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Mr. President:

This is the CIA document  
analyzing probable Soviet motives  
for resuming nuclear testing.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

1 September 1961

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF THE ANNOUNCED SOVIET  
INTENTION TO RESUME NUCLEAR TESTING

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the motives for the Soviet decision to resume nuclear testing, the broad consequences of the decision for the Soviet international position, and its implications for Soviet foreign and military policies during the months ahead.

THE ESTIMATE

The Motivations for Testing

1. The Soviets have, as time passed, had increasing technical motivations for further nuclear weapons testing. While we do not believe that any of these were <sup>immediately</sup> essential requirements, it is likely that some were of growing importance: tests related to development of antimissile defenses; tests of low-yield, light weight devices; tests

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directed toward economy of fissionable materials and improving yield-to-weight ratio; and perhaps tests in new areas of development. Of these, the one relating to anti-missile defenses has probably been the most urgent. We do not think that the Soviets would expect tests to be conducted in the months immediately ahead to materially affect Soviet military capabilities in the present period of crisis. However, some proof testing of present weapons incorporating untested improvements might have been desired.

2. These military requirements, which Khrushchev has admitted were being pressed by the Soviet military leaders, were thus one factor of increasing weight on the side of resumption. During the period beginning in the early spring of 1961, Soviet lack of interest in negotiating a nuclear test ban agreement was evident. Also during the spring, preparations had probably begun. At that time, the Soviet leaders probably believed that the US would soon resume testing, taking upon itself the onus for doing so and

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at the same time freeing the Soviets to test. However, by July or August it was clear that the US had not decided upon early resumption of tests, and the need arose for Soviet decision on whether to proceed without the benefit of prior US resumption.

3. At the same time, developments in the world political situation, and particularly manifestations of firmness in the Western stand on Berlin, apparently led the Soviet leaders to reassess their foreign policy tactics. In a situation in which they were adopting a policy of increased militancy, and both East and West were demonstrating their military strength, the political disadvantages of a Soviet announcement to resume testing grew less important. Indeed, in this situation positive advantages were seen in the demonstration of Soviet military strength and political toughness which the resumption would signify.

4. Thus, when continuing military incentives to test came to be supplemented by important political ones, the

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decision was reached -- probably in late July -- to proceed with the tests for which contingent preparations had for many months been underway.

General Implications of the Soviet Announcement

5. The main intent behind the Soviet announcement at this time was to raise the level of fear and anxiety in the world in general, and to impress Western statesmen -- and still more Western peoples -- with the strength and ruthlessness with which the Soviets intend to pursue their objectives. We believe the move reflects and dramatizes the turn by the Soviets to an openly militant and increasingly risky phase of tactics in relations with the West. Renewed testing will accord with other recent demonstrations of Soviet military strength and of the Soviet determination to increase it.

6. In relation to the Berlin situation, the Soviets probably hope the Western leaders will take the move as an earnest of Soviet determination to carry out their intention to change the status of West Berlin, at whatever

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cost. They may have decided that the only way to induce the West to accept the main lines of the Soviet position was to launch upon a course of action which displayed or seemed to display Soviet willingness to face the danger of eventual East-West conflict as the alternative.

7. We believe that the Soviets will follow up this announcement in coming months with other threatening measures. In this connection, they will probably soon detonate a high-yield thermonuclear explosion, and possibly a missile delivered warhead, primarily for political effect. They may materially augment Soviet forces in East Germany, and deploy troops along the East-West German border or along Western access routes to Berlin. The Soviet leaders may in addition take measures to prepare the Soviet populace for the possibility of war. In general, we expect the Soviets to be harsh and uncompromising in the next few months in their attitude toward the West, in the hope of compelling Western negotiation over Berlin on terms acceptable to themselves.

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8. The Soviets have always reinforced their appeals for peaceful solutions of East-West disputes with reminders of their military strength. At the present juncture, as the announced decision to test nuclear weapons eloquently bespeaks, they are shifting the emphasis from persuasion to intimidation. This may reduce the acceptability of Soviet policy to many in the world, and tend to deflate their claims to reasonableness. But it will probably also frighten some neutrals and Western spokesmen to put pressure on the US to make concessions, as the party in the dispute more susceptible to the influence of popular opinion. Thus, while almost certainly anticipating a generally unfavorable reaction to the resumption of nuclear testing, Moscow may also have expected even greater neutralist anxiety over war and a rising clamor for East-West negotiations.

Timing of the Announcement

9. Apart from these broad considerations, there remains the question of the reasons for the precise timing

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of the announcement. The fact that the statement was made just two days prior to the convening of the Belgrade conference of neutral leaders may have, in part, reflected Moscow's belief that the conference intended to declare its strong opposition to a resumption of nuclear testing by either side. The Soviets apparently concluded that it was preferable to make their announcement beforehand, rather than declare its intentions after they had, in effect, been formally condemned. They may also have thought that they could counteract much of the negative effect by lobbying at the conference, focussing increased attention on the dangers of war.

10. The Western decision to present new positions at the test ban talks in Geneva in late August may also have lent urgency to the decision to announce the resumption. Moscow must have been aware that these new Western positions would be favorably received by responsible neutralist opinion and would stand in marked contrast to

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Soviet resumption of testing. Moreover, the nuclear test ban issue was about to be brought to the UN General Assembly. Therefore, the Soviets may have decided that the sooner the question of a moratorium became academic, the less they ultimately stood to lose from their decision to break the moratorium.