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Khrushchev Memorandum to CC CPSU Presidium

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Summary:

Khrushchev proposes a unilateral reduction of armaments and personnel of the armed forces, promoting a more positive international image while still maintaining strong defense capabilities.

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TO MEMBERS OF THE
CC CPSU PRESIDUM
TO ALTERNATE MEMBERS OF THE CC CPSU PRESIDUM

I would like to express some thoughts on our further steps in the struggle for reduction of international tension and on the resolution of the issues of reduction of armaments and of disarmament.

The Soviet Union today has seized good positions on the international arena. The trip to the United States of America [and] our proposal in the United Nations Organization on general disarmament was well received in the world and cannot be simply rejected and neglected even by the reactionary circles of various countries. Even those who do not want a reduction of tension, much less disarmament, even they cannot oppose [it] openly in view of such a mood of broad circles of the public and desire for detente and reduction of armaments; they would probably use procrastination to find some arguments in order to turn this down, or in order to delay or disrupt decision-making on our proposals.

I believe that we today should take advantage of this opportunity [konyunktura], which we created in our favor, not to feel satisfied by our conquests, which we won, by positive recognition and our sound international position, and our leading role and initiative, which we retain consistently for several years.

I would think that we should now undertake a further reduction of armaments in our country, even without conditions of reciprocity on the part of other states, and a considerable reduction of personnel of the armed forces. I think that one could cut by perhaps a million or a million and half - one still must discuss it, study it with the Ministry of Defense. I believe that such a considerable reduction would not undermine our defense capabilities. Yet, if one comes forward with such a decision and implements it - this would have a large positive influence on the international situation and our prestige would grow enormously in the eyes of all nations. This would be an irresistible blow at the enemies of peace, and war-mongers, and advocates of the Cold War.

Why do I believe today that this would be feasible and not dangerous? My decision is based, first, on the fact that we have now reached a good position in the development of the economy of the Soviet Union; second, we are in an excellent position with [regard to] missile-building; indeed, we have an assortment of rockets to serve any military purpose, from long-range to close-combat range, "ground-to-ground" rockets as well as "air-to-ground" and "air-to-air" ones, atomic submarines and so on, and also in terms of the [explosive] yield we have a good variety. Besides, we worked out [naladili] the serial production of these rockets. I will not enumerate in this note all these rockets - those who are in charge, they know, and when we start discussing it, - we will repeat - therefore I do not enumerate [them] in the note, but I can lay out in more detail, when we begin discussion.

We now have a broad range of rockets and in such quantity that can virtually shatter the world. One may ask - shall we have this terrible armament - atomic, rocket armament, and shall we have such a big army, which we have [today]? This does not make sense. Our assumption is that we do not seek war and we do not prepare for offensive [war], but we prepare defense. If one accepts this assumption, as we do, our army should be capable of defending the country, of repelling enemies that might try to attack our Motherland or our allies, when we have these powerful armaments, such as rockets. But that is what they are for. What country or group of countries in Europe would dare to attack us, when we can virtually erase these countries from the face of the Earth by our atomic and hydrogen weapons and by launching our rockets to every point of the globe?

Therefore, if we now fail to take steps toward reduction of armed forces, and transfer this all, as it is already the case, for decision-making in the Committee of Ten, while having advantageous and active positions on our side, that would mean reducing our possibilities. Because our proposals would then be transferred to the labyrinths of the Committee, there will be much talk, speeches, and pompous verbiage, exercises in glorification, and this would scale down our initiative in this question.

If we, for instance, pass now a decision to cut our armed forces by a million or a million and a half, and would put forth appropriate arguments, it would be a considerable step forward. I believe that the conditions are quite ripe for us to speak about it. Indeed, we already spoke about it: in my report, that I made, and in our other declarations. We have already said many times that our ideological debates with capitalism will be resolved not through war, but through economic competition. Therefore our proposals and measures on further reduction of our armed forces would allow us to further pressure our opponents - the imperialist countries. Some comrades might object that we would cut armaments, while the enemy would not. But it is debatable if the enemy would be doing the right thing. If we cut and say that we cut because our hydrogen and rocket armament enable us to maintain defense capabilities at the necessary level, because we do not want war, therefore we want to cut the army, because we do not get ready for attack, the Soviet Union has never sought conquests, nor have socialist countries - then why we need such a huge army? To maintain this huge army would mean to reduce our economic potential. We have a chance to reduce the army. And if our enemies do not follow our example - one should not consider it as if it would cause us some damage. On the contrary, the countries which would maintain big armies, in the situation which emerges in socialist countries (i.e., their economic potential and, more importantly, powerful thermonuclear and rocket armament in their possession), these armies would, so to say, be sucking from their budgets, depleting national economies, and if one takes this in the light of struggle between communism and capitalism, they [i.e., the imperialist countries] would to a certain extent be our "ally," since they would devour their budgets, reduce the economic development of these countries, thereby contributing to the increasing advantages of our system.

I gave much thought to this issue, and decided before my arrival to Moscow to send such a note, so that the members and alternate members of the CC Presidium could read it, and, when I arrive, discuss it. If the comrades agree with me, then one could adopt necessary proposals. In my opinion, one could do the following: to convene a session of the Supreme Soviet, for instance, the session could be convened at the end of January or in February (one should select a time, but not delay) before the Committee of Ten starts, which is convened for February to discuss our proposals. So we should convene a session of the Supreme Soviet before this Committee starts its work, to approve a rapporteur, to report to the Supreme Soviet, to summon arguments and to take the decision, to accept an appeal that would say that, regardless of the reaction of other countries to our appeal, whether they would follow our example or not, we would abide by the decision of the Supreme Soviet.

I am confident that this would be a very powerful, fantastic [potryasaiuxchii] step. Moreover, this step would not in any way cause damage to our defenses, but would give us major political, moral, and economic advantages. Therefore, if we fail to do this, then speaking in economic terms, it would mean failing to make a full use of the powerful capital our socialist policy and our socialist economy have accumulated. For our economy is prospering, developing fast. Our science has advanced to such an extent that it has given us advantages in creating means to defend our country. And there are not only discoveries of science, but skillfully implemented scientific discoveries for practical needs.

I think that it would not make sense now to have atomic and hydrogen bombs, rockets, and to maintain at the same time a large army.

In addition, one should keep in mind that since we possess modern armaments of the

strongest kind, against which so far there is no defense, and [since] we maintain the largest army in the world, this indeed scares our enemies, and it scares even honest people among those who otherwise would welcome a fair disarmament, but who are afraid that perhaps this is just our tactical move. Their argument is the following: the Soviet Union introduced a proposal for a new reduction of armed forces, but does not make these reductions within its own territory. This might scare off some honest people, among those who seek disarmament; and the reactionary forces, who resist the reduction of international tension, these aggressive and militarist forces would of course use it for their ends.

If, however, we carry out a further reduction of our armed forces, then such a step would encourage those forces in bourgeois countries, those liberal bourgeois, capitalist circles who seek to improve the international situation, to live by the principles of peaceful coexistence. This would strengthen them and weaken the arguments of aggressive, militarist circles, who take advantage of our might and intimidate other countries.

How we could do it and all the details - for this one should already exchange opinions; we will give instructions to the Minister of Defense, to the General Staff so that they prepare [a proposal] in a concrete way.

Such a reduction, such a reduction (considerable) would be better extended over a year, year and half, or two. Thus during this time we would take a decision, would gradually start to reduce the army, because, while cutting such a number of people in the army, one should accommodate them: officers, military officials (soldiers are easy to accommodate), so that they would be all set and accommodated. And then we would see in which direction it goes, because we are not cutting at once: it would take a year, year and a half, two (but no more than two years). It would be logical. If we introduced a proposal at the session of the [U.N.] General Assembly about general and complete disarmament in 4 years, then a partial, unilateral disarmament we might carry out within two years or less. This would also be logical and convincing. And besides, it would not be dangerous.

Presenting for deliberation of the Presidium these proposals that I have thoroughly thought through, I hope that we will discuss them well at the Presidium and will weigh all arguments for and against. Perhaps I cannot foresee everything. But it seems to me that these proposals of mine, if we implement them, would not cause any damage to our country and would not threaten our defense capabilities vis-a-vis the enemy forces, but would rather enhance our international prestige and strengthen our country.

I have some details in these proposals, but I do not outline them in the note. When we begin discussing them, I will explain my arguments in more detail than [I do] in this note. For instance, while reducing armed forces, at a certain time, to a certain degree, perhaps one should move to a territorial system (militia formations). In other words, there would be regiments and divisions built on a territorial principle (with citizens recruited to serve in them without leaving their industries). Of course, one should have an appropriate cadre of officers for such regiments and units, armament must be stored somewhere in warehouses. We must have transport aviation, because in case of emergency one must transfer these regiments quickly from one place to another. For instance, if one has to transfer several divisions to Germany, we must do it practically in a few days. Armament for these territorial divisions must be stored in a suitably reasonable variety near the sites of deployment of these formations. And these divisions, for instance from Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov, would get together right away, on alert, to a gathering point, would board planes and leave.

And there are other considerations we should take into account so that the defense capabilities of our country would not diminish, but increase. The burden of

maintaining armies would be smaller, and the political position domestically, as well as internationally, would grow stronger, since we would free the resources that are sapped by the maintenance of a huge army and armament. And we would conquer even more [ground] in our favorable position in the international arena in the struggle for peace, the prestige of our country would grow even further. And all this would promote our Marxist-Leninist ideas, our teaching, our struggle for peace, because not only workers, but also peasants, petit bourgeois elements would become more sympathetic to us with every new year. Their sympathies would grow. They would move first from fear to neutral positions, and then would develop sympathies toward our country. This I take to be natural, and we should work to achieve it.

When I am saying that one perhaps should have not only a cadre army, but also in part territorial, militia forces, in doing so we essentially, to some extent, repeat what Lenin did after the October [1917] revolution, but in a different situation and somewhat in another way, since back then we had no other option, we had no army; and today we have both resources and armaments, we have an army. And we cannot be left without an army and we do not want to be. But we should build this army in such a way, that it would be reasonable, without excessive frills [bez izlishestv], so that it would be combat-ready and meet the needs of national defense.

Of course, we would have to revise the system of military schools: their profile and number. Perhaps, if we switch to a new system, we should also establish such military schools where officers would be trained without leaving their jobs in industries. This is also of great importance.

All these measures will undoubtedly take the burden off the national budget. We have big opportunities for implementation of the proposals I have outlined on a unilateral reduction of our armed forces.

A couple of words about our military schools. When we created our multiple military schools, we did not have a sufficient number of trained people in our country. Today all young people have education, and therefore it is possible to enlist enough people for military schools who will work, will train cadres without denying them to industrial economy, and will prepare officer cadres for all branches of the military. These commanders will be of the kind that will be even closer to the people, will be free of the so-called caste spirit that is emerging as a result of better material supply for students of military schools.

On the other hand, it would make sense and the costs would be less expensive.

These are the questions that I would consider necessary to offer for deliberation at the CC Presidium.

N. KHRUSHCHEV
8 December 1959