

## News and Comment

### **To Test or Not to Test: Kennedy's Remarks at His Press Conference Make the Answer Quite Clear**

At his news conference last week, which was dominated by talk of the impending decision on the resumption of atmospheric testing, the President raised several points he had never before mentioned in public.

He introduced the argument that our decision had to take into account not only our relative position vis-à-vis the Russians as it is now, but also an extrapolation of where we might be several years from now if the Russians were to repeat the deception they practiced leading up to their resumption of testing last fall. The point here is that we have no assurance that, even if we forgo testing, the Russians will not stage a further test series themselves, which might give them a real lead in weapons technology. "My statement today," the President said, "indicates our feeling about our relative position today and tomorrow. . . . These [Soviet] tests were very intensive. They had been in preparation for many months, and we could see a period go by possibly of another year or year and a half of secret preparations being made, and suddenly a new series of tests, with extrapolations from those tests, particularly on matters involving, maybe, an anti-missile missile."

To avert this, the President said we would require, even for a ban limited to atmospheric testing, an inspection system to give us "some assurance" that the Russians are not conducting secret preparations for a further test series. The effect was to answer in advance any Soviet offer to accept now the uncontrolled ban on atmospheric testing we had suggested at the beginning of their test series.

The effect of all the President said was to put himself in an awkward political position if we now fail to resume testing. It is difficult for anyone outside the government to judge the

validity of the technical and military arguments for and against a resumption of testing. The information for an informed judgment is not available. One can only accept, or refuse to accept, the President's judgments. But the political implications of his statements are clear. For the President has now lent his personal authority to two of the major arguments that will be used to attack him if testing is not resumed: the argument that we cannot afford to sit by while the Russians may be secretly preparing a new test series, and the argument that we have to worry about the possible Russian development ahead of us of an antimissile missile. The President would hardly have said what he did, regardless of the importance of the points, if he had any serious doubt what his decision was going to be.

The White House is still saying that the President has made no definite decision to resume nuclear testing, which presumably is true in the technical sense that George Romney had not definitely decided to run for governor of Michigan until he made his formal announcement last Saturday. But barring a dramatic, and unforeseen, change in the Soviet attitude on the question of disarmament, it must be assumed that we will shortly announce a resumption of testing. The President's remarks at his news conference last week made it extremely difficult to avoid this conclusion.

#### **Extent of Test Series**

What continues to be seriously at issue is not whether to resume testing, but how extensive the test series needs to be. "There will be no testing that is not clearly necessary," the President said, a remark which carries somewhat different connotations than, say, "there will be no testing unless it is clearly necessary." The outlook is for a joint Anglo-American test series, probably beginning within 2 months, limited in terms of number and size of explosions to quantities to something less than the

Soviet series. The test ban proper appears to be a dead issue. The U.S. and Britain are still standing by their readiness to sign the proposed treaty, but the Russians have made it clear that they regard the amount of inspection that would be necessary to police underground explosions as unacceptable. But there is a strong possibility that a serious effort will be made to assure the world that the presumed Anglo-American test series will mark the end of atmospheric testing by the current nuclear powers.

The President's remark that we would require assurance that the Russians were not secretly preparing for a new atmospheric test series can be interpreted in widely different fashions. At one extreme it is really an impossible condition: It would appear to require the most intimate kind of inspection, including access to Soviet weapons laboratories. The Russians would hardly accept this degree of inspection except as part of a very extensive scheme of general disarmament. It is out of the question now and for the foreseeable future. At the other extreme the proposal could be interpreted to require only the most limited token inspection, in which case the inspection would serve merely as a symbol of the commitment not only not to test in the atmosphere, but not to prepare for tests. It would make it clear to the world that if a nation suddenly began a series of tests the offending country, whatever the excuse it produced for resuming atmospheric testing, would be convicting itself of having violated the treaty for many months prior to the resumption of testing. The treaty would presumably require a nation which felt it must be free to prepare for tests publicly to abandon the treaty a certain time, say 1 year, before it resumed testing.

The President's remarks on this point, then, can be interpreted to preempt a Soviet attempt to prevent the West from answering the Russian series with a series of our own, and simultaneously to serve as the basis for serious negotiations for a permanent ban on atmospheric testing as part of the conference on disarmament scheduled to begin in Geneva 14 March. The possibility of reaching such an agreement would presumably depend to a large extent on how widely accepted is Hans Bethe's thesis that nuclear technology has progressed to the point where there is really not a great deal more to be learned from further testing.