Address by Leonid Brezhnev (24 June 1973)

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The General Secretary's Radio and Television Address to the American People (June 24, 1973)

Dear Americans:

I highly appreciate this opportunity of directly addressing the people of the United States on my visit to your country.

I would like, first of all, to convey to all of you the greetings and friendly feelings of millions of Soviet people who are following with great interest my visit to your country and our talks with President Nixon, and who are looking forward to this new Soviet-American summit meeting making a fruitful contribution to better relations between our countries and stronger universal peace.

Our discussions with President Nixon and other United States Government officials have been going on for several days, and they have been very intensive indeed. We came to this country anticipating that these would be responsible negotiations devoted to major questions bearing on the development of Soviet-American relations and to a search for ways in which our two nations could promote the further invigoration of the entire international atmosphere. Today I have every reason to say that those hopes were justified. We are satisfied with the way the talks went and with the results already achieved. New agreements have been signed in Washington, and in many respects they broaden the sphere of peaceful and mutually advantageous cooperation between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Another big step has been taken along the path that we jointly mapped out a year ago during our meeting in Moscow.

Let me say frankly that personally I am also pleased that this visit has given me an opportunity to gain some first-hand impressions of America, to see some aspects of the American way of life, to meet with prominent government and public leaders of your country, and to have some contact with the life of Americans.

You are well aware that, in the past, relations between our countries developed very unevenly. There were periods of stagnation; there were ups and downs. But I guess I would not be making a mistake if I said that the significance of good relations between the Soviet Union and the United States has always been quite clear to the more farsighted statesmen. In this connection we have good reason to recall that this is the year of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our countries on the initiative of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In World War II the Soviet Union and the United States became allies and fought side by side against Nazism, which threatened the freedom of nations and civilization itself. The jubilant meeting of Soviet and American soldiers on the Elbe River at the hour of victory over Hitlerism is well remembered in our country. The wartime alliance could have been expected to usher in a new era of broad peaceful cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States. I can tell you with confidence that that is what our country wanted. We wanted to cement and develop the good relations whose foundations had been laid during the war.

Things went differently, however. What came was not peace, but the "cold war," a poor substitute for genuine peace. For a long time it poisoned relations between our countries, and international relations as a whole. Some of its dismal influence can unfortunately be felt in certain things to this day.

Under the circumstances, it was no easy task, indeed, to make a turn from mutual distrust to détente, normalization, and mutually advantageous cooperation. It took courage and political foresight; it took a lot of painstaking work. We appreciate the fact that President Nixon and his Administration joined their efforts with ours to really put Soviet-American relations on a new track.

I have heard that the American political vocabulary includes the expression, "to win the peace." The present moment in history is, I believe, perhaps the most suitable occasion to use that expression. We jointly won the war. Today our joint efforts must help mankind win a durable peace. The possibility of a new war must be eliminated.

The outcome of the two meetings between the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States and the practical steps taken in the intervening year convincingly show that important results have already been attained. It transpired that a reasonable and mutually acceptable approach to many problems, which previously seemed insoluble, can in fact be found. Not so long ago I suppose it would have been hard even to imagine the possibility of such progress.

Last year's agreements are, on the whole, being successfully implemented. Tangible progress is being made in almost all spheres – and it is a progress secured through joint efforts. The inauguration of a regular passenger shipping line between Leningrad and New York, the establishment of Consulates General in Leningrad and San Francisco, the initiation of friendly ties between Soviet and American cities, and livelier athletic exchanges are all becoming part of the daily lives of the peoples of our two countries today.

The best possible evidence that Soviet-American relations are moving ahead, and not marking time, is provided by the important document signed the other day by President Nixon and myself, the agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States on the prevention of nuclear war. I trust I will not be accused of making an overstatement if I say that this document is one of historic significance.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America have concluded an agreement to prevent the outbreak of nuclear war between themselves and to do their utmost to prevent the outbreak of nuclear war generally. It is surely clear how important this is for the peace and tranquillity of the peoples of our two countries and for the improvement of the prospects for a peaceful life for all mankind.

Even if our second meeting with the President of the United States yielded no other results, it could still be said with full grounds that it will take a fitting place in the annals of Soviet-American relations and in international affairs as a whole. The entire world can now see that, having signed last year the fundamental document entitled "Basic Principles of Relations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America," our two nations regard it not as a mere declaration of good intent but as a program of vigorous and consistent action, a program they have already begun to implement, and one which they are determined to go on implementing.

It is also of no little significance that our countries have agreed on the main principles of further work to prepare a new agreement on strategic arms limitation, a broader one this time and for far longer duration. This means that the exceptionally important job begun in May 1972 in Moscow is continuing. It means that political détente is being backed up by military détente. And this is something from which all the peoples and the very cause of peace stand to gain.

The other day representatives of our two Governments also signed new agreements on Soviet-American cooperation in several specific fields. Together with the earlier agreements concluded during the past year, they make up an impressive file of documents on cooperation between our two nations and our two great peoples in some widely ranging fields: from the peaceful uses of atomic energy to agriculture, and from outer space to the ocean depths.

Of course, the Soviet Union and the United States are countries which are, so to speak, self-sufficient. Until recently that was, in fact, how things were in our relations. However, we, as well as many Americans, realize only too well that renunciation of cooperation in the economic, scientific, technological, and cultural fields is tantamount to both sides turning down substantial extra benefits and advantages. And, most important, such a renunciation would be so pointless as to defy any reasonable argument. This is particularly true of economic ties. Today, I believe, both you and we would agree that in this area it is not enough simply to overcome such an anomaly generated by the "cold war" as the complete freezing of Soviet-American trade. Life poses questions of far greater importance. I have in mind, above all, such forms of economic relations as stable large-scale ties in several branches of the economy and long-term scientific and technological cooperation, and in our age this is very important. The contacts we have had with American officials and businessmen confirm that it is along these lines that the main prospects for further economic cooperation between our countries can be traced.

It is alleged at times that the development of such cooperation is one-sided and only benefits the Soviet Union. But those who say so are either completely ignorant of the real state of affairs or deliberately turn a blind eye to the truth.

And the truth is that broader and deeper economic cooperation in general, and the long-term and large-scale deals, which are now either being negotiated or have already been successfully concluded by Soviet organizations and American firms, are bound to yield real and tangible benefits to both sides. This is something that has been confirmed quite definitely by American businessmen whom I have had an opportunity to talk with both in this country and, earlier, in Moscow. It was in that context that we discussed the matter with President Nixon, too.

To this I would like to add that both the Soviet leadership and, as I see it, the United States Government attach particular importance to the fact that the development of long-term economic cooperation will also have very beneficial political consequences. It will consolidate the present trend toward better Soviet-American relations generally.

Prospects for the broad development of Soviet-American exchanges in culture and the arts are, as we see it, also good. Both our countries have much to share in this field. To live at peace, we must trust each other, and to trust each other, we must know each other better. We, for our part, want Americans to visualize our way of life and our way of thinking as completely and correctly as possible.

By and large, we can say that quite a lot has already been done to develop Soviet-American relations. Yet we are still only at the beginning of a long road. Constant care is needed to preserve and develop the new shoots of good relationships. Tireless efforts are needed to define the most essential and most suitable forms of cooperation in various fields. Patience is needed to understand the various specific features of the other side and to learn to do business with each other.

I believe those who support a radical improvement in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States can look to the future with optimism, for this objective meets the vital interests of both our nations and the interests of peace-loving people all over the world.

The general atmosphere in the world depends to no small extent on the climate prevailing in relations between our two countries. Neither economic or military might nor international prestige give our countries any special privileges, but they do invest them with special responsibility for the destinies of universal peace and for preventing war. In its approach to ties and contacts with the United States, the Soviet Union is fully aware of that responsibility.

We regard the improvement of Soviet-American relations not as an isolated phenomenon, but as an integral — and very important — part of the wider process of radically improving the international atmosphere. Mankind has outgrown the rigid "cold war" armor which it was once forced to wear. It wants to breathe freely and peacefully. And we will be happy if our efforts to better Soviet-American relations help draw more and more nations into the process of détente — be it in Europe or Asia, in Africa or Latin America, in the Middle or the Far East.

We regard it as a very positive fact that the normalization of Soviet-American relations is contributing to the solution of the great and important problem of consolidating peace and security in Europe and of convening the all European conference.

The improvement of Soviet-American relations undoubtedly played its useful role in promoting the termination of the long drawn-out war in Vietnam. Now that the agreement ending the Vietnam war has come into effect and both our countries, together with other nations are signatories to the document of the Paris Conference on Vietnam, it seems to us to be particularly important that the achieved success be consolidated and that all the peoples of Indochina be given the chance to live in peace. There still exist hotbeds of dangerous tension in the world. In our discussions with President Nixon we touched upon the

situation in the Middle East, which is still very acute. We believe that in that area justice should be assured as soon as possible and a stable peace settlement reached that would restore the legitimate rights of those who suffered from the war and ensure the security of all the peoples of that region. This is important for all the peoples of the Middle East, with no exception. It is also important for the maintenance of universal peace.

In short, the ending of conflicts and the prevention of new crisis fraught situations is an essential condition for creating truly reliable guarantees of peace. And our two countries are called upon to make a worthy contribution to that cause. In our discussions President Nixon and I have devoted a great deal of attention to these matters.

I would like to emphasize at this point that in discussing questions of our bilateral relations and international problems of a general nature we invariably took into account the fact that both the Soviet Union and the United States have their own allies and their own obligations toward various other states. It should be stated quite definitely that our talks, both in their spirit and in the letter of the signed agreements, fully take that fact into consideration.

But the main purport of all that we discussed and agreed upon with President Nixon in the field of international affairs is the firm determination of both sides to make good relations between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. a permanent factor of international peace.

In our time — and I am sure you know this — there are still too many people who would rather make noise about military preparations and the arms race than discuss problems of détente and peaceful cooperation in a constructive spirit.

What can be said on that account? The Soviet people are perhaps second to none when it comes to knowing what war means. In World War II we won a victory of world historic significance. But in that war over 20 million Soviet citizens died, 70,000 of our towns and villages were devastated, and one third of our national wealth was destroyed.

The war wounds have now been healed. Today the Soviet Union is a mightier and more prosperous country than ever before. But we remember the lessons of the war only too well, and that is why the peoples of the Soviet Union value peace so highly; that is why they strongly approve the peace policy of our Party and Government.

For us peace is the highest achievement to which all men should strive if they want to make their life a worthy one. We believe in reason, and we feel that this belief is shared also by the peoples of the United States and of other nations. If that belief were lost, or if it were obscured by a blind faith in strength alone, in the power of nuclear arms, or some other kind of weapon, the fate of civilization — of humanity itself — would be miserable indeed.

Our path has not been an easy one. Our people are proud that in a historically short period of time, after the victory of the Socialist Revolution, backward Russia transformed itself into a major industrial power and achieved outstanding successes in science and culture. We take pride in having built a new society — a most stable and confidently developing society — which has assured all our citizens of social justice and has made the values of modern civilization the property of all the people. We are proud that dozens of previously oppressed nations and nationalities in our country have become genuinely equal, and that in our close-knit family of nations they are developing their economy and culture.

We have great plans for the future. We want to raise considerably the living standards of the Soviet people. We want to make new advances in education and medicine. We want to make our villages and towns more comfortable to live in and more beautiful. We have drafted programs to develop the remote areas of Siberia, the North and the Far East, with their immense natural resources. And every Soviet individual is deeply conscious of the fact that the realization of those plans requires peace and peaceful cooperation with other nations.

Of course, like any other country, we have quite a few problems and quite a few shortcomings. But the solution to all the problems we face requires, as in the case of other nations, not war or an artificial fanning of tensions, but peace and creative labour, which, we are convinced are the only things that can guarantee well-being and abundance of material and spiritual benefits for all members of Society.

I have attempted to give a brief account of the thoughts and plans of the Soviet people and to explain the nature of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. Its peaceful essence stems from the very core of our society. And it is by no mere chance that the very concept of peaceful coexistence which today is turning more and more into a universally recognized basis for the development of relations between states with different social Systems, was evolved by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state.

You probably know that 2 years ago the 24th Congress of our ruling party, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, approved the Soviet Peace Program, which is a concrete embodiment of the policy of peaceful coexistence in modern conditions. It is a program of active contribution to international détente and to securing a truly lasting peace on earth for many generations to come. It expresses not only the convictions and intentions of our people but also, we are sure, the aspirations of millions and millions of peace-loving people all over the world. We are implementing this program, working hand-in-hand with our friends and allies, the socialist countries. On the basis of this program we seek to build relations of good will and mutually beneficial cooperation with all countries that have a similar desire. And the improvement of Soviet-American relations occupies its rightful place in that program.

Dear viewers, the importance and complexity of the problems on the agenda of our talks with President Nixon, of our meeting and discussions with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, headed by Senator Fulbright, and with prominent representatives of the American business community, called for a tight work schedule on this visit.

As I have already pointed out, these were fruitful discussions held in a good atmosphere. This gives us a feeling of satisfaction.

At the same time, I do personally regret that the extreme pressure of business has not given me and my colleagues who accompanied me and took part in our work a chance to see more of your country. While still in Moscow, and then here, in the United States, I received many warm letters from various American cities, organizations, companies, and private citizens kindly inviting me to visit this or that town, to see plants, farms, and universities, or to be a guest in the homes of Americans. I am taking this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all those who wrote such letters. I regret that, for the reasons I have just mentioned, I was unable to take up those invitations.

Of course, it would have been interesting to visit New York and Chicago and Detroit and Los Angeles, to see some of your industrial projects and farms, to talk to American working people, whose achievements are admired by Soviet people. Perhaps the future will offer such an opportunity, especially since President Nixon and I have definitely agreed that in the future our contacts will be placed on a regular footing. We are looking forward to President Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union next year.

But even though this brief visit did not give me a chance to see as much as I would like to in America, I nevertheless have every reason, when I return home, to tell my colleagues and all Soviet people both about the important political results of the visit and about the atmosphere of good will and the trend in favour of peace, of détente, and of improving relations between our two countries. It is a trend which we felt during our stay in the United States and during our contacts with government and public leaders of your country, and with many American citizens. I can assure you that these feelings are fully shared by Soviet people.

I do not believe I will be divulging a major secret if I tell you that in my talks with President Nixon over the last few days we not only addressed ourselves to current political problems but also tried to look ahead and to take into account the future interests of the peoples of both our countries. In so doing we proceeded from the assumption that in politics, those who do not look ahead will inevitably find themselves in the rear,

among the stragglers. A year ago in Moscow we laid the foundation for improving Soviet-American relations. Now this great and important objective has been successfully brought closer. It is our hope that this trend will continue, for it meets the interests of our two great peoples and of all mankind.

In conclusion, I want to express my sincere, gratitude to the American people, to the President and the Government of the United States for their hospitality, for their kindness, and numerous expressions of warm feelings toward the Soviet people and us, their representatives.

Dear Americans, please accept my wishes for well-being and happiness to all of you.

Thank you.