



**July 8, 1961**

**Record of a Conversation Between N. S. Khrushchev  
and K. Popovic, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs  
of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Concerning  
the Questions of Signing a Peace Treaty with  
Germany**

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**Summary:**

Khrushchev and Popovic discuss the ongoing tensions surrounding the peace treaty with Germany and the future of West Berlin, with Khrushchev emphasizing the Soviet Union's readiness to act if negotiations fail. They address the actions of Western powers, particularly the United States and its allies, and the risks of escalation, while acknowledging the importance of diplomacy to avoid conflict. Khrushchev also touches on the Soviet decision to suspend disarmament measures, the broader international situation, and internal developments in both the USSR and Yugoslavia.

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**Secret**

b Underlined by typewriter.

After a brief exchange of greetings K. Popovic, on Tito's instructions, passed the warmest greetings to N. S. Khrushchev. Then K. Popovic said that he had already met with Cde. A. A. Gromyko, with whom they discussed a number of important international problems. He said, we are supposed to meet several more times.

N. S. Khrushchev Of course it's necessary to talk about all questions. Today I plan to make a big speech to the graduates of the military academies. Among us annual meetings of graduates of the military academies have become a good tradition. In my speech I will try to some degree to respond to the threats of the West directed against us. In recent days De Gaulle, who promised to transfer one division from Algeria to Europe, although it is clear to everyone that with modern military equipment even 10-20 divisions do not have importance, "began to intimidate" us.

a Underlined by typewriter from this point on.

K. Popovic Probably this step has more political significance. De Gaulle probably planned to disrupt the balance of forces with it.

N. S. Khrushchev Not long ago I talked with British Ambassador Roberts about Macmillan's statement that the West should stand firmly on the question of Berlin. I told him that we will conclude a peace treaty which will apply to the GDR and thereby end the right of occupation. Then, the sovereignty of this country will be violated in the event of movement through GDR territory without its permission. Our troops, as everyone knows, are in the GDR for protection of its sovereignty. When Roberts began to say that the West will take a firm position on this question, I asked him how many bombs will be needed to destroy Britain. Roberts replied that according to the calculations of some specialists, something around six. Then I told him a new version of the anecdote about pessimists and optimists. The pessimists think that six bombs will be needed to destroy Britain, and the optimists [say] nine. I calmed him down, declaring that we have several dozen bombs for this matter, and said that it is better to refrain from such arguments and begin to hold genuine negotiations on the question of concluding a peace treaty with Germany. Let's sit at the negotiating table, but you're not sitting - we will sign a peace treaty with the GDR.

K. Popovic Negotiations are the only way and opportunity to solve this question. But what does the West propose to do for their part?

N. S. Khrushchev We have information that the Western countries are proposing to submit a proposal to begin negotiations, and then drag them out endlessly. We won't accept a delay of negotiations and will sign a peace treaty with the countries which agree to this.

K. Popovic Do the Western powers not agree to any temporary solution to this question?

N. S. Khrushchev No, they don't want a temporary solution. They all well understand right now that no one can change the present borders of Germany, but no one except De Gaulle wants to recognize these borders as final. The Westerners recognize this only during negotiations face to face, but they will never sign a peace treaty but will, so to speak, engage in "fishing in troubled waters", demagogically declaring that the signing of a peace treaty perpetuates the division of Germany. There won't be a united Germany, Adenauer knows this, but he is trying to instill in the revenge-seekers the hope of a return to them of their previous lands.

K. Popovic Evidently an increase of international tension serves their interests.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, of course, the German question is such a tangle which promotes the preservation of tension throughout the entire world. Judge for yourself what would happen if they signed the peace treaty, and West Berlin were turned into

a free city. This would mean resolution of the most important tangle of our differences with the West. We have no conflicts with Britain, France, or the US except political ones. There are none with West Germany, our trade relations with it are developing better than with other Western countries. The Americans fear that the conclusion of a peace treaty will lead to a weakening of NATO since here the unity rests on fear of "the Russians". With regard to Berlin they say that they are for a free Berlin; we, too. We are ready to give any guarantees to the residents of West Berlin or from the four powers, neutral countries, or the United Nations. They understand to what consequences a resolution of the German question will lead and fear this. So, Kennedy declared to me during the Vienna meeting that it would lead to the collapse of NATO. He said, we gave guarantees to many countries of the world and have to carry them out. But whoever asked him to give these guarantees, to take on the role of the Pope issuing indulgences[?] Our forces are equal but he, Kennedy, acts like a stubborn old man. Life goes forward, everything changes, but people don't notice this. The Americans are fat, rich, and everyone crawls before them and curries favor. But there are socialist countries in the world, but the Western countries still have not really recognized this. Right now the Westerners are faced with an alternative - either a clash occurs, and then they will feel the strength of the socialist countries, or they will display more reason. We have no [other] way out. We will sign a peace treaty and halt access to West Berlin except by agreement with the GDR. I recently approved the positioning of our troops in this region at the suggestion of our military men. We don't plan to fight, but are prepared for war. There is no [other] way out, otherwise they will try to demonstrate their strength to us further.

K. Popovic They have very weak arguments. They lose nothing in West Berlin, neither prestige nor NATO.

N. S. Khrushchev The position of the West is not distinguished by logic. Kennedy is acting like a child who says "I want". A report appeared in the press that the Americans are proposing to conduct a mobilization and increase the military budget by \$3.5 billion. For our part we have given the Ministry of Defense instructions to temporarily halt the reduction of the armed forces planned for 1961, and have also made a decision to increase expenses for defense in the current year by 3,144,000,000 rubles. If they transfer armed forces to Europe then we will also transfer part of our troops to the GDR, but not much, we have enough there.

K. Popovic In your opinion, how will events develop in the future?

N. S. Khrushchev We don't know what Kennedy will do. If they declare a mobilization then we will respond likewise and field 300 divisions. I said so to Roberts.

K. Popovic But is some other decision possible?

N. S. Khrushchev The best is to sign the peace treaty, declare West Berlin a free city, and recognize the GDR. It is not a matter here of prestige, but only of documenting [*fiksirovanie*] the situation which has developed. We don't demand anything, and do not propose to change borders. We do not demand indemnities, although we have the complete right to this.

A. A. Gromyko. The Americans signed a treaty with Japan without us.

N. S. Khrushchev They signed a peace treaty with Japan without us. Why can they act this way, but we cannot? In this case it is a matter of prestige. My opinion is that common sense will triumph and there will be no war. Ninety-five percent think that there will not be one, and five percent are for war. It would be 99% if the late Dulles were alive. We all well know that he was a reactionary, an anti-Communist, and pursued matters to the brink of war, but he knew where this line was which could not be crossed. When he died Cde. Gromyko did not want to go to his funeral, but I convinced him to do this. With the death of Dulles the danger of an outbreak of war has increased. He did not want a war and even called the situation which had developed in West Berlin "abnormal". If he were alive we would have possibly come to agreement with the Americans sooner. Right now no one dares to follow his example. Eisenhower is in general a good person, but not a statesman. Kennedy is a new person, young, but needs to use his energy wisely. One person might come to him and advise one thing, and another a different thing, but when a person doesn't have his own opinion, this is strange. Kennedy has a small majority which elected him, and he constantly feels this. In his circle is Rusk, who was connected with the

house of Rockefeller. McCloy was somehow offended by me when I told him after his appointment to the post of special assistant to the President for questions of disarmament that "they let the goat go to guard the cabbage". Since he has dealt with questions of disarmament his whole life his appointment to the new post means only that they do not want to disarm. The Western countries are ready for an agreement to halt the testing of nuclear weapons because they have big stocks of these weapons, which they can increase unhindered. In addition, such an agreement would allow them to create a broad espionage network in our country. This is what they have been striving for since the time of our Revolution. They do not extend their agreement to halt the testing of atomic and hydrogen weapons to underground testing, although it is also possible to test new technical devices in the course of these tests. In addition, their NATO allies, the French, conduct tests. Therefore we, too, have decided to send them to Hell.

K. Popovic We also think that a decision to halt the testing would be only partial, and it is not necessary to create illusions that this will lead to a solution of the whole question.

As concerns the German question, then we well understand the positions of both sides, which have been recently been repeatedly presented. Not long ago I attended a reading of the record of Cde. N. S. Khrushchev's conversation with Kennedy. At the present time our government is concerned about the possibility of a new aggravation of international relations. There were aggravations earlier, too, but then the situation was nevertheless better. A more serious situation is taking shape right now although, in your opinion, only a 5% probability of war exists. Therefore it seems to us that it is necessary to do everything possible to begin negotiations with the goal of finding some solution of the German question. No one doubts the strength of the Soviet Union and the US, it is not worth convincing the world of the might of these powers. In order to fully understand your position I would like to find out why the Soviet government has decided to pursue all these measures in the near future. These are my reflections, but not comments. Of course, the question of West Berlin exerts a great influence on the international situation, and therefore its resolution would be a positive factor. But I doubt that a resolution of the Berlin question will lead to a resolution of a wide range of European problems inasmuch as other factors remain which allow West Germany to pursue its aggressive policy. But, of course, we do not oppose a resolution of the problem of West Berlin.

N. S. Khrushchev Why did we choose this very time? It simply coincided. Sixteen years have already passed from the end of the war and all possible deadlines have expired. We raised the question of the conclusion of a peace treaty in 1958, and three years from that moment expires in November. The fact that such a large interval of time has passed already harms us. Earlier the leaders of the Western powers recognized the importance of negotiations on this question, including Macmillan, who came to Moscow at that time. Remember that regarding this trip he replied: the question is this - either to hold negotiations with the Russians or turn to the Queen with a request to permit an evacuation of Britons to Canada.

We prepared very seriously for a summit meeting. They had Dillon, Herter, Nixon make provocative speeches, concerning which Eisenhower declared that he agreed with them. In April the Americans made a big provocation against us, launching their aircraft toward us; it flew over our territory, but we did not shoot it down. We punished our military for this severely. On 1 May they again sent their aircraft, and we shot it down. Then we made a very vague declaration about this on purpose, not saying that the pilot was alive and that we had physical evidence of the flight of this aircraft. And the Americans fell for this like a fly into flypaper. They made a provocation right before the negotiations. The matter reached the point that the Americans declared it their right to fly over the territory of the Soviet Union. In Paris we firmly demanded an apology. They didn't want this, citing the need to preserve prestige. Macmillan urged me very much to agree to begin negotiations, but we could not do this. [I] had to also cancel Eisenhower's visit. If he had come to us we could have thrown rocks at him. Then the resolution of the question was moved back in connection with the upcoming elections in the US. Right now they tell us that it is impossible to conduct negotiations since there will be elections in West Germany. But a delay in a resolution of the question about the signing of a peace treaty with

Germany gives us nothing. We have only worsened our position. They will think this way: we have shown firmness, and the Russians have retreated. Kennedy said to me, why change the current situation. But we will change it, the legal rights are on our side.

K. Popovic I don't understand how the Americans could cherish any illusions regarding your determination to defend the GDR or do they hope to frighten you? They should have been ready to begin negotiations about a peace treaty or to take some practical measures. You possibly would have had to suggest holding negotiations right now, which could have led to some changes. Then the Soviet Union would not have needed to make declarations which they in the West try to pass off as ultimatums.

N. S. Khrushchev We favor negotiations. Macmillan will never agree to begin a war, just like Adenauer and De Gaulle. The Americans represent a great danger: it is for them to start and for their allies to die. The allies of the US are to some extent our hostages. On the first day of a war we will suffer great damage, but we will destroy them. Even the West German Minister Straus declared that nothing will be left of West Germany in the event of war. Hitler did not know how the war which he started would end but if he had known that he would have to shoot himself in a bunker then he would not have started the war. But these [people] know that if they begin a war then this would be crazy. Therefore I think that the possibility of a war is not five percent, but even less. As concerns the question of prestige because of which officers previously fought duels, then nowhere do we clash on this question except Germany. We do not propose changing anything, including borders. Once De Gaulle declared to me during negotiations: we fear the Soviet Union because it is a strong country. There will not be any redistribution of forces here. West Germany remains an ally of the Western countries. By the way, you know the views of De Gaulle on the question of the reunification of Germany. He favored its division not into two, but three or four parts. What he is doing right now is being done for Adenauer.

A peace treaty with Germany will not lead to a change of borders. The creation of a free city does not change the political system of West Berlin. The entire dispute is about to whom the stamp is applied. For nothing is changed except the right to access to West Berlin. In the same conversation about Roberts I said that we have an agreement about air communications with Great Britain, but when we fly there over Denmark we ask the latter for special permission. Consequently the question naturally arises why should a special procedure exist in the case of an overflight of the territory of the GDR or when using its roads? According to a statement of the Westerners this is explained by the fact that they do not recognize the GDR. I once reminded the Americans that they did not recognize the USSR for 16 years. They replied to me that our Tsar did not recognize America for 26 years. Then I told the American ambassador that the Tsar was a fool, but what are you?<sup>79</sup>

The Americans are not such heroes. In the last World War the Soviet Union lost 20 million men and the Americans only 250,000. Macmillan is an intelligent person, but if he commits this stupidity then it is in order to mollify Adenauer.

Does a resolution of the Germany problem serve the cause of relaxing international tension? Yes, of course. At first an aggravation of the international situation will occur, but if the guns don't begin to speak then equal relations will be established and then a general lessening of international tension will occur. What can they do to us - halt trade with us? This would not throw us back. Our seven-year plan is based on our own resources, and not handouts of the West. They can even sever diplomatic relations with us - this, too, will not frighten us. We will live, you'll see who loses more from this.

K. Popovic Yes, all this can be overcome, but there still exists a three or five percent danger of an outbreak of war.

N. S. Khrushchev Of course. One cannot exclude the possibility of a clash in the form of combat operations. We are Marxists and know that imperialism is not a "paper tiger" and as long as imperialism exists the danger of an outbreak of war exists. Not long ago in his speech in Manila General MacArthur called for outlawing war. Previously war brought benefit to the victors. The last war did not bring a profit but, on the contrary, required great expenditures in men and equipment, and the victorious countries had to revive the economies of the former enemy. Right now, declared MacArthur, the Russians think that we are searching for a moment to

destroy them, and we think that the Russians are searching for the same moment. The peoples want peace. British Field Marshal Montgomery suggested withdrawing all foreign troops from Europe, eliminating military bases, etc. They have informed me that Eisenhower recently made a statement at some military school in which he said that it was necessary to eliminate military bases. The "free" society of the US naturally did not publish the text of this statement.

During the conversations in Vienna Kennedy said to me, "let's compete". We agreed to compete because we think that we will catch up to the US in several years. In the last 16 years our average annual growth of productivity in the USSR has been 10.6%, and theirs, two percent. If the current growth rates of industrial production are maintained the Soviet Union will already overtake America in 1967, although Kennedy says that this will happen only at the beginning of the next century. Let the question of the advantages of a system be decided by history itself, without human casualties. I think that reason will prevail. There is a share of risk, of course, and you would not have revolted in 1941 had you not been completely convinced in your final goal<sup>80</sup>. In 1941 you had a very serious situation, but we knew that Marxism would be victorious in the final account.

K. Popovic [I] would not like it for the matter to reach the point of a military clash because of differences on this question. This question does not deserve to be fought over. The West's line is clear to us. Macmillan is taking a rigid position right now since he is performing his duty with respect to his allies. At the same time we have accurate information that the British are exerting all kinds of influence on the Americans to convince them to begin negotiations. Time is flying, and the question comes down to whether Kennedy will be able to make a rational decision during these several months. Now the Soviet point of view is clear to me personally, but the question arises whether it is still impossible right now to suggest a specific date for negotiations since up to now only the general position of the Soviet government has been presented.

N. S. Khrushchev We proposed our draft of a peace treaty long ago. We didn't indicate a timeframe for negotiations, so our proposal could not be viewed as an ultimatum. We will offer a date sometime later. I once asked FRG Ambassador Kroll when it is better for Adenauer for us to sign the peace treaty with Germany. He replied that it was all the same, but better after the elections in West Germany. The peace treaty will be signed after our Party Congress, most likely in November or December, but this does not change things. Right now we are awaiting the reply of the Western powers. They are hinting that they will negotiate. We will wait, since we don't want to act like cocky roosters. It is expected that the Western powers will send their answer in literally several days.

If the signing of the peace treaty is put off for another three years, then the matter will get worse. West Germany is already the strongest power in Europe right now. Its army is stronger than the armies of Britain and France (without counting nuclear weapons). In three years they will create an even more powerful army. The FRG does not have nuclear weapons, but it might have them. The positions of West Germany in NATO are increasing. West German generals occupy command posts in NATO, and Adenauer, more than others, increasingly determines NATO policy. The position of West Germany will be further strengthened. The delay with the signing of the peace treaty would be to the advantage of the Westerners.

Even before the meeting with Kennedy I talked with American Ambassador Thompson. I did this in order to warn the President about our position on disarmament, about West Berlin, and about the testing of nuclear weapons. I did not want us to be accused of a rigid position during the meeting in Vienna. Then Thompson declared there will be a war. I replied to him that it will not stop us. Thompsons said that if we persistently pursue our policy then the German army will get nuclear weapons. I noted to Thompson that this will not stop us inasmuch as the sum does not change from a change of the positions of the terms. Whoever has these weapons, they are directed against us all the same. The Americans do not want to depend on Adenauer's stupidity and prefer to depend only on their own.

We understand that a war will lead to colossal losses. But don't forget about our capabilities. The Americans don't know war on their own territory, but a certain part of them are nevertheless beginning to think about it. I have already talked about

MacArthur's speech.

If someone also understood what war would be like in contemporary conditions, that person was Dulles. Remember how the Americans at one time started an affair around Syria. There was a strong Communist Party in Syria, and it would have won if Syria had occupied another geographical position. At that moment Dulles was beginning to prepare Turkey and Iraq to seize Syrian territory. We well knew about all their preparations, even to the deployment of the regiments and individual field guns. The threat was quite real. What did we do then? We send one of our marshals to the borders of Turkey and another to the border with Iran and conducted military exercises in these regions. Military exercises were also held at our request in Bulgaria. The Turks took a step, and we took a step. Two steps remained to war, and Dulles sounded the retreat. America's interests were not affected there. America should be directly included in combat activities here.

K. Popovic It is very important what kind of reply the Western powers send.

N. S. Khrushchev The reply will be very bold. They will throw thunder and lightning, but will agree to hold negotiations. But only you, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, know to what extent they agree to hold negotiations.

K. Popovic Ministers mainly only give the appearance that they know everything.

N. S. Khrushchev We assess the situation as not bad. We do not think the current international situation is a pre-war [situation], but we think that it is the result of an artificial complication of the situation. I think that the Western powers will be forced to agree with such a solution of the question, as they say - they will swallow it and bite their tongues [*s"yedat i yazykom zakusyat* - SIC].

K. Popovic Kennedy is pleased that you admit the existence of a certain balance of forces at the present time. He is glad of this since their positions in the broad sense of this word are not equal, and their prospects are not especially good.

N. S. Khrushchev Events in Cuba, in Laos, and in Berlin - all these are a specific manifestation of the policy from a position of strength which the Western powers are trying to pursue right now.

How are things going in Yugoslavia with the harvest?

K. Popovic A good harvest is expected this year, although at the beginning of the year a very bad situation developed in connection with a cold spring.

N. S. Khrushchev A very good harvest in Ukraine is expected this year. It is supposed that the harvest this year will be double last year's. We have contemplated buying 700 million poods in Ukraine. Ukraine has never before produced so much. Now we are orienting the Ukrainian comrades toward 750 million poods, but this depends on the harvest of corn. As concerns the situation in Siberia and Kazakhstan it is still hard to make forecasts since the harvest ripens later. Purchases of grain in Kazakhstan are about 900 million poods. If we did not have the virgin lands we would have had to purchase grain abroad, including in Yugoslavia.

K. Popovic I doubt that we don't care about the reserves.

N. S. Khrushchev Basically, three republics - the RSFSR, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine - supply the country with grain, and all the rest give a very small part of grain production.

K. Popovic We rejoice in your successes with all our heart.

N. S. Khrushchev Not long ago we completed preparation for the Party Program. I am very satisfied with it. A number of questions of theory and Communist development are raised in it in a new, very interesting way. The Program provides, along with other measures, that after some time all our children will be covered by nurseries, kindergartens, and boarding schools; office workers and manual laborers will work 30 hours a week, and we will have two days off a week; all old people who wish it will live in buildings for the elderly; free breakfasts and lunches will be organized for all workers; 60% of all material goods will be distributed in a public manner, and 40% individually. But we do not yet intend to abandon the principle of material incentive. The Program contains criticism of Yugoslav revisionism, of course. Our differences on the main questions of principle are well known to you. If there was no criticism of

Yugoslav revisionism in the Program you would even be surprised. And you did not forget us in your revisionist program adopted several years ago<sup>81</sup>.

K. Popovic You have enormous achievements in all areas of life, and the Soviet economy is developing successfully. Why do you need to criticize Yugoslav revisionism? As concerns our program, we did not have such successes at the time it was adopted.

In conclusion N. S. Khrushchev asked that greetings be passed to Tito, Rankovic, and the other Yugoslav leaders.

[The following] took part in the conversation from the Soviet side; A. A. Gromyko, USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs; N. P. Firyubin, Deputy USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs; A. A. Yepishev, Soviet Ambassador in the FNRYu; and S. T. Astavin, Chief of the 5th European Department of the USSR MFA.

Present at the conversation were I. Vejsvoda, Assistant SFRYu State Secretary for Foreign Affairs; L. Mojcov, FNRYu Ambassador in the USSR; and G. Zarkovic and B. Loncar, chiefs of departments of the FNRYu GSID [State Secretariat for Foreign Affairs].

the conversation was recorded by S. T. Astavin and V. K. Zhuravlev

*Memo:* N. S. Khrushchev did not review the record of the conversation

*Note:* "distributed"

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