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 By JB NARA Date 10/27/88
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 April 26, 1962

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TO: The Secretary
 THROUGH: S/S
 FROM: S/P - W. W. Rostow
 SUBJECT: Prospective Results of New Series of Soviet Atmospheric Tests

SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY
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We gathered that the impression was gained during the Foreign Ministers' phase of the Geneva talks that the Soviets: (1) are adamant against a test ban agreement at this stage, almost regardless of terms; and (2) are marking time, as if waiting for something to happen.

One possibility would be an expectation in Moscow that some military breakthrough might emerge which would shift the political and psychological balance - if not the military balance - in their favor.

In the light of that possibility we mounted a session with INR, CIA and Defense experts on Soviet weaponry. Messrs. Bohlen and Kitchen also participated.

The following emerged from our discussion:

1. Evidence is "unmistakable" that the Soviets are carrying on intensive preparations for early, large-scale atmospheric tests.
2. Technical factors appear to rule out a Soviet accomplishment that would constitute a breakthrough in the sense of effecting a significant shift in military power.
3. The Soviets nevertheless can and probably will demonstrate significant progress through their next series. The area indicated as the most likely is the anti-ICBM missile. The Soviets have already carried out tests that indicate that they are in fact at an advanced stage in developing an effective anti-missile missile, and our intelligence people view a convincing demonstration as a distinct possibility - perhaps the shooting down of a satellite, since this could be publicized without having to admit foreign observers to the AICBM site.

Other, but not necessarily alternative, possibilities are: (1) Moscow may schedule tests that will "out do" us by firing missiles with larger warheads over a longer range than those we plan to test;

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(2) the Soviets may demonstrate a capability to deliver a super bomb (50 to 100 megaton) by missile. (Our people believe that the Soviets should be able to carry up to a 100 megaton bomb on their first generation ICBM a distance of some 1500 nautical miles. Further tests might reduce the weight, hence increase the range.)

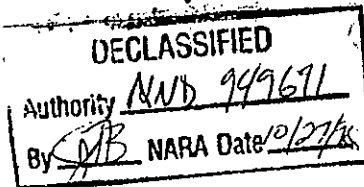
4. Although Soviet success in any of these several fields will constitute solid progress, the resultant situation should be technically manageable for us: (a) It will be some time before Moscow can deploy sufficient anti-missile missiles to make much difference. By that time we should have incorporated reasonably effective countermeasures (decoys) in our delivery systems. At very huge cost the Soviets might reduce during an interim period the vulnerability of a few key centers — e.g., Moscow and Leningrad — but they could not protect the country generally, or even the gamut of missile launching sites. Overall, the advantage in missileery is still with the offense. (b) The military advantage of a super bomb is still questionable, although it could be useful against hardened sites if it could be made light enough to be carried by a missile. Rumors about the fireball effect of a 100 MT weapon at high satellite altitudes — as in Gladwyn Jebb's letter to you — are grossly exaggerated and should be promptly corrected.

5. Aside from legitimate experimentation, Moscow's aim will be (a) to restore its image of superiority in the nuclear-missile field; (b) to give our military people evidence of real strength. (The group thought Moscow must be aware of, and concerned over, the shift in the U.S. estimate of Soviet missile capability as a result of our improved intelligence over the last year.)

6. The experts stressed that the Soviets so far have enjoyed great political and psychological advantages from costs far less than ours. This arose from the fact that they have traded in futures, against a background of secrecy. Through spectacular accomplishments they have achieved maximum psychological impact; but they have not effected corresponding gains in weapons systems and the space field as a whole. We, on the other hand, have made steady scientific progress and stand now on the verge of substantial payoffs. If the Soviets are not to fall behind they have to increase and reorient their efforts. How far they are prepared to allocate the necessary resources is an open question, since they are caught between heavy pressures to increase allocations to agriculture, housing, consumers goods, space and military production while maintaining a high rate of investment. Because of this resources problem, Moscow may be doubly interested in another high score — low cost spectacular feat.

7. The group recognized that unless countered through an educational campaign on our part, Soviet performance in the tests, particularly a

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spectacular anti-missile shot or demonstrations re the super bomb, would nevertheless produce once again an important impact on U.S. and world opinion. The group felt, therefore, that immediate attention should be given to how we will handle the Soviet tests both before and after they take place. Another space first (e.g., a soft landing of instruments on the moon) is also a possibility to which we should give some advance thought.

cc: U - Mr. Ball
M - Mr. McGhee
S/B - Mr. Bohlen
G - Mr. Johnson
EUR - Mr. Kohler
P - Mr. Manning
S/AE - Mr. Farley

INR - Mr. Hilsman
G/PM - Mr. Kitchen

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