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IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOVIET  
RESUMPTION OF NUCLEAR TESTING

*Submitted by the*  
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*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, The Joint Staff, and The Atomic Energy Commission.*

*Concurred in by the*  
**UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD**

*on 7 September 1961. Concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; the Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of his jurisdiction.*

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## IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOVIET RESUMPTION OF NUCLEAR TESTING

### THE PROBLEM

To estimate the motives for the Soviet decision to resume nuclear testing, 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; for example, tests related to development of antimissile defenses; tests of high-yield, and low-yield, light-weight devices; tests 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 antimissile defenses has probably been the most urgent. There is not yet enough information on the new Soviet test program to determine what technical purposes it is designed to serve. It is very unlikely that any developmental tests could result in operational Soviet weapons in time to affect Soviet military capabilities during the next few months. On the other hand, proof testing of possible stockpiled but untested weapons might be considered desirable at this time. If the Soviets engaged in clandestine testing during the moratorium, some of the current tests would be designed to exploit the results achieved.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The likelihood of Soviet clandestine testing was last estimated, well before their resumption of overt testing, in SNIE 11-9-61, "Possibility of Soviet Nuclear Testing During the Moratorium," dated 25 April 1961, SECRET.

2. These technical and military requirements, which Khrushchev has said were being pressed by the Soviet military leaders, were thus a major 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. At that time, the Soviet leaders probably believed that the US would soon resume testing, taking upon itself the onus for doing so and at the same time freeing the Soviets to test. However, by July or August it appeared that the US had not decided upon early resumption of tests, and the Soviets had to decide whether to proceed themselves without the benefit of prior US resumption.

3. In addition, developments in the world political situation, and particularly manifestations of firmness in the Western stand on Berlin, almost certainly played a major role in the decision to resume tests at this time. The USSR in its Berlin tactics has regularly kept open the options of unilateral action and negotiation, hoping that its threats to act alone would eventually induce the West to agree to concessions. Instead, Moscow has been confronted by new Western military preparations and a diplomatic stance which

has offered little encouragement to these hopes. In response, the Soviets have since mid-summer undertaken a succession of demonstrative military actions intended to increase the pressure for concessions or, failing these, to manifest such strength and determination as to dissuade the West from forcibly opposing unilateral steps when they finally came.

4. When such measures as the Air Show display, the suspension of troop reductions, and the supplementary defense budget all failed to produce a significant change in the Western attitude, the resumption of nuclear tests must have appeared as a more forceful means of demonstrating Soviet military strength and political toughness. Thus, when pressing military incentives to test came to be supplemented by important political ones, the decision was reached—probably in late July—to proceed with the tests for which contingent test site preparations had for many months been underway.

#### General Implications of the Soviet Announcement

5. The resumption of nuclear testing at this time was clearly intended to raise the level of fear and anxiety in the world in general, and to create a powerful impression of the strength and ruthlessness with which the Soviets intend to pursue their objectives. We believe that the timing of 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 accords with other recent demonstrations of Soviet military strength and of the Soviet determination to increase it.

6. 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. They appear to have decided that the only way to induce the West to accept the main lines of the Soviet position is to launch upon a course of action demonstrating 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 with other threatening measures. In this connection, they will probably soon detonate a high-yield thermonuclear device—perhaps at a higher yield than they have previously tested—and possibly a missile-delivered warhead. 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 their attitude toward the West, in the hope of compelling early Western negotiation over Berlin on terms acceptable to themselves.

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 decision to test nuclear weapons eloquently bespeaks, they are shifting the emphasis from persuasion to intimidation. They 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 many neutral and some 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. The outcome of the Belgrade conference would tend to justify such an expectation.

9. The Chinese Communists, who have almost certainly pressed the Soviets not to conclude a test ban, will welcome the Soviet test resumption as a manifestation of aggressiveness in the struggle with capitalism. They will also regard this move as an opportunity to press anew their demands for Soviet assistance to the Chinese nuclear program, since the end of the moratorium may weaken one of the arguments with which the Soviets have justified their reluctance to satisfy these demands.

We do not believe, however, that the Soviet resumption of nuclear testing indicates any increase in Moscow's willingness to assist the Chinese nuclear program.

#### Timing of the Announcement

10. Apart from these broad considerations, there remains the question of the reasons for the precise timing of the announcement. The fact that the statement was made just two days prior to the convening of the Belgrade conference probably reflected Moscow's belief that the conference intended to declare its strong opposition to a resumption of nuclear testing by either side. Thus the Soviets probably thought it was preferable to make the announcement beforehand, rather than after their decision had, in effect, been formally condemned. The Soviets probably also be-

lieved that the desired effect on neutralist opinion—*anxiety and clamor for East-West negotiations*—would be enhanced by the use of "shock" tactics on an assembly of major neutralist leaders, and that much of the negative effect could be counteracted by lobbying at the conference. Finally, the Western decision to present new positions at the test ban talks in Geneva in late August may have advanced the timing of the announcement of the decision to resume testing. Knowing that the forthcoming UN General Assembly would be likely to consider the test ban problem, and aware that the new Western positions would be favorably received by responsible neutralist opinion, the Soviets may have decided that the sooner the question of the moratorium became academic, the less they ultimately stood to lose from their decision to break it.

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