

Briefing Paper for the President's Press Conference

May 11, 1960

GENEVA TEST BAN NEGOTIATIONSQUESTION

Mr. President, on Saturday, you released an announcement which stated the United States' intention to resume nuclear tests. Could you explain why this decision was taken and why an announcement of the decision was made at this time?

ANSWER

First, I would point out that the United States is not resuming nuclear weapons tests. The nuclear detonations referred to in the announcement are in no way related to nuclear weapons development. Such tests, when conducted, would be undertaken solely to further an improved capability to detect and identify underground nuclear explosions. I might add in this connection that we are prepared to work out arrangements which provide assurance to those concerned that this would indeed be the only aim of such tests.

Second, it should be recognized that there is nothing really new in this announcement other than the fact that the present program which has been under way for some time, will be considerably expanded in Fiscal Year 1961. The fact, for example, that the program will have to involve both chemical and nuclear detonations has been common knowledge since the Berkner Panel on Seismic Improvement recommended (June, 1959) such explosions as a necessary undertaking to improve detection and identification capabilities of the control system.

Finally, as is well known, since January, 1959, in concert with the United Kingdom, we have asked the Soviet Union to join with us in a research program aimed at improving the capability of the proposed control network. Since we received no response to this proposal, we began our own national program. Recently, of course, the Soviet Union has indicated its willingness to join in such a program. But now our own program is well under way and there is no sense in duplicating what we have already done. Therefore, we shall want to carry on our program. However, we wish as well to determine areas in which coordinated or joint research, including the use of nuclear detonations, would be profitable in the light of the Soviet Union's recent response. We hope to begin laying the groundwork for this type of program at the May 11th meeting (today) in Geneva of U.S., U.K. and U.S.S.R. scientists.

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As to why the announcement was made at this time, I would cite two factors.

First, I just approved the expansion of the program.

Second, U.S., U.K. and U.S.S.R. scientists will be discussing, among other things at their May 11th meeting, national programs under way or contemplated. In the light of this, we wished to make our plans public.

QUESTION

Mr. President, a summary of recent Congressional hearings on the technical aspects of detecting and identifying nuclear explosions was released the other day by the Joint Atomic Energy Committee. The summary's appraisal of the feasibility of policing a ban on underground tests was quite pessimistic. In view of the difficulties summarized in this release, does the United States intend to reappraise its present position in the Geneva test ban negotiations?

ANSWER

We have proposed a controlled treaty which would ban all nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, the oceans, at high altitudes and above a seismic magnitude of 4.75 in the underground area. This proposal was made on the basis of a worldwide control system as recommended in 1958 by the Geneva Technical Conference of Experts. We believe that in terms of our present proposal this system will provide for the controls we deem as necessary and adequate.

For small underground disturbances below the seismic threshold of 4.75 there is no question but, that, if tests in this area are to be banned we will need an improved control system. It was precisely for this reason that we suggested that a research program be carried out to determine just what improvements could be made to permit adequate controls to be established over this area.



SAMOS SATELLITE

QUESTION

Mr. President, there have been reports which indicate that the United States will probably launch its first reconnaissance satellite early this fall. Could you tell us whether we intend to go ahead with this launching in the light of the recent furor over intelligence gathering operations? Could you also tell us something more about the operation that Samos will perform?

ANSWER

I do not wish to comment on this matter in the belief that discussion of any plans concerning the Samos satellite would be premature at this time.

ATLAS ICBM SHOT

(If successfully launched)

QUESTION

Mr. President, could you tell us your reaction to the 9,000 mile Atlas shot? Also, could you tell us whether there is any particular significance in the firing of this shot at this time?

ANSWER

This Atlas shot - which was quite an accomplishment - is to me a telling indication of the great strides we are making in the missile field. I am, of course, pleased that the shot and its objectives were successfully achieved.

I see no reason to suggest that there is any particular significance to be attached to the firing of this shot at this time. The Air Force made known, some time ago, that such a shot would be undertaken. I see this simply as part of the general missile research and development program being carried on by the Defense Department - and nothing more.

