

Russian Agent Reportedly Asked U.S. Diplomat About China Attack

AP Associated Press 2/19/78
What, the KGB agent asked, would the U.S. attitude be if the Soviet Union launched a preemptive nuclear strike against China?

That question, put to an American diplomat over lunch in Washington in August, 1969, drew an immediate and unofficial response.

Such an attack, diplomat William Stearman told the Soviet secret police agent, Boris Davydof, would represent a serious threat to world peace.

Stearman, an expert in communist activities in Indochina, reported the incident to his superiors at the State Department and it was passed on from there to then-president Nixon.

A reliable source who asked not to be named gave an account to the Associated Press.

The Soviet attack never came off.

H.R. (Bob) Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, provided his own account in his book, "The Ends of Power," with-

out identifying the KGB agent, who was assigned to the Soviet embassy here, and Stearman.

According to Haldeman, the Soviets suggested that the United States join in a "surgical strike" against China. The AP's source dismissed that aspect of Haldeman's account as inaccurate. Former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger has also disputed the account.

Tensions at the time were at a peak between the Soviet Union and the Chinese, once close communist allies. Armed skirmishes had rippled along the Ussuri River border.

Eventually, Nixon sent Kissinger, then his national security adviser, to Peking on a secret mission that led to the first serious diplomatic contact between the United States and China in a quarter century.

Liaison offices were opened in the two capitals, but full relations have not yet been established.