

November 4, 1973

**From the Journal of A.F. Dobrynin, 'Record of a
Conversation with US Secretary of State H.
Kissinger, 4 November 1973'**

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Summary:

Kissinger concedes to Dobrynin that the United States had made a "significant mistake when it rushed to introduce heightened combat readiness."

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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
 with US Secretary of State H. KISSINGER
 4 November 1973

At the end of the meeting with Kissinger, at his own initiative he again raised the issue of the events of recent days and their possible impact on the state of Soviet-American relations.

Kissinger began the discussion on this topic by noting that he and the President had thought a lot about the General Secretary's last letter to the President, which spoke of a "crisis of confidence." He, Kissinger, also remembers well the well-founded pressure put on him personally in this regard by the Soviet Ambassador in several conversations regarding his, Kissinger's, behavior in connection with events in the Middle East, especially in connection with the White House's action to bring the US forces armed forces to a higher combat readiness.

All this has caused growing concern in the President and him, the Secretary of State, because they are well aware of what a "crisis of confidence" is between the leadership of the USSR and the US.

He, Kissinger, talked again on this topic with the President on the eve of his arrival at our Embassy on November 4. They tried to more clearly imagine how recent events could look in the Kremlin, in the eyes of the General Secretary and his colleagues in the Politburo, and realized that raising the issue of a crisis of confidence could be quite justified and well-founded. This worried the President and him, the Secretary of State, even more.

As a matter of fact, and not justification, he said further, the White House's actions were caused by a combination of circumstances and the White House's fears regarding possible unilateral actions by the Soviet Union, which (the fears) then turned out to be unfounded and exaggerated, although at that moment the above circumstances and fears served as the basis of the position then taken by the President.

However, in retrospect, Kissinger then emphasized, the President and I see that the White House made a significant mistake when it rushed to introduce heightened combat readiness. Of course, it would have been better for the President to have then once again contacted the General Secretary through channels or the "direct line" and frankly share his concerns without immediately resorting to such an action. The President, it is true, has been under great stress all these weeks and even months, but this, of course, cannot in any way justify the haste shown, especially against the backdrop of the restraint demonstrated at that moment personally by the General Secretary and the other Soviet leaders. The General Secretary's nerves turned out to have been stronger than those of the President.

Yes, we now see, Kissinger repeated, that we were in a hurry, thereby causing serious damage to Soviet-American relations. This cannot be denied. The main thing now is

not to aggravate this damage with further mutual reproaches or insults, because we admit a possible major blunder on the American side. Let us look forward to maintaining and developing all that is constructive and positive that has remained in our relations, and these positives extend beyond the region of the Middle East alone, as the President noted in his recent message to the General Secretary. And there are many opportunities and needs in this area for the restoration of the Soviet-American understanding and joint or parallel actions to achieve an overall Middle East settlement.

I told Kissinger that the assessment of certain acts and the actions of the White House by the Soviet leadership was well known to the President. There is no need to repeat it. We are now talking about specific positive steps by the American side which could reinforce the President's current frame of mind in the area of Soviet-American relations as outlined above. And there are considerable opportunities in this regard. The main thing - as agreed at the last summit meeting - is to conduct business in such a way that the improvement of relations between both countries becomes an irreversible process, so that this process can strongly withstand various international crises, and does not depend on one or another momentary fluctuation within the United States.

The Soviet Union is, as before, ready to build its relations with the Nixon administration on this basis, I emphasized to Kissinger. But to be completely frank, I said in conclusion, good words alone from the White House are not enough; concrete actions are needed that would indicate the real readiness of the President and him, the Secretary of State, to build relations with us on the basis indicated above.

Kissinger said that they understand this well and that is why they have now turned to Moscow with specific proposals on a possible joint course of action in the field of further negotiations about a final Middle East settlement on the basis of the understanding reached earlier in Moscow. Perhaps this understanding was somewhat shaken in the eyes of the Soviet leadership as a result of recent events, but the White House remains ready to act within the framework of this understanding, he added.

I told Kissinger that the proposals he made on Middle Eastern affairs at the instructions of the President would be reported to Moscow and that they would be notified about the response of the Soviet leadership in a timely manner.

The conversation with Kissinger ended around one in the morning.

It is interesting to note that during the course of the conversation - regarding the internal situation in the United States in connection with Watergate, Kissinger, asserting that President Nixon was not going to resign, noted at the same time that Ford, the nominee for the post of Vice-President, had secretly assured him, Kissinger, that he would retain Kissinger as Secretary of State if he replaced Nixon as President.

It needs to be said that on November 5, Ford himself spoke in approximately in the same spirit, when answering a question from one of the senators during a hearing in the Senate.

SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN THE US
(A. DOBRYNIN)