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Nixon, Kissinger, and the Madman Strategy during Vietnam War

Nixon Wanted the "Other Side" to Think He and Kissinger "Might be Crazy"; Signalled Moscow and Hanoi By Pushing "So Many Chips in the Pot" to Suggest He "Might Really Go Further" Even to Nuclear Use

New Book Discloses Top Secret Consideration by Nixon White House of Nuclear Options against North Vietnam in September 1969

White House Ordered Secret Mining Exercises as Threat Signal, Later Uncovered by Walter Pincus When He Was a Senate Investigator

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By William Burr and Jeffrey P. Kimball

For more information, contact:

William Burr at [202/994-7000](tel:2029947000) or nsarchiv@gwu.edu Jeffrey Kimball at [513/523-3640](tel:5135233640) or jpkimball@miamioh.edu

Washington, D.C., May 29, 2015 - President Richard Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger believed they could compel "the other side" to back down during crises in the Middle East and Vietnam by "push[ing] so many chips into the pot" that Nixon would seem 'crazy' enough to "go much further," according to newly declassified documents published today by the National Security Archive (www.nsarchive.gwu.edu).

The documents include a 1972 Kissinger memorandum of conversation published today for the first time in which Kissinger explains to Defense Department official Gardner Tucker that Nixon's strategy was to make "the other side ... think we might be 'crazy' and might really go much further" - Nixon's Madman Theory notion of intimidating adversaries such as North Vietnam and the Soviet Union to bend them to Washington's will in diplomatic negotiations

Nixon's and Kissinger's Madman strategy during the Vietnam War included veiled nuclear threats intended to intimidate Hanoi and its patrons in Moscow. The story is recounted in a new book, *Nixon's Nuclear Specter: The Secret Alert of 1969, Madman Diplomacy, and the Vietnam War*, co-authored by Jeffrey Kimball, Miami University professor emeritus, and William Burr,

who directs the Archive's Nuclear History Documentation Project. Research for the book, which uncovers the inside story of White House Vietnam policymaking during Nixon's first year in office, drew on hundreds of formerly top secret and secret records obtained by the authors as well as interviews with former government officials.

With Madman diplomacy, Nixon and Kissinger strove to end the Vietnam War on the most favorable terms possible in the shortest period of time practicable, an effort that culminated in a secret global nuclear alert in October of that year. Nixon's *Nuclear Specter* provides the most comprehensive account to date of the origins, inception, policy context, and execution of "JCS Readiness Test" - the equivalent of a worldwide nuclear alert that was intended to signal Washington's anger at Moscow's support of North Vietnam and to jar the Soviet leadership into using their leverage to induce Hanoi to make diplomatic concessions. Carried out between 13 and 30 October 1969, it involved military operations around the world, the continental United States, Western Europe, the Middle East, the Atlantic, Pacific, and the Sea of Japan. The operations included strategic bombers, tactical air, and a variety of naval operations, from movements of aircraft carriers and ballistic missile submarines to the shadowing of Soviet merchant ships heading toward Haiphong. The Soviets noticed the alert, but no evidence emerged that it "jarred" them.