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From the Journal of A.F. Dobrynin, 'Record of a Conversation with US Secretary of State of the United States Henry Kissinger, 18 December 1974'

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Summary:

During a December 1974 conversation between Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Kissinger expressed frustration over the public release of a Soviet letter amid sensitive trade legislation in Congress. The discussion also covered U.S. and European coordination on the Pan-European Conference and ongoing Middle East negotiations, with Dobrynin warning that US unilateral actions risked undermining broader peace efforts and US-Soviet relations.

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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION
with US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger
18 December 1974

On 18 December I met with Kissinger over breakfast, to which he invited me last week.

First. Before we could begin the conversation, an excited Assistant Secretary of State ran into the room and handed him a TASS statement that the State Department had just received, along with the text of the letter from A. A. Gromyko, handed to Kissinger on 26 October on the issue of the so-called "Kissinger-Jackson agreement."

After reading the TASS report, Kissinger immediately became angry and began excitedly saying that Moscow should have at least warned them in advance about the upcoming publication of A. A. Gromyko's letter and that such publication in the midst of discussion in Congress of a trade bill could lead to the failure of all legislation regarding the Soviet Union and thereby jeopardize the Ford Administration.

I interrupted Kissinger to tell him that, to be frank, in the current form the legislation being formulated in Congress was an open attempt to interfere in our internal affairs and was even more discriminatory against the USSR than it was in 1972, when both governments began a policy of détente between the two countries. Since 1972, the Soviet Union at least had the right to receive credits without any special conditions from the US Export-Import Bank subject to agreement with the Bank's management and the Administration. Now, according to the bill which is about to be approved, the provision of credits to the USSR will be specifically limited by law to the amount of 300 million dollars for four years, i. e. no more than 75 million dollars per year; this, of course, is next to nothing if we are talking about commercial relations between such large countries as the USSR and the US.

Moreover, now even the President himself will not have the right to increase this amount without a special decision of the two houses of Congress, not to mention the additional deprivation of the President's right to enter into major deals with the USSR on oil, gas, and other energy issues without, again, a special decision from those the same two houses of the US Congress. But it is well known what can be expected - in the context of the manifestation of current anti-Soviet tendencies in Congress - from such an unprecedented discussion of every major commercial and credit transaction with the USSR by both houses of Congress.

Although, starting in 1972, the Administration assured us of its interest and readiness to achieve improved diplomatic ties and, in particular, the implementation of joint gas projects, I continued, now in fact all this is being erased, as if there were no corresponding judgments [*prigovory*] with the US government over the past four

years.

In general, I added, it is surprising that the current Administration - neither the President, nor the Secretary of State, nor the Secretary of Commerce - has not yet made a single protest against such clearly discriminatory legislation and, in fact, allows opponents of détente to push it through Congress without any visible opposition from the US government.

To be honest, I said, President Nixon, as you know, promised to veto legislation that discriminated against the USSR, and the current Administration is silent, as if it agreed with what is happening now in Congress. This position cannot but surprise us.

"Under these conditions," I further told Kissinger, "one could hardly expect tacit approval from us of what is happening now around trade legislation in the US Congress. The fact that we published our message right now, in the height of the discussion of two bills on trade and credits, is precisely intended to honestly and clearly show everyone that we are for improving relations with the US, for developing trade with them, but we will not accept any discrimination or interference in our internal affairs; We absolutely reject such an approach towards the USSR. This should be made very clear to American legislators so that senators like Jackson do not confuse and deceive American public opinion about the Soviet position.

"You can say all this to the President," I added.

Kissinger noticeably cooled down. He asked again whether the discrimination against the USSR I mentioned actually took place in the bill on the Export-Import Bank. I confirmed that this was the case.

Then Kissinger called General Scowcroft and asked him the same thing. He answered in the affirmative. Kissinger began to shout at Scowcroft about why he was not informed about such a development in time, but, without listening to the end, he hung up. Kissinger then began to make excuses, saying that he himself really did not know about such a bad turn of events ("[my] assistants let [me] down"), and had not drawn the President's attention to it in time.

Seeing my skeptical attitude towards these statements of his, Kissinger said that he was ready to call the President in front of me and talk about this topic, asking if I would object if he described to Ford the substance of what I had said. I replied that I had no objections to the President being informed of what I had expressed to the Secretary of State.

Kissinger contacted the President in my presence and repeated our entire conversation almost verbatim, ending it with the phrase that "the Soviet Ambassador, not without reason, asks how then to interpret the position of the US government itself in a situation where, after the declared intention of both governments to pursue matters towards détente and improving relations, the US Congress is now adopting legislation that is much worse in relation to the USSR than it was before?"

Kissinger added that they in the Administration apparently made a definite mistake by not paying due attention to the questions of separate credit legislation, but concentrated all their efforts on the trade reform law, where Jackson was the center of opposition.

As one could understand Ford's reaction, he admitted that indeed the matter in Congress as a whole had taken an unpleasant turn for Soviet-American economic relations and that he asked Kissinger's opinion, what could now still be done in this regard, given that Congress was finishing its work in two days.

Kissinger replied that, in his opinion, there was an urgent need to let Congress know through his White House staff, who were constantly in touch with Congress, that he, the President, could veto the entire Export-Import Bank bill if most of the restrictive amendments were kept, to repeal them in the national interest. Or, Kissinger added, they ought to threaten to use a "pocket veto" (the President in such cases simply does not sign the bill approved by Congress within 10 days after the adjournment of Congress, which means an actual veto).

After listening to the President's response, Kissinger hung up.

Kissinger said that the President generally agreed with the assessment of the situation and that within the next couple of hours a secret meeting would be held at the White House in order to find out what could be done now in this direction, given

that there were only two days left before the end of the current session of Congress. The President, said Kissinger, further noted that Congress should not be allowed to constantly "clip the wings" of the Administration in matters of relations with the Soviet Union and that something must be done in this sense with the start of the work of the new Congress in January 1975 to halt the current dangerous tendency of Congress to endlessly interfere in every step of US-Soviet relations.

For his part, he noted that it is high time for the Administration to take such a position.

In general, it was clear that the publication of the TASS statement along with the text of A. A. Gromyko's letter produced a good jolt both in the White House and in the State Department. It is significant that after the first emotional "outburst" and my response in this regard, during the entire subsequent conversation Kissinger no longer made any complaints to us regarding our publication of A. A. Gromyko's letter, although it was clear from everything that this was clearly not to his taste.

Second. In the course of the meeting with Kissinger, I touched on the question of the discussion of the progress of the work of the Pan-European Conference in Geneva at the American-French meeting in Martinique.

Kissinger said that Ford and Giscard d'Estaing did not review the proceedings of this meeting in any detail, but that this whole question was the subject of a separate discussion.

"Both presidents," the Secretary of State summed up this discussion, "came to a mutual clear understanding that the work of the conference should be completed at the highest level and within a time frame approximately corresponding to that discussed by L. I. Brezhnev with Ford in Vladivostok and with Giscard d'Estaing in Paris.

Both the American and French sides, Kissinger noted, agreed that measures should be taken to ensure that the discussion of the "third basket" is successfully completed, and expressed their readiness to end this protracted discussion without much delay if the Soviet side "helps this" and makes "at least a small gesture towards the position of the West."

When I asked what exactly he meant, Kissinger replied that at the meeting in Martinique the question was not raised in such detail and that both presidents discussed and agreed in principle on their future intentions without going into great detail.

According to the wording concerning the possibility of a peaceful change of borders, according to Kissinger, both presidents agreed that this issue was not of great importance to them, that they were ready to agree with any version of this wording that could be agreed upon between the Soviet and West German sides. Kissinger made it clear that neither they nor the French wanted to get into a dispute with the FRG because of this question.

It is worth noting from Kissinger's statements that, perhaps for the first time in many months, namely after L. I. Brezhnev's recent visit to France, the Americans stopped justifying their particular inactivity with references to France's obstructionist [*tormozayachie*] positions on the issues of the conference.

In general, it can be established that L. I. Brezhnev's conversations with both the President of the United States and the President of France have now secured the agreement of both of these countries on a definite schedule agreed upon with us for the conclusion of the work of the Pan-European Conference and its completion at the highest level. At the same time, additional impetus was given to the ongoing discussion of the issues of the meeting in Geneva.

Third. During the meeting with Kissinger, the question of the situation in the Middle East was also raised.

Taking into account our previous conversation with him and his own promises then to speak in more detail regarding President Ford's expressed intention in Vladivostok to make some efforts towards a better mutual understanding of the positions of our two countries in the Middle East and the coordination of our possible joint activities for a peaceful settlement, I asked what Kissinger had to say about this now.

Kissinger's response came down to a lengthy repetition of the Administration's

well-known position on the Middle East, the center of which is an emphasis on the difficulties experienced by the Administration within the United States itself, this related desire of the White House and Kissinger himself not to aggravate relations with influential American Jewish and pro-Israel circles, and the US government's tactics therefore supposedly dictated and aimed at a gradual "step by step" solution, and not at "unrealistic attempts" to solve the entire problem of a political settlement in its entirety right away. On the whole, Kissinger did not say anything especially new on this issue.

I talked to him about this just like that. At the same time, I criticized the continuing separate actions of the Americans and Kissinger personally on the question of a Middle East settlement, emphasizing the danger of such actions, which leave aside an overall political settlement and are fraught with a new military explosion in the area, which cannot but affect Soviet-American relations.

At the same time, I conducted a corresponding critical analysis of American activities and the personal diplomacy of the Secretary of State himself, also showing this in the reactions of the US press, radio, and television which, without any embarrassment, cynically and frankly speak about the goals of the US, which is now seeking a separate agreement between Israel and Egypt on the second stage of the disengagement of troops, including in connection with the upcoming visit to the Middle East of the General Secretary of the CPSU CC.

Kissinger began to assert that the reports in the American press were "untrue" and that observers "are not aware of what is really happening, but are only engaged in speculation."

"What's really going on?" - I asked Kissinger.

After thinking for a while, Kissinger said that he asked for the following to be conveyed to Moscow.

The United States is currently actually negotiating with Sadat and the Israeli government to come to agreement on the second stage of the disengagement of their troops. The negotiations are not easy, given the disputes of a political and territorial nature; geographically, we are talking about the withdrawal of the Israelis about 20-30 km deep into Sinai. However, these negotiations on the American side are not intended to somehow influence L. I. Brezhnev's upcoming visit to the Middle East. On the contrary, Kissinger asserted, the US, although it continues contacts with Cairo and Jerusalem on this question, has recently even "reduced its activity" precisely so as "to not create the impression" in Moscow and throughout the world that the US is in a hurry to agree on such a separation before the visit of the General Secretary of the CPSU CC to Cairo. Both President Ford and he, Kissinger, are well aware of the serious consequences such tactics could lead to in Soviet-American relations. However, in Kissinger's words, they consider it necessary to maintain these negotiations in order "not to completely lose the momentum of the movement," inasmuch as they consider this latter circumstance an important factor in restraining the passions of the sides in the conflict and in preventing a military clash, primarily between the main antagonists of this region - Egypt and Israel.

Our further conversation on this topic did not identify any additional details of the current US negotiations with Egypt and Israel, which he was clearly avoided disclosing.

Kissinger said he would talk again with the President and might meet with me next Monday or Tuesday before the Christmas holidays to continue discussing the question raised in this regard in Vladivostok. For their part, he said, they would welcome it if Moscow expressed some of its thoughts on this matter.

I told Kissinger that our position had been repeatedly stated by the Soviet rulers, right up to the highest level. It is undoubtedly well known to the White House. Inasmuch as President Ford, on his own initiative, then raised the question of improving the coordination of our actions, we expect more detailed explanations of his point of view on this matter if, of course, the American side really has something to tell us in this regard and will not limit itself to wishes of the most general nature.

SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN THE US

(A. DOBRYNIN)

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