

By 1959, Khrushchev came to the conclusion that it was possible to significantly improve Soviet-American relations. However, any policy that he might follow directed toward realizing this goal would sharply conflict with Stalinist doctrine. Nor was it just a matter of doctrinal niceties. The orthodox Marxist-Leninist position was fervently championed by the Chinese leadership, and for the first time since Trotsky's defeat in the 1920s, the Soviet Union's rulers were being subjected to a sustained ideological attack from within the Communist movement.

When Khrushchev returned from his official visit to the United States in September 1959 — the first ever by a Soviet leader — he was full of optimism for the future prospects of Soviet-American relations. In speech after speech, he lavished unprecedented praise upon the American president, Dwight Eisenhower. For example, in reporting to the Soviet people on the results of his dramatic twelve-day sojourn in the United States, Khrushchev stated:

I can tell you in all frankness, dear comrades, that as a result of my talks and discussions of concrete questions with the U.S. President, I have gained the impression that he sincerely wishes too see the end of the "cold war," to create normal relations between our countries, to help to improve relations among all countries.⁴⁴

A few days later, at an official reception in Beijing, Khrushchev shocked his hosts by reiterating this heretical view:

In our times the Heads of Government of some capitalist countries have begun to show a certain inclination for a realistic understanding of the situation existing in the world. When I talked to President Eisenhower — and I have just returned from the United States — my impression was that the President of the United States, and he has the support of many people, is aware of the need for relaxing international tension.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 332.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 349.