

October 2, 1959

**Record of Conversation of N. S. Khrushchev with CC
CCP Chairman Mao Zedong, Deputy Chairma Liu
Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Lin Biao, Politburo
Members Peng Zhen and Chen Yi, and Secretariat
Member Wang Jiaxiang**

Citation:

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Summary:

Record of conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and top Chinese Communist Party leaders. Khrushchev blames the Chinese for the border conflict with India and for allowing the Dalai Lama to escape from Tibet. The two sides argue over how the Chinese should have handled these problems, with Mao accusing the Soviet Union of being "time-servers."

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RECORD of CONVERSATION of COMRADE KHRUSHCHEV N.S.

With CC CCP Chairman MAO ZEDONG, Deputy Chairman CC CCP LIU SHAOQI, ZHOU ENLAI, ZHU DE, LIN BIAO, Politburo members PENG ZHEN and CHEN YI, and Secretariat member WANG JIAXIANG

2 October 1959

[After a tense and disagreeable discussion of the Taiwan issue and U.S. prisoners held by the PRC (raised by Eisenhower at Camp David), Mao and Khrushchev decide to take a break for an hour. After this, they begin a conversation regarding the uprising in Tibet and the border war with India.]

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: [Discusses the flexibility of the USSR in territorial issues giving Persia and Turkey as examples.] During many years, you and India had good relations. And suddenly a bloody incident as a result of which Nehru is in a difficult position. You could say that Nehru is a bourgeois figure, but we know this. If Nehru leaves [the scene], who will be better than him? The Dalai Lama has left Tibet and he is a bourgeois figure. This matter is also unclear to us ... If you will allow me to say what it is not permitted for a guest to say, the events in Tibet are your fault. You ruled in Tibet and should have had your intelligence agencies to know the Dalai Lama's plans and intentions.

MAO ZEDONG: Nehru also says that the events in Tibet are our fault. Furthermore, the Soviet Union published a TASS announcement on the conflict with India.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: What do you want, that we approve your conflict with India? That would be stupid of us. The TASS announcement was necessary. You, of course, nonetheless see some difference between me and Nehru. If we had not made the TASS announcement, then there would have been an impression that Nehru faced a united front of socialist countries. The TASS announcement made the question into one between you and India.

MAO ZEDONG: Our mistake was that we should have disarmed the Dalai Lama right away. But at that time we had no contact with the Tibetan masses.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: And now too you have no contact with the population of Tibet.

MAO ZEDONG: We understand this question differently.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: Of course. Exactly for this reason we touched on this question. We could speak as follows: Both we and you [host] Koreans who ran away from Kim Il Sung. But this is not a reason to ruin our relations with Kim Il Sung, with whom we remain good friends, as before. As for the Dalai Lama's departure from Tibet, had we been in your place, we would not have given him the chance to leave. It would be better if he was in the grave. [Luchshe by, esli by on byl v grobu.] But now he is in India and maybe will go to the USA. Is it possible that this is advantageous for the socialist countries?

MAO ZEDONG: It's impossible. We couldn't arrest him. We couldn't prevent his departure, because the border with India is long and he could cross it at any point.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: It's not a matter of arrest. I'm only saying you let him go in vain

[naprasno]. If you gave him the chance to escape to India, what would be Nehru's role? We think that the Tibetan events are the Chinese Communist Party's fault and not Nehru's.

MAO ZEDONG: No, they are Nehru's fault.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: Then should I understand you [as saying] that we then are not at fault for the events in Hungary, but the United States of America [is]. You understand, we had an army in Hungary and we supported [that] fool [durak] Rakosi. That was our mistake, not the United States'.

MAO ZEDONG: Is it possible to compare Rakosi with the Dalai Lama?

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: If you will, to a certain extent, yes.

MAO ZEDONG: The Indians acted in Tibet as if it belonged to them.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: We know this. As you know, Nepal wanted [us to post] a Soviet ambassador and we for a long time didn't send one there. You did the same. The reason is that Nehru did not want Soviet and Chinese ambassadors there. This should not surprise, since nothing other than this could be expected from Nehru. But this should still not be a reason to break off relations with him.

MAO ZEDONG: We also support Nehru, but he should be beaten on the Tibet question.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: Why did you have to kill people on the Indian border?

MAO ZEDONG: They attacked us first. They crossed the border and fired during 12 hours.

ZHOU ENLAI: Whose information do you believe – ours or the Indians'?

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: Although the Indians attacked, there are no Chinese dead, [only] Indians.

ZHOU ENLAI: What are we to do if they attack us first? We can't fire into the air. They even crossed the McMahon line. Besides, [Indian] Vice President [Sarvepalli] Radhakrishnan will visit China soon. This shows we are taking measures to solve the problem peacefully, by negotiations. In my 9 September letter to Nehru, we explained in detail all that happened between ourselves and India.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: Comrade Zhou Enlai, you were Foreign Minister for many years and know as well as I do how to solve disagreements without [spilling] blood. I am not now talking about the border, for if the Chinese and Indians do not know where the border between us [sic] is, then it's not worth it for me, a Russian, to get involved [vmeshivat'sia]. I'm just against the methods that were applied.

ZHOU ENLAI: Until a certain point, we didn't know anything about the border incident and all the measures were undertaken by the local authorities without central directives. Besides, this is about three contested areas between China and India. The Indians crossed the McMahon line first and opened fire first. No government of China has [ever] recognized the McMahon line. If [someone] attacked the borders of the USSR, say the Finns, wouldn't you answer [fire]?

SUSLOV, M.A.: We have no claims on the Finns.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: That the Center didn't know about the incident is news for me. I can only tell you something that I was against. On 22 June 1941, the Germans began an attack on the Soviet Union. Stalin forbade [us] to open answering fire and the directive to open fire came only somewhat later. Stalin explained this by the possibility that this was a provocation. Of course, this was one of Stalin's errors. He was simply a coward [strusil]. Here we have a completely different matter...

[A series of unpleasanties ensued with the Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi calling Khrushchev's policy "time-serving" (prisposoblenchestvo) and Suslov taking umbrage at Lin Biao's comparison of the "trivial [border] incident" with the "fatherland war in which tens of millions died."]

MAO ZEDONG: [The Indians were] repulsed by a decision of the local military organs.

LIN BIAO: There were no orders from above.

MAO ZEDONG: We were unable to hold the Dalai Lama, because the border with India is long and he could cross it at any point.

SUSLOV, M.A.: You should have known his intentions and plots in advance.

MAO ZEDONG: We wanted to delay the transformation of Tibet for four years.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: And that was your error.

MAO ZEDONG: The decision to delay the transformation was made earlier, after the Dalai Lama had been in India [and returned, in early 1957.] Without an excuse, we couldn't begin the attack. And this time we had a good reason, so we acted. It is this that you don't understand. You'll see later that the McMahon line with India will be maintained and the border conflict will end.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: This is good. But the matter is not about the line. We don't know it and don't want to.

MAO ZEDONG: We will solve the border question with India through negotiations.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: We welcome this intention.

ZHOU ENLAI: We suggested to Nehru that we negotiate this [coming] year on 22 January. Then he didn't agree. Now he does.

MAO ZEDONG: You pasted two labels on us, saying that the conflict with India was our fault and that the Dalai Lama's escape was our fault. We pasted one label on you - time-servers. Here.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: We don't accept. We hold a principled, Communist position. [Khrushchev wonders out loud, why the Chinese can criticize the Russians, but not the other way around. He concludes that: "You want to subordinate (podchinit') us ..."] Mao compares the Dalai Lama's escape to the departures of Kerenskii and Trotskii from the USSR, but Khrushchev rejects the comparison.]

CHEN YI: I am upset [vozmushchen] by your statement that the “worsening of relations with India was our fault.”

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: I am upset by your statement that we are time-servers. We should support Nehru, help him to keep power.

MAO ZEDONG: The Tibetan events and the border conflict are passing matters. Best that we end our discussion of these questions. Can’t we evaluate our relations as on the whole united, with some disagreements that do not prevent our friendship.

KHRUSHCHEV N.S.: We held and hold exactly that point of view.

[The conversation flares up once again between Chen Yi and Khrushchev with Wang Jiaxiang defusing the tension by claiming that Chen Yi was mistranslated. The final note is one of agreement on avoiding war in Laos.]