, no, no. This is my impression too; it's unbelievable.

K: You and I, when this thing is over, we are going to have one purely social evening with not one word of business.

D: Okay, I'll get prepared.

K: We have earned it.

D: You see, only one of your respectable newspaper men after you—when you come back here. You remember on this [omission in the source text] when we worked together. After this, on those [omission in the source text].

K: Oh, yes.

D: He asked me, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, you heard Johnson speak with Kennedy all night so what you are talking about?" I said, "We went to sleep." And he couldn't believe it really; that an Ambassador didn't even have time with such a man and not to talk with him all the whole night.

K: (laughter)

D: He couldn't really believe it. So you see even in this case, not everything is believable but on this occasion I agree, not a word.

K: No.

D: No politics.

⁸ Brackets in the source text.

K: Exactly. We will do it.
D: Okay. I'll be in touch with you.
K: Good, Anatol.
D: Bye, bye.

221. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, May 12, 1972, 4:22–5:05 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador to the United States
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

The meeting was at Dobrynin's request. Dobrynin brought a proposed text (attached) of a U.S.-Soviet treaty renouncing nuclear weapons,² which seemed to take into account some of the points I had made to him at previous meetings. He said that this would be considered an enormously important step by his government and we should take it extremely seriously.

I told Dobrynin we would study it carefully, though it was a matter of the gravest consequence which could not be easily taken. I said this was a matter, for example, that we had to discuss with our allies. Dobrynin said that we could just have Rogers discuss it at the NATO meeting³ after we had agreed to it. I said that I doubted that this would do, but that we would study it carefully and would let him have a tentative reply.

Dobrynin said that if I thought about it carefully, I could see that their submitting such a text to us was really an answer to the questions I had put the day before about whether the Summit would continue. I said I understood this.

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Kissinger and Dobrynin met in the White House Map Room. The closing time of the meeting is from Kissinger's Record of Schedule. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–1976)

² Attached but not printed. A notation on the attachment reads: "Handed K by D, 4:00 p.m., May 12, 1972." Also attached was the Soviet note described in footnote 4.

³ Reference is to the planned NATO ministerial meeting at Bonn May 30–31; Rogers headed the U.S. delegation. The text of the communiqué released at the end of this meeting, which makes no mention of this Soviet proposal, is printed in full in Department of State *Bulletin*, July 3, 1972, pp. 21–22.

There was some desultory talk about the Summit, and the meeting broke up.⁴

⁴ A copy of the Soviet note on May 12 is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, vol. II. In his memoirs, Kissinger wrote: "Unbelievably by the standards of our fevered domestic debate, Vietnam disappeared entirely as a point of contention in our dialogue with the Soviet Union. On May 12 Dobrynin handed me a note—in the private Channel—that grudgingly accepted the President's expression of regret at the harm to Soviet ships and seamen and his assurance that care would be taken to avoid such incidents in the future. Nothing was said about the blockade of North Vietnam." (*White House Years*, p. 1196) In his diary entry for May 12 Haldeman wrote: "There was a lot of concern during the day about speculation on the Soviet Summit and the P and Henry both pushed very hard to have everybody kept quiet on any kind of speculation. Henry met with Dobrynin in the afternoon, and the discussion was so strongly substantive that both Henry and the P[resident] both believe now that there's no chance of the Summit being canceled. They even got to the question of the exchange of gifts. The Soviets want to give the P a hydrofoil to play with in Key Biscayne and in return want a hot sports car from us." (*The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 459) In handwritten notes taken that day at a briefing by Haig, Haldeman also recorded: "We're fracturing the Hanoi-Moscow linkage & have China pushed away." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, Staff Memoranda and Office Files, Haldeman Files, Box 45, Haldeman Notes, April-June 1972, Part II)

222. Memorandum From the Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Eliot) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)¹

Washington, May 12, 1972.

SUBJECT

President's USSR Trip: Negotiating with the Soviets

There follow a number of conclusions about negotiating with the Soviets which may be useful in connection with the President's forthcoming trip to the USSR. These have been selected from the writings of various American officials who have dealt with the Soviets over the years and of academicians who have studied U.S.-Soviet negotiations—

¹ Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 7 US/NIXON. Confidential. Drafted by Herbert Okun and Wayne Smith (EUR/SOV) on May 11, and cleared by Matlock and Deputy Assistant Secretaries for European Affairs Richard Davies and George Springsteen.

Llewellyn Thompson, Philip Moseley, General John R. Deane, Fred C. Ikle, Urie Bronfenbrenner.²

(1) The word “compromise” is not native to the Russian language and has unfavorable connotations; in Soviet usage, it is frequently preceded by the adjective “rotten.” Soviet negotiators can be persuaded to alter their negotiating positions, but success is more likely if the results are not referred to as a “compromise.”

(2) Agreements with the Soviet Union should be on a quid-pro-quo basis with the quid running concurrently with the quo. When the Soviets are paid in advance, the incentive is low for them to deliver on their part of the obligation.

(3) Soviet positions are not immutable, nor should the non-Soviet negotiator fail to make proposals simply because the Soviets have in the past refused to consider them. Conditions—and Soviet positions—change. What was not acceptable yesterday may be today. The Austrian State Treaty is prime evidence. By the same token, the bases of our own positions should be constantly reviewed. Our proposals should not be put forward simply on the grounds that they have been put forward previously. The original rationale may no longer be valid or cogent.

(4) Minute analyses of Soviet rhetoric are neither necessary nor fruitful. When the Soviets have a major point to make or a significant shift in their negotiating position to signal, they usually go about it in a straightforward way. When they were ready to lift the Berlin blockade, they said so.

(5) It is not productive to be too clever in putting forward positions. We should state our case in a straightforward manner and with as much candor as possible.

(6) Communication with Russians has proven most successful when the negotiators for the other side speak in the name of ideals and feelings, rather than invoking evidence and logic. The lofty principle should come first; then, facts can be introduced, preferably as inevitable deductive necessities, rather than as empirically independent observations. This deductive approach clashes with the pragmatic and legalistic approach common in the West.

(7) Recognition of Soviet sensitivities and values, where this does not jeopardize American interests, can play a significant role in

² Thompson was former Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Moseley was a former Harvard University professor of international relations, Deane was formerly an administrator of the lend-lease program of assistance to the Soviet Union, Ikle was a Department of State consultant on arms control issues, and Bronfenbrenner was a professor of psychology at Cornell University.

breaking down Soviet rigidity, opening up channels of communication, enabling previously dissonant information to be understood, and enhancing the possibility of arriving at mutually advantageous agreements.

(8) At the negotiating table, it is even more important in dealing with Russians than with representatives of other countries to avoid arousing national fears and sensitivities. To do so is to risk activating a characteristic pattern of response involving constricted perspective, distortion of reality, intransigence, and emotional rather than rational reaction. Once such a pattern is mobilized, it is counterproductive to attempt to cope with it directly.

(9) We should be prepared for Soviet attempts at psychological one-upmanship. The Soviet penchant for claiming at the outset of negotiations that they are more sinned against than sinning has sometimes succeeded in putting their negotiating partners on the defensive.

(10) Soviet negotiators usually operate under rigid instructions and must refer back to their superiors for changes in those instructions. Even in negotiations at the highest level, it is sometimes necessary for the Soviet negotiator to ensure that a change in position is acceptable to his colleagues in the collective leadership. When new negotiating initiatives are put forward, time must be allowed for the Soviet negotiator to receive new instructions or to conduct consultations with his colleagues.

James Carson³

³ James L. Carson signed for Eliot above Eliot's typed signature.

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

Washington, May 12, 1972, 5:21 p.m.

K: Mr. President.

P: Hi Henry.

K: I just spent about 45 minutes with Dobrynin.² He's just busily working away at the summit. He brought me a text of another agreement they want to sign on renouncing nuclear weapons. We can't do it but I'm just diddling him along on it. He wanted to know if you would accept a hydrofoil. They want to give you a hydrofoil for Key Biscayne to ride around in. They're pioneers in hydrofoil.

P: Sure. Did you ask him about the gifts for their . . . ?

K: Yes, what he mentioned was that Mr. Brezhnev loved automobiles. Can we give them a . . . ?

P: Hell, yes. Particularly if they're going to give us a hydrofoil, we can give them an automobile.

K: Well, if I could tell him on Monday³ or Tuesday that we can give him an automobile . . .

P: What kind would he like? Give him one of the American automobiles.

K: It's got to be an American one.

P: Yes, but if he's going to give us a hydrofoil that'll have to be the understanding that we can't accept that unless we can give something that we make.

K: The French gave him a [omission in the source text] and he likes fast cars.

P: We could talk to some of our people here—Ford or—no let's get one of the real sports car people. We'll get GM, probably they're the best. Actually that's an expensive gift that we could have the company go along on it. The hydrofoil sounds great.

K: OK.

P: But as far as messages are concerned it didn't have anything . . .

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

² See Document 221.

³ May 15; for the meeting on this date between Kissinger and Dobrynin, see Document 226.

K: No, it was just plans for the summit. Then he brought me little bits again about the mining. One, that they took note with pleasure that we were not going to have any more incidents. Secondly, they said that they want to make sure that their ships can go in and out of Vietnamese ports. I said if you mean by that that you can go in there without hitting a mine, that's totally out of the question. The mining will continue. I think we've got to be tough.

P: Oh, God. We give in on that and the summit is not worth it.

K: Exactly. And he said no, we don't mean that.

P: It'll come at a later time. When we settle the damn war we'll let them go any place they want.

K: Right. At any rate I think we can now count on the summit. He just pleaded with us not to keep putting out these speculative stories. George Sherman has another one in the *Star*.

P: Oh, he gets his stuff from the State Department.

K: Exactly. All of this stuff is State.

P: What does it say?

K: Well, that they blame . . .

P: Who the poop—that the Russians do?

K: Yes.

P: Now who the hell would put that out? That can't be anybody from the White House can it?

K: No, and no one over here speaks to Sherman. Kalb no one over here speaks too.

P: Can't Haldeman get after that?

K: Yes, I'll talk to Haldeman.

P: Well, I don't blame the Russians. Of course you can assure them that we aren't talking to Sherman or Kalb or any of these people.

K: I told him that you might go to Key Biscayne for a few days next week to prepare for the summit and he said that's a good idea. Then I said to him maybe he wants to come down for a day of talks with me and he said absolutely.

P: Good. Well, at this point, Henry, I think that it's too late for them to . . .

K: Mr. President, it's 99%.

P: Because you see they wouldn't be sending a message. This message will be from whom?

K: From Brezhnev to you.

P: As of this date. Well, what the hell, then, if he's talking that way . . .

K: They're paying too high a price, Mr. President. Hanoi must be beside itself.

P: The point is though I think Dobrynin is absolutely right. They do not want to have a positive act reassuring the summit. That would be too much, but on the other hand they can go along if it doesn't require a decision. I can see that point.

K: Of course.

P: That's the way our people ought to play it and quit their god-damn talking.

K: Exactly.

P: Why don't you just tell Haldeman he's going to have to call . . . Who can Haldeman call over there?

K: I think they are now going to shut up over the weekend and I'll go after them again on Monday.

P: The idea is that tell Haldeman that he is to enforce it with the whole White House crowd. Don't say boo about the summit.

K: That's right. Just say we are proceeding, we don't know what the Russians are doing.

P: Let Ziegler say that all summit questions are referred to Ziegler. Why don't we do it that way.

K: Exactly.

P: And that way we know what he'll say and nobody else—you know Scali, or Moorer or these other people that they just won't know anything.

K: Right.

P: And I really think that's the way—that all summit things should be referred to Ziegler and in fact that's what I think State ought to say. They don't have anything to do with it.

K: Well, I'll send you now some briefing books, Mr. President.

P: I think under these circumstances . . .

K: I wouldn't give it any more thought.

P: We've got to assume it. I must say though that when you stop to think where we were. I just was thinking that one week ago I was sitting here working on my speech.⁴ If we thought then that we could be sitting here this way at this point what would you have thought. There were two things—the summit, but second was the enormous public support. The public support is bigger than I thought, Henry. In one sense because it's so emotional.

K: Right it's more . . . specific action.

⁴ See Document 208.

P: That's right. November 3rd⁵ they were just standing up against the demonstrators but now they say thank God we're doing something.

K: Well, Le Duc Tho has also in his press conference said he's willing to resume private talks.

P: He has.

K: Yes. We've got everybody totally confused.

P: That's good, isn't it?

K: Of course.

P: That's really an answer to your message, isn't it?

K: Yes, but we'll get another answer too.

P: But what I meant is that he said he's willing to resume private talks. Now if he says that at the time we're mining . . .

K: That's a sign of unbelievable weakness.

P: For Christ's sake, normally he would say we will not talk. Remember they said before they would not talk until we quit bombing.

K: Exactly.

P: That was the way it was with [former President Lyndon] Johnson wasn't it?

K: Exactly.

P: And now when we're mining—and bombing. Dobrynin understands himself that we have nothing to do with these damn statements?

K: Oh, yes.

P: I don't know how we can control it, Henry.

K: Well, I'll talk to Haldeman.

P: It's hard for him to do it, but Rogers said you know that he had everybody set up, but I think, I don't think he controls them, do you?

K: No.

P: You know damn well we don't talk at the White House to the Kalbs because we know that they're out to job us.

K: No question.

P: Nobody's talking to George Sherman, you know that. The leaks are all from the State Department.

K: Mr. President, Murray Marder—no one here talks to him. He had another dove story today.

P: Which way does he say—on or off?

⁵ Reference is to Nixon's November 3, 1969, speech on Vietnam; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969*, pp. 901–909.

K: Well, he says on but in such a way—still high officials remain profoundly worried about having challenged the Russians. You know everything is wrong in there.

P: I think I'll call Haldeman and get it started.

K: OK.

P: Well, it's been a hard day, but from now on don't worry about their messages. We're just assuming that we're going to go ahead.

K: There's no question about it now.

P: Because Brezhnev wouldn't have sent such a message—this was a message from Brezhnev to me.

K: Yes.

P: Well if he does this and then pulls off . . .

K: I don't see how he can do it because . . .

P: Because it's been sent as of yesterday, I presume.

K: As of this afternoon.

P: Oh, their time, yes. So what the hell and after we'd seen the—and they had received probably an account of my meeting with that little Trade Minister which might have made them drool a little too.

K: If it didn't I don't know what the English language can do.

P: OK.

K: Goodbye, Mr. President.⁶

⁶In a May 13 telephone conversation, Kissinger told Nixon that Dobrynin had called him and said he wanted the President to know that Moscow was sending him some substantive plans for the summit, but didn't want him to tell this to the press. Kissinger added that he thought this was the Soviets' way of letting them know that they were continuing the summit, but that they didn't want a public statement. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 372, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)