News and Comment

Nuclear Testing: The Rival Series Are Not Likely To Go On and On

The resumption of testing seems to have been accompanied by, among other things, more talk of a successful test ban than has been heard for a year or more. Harold Brown, chief of research and engineering at the Defense Department, and Arthur Dean, our chief negotiator at Geneva, have been among those in official positions who have publicly made remarks which could be interpreted to mean that the United States might, after its current tests have been completed, be prepared to accept some sort of test ban not requiring an elaborate international inspection system. This is not the official U.S. position by any means: the official position is still that we are insisting on control arrangements similar to those we have been asking for all along. Vague talk of hopes for a fairly easy test ban may be nothing more than an easy response to the pressures that have resulted from the final collapse of the present test ban. On the other hand, we did offer the Russians an easy test ban last September, after they had resumed testing but before they had made many tests: this ban would have been limited to tests in the atmosphere and in the sea, which are relatively easy to detect without an international inspection system. Underground testing would not have been covered. It seems likely that we will eventually offer to accept such a proposal again, if only because the neutrals and, indeed, many of our allies are sure to ask for it, and it will be very difficult to explain why we were no longer interested, even if, in fact, we were no longer interested.

The expectation at the moment is that our current series of tests will be completed early this summer; that the Russians will conduct, as they have warned they would do, another test series of their own, hopefully a short one; and that the stage will then be set for a new moratorium, at least on atmospheric tests. If things run in their past pattern, we will offer to sign a ban on atmospheric and undersea tests; the Russians will insist that the agreement cover *all* tests; we will insist that we cannot accept another uninspected moratorium; and things will then quiet down for a while, with neither side willing to sign an agreement acceptable to the other, but also with neither side testing. This is presumably the sort of situation Harold Brown had in mind when he mentioned the possibility of a tacit test-ban agreement during his Meet-the-Press interview last Sunday, a tacit agreement perhaps augmented by a unilateral American commitment not to test in the atmosphere again so long as the Russians did not do so again.

What makes it unlikely that we would seriously consider *another* test series to respond to the expected new Russian series is that the technical considerations that led to the current series would not be so relevant in deciding on an appropriate response if the Russians should test again in the near future.

Technical Problems

The Russian test series last fall was an extremely elaborate and carefully prepared one based on technical developments over the 3 years since the test moratorium had begun in 1958. It raised at least two serious technical problems for the U.S.

One was that the Russians conducted a number of tests to provide data on the effects of nuclear explosions at very high altitudes intended for use not as weapons but as devices for disrupting electronic equipment and communications. The most pronounced effect from such explosions is a temporary blackout of radio communications over a wide area. This and other known or possible effects suggested the need for parallel U.S. tests in order to provide precise information to serve as the basis for whatever redesign of electronic equipment in our missile and defense systems is required to counter these effects.

Next Time Around

A second major problem was the more general one that by testing the Russians had simply jumped ahead 3 years, not necessarily in technology immediately translatable into military weapons, but in overall experimental data in several areas requiring atmospheric tests. These data probably are not any immediate threat to our security. But they leave the Russians in a position to achieve a possible unacceptable lead if they should hold another surprise test series after 3 more years of laboratory work: in other words the concern was that the Russians, if we did not test, would not merely be one jump ahead of us, but in a position to get a double jump ahead of us if they chose to do so.

Neither of these problems was overwhelming: otherwise it is very unlikely that Kennedy would have been so obviously reluctant to resume testing, or that Kennedy's personal science adviser, Jerome Wiesner, whose technical evaluation of the Russian series was essentially the same as that of the Defense Department and the AEC, would have found himself unable to recommend resumption.

That the President found the decision an agonizing one to make does not, of course, imply that there were not reasonable grounds, technical and otherwise, for resuming. It does suggest that the decision was far from a black and white one, and therefore that the balance would shift rather clearly against still another series following the expected renewal of Russian testing: for neither of the two major problems noted here will then be anything like so serious: the basic data on high-altitude effects would have been obtained; and the Soviet series, coming so soon after their previous series, could not be based on a full exploitation of last fall's data, so reducing the risk of the Russians' getting a significant double jump ahead.

On top of these and several other shifts in the weight of the technical arguments, there would also be nothing like the various kinds of political pres-

sures, both domestic and international, for another round of testing that there have been in the present situation. Here, the rather free talk of Administration officials of the unlikelihood of our having to test again following the presumed new Russian tests may indicate not only an effort to reassure those who are opposed to the present testing but an inclination to get the jump on those who will be charging the Administration with appeasement if it fails to follow a second Russian series with a second American series.

Last Sunday evening the President gave a dinner for Nobel laureates living in North America, plus a scattering of guests who had not won the prize, of whom the most significant was J. Robert Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer was ruled a security risk in 1954 after a hearing in which his opinions on national security policies appeared to be more of an issue than his leftist associations prior to 1942. In particular, Oppenheimer had been chairman of the AEC General Advisory Committee in 1949 when the GAC recommended against an immediate crash program to develop the hydrogen bomb. Although the GAC recommendation was unanimous (with one member unrecorded), the witnesses against Oppenheimer placed the blame on him, asserting that he had enormous powers to sway others to his views.

In a more general way, Oppenheimer was accused of undermining the effort to build a massive nuclear deterrent by pressing for alternative use of resources. On several of the subordinate issues, such as the need for continental air defense, tactical nuclear weapons, and conventional non-nuclear forces, Oppenheimer's position has since become accepted national policy. But at the time, it seemed to some people reasonable to suspect that Oppenheimer was, or might well have been, motivated not by an honest difference of opinion over the most effective defense policies, but by a conscious desire to deflect American policy from its most effective course, presumably through some combination of leftist sympathies and softhearted pacifism.

Only one witness (not Teller) questioned Oppenheimer's loyalty, and the review board explicitly absolved Oppenheimer of that charge. But apparently the view prevailed that it was dangerous to have such a purportedly pursuasive man of such purportedly unsound views advising the government on questions of high national policy.

The decision was not formally on these grounds, for they would imply at most only that the man should not be used as a consultant to the government, not that he was a security risk. The decision was based essentially on various incidents and associations of Oppenheimer prior to 1943, none of which involved any leakage, or alleged leakage, of security information. All of this information had been known to the AEC for years, and had been reviewed in detail before he had been granted clearance in 1947. In 1954, though, any number of people who were no more serious "security risks" than Oppenheimer suffered similar humiliations. The Alsop brothers, who had been the most effective supporters in the press of the crash program for developing the hydrogen bomb which Oppenheimer had opposed, wrote that Oppenheimer had been made a "burnt offering" to the spirit of McCarthyism. They produced an elaborately documented book on the case called *We Accuse* (after Zola's defense of Dreyfus), but neither the Alsops' book nor the efforts of Oppenheimer's defenders, in and out of the scientific community, produced any concrete results. Oppenheimer's position outside the government did not suffer in any obvious way (he is head of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton), but he remains, officially, a security risk.

After the new Administration took office, this reporter asked a high official whether any sort of formal relief was being considered on the Oppenheimer case. The answer was that it was difficult to see exactly what could be done that would be in Oppenheimer's best interest. The view, perhaps a sound one, was that any overt action would do as much harm as good to Oppenheimer by opening the door to a public raking-over of all the old charges. Essentially the same argument is made on suggestions that several other victims of the McCarthy era receive some sort of formal absolution. On the other hand, it can, of course, be argued that the Administration is worried more about the possible political liability of overt steps. Oppenheimer's invitation to dinner at the White House presumably was intended as a modest compromise between the political and personal problems inherent in a formal reinstatement and the needs of conscience.

—HOWARD MARGOLIS

Fallout Shelters: Administration's Program Is Facing Difficulty On Capitol Hill

The Administration's civil defense program appears to be bound for drastic surgery in the House of Representatives.

Having sat by patiently and, in many cases, extremely attentively during the long and often emotional public debate over a nationwide fallout shelter program, the House is now about to exercise its vital function of writing the checks. The final decision has yet to work its way through the complex and frequently unpredictable appropriations process, but the prevailing sentiment appears to be fairly divided between indifference and hostility. Unless the Administration is able to work some magic on the generally untractable members of the lower house, it seems very likely that the $695-million civil defense request is going to be liberally cut; just how much is uncertain, but 50 percent is said to be the amount in the mind of Rep. Albert Thomas, the reticent and highly influential Texas Democrat who chairs the Independent Offices subcommittee, the body that passes on civil defense funds.

In past years Thomas has whacked 50 to 75 percent from Administration civil defense requests, basing his opposition on what was generally regarded to be the ineptitude of civil defense management. The current Administration program—for whatever its worth and whatever its implications may be in the broad context of the Cold War—is acknowledged to be in competent hands, but Thomas and a good number of his colleagues are understood to regard it as an almost meaningless, and quite costly, response to the possibility of nuclear attack. As one member of Thomas's seven-man subcommittee put it: "I've studied the Administration program, I've talked to the civil defense people, I've read lots of studies, and still no one has been able to convince me that this fallout shelter program is worth a damn."

Mail and Polls

Civil defense officials seeking to cultivate congressional support have cited the enormous volume of inquiries they receive as evidence of grass roots support for the program; but congressmen consider themselves pretty well tuned into the more sensitive concerns of their constituents, and the mail flooding