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Transcript of the Conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and the President of the French Republic, Charles de Gaulle, regarding incidents with American Aircraft and the Participation of the USSR in the Summit

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Summary:

On May 15, 1960, Nikita Khrushchev met with French President Charles de Gaulle in Paris to discuss the fallout from recent incidents involving US reconnaissance aircraft violating Soviet airspace. Khrushchev emphasized the Soviet Union's outrage over these acts, labeling them as aggression and a threat to sovereignty. He called for the US to acknowledge its violations, condemn the actions, hold those responsible accountable, and commit to ceasing such provocations. De Gaulle expressed regret over the incidents but maintained that espionage was an inevitable reality of modern geopolitics. He assured Khrushchev that he would convey the Soviet statement to US President Dwight Eisenhower but noted that France had not participated in planning the reconnaissance missions. The discussion also touched on broader themes of disarmament and international cooperation, with Khrushchev reiterating the USSR's readiness to engage in the summit only if the US changed its course. De Gaulle stressed the necessity of dialogue to prevent future incidents and achieve détente. Both leaders reaffirmed their nations' desire for peace but left the resolution of the immediate crisis contingent on US actions. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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No. II**Transcript of the Conversation****between N.S. Khrushchev and the President of the French Republic, Charles de Gaulle, regarding incidents with American aircraft and the participation of the USSR in the summit^b**

15 May 1960

11:00 am

Paris time

De Gaulle^c: Mr. Chairman, as you have expressed an interest in meeting with me in the presence of members of the delegation and advisors, I assume that you have something to communicate to us. We are ready to listen to you, Mr. Chairman.

N.S. Khrushchev: Your assumptions are correct, Mr. President. I do indeed intend to make a statement. But before proceeding with that, I would like to express my gratitude once again, Mr. President, for the warm reception you extended to us during our visit to France. I particularly appreciate the discussions that took place between us.

Today we have an official meeting, Mr. President. However, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my personal greetings and best wishes to you, your spouse, and members of your family from me, my wife, and members of my family.

De Gaulle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind wishes. In turn, Mr. Chairman, please convey my best regards to your spouse and members of your family.

N.S. Khrushchev: Now I would like to share some of our considerations regarding the summit. We have been preparing for this meeting for a long time and had high hopes for it. However, the incidents that took place on 9 April and 1 May led to different thoughts. These incidents showed that one of the participants is not interested in easing international tensions and is trying to sabotage the possibility of reaching coordinated decisions on urgent international issues.

I kindly request, Mr. President, that you allow the interpreter to read our statement that we have prepared in advance.

The translator is reading the following statement:

"As is known, recently the United States Air Force engaged in a provocative act against the Soviet Union. On 1 May of this year, a U.S. military reconnaissance aircraft intruded into the territory of the Soviet Union, carrying out a specific espionage mission to gather information about military and industrial facilities within the USSR. Once the aggressive purpose of the flight became known, it was shot down by a unit of Soviet missile troops. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident of aggressive and espionage actions by the U.S. Air Force against the Soviet Union.

Naturally, the Soviet government was compelled to characterize these actions as treacherous and incompatible with the basic requirements for maintaining normal relations between countries in peacetime, let alone the fact that these actions were also in stark contradiction with the goal of easing international tensions and creating the necessary conditions for the fruitful work of the summit. The Soviet government condemned these actions in speeches at the session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and also issued a special note of protest to the government of the United States.

Initially, the US State Department offered a preposterous explanation, claiming that their aircraft had unintentionally crossed the border of the USSR and had no intentions of espionage or sabotage. However, when confronted with undeniable evidence that disproved their statement, the U.S. Department of State admitted on 7 May, and subsequently the Secretary of State on 9 May on behalf of the U.S. government, that American aviation had indeed intruded into the Soviet territory for the purpose of military espionage, as part of a government-approved program that was personally endorsed by the president. Two days later, President Eisenhower himself confirmed that the flights of American aircraft over the territory of the Soviet Union were and remain a deliberate policy of the USA. The US government also stated

the same in a note to the Soviet government on 12 May. By doing this, the US government blatantly violates universally recognized norms of international law and the high principles of the U.N. Charter, to which the United States of America is a signatory.

The U.S. government leaders' statements were met with indignation by the Soviet government and the people of the Soviet Union, as any honest person concerned about world peace would.

Now that the government leaders of the four nations have arrived in Paris for the summit, the question arises: how can negotiations be conducted productively, and how can the summit issues be addressed when the U.S. government and the president personally not only did not condemn the provocative act, which resulted in the intrusion of an American military aircraft into the territory of the Soviet Union, but, instead, stated that such actions remain the official policy of the USA towards the Soviet Union? How can negotiations be conducted on various issues, which require resolution aimed at détente and eliminating suspicion and mistrust between countries, when the government of one great power directly declares that its policy is to intrude into the territory of another great power for espionage and sabotage purposes, thus exacerbating tension in relations between the countries? It is evident that proclaiming such a policy, which can only be pursued when a state is at war, will undoubtedly lead to the complete failure of the summit.

We certainly have taken note of the U.S. government's policy declaration, and we declare that if American aircraft intrude into the Soviet Union's territory again, we will shoot down such aircraft.

The Soviet government reserves the right in all such cases to take appropriate retaliatory measures against anyone who violates the sovereignty of the USSR or engages in such espionage or sabotage against the Soviet Union. The Soviet government also reiterates that in relation to those countries who, by providing their territory for American military bases, become accomplices in aggressive actions against the USSR, appropriate measures will also be taken, up to striking these bases.

It is important to note that President Eisenhower warned that he would decline to participate in the summit due to his concerns about the potential conclusion of a peace treaty with the GDR. However, what he perceived as a threat was actually a statement by the Soviet government expressing its determination to end the remnants of the war in Europe and achieve peace, thus bringing the situation, particularly in West Berlin, in line with the life necessities and interests of ensuring peace and security for the European people. How can the Soviet government participate in negotiations when the U.S. government poses an actual threat by stating that it will continue to violate the borders of the USSR and that American aircraft have flown and will continue to fly over the territory of the Soviet Union? By doing this, the U.S. government has demonstrated its intention to continue unheard-of and unprecedented actions that undermine the sovereignty of the Soviet state, while the principle of sovereignty is sacred and inviolable in international relations.

From all of this, it follows that to ensure the successful summit, it is imperative that all represented governments commit to an open and honest policy and solemnly vow that they will not engage in actions that violate the sovereignty of other states. This means that if the U.S. government genuinely desires to cooperate with the governments of other states in the interest of fostering peace and strengthening trust between countries, then it must, first, condemn the unacceptable provocative actions of the U.S. military aircraft against the Soviet Union, and second, refrain from continuing such actions and such policies against the USSR in the future. It goes without saying that in this case, the U.S. government cannot avoid holding accountable the direct perpetrators who deliberately violated the Soviet Union's state borders using American aircraft.

The Soviet government believes that productive negotiations with the U.S. government at the summit are not possible until the U.S. government takes necessary actions. The Soviet government cannot participate in negotiations if one of the negotiating parties has based its policy towards the Soviet Union on treachery.

If, under these conditions, the Soviet government were to participate in negotiations

that are doomed to fail, it would become complicit in deceiving the people, which it does not intend to do.

It goes without saying that if the U.S. government were to declare that in the future the U.S. would not violate the state borders of the USSR with its aircraft, condemn the provocative actions taken in the past, and punish those who were directly responsible for such actions, thus ensuring equal conditions for the Soviet Union with other states, then, I, as the head of the Soviet government, am ready to participate in the summit and make every effort to ensure its success."

N.S. Khrushchev: I would like to make it clear, Mr. President. The Soviet Union is a sovereign state. An outrageous act of aggression has been committed against our country. Moreover, the United States of America has made a statement containing a threat of further flights over the territory of the Soviet Union, which indicates the possibility of continuing aggressive acts against our country. In these circumstances, the Soviet Union cannot participate in the summit until this threatening statement against the Soviet Union is withdrawn. If we were to take a different line regarding this treacherous act, it would mean the surrender of the Soviet Union. However, we are not in a position that implies surrendering to the United States of America. We have all the means at our disposal to defend our country, and we will defend it by all available means.

De Gaulle: I hope, Mr. Khrushchev, that you will provide me with the text of your statement.

N.S. Khrushchev: We intended to make this statement orally and I asked the interpreter to read the text of the statement to save time. However, if you wish, we can provide you with the text.

De Gaulle: We would like to have the text of the statement.

A.A. Gromyko passes the French text of the statement to Couve de Murville.

De Gaulle: I acknowledge what you have stated, Mr. Chairman. Today, in the second half of the day, I have a meeting with President Eisenhower of the United States where I will relay the contents of your statement. I believe that the recent incidents that have occurred should be settled between the USA and the USSR. These incidents are not directly related to the summit. As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, if this incident is resolved between the USSR and the USA, the summit may take place. Therefore, I will relay your statement to President Eisenhower and await his response on the matter.

Further, I would like to discuss the core issue of the incident that has taken place. Currently, the Soviet Union is heavily armed with missile and nuclear weapons. The United States of America is also heavily armed. In these conditions, if war were to break out, the result would be immediate and widespread destruction. In these circumstances, both you and the United States of America want to have as complete information about each other as possible. This is necessary and even inevitable. The USA, of course, employs methods different from yours to achieve these goals. However, you also gather information. The only solution to prevent such incidents is to achieve disarmament and thus eliminate anxiety and mutual distrust. I believe that this was the main reason for convening the meeting at the highest level. I deeply regret the incident you mentioned has taken place. I particularly regret that an American aircraft intruded into your territory just before our summit. But I am equally sorry that this act of espionage has caused such great concern in the Soviet Union. As I have previously mentioned, espionage is inevitable and even necessary in the modern world. But facts are facts. They must be accepted as they are. As I have already told you, I will inform President Eisenhower of your statement.

If the summit takes place, we will gladly participate in it. If the summit does not take place, we will regret it.

N.S. Khrushchev: I would like to respond to some remarks made by Mr. President. You, Mr. President, mentioned that the incidents in question concern only two countries - the Soviet Union and the United States of America. I see this issue differently. In the current circumstances, the Soviet Union is confronted by three Western countries. The United States of America is an ally to both you and England. This makes us look at the problem from a different perspective, especially since the aggressive act against the Soviet Union had been committed by the main and

strongest Western state.

I was taken aback by your statement as well, if I understood it correctly. It seems to suggest that you condone the idea of conducting intelligence-gathering flights over foreign territory, that is you approve of something that, in our opinion, should trigger strong indignation. If this is indeed your stance, it greatly disappoints us as it implies that you indirectly support the policies of the United States of America.

I recall our conversations, Mr. President. We both agreed then that disarmament is the primary issue in the current international situation. We shared many common views on the topic of disarmament. Frankly speaking, our portfolio contains proposals that reflect our shared perspectives on several issues we discussed.

However, I must inform you that if any foreign aircraft fly over our country, we will shoot them down, we will respond with force against any aggressor. This is the unwavering resolution of the Soviet government and the Soviet people. We will cower before no one, no one can bring us to our knees.

De Gaulle: I have listened carefully to everything you have said, Mr. Chairman. You mentioned the solidarity between France and the United States of America. Yes, we are indeed in solidarity with the United States of America, but this solidarity is intended for times of war. We did not participate in the planning of the actions in question, nor in the actions themselves. I would like to emphasize that if the United States of America engages in espionage, then similar activities are carried out by Eastern countries and the Soviet Union, albeit in different forms. But let's focus on the facts. An incident has occurred. As I have already mentioned, I regret that it happened.

Today, I will convey the content of your statement to Eisenhower. Regarding the summit, I want to reiterate that if it takes place, France will gladly participate in it. If it does not take place, it will not be our fault. I would like to emphasize that no one desires to achieve détente in international relations as much as France, because only détente can eliminate the basis for incidents like those that have occurred in the recent past.

N.S. Khrushchev: I fully agree with you, Mr. President, that easing international tensions will eliminate the basis for such incidents. I also agree with you that the best way to achieve détente is by resolving disarmament issues. That is why we have worked with honesty and diligence [in preparation] for the summit meeting and the discussion of disarmament. However, the two flights of American aircraft over the territory of the Soviet Union, one on 9 April and the other on 1 May, suggest that some have been working in precisely the opposite direction.

As for the incident, I am surprised that you, Mr. President, are attempting to somehow balance the actions of the United States of America, manifested by the aforementioned incidents, with some actions of the Soviet Union. I know, Mr. President, that you are striving to have an independent policy, and I respect that. However, in this particular situation, you are taking the side of the United States, despite the fact that we have concrete evidence and a captured American pilot who flew over Soviet territory. Neither you nor the United States possess such evidence against the Soviet Union. You mentioned, Mr. President, that all countries are currently engaged in gathering intelligence. This is indeed the case, but there are limits to what is permissible, there are legal means of gathering intelligence. For instance, there are two ambassadors present here. Your ambassador in Moscow and our ambassador in Paris. If they come across any information, they will undoubtedly inform their governments, and the government will draw the appropriate conclusions from this information.

R.Ya. Malinovsky: The use of military aircraft for intelligence gathering can be justified only during wartime. However, we are not at war with the United States of America.

N.S. Khrushchev: The United States of America has repeatedly stated that if Soviet aircraft were to appear over American territory, the U.S. would start a nuclear war against the Soviet Union. Why, in these circumstances, do they not allow the reverse? That is, if aircraft of the United States of America appear over the territory of the Soviet Union, we will respond with a devastating strike against the United States of America. Why do they interpret this right unilaterally?

Speaking about the incident that occurred, President Eisenhower stated that sending aircraft to the Soviet Union was his desire. However, President Eisenhower may fulfill his wishes in his own country if the people allow it. In the Soviet Union, [illegible] belongs to the Soviet government, and we will not allow any trespassing on our independence.

I am surprised, Mr. President, by your position on this issue, as it diverges from the impression I had of you as a statesman who realistically assesses international issues. In this case, I do not see this realistic approach, as otherwise you would not attempt to somehow balance the actions of the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

President Eisenhower stated that Soviet aircraft had never appeared over the United States of America. I believe that this statement demonstrates our honesty in the matter. We firmly believe that the responsibility for the incident cannot be shared. We place full responsibility for this incident solely on the United States of America, your ally.

The United States of America intends to threaten us from the territory of their allies. The state of technology in the United States of America does not allow them to threaten us directly from their own territory. The United States of America has established a network of bases, including bases in France and England, and they threaten us from these bases. We believe that this matter should be of concern not only to the Soviet Union but to the allies of the United States of America as well, because in the event of a conflict, no one will be spared.

De Gaulle: The flight of an American aircraft over Soviet territory is a fact. You, Mr. Khrushchev, have conveyed a statement to me regarding this matter. I will pass its contents to Eisenhower. Eisenhower should respond to this issue. I myself cannot provide any response to this statement.

I have only taken note of what you have said regarding the summit, which may either take place or not. If it does not take place, then on behalf of France, I express deep regret. If the incident that occurred is to lead to war, it will be a terrible disaster for humanity. However, war has not arisen from this incident yet. And since that is the case, we need to work towards building peace. To achieve this, negotiations are necessary, and the most convenient means for this is the summit. The summit has never been as necessary as it is now. If the Soviet Union decides not to participate in the summit, we will deeply regret it.

N.S. Khrushchev: We came to Paris to participate in the summit. We have brought specific proposals for this meeting. However, we will be able to participate in the summit only if the United States fulfills the following conditions:

- acknowledge that they have violated the sovereignty of our state,
- condemn the actions taken by the United States,
- hold accountable those directly responsible for the incidents,
- withdraw the threats to continue reconnaissance flights over Soviet territory.

If the United States makes a statement on these issues in a format they find appropriate, as it is not my place to teach them how to make a statement, then the Soviet Union will happily participate in the summit and we will make every effort to honestly and vigorously resolve the disputed issues, which is eagerly awaited by people all around the world.

If the United States does not make such statements, then, to our regret, we will not be able to participate in the summit. Otherwise, we would be in a situation when we are here in Paris discussing various issues while American planes are flying over Moscow. In such a scenario, the Soviet government would lose any respect and trust from the Soviet people. So far, the Soviet government has enjoyed full respect and trust from the Soviet people. The Soviet government and I personally will do everything necessary to maintain and justify this trust in the future.

I have information that there are rumors within the United States government about Khrushchev facing difficulties within the party, allegedly lacking full support from the people. However, such nonsense has been going on for 42 years, and it is high time to discard it. The fact that these assumptions exist among American leaders shows that American intelligence is utterly useless and misinforms its government about the

real situation in the Soviet Union. I am saying that if American intelligence properly informed its government, they would know that there is currently no country in the world that is in a better situation than the Soviet Union. Mr. President, I want to emphasize this. If the American aggressors unleash war against our country, you will see for yourself that the Soviet people will be as united in the struggle against the United States and their allies as they were in the fight against Hitler.

De Gaulle: It's difficult to predict what will happen in the event of a war.

I would just like to add that during my visit to the United States, I expressed my opinion that you, Mr. Khrushchev, represent the Soviet Union in the best possible way on the international stage at the present time.

N.S. Khrushchev: Thank you, Mr. De Gaulle, for your words. I have read your statement and greatly appreciate it, particularly because I know that when De Gaulle says something, he never backs down from his words.

I have kept you, Mr. President, a little longer than expected, but circumstances have compelled me to do so.

The decision of whether or not to hold the summit depends not on us, but rather on you.

The Soviet Union has always advocated and continues to advocate for peaceful coexistence between states, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, respect for the sovereignty of states, and cooperation in finding solutions to issues that contribute to the détente in international relations and resolving the issue of disarmament. This is our ideal, and we will never deviate from it. However, if American aggressors unleash war against us, we will fight with all our might, and we are confident that we will win.

If the United States does not change the course they have declared, then we cannot participate in the summit. Thus, everything hinges on the Western countries.

De Gaulle: Regardless of whether the summit takes place or not, I listened with great interest and even satisfaction to your statement, Mr. Chairman, that the Soviet Union intends to follow a policy of peaceful coexistence and seek coordinated solutions to contentious international issues.

At the same time, I know the true intentions of Western countries, and therefore I am confident that regardless of whether the summit takes place or not, we will find a path to peace.

From the Soviet side the meeting was attended by: Minister of Foreign Affairs, A.A. Gromyko; Minister of Defense, R.Ya. Malinovsky; Ambassador of the USSR to France, S.A. Vinogradov, and

from the French side: Prime Minister M. Debré, Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Couve de Murville, and Ambassador of France to the USSR, M. Dejean.

b The documents No. II-VIII of the documentary preface were printed by a typographic method for the brochure prepared at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union "Why the summit did not take place. (Documents and materials). 1960. Not for printing."

c Here and further in the text of documents No. II-V and VII-VIII of the documentary preface, the surnames of the speakers are highlighted in bold font.