

Science in the News

Disarmament: U.N. Agrees To Cancel Public Debate While U.S. and U.S.S.R. Talk Things Over

From New York. What had been feared would be a lengthy and acrimonious debate on disarmament at the United Nations took exactly 23 minutes last week, of which less than 5 minutes was taken by the principal adversaries. In a brief statement opening the "debate," Adlai Stevenson recommended that the topic be put off while the United States prepared its position for negotiations that, he hoped, would "produce results, rather than further disappointment." Andrei Gromyko, in an equally brief statement, announced that in view of the desire of the new Administration to complete its policy review the Soviet Union "found it possible not to insist" on a full debate until fall.

The two powers promised to carry on private discussions leading to full-scale formal negotiations this summer. The Canadian delegate said that the dropping of disarmament from the agenda until fall did not mean that the smaller powers were accepting the notion that disarmament is a private matter to be left to Russia and America, and he suggested that the two powers keep the U.N. informed of what they are up to in their private talks.

The meeting was more of a public performance than a public discussion. Except for some brief statements by African delegates echoing the Canadian position that disarmament and nuclear weapons are a matter of concern to the lesser as well as the great powers, the entire show was planned in advance, with everyone aware of what everyone else would say, including the fact that Krishna Menon, the Indian delegate, would say nothing. Several hours before the meeting began an American spokesman provided the

press with a briefing on what was going to happen, and the outcome, approval of a joint Soviet-American resolution putting off the debate until fall, was known before the meeting began.

The official American position is that the Russians, who originally wanted the debate, had quite unexplainedly agreed to put it off, and that they received no concessions. A minor Russian official, talking informally, suggested: "Gromyko talked to Kennedy alone, not even an interpreter present, so nobody knows just what happened; but we wanted to debate, now we agree not to debate; we must have gotten something."

A common view is that what the Russians got was American agreement to participate in bilateral negotiations with the Russians on disarmament, something which we have always refused in the past, if only on the grounds that our allies insisted on being included in the talks. The official American position is that this is not true: that the private Soviet-American discussions will deal only with setting up the formal basis for negotiations, not with questions of substance.

Hope for Progress

Whatever the details of the Soviet-American agreement, the effect of what happened last week was, first, to raise slightly hopes for real progress on disarmament, on the assumption that the Russian agreement to pass up the opportunity to insist on a battle of propaganda at the current U.N. session indicates that they are growing more serious about disarmament, and, second, to commit the U.S. more heavily than ever to coming up with specific proposals on disarmament in August, for we will surely look very silly at the next U.N. session in the fall if, after getting everyone to go along with our desire to take the better part of a year

to review our position, we come up with nothing new.

Just how much the Russian agreement to put off the disarmament debate indicated a real increase in the Russian willingness, or even ability, to deal realistically with the question is uncertain. There is somewhat less uncertainty about the sort of disarmament proposals the U.S. will make when its policy review is completed this summer.

The Soviet decision to put off debate was certainly influenced by the fact that the propaganda advantages to be gained, and therefore the temptation to insist on debate, had lessened with the change in the American administration.

What is sought is disarmament with inspection. The basic problem for the United States, and what made nearly everyone assume that it was the Russians who would get a propaganda advantage out of a U.N. debate today, is the necessity of the United States to worry, and consequently to talk, a great deal about the need for inspection, while the Russians feel free, and indeed are impelled, to talk a great deal about disarmament itself. The reasons for this, and for the greater appeal to other nations of the Russian approach, were reported in some detail here last fall (*Science*, 14 Oct.).

Russian Argument

The Russians last fall had no trouble finding sympathetic listeners, even among people sympathetic to the U.S., for their argument that the Americans were not really interested in disarmament, that we were only interested in "arms control," which, the Russians claimed, was just a device to open Russia to Western inspectors without doing anything much about disarmament. For themselves, the Russians insisted that they were perfectly ready to talk inspection if the Americans would only begin to talk specifically about disarming, and not just about control over existing arms.

The appeal of these arguments remains, but the fact that there is a new American government, and one which has, in general, favorably impressed the world, made it difficult for the Russians to make much of the propaganda advantage they might have in a debate. For there was a widespread willingness to accept the new Administration's contention that it needed time to prepare for serious negotiations, and consequently a willingness to listen to the

American argument, sure to be forthcoming if the Russians insisted on a full debate, that the Russians are more interested in stirring up controversy than in really trying to accomplish something on disarmament.

Thus the Russian agreement was not based solely on a willingness to give up making propaganda hay on disarmament, but partly at least on an awareness that there is not much hay to be made at the moment.

Soviet Attitudes

The American representatives at the latest Pugwash conference came away, in general, with the impression that the Russians were becoming more realistic in dealing with the problem of disarmament, but that they still had some way to go before really fruitful negotiations would be possible.

A favorable sign among the Russians has been a diminishment, not entirely satisfactory to the Americans, but noticeable, of the tendency of the Russians to dismiss American studies pointing up the pitfalls of various disarmament proposals as mere nitpicking thought up by people who are against disarmament anyway. Less favorable is the absence among the Russians of the sort of indisputably realistic talk about the arms race that one can find, at least on occasion, among Americans.

An interesting example of the way influential Americans can talk about the problems of disarmament was given in a telecast taped and distributed widely by WGBH, an educational station in Boston. Its panel was made up of members of the American delegation to the Pugwash (scientist-to-scientist) conference in Moscow last December, including Jerome Weisner, now special assistant to the President for Science and Technology, and W. W. Rostow, now deputy special assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

Here is Weisner's comment on the Soviet concern that America might use arms inspection for espionage: "It (the concern) is real, and you can demonstrate this by an incident such as the U-2. In order to support our military strategy we have to have intelligence, and we pay a high price to get it. Therefore it is militarily important for them to keep us from getting it. Therefore it is not a price they are prepared to pay for trivial arms control or disarmament measures, and I think if I was negotiating for the Soviets or doing

their military planning, I would take this view too."

This is about as clear a presentation as a Russian could have given of the sort of factor that influences the Russians to take the position they do, and it is an important statement; for to recognize the other side's legitimate concerns is both a sign that you are taking the issue seriously and have thought it through carefully and an assurance that you will recognize a concession when it is made.

Unfortunately there is not much evidence yet that the Russians have brought themselves to see very clearly American interests as compelling as the Russian desire to protect their secrecy, and until they do so there is not much chance of agreement being reached on anything significant. The commonest Soviet attitude is to assume that the American negotiators may be sincere, but that they are held back by the evil forces of the Pentagon and the nasty capitalists.

Sputniks and Disarmament

There is also another disturbing factor, one that perhaps helps explain why the Russians have been slower than their American counterparts in really thinking through the problems of disarmament. This is that the Russians do not accept the existence of noncommunist nations. The serious American studies of disarmament have begun to grow into something important only in the past two or three years. They date, as do so many other recent developments, roughly from the Russian launching of the first sputnik.

This brought with it, of course, awareness that the age of intercontinental missiles is almost upon us, and a consequently more horrifying prospect of what a full-scale war would be like. But it also brought with it acceptance of the fact that Soviet power and technological achievement are strongly based and are roughly equivalent to our own, and consequently an abandonment of any real hope that the Soviet threat is just going to fade away, or even that it can be kept reasonably in hand by our maintaining the kind of overwhelming superiority in striking power we have enjoyed in the past.

Once you accept the fact that you are going to be in an arms race for a long time, and that you have no substantial prospects of being able to "win" this race, you begin to think more seriously of where it is leading

you not only in the foreseeable future of 2 or 3 years from now, but in the longer term future of 10 or 20 years; and although the view of this longer term future is cloudy, it is perceptible enough to be thoroughly disagreeable.

It is, again, easier to recognize the problems in the abstract than to really make them a part of your planning, for to do so requires you to make compromises on your more immediate objectives.

We seem to have become more and more realistic in our thinking about the arms race and disarmament as we have come to accept the idea that Soviet power is real, and that, if it is not permanent, it is certainly going to be around for a long time. Part of the difficulty in getting the Russians to be equally realistic is that they do not accept the idea that we are going to be around for a long time, at least not with power on a par with their own.

Prospects Cloudy

This suggests that one of the important factors that will affect disarmament prospects will be the success of our domestic and foreign policies in general. For our success will decide how much and how quickly we can alter the Soviet conviction that the tide of events in the world is going strongly in their direction, which tempts them with the idea that they only have to sit tight a few more years and we will no longer be such a real threat to them, or, at the least, that they will be able to get us to accept settlements on disarmament and other matters on their terms.

The net effect of this, ameliorated by some other factors, made more difficult by others, is that there is more optimism about the prospects for useful disarmament negotiations now than there has ever been before, when neither side was taking the subject very seriously except as a topic for propaganda warfare. But the outlook, nevertheless, can hardly be described as rosy.

A report on the likely product of the current American reappraisal of disarmament policy, based on the Administration's actions and statements, will appear here next week. In general, what can be expected above all is clarity; until now it has been almost impossible to find anyone who really claimed to know just what the American proposals meant and just what were the policy assumptions that underlay the proposals.—H.M.