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TIME MAGAZINE

Nikita Khrushchev: "We Will Bury You,"
November 26, 1956

The first years of the Cold War pitted former World War II allies Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin and Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower against each other. Stalin died in 1953, to be followed by two inconsequential leaders¹ and then longtime Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev, premier from 1955 to 1964. Khrushchev initiated the Soviet space and missile program, but he attempted to reduce the size of the army and strengthen the consumer sector of the

¹ Georgy Malenkov and Nikolai Bulganin.

Source: "We Will Bury You!" *Time*, November 26, 1956.

economy. In February 1956, Khrushchev startled party members with a speech denouncing Stalin as a brutal dictator. The speech expressed long-suppressed grievances, especially in the dependent Soviet satellite states of Poland, East Germany, Romania, and Hungary.

Hungarians opposed to continued Soviet rule saw an opportunity in the new climate and took to the streets in protest in October 1956. On November 1 their leader Imre Nagy declared an independent Hungarian government and asked for UN recognition. On November 4 Soviet troops invaded Hungary, crushing the revolution by November 10. This selection is a *Time* magazine report of a routine event the following week.

On November 17 Khrushchev attended a reception at the Polish Embassy hosted by visiting Polish communist leader Wladyslaw Gomulka, who also invited representatives of Western countries. At the reception, Khrushchev compared Soviet troops in Hungary and Eastern Europe with Western troops in two areas. What are these areas? What do you think of these comparisons? What was Khrushchev's attitude toward the United States and Western capitalist countries? What was his attitude toward colonialism?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

No four words better raised the fear of a Soviet threat for Americans during the Cold War than Khrushchev's "We will bury you." Numerous American political leaders, commentators, and citizens referred to that quote in the following years to underscore Soviet aggressive intentions. With those four words, the reformist premier who de-Stalinized Kremlin policy and later traveled through the United States arguing for nuclear disarmament and peaceful coexistence could be pictured as a dangerous belligerent.

What do you think Khrushchev meant by those four words? Why do you think *Time* magazine chose them to headline the article? How else might you summarize the evening at the Polish Embassy? What would be your headline?

At the final reception for Poland's visiting Gomulka, stubby Nikita Khrushchev planted himself firmly with the Kremlin's whole hierarchy at his back, and faced the diplomats of the West, and the satellites, with an intemperate speech that betrayed as much as it threatened.

"We are Bolsheviks!" he declared pugnaciously. "We stick firmly to the Lenin precept—don't be stubborn if you see you are wrong, but don't give in if you are right." "When are you right?" interjected First Deputy Premier Mikoyan—and the crowd laughed. Nikita plunged on, turning to the Western diplomats. "About the capitalist states, it doesn't

depend on you whether or not we exist. If you don't like us, don't accept our invitations, and don't invite us to come to see you. Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!"

Just the day before, ambassadors of twelve NATO nations had walked out on a Khrushchev tirade that lumped Britain, France and Israel as bandits. Now Khrushchev was off again.

The Kremlin men cheered. Gomulka laughed. Red-faced and gesticulating, Nikita rolled on: "The situation is favorable to us. If God existed, we would thank him for this. On Hungary—we had Hungary thrust upon us. We are very sorry that such a situation exists there, but the most important thing is that the counterrevolution must be shattered. They accuse us of interfering in Hungary's internal affairs. They find the most fearful words to accuse us. But when the British, French and Israelis cut the throats of the Egyptians,² that is only a police action aimed at restoring order! The Western powers are trying to denigrate Nasser,³ although Nasser is not a Communist. Politically, he is closer to those who are waging war on him, and he has even put Communists in jail."

"He had to," offered Soviet President Kliment Voroshilov.⁴ Khrushchev turned on him and said: "Don't try to help me."

"Nasser is the hero of his nation, and our sympathies are on his side. We sent sharp letters to Britain, France and Israel—well, Israel, that was just for form, because, as you know, Israel carries no weight in the world, and if it plays any role, it was just to start a fight. If Israel hadn't felt the support of Britain, France and others, the Arabs would have been able to box her ears and she would have remained at peace. I think the British and French will be wise enough to withdraw their forces, and then Egypt will emerge stronger than ever."

Turning again to the Westerners, Khrushchev declared: "You say we want war, but you have now got yourselves into a position I would call idiotic" ("Let's say delicate," offered Mikoyan) "but we don't want to profit by it. If you withdraw your troops from Germany, France and Britain—I'm speaking of American troops—we will not stay one day in Poland, Hungary and Rumania." His voice was scornful as he added: "But we, Mister Capitalists, we are beginning to understand your methods."

By this time, the diplomats—who, in turn, have come to understand Mister Khrushchev's methods—had already left the room.

² On November 5, 1956, combined British and French forces invaded Egypt in retaliation for Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal, while Israel occupied the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. [Ed.]

³ Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), nationalist leader and president of Egypt, 1956–1970. Nasser was a socialist, a leader of neutral "nonaligned nations," and sought help from the United States, Soviet Union, and China. [Ed.]

⁴ Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the head of state but a largely symbolic office compared to the premier or the head of the Communist Party, both of which positions Khrushchev held. [Ed.]