to its supporters. David Rockefeller told me the president struck his fellow bankers as “obsessed by the idea of a global contest with the Russians,” and that Nixon believed we were challenging him “in all conceivable ways.” Henry Ford II, whom I had first met when he escorted me along his Detroit assembly line in 1964, came to dinner en route to Moscow where he would discuss building a plant on the Kama River—only to discover upon his return that the project had been vetoed by the administration, probably because of the harsh Soviet reaction to the U.S. invasion of Cambodia.

I was also told by Harriman that Kissinger and Nixon felt ill-used by our military support of Egypt, worried by Soviet naval activity around Cuba, and persuaded in any case that a tough stand against Moscow would not harm the Republicans’ prospects in the November congressional elections, even though they had no intention of provoking a direct confrontation. In sum, the administration was not yet genuinely interested in making Soviet-American relations a major foreign policy priority in 1970. The clear evidence of this was the fact that Kissinger was almost completely inactive in the area, except for SALT. Nor was the confidential channel fully in operation yet.

II. Summit Foothills

Gromyko and Andropov Want to Drive a Hard Bargain

On the eve of the New Year of 1971, there was growing irritation and impatience with Nixon in Moscow. Two years of his presidency had already passed, but nothing was clear about his intentions toward the Soviet Union. Gromyko and Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB, drafted a memorandum on Soviet-American relations for discussion by the Politburo. The authors did not then hold out much hope that our relations would improve soon, let alone turn friendly.

The memo warned that during its first two years Nixon’s presidency had produced only idiosyncracies and tactical delays in foreign policy, and no major changes from its Democratic predecessors. “The confrontation between the United States and the USSR will apparently cover a historically long period,” the memo said. It emphasized that the Nixon administration “must realize the need for the West to reckon with the interests of the Soviet Union,” and it enumerated the objectives of our foreign policy. These included maintaining Soviet military capabilities to convince American ruling circles that it is in the most vital national interest of the United States to conduct its foreign policy to avoid the dangers of a direct clash with the Soviet Union. At the same time Gromyko and Andropov proposed that we press for peaceful coexistence with the United States and emphasized the necessity of reaching agreements that served our interests.

The Soviet leadership approved the policy in the belief that Nixon wanted a summit meeting to enhance his political fortunes for his reelection campaign the following year. They also wanted one because, as the memo said, it was “in our long-term interest to demonstrate the possibility of a further development of Soviet-American relations in spite of their inherent fluctuations.” Thus the Politburo had made a major decision to become more actively involved with Nixon.

As ambassador, I had already been thinking along these lines for several months and recommended that Moscow follow that same course toward the summit. Andropov, who also headed the powerful Soviet intelligence services
abroad, had by that time become very active in foreign policy. Gradually he became a cosponsor with Gromyko of major foreign policy proposals introduced to the Politburo. Gromyko did not mind this at all, because it assured approval of his most important suggestions. Their personal relations were not bad, because Andropov was cautious enough not to interfere in Gromyko's everyday management of foreign policy, and Gromyko for his part respected Andropov's growing influence in the Politburo.

The Politburo's policy shift in a curious way coincided with Nixon's own political scenario for the campaign. He began to show a renewed interest in our relations and in the possibility of a summit meeting. Vietnam remained a burning problem, so improving relations with the Soviet Union was even more vital for the president.

Kissinger in turn became more active in our relations, especially in his exchanges with me on strategic arms limitations and the arrangements for the summit meeting. The confidential channel became increasingly busy. The Politburo thought that Nixon's desire to secure Moscow's consent for a summit would push the administration to search for new agreements on Berlin and take a more definite stand on the strategic arms talks. Gromyko and Andropov did not know for sure but guessed it was worth a try. I was also guessing, but to a lesser extent because I favored a summit, and probably more so than Gromyko.

In any case, their strategy not only helped secure an agreement on Berlin but also unfroze the restrictions that had so annoyed Henry Ford II on U.S. help for the construction of the Kama River automobile plant (although by that time Ford had lost interest). There were some formal steps promoting bilateral relations, a modernization of the Soviet-American hot line, and an agreement to limit the risks in case of nuclear accidents, both signed later by Gromyko and Rogers in Washington. And of course, the agreement to hold the summit in May of 1972, and in Moscow.

On January 9, 1971, I met with Kissinger who had flown specially from Nixon's vacation home at San Clemente on the Southern California coast. He wanted me to communicate the president's ideas to the Soviet leadership. Nixon, he said, shared the Soviet leadership's belief that our relations left a great deal to be desired, and he now felt he could work full force on improving them during the year of 1971, before turning his attention to the elections.

Kissinger then touched upon the major issues to be discussed: the Berlin problem (the president suggested a strictly confidential exchange of views through our direct channel), the Middle East (the president proposed to resume the bilateral dialogue to reach a settlement), and strategic arms limitations (the president suggested first to agree on defensive weapons and then prepare an agreement on offensive arms). Kissinger particularly emphasized the importance of a summit meeting for all these issues.

Then he came forth with a rather "delicate request": the American side strongly hoped that if the Soviet government had any major proposals on international issues, they would make them directly to the U.S. government and not through Senator Edmund Muskie, a Democrat from the state of Maine who was shortly to visit Moscow and was already planning to run against Nixon the following year.

I got the impression that Nixon and Kissinger had held an important discussion in San Clemente and they agreed on the need to resuscitate the Soviet-American dialogue and move toward the summit. At any rate, his message to me surely represented a serious first attempt to do so. I reported my conclusions to Moscow, recommending that we react positively. Electoral considerations were already at work!

The response arrived quite promptly. On January 23 I informed Kissinger that Moscow would agree to a summit and suggested the second half of that summer. The president's agenda was acceptable, with the understanding that it would include Europe, West Berlin, strategic arms limitation, a possible settlement in the Middle East, and the war in Indochina. In short, the Soviet response immediately put our relations for the year on a practical footing.

Five days later Kissinger told me the president agreed with the Soviet suggestions but said it was "physically difficult" for the two of them to handle simultaneous preliminary talks on three major problems: West Berlin, nuclear arms, and the Middle East. Kissinger then proposed that "for the time being" we concentrate our efforts in the confidential channel on the first two issues. He was generously leaving the Middle East to Rogers and the State Department, knowing perfectly well this was a hard nut to crack. We had no objection to this division of labor.

**SALT, ABM, and the Summit**

From their very beginning in November of 1969 and during 1970, our delegations carried on lengthy and complicated discussions on SALT in Helsinki and Vienna without evident success. SALT negotiations involved two different types of strategic forces: offensive nuclear arms systems and defensive antiballistic missile systems. The Soviet side initially introduced—but Washington declined to discuss—the American aircraft based in Europe and on aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean and North Pacific. These were the so-called forward-based systems that could reach our territory on U.S. fighter-bombers. Eventually these were discussed in the later rounds of talks, which began after SALT I was signed in 1972.
The impasse developed over offensive arms, which involved a wide variety of weapons and was complicated by the different nuclear force structures of the two countries. Ours depended strongly on land-based heavy missiles, while the West had a "triad" of land, air, and submarine-based missiles. Moreover, more sophisticated types of missiles were being developed, so military technology was running ahead of the protracted negotiations. For example, the broad public discussion for some time left out of the count the important question of missiles with multiple warheads, or MIRVed missiles, which, once at the target area, could launch their warheads at a number of separate and more specific targets. This subject was not at first on the table for negotiations, although MIRV and ABM systems actually were two crucial issues in SALT I.

The American side was the first to achieve a technological breakthrough in MIRV and the Nixon administration tried to preserve its advantage for as long as possible. By 1970 the United States had MIRVs ready for deployment whereas the Soviet Union had not even begun testing them. So the Americans did not exert themselves to discuss MIRVs during the SALT talks and definitely were not eager to ban them. In a private talk Kissinger bantered with me, "Well, you are very smart indeed to suggest banning something you don't have and we already do."

So Moscow formally raised the question of MIRVs when the American side began to seek definite limitations on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), including our heavy missiles, because a straightforward missile count without MIRVs would give them a clear advantage. The American agreement to count MIRVs was then rather skillfully hidden under the cover of a condition which the Nixon administration (and Kissinger especially) knew Moscow could not accept: a link between a ban on MIRVed missiles and on-site inspections to verify the ban. As expected, the proposal was immediately rejected by the Soviet side. Besides, the American proposal to reduce the number of ICBMs was couched in such terms that would have significantly reduced the principal Soviet heavy missile systems but not those of the United States.

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America's confidence in its technical superiority played a major role in the whole story of nuclear disarmament. From the MIRV controversy all the way to Ronald Reagan's favorite dream of a Star Wars defense, it is easy to trace an American desire to acquire some form of ultimate weapon guaranteeing superiority over the Soviet Union, however illusory that might have been. The whole history of the arms race showed that neither side would let the other pull ahead. MIRVed missiles lasted as an American advantage for only a couple of years, when the Soviet Union built its own.

The American refusal to ban such missiles was a major mistake throughout the SALT negotiations. The failure to realize the need to work for mutual renunciation of MIRV during Nixon's presidency proved to be yet another missed opportunity in curbing the Soviet-American strategic arms race at an early stage. No such effort was made by the Nixon administration. It was not until the early 1990s—twenty years later—that both governments came to realize this in their 1993 agreement, to scrap MIRVed missiles as part of the overall strategic arms reductions by both countries.

Because a limitation on MIRVed warheads or an outright ban would have been opposed by the Pentagon and its political supporters on the right, Nixon and Kissinger gradually decided to seek curbs on ABM systems only. At the same time, the White House was looking for some agreement symbolizing its readiness to continue seeking limitations on strategic arms. An impasse developed in the SALT negotiations in Helsinki and Vienna, and the confidential channel became correspondingly more active in preparing arms agreements for the summit.

On behalf of Moscow I proposed to Kissinger that we separate out the issue of antiballistic missiles and, as an initial step, concentrate our efforts on it in order to conclude an agreement that same year, meanwhile deferring the deadlocked issue of offensive arms control. But Kissinger wanted some kind of offensive missile agreement, and Llewlyn Thompson, who was a member of the American delegation to the SALT talks, told me that Nixon would not sign a separate ABM agreement without reaching at least a limited, even symbolic, SALT arrangement on offensive weapons. At least those were the instructions to the delegation.

The discussion about ABM systems also was not simple. Should they be outlawed completely or permitted to protect capitals, National Command authorities, and ICBM sites? The question became even more complex and confusing because of continuing disputes inside both governments. In Moscow, some members of the political leadership were prepared to discuss a zero option for ABM systems with the Americans. But most of the military brass opposed a total ban, arguing that a system was already under construction around our capital, although there was a technical argument against that: the system was imperfect and further construction would demand huge expenses. That left the Soviet leadership undecided.

The American side had its own disagreements and in any case misread the already confused Soviet intentions. As a result, after prolonged negotiations the zero option for ABM was dropped. What was finally worked out was an agreement giving each side the right to an ABM site protecting its capital and, if it wished, one of its ICBM bases. This was a grave mistake on both sides, because forswearing ABMs before they were built would have solved...
one of the most crucial disarmament problems. To understand what a major opportunity we had lost, suffice it to recall how the idea of an ABM system developed into Ronald Reagan's “Star Wars” program about a decade later.

In our private talks to construct a diplomatic framework for disarmament agreements politically acceptable to both sides, Kissinger and I reached "an understanding" that ultimately led to the idea of coupling ABMs to certain limitations on ICBMs, which then would be the subject of specific future negotiations. Both governments decided to formalize the results of our talks by exchanging confidential letters between Nixon and Kosygin, and during May Kissinger and I worked on the wording.

On May 20, 1971, the breakthrough was announced in Washington and Moscow. It was stated that the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to seek to work out an ABM agreement and certain measures to limit offensive strategic weapons. Precisely what that agreement and those limitations would be remained to be determined during further negotiations prior to the summit.

Again Rogers knew nothing about the numerous meetings between Kissinger and me to negotiate the agreement. He was deeply hurt when he was informed about the forthcoming announcement, and according to the memoirs of H. R. Haldeman, the president's chief of staff, he asked Haldeman, "Why didn't you tell me you were doing this? There's no need for me to be involved, but I do have to be informed."

Kissinger's SALT negotiators also were furious at him. They later accused him of selling them out to obtain a quick agreement to dress up the summit with, in their opinion, Nixon wanted badly. I cannot speak for them or the American side, but my personal impression was that both sides wanted to find the source of his information but did not succeed in uncovering it. In any case, the SALT negotiations continued, with Semenov still in charge of both delegations angrily felt that they had been deprived of the fruits of their work by the participants in the private channel. I can understand their anger, especially since they had been working so hard at their job.

The complex nature of these two-level negotiations is illustrated by one episode. In mid-May, I received an unexpected telephone call from Kissinger concerning the arrival in Washington of Gerard Smith, the American SALT delegation leader. Smith had submitted a memorandum to Nixon on a lengthy conversation he had held with Vladimir Semenov, head of the Soviet delegation as they were out boating alone on the Lake of Geneva. The confidential memorandum summed up Semenov's suggestions which, according to Smith, finally opened the way for agreement.

To the great surprise of the president and Kissinger, Semenov's suggestions in the memo covered the very points on which the president himself had exchanged views with the Soviet government through the confidential channel, of which Smith and his delegation were not supposed to have the slightest idea. Kissinger vehemently accused the Soviet side of neglecting the confidential channel and ignoring the president's eagerness to keep in touch personally with the Soviet leadership. The Soviet side, he said, preferred routine diplomatic channels although it was perfectly aware it could spring leaks which could make things difficult for both Nixon and Kissinger himself.

"We can just stop using the channel," he warned.

I replied that it was up to either party whether to use the channel, but I was sure this incident was based on a kind of misunderstanding or misconduct that could never be excluded in the difficult conditions of two-tier talks.

It turned out that Semenov, who held the post of deputy foreign minister, had learned from his friends in Moscow about the confidential channel and its work, and decided to take an initiative along the same lines, without of course revealing to anyone that he knew about the channel. He hoped to give Moscow a pleasant surprise with his improvisation and obtain permission to continue negotiations along those lines. Nothing of the kind happened. Moreover, Gromyko launched a secret investigation in Moscow to find the source of his information but did not succeed in uncovering it. In any case, the SALT negotiations continued, with Semenov still in charge of our delegation but without information on what passing through the confidential channel.

Evidently to encourage us to conduct negotiations on SALT, Kissinger informed me on May 24 about Nixon's decision to exempt wheat and other grain exported to the Soviet Union from the list of items requiring the Commerce Department's prior approval. At the same time they lifted another requirement, that half of all wheat supplies be carried by American ships (their shipping charges were higher than ours). In November the American government approved the sale of grain worth $136 million to the Soviet Union.

One final sensitive SALT question also needs clarification here, that of sea-launched or, more accurately, submarine-launched ballistic missiles. When Kissinger and I had first discussed the relationship between ABMs and a possible freeze on strategic missiles back in January of 1970, I asked him at once if sea-launched missiles were to be covered. He said the United States was prepared to accept both schemes. I stated, on my part, that the
As I was preparing to leave for the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress in Moscow was not until the end of 1971 that he realized it and tried, over our objections, or if he just concentrated his main efforts on so many other concerns, or if he just concentrated his main efforts on.

As a matter of fact, that understanding was still in effect on May 20, 1971, the day of the Soviet-American joint statement on our preliminary agreement on SALT. But, as it turned out later, only the Soviet side and Kissinger proceeded from this, because the Pentagon and other American negotiators at the official talks (not in the confidential channel) believed it important to cover SLBMs by an overall SALT agreement, since the United States had by that time achieved superiority in strategic submarines, while the Soviet Union was building its submarine fleet in a bid to catch up. In short, freezing submarine-launched missiles by official agreement would have benefited the United States rather than the Soviet Union, thus preserving American military superiority. That was why I first rejected the idea in my discussion of the subject with Kissinger.

I am not sure if Kissinger kept it all in his mind, which was burdened with so many other concerns, or if he just concentrated his main efforts on the limitation of land-based strategic missiles, which were believed to be the most dangerous weapons in the whole Soviet strategic arsenal. In any case, he did not attach due importance to sea-launched missiles at the initial stage. It was not until the end of 1971 that he realized it and tried, over our objections, to adjust his position. He managed to fill the gap to some degree only during his trip to Moscow in April 1972 during his talks with Brezhnev to prepare for the summit.

As a result of the visit, an agreement was reached to freeze the construction level of new missile-launching submarines. American historians regard that as Kissinger's major achievement. True enough, but one should not forget that in accepting the freeze, the Soviet side agreed to a ceiling which ensured it would also be able in due course to construct the number of submarine missile launchers it was already planning. Kissinger knew that, too. But both sides preferred not to publicize it.

**Maneuvering Toward the Summit: China in the Wings**

As I was preparing to leave for the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress in Moscow as a delegate, Kissinger said he had a message from Nixon for me to convey to the Soviet leadership. It was one of their typically delicate maneuvers.

Frankly speaking, said Kissinger, the president wanted Moscow to know that he found it difficult to see much definition in Soviet-American relations. The Soviet government had been pressing for a settlement on West Berlin during the previous two months, and while Nixon understood the importance of the issue, Kissinger said, the Soviet side had been rather sluggish on strategic arms limitation, something the president regarded as no less important. There also had been no Soviet reaction to his message in mid-February expressing concern over the increased activity servicing Soviet submarines in Cuban ports.

The president had a vague feeling—and maybe, Kissinger said, it was wrong—that "a shade of uncertainty" had arisen about the proposed summit. Nixon was still sure it could be useful if both sides reached an agreement on West Berlin by, say, July, and also wrapped up an ABM agreement at about the same time for signature at the summit. Finally, Nixon also offered the possibility of a European Security Conference that could be convoked at the summit to meet in 1972, and he was also ready to discuss the Middle East.

However informal in its presentation, this was an important message. Nixon was making it clear that he was ready for a Soviet-American summit in 1971—even before his trip to China—although many American historians see things otherwise and believe he played the China card to strengthen his hand at Moscow. The message also was undoubtedly designed to influence the Soviet leadership prior to the party congress, which would be discussing our relations with America. In fact, it was received favorably in the Kremlin and consolidated Brezhnev's desire to improve relations with the United States. But it was not enough to hasten the summit, which did not take place until 1972, because Moscow tried to force the United States to move substantially on West Berlin and SALT before the meeting. This tactic only helped precipitate Nixon's visit to China, something we were of course unaware of at that time and did not in the least expect.

The party congress was held from March 30 to April 9, 1971, and was an important event for the country and the party. The Soviet leadership knew that the country was in a difficult situation. The Soviet economy and living standards were stagnant. Famous dissidents were emerging, such as the physicist Andrei Sakharov and the author Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. Underground samizdat publications showed that discontent was growing among our educated classes. The sharp exacerbation of our relations with China and uncertainty in our relations with the United States led to greater military expenditures, which strained the national budget.

The party establishment gradually began to realize the need to satisfy the population's basic requirements more fully and to narrow the gap with
the West in technology and the economy itself. But it was not yet prepared to set about solving the country's domestic problems by offering a measure of political or economic liberalization. Dissidents were considered enemies of the regime, and authors who published their works abroad were subjected to reprisals. Nonconformity was still frowned upon. In short, our dogmatic domestic ideology remained unchanged.

But the realities of the rest of the world and the strains on our economy prompted the Soviet leadership to improve relations with the nations of Europe and the United States. Our foreign policy pronouncements were increasingly based on the idea of peaceful coexistence with these countries despite their different system. Within the Kremlin, these sentiments were consolidated by the dialogue with Nixon about holding a summit meeting. The party congress therefore was designed essentially to proclaim the party's peace program, and that was favorably received in the country.

The improvement of our relations with the United States was among our major priorities, although it was balanced by the usual criticisms of American foreign policy in various regions and declarations about "the ever deepening crisis of capitalism." But for the first time, the summary report by the party's general secretary also emphasized the production of consumer goods as a priority in the new five-year plan. He also stressed that the Soviet Union would continue to favor better relations with the United States.

Support from the party congress itself made him feel that he had more freedom of action in foreign policy, and particularly with respect to arranging his first meeting with Nixon.

After the Congress the Politburo met to hear me deliver Nixon's message and discuss our response. I expressed the view that Nixon's conditions could form a good basis for a summit meeting, and Kosygin supported me. Some other Politburo members began to lean toward the same view. But Gromyko rather surprised me by insisting that we should take advantage of Nixon's eagerness for a summit by first solving the problem of West Berlin which, no matter how important it was for the Soviet union, "is passed from one American administration to another." Led by Brezhnev, most of the Politburo members agreed with Gromyko that "a meeting with Nixon can wait," especially against a background of the war in Indochina and the approaching presidential election in the United States—which of course was exactly why Nixon wanted the meeting.

Except for the handful involved in foreign affairs—Brezhnev, Gromyko, Kosygin, Andropov, and the representatives of the military—very few members of the Politburo knew much about America. Their views were limited mainly to what they read in Pravda and Izvestia, and their discussions of the subject sounded very much as though they could have been lifted from their columns. They received my telegrams but stayed away from the complicated issues I raised unless they were actually discussed at their meetings. For most Politburo members, America and foreign policy were not part of their domain; each had his bureaucratic territory and would not welcome an invasion from another member, so they acted accordingly in foreign territories that were not their own. They usually held the most orthodox views and rarely made concrete proposals of interest on their own. As a rule, they could be counted on to support the general secretary's proposals in foreign affairs (which were usually prepared by Gromyko).

In the West many believed that the general secretary of the Communist Party was a true dictator accountable to no one, and this was of course true for Stalin, but not his successors. Brezhnev was no exception. True, he was number one among the leadership, but even as first among equals he could not always impose his views on the other members of the Politburo. Each of them had a right to express his opinion on any subject on the agenda of the regular weekly meeting, which was usually held on Thursdays. Meetings could be called at any time to discuss urgent matters.

All meetings were held in the Kremlin in what was called the Politburo Room, a rather spacious but simple room with no touch of Kremlin splendor. Members would sit on both sides of a long table in a predetermined order, as in White House Cabinet meetings. At the head of the table sat the secretary general who presided. After he announced the item to be discussed, the floor was given to the member who had proposed the item or prepared it on behalf of the general secretary. A general discussion would follow, at times rather lengthy and lively, as was the case with the question of whether to have a meeting with Nixon in Moscow while he continued to bomb North Vietnam. Discussions were concluded and summarized by the general secretary. As a rule decisions were taken by consensus, and voting was extremely rare. If there was a strong division of opinion, the general secretary usually postponed the decision for the next meeting, which was a signal for him to meet privately in the interim behind the scenes with each of his colleagues to work out a compromise. A general secretary of course had many ways of persuasion to carry his ideas through the Politburo, but he was always careful not to antagonize the other members unnecessarily. After all, they could always revolt and replace him, as they did with Khrushchev.

On all important international issues the foreign minister—Gromyko, during most of my career—had to present a draft of our position for discussion and approval by the Politburo. To gather support, he usually discussed his suggestions with the general secretary and some influential
members of the Politburo beforehand. Sometimes, the Politburo invited ambassadors to report on the situation in their respective countries, which I did many times.

When Brezhnev planned a visit abroad or any negotiations with foreign leaders, he or the Foreign Ministry presented to the Politburo for its approval a written draft of basic instructions which he would follow. This draft was always drawn up with Gromyko’s assistance. While Brezhnev had some room for maneuver, essentially he had to follow the guidelines approved by the Politburo. Afterward, the general secretary always presented, orally or in writing, his report to the Politburo for its deliberations. Other Politburo members receiving foreign visitors or negotiating abroad followed the same procedure.

American presidents had much more freedom in the conduct of foreign affairs. They were not obliged to tell anyone the details of their meetings with foreign leaders. Of course the general secretary of the party also had more than one way to pursue his policies, though no decision of substance could be taken without Politburo approval.

When the Politburo meeting was over, Brezhnev told me in private that although the decision of the majority not to agree right away on a summit had to be respected, I was on the right track toward a summit and should “proceed along these lines.” He added, “The summit is most likely to be held next year.” He confided to me that he would very much like to visit America and hoped to do so after Nixon’s visit to the Soviet Union. He commanded me lightly and in our usual friendly exchange “to continue on the same course.”

For me, the party congress marked a step in my career. With the increasing importance of our relations with the United States I had to conduct talks regularly with the highest officials in Washington; I was therefore advanced from alternate to full membership of the Central Committee.

On my return to Washington I met with Kissinger in the White House on April 23 to report on the events in Moscow. They had of course already heard of Brezhnev’s public speech, and Kissinger said that the president welcomed his point about pursuing a constructive approach to our relations. I informed him that the Soviet government was ready to exchange letters with the president on limiting ABM systems, and Kissinger commented, “This is a serious step toward an agreement.”

Then I proceeded to the question of a summit. On instructions from Moscow, I told him that President Nixon had already been advised of the Soviet government’s essentially positive attitude, but I voiced “my serious personal doubts” about the meeting unless we could first reach an agreement on West Berlin. Kissinger was patently surprised and reacted rather nervously. He vehemently declared he could not possibly accept an ultimatum from the Soviet side making a Berlin agreement a price for the summit; that would leave the president no alternative but to give up the summit.

I told him he had no reason to be indignant. It was anything but an ultimatum. The public in many countries, including our own, would be puzzled at a Soviet-American summit if tension still persisted around West Berlin. I knew perfectly well why Kissinger was disgruntled, but I was bound by the Politburo decision. I was not surprised later that our tough response on Berlin made Nixon set his political sights on visiting China before he would visit the Soviet Union. That was a direct result of Gromyko’s Politburo proposal.

Four days later I met again with Kissinger at his request. He said the president had instructed him to discuss three questions: the summit, West Berlin, and SALT.

On the summit, he said Nixon had long noted the hesitation of the Soviet leadership, and whatever Moscow’s private reasons, he no longer felt entitled to raise the question of a definite date of a summit—nor could he accept any linkage between the summit and another problem (hinting at West Berlin), although he was prepared to discuss any other world issues. So he was leaving open the question of a summit indefinitely, although he was prepared to discuss it again when Moscow was ready.

As to West Berlin, Kissinger said that unfortunately, the pace of negotiations appeared to be much slower than expected but the president was prepared to continue his efforts to seek an agreement. Kissinger himself had discussed matters with Egon Bahr, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s personal assistant for East-West questions, who wanted an agreement. (Bahr was particularly helpful in improving relations between Bonn and Moscow.)

It took Kissinger several days to cool down and deny, with Nixon’s knowledge, speculation in the American media that the administration was improving its relations with Beijing for anti-Soviet motives. China and the United States were already warming up to each other through an unofficial process of exchanging delegations and sports teams, which was known as “ping-pong diplomacy” for the first such team to visit the United States. It looked like the White House was trying to dampen any negative effect of its overtures to Beijing on Soviet-American relations, but in no way did it refuse to stop playing the diplomatic game with us.

On June 10, Kissinger invited me to a very informal meeting with him alone at Camp David, the president’s retreat in the mountains north of Washington. It was a most unusual and friendly gesture toward a foreign am-
bassador. We two flew there by helicopter. Kissinger said that on the president's instruction—Nixon was not there at the time—he would like to review our relations in specific areas without haste. We talked for six relaxed hours and the conversation was marked by a positive attitude on almost all issues. In conclusion Kissinger again raised the question of Nixon's prospective visit to the Soviet Union. I had felt all along that this whole tour d'horizon was designed to lead the conversation to its principal subject, the summit meeting.

Kissinger said the president was ready to discuss concrete moves by both sides in Europe in order to "start untying" European problems. Kissinger went on to stress the importance attached by the president to the Middle East and wanted it moved up on the agenda so he and Brezhnev could discuss it without the presence of other Americans (he even preferred to have only a Soviet interpreter). If such a frank conversation resulted in a strictly confidential agreement with the Soviet leadership, Kissinger said, the president would find ways and means to keep his side of the bargain without accounting to anyone.

Unfortunately, Moscow failed to take advantage of Nixon's interest in finding a mutually acceptable first step toward a solution. It was a time of opportunity because Washington was concerned about Soviet arms supplies to the Arabs. We had just signed a Treaty of Friendship with Egypt and continued to supply Syria with combat aircraft and surface-to-air missiles; we also sent military advisers. But our excessive connection with the Arab countries prevented us from pursuing a more flexible policy in the Middle East and acting in concert with Washington.

In conclusion Kissinger asked me to inform the Soviet leadership about the projected date of Nixon's visit to Moscow, provided the Kremlin regarded such a visit as acceptable in principle. He said September would be the most suitable time (apparently, Nixon still hoped to arrange a summit in 1971, probably before his trip to Beijing). Another acceptable period would be between March and May of 1972.

For my part, I gave him our detailed proposals on West Berlin, which remained unsettled following negotiations in Berlin and an exchange in Bonn in connection with Brandt's visit to Washington. Kissinger commented that the negotiations held by the Soviet Union and the United States and Germany in Berlin were both crucial and confidential. Only three Americans were immediately involved in the matter: the president, Kissinger, and Kenneth Rush, the U.S. ambassador to Bonn who was trusted to be in the loop because he had been Nixon's law professor at Duke University. The State Department, including Secretary Rogers, had no idea about the confidential exchange and proceeded from the guidelines agreed upon by the four Western powers.

I then began hearing confidential reports of progress being made in negotiations with Willy Brandt on West Berlin from Kissinger and from the West German ambassador, Rolf Pauls, who informed me that Brandt had been told by Nixon that he was much more optimistic than on Brandt's last visit. The president based his optimism on the more positive foreign policy of the Soviet Union following the Communist Party Congress. But in all probability, progress in the Berlin talks was also the result of the implicit linkage with the summit that had been made at the secret meeting of the Politburo.

On the government's instructions, I visited President Nixon late in June to deliver the text and give him the details of a Soviet statement calling for a conference of the five nuclear powers to discuss the questions of nuclear disarmament. The president said he would carefully examine the proposal but said he wanted to make some frank but strictly confidential preliminary observations. He stressed that he wanted them brought to the notice of the Soviet government, but without their being recorded in the official exchange between the State Department and our Foreign Ministry.

"I don't want to appear cynical," Nixon said. "I am a realist as much as the Soviet leaders." But there were only two real nuclear powers in the world, he said, and they of course were the Soviet Union and the United States. The other three could bear no comparison in terms of nuclear potential, although they were going out of their way to boost their prestige and it would take them a long time to bridge the gap. Given this relationship, he suggested, wouldn't such a five-power conference turn out to focus on reducing the nuclear armaments of the two nuclear superpowers without seriously affecting the other three? Before even discussing a reduction of their own small nuclear arsenals, they could demand from the very outset that the nuclear potential of the Soviet Union and the United States be reduced to their level. Finally he suggested we continue the exchange through the confidential channel. To my mind, his arguments were sound.

The president then turned to Soviet-American relations. He believed there had been a certain improvement although not a very significant one. In a sense, our relations were entering a new important period of trials and opportunities, he said, and given good will on both sides, it would be possible to make headway before the United States focused on the election campaign in the middle of the next year.

"At present," the president continued, "I see two main priorities in our
relations in this particular period, that is, reaching agreements on West Berlin and SALT. There are other questions, like the Middle East, but this cannot be solved easily."

In the Middle East, he said Moscow and Washington should concentrate on preventing a new outbreak of armed hostilities. Then, with some visible hesitation, the president added that the Soviet leadership should know about his suggestions on "an important question" recently raised by Kissinger to the Soviet ambassador on his personal instructions (Nixon clearly meant the summit but avoided using the word). He hoped the Soviet leadership would devote as much attention to these suggestions as he devoted to Moscow's suggestions on other questions, including Berlin. On the whole, the president said in conclusion that he believed it would be possible "to achieve a breakthrough" in U.S.-Soviet relations during the months preceding the election campaign. I expressed my personal agreement.

We did not discuss relations with Beijing, which had begun to emerge as an important and newly vexing strand in geopolitics and a question of Washington's priorities between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The administration continued to hide its contacts with the Chinese. They were handled confidentially and at the highest level by Nixon and Kissinger. Only a limited circle of confidants was involved.

Nevertheless, a general discussion within the government was under way. Llewellyn Thompson, who had remained an adviser to the White House and the State Department, told me confidentially in mid-June that there had been a struggle within the American leadership, including the highest State Department officials, over American foreign policy priorities and their influence on American-Soviet relations.

There were basically two camps. He said one side leaned toward giving priority to agreements with the Soviet Union, arguing that this was justified by the role played by the Soviet Union and the United States in the world. The other view gave precedence to an opening to China—with which the United States had had little official contact and no formal relations at all since the Communists came to power in 1949. This camp believed China could help end the Vietnam war soon, partly by bringing pressure to bear upon the Soviet Union. They reasoned that Moscow would hardly choose to have tense relations with both Washington and Beijing. Thompson's impression, from his private conversations with the president, was that Nixon was trying to keep both opportunities open for the time being.

Kissinger went off to Asia shortly thereafter and on June 30 even called me in to talk about it. The trip was supposed to acquaint him with the rising tensions between India and Pakistan, and perhaps it did. But Pakistan turned out to be the jumping-off point for his secret visit to China, which was of course the principal goal of the journey. He kept silent about that.

While Kissinger was away, Moscow finally settled on a date for the summit in November or December, thus effectively postponing it until the end of the year. I delivered the message to Kissinger's deputy, Alexander Haig, who was demonstrably pleased by what he called "the good news" and said he would immediately report it to the president and Kissinger. The Soviet government, given the long history of unfriendly relations between the United States and China under the Communist government, had not even considered it a possibility of rapprochement between the two nations on the scale that was taking place in secret at that moment. No one was more surprised and confused than the Kremlin when it received the news of Nixon's plan to go to China even before, as it finally turned out, he would meet Brezhnev at the summit in Moscow.