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Memorandum of Conversation between Polish Leader Władysław Gomułka and British Journalist David Astor, 19 November 1962 (excerpt)

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Summary:

Polish leader Władysław Gomułka and British journalist David Astor discuss the stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union in the situation of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

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Record of conversation of comrade Władysław Gomułka with the editor of the newspaper "[The] Observer" Mr. David Astor

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[the conversation begins with the two discussing nuclear disarmament - trans.]

Gomułka: [...] What is the situation today? Recently we witnessed the stand-off between forces of two powers, between two positions in connection with the events around Cuba. The danger of war, when it is talked about for a long time, when it lasts for a long time, becomes psychologically absorbed in the people's consciousness [soznanie] so that they no longer fully appreciate it. Like bacteria in a body get used to certain conditions and resist them, so people, too, get used to the danger of war, when it is talked about for a long time, and no longer react to it. Recently, this danger of war, which had not been clearly defined, became reality, a question of today, a question of the hour, it became an immediate threat, which the entire world faced. One careless step, one careless action could have pushed the world over into the abyss of war. The stand-off of the USA and the USSR made everyone feel the sharpness, the extent of this danger. And there were certain forces in the USA, who wanted to take matters to that, who consider that they have a military advantage over the Soviet Union and that they can destroy it. Fortunately, [US President John F.] Kennedy did not represent these forces.

Kennedy did not want a war. If it happened that the position of the President of the United States was occupied by a person who represented the military forces, then one cannot know what could be happening in our world today. (A[stor]. agrees.)

The main contribution to saving peace was made by the Soviet Union, was made personally by [Nikita] Khrushchev as the leader of government and of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. I do not want to give an appraisal of the Cuban crisis itself. I only say one thing, that those voices in the West [who say] that the Soviet Union yielded under the pressure of the United States, before the danger of war, that [the Soviet Union] was forced to retreat, that it got scared - are not based on anything. They have no basis.

A[stor]. adds that these views are also dangerous; Kennedy himself and a number of people in the USA government do not believe that the Soviet Union retreated in Cuba as a result of a threat.

G[omułka]. The Soviet Union provided demonstrative evidence that it seeks the solution of international problems by means of compromises. For other than by means of mutual concessions, these problems cannot be solved. The last stand-off between the forces of the USA and the Soviet Union made everyone understand that war is not something far-away, something that one should not now be apprehensive about. By contrast, it showed that the war can be unleashed at any time. Today a clash like this occurred around Cuba; tomorrow there may be clashes in other parts of the world, for example, in Germany, in West Berlin, which is a time-bomb, placed under peace in Europe.

A[stor] fully agrees to this.

G[omułka] continues. The new thing that appeared in connection with the stand-off of forces around Cuba is that in the minds of leaders of many countries, in the minds of the people responsible for the fate of the world, there ripened a conviction that one

must necessarily look for a way towards détente, towards the resolution of ripe international problems. If this is so, if one can move forward détente everywhere in the world, this will be a positive side of the Cuban crisis. [...]