

December 1, 1976
**Ambassador A.F. Dobrynin's Conversation with
Averell Harriman**

Citation:

"Ambassador A.F. Dobrynin's Conversation with Averell Harriman", December 1, 1976, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Russian Foreign Ministry archives, Moscow; translation by Mark H. Doctoroff. <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/112013>

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Embassy of the USSR in the USA Washington, D.C.

Top secret
Copy No. 1

From the Journal
of DOBRYNIN, A.F.

RECORD OF THE CONVERSATION
with A. HARRIMAN

December 1, 1976

On December 1 Harriman came to visit me.

I. He said that he had met with J. Carter on Monday, November 29, at his (i.e. Carter's) home in the city of Plains (state of Georgia). As had been agreed, he, Harriman, had brought to Carter's attention the messages which had been brought from Moscow on behalf of L.I. Brezhnev,¹ as well as other messages which the Soviet Ambassador had expressed to him, Harriman, in accordance with the instruction to bring this information to Carter's attention.

The "President-elect" (Carter's current title) has authorized Harriman to convey the following answer for transmission to L.I. Brezhnev (Harriman read further from the text which he was holding):

Carter received the message from General Secretary L.I. Brezhnev and was grateful for the sentiments expressed in it. Personally, he highly values the fact that he received an expression of the views of the General Secretary. Although he does not have the possibility to conduct negotiations before assuming his position, he would like to declare that he shares the aspiration of the General Secretary for an improvement in relations between our two countries. He also recognizes the importance of mutual limitations in nuclear weapons and of bringing the arms race to a halt.

Mr. Carter often expressed these sentiments during the recent presidential election campaign, and he thinks that the majority of Americans agree with his desire to limit the nuclear weapons in our two countries and to stop further proliferation of nuclear capability among other countries.

He notes with satisfaction that Mr. Brezhnev shares his point of view on the importance of cooperation between our two countries in the matter of taking measures against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

President-elect Carter expects as well the establishment of constructive relations in other areas to which Mr. Brezhnev had referred. With good will on both sides, President-elect Carter believes, progress can be made in the matter of cooperation between the USA and the USSR, which will strengthen peace in the whole world.

Harriman said further--continuing to read--that Carter is very satisfied with the tone of the General Secretary's message. Noting that before he assumes the post of President he is not in a position to conduct negotiations, Carter at the same time declared that when he receives the authority, he will quickly and insistently act to achieve an agreement on the limitation of strategic weapons. Carter added that he would like to be sure that limitations will be mutually advantageous and that the

relative power of the two sides will not be changed during the process of reductions. In addition he stressed that a means must be found to assure our peoples that the agreement will be fulfilled.

The current problems in the negotiations on the limitation of nuclear weapons are too technical for him to comment on at the present time, and he, Carter, cannot, it goes without saying, be bound by the past negotiations. At the same time he fully will take into account the work that has been done over the past two years.

Further Harriman said that Carter hopes that the negotiations on limiting strategic weapons will be concluded at a summit meeting, i.e. at a personal meeting between him, Carter, and L.I. Brezhnev.

Carter thinks that the negotiations which will begin after he assumes the post of President would be accelerated if it would be possible to maintain the practice, which had justified itself in the past, of dispatching at the decisive moment in the negotiations a special trusted representative of the President to set forth the President's proposals and thoughts personally to General Secretary L.I. Brezhnev.

Harriman further reported in confidence that Carter had asked him whether L.I. Brezhnev would accept an invitation if he, Carter, invites the General Secretary to come to the United States for the final stage of the negotiations and the conclusion of an agreement on the limitation of strategic weapons.

Harriman, in his words, had expressed to Carter his own opinion to the effect that he hopes that L.I. Brezhnev will accept such an invitation, insofar as there is already established a definite order of visits of the countries' leaders to each other for summit meetings, and it was now the President's turn to invite the General Secretary to the United States.

2. During the conversation with Harriman, in relation to his comments about J. Carter's attitude about strategic arms limitation negotiations, I inquired of Harriman whether he could not in a more detailed way set forth Carter's position on that question. In particular, I asked him what, concretely, did Carter have in mind when he publicly offered a proposal for a "freeze" in strategic weapons: within what temporal, quantitative, or qualitative framework was he operating.

Harriman said that he had asked that type of question in his conversation with Carter. However, Carter had answered him that for the time being he had on that issue only ideas and convictions of a general character which seemed important to him, but he still had not precisely formulated comprehensive, integrated positions.

He intends to formulate such a position when he names his chosen candidates to the posts of Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Aide to the President for National Security Affairs, whom he would, as one of his highest priorities, instruct to work out this position, which would encompass the complex political and technical aspects of the entire problem.

I directed Harriman's attention to that point in the thoughts of Carter which he had transmitted today where (Carter) had said that he could not be bound by past strategic arms limitation negotiations. I said that an approach like that is incomprehensible, if it is fraught with serious complications for future negotiations. All previous negotiations had been conducted on behalf of the United States, of the country as a whole and the arrival of a new President should not mean breaking off everything positive that had been achieved before him. I reminded Harriman that I had pointed this out to him at our previous meeting, when, in accordance with instructions certain considerations from Moscow had been expounded to him for

transmittal to Carter.

Harriman said that he had recalled this when he was speaking to Carter, and had specially directed his attention to that circumstance.

Carter had answered him, Harriman, that he understands this point, and that he had therefore included in his responding thoughts to L.I. Brezhnev the comment that he will take the work that has been done at the SALT negotiations over the last two years fully into account. However, at the same time, he, Carter, would like to reserve for himself the right to express certain possible new thoughts or correctives which might occur to him in the context of finishing up a final agreement, especially if they might promote the resolution of the remaining disputed issues. In principle he wants to reserve for himself such a possibility.

3. During the conversation Harriman underlined that Carter is very interested in the question of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, which along with the question of limitation of strategic arms will be a priority in his plans regarding negotiations with the Soviet Union after he assumes the post of President.

He, Carter, is very worried by the spread of nuclear technology around the world. And although many chances had already over the past years been missed, there is still, in his opinion, time to take certain joint measures to put a brake on this process. As on the question of limitation of strategic weapons, so far Carter has no more concrete thoughts on this issue. In Harriman's words, Carter himself said that the details of his position still need to be worked out.

Ambassador of the USSR in the USA

[signature]

/A. DOBRYNIN/