

Briefing Paper for President's Press Conference

February 17, 1960

GENEVA TEST BAN NEGOTIATIONS

QUESTION

Mr. President, the Soviet Union yesterday officially rejected the new United States proposal on a phased test ban agreement. Could you tell us what you now see as the prospects for agreement?

ANSWER

First, I must say that I hope this is not the Soviet Union's final response to our proposal. Certainly, however, this immediate Soviet rejection is a great disappointment and casts considerable doubt on the Soviet Union's professed desire to halt nuclear weapons tests.

Regardless of what the future holds, our recent proposal places within the grasp of the three negotiating powers the opportunity to halt immediately the major portion of these tests. It is difficult to believe that any country in good faith would let such an opportunity pass, particularly with the assurance that we are ready to extend the ban to the areas which cannot now be adequately controlled through a joint program of research and experimentation. I hope other nations of the world will recognize what a disservice can be done to the hopes of all peace loving people if the Soviet Union intends to stand by the position it has thus far taken.

As to the future of the negotiations, I wish to make no predictions. The Soviet representative at the talks has put forward a proposal dealing with the question of technical criteria. This we shall study and will respond to in due course.

QUESTION

Mr. President, why didn't the United States in its new test ban proposal include a moratorium on tests below the threshold of 4.75 (19 kilotons) for perhaps a one or two year period while the joint research program to overcome existing technical difficulties in that area is being carried out?

ANSWER

First of all, this does not conform with our position, which has always been based on the premise that we should not agree to a ban on any tests which can not be adequately controlled. Moreover, such an arrangement could delay establishment of controls over the presently exempted area since a nation, if it desired a minimum of control, could, to further

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this aim, slow down progress on a joint research program for such period of time as the moratorium was in effect.

QUESTION

Mr. President, is the United States going to resume testing underground regardless of what happens in the Geneva test ban negotiations?

ANSWER

I believe my statement of December 29 makes our position on this matter quite clear. We are free to resume tests at any time, but we will give prior notification of our intention to do so before any testing is conducted.

TEN NATION DISARMAMENT TALKS

QUESTION

Mr. President, the heads of the delegations of the five nations to the March disarmament talks are meeting here in Washington. Could you tell us whether the United States will table for consideration at this meeting any new disarmament proposals?

ANSWER

We are still in the process of developing disarmament policy and any ideas we put forward will, of course, be tentative until we receive the views of our allies.

The meetings thus far, I might add, have been extremely useful and have permitted a frank exchange of views on the objectives and scope of Western disarmament proposals. Eventually, through these meetings, we expect to develop a unified Western position on disarmament for consideration in the Ten Nation Disarmament Conference.

QUESTION

Mr. President, the Ten Nation disarmament talks are only about a month away. The United States is evidently still formulating its disarmament policy. Are we holding up development of a unified Western disarmament policy?



ANSWER

I believe that most of the other members of the Western negotiating team are about at the same stage in their thinking as we are. As matters now stand, I foresee no difficulty in reaching a sound Western position by the time the Ten Nation talks begin.

COOLIDGE STUDY



QUESTION

Mr. President, is the recently submitted report by Mr. Coolidge being used as a guide in the formulation of our disarmament proposals?

ANSWER

The study which Mr. Coolidge completed, has been submitted to both the Secretaries of State and Defense and is being used by them as they see fit, to assist them in the development of disarmament policy to be recommended to me.

QUESTION

Mr. President, could you tell us whether the Coolidge study will be made public?

ANSWER

There was never any intention of making the Coolidge study public. It was developed for internal use only by the Secretaries of Defense and State to assist them in the development of our disarmament policy.

QUESTION

Mr. President, there have been stories to the effect that a number of officials concerned with disarmament were disappointed in the Coolidge report. Would you care to comment on this?

ANSWER

I believe the best answer I can give you is that the Coolidge study is, as has been stated before, being used to assist the Secretaries of State and Defense in the formulation of disarmament policy.

ATOMIC ENERGY ACT

QUESTION

Mr. President, last week you indicated that you favored liberalizing the Atomic Energy Act to permit a greater exchange of information with our allies as well as possibly transferring nuclear weapons to them. Would you care to comment on this?

ANSWER

At my last press conference, I reiterated my views that the United States should do all that is possible to insure that our allies are armed in such methods and ways as will make our collective defense the strongest. Present law does not authorize the United States to transfer the ownership and custody of nuclear weapons to other nations under conditions of peacetime or give to them any information except under carefully restricted conditions. As to possible amendments, I believe the statement issued by the White House clarified this matter.

WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT

"The question of possible amendments to the Atomic Energy Act in relation to the transfer of nuclear weapons or information concerning them to other friendly nations is, like all major policy matters, under continuing review within the Executive Branch. There is no executive proposal now before the Congress or in preparation for amendments to the Act in either of these respects."

FRENCH TEST



QUESTION

Mr. President, could you tell us what our position is on the recent French nuclear test?

ANSWER

I have nothing to add to the statement issued by the Department of State last Saturday. (Statement attached.)

QUESTION

Mr. President, do you believe France now qualifies under the Atomic Energy Act for receipt of information in the sense that the United Kingdom now does?

ANSWER

I have in the past made clear my views on the general subject of an exchange of information on nuclear weapons. I don't care to spell this out in any greater detail at this time since there are obviously many factors which enter into this matter.



Statement Issued by Department of State
February 13, 1960 Concerning French Atomic
Explosion

The announcement of an atomic detonation by the French Government was not unexpected since that government has in past public statements made known its intention independently to design, fabricate and explode such a device.

