

October 11, 1955
**Report by [Canadian Minister of External Affairs]
Pearson on His Talk with Mr. Khrushchev**

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Summary:

Canada's Minister of External Affairs Lester Pearson provides a summary of his talks with Khrushchev and Bulganin. In context of July's Geneva Summit, the main topics discussed are NATO, the German Question and European security. Wh

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REPORT BY MR. PEARSON OF HIS TALK WITH
MR. KHRUSHCHEV ON OCTOBER 11, 1955

The talk which I had with Khrushchev and Bulganin on the last night of my visit was undoubtedly the most interesting, both an account of the two Soviet personalities involved and the frankness with which Khrushchev in particular put forward the Soviet attitude to such important matters as NATO and the security of Europe.

2. Khrushchev, who is as blunt and volatile as only a Ukrainian peasant turned one of the most powerful political figures in the world can be, came straight to the point before we even sat down. With a C.B.C. microphone pushed in front of him (this was permitted for the first few minutes of our visit, along with photographers and a few journalists), he asked me why Canada does not leave NATO, which he described as an aggressive alliance and a direct threat to Russia and to peace. I replied that I had talked myself hoarse (I had indeed almost lost my voice at the time) trying to convince people in Moscow that NATO was purely defensive and had no aggressive intent whatever. I added for good measure that I had also been trying to convince them that the Americans were fine people, good neighbours, with no thought of attacking anybody. Khrushchev also said that he hoped I was convinced by my visit that there was no economic or food crisis in the Soviet Union. It was typical of wishful thinking in the West, who were looking in vain for Soviet weaknesses. I said that I doubted any such reports of crisis and that my own experience would suggest there was lots of food!

3. After this characteristic outburst and after we had taken our places around a table, I tried to direct the discussion into more orderly channels by referring to my talks in Moscow and the communique. Khrushchev said that he had been kept informed and regarded the communique as acceptable, though disappointingly vague and non-committal. From their point of view, perhaps they cannot expect more at this stage in Canada-Soviet relations, he added somewhat revealingly.

4. This gave me an opening to say that Canada is increasingly conscious of the fact of being between two powerful neighbours; with the United States we are on very friendly terms of good neighbourhood, and we hope to be on better terms with the Soviet Union also. Khrushchev replied that Russia never had conflict with Canada, and that he could not foresee any conflict arising. He didn't neglect to point out, however, that we were on their route to United States cities if war was ever forced on them. In that tragic contingency, he reminded me, they also had buttons which could be pushed with devastating effect.

5. In reply to my remark that Canada cannot feel comfortable unless Soviet-U.S. relations are also satisfactory, Khrushchev agreed, adding that he saw no special grounds for concern at present; things would work out all right, he thought. People like McCarthy, who flourished on the line that the Soviet

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Union wanted war, had been discredited. I emphasized that no right thinking people in the United States, and especially the President, even considered any aggressive attack on anybody; that much of the news from the United States reaching Europe and the U.S.S.R. was misleading as to United States intentions, and United States feelings. The sensational was shouted too much, which distorted the picture so far as the U.S. was concerned. One of the advantages of visits was the opportunity to dispel misapprehensions and remove misunderstanding and distortions.

6. Khrushchev then brought up the alleged Carpenter statement again, saying that he (who was described as "The Chief of the Air Staff in Canada") had said that the U.S.S.R. should be made to understand that they could be "utterly destroyed" and that the Soviet military set-up was "20 years behind the times". I reacted strongly to this by saying that Carpenter was not Chief of Air Staff, but a subordinate officer and that if it was found that he made such irresponsible statements he would no doubt be appropriately dealt with. I went on to say that what disturbed me more was that such an inaccurate and misleading report should have reached the Soviet leaders. In Canada it could be denied by responsible persons in our free press, while in the U.S.S.R. it was accepted without question or any opportunity of correction.

7. Khrushchev said that the Soviet leaders were not concerned by the implied threat in the statement, but by the suggestion that the Soviet Union's military establishment was out of date. This kind of talk might encourage aggressors.

8. I then turned the conversation to the Geneva Conference and the German problem. Khrushchev said that the Soviet Government had no illusions about the prospects of the forthcoming Foreign Ministers' meeting at Geneva. He agreed with me, however, when I said that even if much did not come out of this meeting, it was only the beginning of what I hoped would be a continuous search for solutions to problems at such meetings. The main stumbling block, Khrushchev said, would be German and the approach to the solution of this problem agreed between the three Western powers. This was definitely not acceptable to the Soviet Union. They could not agree to having the NATO military organization of the West, which Khrushchev said again was directed against the U.S.S.R., further strengthened by the addition of 17 million Germans from the Democratic Republic: Better have 2/3 of Germany against us than the whole of it. We cannot be so stupid as to agree to strengthening the organization which is directed against us".

9. This gave me the chance to say that I might be willing to agree that the Soviet Union was justified in its fear of Germany if NATO were not a purely defensive organization. I was about to explain why NATO should be so regarded, when Khrushchev broke in with the remark, "You should let us into NATO - we have been knocking at the door two years". I replied that if the world situation were such as to permit entry of the U.S.S.R. into NATO, it would also, presumably, permit proper functioning of the United Nations in the security field; that NATO was resorted to by the Western powers because the United Nations was not given a chance to do work intended for it. I suggested beginning with implementation of Article 43 of the Charter. I also pointed out that if the Soviets were in NATO, they would ~~integrate~~ ^{have to accept}

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integrated defence system and unified command. If they were prepared to accept that, why not make the U.N. security system work?

10. This seemed unfamiliar ground for Khrushchev, who returned to the charge against NATO, with the remark that the Soviets could afford to wait for the break-up of NATO owing to over-spending on armaments and inter-allied disagreements. I countered this with the argument that without NATO, the Soviets might be worse off with the United States 'going it alone' and Germany free-sheeling in the centre of Europe, both without cautious and restraining influence of countries like the United Kingdom, Belgium, France and Canada.

11. I left Khrushchev in no doubt that while we consider NATO a purely defensive arrangement, it is an essential element in our defence and foreign policy and would remain so until international confidence reached a point where the United Nations itself could effectively guarantee international security.

12. I asked Khrushchev if he would clarify the Soviet attitude to the German problem. His reply could not have been more categorical: "So long as the Paris agreements exist and Germany remains in NATO, we shall do everything possible to prevent the reunification of Germany". I asked him whether he was aware that it was the intention that a United Germany as a sovereign state would not be forced into NATO but would be free to choose whether to be in NATO or remain neutral? Khrushchev answered that this was the first time he had heard of it. While I was replying that he ought to look into this possibility, Khrushchev got some prompting from Bulganin and returned to the charge with the statement that the U.S.S.R. had suggested a general security system which would include the United States and Canada as well as the U.S.S.R. and European states.

13. Referring to the U.K. proposals put forward by Sir Anthony Eden at the "summit" meeting for a security guarantee, Khrushchev said that so long as the Paris agreements and NATO remained in effect, a guarantee by the Western powers would be regarded as humiliating for the U.S.S.R. and unacceptable. In reply to my question - why they would not regard membership in NATO involving mutual guarantees as equally humiliating? - Khrushchev said that Soviet membership in NATO would put them on a footing of complete equality with the other powers in the matter of security and they would not then have to depend upon the favours or goodwill of the four powers envisaged in the U.K. proposals. Getting quite excited at this point, Khrushchev said that the U.S.S.R. would prefer to "exist by ourselves and impose co-existence on other". "After all", he said, "we have to co-exist don't we, or else fly away to Mars?".

14. Then more soberly, Khrushchev (after prompting from Bulganin) said that the Soviet Union does not reject the Eden proposals completely. If they could be altered, for instance, to include not four other powers but, say, 8 or 10, they might be made acceptable. Khrushchev's idea for the composition of such a group which might undertake mutual guarantees included: The United States, France, the United Kingdom, both Germanies, the U.S.S.R., Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Denmark (and then added, "even Canada").

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15. If the obstacle to agreement to such an approach were the two Germanys, perhaps it would be better to keep them both out of the mutual guarantee arrangement, he said, but at the same time restrict their armaments. They would be indirectly associated with the guarantee arrangement through their association respectively with NATO and the Warsaw Pact. To my question whether it would not be better to let a united, free Germany decide by free choice how best to provide for its security, Khrushchev abruptly said, "We want either both Germanies in the European security system or else neither" - as to reunification, he said the U.S.S.R. could wait - "Why the hurry?", he said.

16. Khrushchev said that the approach to European security which he had outlined could open the way to a solution. So long as the Western powers insisted on trying to negotiate from positions of strength, there could be no chance of agreement. Russians, he said, don't like to negotiate with "a knife in their backs". To my rejoinder that the Western powers sought only defensive strength adequate to deter aggression, Khrushchev bluntly said that the policy of the Western powers was plainly designed "to impose solutions" on the U.S.S.R. which the U.S.S.R. would not tolerate. I rejected this view.

17. Getting again quite excited at this point, Khrushchev said that Russians knew better than any other people what war means (he mentioned that he had lost a son) - only the Germans had comparable experience. If NATO starts a war, he said, the alliance would fall apart, since most of its members would not be willing to fight. He returned to this theme of NATO falling apart a number of times, either in the context of defence costs or because of unwillingness to fight. At one point he said that the war, if it occurred, would inevitably involve Germany and the allies might as well face up to the fact that the Germans will not fight, having had enough of war.

18. I replied that no one wanted war in the nuclear age and the West would never be the first to start a war, to which Khrushchev replied, "We shall never fire the first shot but we shall be in at the finish". To my answer that under present circumstances any world war would be infinitely worse than the last, Khrushchev agreed, but added "This time Canada would not be geographically secure".

19. Since Khrushchev spoke somewhat disparagingly of the military experiences of the West both in the last war and in Korea, I had to take him up on both counts, reminding him in particular that Canadians, although not themselves invaded, had gone in large numbers thousands of miles to fight in the common cause; and that as for Korea, our forces had joined others in support of a U.N. decision that aggression had been committed by North Korea and had stopped that aggression.

20. Khrushchev dismissed the current disarmament discussions in the U.N. as just a "talking shop" - if they were serious why had the other powers not replied to the Soviet proposals of 10 May? he said. I reminded him that we had reacted, but the difficulty had been the introduction of political conditions by the Soviets relating to security.

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21. In conclusion, Khrushchev, now in a more mellow mood, said that what the world needs is "time and patience". "The Soviet Union", he said, "could afford to be patient" - "Our system is solid, our economy developing". Western leaders, however, have to accord, he said "civil rights to Communism" and not react to it, "like a bull to a red rag". "If you don't like it", he said, "you don't have to join it". In reply I said that it was not the Soviet system that we reacted to, but to the parties which boast that their loyalty is for their "socialist fatherland" rather than for their own, but that was our own problem. Khrushchev agreed. When I pressed the matter of outside assistance to local Communist parties, Khrushchev laughed it off with "What, a dollar a day? We haven't the dollars for that". What they also wanted, Khrushchev said, was foreign trade with the West and business contacts; there could be peaceful competition between different systems. The talk ended with my thanking the Soviet leaders for this opportunity of talking frankly with them and telling them that it was our desire to have friendly working relations with them, to which my visit, I hoped, had contributed. Both Bulganin and Khrushchev hoped that this would not be the last such visit from Canada.

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Report by Mr. Pearson on his Talk with Mr. Khrushchev on October 11, 1955

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The talk which I had with Khrushchev and Bulganin on the last night of my visit was undoubtedly the most interesting, both on account of the two Soviet personalities involved and the frankness with which Khrushchev in particular put forward the Soviet attitude to such important matters as NATO and the security of Europe.

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