

September 8, 1961

Record of a Conversation Between N. S. Khrushchev and Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India

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Summary:

In this conversation, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev discuss the urgent need for disarmament and the global threat posed by nuclear weapons. Nehru stresses the catastrophic consequences of nuclear war and advocates for international efforts to reduce tensions and promote peace. Khrushchev reaffirms the Soviet Union's commitment to peace and disarmament but defends the resumption of Soviet nuclear testing as necessary to deter Western aggression and ensure national security. The discussion also covers recent speeches by Western leaders, the ongoing arms race, and a confidential letter Khrushchev received from US diplomat John McCloy regarding disarmament negotiations, which both leaders agree merits further consideration as a potential path forward.

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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION

between N. S. KHRUSHCHEV and Jawarharlal NEHRU, Prime Minister of India

8 September 1961

[handwritten at the bottom of the first page: "Not reviewed by Cde. Khrushchev", followed by some illegible initials]

J. Nehru said that he had come to the Kremlin directly from the Exhibit of the Achievements of the Soviet Economy. This exhibit made an enormous impression on him but, unfortunately, he only spent two hours there, but at least two weeks would be needed to see everything.

N. S. Khrushchev said that he also likes the Exhibit. When you were there you were struck at what a person is capable of.

N. S. Khrushchev noted further that he plans to go to Stalingrad tomorrow and see the "exhibit" there of turbines in operation.

J. Nehru inquired about the capacity of the Stalingrad Hydroelectric Station.

N. S. Khrushchev replied that its capacity is about 2,500,000 kilowatt-hours. The annual output of the Stalingrad Hydroelectric Station, he added, is equal to the output of all the hydroelectric stations of the Soviet Union in 1950, or somewhat less than this.

J. Nehru asked what amount of energy was produced by pre-revolutionary Russia.

N. S. Khrushchev answered that the entire installed capacity of the pre-revolutionary electric power stations was equal to 1,300,000 kilowatt-hours.

A. N. Kosygin added that these electric power stations were low-capacity and scattered throughout the entire territory of the country

J. Nehru asked: what is the total capacity of all the electric power stations of the Soviet Union[?]Q

N. S. Khrushchev replied that about 67,000,000 kilowatt-hours of electrical power in all are produced. This year the Bratsk Hydroelectric Station will be put in operation with a capacity of 4,500,000 kilowatt-hours. This is a very interesting station, as all the Angara stations operate with constant power the entire year without fluctuations in the production of power thanks to the fact their basin is Lake Baikal.

J. Nehru noted that during his stay in Moscow he had the opportunity to meet with N. S. Khrushchev several times and he was very appreciative of the fact that the Head of the Soviet government kindly shared so much of his time and explained his understanding of various problems. As I have already said, continued J. Nehru, we are very concerned about the possibility of a conflict or war breaking out. If a war begins, it will grow into a world war and, judging from what the scientists say, it will bring with it mutual destruction. Therefore it is natural that all these years we have been propagandizing for peace and opposing war, especially nuclear war. We very much hope that everything will be done to avert it.

In various countries without doubt there are quite diverse views, different understandings of international problems, and they need to be discussed, but the main thing is to prevent a new war and create the possibility of building a society which is most suitable for that people. The Soviet Union is the first in the world to build its own socialist society and has achieved outstanding successes in socialist development. The great tasks outlined by the 20-year plan demonstrate this. The grandiose achievements of the USSR on the basis of this plan will exert a great influence on all humanity.

It will be a great tragedy if a war interfered in these plans. As I have already said, continued J. Nehru, the only realistic possibility of solving contentious questions is personal meetings and discussions in order to in some way lessen fears since it is difficult to act logically in an atmosphere of fear. Personally, I think that disarmament is the most radical means for this. But as long as people fear one another it is hard to convince them that it is necessary to begin disarmament. If these fears are eliminated then it will be easier to solve the main contentious problems. Much has

been said about peace and disarmament in recent years. Millions of people want this, and all the same armament is going on instead of disarmament, that is, the reverse process is taking place, an accumulation of armaments is occurring. How to achieve disarmament, how to eliminate fear and suspicion - that is the question.

Much has been said recently about nuclear bombs. At the Exhibit we say photographs and slogans saying that people do not want war, that the bombs should be destroyed. The Soviet Union has taken the initiative on itself in the question of prohibiting nuclear weapons, on the question of disarmament. We share such ambitions. If the nuclear arms race continues like the convention arms race, new tests of nuclear weapons will be made in the future, and this might lead to a conflict which we want to avoid. This question has many aspects, political and military, and the need to strengthen security. I cannot judge the military aspect. I know that everything is being done in the Soviet Union for the person, to improve his life. In the current situation it is hard to do this and it is hard to pursue work to remake society.

I am of the opinion that humanity is waiting for some powerful country to be the first to take the initiative in this. A weak country can only express its opinion, but it cannot take effective steps. I am confident that N. S. Khrushchev knows all this and am convinced that he, with his sincere desire for peace, can take the initiative upon himself before the world.

N. S. Khrushchev said that he and his comrades understand the concern of J. Nehru.

I am very glad, continued N. S. Khrushchev, that we have had the opportunity to share our thoughts and better understand one another's position on the questions with which we are faced. If you look at the period of time which has passed since the death of Stalin then it will be clear that we have made very great successes during this time. We have laid the foundation of a Communist society. We have shown that the Soviet Union and the socialist countries construct their policy not on aggressive designs, but on a desire for peace. We have eliminated military bases on foreign territories, and all the mixed economic companies which we had in other countries since these societies are a source of conflict and have the odor of economic interference.

J. Nehru asked what mixed economic companies N. S. Khrushchev meant.

N. S. Khrushchev replied that he was speaking of the joint stock companies on the territory of Poland, China, and other countries, and added that the existence of such societies was bad policy. Sometimes it turned out this way: at first economic interference, then political. We noted that this was a useful measure. We unilaterally reduced our armed forces, but could not ignore the fact that the Western countries did not make a single step to meet us halfway. They surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases, and at the same time accused us of being a hotbed of tension. They hold large maneuvers, and therefore we should do the same. At the present time large maneuvers are being held in countries bordering the USSR and we are forced to also schedule large maneuvers.

We propose concluding a peace treaty with Germany, but they reply that this would lead to an increase of tension, and they are starting to threaten us. Why do they need West Berlin, if not for aggressive purposes? N. S. Khrushchev said, you yourselves were witnesses that they launched aircraft over our territory, and then the President of the US publicly declared that this is their right that they conduct these flights and should conduct them for intelligence purposes, to ensure their security. This, of course, is the limit of impudence. At first they lied and dodged, and then made this statement. How can we not be concerned about our own security? Right now we are in a real blockade and are arming ourselves to break through it. Of course, a war might break out in such conditions. We are concerned about such a situation, but we have a formidable powerful force at our disposal with the aid of which we can destroy our enemies. This is not a threat, this is a reality.

Why don't they liquidate their bases on foreign territory, said N. S. Khrushchev. We already proposed withdrawing our troops from foreign territories long ago. We also proposed reducing the strength of the armed forces in third countries. They did not meet us halfway. What were we to do? We were forced to resume nuclear tests. This led to an increase of international tension. They are organizing military bases on the territory of the countries which border us, and we have to create weapons to destroy

these bases.

There is no alternative. The other alternative is capitulation, but a capitulation that one is not in a position to defend themselves. I want to say, N. S. Khrushchev continued, that if one places hopes on relations between the US and the Soviet Union to wait until they improve and do nothing yourselves, then there might be a war.

The non-aligned countries should understand that the bases located on the territory of other countries is aggression and that anyone who does not admit this is rewarding the aggressor. Those who do not want to recognize the existence of the two German states, is in fact rewarding an aggressor desiring to swallow the GDR. Those who refrain from condemning the US for not desiring general disarmament are in fact rewarding militaristic forces.

If one examines the Belgrade Conference in these terms the it needs to be admitted that it did not play its role.

If the countries which are not aligned in blocs do not condemn the presence of military bases on foreign territory then they are not promoting the strengthening of peace. Such a situation result that the non-aligned countries leave the two opposing countries to act, but they themselves stand between them. Such a situation might lead to a clash from which the non-aligned countries will also perish.

We ought not to be accused of inflaming the atmosphere. We are not traders in death, which the representatives of monopoly capital are, we are Communists. We were forced to conduct tests because we have to defend ourselves.

They want to read lectures to me, continued N. S. Khrushchev about what influences the health of people. My grandfather was a serf and worked for a landowner his whole life. This was bad for his health. My father and I worked 12 hours in dank mines – this was harmful to [our] health. We had no alternative – such were the living conditions under a capitalist system, but they only work six hours under socialism. Therefore we also rose up against capitalism. And right now, to defend ourselves against the onslaught of capitalism we have been forced to take steps, although also to our own harm. If we had not done this [our] enemies would have shackled us. We do not want to wait until they us again confine us, and we are accumulating [our] forces.

You possible know how barbarically the Germans behaved on our territory, and how terribly they treated the Russian prisoners of war. We don't want this to be repeated.

The preservation of the state of war is preparation for a new war. We need to arm ourselves and be armed until our enemies understand that it is impossible to conquer us with the aid of weapons. We demand nothing that would harm the sovereignty of other nations. We are defending our sovereignty. This is our right, this is the law. Even a small bird resists when they want to put it in a cage, even a sparrow defends itself when they ravage its nest.

We have to defend ourselves. If they threaten us there will be war, but I think that there will be no war. A war might only be started by crazy people. We don't need war, we do not wish either the riches or sovereignty of other countries. If they start a war, if they want to destroy us, then we will counter strength with our strength. There is no alternative. If the UN were an effective organization then we could act through it. But right now the UN is a branch of the State Department.

Reports are already appearing in the American press which say that in determining the size of economic aid to other countries it is necessary to take into consideration what position a particular country took at the conference in Belgrade. This is at least arrogance.

Such is reality. I can assure you, said N. S. Khrushchev, and I think that you believe me, that we will not start a war. We don't want a war. Our policy will be peace-loving in the future. The draft CPSU Program envisions peaceful development, but that is evidently what frightens the aggressive forces.

Some tell us: you ought not sign the peace treaty, this will increase tension. But this does not solve the question, but only delays its solution. Therefore we will sign the peace treaty. We have no other alternative.

I have already presented the motives for a resumption of nuclear weapons tests in sufficient detail. As concerns disarmament, we have presented our positions quite clearly more than once. At the present time our position on this question remains the

same.

Whether there will be a war or not depends on a large degree on the non-aligned countries. It is not necessary to associate oneself with military blocs to solve the question of war and peace, but one cannot be neutral in these questions. In these questions neutrality assists the forces of war.

We have received a letter from V. A. Zorin, N. S. Khrushchev said further, who met in Moscow with McCloy to discuss the question of disarmament. McCloy presented his proposals concerning disarmament. It seems necessary to study this question additionally since it is impossible to understand everything to the end at once, However, at first reading we have decided that there is hope that we will be able to come to an agreement about these questions. But it is necessary to read these proposals again and thoroughly study whether or not there are hidden dangers. If this document actually represents a will for disarmament, then we can only welcome it.

Then N. S. Khrushchev said that we are very glad that J. Nehru could visit our country, which gave [him] the opportunity to frankly exchange opinions. We have presented our views, but the situation will tell what actions need to be taken. I am not a pessimist, N. S. Khrushchev said further, but in life there are still a great many strange things. Even crazy people sometimes behave rationally, so there is still hope.

McCloy sent a reply to my personal letter, said N. S. Khrushchev. He wrote that he spent his vacation in the mountains, but he was literally pulled out of the mountains and brought to the President. It turned out that the reason for this was the Soviet Union's resumption of the testing of nuclear weapons. The letter seems interesting to me. In it McCloy spoke about his views; if you want, said N. S. Khrushchev, I will give you the opportunity to familiarize yourself with this letter confidentially. I received the letter only today, so the thoughts expressed in it are very topical. I can show [you] my previous letter so the content of this letter is clearer. McCloy noted in particular that both the President and the US Secretary of State were familiarized with the substance of my letter.

J. Nehru thanked N. S. Khrushchev and expressed a desire to familiarize himself with the letters. He added, we would very much like to find out N. S. Khrushchev's opinion with respect to the various opinions advanced in this letter. From what N. S. Khrushchev said he, Nehru, is of the opinion that the letter contains a new and more acceptable approach.

J. Nehru said further that he very well understood that the Soviet Union has done much in recent years to lessen tension. Unfortunately, the attitude of the Western powers toward the proposals of the Soviet Union has been negative.

No one can suggest that countries, and especially such a great power as the Soviet Union, follow a policy of capitulation. We are not suggesting abandoning the signing of the peace treaty with East Germany, but we suggest approaching the solution of the problem so that if possible they yield the most positive results. There are two groups in the United States, one if which is for, and the second is against a war. I think, said J. Nehru, that President Kennedy belongs to the second group. It is necessary that this group obtain any assistance.

N. S. Khrushchev replied that we also want this. We want to assist all forces which are in favor of peace. Not long ago a very stupid statement of Eisenhower in a very belligerent tone. was published. Truman, who has evidently finally lost [his] mind, also made an analogous statement. But this is just the party to which the President belongs. How can they, these parties, be understood?

Then N. S. Khrushchev suggested that J. Nehru familiarize himself with the letters.

J. Nehru familiarized himself with McCloy's letter to N. S. Khrushchev and his reply.

J. Nehru thanked N. S. Khrushchev for the opportunity afforded him to familiarize himself with these letters. He would like to speak about the contents of the letters but, unfortunately, time has run out and it was time to go to a rally.

The conversation lasted one hour and 30 minutes. Present from the Soviet side were: Cdes. A. N. Kosygin, A. A. Gromyko, V. V. Kuznetsov, I. V. Arkhipov, S. P. Borisov, I. A. Benediktov, and V. I. Likhachev; [present] from the Indian side were: R. K. Nehru, Secretary General of the MFA; S. Datta, the Ambassador of India in the USSR; Minister V. H. Coelho, chief of a department of the Indian MFA; [Than], Counsellor of

the Indian Embassy in the USSR, and A. Gonsalves, 1st Secretary of the Indian Embassy in the USSR.

Recorded by: [signature]
Yu. Vinogradov

[handwritten: 1945/[[three illegible letters]]