

May 27, 1957

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Dear Stub:

Let me first thank you for your thoughtful letter of May twenty-second. The whole question of testing of atomic weapons has engaged my concern from the time I took office. I have often talked with Lewis Strauss about it and, knowing my views and sharing them fully, he has held testing to the absolute minimum, ruling out shots which he felt could not be justified on the basis of the results sought. As you know, the fall-out of the last series in the Pacific was only a fraction of that from the 1954 tests.



On the other hand, as you also know far better than almost any other person I can think of, there has been a great enhancement of our defensive strength through the developments which have come from the test program to date. We have increased the numbers, the deliverability, the efficiency and versatility of our weapons. Most recently, we have learned that certain of them can be made in such a manner that radioactive fall-out is very greatly minimized. The tactical usefulness of this latter development is known to you.

You are correct in your observation that I feel our large weapons (incidentally, now susceptible of being relatively the cleanest in the sense of fission product yield) are large enough and that we know we can make them larger on the same principles if ever there were strategic need for them, but I do not believe you are correctly informed that there is any approved plan to test larger weapons

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than were tested in 1954. The Atomic Energy Commission at any rate has informed me that it has no such plans. If there is ever to be a test of larger weapons, this would have to be submitted to me, evaluated, and cleared by me. Chairman Straus is opposed to any larger shot than we have had.

Some form of limitation either in numbers, explosive yield, fission product output, or even a temporary test suspension might well be the result of the current disarmament negotiations in London. To announce the concession unilaterally would deprive our negotiators of whatever trading advantage it might embody and that could be substantial. You have recommended registration with the United Nations in advance of tests and, in effect, we do this because we announce our tests in advance to the whole world. It was with this end in view, viz., to re-emphasize this fact that in the Bermuda Declaration in March we stated that we would register our intention to conduct tests with the United Nations in advance.



I do want to assure you that my position is far from being inflexible -- has indeed been a constant effort to find a way out of what has for so many years seemed an impasse. Meanwhile, our tests continue to develop very valuable information, not so much in the enhancement of the destructive power of atomic weapons as in civil effects tests to improve our protective measures in event of attack -- in the development of warheads for missiles to be employed in defense against an airborne attack -- and in the further development of the feature of cleanliness which, as of now

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at any rate, does not yet apply to weapons of small size and yield.

It is a pleasure to find that our views are running concurrently and I hope that you will always feel free to let me know what is in your mind on this subject on which you are an authority.

With warm regard,

Sincerely,



The Honorable Sterling Cole
The House of Representatives
Washington, D. C.

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