MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:  President Ford
     Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State
     Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
     for National Security Affairs

DATE AND TIME:  Thursday - March 18, 1976
     9:35 - 10:15 a.m.

PLACE:  The Oval Office

Kissinger:  There is nothing in the Soviet letter [the Brezhnev letter
     of March 17]. They misled us all day long. Voronostov briefed the press
     that we could have an agreement in two months. He called me and said
     it didn't meet all our points but was positive. [He describes the letter.]
     They proposed going back to their January position as a basis.

President:  Their idea for reductions has appealed to me.

Kissinger:  We have two problems: How to handle the letter so it doesn't
     do damage next week; and how to conduct our affairs in the government.
     I think we are undermining detente. Except for Angola, I think the
     Soviets are getting a bum rap. I don't believe they have massively
     increased their forces. It is a gradual trend and will continue no matter
     what. They have been quiet in the Middle East. Only Angola was out
     of bounds.

     The next thing which will happen is the Democrats will say SALT has
     collapsed and we have ruined detente. The Democrats may seize the
     peace issue.

President:  Reagan hasn't made headway with his charges as long as we are
     at peace and moving. SALT is in our national interest. The question is how
     to proceed.

Kissinger:  We could have an NSC meeting late tomorrow. Hand out the
     letter, warn them against all leeway we want a proposal for the next
     step within two weeks.
Scowcroft: It will leak. I would suggest instead that you call in just the principals, show them the note, and tell them you want to think about next steps.

President: I think it should be principals only. Maybe just here in the office -- the three of us, Don, George, and George Bush.

Kissinger: I think I'd also.

President: Let's have a meeting late Friday with those people. Say it is not to distribute or it will leak. Say start a study the first of next week.

Kissinger: I agree with Brent. Say you just want to think about it over the weekend. Then have an NSC next Wednesday. I would even mention the option of suspending the talks. None of them will want to take the heat for it! [There is discussion of notifying Rumsfeld ahead of the others.]

You could then decide whether to go for one or not. If not, you could respond -- which I don't recommend -- or string out the talks.

President: I see the papers played a tough line on the Jewish meeting.

Kissinger: I don't see how you could have done anything else. [There is some discussion of the meeting, C-130's and transition quarter funding.]

Len Garment says these guys are fund raisers and they need a crisis every few months to keep the money coming in.

I disagree with Don. These guys will not be with you. If you get any, it will be with women like Klutznick.

President: I think that is right. And I think I would win in a confrontation.

Kissinger: I met with the Sonny Montgomery Committee. I was tough but I did say we would agree to open talks with North Vietnam. We could send a note through Paris and offer to start talks on outstanding issues -- at a low level.

President: Will it leak?

Scowcroft: Yes. We will have to tell the Committee and they will publish it.

Kissinger: We can say we are discussing MIA's.
Scowcroft: Will the Committee drop the embargo amendment in the Security Assistance Bill?

President: That should be a precondition. Let's go ahead, just with talks.

Kissinger: I think we should trim our sails a bit on the Soviet Union. We should keep clobbering them on Angola -- partly to keep the head on the Congress but . . .
K. There is nothing in a Saeb letter. They should
see all the files. No letter drafted a year
ago could have a separate in December. He said
we could have a separate in 2 days. The Saeb
was not said it didn't write a separate until
Christmas (Saeb was late).

They prepared going back to their June position
of 30 bases.

P. Their idea for deductions has received a lot of
money.

K. We have 2 preps: How to handle a letter
so it doesn't damage what we have,
to conduct negotiations in a good
\textit{spirit.}

I think we are receiving an estimate. Except
in Europe, I think we are getting a
\textit{liar.}

I don't believe they have seriously
weakened their forces. It is a公顷ideal
to maintain as another weapon. They have been
maintained in 1950. Only Anglo awards if
forces.

The worst thing is what happened in a
Danish with the death of the two
army officers. The Danes may strike
peace alone.

P. Roger's report made sending a 12-hour
long, as including 2 places and
might be in one hour interest. Question
is important.

K. We could have a NSE study for tomorrow.

Handwritten letter, more against size, and
may not report for part of it in 2 days.

I said there is something suggested that
good in part the principle, though the
write, and tell them you want to think about it

P I think it should be principal only. Maybe just have 2 or 3 others, Dan, Ben, George.

R I think Phil also

P let's have maybe 4 or 5 other people. Say 3 or 4 other people. I think we'll work on it. I would like to start a study club. May work on it.

K I agree of bent. Say you just want to think about it over a weekend. Then have an NSE meeting Wed. Decide some informal questions. Supposed to write up what you think will work and take a look at it. (Discussion about writing in Dan ahead)

R you could then decide whether to go from a risk to, you would respond with a risk of engineering or something of the sort with a talk.

P love the paper and agreed a tough line on a zero

K I don't see how you could have done anything else.

C (Sewell discussion of - 0, 0, 19 - 70)

C have some used those paper and find some new ones. The goal is to raise some money for some

K discussion of Dan. Three years will not be 5. If you get any it will be 5 years or more like

P I think that is right. And I think I could win

K Grant of George. Montgomery wants. I was thinking that I did say you would agree to open books if not. We could make notes on him.
Take an extra意义 time - at lunch
P will it be??
S. yes. We need some to talk about - they will
finish
K. We can start breaking 11.45.
S. With a short dry or maybe short admiration see.
are li? 
P. That should be a poinchal, lots of adverbs, first of tables
K. I think we should turn over control but as
S: U. We should keep adding forms and growth
potentially keep a habit a long - but