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SPECIAL ARTICLES

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MOSCOW AND A NUCLEAR TEST BAN

During his heated remarks to the press in Paris after the collapse of the summit meeting last May, Khrushchev said that, as far as the ten-nation disarmament talks were concerned, he was "almost convinced that our partners in Geneva do not want disarmament--what is happening is merely procrastination." He stated flatly, however, that the USSR would continue the nuclear test ban negotiations, thus indicating that he considered the test ban issue outside the framework of general disarmament talks and beyond the limits of Moscow's anti-US agitation and propaganda offensive.

Similarly, public statements by Khrushchev during his visit to Austria last July seemed intended to provide assurance that the bloc walkout on 27 June from the disarmament talks did not foreshadow a similar move in the test ban negotiations.

The Soviet leaders were nonetheless concerned that their actions might lead to Western withdrawal from the test ban talks. Shortly after the US announced on 17 July that it would conduct 11 underground tests for research purposes during the next two years, the Soviet delegation in Geneva made a major concession in its negotiating position. The concession involved the question of permitting international inspection of sites at which instruments indicated a nuclear explosion might have occurred. The Soviets had previously

declared the precise number of such inspections an issue beyond the scope of the Geneva talks. However, they conceded at this point that they might allow three annually. The number was patently unacceptable to the Western powers, but the initiative was probably intended as a sign of continuing Soviet interest in arriving at a test ban agreement.

The USSR thus sought to keep the test ban talks alive despite its militant anti-US campaign and virtual severance of relations with the US in all other matters pending a change in administration. This persistence probably stemmed from four main factors: the obvious political and strategic advantages of maintaining a de facto but uncontrolled ban; a desire to use the test ban question in future efforts to promote some accommodation with the US; concern over the spread of nuclear weapons within the Western alliance; and an urgent need of a pretext for rebuffing Communist China's insistence that the USSR provide it with nuclear weapons.

The Soviet Position

When the Geneva talks opened in October 1958, the Soviet leaders probably decided that protracted negotiations, accompanied by an uncontrolled moratorium on testing, would serve both their political and long-range strategic aims. They appear to have concluded that, despite US superiority in certain technological aspects, stabilization of nuclear weapons

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JUL 2002

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technology would serve Soviet military interests better than a continuation of testing by both sides with no assurance that the USSR would improve its relative military position by further tests. The USSR, moreover, had available a wide range of nuclear weapons which were probably considered adequate to meet basic military requirements.

From the political viewpoint, the Soviet leaders probably saw at least three distinct advantages to the talks: they would further the Soviet effort to single out and stigmatize nuclear weapons; they would strengthen the long Soviet campaign for a test ban as the first step in nuclear disarmament; and they would generate political problems in the free world which would serve to inhibit Western defense planning.

The close relationship in Soviet thinking between a test ban and Western defense activities was reflected in Foreign Minister Gromyko's announcement in March 1958 of the USSR's first unilateral cessation of testing. Gromyko warned that the West German decision to accept nuclear weapons and missiles made a test ban agreement an urgent and imperative task.

Soviet Tactics

Moscow over the past three years has tied its tactics

in negotiations to the over-all state of Soviet relations with the Western powers. From October 1958, when negotiations began, until Khrushchev's visit to the US in September 1959, Soviet moves on the test ban issue were primarily designed to keep the talks alive by making strictly limited concessions on the vital control issues. With the summit conference virtually agreed upon after Khrushchev's visit, the USSR adopted a more flexible position and sought to isolate a few outstanding problems for settlement. After the Paris conference, however, the Soviet delegation withdrew some previous concessions, temporized on almost all major issues, and made it clear the USSR would await negotiations with a new US administration.

Soviet sources have recently begun to revive the test ban question as a summit-level topic, and the Soviet note agreeing to postpone negotiations from 6 February until 21 March was couched in optimistic terms. A number of Soviet spokesmen have also implied that when negotiations resume, the Soviet delegation will be prepared to offer concessions on key issues.

On the number of on-site inspections, Soviet officials and scientists at the Pugwash Conference in Moscow last December implied that a compromise would be possible in which the USSR would accept the American proposal for 20 inspections in the USSR each year in return for American agreement to a four-year moratorium on small

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underground tests, instead of the 27-month moratorium proposed by the US.

course and what concessions it can make.

In his recent letter to the American Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, Khrushchev acknowledged that the moratorium and a research program to improve detection methods for small underground explosions remained major unresolved issues. The Soviet negotiating position has been to defer settlement of the question of a research program until the duration of the moratorium is agreed on. Moscow probably believes that an extended moratorium would make it increasingly difficult for the West to resume underground tests, even if an agreed research program during the moratorium failed to yield results in improving detection methods.

The Soviet leaders may also anticipate that, following settlement of the on-site inspection and moratorium problems, continued rejection of the American position on a coordinated research program which includes nuclear explosions would endanger the talks.

Last August the Soviet delegate also indicated some interest in working out a compromise formula to resolve the impasse over another key issue, the composition of the control commission.

In general, however, Moscow is likely to await new American proposals before deciding on its over-all