

Report by Nikita Khrushchov to the Supreme Soviet (31 October 1959)

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[...]

The Soviet Union and all the socialist countries have by their peace policy opened mankind's road to the development of society without wars, on the basis of peaceful co-operation.

Today the peoples of the whole world are realising more and more the outstanding importance of the wise idea of peaceful coexistence put forward by the great Lenin.

In view of the present alignment of forces in the world arena and of the level reached by military technique, no one except those who have lost their sense of reality can suggest any other way but peaceful coexistence for promoting relations between countries with different social systems.

Western leaders often indulge in talk of whether they should "accept" or "reject" the proposal for peaceful coexistence put forward by the Soviet Union. This sort of talk, in my view, shows an inability to grasp the essence of the problem. The point is that today peaceful coexistence is an indisputable fact and not someone's request or suggestion. It is an objective necessity stemming from the present world situation and the present stage of the development of human society. The two main social systems now existing on earth possess arms whose use would lead to disastrous consequences. Whoever today declares that he does not recognise peaceful coexistence, and argues against it, in fact advocates war.

The point at issue now is not whether or not there should be peaceful coexistence, for peaceful coexistence is there, and will be there if we want to avoid the lunacy of world nuclear and rocket war. The point is to coexist on a reasonable basis. It can hardly be considered reasonable that countries have to live in conditions in which, despite the absence of war, guns and missiles are constantly at the ready and military aircraft carrying atom and hydrogen bombs are kept in the air all the time. And those aircraft not only fly — they sometimes crash with their deadly cargo as a result of various accidents. There have been several accidents of this kind in the United States. The very fact that such mishaps occur indicates how dangerous it is to stockpile and play with such weapons.

The Soviet Government and the entire Soviet people proceed from Lenin's thesis regarding the coexistence of states with different social systems, and are doing everything in their power to ensure a durable peace on earth. It is essential that people should not think as they go to bed that it may be their last peaceful night, that a military catastrophe may break out at any moment. We want peaceful coexistence on a reasonable basis; we want government agencies and public bodies to work towards this end, and want conditions to be provided for international co-operation. That co-operation should be based on the principle that every country chooses for itself or borrows from its neighbour what it thinks fit, without any outside imposition. This is the only condition on which coexistence can be genuinely peaceful and good-neighbourly.

Such coexistence of countries with different social systems naturally presupposes reciprocal concessions in the interests of peace. It is fair to say that here we need a realistic approach, a sober assessment of the actual state of affairs, and mutual understanding and consideration of each other's interests. This is a principled, and at the same time a flexible, attitude in the struggle to preserve peace.

Coexistence on a reasonable basis presupposes the recognition of the existence of different systems, the recognition of the right of every people independently to deal with all political and social problems of its country, respect for sovereignty and adherence to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, and the settlement of all international issues by negotiation.

The principles of peaceful coexistence were well formulated at the Bandung Conference, and were later also approved by the United Nations. Speaking plainly, under peaceful coexistence the countries concerned must meet each other halfway in the interests of peace.

In itself, the peaceful coexistence of countries with different social systems presupposes elements of

reciprocal concessions, and mutual consideration of interests, because there is no other way of building up normal relations between countries.

[...]

(The International Situation and the Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union. Report to the Third Session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., October 31, 1959. World Without Arms, World Without Wars, Moscow, Book 2, pp. 379-81.)