Cuba: Missile Episode Provided New Incentive for Arms Agreement, but Left Behind Some Impediments

While the near-calamity of the Cuban episode has provided East and West with new incentives to conclude an arms control agreement, it also raised some impediments to an accord.

If it can be assumed that the administration is telling the whole story, the Soviet gambit in Cuba reflects a capacity for deceit that will amply support those who contend that the Soviets cannot be trusted to abide by any test ban or arms control agreement. Hand in hand with this view of Soviet duplicity goes an insistence on a degree of inspection which is so unacceptable to the Soviets as to rule out any agreement.

At the same time, it seems to be a fair assumption that the retreat from Cuba burdened Khrushchev with some internal political liabilities. Just how serious these are is something that can only be guessed at from outside the Kremlin. But it does not seem likely that Khrushchev would be inclined to follow up his Cuban retreat with a retreat from the Soviet Union's traditional aversion to obligatory inspection.

Bits and scraps of the diplomatic intercourse that preceded the Cuban crisis have been coming out over the past few weeks, and they do nothing to improve the Soviets' badly tarnished reputation for veracity. The President, in his address announcing the blockade, flatly accused Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko of falsehood on Soviet intentions in Cuba. This has been followed by disclosures that through various diplomatic channels, high and low, the Soviets explicitly assured the administration that they had no intention of converting Cuba into a base that could threaten the United States. Administration officials feel that the kindest thing that can be said is that those who carried the messages were not let in on the missile plans. But at some point within the Soviet government the whole scheme—military and diplomatic—came together in an attempt to improve the Soviet strategic position under a cover of comforting words.

While the Cuban experience has furnished the administration with grounds for increased wariness of Soviet motives, the fright it produced has also raised the possibility that conditions may be ripe for a bold move toward some sort of agreement. There have been no outward indications of just what this might involve, but persons close to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency report that there has been an unusal amount of activity there during the past few weeks, and that new or revised positions are under active consideration, possibly for presentation when the 18-nation disarmament conference resumes next week in Geneva.

The Soviets, for their part, have lately indicated a greater interest in the "black box" concept of inspection, an untouched-by-human-hands system based on sealed, unmanned seismic stations. The administration has not committed itself one way or another on black boxes, but, at the technical level, it is felt that the system may be nothing but a grand package of headaches that will create more problems than it solves. Basically, it involves planting a network of stations whose supposedly tamperproof tapes would be periodically forwarded to an international authority charged with seeing that no clandestine underground testing has taken place. Still unresolved, however, is the question of what happens if the international authority cannot determine the cause of an underground phenomenon. An instance of this type would bring up the issue of on-site inspection, something the Soviets say they would accept on an invitational basis but not as an obligation. (It was recently proposed in a letter to the New York *Times* that the United States and the Soviet Union each post a $5 billion bond, which would be forfeited upon refusal to permit on-site inspection. It was not explained, however, why the Soviets would be willing to pay $5 billion to maintain a policy that now costs them nothing.)

The Soviet interest in the black box approach is considered curious by some American disarmament planners, especially since there is nothing to indicate that the Soviets have undertaken very much of a research effort in this field. At present the United States has several dozen of these stations in experimental operation, and there is no great enthusiasm among those who have worked with them or studied their operation.

It is felt that in an atmosphere of trust, the black box approach would do nicely for verifying observance of an underground test ban. But if the duplicity involved in the Cuban operation is any indication of Soviet trustworthiness, the difficulties that frequently attend the operation of complex equipment could easily set off charges of bad faith and deception. The argument that the boxes would be "tamperproof" is not very reassuring, since lots of things that are supposedly tamperproof, from U.S. currency to massive bank vaults, stop being tamperproof if sufficient resources are devoted to the effort. Furthermore, in visualizing the problems that might arise if a black box system were in operation, American officials see a grand and troublesome variety. Among these is the question of what happens if U.S. detection devices report an underground Soviet occurrence that fails to show up on a tape inside the Soviet Union. The vagaries of the underground motion offer this possibility, and the hostility of East-West relations assures that such an event would immediately raise a demand for an on-site inspection. One way around this might be to blanket the Soviet Union with so many stations that such peculiarities would be eliminated or made extremely rare. At present, however, the Soviets, in their informal discussions of black boxes, are talking in terms of a handful or so, while American officials say they are thinking in terms of at least 1000 and possibly of as many as 5000.

Whatever the Soviets may have in mind for the black box approach, the administration is acutely aware of the fact that any test ban or arms control agreement must be acceptable to Congress as well as to Khrushchev. Here again the Cuban episode will be long remembered, and will not provide the administration with any additional maneuvering room. The perils of the Cuban crisis served to stifle criticism of the administration's performance, and since nothing succeeds like success, Kennedy emerged unscathed. But any test ban or arms control agreement that relies on Soviet good faith as one of the ingredients for assuring compliance is not likely to be well received by Congress. That body's suspicious and jealous attitude toward things atomic was clearly demonstrated anew recently on something no more perilous than the administration's interest in selling France some early model nuclear submarines. In response to these reports, Chet Holifield, chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, stated that no one had attempted to clear it with him and that if they had, the answer would have been no.

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