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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

THE DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum
RSB-152, September 4, 1962

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

SUBJECT: Soviet Tactics in Talks on Non-Diffusion of Nuclear Weapons

In accordance with your request we have examined the factors which may be influencing the Soviets in their conduct of the current phase of the non-diffusion talks. 1/

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude that Moscow's most recent (August 23) formulation of provisions for a non-diffusion agreement reverts to language which does not differ greatly from what the Soviets have in the past been prepared to accept; that the timing of this most recent Soviet formula may be explained chiefly in terms of Moscow's estimate that the US is interested in an agreement; and that, on the basis of evidence available to us, Soviet tactics in these negotiations do not appear to be materially affected by considerations involving the Chinese Communists.

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By giving up their insistence of the last several months on specific mention of Germany and on extending the prohibition of transfer of nuclear weapons to military alliances, the Soviets appear to have brought agreement on a formula for a non-dissemination arrangement within reach.

Substantive or Tactical Shift? In attempting to determine the reasons for these adjustments is should be recalled that on several occasions in the past the USSR has advanced or supported proposals on non-transfer which did not single out Germany or explicitly extend to military alliances. For example, Article 16 of the Soviet draft disarmament treaty of March 15, 1962,

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1. Previous papers dealing with Soviet attitudes and tactics on the non-diffusion issue were as follows: RSB-148, August 27, 1962, Soviet Tactics on Some Major Issues at the 17th General Assembly; RSB-128, July 7, 1962, Probable Soviet Position at the Resumed Disarmament Conference; and RSB-47 January 15, 1962, Probable Soviet Position at Forthcoming Disarmament Talks.

merely provided for a commitment by nuclear powers not to transfer nuclear weapons to the control of non-nuclear powers. Likewise, the USSR voted for the Irish resolution (General Assembly Resolution 1665 (XVI)) last December which called for agreement on non-diffusion without reference to specific countries or alliances. Similarly, point 6 of the Soviet memorandum submitted at the UN on September 26, 1961, although referring to the danger of nuclear weapons being placed at the disposal of the Federal Republic, formulated the proposed non-transfer undertaking in general terms. Similar general formulations were used in the Soviet disarmament proposals of June 2 and September 23, 1960.

In accepting the universal applicability of a non-transfer arrangement the Soviets therefore appear to have returned to terms which they had previously found agreeable. As far as a reference to "alliances" is concerned, by adopting language which would prohibit indirect transfer to individual states through alliances, the Soviets have assumed a position halfway between their occasional demands for outright prohibition of transfer to alliances and their omission, on other occasions, of references to alliances altogether.

Thus, the history of Soviet proposals would appear to suggest that the Soviet position of the last several months, during the US-Soviet exchange on the subject, has been a bargaining position rather than a rigid, substantive one, and that the Soviets are now returning, at least most of the way, to a formulation previously acceptable to them.

Indeed, in some respects, Moscow took a more basic step than the recent one in the evolution of its substantive position, when it accepted, in December 1961, the concept that a prohibition should apply to the surrender of control over nuclear weapons rather than, more ambiguously, to the "turning over" or "giving" of nuclear weapons to other countries. (It should be noted that the Soviet August 23 formulation again reverted to the more ambiguous language.)

Why Now? In sum, the recent adjustment in the Soviet position appears to be essentially a tactical rather than a substantive one. This still, however, leaves the question of what factor or factors may have produced such a tactical shift at this time.

In general, the long-standing Soviet advocacy of some form of non-transfer agreement suggests a genuine Soviet interest in obtaining one. We believe that the basis for this interest is Soviet belief that such an agreement would (1) strengthen the obstacles to German acquisition of nuclear weapons, (2) hamper non-aligned countries in developing nuclear capabilities,

and (3) provide a platform from which Communist propaganda could seek to belabor Western arrangements for the deployment and control of nuclear weapons. In addition, the type of agreement now under discussion may hold particular attraction to the Soviets because it is declaratory and does not involve inspection. Finally, the Soviets may feel that an agreement at this time may on the one hand produce an atmosphere in which the West would find it more difficult to mount forceful resistance to Soviet attempts at gradual encroachments of the Western position in Berlin, and, on the other, provide evidence of progress toward Soviet goals for intra-bloc critics who may be impatient with Moscow's relative caution in Berlin.

These considerations would suggest that the Soviets prefer an acceptable agreement sooner rather than later and that having confirmed, through the bilateral talks, a parallel US interest in an agreement they are now willing to make tactical adjustments in order to move toward a successful outcome.

Communist China. We are inclined to doubt that developments within the Communist Bloc, especially in China, are playing a decisive role in the determination of Soviet tactics in these negotiations. We believe the Soviets are confident they can contain any East European pressures for a nuclear weapons capacity, or for a share over the control over the Soviet capacity, without having to rely on an international agreement. As regards China, the Soviets decided in 1960 to curtail their assistance to the general Chinese nuclear development program and there has been no recent evidence to suggest that they are reconsidering this decision or that they are under pressure from the Chinese to reverse it. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the Soviets would have made a new decision that an international non-transfer agreement is now necessary to maintain their position vis-a-vis the Chinese.

It is possible, on the other hand, that, because the agreement now under negotiation also includes a provision barring non-nuclear countries from embarking on production of nuclear weapons, developments in China are influencing Soviet tactics in the talks with the US. Moscow must realize that the US would not permit an agreement to take effect, or at least to continue, unless China participated. By the same token, the Soviets must be aware (1) that China would not be willing to enter an agreement preventing it from building a nuclear capability, and (2) that they do not have it in their power to strong-arm the Chinese into becoming a party to such an agreement against their will. This dilemma would be eased for the Soviets if they thought China was about to detonate a nuclear weapon, thereby becoming a "nuclear power" and thus able to accede to the non-diffusion agreement without detriment to its nuclear ambitions.

But our own estimate continues to be that there is only the remotest chance of a Chinese nuclear detonation in the near future; while the Soviets may have somewhat better information than we do, we doubt that this information would lead them to a substantially different estimate than our own of the Chinese nuclear weapons time-table. This analysis suggests that the Soviets are not proceeding with their present tactics in the talks because of knowledge that the Chinese are about to remove the disability which as of now would prevent them from acceding to the formula.

The Soviets might, of course, reverse their 1960 decision, reinstitute an aid program which would speed up Chinese nuclear development, and thereby facilitate Chinese acceptance of the non-diffusion agreement and remove a new potential apple of discord in the Moscow-Peiping relationship. Information available to us does not, however, indicate such a shift in Soviet policy: First, we are not aware of any intelligence indicating a stepup in Soviet aid; second, we see no change either in the general status of Sino-Soviet relations or in Moscow's intrinsic desire to see a Chinese nuclear capacity postponed as long as possible, to suggest that the Soviets would be induced to alter their policy on assistance.

The foregoing leads us to the conclusion that the "Chinese factor" probably plays little or no role in Moscow's recent tactics in the non-diffusion talks and that the Soviets may, in fact, be moving toward an agreement in this field even though they realize that, for the present, at any rate, the Chinese would not be prepared to join it.

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