

November 9, 1962

Record of Conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and Ambassador of India T. Kaul

Citation:

"Record of Conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and Ambassador of India T. Kaul", November 9, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 52, op. 1, d. 564, ll. 15-30. Contributed by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/300880>

Summary:

Indian Ambassador T. N. Kaul met with Khrushchev to discuss the conflict between India and China, which India views as Chinese aggression. Kaul conveyed India's desire to end the conflict while expressing concern over China's military advantage. He requested Soviet weapons support to strengthen India's defense and demonstrate balanced international backing. Khrushchev declined, stating that the USSR seeks only a peaceful resolution and does not wish to escalate the conflict by supplying arms. He emphasized that negotiations are the only solution and reaffirmed the Soviet Union's neutral stance. Kaul also requested continued Soviet support for non-military assistance, such as transport aircraft and pilot training, which Khrushchev agreed to consider.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

[handwritten: distributed]

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN N. S. KHRUSHCHEV
AND AMBASSADOR OF INDIA T. N. KAUL
9 November 1962*

* The record of the conversation was not reviewed by N. S. Khrushchev

After a mutual exchange of greetings Kaul said that he will not take much time, but he has important information which he would like to pass N. S. Khrushchev and to make some clarifications.

N. S. Khrushchev said that he is glad to hear out the Ambassador

Kaul reported that Indian President Radhakrishnan had asked him to pass N. S. Khrushchev greetings and best wishes. The President expects that N. S. Khrushchev will perform his historic role in the matter of preserving peace and helping eliminate the present conflict between India and China.

N. S. Khrushchev asked that gratitude be passed to the Indian President and said that he regards Radhakrishnan with great respect, and values his opinion as a person who devotes his efforts to the cause of maintaining peace. N.S. Khrushchev asked that good wishes and success in his activity be passed to the President of India.

Kaul said that Indian Prime Minister Nehru charged him with being absolutely frank and honest during a discussion of all problems with the Soviet government. The Ambassador said that he will follow this instruction of the Prime Minister and will speak with complete frankness in conversation with N. S. Khrushchev.

Kaul said that the Prime Minister asked him to explain the broad, fundamental aspects of the policy of the Indian government on the question of the conflict between India and China and not to touch on the details and all the pluses and minuses in this problem. First, continued Kaul, India does not view the conflict with China as a conflict between Communism and anti-Communism. The Indians are pursuing a policy of nonalignment. The conflict with China is viewed by them as a clash between a peace-loving policy and an expansionist policy, with a policy of aggression and a seizure of others' territory. This clash of positions is on the question of the possibility and impossibility of peaceful coexistence. Secondly, until recently the conflict between India and China was viewed as a border conflict. The government of India has strived to reduce its dimensions and thought that China, holding to the principle of "pancha shila"[five principles of peaceful coexistence], wants to live in peace with India. India is not so much worried about the way that China advances territorial claims as the means - the use of force - by which China is trying to accomplish its goals. In 1954 India concluded an agreement with China on trade and relations with the Tibet region. Kaul said that he had personally taken part in the negotiations on this question and had gone to Peking for this. Kaul said, we then thought that China was a fraternal country which would unswervingly observe the principles of non-aggression and peaceful coexistence in relations with India. But, unfortunately, it didn't turn out that way. China refuses to live in friendship and peace with India. Before 1959 China gradually seized more and more Indian territory, the total amount of which was 12,000 square miles. However, the Indian government has tried to somehow reconcile itself to this situation since there was no large-scale invasion from China. Until recently the government of India has repeatedly offered proposals about a peaceful settlement of the disputes with China.

However, the situation completely changed after 8 September of this year when China committed a large-scale aggression against India in the Northeast of the country. Chinese troops seized regions which China itself had considered for thousands of years, if not de jure, then in any event de facto, Indian regions. Tibetans did not live in these regions during this period of time. This changed the nature of the relations between India and China. And before 1959 there were cases of attacks on Indian soldiers by Chinese. For example, once the Chinese killed an Indian patrol of eight men. However, after 8 September, and especially after 20 October of this year, when India lost 2,500 men in one week, the Indian government understood that a real

war had begun, although it had not been declared.

Kaul said further that only two weeks ago he was in India and observed the reaction of the Indian people to the Chinese aggression. The mood of the Indians could be compared with those feelings which gripped the Russian people during the October Revolution or the Second World War. Indians are deeply outraged by the aggressive actions of China, and not one self-respecting Indian agrees to talks with the aggressor under the threat of the use of force. As is well known, Prime Minister of India Nehru made a suggestion about peace negotiations with China on condition that the status quo which existed before 8 September of this year was observed. But at the present time even this suggestion of Nehru's causes objections from a considerable part of the Indian population and members of the Indian Parliament. If negotiations on the basis of this suggestion were possible today then tomorrow they might turn out to be impossible.

Kaul recalled that UAR President Nasser made an offer of mediation between India and China, but that the Chinese government categorically rejected Nasser's offer. At the present time, the Ambassador continued, India's position is supported by 45 countries - 15-20 countries from the Afro-Asian bloc, 15 countries of Latin America, and others. In addition, five countries have declared their sympathy with India's position. It is characteristic that even from the countries of the socialist bloc only one country has declared its support for China. In various countries the feeling is intensifying that the current conflict is a conflict between expansionist forces and forces which favor peaceful coexistence. Today India has become a victim, but tomorrow it might be any other peace-loving country.

Kaul said further that India does not want a continuation or a widening of the conflict with China. But if one country might begin a war, then the agreement of two sides is needed to conclude a peace. The Ambassador continued, we know that China is a fraternal country for you, and we think that if a brother sees how another brother wants to injure a friend then he should restrain his arm. We value the position of the Soviet Union and think that the role which the Soviet Union and the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers personally play in the conflict between India and China is useful and is conducive to a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The government of India does not want to tie the current conflict with the Cold War and is not striving to expand the number of participants of this conflict.

Kaul declared further that regardless of the current conflict with China India will henceforth strictly pursue a policy of nonalignment with blocs. However, said the Ambassador, we cannot calmly regard our brave soldiers fighting an enemy who is better-armed dying because of a lack of modern weapons. The Indian government is forced to get weapons for its defense. We are ready to buy weapons anywhere on the usual commercial terms, on conditions of short-term or long-term credits. Following the principles of nonalignment with blocs India would not want to buy weapons only in the West and therefore the Indian government has charged Kaul with turning to the Soviet government with a request to sell India some kinds of weapons. Kaul expressed a desire to pass N. S. Khrushchev a list of those kinds of weapons which India would like to buy in the Soviet Union. The Ambassador explained at this time that the weapons themselves were not so important for India as the fact of obtaining weapons both in the West and in the East. The fact that India is not getting weapons from one side would have a great morale effect both in India as well as beyond its borders, and would be a stabilizing influence in the interests of preserving peace.

Kaul said further that if there are some more minor questions which he could raise in the conversation with N. S. Khrushchev, in particular the question of why China recognizes the McMahon Line in its relations with Burma, but does not recognize this Line with respect to India, but he does not want to take away too much time from N. S. Khrushchev. Taking out a map, the Ambassador tried to show N. S. Khrushchev the territory seized from India by China in the opinion of the Indian government.

N. S. Khrushchev did not show interest in the map and said that he had never dealt with these maps, and indeed did not see the need for this since he did not plan to get into the details of the conflict between India and China. Our attitude, continued N. S. Khrushchev, toward the sharp and bloody conflict between India and China is known, which we have repeatedly declared. Each side in the conflict finds justification for its policy. As friends and brothers of the Indian and Chinese peoples we do not find a

justification for this conflict. It is hard for us to watch while our friends and brothers are shedding blood. This conflict does not meet the interests of any of the sides. N. S. Khrushchev noted that he has already presented the position of the Soviet Union in his conversations with other representatives of India and has shown on the basis of historical examples how the Soviet Union has solved problems in such conditions on the basis of reason and good sense.

N. S. Khrushchev said further that the question of state borders is very complex and one could hardly find a country which considered its borders perfect. For example, there are union republics in the USSR which in a number of places consider their borders with neighboring republics arbitrary in a number of places and do not meet national and ethnographic needs. N. S. Khrushchev said that he himself is well acquainted with this problem since he has encountered it while working in Ukraine. Or take, for example, the countries of the socialist camp. Hungary has contentious ethnographic questions with Romania and especially with Yugoslavia. About a million Hungarians live on the territory of Yugoslavia. It is true that the Yugoslavs say that they have fewer Hungarians, but the substance of the problem does not change from this. Many Hungarians live in Transylvania, which belongs to Romania. However, it is hard to say what population, Romanian or Hungarian, is greater there.

It seems that all the same there are more Romanians, but anyway the Romanians and Hungarians live in Transylvania in friendship, and they don't have conflicts or disputes. N. S. Khrushchev said that he was in Transylvania two years ago with Gheorgiu-Dej and was personally convinced of this. Hungarians also live on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR. Obviously, the Hungarian comrades might think that the land on which Hungarians live ought to belong to Hungary. But the Ukrainians hold to another opinion. They justly say that at one time the Hungarians came to these lands from other places, but this territory belongs to Ukraine. Or take the border between the USSR and Turkey, for example. In Georgia they say that Georgian lands stretch far to the south and it is even hard to determine in which place on Turkish territory they end. Well, at one time the Turks owned Azov, Crimea, the Black Sea coast, and the entire Balkan peninsula. Or take Afghanistan. Many Uzbeks and Tajiks live there. Briefly put, if one begins to search for the truth in these matters it is not hard for oneself to imagine what a dumping ground of peoples [*svalka narodov*] it will be. Ideal borders do not exist. We Communists think that the borders will be ideal under Communism, when they lost their significance. But this already relates to the area of our world view.

N. S. Khrushchev again stressed that in the Soviet Union they greatly regret that the conflict between India and China continues, and we think that the Indians believe in the sincerity of our regret.

Kaul noted that of course they believe so.

N. S. Khrushchev said that we would be very glad if the war ended. But if you came to agreement about the border then we would be happy. N. S. Khrushchev noted that the only way to solve this problem is peace negotiations. Obviously, when this is done it will be necessary to overcome the nationalistic frenzy of some people, which is intoxicating like wine. And if one does not fight it, then it might lead to dire consequences.

N. S. Khrushchev said further that he had experienced two World Wars and well knows those sentiments which people have. Nationalistic frenzy is like a fire in a swamp at night: it promises a traveller rest, but leads to death - the traveller sinks. I am convinced that you understand our feelings and sorrows perfectly. We are also bitter because our friends who understand our sincerity have clashed, but are not finding the strength to halt the war. There are reports that in recent days a deep snow has fallen in the region of combat operations and the battles have somewhat calmed down. We don't exactly know that the inclement weather will help halt the bad military weather, and cool passions and heads, so that you sit at a table and begin negotiations. We don't see any other way out. If you don't find the strength in yourself for peace negotiations then no third party, no adviser can do anything. The position of the Soviet Union with respect to the conflict between India and China was presented in a 5 November Pravda editorial. We stand on this position right now and consider this policy reasonable. Otherwise we need to slip into a position of one of the sides and then it would be inflammatory and not calming. We would like this conflict

to be liquidated without winners and losers. Is it really impossible to decide this rationally? If both sides see this solution in an increase in the quantity of weapons or numbers of soldiers then the conflict will be even harder to settle and both sides will suffer new losses.

N. S. Khrushchev further mentioned that after the Great October Revolution the Soviet government turned to all the warring powers with an appeal to halt combat operations and conclude a peace, which was expressed in a Leninist decree about peace. This wise position is our policy of peaceful coexistence right now and the solution of questions by peaceful negotiations.

Now about your intention to get weapons from us. I think that you will understand me correctly if I say that we cannot sell you weapons, and I cannot take the list from you. We don't want to be people who throw powder on the fire of war. Kerosene is not a means of putting out a fire. We don't know on what terms India will buy weapons from Britain and the US. We completely understand the position of Britain and the US on this question. They are pursuing their own imperialistic goals - to inflame the conflict and gain material and political advantages from the clash between India and China. We not only do not want to profit from wars, but war fills us with disgust. We eagerly help people waging a war against colonialism for their liberation, but the combat operations between India and China have nothing in common with such a fight. Therefore we cannot be direct or indirect participants in this conflict. We want to end this conflict. You know that we give aid to countries waging a struggle against [Translator's note: partially-unreadable word, but probably "colonialism"]. For example, we did not make a secret of our great military aid to Indonesia. We gave Indonesia aid at a time when it was preparing for war with the Netherlands for West Irian. The whole world knew of our weapons in Indonesia. We are very glad that these weapons were not used and that the question was settled peacefully. One could cite other examples of our aid to some countries.

N. S. Khrushchev further expressed the hope that India would be able to find a dignified way out of the situation which has been created and preserves its positions in the world which have won it the respect of many countries. In the Soviet Union they understand those difficulties which Prime Minister Nehru is experiencing. We see this and understand that our efforts to settle the conflict are insufficient. But, unfortunately, we see we can do nothing more. I know from experience that the greater and deeper the conflict the harder it will be to turn the chariot of Chinese-Indian relations from the rut of war. Right now both sides are putting stress on considerations of prestige, the territory does not much interest them, since it is lightly settled while India and China are overpopulated. We are left only to again express the wish that the sides display sufficient wisdom and find an opportunity for a peaceful settlement. A peaceful solution of this question cannot be postponed for an indefinite period, and it cannot be permitted that the frenzy of chauvinism allows combat operations to be drawn out, which might lead to irreparable disasters. Negotiations are the only way out of the situation which has been created.

Kaul noted that, in his opinion, the last statement of N. S. Khrushchev ought to be addressed to the Chinese.

N. S. Khrushchev expressed the hope that the Ambassador will correctly understand him, that if in conversations with a representative of India he were to address himself to the Chinese side, and in conversations with a representative of China he were to address himself to the Indian side, it would hardly be useful. This would be a provocative line. Moreover, added N. S. Khrushchev, right now the Indian representatives have no shortage of people who keep anti-Chinese discussions going. Like crows flock to a corpse so the imperialists hasten to where conflicts arise.

The Soviet Union is striving toward one goal - a settlement of the conflict by peaceful means. If you don't understand us today, then you will tomorrow. Although I know that anti-Soviet sentiments are starting to be displayed in India right now and there was even a small demonstration in front of the Soviet consulate in Bombay, that this is worthy of regret, but we understand that this frenzy will pass. We are Communists, continued N. S. Khrushchev, Bolshevik Leninists, we cannot make concessions on questions of principle, on questions of war and peace, even if we have to go against the tide.

Kaul expressed gratitude for the frank and detailed presentation of the position of

the Soviet government. He said that they highly appreciate the sincere and reasoned position of the Soviet Union in India. Kaul continued, we know that your only desire is the preservation of peace. But we are asking that you understand our sentiments, feelings, and our difficulties.

The Ambassador said that he would convey to the Indian government what N. S. Khrushchev said about the position of the Soviet government. He added that he is confident that the Indian government will perfectly understand the position of the Soviet government, but the Indians are asking that they, too, be understood.

N. S. Khrushchev said that it is good that the Indians understand the position of the Soviet government and we are grateful for this. The Soviet people, continued N. S. Khrushchev, harbor feelings of pure, unselfish friendship for the peoples of India; it only remains for us to regret that we do not have sufficient resources and strength to stop the conflict. Both sides are listening to us, but they are doing their part. They are shooting from both sides, people are dying, and for this? It is hard to say. Each side explains the events in their own way. The fact that there are significant casualties which could have been avoided causes us deep regret.

N. S. Khrushchev said further that he understands the motives for why India wants to buy weapons from the Soviet Union. India's desire to get weapons both in the West as well as in the East are entirely explainable. However, the Soviet Union cannot slide into the positions of its enemies, the imperialists, who happily sell weapons, striving to inflame the conflict between India and China. We want to put out the fire, it is hard for us to see how our friends and brothers are dying in it. We don't want to facilitate a kindling of this conflict. N. S. Khrushchev asked the Ambassador to pass to Prime Minister Nehru that the Soviet Union cannot sell weapons to India since this would be a fatal move.

Kaul asked whether one could think that the Soviet Union will not help either side.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes. China is not using our weapons. All the weapons with which China is fighting are made by them and have no relation to us. Noting that he would not like for this conversation to get into the press and please the imperialists (the Ambassador nodded as a sign of agreement), N. S. Khrushchev said that many years ago the People's Republic of China received licenses from the Soviet Union for the production of some types of weapons. At the present time China not only produces these weapons for themselves but also sells them to other countries. One can give a guarantee that the weapons which you get in battles will not have a Soviet label. China not only did not appeal to us for weapons but also did not hint at this. They have no need of this. N. S. Khrushchev said that he has been in both India and China, and knows that both these countries have taken and are taking considerable effort in the direction of the production of various kinds of weapons. China is developing its own defense industry. N. S. Khrushchev noted that during his trip to India the Indian government leader turned to him with shy requests with respect to the production of weapons. At that time, the same good and fraternal relations also existed between India and China as between India and the Soviet Union. The People's Republic of China also made efforts to create their own military production. We are convinced that China does not produce weapons for a war with India. It has enemies which are sharpening [their] knives against the People's Republic of China.

Kaul asked N. S. Khrushchev to give his opinion about the motives which prompted the Chinese leaders with respect to the conflict with India. He said that he could not understand why they are behaving this way. Such a policy of China's could only be explained if, let's say, the Kuomintang were in power. But why does the Communist government of China behave this way, why do they push India toward enemies? Kaul said that he would like to know N. S. Khrushchev's opinion for himself personally.

N. S. Khrushchev replied that it was hard for him to explain the policy of another government, although a socialist one. The theoretical positions which guide the socialist countries are one and the same, but each socialist country has its own national peculiarities. We socialist countries guard one another's sovereignty, independence, and non-interference in internal affairs very jealously. Therefore, continued N. S. Khrushchev, his opinion about the policy of other socialist countries would hardly be useful for China, India, or for Indo-Chinese relations. Therefore N. S. Khrushchev would not like to give rise to undesirable consequences with his own statements. "We are Communists, but we are people, and we have our originality of

ambition. These are manifested in domestic and foreign policy questions, although we take the same positions”.

Kaul said that he is a friend of the Chinese, that he lived in China for three years, and he loves the Chinese people and their leadership. He sincerely hoped that the Chinese would always live in peace with India and build their relations with it on the basis of the principles of peaceful coexistence. Many Indians and the leaders of India hold to the same views, including Prime Minister Nehru. Therefore he was shocked and deeply puzzled by the actions of China, which has committed an aggression against India and thereby undermined one of the basic foundations of Indian foreign policy, peaceful coexistence and friendship with China. The Ambassador repeated that in spite of everything, India will hold to the principle of non-alignment and will continue to construct their own foreign policy.

N. S. Khrushchev said that it is very hard for us to see how the Indians and Chinese are shedding blood on the fields of battle. The only thing that we can say is to sit at a table and hold negotiations and negotiate peacefully.

Kaul said that he would like to state one more request to him. At one time an agreement was concluded between India and the Soviet Union about the training of Indian pilots of transport planes and helicopters. These transport planes and helicopters are being used at the present time to transport the wounded and to bring up food and basic necessities. The Indian government hopes that in spite of the current events the fulfillment of this agreement will continue and requests the Soviet government hasten the implementation of the agreement.

N. S. Khrushchev said that he sees no obstacle to the implementation of this agreement

Kaul added that, in addition, the Indian side would like to get additional transport aircraft and helicopters.

N. S. Khrushchev replied that, in his opinion, this request of the Indian government could be considered and that the USSR Ministry of Foreign Trade will be given instructions on this matter.

Kaul thanked N. S. Khrushchev for the sincere and frank conversation, and said that he completely understands the position of the Soviet Union, which is sincerely striving for a peaceful settlement of the conflict between India and China. In this situation, declared the Ambassador, in India they would like only one thing – a strengthening of the peaceful relations between the Soviet Union and India. This would be a demonstration for the whole world of the vitality of the principles of peaceful coexistence.

N. S. Khrushchev noted that this is confirmed by all our matters.

Kaul said that, in the opinion of the Indian side, it would be useful for the cause of peace if the Soviet side did not speak in support of one proposal or another, as was evident from the first article in Pravda. This creates among some people in India the impression that the USSR is coming to support one side. As regards the government and Prime Minister of India, they are confident in your sincerity and impartiality.

N. S. Khrushchev said that to ease the position of the sides on 5 November we published a second article in Pravda where it spoke not of details, but about the principles of a settlement of the conflict.

Kaul noted that the 5 November article in Pravda and A. N. Kosygin's 6 November speech were correctly understood in India.

In conclusion Kaul expressed gratitude for the conversation and apologized for taking much time, and noted that if he overstepped some norms today it was done from the best motives – to speak not only as an official, but also as a friend of Russia.

N. S. Khrushchev asked that [Kaul] be frank, for this leads of a strengthening of relations. He noted that life has two sides: a pleasant one and an unpleasant one, and one cannot fail to take this into consideration.

At the conclusion of the conversation Kaul again expressed gratitude to N. S. Khrushchev.

Present at the conversation were V. I. Likhachev, Chief of the USSR MFA Department

of South Asia, and S. B. Chetverikov, [inserted by hand: translator] and Second Secretary of the USSR MFA Bureau of Translations. The conversation lasted one hour and 40 minutes.

[handwritten: recorded by
[[V. Likhachev and one illegible name]]
12 November 1962]