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**From the Journal of A.F. Dobrynin, 'Record of a  
Conversation with Z Former US Secretary of State  
Kissinger, 23 November 1979'**

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**Summary:**

In this November 1979 conversation, Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin confronted former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger over his increasingly anti-Soviet rhetoric and alignment with Republican hardliners, which Dobrynin criticized as opportunistic and damaging to détente. Kissinger defended his shift as a tactical response to domestic political pressures and his ambitions to return to government, while still insisting he valued stable Soviet-American relations. The discussion also touched on US fears of instability in Saudi Arabia, the strategic implications of Soviet and Cuban involvement in Africa, and Kissinger's belief in the need for a tacit division of global influence between the superpowers.

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from the journal  
of A.F. Dobrynin

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION  
with former US Secretary of State KISSINGER

23 November 1979

During a long conversation, I specifically criticized his opportunistic behavior over the past year, his slide into the position of right-wing circles in the United States, and the actual rejection of everything that he himself carried out and defended in the field of Soviet-American relations in those years when he was Secretary of State. In conclusion, I asked him how one could explain such a metamorphosis and what he is actually achieving in now speaking essentially from an anti-Soviet position.

Kissinger made every excuse, arguing that his basic views on the primacy of Soviet-American relations have not changed, but that, they say, he must take into account the situation and mood in the country, including and especially in the context of the unfolding election contest.

Playing it straight, Kissinger said that he was now quite active in the Republican Party, hoping that eventually he could return to government as Secretary of State if the Republicans won. According to him, such a possibility exists if any of the current Republican candidates come to power, with whom he seeks to maintain smooth relations so as not to antagonize any of them - with the exception of Reagan, to whom, although he is not opposed, he is sure that Reagan would not take him into government.

In this regard, Kissinger argued that, while supporting Republican candidates, he should also take a position as close as possible to the basic philosophy of the Republican Party. At the same time, he sought to present the matter in such a way that his current speeches, which may not be liked in Moscow, are mainly tactical in nature, and that after the Republicans come to power he will strive to return US foreign policy to a familiar channel [*v ruslo priznaniya*] - as it was "in his years" - the main priority being for Soviet-American relations.

Capitalizing in every possible way on his critical attitude towards the current Administration and on the fact that, they say, under the Republicans it will be easier to build Soviet-American relations, in this connection Kissinger criticized Carter and Brzezinski, who, according to him, had moved away from the above central direction by making relations with the Soviet Union "one of several directions" of American foreign policy and became too carried away with courting Third World countries, not thinking about the consequences, but hoping that these countries would take their side. Iranian events have shown the failure of this policy. In essence the Carter Administration "lost" the Soviet-American direction, without receiving much positive in return in any other areas.

In a plan clearly aimed at us, Kissinger also criticized the Administration's "policy of

petty pin-pricks" with respect to the Soviet Union, including on the Chinese issue, instead of conducting a "by and large" frank exchange of views with the USSR on the most important issues of international relations.

In the same spirit, Kissinger also criticized Carter for his preoccupation with human rights issues, with which he had confused US policy. A Republican administration, he said, will not engage in "such nonsense," and, as history shows, it will be easier for the Soviet Union to come to agreement with it on the main issues of relations, although, of course, the Republicans will take a fairly firm position on some of these issues.

In response to a direct question why - if he himself believes that Soviet-American relations should be the subject of special attention, as the key to the entire international situation - does he not speak about this publicly now, Kissinger argued that the indicated thesis remains the "subtext" of all his speeches, but that the situation in the country is changing and he cannot ignore this, especially in a pre-election year.

I frankly told him that even the "subtext" he indicated is now difficult to detect in his speeches; rather, it sounds like a completely different subtext. I added that, in my firm conviction, he was making a serious political miscalculation by playing at the situation. And we cannot and will not ignore his similar behavior.

In response to my criticism of his current essentially obstructionist position on issues of the ratification of SALT II, in the negotiations of which he himself played a leading role at one time, Kissinger denied the "impression among many" that he was against the Treaty. He himself, he said, is in favor of the Treaty, but seeing that very strong opposition to it in the Senate threatens a failure of ratification; he said, that he is maneuvering to obtain "the appearance or a minimum of concessions" from the Administration, but with a public showing of the "Republican flag" at the hearings, to then swing some of the Republican senators who can ultimately decide the outcome of the vote in the Senate.

I told Kissinger that only naive people could believe in the so-called appearance of concessions when he himself, for example, demanded that the Administration increase the military budget by more than 3%, thus participating in a campaign to increase the arms race. I brought up a recent incident when he, along with Senator [Sam] Nunn, at a closed meeting of congressional leaders with Secretary of Defense [Harold] Brown, persistently sought an increase in the military budget from the Administration as the price for agreeing to support the ratification of SALT II.

Kissinger did not deny all this and began to say that in this area he, they say, sincerely believes that in recent years the military power of the Soviet Union has increased so much that the United States needs to "not lag behind" in order not to lose its positions in the world. He argued, for example, that according to information he has received from the Carter Administration, the current correlation in Europe in the area of intermediate-range nuclear missile weapons is 3 to 1 in favor of the Soviet Union and that even after the modernization of these weapons within NATO, the advantage is still the same, they say, and will remain with the Soviet Union, although not so significant.

In response to our estimation of the actual state of affairs in this matter that I cited (taking into account American forward-based bases, etc.), Kissinger limited himself to only the remark that he is now "not in government [*ne u vlasti*]" and operates, they say, only with the information that is given to him by the current Administration.

Kissinger also spoke at length on his favorite topic, that the "use" by the Soviet Union in Angola, Ethiopia, etc. is causing and will continue to cause quite serious damage to Soviet-American relations. I, he said, will continue to oppose this, as I did at the last stage of my official tenure as Secretary of State.

Regarding the prospects for Soviet-American relations, Kissinger said that he sees the main danger for these relations under the Carter Administration in the complete absence of any elements of trust between Moscow and Washington, which, in his opinion, still existed during the Nixon Administration. This could lead to an unexpected major crisis in relations between the USSR and the US.

For example, he is worried about this possibility. The regime in Saudi Arabia, based on the dominance of the royal family, can be overthrown at any time as a result of a

palace coup carried out by one of the young officers of the palace guard. As a result, a leader like Gaddafi could unexpectedly come to power there. He might turn to the Soviet Union for help by putting forward a program of appropriate social transformation in Saudi Arabia. The United States, fearing the loss of much-needed Saudi oil, might also intervene. An international conflict will arise.

Both our governments, Kissinger argued, should have thought out in advance the line of "most rational" behavior in such "explosive situations," but in the absence of appropriate contacts between both capitals now, this is hardly possible.

I told him that the scenario he had drawn was based on the same premise: the US interferes in the internal affairs of another country. What kind of "trust" is he talking about?

Kissinger said that, without fear of being called a cynic, he can frankly say in a personal conversation that he is in favor of some kind of division of spheres of influence between the USSR and the US, if not in the literal sense, then in terms of a "definite but clear understanding" between Moscow and Washington about their spheres of interests. This requires a confidential dialogue between them, which, in his opinion, does not exist, but the importance of which, they say, is now well understood, for example, by the Chinese in their relations with the United States, actively developing such a secret dialogue with Washington on their own initiative. In his words, when receiving leading American figures in Beijing, the Chinese devote the first half or two-thirds of all conversations to an exchange of views on the general international situation and its various aspects, and only then move on to bilateral US-Chinese questions, trying to reach agreement in principle and leaving detailed study of these issues to a lower level.

I noted that his own admiration - without any criticism - is well known to all the Chinese people, at least from his just published memoirs. I expressed confidence, however, that history will make its own significant adjustments to his preconceived assessments of the Chinese direction and that the US itself will be convinced by its own example of the fallacy of its current approach to Beijing's policy.

Kissinger immediately began to assert that from the long-term point of view, he also believes that Soviet-American relations have a good chance not only of aligning, but also of close mutual development, because in 15-20 years both the USSR and the US will most likely will face a powerful alliance between China and Japan.

When asked why, then, Washington should try to play the "Chinese card" right now if, in his own assessment, it is dangerous in the future for the US, Kissinger limited himself to the remark that this, they say, is, unfortunately, "the fate of history."

Kissinger doggedly maintained his defense of the former Shah's right to asylum in the US. He justified this by the fact that otherwise the US risks losing its allies, primarily in backward countries where there are still regimes with kings or sultans. How will the king of Saudi Arabia look at his relations with Washington in the future if he knows that he will not be able, if necessary, to seek asylum in the United States, he asked.

He contrasted this with the "consistent and purposeful policy of Moscow," which has always and everywhere protected the leaders of the Communist Parties and not only provided them with refuge, but has also taken the most active measures to rescue them from prison and to come to the USSR, as was the case, for example, with Corvalan, Secretary of the Communist Party of Chile. Carter needs to learn loyalty and fidelity to its allies and friends from Moscow, he said.

In general, from the conversation with Kissinger it was clear that he remains an unprincipled politician, a political chameleon, caring only about remaining visible in the political life of the US and to again return to government [*priyti k vlasti*], guided by purely opportunistic considerations as events unfold.

At the same time, of course, we must admit that his authority and popularity within the US are largely preserved, and his influence in the Republican Party is growing. The Carter Administration itself and the President personally avoid conflicts with Kissinger publicly, although behind the scenes they disparage him with abusive language.

Kissinger, one senses, does not want to burn bridges with respect to us, understanding the entire importance of Soviet-American relations, despite all his pre-election balancing act. It is significant that at the end of the conversation he

noted that he was thinking about a possible trip to the Soviet Union in April, "if the door there is not already closed to him."

I, of course, did not get involved in the discussion of this topic, noting that April was still far away and adding, as if in a half-joking but quite serious form, that we would still have to see how he would behave in the remaining time and whether he would close this door himself.

SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN THE US  
(A. DOBRYNIN)