

December 8, 1959

**Copy of a Note from N. S. Khrushchev to the CPSU
CC Presidium about a Further Reduction of the USSR
Armed Forces**

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Summary:

Nikita Khrushchev outlines a proposal to the CPSU CC Presidium for a significant reduction in the USSR's armed forces by 1 to 1.5 million personnel, even without reciprocal actions from other countries. He argues that the Soviet Union's advancements in missile technology and nuclear capabilities ensure its defense without the need for a large standing army, thereby enhancing economic efficiency and bolstering international prestige. Khrushchev emphasizes that such unilateral disarmament would reduce Cold War tensions, undermine militaristic factions globally, and improve the Soviet Union's image as a proponent of peace. He suggests transitioning to a mixed system of professional and territorial (militia) forces to maintain readiness while lowering costs. The proposal aims to strengthen both domestic and international support for the USSR while showcasing the superiority of the socialist system. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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COPY OF A NOTE OF N. S. KHRUSHCHEV

to the CPSU CC Presidium about a further reduction of the USSR Armed Forces

8 December 1959

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CPSU CC PRESIDUM
AND CANDIDATE MEMBERS OF THE CPSU CC PRESIDUM

I would like to express some considerations about the further steps to fight for a lessening of international tension and a solution of the problem of reducing weapons and about disarmament.

The Soviet Union has won good positions in the international arena right now. The trip to the United States of America and our proposal at the United Nations about general disarmament was well received in the entire world and could not be simply rejected or ignored even by the reactionary circles of various countries. Even those who don't want to reduce tension and let alone, disarm, they too by virtue of such a sentiment of the broad circles of the population and a desire for détente and a reduction of armaments do not say [so] openly; obviously they will seek arguments under the pretense of playing for time in order to reject in so as to either drag out or wreck a decision about our proposals.

I think that right now we ought to use this situation in our favor which we have created in order to not be satisfied with the accomplishment which we have achieved, a good recognition and strong international position, and our leading role, the initiative which we will invariably keep for ourselves for several years.

I think that right now [we] ought to seek a further reduction of armaments in our country, even without conditions of mutuality from the other countries, and a considerable reduction of armed forces personnel. I think that it is possible to possibly cut by a million or million and a half men, but it is still necessary to consult and study with the Ministry of Defense. I think that such a considerable reduction would not undermine our defense capacity. But to come out with such a decision and carry it out, this would have great positive influence on the international situation and our prestige would grow immeasurably in the eyes of all peoples. This would be an irresistible blow to the enemies of peace and the instigators and supporters of the "Cold War".

Why do I consider this possible right now and not dangerous? Such an opinion of mine is based first on our having achieved a good position right now in the development of the economy of the Soviet Union; second, we have an excellent position with missile construction. Right now we, properly speaking, have an assortment of missiles to solve any missile problem of either a long-range or short-range battle, both "ground-to-ground", "air-to-ground", "air-to-air", nuclear missile submarines, etc. And in power of explosion we also have a good range. In addition, we have organized the series production of these missiles well. I won't list all these missiles in the note - those to whom they are relevant know, but when we discuss, we repeat, therefore I don't list [them] in the note, I can present [them] more specifically when we discuss [them].

Right now we have a broad range of missiles and in such quantity which can literally shock the entire world.. It is asked, why do we have such a terrible weapon - atomic, missile weapons, and we will have such a large army, which we have? This is irrational. We don't proceed from the position that we want war and are ourselves preparing to attack, but we are preparing for defense. If one proceeds from this, but we proceed from this so that our army can defend the country, repel enemies which are trying to attack our motherland or our allies when we have such strong weapons as missiles. Since as a matter of fact they serve this purpose. How can any country or group of countries in Europe attack us if we can literally wipe these countries off the face of the Earth with our atomic and hydrogen weapons and with the delivery of our missiles to any point of the world?

Accordingly, if we do not take steps right now in the direction of a reduction of the

armed forces, but pass all this, as has already been done, to a decision of the Committee of Ten, having good and active positions from our side, this would narrow them down, our capabilities. For right now they will send our proposals to the labyrinth of a commission, there will be many discussions, speeches, and words, there will be exercises in wordsmithing, and thereby our initiative on this question will be reduced.

If, for example, right now we make a decision about a reduction of our armed forces by a million or a million and a half men and present appropriate arguments, this will be a considerable step forward. I think that conditions are fully ripe to tell you about this. Yes, we have already talked about this: both in my report which was made, and in other of our statements. We have more than once said that our ideological disputes with the capitalist world will not be resolved by war, but by economic competition. Accordingly, we have even further pressed our enemies, the imperialist countries, with our proposals and measures for a further reduction of our armed forces. Some comrades may object that we, they say are reducing weapons, but the enemy is not reducing [his weapons]. But still the question is, is it reasonable that he will do it? If we reduce [our weapons] and say, why we reduce [them] (because our hydrogen and missile weapons ensure that we maintain combat readiness at the necessary level, because we don't want war, therefore we want to reduce the army because we don't plan to attack, the Soviet Union has never had such a goal to conquer, and the socialist countries also did not) - why then do we keep such an enormous army? To keep such a large army means to reduce our economic potential. We have the ability to reduce it. And if our enemies do not follow our example, this is not to be viewed like it will cause us harm. On the contrary, countries which will now maintain large armies in that position which has been created right now in the socialist countries (their economic potential, and the main thing, that we have a powerful thermonuclear missile weapon). These armies will sort of suck at budgets, deplete the economies of the countries, and to some degree they will, if one examines this in the light of the fight between Communism and capitalism, reduce the economic development of these countries, and promote the growth of the advantages of our system.

I have thought much about this question, and before coming to Moscow I decided to send such a note for members and candidate members of the CC Presidium to become familiar with it, but then to discuss it when I arrived. And if the comrades agree with me then the necessary proposals could be adopted. I think it is possible to do it this way: convene a session of the Supreme Soviet. For instance, the session could be convened either at the end of January or February (choose a time, but don't procrastinate), before the start of the work of the Committee of Ten, which will be convened in February to examine our proposals. So, before the start of this Commission and the convening of the session of the Supreme Soviet, approve the speaker, report to the Supreme Soviet, give reasons for it, and make a decision, and adopt an appeal in which it says that regardless of how other countries react to this appeal and our decision, whether they follow our example or don't, we will be guided by the decision of the Supreme Soviet regardless of this.

I am confident that this will be a strong, shocking step. And, in addition, this step will in no degree damage our defense, but gives us great political, moral, and economic benefits. Therefore, if this is not made use of, then speaking in the language of an economist, this would mean not using the accumulated capital of our socialist policy and our socialist economy to full power. Because our economy is flourishing and developing. Our science is progressing so much that it has ensured advantages in the creation of means of defense for our country. And this is not only as the discoveries of science, but we have skillfully used scientific discoveries for practical purposes.

I think that it would be unreasonable right now to have atomic and hydrogen bombs and missiles at the same time as keeping a large army.

In addition, it needs to be kept in mind that when we have such very powerful modern weapons which have not yet been defeated and we keep the largest army in the world, that this actually frightens our enemies and even the honest people among them, who might want seek honest disarmament but are afraid that this might be a tactical move for us. They reason this way: the Soviet Union is submitting proposals about a new reduction of armed forces, but no reduction is going on inside the country. This might frighten the honest people among them who want disarmament,

but the reactionary forces who don't want a lessening of international tension are aggressive militaristic forces which of course use this for their ends.

If we conduct a further reduction of our armed forces then this step of ours would strengthen those forces in the bourgeois countries, the liberal bourgeoisie, the capitalist circles who want to improve the international situation and to exist on principles of mutual coexistence: they would be strengthened and the arguments of the aggressive, militaristic circles who use our might and frighten other countries would be weakened.

How to do this and the details - opinions already need to be exchanged; we'll give instructions to the minister of defense and the General Staff so that they make preparations specifically.

Such a disarmament, such a reduction (considerable) would need to be drawn out for a year, year and a half, or two. Thus, during this time we would make a decision and begin to gradually reduce the army, because in reducing such a number of people from the army they need to be provided for: the officers and military officials (soldiers are easy to provide for) in order for the forces be appropriately supplied and provided for. But then we would see where the arrow goes because we aren't reducing right away: this would be a year, year and a half, or two (but not more than two years). This would be logical. If at a General Assembly session we offered a proposal about general and complete disarmament over four years, then we would pursue partial disarmament unilaterally in a period of two years or less. This also would be logical and convincing. And then not dangerous.

In submitting these proposals for the consideration of the Presidium, on which I have carefully deliberated, I think that we will discuss it properly in the Presidium, weighing all the arguments for and against. Possibly I have not foreseen everything. But it seems to me that these proposals of mine, if they are carried out, not only will not harm our country and not subject its defense capacity to the danger of hostile forces, but will further facilitate the yet greater strengthening of our international position and a strengthening of our country.

I have some details in these proposals, and I am not presenting them in the note. When we discuss them I will express my ideas in more detail than in the note. For example, when reducing the armed forces at some time, to what degree, and possibly [we] ought to switch to a territorial system (militia forces). That is, regiments and divisions will be created on the territorial principle (enlisting civilians to serve in them without leaving production). Of course, it is necessary to have the appropriate career officer forces for such regiments and formations, and to have weapons in depots somewhere. We need to have transport aviation in the event the need arises to quickly transfer units from one place to another. For instance, if it is necessary to send or transfer several divisions to Germany then we have to do this over literally several days. Weapons for such territorial subunits should be located in an appropriate reasonable mixture near those places where these subunits which have been formed will be located. And the divisions right away, for instance, Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Khar'kov [divisions] gather at an assembly point at a signal right away, board aircraft, and are sent off.

And other considerations which need to be considered so that the security of our country not only is not decreased, but increased: the burden of maintaining the army would be decreased, but the political position both inside the country and without would be strengthened because we will have freed up the resources which swallow up the maintenance of an enormous army and weaponry. And we would still gain a better position in the international arena in fighting for peace, and the prestige of our country would grow even higher. And this all in sum would promote our Marxist-Leninist ideas, our teachings, our struggle for peace, because not only workers, but also peasants and petty bourgeois elements increasingly sympathize with us with each year, and their sympathies would be intensified. They would at first move from fear to neutral positions, then would switch to sympathies to our country. I think this is completely justifiable, and we ought to seek it.

When I say that possibly [we] ought to have not only a career army, but partly territorial, military forces, by this we properly repeat what Lenin did after the October Revolution to some degree, but in other conditions and somewhat in different terms, because then we had no way out, we had no army; but now we have both the

material resources and weapons, and we have an army. And we cannot remain without an army right now and don't want to. But this army needs to be made such that it is reasonable, to be without superfluous things, to be fit for combat and to meet the requirements of ensuring the country's security.

Of course it will also be necessary to reexamine the system of military educational institutions: their curriculum [profil'] and quantity. Possibly if we switch to the new system [we] also ought to organize such military educational institutions in which the training of officer personnel is done without leaving their posts [bez otryva ot proizvodstva]. This also has great importance.

All these measures would unquestionably alleviate the country's budget. We have great capabilities to accomplish the proposals I have stated concerning a unilateral reduction of our armed forces.

A couple more words about military educational institutions. When we created our numerous military educational institutions, we did not have a sufficient number of trained people in the country. Now all young people receive an education, and therefore we can select the necessary number of people from among them to train officer personnel for all the troops arms [rody voysk] for the military educational institutions which will conduct the work and the training of personnel without them leaving their posts. There will also be such commanders who will still be closely connected with the people, relieved from the so-called cliquishness which is created as a result of the best material support of the students of military educational institutions.

On the other hand, maintenance ought to be reasonable and cheaper.

These are the questions I would consider necessary to submit for the consideration of the CC Presidium.

N. KHRUSHCHEV

8 December 1959