

**January 15, 1975**

**From the Journal of A.F. Dobrynin, 'Record of a Conversation with Vice President of the United States N. Rockefeller and Secretary of State H. Kissinger, 15 January 1975'**

**Citation:**

"From the Journal of A.F. Dobrynin, 'Record of a Conversation with Vice President of the United States N. Rockefeller and Secretary of State H. Kissinger, 15 January 1975'", January 15, 1975, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVP RF), f. 0129, op. 59, p. 449, d. 4, ll. 89-96. Contributed by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Angela Greenfield.  
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/301414>

**Summary:**

In this January 1975 conversation, Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin met with US Vice President Nelson Rockefeller and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to discuss the state of US-Soviet relations, focusing on discriminatory trade legislation, strategic arms negotiations, and the upcoming Brezhnev visit. Kissinger and Rockefeller expressed shared concerns over congressional interference in foreign policy and emphasized their commitment to preserving détente, while privately assuring Dobrynin that recent US threats of military intervention in the Middle East were strategic posturing to prevent another oil embargo. The meeting also highlighted US plans for long-term energy independence and efforts to sustain diplomatic momentum despite mounting domestic political challenges.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

In. No. 0548  
17 March 1975

Embassy of the USSR in the USA  
Washington, DC

From the diary of  
A.F. Dobrynin  
TOP SECRET Copy No. 1  
25 April 1975

Out. No. 225

MEMORANDUM OF THE CONVERSATION  
with Vice President of the United States N. Rockefeller  
and Secretary of State H. Kissinger

15 January 1975

First. On 15 January, 1975, Vice President Rockefeller and Secretary of State Kissinger attended a luncheon held at the embassy.

During a lengthy three-way conversation, opinions were exchanged on a wide range of issues related to the Soviet-American relations. I directed the conversation in such a way that, along with a critical analysis of the negative factors hindering and obstructing the proper development of our relations from the American side, particularly in the recent period, we aimed to support and advance the positive tendencies and further steps in these relations on important specific issues for the upcoming year 1975.

It is worth noting that at the start of the conversation Rockefeller took the initiative to speak, outpacing Kissinger. However, as we delved into the specifics and details of the issues, he became more reserved and listened more to what Kissinger and I were discussing.

The latter emphasized to me that he had "no secrets from Nelson" (Rockefeller) and encouraged me to speak with him, the Secretary of State, as openly as we do in our private conversations.

It was apparent that our businesslike and at times quite frank conversation (I expressed myself quite critically on occasions) with Kissinger had a certain impact on the Vice President, who found himself for the first time in such a working conversation between the Secretary of State and the Soviet Ambassador.

At the same time, he had a good opportunity to personally hear our Soviet arguments on the key issues of our relations (I made sure to keep this in mind during the luncheon). He mentioned this to me at the end, noting that he found the evening very beneficial for himself and for his "self-education."

Regarding the personal relationship between Rockefeller and Kissinger, our dinner only reinforced the belief that Kissinger significantly influences his patron in foreign policy matters. The latter appears to be more experienced than the Secretary of State in domestic affairs and does not mind teasing him about it.

To summarize the conversation briefly, it can be stated as follows:

1. The conversation started with a discussion about a current topic of interest in the United States, which was related to recent events involving our rejection of discriminatory trade legislation. Once again, I explained our approach in detail.

Rockefeller stated that he fundamentally agrees with the decision of the Soviet government and even “welcomes” it unofficially for the following reasons:

Firstly, this decision – “one can say with relief” – removes, for a certain period of time, the long-standing “Jewish issue” from the sphere of interstate relations between the governments of the USSR and the USA. The White House now internally gains the ability to deflect demands for discussion of this issue with the USSR by referring to Moscow’s clear decision, which was made “due to the irresponsible behavior of the Congress.” Jewish leaders in the USA and the senators supporting them, such as Jackson, who had been stirring up controversy around this “demand,” now find themselves unexpectedly not “victors,” but individuals who have deadlocked the situation and must now provide various explanations.

Secondly, the action taken by the Soviet government has assisted the Ford administration in intensifying efforts to counter excessive congressional meddling in U.S. foreign policy matters. It is significant that President Ford particularly highlighted in his message to the Congress on “the state of the nation” the situation that arose in Soviet-American trade relations as an illustration of the consequences of hasty and irresponsible congressional interventions in foreign affairs. The White House reported that this directly alarmed and even perturbed the Congress, where the majority of members had previously doubted that the USSR would revoke its most favored nation status. Now confronted with a different reality, the Congress finds itself unexpectedly compelled to consider the implications for the détente, which, despite the political rhetoric in the Congress and the media, is widely supported by various segments of the American public.

Kissinger concurred with Rockefeller’s evaluation. Additionally, he noted that senators who have spearheaded anti-Soviet legislative efforts are starting to express apprehension as well. To illustrate this point, he highlighted that Jackson had recently dispatched his aide to the administration with a suggestion to amend the credit legislation, aiming to raise the allowable loan amount to the USSR from \$300 million to one billion dollars spread across four years.

Kissinger conveyed that he cautioned Jackson that altering the amendment alone may not be sufficient to appease the Soviet Union if the remainder of the discriminatory legislation remains unaltered (I confirmed that this is exactly the case).

He noted that Senator [Jacob] Javits, a prominent figure in the Jewish community, had also presented a similar proposition to him previously.

Both Rockefeller and Kissinger believe (and they specifically emphasized that they had just discussed this with President Ford), that it is crucial to capitalize on the notable development that the Soviet government’s actions in the trade sector have sparked concerns among many Americans regarding the future of the détente in the Soviet-U.S. relations. This policy has already deeply rooted itself in the minds of the majority of Americans. Therefore, in the administration’s view, it is vital not to eliminate the external sense of uncertainty regarding how the trade-related situation could impact the broader relationship between our two countries. Such a move would work against Senator Jackson and help prepare a favorable ground for revising the trade legislation concerning the USSR.

Both Rockefeller and Kissinger underscored that President Ford and they are in complete alignment with the stance articulated in the recent communication from L.I. Brezhnev, which highlights the importance of not being disheartened by the trade-related developments but instead actively striving for advancements in all other aspects of the Soviet-American relations. They are resolute in maintaining this course of action. Today, as per Ford’s directive, the White House press secretary has unequivocally affirmed this position.

However, Kissinger further noted that it might not be prudent to openly establish a distinct boundary between the trade matter and other facets of Soviet-American relations. Externally, it is crucial to sustain, to some extent, an air of ambiguity in light of the irresponsible actions of the Congress, in order to prevent it from “easily and with impunity wriggling off the hook.”

Kissinger asked to alert Moscow that they (primarily himself in his statements) will adhere to this tactic over the next few weeks, which, in their view, may “work” in the

desired direction for both of our countries regarding influencing the Congress.

Touching on the practical side of the matter, Kissinger stated that they are considering discreetly designating one or two trusted individuals from the U.S. government to engage with our authorized representatives in the trade field. Together, they will proactively prepare an appropriate plan of corrective steps in this area for high-level consideration during the upcoming visit of L.I. Brezhnev to the USA.

This plan does not necessarily involve the signing of a new formal trade agreement during this visit. Instead, it focuses on discussing practical measures to enhance trade within the existing legislative framework. Most importantly, it includes coordinating a joint strategy to expedite changes to trade legislation in the Congress. After the visit, the White House will be ready to submit its official proposal to the Congress concerning the necessary changes in the trade legislation related to the USSR.

They anticipate that, with careful preparation and thorough public opinion shaping within the U.S., these changes could be implemented no later than the following spring.

I told Kissinger that the following year, 1976, would be unsuitable for this purpose due to the active pre-election campaign for the presidential elections. I emphasized that the administration must complete all of this within the current year if they are genuinely committed to resolving the issue with the discriminatory law.

Rockefeller affirmed his agreement with my assessment that, due to the upcoming elections next year, it is unlikely that the White House will be able to persuade the Congress to change the law during that time. Kissinger also concurred with my amendment and expressed commitment to working towards changing the law within the current year.

In terms of our practical policy on emigration, while Kissinger acknowledged that he understands it is strictly an internal matter of the Soviet Union, he would like to offer the following advice, which was also endorsed by Rockefeller, in the hopes that it would be correctly interpreted by the Soviet government.

They believe that no actions should be taken to increase emigration at this time. Doing so would only embolden opponents of the détente policy. Instead, it is advisable to maintain the current emigration levels, which they recognize to be significantly lower than the previous year. However, sustaining this level was important from the White House's perspective to demonstrate that the Soviet Union has not linked, nor is linking, these two issues - trade and emigration - and that the same approach is expected from the U.S. Congress. These arguments will then be actively employed by the White House in its efforts with the Congress regarding changes to the law.

Meanwhile, the U.S. government will indeed support the continuation of all feasible communications between our nations concerning trade and finance, facilitated by existing relations between Soviet trade organizations and American banks and companies. The White House will actively promote the expansion of these ties and commercial partnerships.

2. Regarding the upcoming visit of L.I. Brezhnev to the USA, which they believe now holds special importance for the advancement of the Soviet-American relations, Kissinger stated that the primary outcome of this meeting, particularly in the view of the American public, will be the signing of an agreement to restrict strategic weapons.

They understand that difficult negotiations lie ahead in Geneva and it is understood that utilizing back-channel communication will be essential to navigate potential roadblocks, as was previously done. Nevertheless, they are confident in the ultimate achievement of success.

Kissinger emphasized that while the Vladivostok accords face opposition in the Congress, the U.S. government remains optimistic about overcoming this opposition and obtaining the Senate approval for the agreement.

The current lesson being learned by the Congress on trade matters will not be in vain and will play a role in discussions within the Congress on a future agreement to limit

strategic weapons.

Additionally, the White House holds the view that a significant portion of the opposition in the Congress towards trade matters was influenced by the proposal's association with Nixon, who was a target of intense emotional criticism within the Congress. With a new president in office, this factor is eliminated, thereby aiding in reducing opposition within the Congress.

3. Kissinger stated that it would be very good – and this is also Ford's personal opinion – if a third outcome of the upcoming visit (in addition to the agreement on limiting strategic weapons and addressing the trade-credit situation of our relationship) would also include some agreement on the symbolic reduction of Soviet and American troops in Central Europe.

Kissinger highlighted the importance of a joint symbolic gesture in this regard, emphasizing its political significance, rather than seeking a substantial shift in power dynamics.

He is well aware of the obstacles in reaching an agreement on symbolic troop reduction as it necessitates navigating the dilemma of ensuring that neither the Soviet nor Western concepts dominate in addressing the broader issue of troop reduction in Central Europe.

Therefore, Kissinger believes it would be worth exploring a solution that deviates from the existing concepts and embodies a one-time compromise reflecting elements of both the American and Soviet perspectives.

The key objective in this matter is to demonstrate to the people of our two countries, as well as to the people of Europe, that consensus can be achieved and military forces can be reduced. The psychological and “educational” impact of such a symbolic agreement during a forthcoming top-level Soviet-American meeting would be hard to overestimate.

4. The situation at the pan-European conference was also discussed during the conversation. Kissinger, while not possessing in-depth knowledge of this matter as he explained it to Rockefeller, mentioned that Ford operated under the assumption that during the Vladivostok meeting, he had provided his principled consent to L.I. Brezhnev for the concluding phase of this conference at the highest level, and this phase is expected to occur around May or June of this year.

Kissinger continued by stating that the crucial factor for the successful conclusion of this conference lies in the recent development of a principled agreement not only between Moscow and Washington but also between Moscow and Paris, as relayed to Ford by the French president.

Hence, Kissinger concluded that a sort of trio – comprised of the USSR, the USA, and France – is currently engaged in discreetly advancing towards the successful conclusion of the high-level conference within the designated timeframe. This collaboration should ensure success.

Kissinger emphasized that the conclusion of the conference would be the second most important event of the year, in addition to the new Soviet-American high-level meeting.

In agreement with Kissinger's perspective, I urged him to secure active cooperation from the USA in the ongoing final preparatory stage in Geneva.

He made a promise to do it.

5. Regarding the date of the new Soviet-American meeting, Kissinger mentioned that they are awaiting our proposals on this matter, currently assuming based on the discussions in Vladivostok that the visit could potentially occur in the middle of this year.

During the conversation, Rockefeller mentioned in a more general context that he had not yet visited the Soviet Union and expressed a keen interest in visiting us.

On my part, I expressed hope that he would have such an opportunity.

Kissinger interjected with a remark that he believes that when the time for such a trip draws near, it will still be necessary to discuss it preliminarily with the President.

Rockefeller acknowledged understanding this.

Secondly. During lunch, Kissinger conveyed the following message as the response to our inquiry about American statements concerning the potential for military intervention in the Middle East:

“In response to the request from L.I. Brezhnev, we wish to convey the following on behalf of President Ford.

The statements in question were issued in reaction to particular inquiries during interviews with journalists. As the President publicly stated, the questions were hypothetical, and the responses were given within that context. The Soviet government can rest assured that the United States will faithfully uphold the commitments it solemnly made in agreements with the USSR regarding consultations in specific circumstances.”

I told him that our inquiry was a component of an informal exchange of perspectives within the consultation framework, and we naturally anticipate a more open explanation of the American stance, especially considering the potentially severe implications of the matters at hand, not only for this region but also for our bilateral relations.

After some consideration, Kissinger mentioned that the somewhat cautious tone of their response, which nonetheless accurately conveys their position, is mainly a result of their apprehension that a more explicit reply could be shared with Arab nations via our channels, potentially disrupting their diplomatic game.

I expressed my surprise at this interpretation of the situation, emphasizing that our inquiry was conducted strictly within the scope of bilateral relations. I pointed out that if the American party consistently evades conversations on critical issues under the guise of potential leakage to third countries - and the White House should be well aware that we maintain the confidential nature of our communications - it would render our consultations ultimately fruitless.

In response to this, Kissinger, once again cautioning that he strongly requests us not to refer to his words in our interactions with Arab countries, said the following.

Indeed, as communicated to the Soviet side in the provided response, the U.S. government has no intentions of engaging in military intervention in Arab nations. We cannot even foresee such a situation arising. For U.S. interests in the Middle East, enforcing such an intervention would be akin to political suicide.

Nevertheless, Kissinger continued, following discussions with President Ford some time back, we came to the conclusion that failing to adequately forewarn Arab countries could potentially lead to the most extreme factions influencing them to reinstate an oil embargo against the U.S., which would significantly complicate affairs in the Middle East and strain American relations with Arab nations.

In this regard, it was informally decided, Kissinger further explained, that he would give an interview in which such a potential threat would be subtly suggested, with subsequent tacit support from President Ford.

I reiterate, Kissinger said, that this was strictly a politically driven measure and not indicative of any actual intentions for military intervention. And we have essentially achieved our goal: Arab countries have visibly become nervous, and we have already received a number of essential assurances from capitals in the Middle East that we should not fear an oil embargo. For example, the Shah of Iran publicly affirmed this, while several other governments of oil-producing countries did so discreetly.

Kissinger said that he can give his “most sincere assurance” to L.I. Brezhnev that this is the real state of affairs and that there are no plans for the U.S. military intervention. The Soviet government could rely on this information for its policy planning. “You do not need any contingency planning for American intervention in the Middle East, as the Ford administration simply does not have such intentions.”

I criticized the U.S. tactics, which, instead of easing, were leading to an escalation of tensions in an already volatile region.

Kissinger defended this strategy as one of the potential effective foreign policy models, claiming that it could prove its worth by averting a conflict without the need for actual armed force in the future.

Rockefeller, who was present during the discussion, corroborated Kissinger’s claim regarding the absence of any genuine plans for military intervention and emphasized

another critical aspect. The Arab oil embargo and the ensuing energy challenges in the U.S. had a significant upside for the United States.

Building on this, Rockefeller elaborated that as a consequence of these events, there is now a resolute determination within the U.S. government and the Congress to achieve complete energy independence for the United States within the next decade, which will be achieved through the development of a wide range of energy sources: not only by significantly increasing oil, gas, and coal production within the U.S., but also through the intensive construction of nuclear power plants, harnessing solar energy, etc.

Apart from the comprehensive energy development plan recently unveiled by President Ford, broad measures are under consideration – though not yet disclosed publicly – to encourage businesses in the U.S. to invest capital in the energy sector by assuring them of substantial returns specifically on such investments.

The government firmly believes, Rockefeller continued, that by implementing these programs and offering lucrative incentives with substantial profits, the United States can greatly bolster its energy infrastructure in the coming decade. This would not only allow the U.S. to comprehensively meet its energy demands but also to extend substantial support in this realm to Western European nations and Japan.

Consequently, the reliance on Arab oil will diminish significantly, making it evident that the consideration of the U.S. military interventions to safeguard Arab oil resources cannot be a primary concern given these strategic plans.

In conclusion, Kissinger added that besides the formal response to our inquiry, he has now openly disclosed one aspect of their strategic maneuverings in the Middle East, aiming to dispel any notions in Moscow of potential U.S. military engagements in the region. This transparency is meant to help guide the Soviet government in shaping its policies in the area. However, they underscore the importance that “this transparency does not compromise American interests in the Middle East,” and stress that this information is to be kept strictly confidential within the knowledge of L.I. Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership, without sharing it with Arab nations, as the U.S. would then deny any exchange of views with the Soviet Union in such matters.

AMBASSADOR OF THE USSR TO THE USA  
(A. DOBRYNIN)

Printed 2 copies eg

1 - USA Desk of the MFA of the USSR

2 - to file

No. 143

24 January 1975