

## The "Kitchen Debate" (1959)<sup>1</sup>

### *Richard Nixon*

*At the gate of the Exhibition, Mr. Khrushchev voiced a gibe about the United States ban on the shipment of strategic goods to the Soviet Union.*

Khrushchev: "Americans have lost their ability to trade. Now you have grown older and you don't trade the way you used to. You need to be invigorated."

Nixon: "You need to have goods to trade."

*The statesmen went on to look at television and video tape equipment for playing back recordings. Mr. Nixon took a cue from it.*

Nixon: "There must be a free exchange of ideas."

*Mr. Khrushchev responded with a remark touching on the reporting of his speeches on his recent Polish tour.*

*Mr. Nixon said he was certain that Mr. Khrushchev's speeches and those of Frol R. Kozlov, First Deputy Premier, had been fully reported in the West.*

Khrushchev (indicating cameras recording the scene on video tape): "Then what about this tape?" (Smiling.) "If it is shown in the United States it will be shown in English and I would like a guarantee that there will be a full translation of my remarks."

Mr. Nixon said there would be an English translation of Mr. Khrushchev's remarks and added his hope that all his own remarks in the Soviet Union would be given with full translations in that country.

Khrushchev: "We want to live in peace and friendship with Americans because we are the two most powerful countries, and if we live in friendship, then other countries will also live in friendship. But if there is a country that is too war-minded we could pull its ears a little and say, 'Don't you dare; fighting is not allowed now.' This is a period of atomic armament; some foolish one could start a war and then even a wise one couldn't finish the war. Therefore, we are governed by this idea in our policy, internal and foreign. How long has America existed? Three hundred years?"

Nixon: "More than one hundred and fifty years."

Khrushchev: "More than one hundred and fifty years? Well, then, we will say America has been in existence for 150 years and this is the level she has reached. We have existed not quite forty-two years and in another seven years we will be on the same level as America.

"When we catch you up, in passing you by, we will wave to you. Then if you wish we can stop and say: Please follow up. Plainly speaking, if you want capitalism you can live that way. That is your own affair and doesn't concern us. We can still feel sorry for you, but since you don't understand us, live as you do understand.

"We are all glad to be here at the Exhibition with Vice President Nixon. I personally, and on behalf of my colleagues, express my thanks for the President's message. I have not as yet read it but I know beforehand that it contains good wishes. I think you will be satisfied with your visit

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Nixon, "The Kitchen Debate," Ch. 2 in *The Challenges We Face: Edited and Compiled from the Speeches and Papers of Richard M. Nixon* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), 219-227.

and if—I cannot go on without saying it—if you would not take such a position<sup>2</sup> which has not been thought out thoroughly, as was approved by Congress, your trip would be excellent. But you have churned the water yourselves—why this was necessary God only knows.

"What happened? What black cat crossed your path and confused you? But that is your affair; we do not interfere with your problems." (Wrapping his arms about a Soviet workman.) "Does this man look like a slave laborer?" (Waving at others.) "With men with such spirit how can we lose?"

Nixon (pointing to American workmen): "With men like that we are strong. But these men, Soviet and American, work together well for peace, even as they have worked together in building this Exhibition. This is the way it should be.

"Your remarks are in the tradition of what we have come to expect—sweeping and extemporaneous. Later on we will both have an opportunity to speak, and consequently I will not comment on the various points that you raised, except to say this—this color television is one of the most advanced developments in communication that we have.

"I can say that if this competition in which you plan to outstrip us is to do the best for both of our peoples and for peoples everywhere, there must be a free exchange of ideas. After all, you don't know everything...."

Khrushchev: "If I don't know everything, you don't know anything about communism except fear of it."

Nixon: "There are some instances where you may be ahead of us; for example, in the development of the thrust of your rockets for the investigation of outer space; there may be some instances in which we are ahead of you—in color television, for instance."

Khrushchev: "No, we are up with you on this too. We have bested you in one technique and also in the other."

Nixon: "You see, you never concede anything."

Khrushchev: "I do not give up."

Nixon: "Wait till you see the picture. Let's have far more communication and exchange in this very area that we speak of. We should hear you more on our television. You should hear us more on yours."

Khrushchev: "That's a good idea. Let's do it like this. You appear before our people. We will appear before your people. People will see and appreciate this."

Nixon: "There is not a day in the United States when we cannot read what you say. When Kozlov was speaking in California about peace, you were talking here in somewhat different terms. This was reported extensively in the American press. Never make a statement here if you don't want it to be read in the United States. I can promise you every word you say will be translated into English."

Khrushchev; "I doubt it. I want you to give your word that this speech of mine will be heard by the American people."

Nixon (shaking hands on it): "By the same token, everything I say will be translated and heard all over the Soviet Union?"

Khrushchev: "That's agreed."

Nixon: "You must not be afraid of ideas."

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<sup>2</sup> Proclamation by the United States government of Captive Nations Week, a week of prayer for peoples enslaved by the Soviet Union.

Khrushchev: "We are telling you not to be afraid of ideas. We have no reason to be afraid. We have already broken free from such a situation."

Nixon: "Well, then, let's have more exchange of them. We are all agreed on that. All right? All right?"

Khrushchev: "Fine." (Aside.) "Agreed to what? All right, I am in agreement. But I want to stress what I am in agreement with. I know that I am dealing with a very good lawyer. I also want to uphold my own miner's flag so that the coal miners can say, 'Our man does not concede.'"

Nixon: "No question about that."

Khrushchev: "You are a lawyer for capitalism and I am a lawyer for communism. Let's compete."

Nixon: "The way you dominate the conversation you would make a good lawyer yourself. If you were in the United States Senate you would be accused of filibustering."

Khrushchev: "If your reporters will check on the time, they will see who has talked more."

Nixon: "You do all the talking and do not let anyone else talk."

*Debate broke out again when the two men reached the model home in the American Exhibition.*

Khrushchev (referring to American model home): "You think the Russian people will be dumbfounded to see this? But I tell you all our modern homes have equipment of this sort, and to get a flat you have only to be a Soviet visitor, not a citizen."

Nixon: "We do not claim to astonish the Russian people. We hope to show our diversity and our right to choose. We do not wish to have decisions made at the top by government officials who say that all homes should be built in the same way. Would it not be better to compete in the relative merits of washing machines than in the strength of rockets? Is this the kind of competition you want?"

Khrushchev: "Yes, that's the kind of competition we want, but your generals say we must compete in rockets. Your generals say they are so powerful they can destroy us. We can also show you something so that you will know the Russian spirit. We are strong; we can beat you. But in this respect we can also show you something."

Nixon: "To me you are strong and we are strong. In some ways, you are stronger than we are. In others, we are stronger, but to me it seems that in this day and age to argue who is the stronger completely misses the point. We are both strong, not only from the standpoint of weapons but also from the standpoint of will and spirit."

"No one should ever use his strength to put another in the position where he in effect has an ultimatum. For us to argue who is the stronger misses the point. If war comes we both lose."

Khrushchev: "For the fourth time I have to say I cannot recognize my friend Mr. Nixon. If all Americans agree with you, then who don't we agree [with]? This is what we want."

Nixon: "Anyone who believes the American government does not reflect the people is not an accurate observer of the American scene. I hope the Prime Minister understands all the implications of what I have just said. When you place either one of the powerful nations or any other nations in a position so that they have no choice but to accept dictation or fight, then you are playing with the most destructive thing in the world."

"This is very important in the present world context. It is very dangerous. When we sit down at a conference table it cannot all be one way. One side cannot put an ultimatum to another. It is impossible. But I shall talk to you about this later."

Khrushchev: "Who is raising an ultimatum?"

Nixon: "We will discuss that later."

Khrushchev: "If you have raised the question, why not go on with it now while the people are listening? We know something about politics, too. Let your correspondents compare watches and see who is filibustering. You put great emphasis on *diktat* [dictation]. Our country has never been guided by *diktat*. *Diktat* is a foolish policy."

Nixon: "I am talking about it in the international sense."

Khrushchev: "It sounds to me like a threat. We, too, are giants. You want to threaten—we will answer threats with threats."

Nixon: "That's not my point. We will never engage in threats."

Khrushchev: "You wanted indirectly to threaten me. But we have the means to threaten too."

Nixon: "Who wants to threaten?"

Khrushchev: "You are talking about implications. I have not been. We have the means at our disposal. Ours are better than yours. It is you who want to compete. *Da, da, da.*"

Nixon: "We are well aware that you have the means. To me who is best is not material."

Khrushchev: "You raised the point. We want peace and friendship with all nations, especially with America."

Nixon: "We want peace, too, and I believe that you do also."

Khrushchev: "Yes, I believe that."

Nixon: "I see that you want to build a good life. But I don't think that the cause of peace is helped by reminders that you have greater strength than we do, because this is a threat, too."

Khrushchev: "I was answering your words. You challenged me. Let's argue fairly."

Nixon: "My point was that in today's world it is immaterial which of the two great countries at any particular moment has the advantage. In war, these advantages are illusory. Can we agree on that?"

Khrushchev: "Not quite. Let's not beat around the bush."

Nixon: "I like the way he talks."

Khrushchev: "We want to liquidate all bases from foreign lands. Until that happens we will speak different languages. One who is for putting an end to bases on foreign lands is for peace. One who is against it is for war. We have liquidated our bases, reduced our forces, and offered to make a peace treaty and eliminate the point of friction in Berlin. Until we settle that question, we will talk different languages."

Nixon: "Do you think it can be settled at Geneva?"

Khrushchev: "If we considered it otherwise, we would not have incurred the expense of sending our Foreign Minister to Geneva. Gromyko is not an idler. He is a very good man."

Nixon: "We have great respect for Mr. Gromyko. Some people say he looks like me. I think he is better-looking. I hope it [the Geneva Conference] will be successful."

Khrushchev: "It does not depend on us."

Nixon: "It takes two to make an agreement. You cannot have it all your own way."

Khrushchev: "These are questions that have the same aim. To put an end to the vestiges of war, to make a peace treaty with Germany—that is what we want. It is very bad that we quarrel over the question of war and peace."

Nixon: "There is no question but that your people and you want the government of the United States to be for peace—anyone who thinks that our government is not for peace is not an accurate observer of America. In order to have peace, Mr. Prime Minister, even in an argument

between friends, there must be sitting-down around a table. There must be discussion. Each side must find areas where it looks at the other's point of view. The world looks to you today with regard to Geneva. I believe it would be a grave mistake and a blow to peace if it were allowed to fail."

Khrushchev: "This is our understanding as well."

Nixon: "So this is something. The present position is stalemate. Ways must be found to discuss it."

Khrushchev: "The two sides must seek ways of agreement."

*In the evening, after formal speeches, Mr. Khrushchev and Mr. Nixon, in departing, stopped by a table laden with glasses of wine. Mr. Khrushchev proposed a toast to elimination of all military bases in foreign lands. Mr. Nixon sidestepped, suggested they drink to peace instead.*

Khrushchev: "If you're not one to eliminate bases, then I'll make a toast."

Nixon: "He doesn't like American wine."

Khrushchev: "I like American wine—not its policy."

Nixon (aside): "I've always heard he's a vigorous defender of his policy, not only officially but unofficially."

Khrushchev: "I will defend the real policy, which is to assure peace. How can peace be assured when we are surrounded by military bases?"

Nixon: "We will talk about that later. We will drink to talking. When we are talking we are not fighting."

Khrushchev: "We drink to talking."

*Mr. Khrushchev suggested they drink to several women standing by.*

Nixon: "A good nonpolitical drink."

Bystander: "A hundred years of life for Mr. Khrushchev."

Nixon: "I will drink to that. We disagree with your policy, but we want you to be of good health. May you live to be a hundred years old."

*Mr. Khrushchev said he would accept the toast, adding: "At ninety-nine years of age we shall discuss the question further. Why should we be in haste?"*

Nixon: "Ninety-nine years [and] you will still be in power?—and without an election?"