
The Nuclear Test Ban Trap

Soviets push test ban treaty to stop SDI

by Kathleen Klenetsky

The Soviet Union is hellbent on forcing the United States into agreeing to a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (CTBT), for the purpose of keeping the United States in a state of relative technological inferiority in nuclear weapons and stopping the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

Soviet spokesmen have admitted that progress on the SDI, especially the x-ray laser, would grind to a halt, under a test ban. Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze charged March 20 that the United States was rejecting Moscow's moratorium on nuclear testing because it "needs them to construct space weapons, and the halting of the tests destroys their plans for 'star wars' preparations." Similar sentiments have been expressed by U.S.-based proponents of a test ban, including Adm. Gene LaRocque's Center for Defense Information, which has been organizing a worldwide movement for a test ban for over a year. CDI literature calls for a test ban specifically because it would terminate x-ray laser development.

The Soviets have expended a great deal of political capital in the last several years to exert maximum pressure on the administration to agree to a CTBT; they have received ample assistance from America's liberal elites, who believe that, by extending the partial test ban negotiated by Averell Harriman in 1963, total U.S. disarmament can be assured. The U.S. House of Representatives has several times passed nonbinding resolutions calling on the administration to open negotiations with Moscow for a test-ban treaty, most recently on Feb. 26, by a vote of 268-148.

Gorbachov's latest ploy

Political pressure on Reagan to embrace a test moratorium escalated dramatically with Mikhail Gorbachov's March 29 proposal for a "mini-summit" with President Reagan limited to the test-ban issue. At the same time, other Soviet officials were warning that if Washington continued to reject a test-ban, Moscow would end the self-imposed moratorium which Gorbachov announced, with great fanfare, last Aug. 1.

The White House immediately rejected the offer. The summit should "deal with the entire range" of U.S.-Soviet relations, said a White House statement, which also described a test moratorium as "not in the security interests of

the United States, our friends, and allies." Washington "has learned through experience that moratoria cannot be counted on to lead to the enhanced security desired. . . . A moderate level of testing is needed to ensure the continued reliability, safety, and effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent."

Gorbachov must have anticipated what the White House response would be, but undoubtedly issued his proposal with the intention of triggering a new round of lobbying by the powerful arms-control mafia in the United States. Within hours, the pro-test ban gang went into high gear, with liberals on Capitol Hill and in the think-tank circuit accusing the United States of spurning "sincere" Soviet peace offerings.

On April 3, the New York Council on Foreign Relations threw its substantial resources into the fray, releasing two reports maintaining that a test ban is necessary to prevent nuclear proliferation. Co-sponsored by the Center for European Policy Studies, the reports say that a halt in testing would create pressure on other countries to cease testing. The chairman of the American panel was Gerard Smith, chief negotiator of SALT I, and head of the National Committee to Save the ABM Treaty.

Representative Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and a longtime friend of Henry Kissinger, used another tack. In an April 1 interview, he criticized the administration for rejecting a summit on nuclear testing, and for not adequately studying "the trade-offs" stemming from a permanent halt in Soviet tests. The Soviets, Aspin claimed, might overcome a U.S. lead in nuclear weapons technology, and expand their role in x-ray lasers, if Gorbachov were to be "provoked" into ending the Soviet moratorium. Aspin failed to mention that less than a week earlier, SDI head Lt.-Gen. James Abrahamson had told a Senate panel that the Soviets were already significantly ahead in x-ray laser technology—a gap that could only be narrowed with continued U.S. nuclear testing.

But most of the test-ban lobby's energy was focused on stopping the nuclear test scheduled for April 8—the same day President Reagan was to meet with Soviet Central Committee Secretary Anatolii Dobrynin to discuss a future summit. That morning, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), who had been a guest of Gorbachov's in Moscow earlier this year, charged that the test would make prospects of an arms-control agreement "more and more remote. . . . The Soviets have challenged the United States. We ought to test Gorbachov's statement and then we'd know whether it's the Soviet Union or the United States that wants to continue the testing process." Kennedy was echoed by a host of others, including Reps. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) and Tom Downey (D-N.Y.).

The test was delayed by two days—partly because of weather conditions, partly because members of Greenpeace, a pro-terrorist environmentalist group, invaded the Nevada test site. The test's firing on April 10 signals that the administration has not succumbed to the Soviet political offensive; but it will probably mean a redoubling of the Soviet effort.