

July 15, 1971

NSSM-132 - Soviet Proposal for  
Five-Power Nuclear Conference

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E.O. 12958, as amended  
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SCOPE

The following is an analysis of the issues involved in a conference or a preparatory meeting of the five nuclear powers as proposed in the USSR statement of June 15, 1971. The study: (1) gives background information on the subject; (2) discusses existing positions of the five powers in this regard, to the extent that they are known; (3) examines in general the possible advantages and disadvantages in accepting the Soviet proposal; (4) outlines possible subjects for discussion at a conference; and (5) sets forth alternative ways to deal with the Soviet proposal.

BACKGROUND

Against the background of French refusal to participate in the Geneva disarmament talks, DeGaulle initiated the idea of a disarmament conference of the (then 4) world nuclear powers at a press conference in May 1962. DeGaulle said, "if there should one day be a meeting of states that truly want to organize disarmament--and such a meeting should, in our mind, be composed of the four atomic powers--France would participate in it wholeheartedly." This position remains, in effect, French policy under President Pompidou, except that China is now included as the fifth nuclear power.

Moscow advocacy of a five-power forum began with the April 30, 1965, joint Soviet-French communique marking

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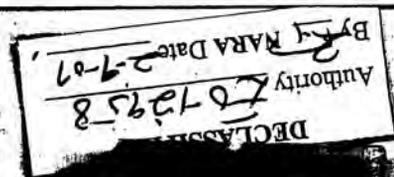
Gromyko's visit to Paris. This indicated a Soviet effort to find common ground with Paris in the nuclear disarmament field.

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The Soviets may also have had in mind the first successful Chinese atomic test on October 16, 1964 and the statement issued by the PRC in this connection. In this statement, the PRC proposed that "a summit conference of all the countries of the world be convened to discuss the question of the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons; as a first step, the summit conference should reach an agreement to the effect that the nuclear powers, and those countries which will soon become nuclear powers, undertake not to use nuclear weapons, either against non-nuclear countries and nuclear-free zones or against each other."

Moscow's advocacy of a conference of the five nuclear powers received fresh impetus from Brezhnev's CPSU Congress speech of March 30, 1971, which opened a period of increased activity in Soviet disarmament policy. The proposal was one among several vehicles in Brezhnev's program for Moscow to play the role of champion in the disarmament field, and author of new initiatives in that field.

It is, at the same time, consistent with previous Soviet support for a five-power conference on nuclear disarmament and with the position, stated by Gromyko in July 1969 in connection with a discussion on negotiations for limiting US and Soviet strategic weapons, that nuclear disarmament



could only be achieved through negotiations and agreement of the five powers.

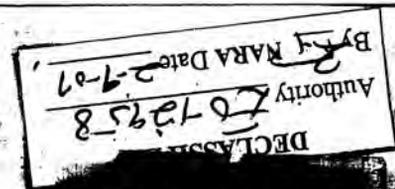
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POSITIONS OF THE FIVE POWERS

USSR. The position enunciated by Gromyko is explicitly acknowledged in the Soviet statement of June 15. With this in mind, the Soviet Government "proposes to convene at the earliest time" a conference of the five nuclear powers.

The Soviet statement asserted that such a conference should examine "the questions of nuclear disarmament as a whole". An agreement resulting from negotiations "could encompass both the entire complex of measures in nuclear disarmament and partial measures gradually leading to that goal". Thus, to the extent that the Soviet proposal is a serious proposition for negotiations, the USSR would seem to have in mind the possibility of both proposals of a sweeping propagandistic nature and partial measures which might be realizable, despite divergencies among the five powers.

The Soviet statement further proposed the beginning, through diplomatic channels, of an exchange of views on questions pertaining to the timing of the conference, its venue, and its agenda and procedure. Regarding timing, the Soviets stated the sooner the better, but did not attempt to set any date. The statement took no position in regard to venue. The statement also said that the Soviet Government did not object to establishment of a preparatory committee for the convening of the conference.

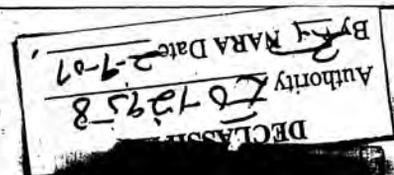


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In informal conversations, the Soviets have indicated that they do not believe that the conference would impinge on SALT and that there should be no connection between the two. The Soviet representative, Ambassador Roshchin, in his opening statement to the resumed CCD June 29 said the USSR five-power proposal is premised on the fact that efforts to limit nuclear arms and on disarmament "will, to be sure, continue through the available channels, in particular, in the CCD."

US. The US response to date has been cautious and conditional, but not negative. In an initial statement to the press on June 18, in response to press questions, the Department of State spokesman stated that "we will study this Soviet statement and consult with our allies about it"; meanwhile, "we continue to regard progress in SALT as the most immediate means to make meaningful progress in the area of arms control." In his statement at the opening of the summer session of the CCD on June 29, in regard to the statement by U Thant concerning ways of associating all nuclear powers, including France and the PRC, with arms control and disarmament negotiations, Ambassador Leonard said that a number of possible approaches have been raised including the recent proposal by the Soviet Government. He further said that the US would welcome the participation of all nuclear weapons states in nuclear arms control and disarmament efforts in a manner acceptable to all of those states and in a manner reflecting the interests and concerns of non-nuclear weapon states as well.

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Finally, the US is now considering an initial, conditional, oral reply to the USSR, which would be sent after consultations with the UK, France and other allies and would state that:

(1) the US Government is studying the Soviet proposal and will be prepared later to give a formal reply; (2) the US considers the subject raised by the USSR as worthy of serious consideration; (3) such a conference would require careful preparation and the consensus of all five powers on what measures were feasible for discussion; (4) there should be no prejudice to SALT; (5) the US presupposes that all five powers would be willing to attend such a conference; and (6)\* we understand as implicit in the proposal that the interests and concerns of non-nuclear states should be taken into account in considering ways to make progress on arms control measures.

China.\* As noted above, the standing Chinese position is that nuclear disarmament should be considered by a world summit conference of nuclear and non-nuclear states. In that regard, the French have a report that in putting the proposal to Peking the USSR asserted that any five-power agreement would have to be submitted to a broader conference.

Because of their general stance against the "super-powers", and their aim of cultivating the lesser-developed countries, the Chinese have shown no interest in playing up the fact of

\* Point (6) would be an addition to the text of the initial oral reply (STATE 119361, paragraph 4 - see footnote on page 23, infra) which has been used in discussing a possible response to the Soviet proposal with the UK and France, prior to consulting on such a response with other US allies.

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PRC membership in the nuclear club. Also, they have not been willing to participate in arms control efforts. They presumably believe that participation in disarmament negotiations could lead to pressure on China to agree to a nuclear test ban or other measures which would inhibit its efforts to achieve eventually a credible nuclear deterrent against both Moscow and Washington. In a more general sense, the Chinese are suspicious of any proposals emanating from the USSR. Presumably, also, the Chinese would feel that they would be entering into such a conference in a position of marked inferiority vis-a-vis at least the US and the USSR.

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These considerations have no doubt conditioned the limited Chinese reactions to the Soviet proposal to date.

The Chinese have not turned down the Soviet proposal, and are likely to be cautious before reaching a final decision in regard to it. On the basis of recent statements by PRC officials, the odds seem likely that they will reject it, if indeed they respond at all. They may, however, just continue to make generally negative comments without specifically and directly rejecting the proposal, thus hoping to avoid the onus of shooting it down.

UK. The UK response to date has been cautious but not negative. Initially, the UK Government responded to a parliamentary question by saying that it was studying the Soviet statement and that the UK would wish to be present should such a conference be convened. The UK now has under considera-

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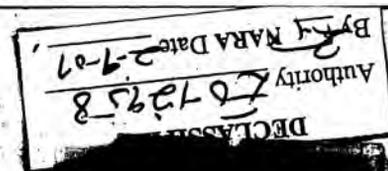
tion an interim reply which would indicate interest in the Soviet proposal, refer to the statement in parliament, state that the conference, if held, would need careful preparation and in this context would elicit Soviet views, i.e., possible agenda. The British have been coordinating closely with us. They want to avoid appearing negative toward the proposal. UK interests seem to be quite close to ours. UK officials have described British views on a reply to the Soviet proposal as "in line with" and "very similar" to US thinking.

France. The French Government has publicly accepted the Soviet proposal. Indeed, the French take the position that it is the Soviet Government which has accepted a long-standing French proposal. However, the GOF is still studying the proposal, and has not decided whether to send a written reply. The French note the Soviets are not pressing since they like the June 16 French oral response. The French view appears to be that the main Soviet aim for the proposal is to embarrass and isolate the PRC. The French believe the Soviets also have in mind underscoring a detente posture.

#### ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Before examining the advantages and disadvantages inherent in the two broad choices of accepting or rejecting the Soviet proposal, it is useful to consider possible Soviet motives in advancing it.

These Soviet motives are probably mixed. Even if such a conference is never held, the Soviets probably believe that



they can score a propaganda gain by advancing the idea so as to enhance the peaceful image which they seek to portend. Second, the Soviets may count on the Chinese rejecting it. If so, this could serve their purpose of isolating the Chinese, particularly if the other nuclear powers were to accept the Soviet proposal. The Soviets might see this to be of particular utility at this time in view of the upcoming UNGA debate on Chinese representation, and the recent signs pointing in the direction of a gradual US-Chinese rapprochement. On the other hand, should a conference be held, the Soviets might view it as a device for bringing pressure to bear on Chinese nuclear programs, and perhaps those of France and the UK. They might also see some advantage in bringing the Chinese out of their shell by engaging them in a discussion of nuclear issues. It is possible that the Soviets might foresee some practical partial measures eventually emerging from such a conference.

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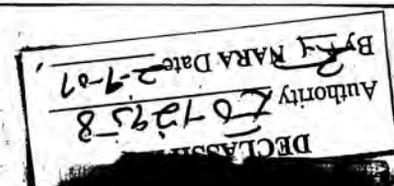
The superficial propagandistic element of the Soviet proposal represents an obvious potential disadvantage for us. However, we can neutralize this to some extent at least by taking a cautiously positive attitude toward it, which has characterized our approach to date.

Another possible disadvantage for us could be the possible adverse impact of the proposal on US efforts gradually to improve relations with the PRC. We should therefore bear in mind when we have the chance to cooperate with the Soviets on practical matters where our interests coincide, that the

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Chinese may view and publicly condemn such steps as big power collusion. We would thus want to avoid the impression of colluding with the Soviet Union to embarrass or isolate the Chinese by a premature acceptance of the Soviet proposal, particularly, in view of its insubstantial nature and unforeseeable results. A possible way to try to handle this potential pitfall would be to make clear the prior condition that such a conference would require the participation of all nuclear powers. However, the USSR would probably still try to exploit our position to the detriment of the PRC, and the PRC might well regard our position as part of a joint US-Soviet effort to pressure the PRC. It is possible, though, that high-level private assurances from us would be of some help in allaying Chinese suspicions.

Another disadvantage of the proposal, which the Soviets may have in mind, is that some of our allies (for example, Germany and Japan) may be suspicious of the proposal and may feel that, although they are not nuclear powers, they have deep security interests in matters of nuclear disarmament. Such suspicions could be harmful to alliance solidarity, and conceivably could have implications for non-proliferation over the longer run. This is also a factor with respect to non-aligned near-nuclears. It is interesting to note that the Soviet Delegation in Geneva at the CCD has shown itself to be sensitive to this problem. An implication of a nuclear power condominium is neither helpful nor healthy, but may be diffi-



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cult to avoid--to some degree--especially, in any which is held. By accepting the Soviet proposal, we might also arouse the concern of the non-nuclear members of the CCD who might feel that a five-power conference would degrade the importance of this established disarmament body. These considerations call for close consultations with key non-nuclear countries, primarily within NATO and the CCD. Whether we eventually decide to accept or reject the Soviet proposal, frank consultations would go far toward relieving their concerns.

A further disadvantage would be the propaganda use the PRC might make of the proposal by putting forward broad nuclear disarmament or no-first-use suggestions.

Finally, and perhaps most important, it is not at all certain that a satisfactory agenda acceptable to all parties could be worked out. The Soviet proposal is vague about what is intended that this conference should take up or accomplish. Even if we are able to clarify Soviet views prior to a conference, this is no guarantee that these would be acceptable to us or to the other nuclear powers, and serve a useful purpose, or that other proposals would meet these criteria, given the wide disparity in the nuclear weapon arsenals of the nuclear states and other disparate interests. No conference would be better than one with ill-defined or unclear purposes which could arouse acrimony and lock us in to an activity which might not serve our interests.

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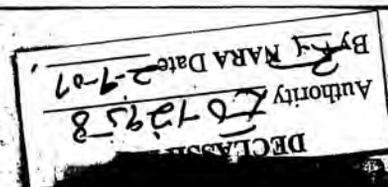


POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR FIVE POWER CONFERENCEDECLASSIFIED  
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The Soviets have not indicated what subjects might be addressed at such a conference, apart from suggesting that partial measures could be considered along with programs for general nuclear disarmament.

To the extent the Soviets have considered possible topics, these could include pressing for adherence to past agreements (the LTBT, the NPT and the Seabeds Treaty) in order to isolate the PRC, but pursuit of this line would also impact adversely on Soviet-French relations. The Soviets might also wish to urge a Comprehensive Test Ban--particularly if they do not want one. Putting the CTB on the agenda of a five-power conference could be a way of avoiding the issue at the CCD while running little risk of real progress given the likely attitude of the PRC and France. It would also put the onus for delay on China and France.

It is also possible that the Soviets would be interested in proposing some kind of freeze on strategic systems once a reasonably comprehensive agreement had been reached in SALT. Because of the inequities they would see as involved, a freeze proposal would meet firm opposition from the PRC and France. While the Soviets may have no real interest in a proposal on no-first-use of nuclear weapons involving the PRC, they might feel compelled to put this idea on the table because of their traditional support for such a measure. They might count on the long-standing opposition of the United States to



non-use undertakings to block any real chance of such an agreement involving the PRC.

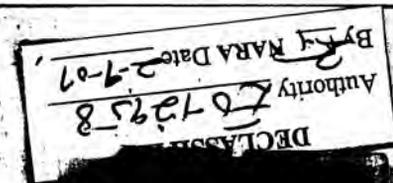
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If the PRC accepts the idea of a five-power conference, it would be likely to advance broad and sweeping proposals, at least in part designed to enhance its image with non-nuclear and non-aligned countries. They would probably press their past suggestions for a no-first-use undertaking and for the abolition of all nuclear weapons.

Although the French claim parentage for the five-power conference and have accepted the Brezhnev proposal, they have given no indication of topics they wish to be discussed at such a conference. They have traditionally argued that genuine disarmament required cutbacks in the strategic arsenals of the nuclear powers, particularly of delivery vehicles. The French might well argue--for propaganda purposes if for no other--that the two super-powers should do most or all of the cutting since the three smaller nuclear powers are already so far behind. In any case, France might welcome the prestige advantages to itself of the establishment of what looked like a five-power world nuclear "directorate."

We might wish to consider the following items as potential agenda topics for any five-power nuclear conference:

Measures to avoid and reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war. Presumably all the nuclear powers have an interest in avoiding such a war. It might be possible to reach an agreement on this subject along the lines of, and supplementing,



the bilateral US-USSR agreement being considered in SALT. The Soviets have expressed interest in accession of nuclear powers to the bilateral agreement being worked out in SALT; however, they have not indicated an interest in opening this particular draft to multilateral negotiations. This topic would have to be managed carefully so as not to conflict with the on-going SALT negotiations; one way would be to use an agreement which had already been concluded between the US and USSR in SALT as a rough model for a multilateral agreement, tailored to meet the circumstances of five powers.

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Expanded "hot line" communications between nuclear powers.

This subject might also be of interest to all five nuclear powers. It does, however, have political connotations both in regard to official contacts between the PRC and the US, and in giving a further impression of a nuclear power directorate.

A proposal in the field of security assurances.\* Such a proposal might draw upon the proposals the US advanced in

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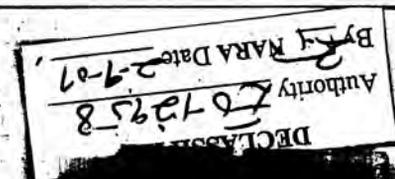
\* The OSD Representative believes that on balance a proposal in the field of security assurances is not a promising subject for a five-power conference, and recommends it be deleted.

The JCS Representative objects to the inclusion of this subject as a possible discussion topic in a five-power conference. A non-use commitment could encourage increased adventurism on the part of US enemies or potential enemies who view themselves as free from the threat of nuclear attack and relatively safe from a significant conventional response because of a stated security assurance.

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connection with the NPT, or be cast in terms of more general-  
ized non-use of force declarations. Such a proposal  
provide a way of coping with Soviet or PRC non-use proposals.  
If negotiable, it might serve to reassure non-Communist  
Asian countries and act as disincentive to proliferation. On  
the other hand, it might merely get us into a war of words over  
non-use and in an awkward position regarding the use of nuclear  
weapons. This we will want to continue to avoid. The language  
of a proposal on security assurances, were we to decide to  
advance one, would be critical in protecting our interest  
in maintaining deterrence against aggression and blackmail by  
the conventional forces of the USSR, the PRC and their allies.  
It would also be in our interest to have it made clear in some  
appropriate way that under a generalized non-use of force  
agreement we would not be prepared to acquiesce in aggression  
falling short of the overt use of force.

A five-power declaration to support the principle of the  
non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This would be a more  
tactful way of trying to get France and the PRC to act in  
accordance with the NPT, without insisting that they sign an  
agreement they had not negotiated. The French have already  
stated that this is their policy, and it is conceivable that  
the PRC might be willing to do so as well.



A proposal not to deploy further ABM systemsDECLASSIFIED  
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proposal were to be advanced, it should, of course, be handled in a way that would not prejudice discussions in SALT. The effect of implementing such a proposal would be to prevent the UK, France and the PRC of acquiring any ABMs, while the US and USSR would deploy limited ABMs in accordance with whatever agreement is reached in SALT. It might be resisted by the former countries for this reason. However, if the US and USSR were prepared to accept zero ABM, it might have wider appeal. It would have the advantage of codifying acceptance of a deterrent strategy by all the nuclear powers.

Limitation on strategic offensive forces.\*\* For completeness this topic is included, even though it is highly unlikely

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- \* The OSD Representative believes that the disparity among the levels of forces of the nuclear powers makes it impossible to consider serious discussion of this topic, and recommends it be deleted.

The JCS Representative believes that this is not an appropriate agenda item to be considered at an initial five-power nuclear conference. Only the United States and USSR have deployed ABM systems, and their limitation is being discussed at SALT. Proposals for zero ABM hinge, inter alia, on US ability to verify such a proposal for all countries. Since there has not been an assessment of the complexities associated with this problem, it would be most premature to put such a proposal forward.

- \*\* The OSD Representative believes that the disparity among the levels of forces of the nuclear powers makes it impossible to consider serious discussion of this topic, and recommends it be deleted.

The JCS Representative believes that this is not an appropriate agenda item to be considered at an initial five-power nuclear conference. The limitation of strategic offensive forces is currently a subject under discussion at SALT, and proposals in the five-power arena could undermine the US position in those talks. Furthermore, there has neither been an assessment of the types of limitations possible or desirable, nor the verification and security implications involved. It would be premature, therefore, to put such proposals forward.

that the five powers could agree on a common basis for considering offensive force limitations in the near term. One important reason for this is the great disparity in level of forces as between the US and the USSR on the one hand, and the UK, France and the PRC on the other. As this disparity lessens, of course, by whatever means, offensive force limitations on all nuclear powers will become a more timely topic--of increasing interest for the US and the USSR particularly. On the other hand, if at the outset one of the other powers were to suggest an agenda item like "prohibition and destruction of nuclear weapons", we might, for tactical purposes essentially, wish to put forward an agenda item couched in these terms.

#### ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

There are a number of possible approaches we might take in deciding upon a final US position regarding the Soviet proposal. The alternatives have here been narrowed down to a handful of broad possibilities in order to reduce the problem to its essentials.

All the approaches presuppose that we have had thorough consultations with the UK and France, as well as with other NATO allies, other interested allies such as Japan, and possibly with the non-nuclear members of the CCD. This is no guarantee, however, that such consultations would have produced

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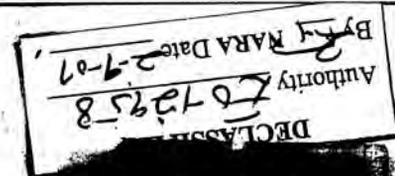
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a consensus in support of a given alternative. For example, France is apparently prepared to participate in a five-power conference without preconditions. Nonetheless, a proposal which directly involves the security interests of our allies must be approached on the basis of full and frank consultations with them.

All this being said, we should bear in mind that in practical terms we may have less than full freedom of action. For example, the US would be hard put to reject a disarmament conference which all the other nuclear powers have agreed to. Thus, the PRC, in one sense, would have an impact on how the US responds to the Soviet proposal. However, the PRC might choose to delay its response or not to respond at all, or to propose, perhaps, a specific alternative. For instance, the PRC might suggest a wider meeting, including the five nuclear powers. In that event, we might face quite a different problem. A number of important states might at least want to explore the idea. It is hard to imagine, however, a wider meeting--including the five nuclear powers--that would not come into conflict with the CCD, at least in terms of membership. It would seem contrary to US interests to undercut the CCD, both as a general proposition, and specifically with respect to the Co-Chairmanship institution.

Another point to bear in mind is that regardless of the amount of true consultation and exchange we have with non-nuclear states (allied and otherwise), we may still face serious reservations about a five-power conference. SALT,

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it can be argued, is an outgrowth of the fact that two states possess large nuclear arsenals. A five-power conference, ever, contrary to the concept of SALT, would tend to show that simply becoming a nuclear power, no matter how insignificant, entitled a country to a special status. This could be viewed as sanctioning the establishment of a "nuclear club". Membership in the club would almost certainly look attractive to a number of states with the capability to meet the membership requirement, and who might well, under the circumstances, believe membership important enough to move to join--regardless of other considerations, including, where it might be relevant, obligations under the NPT.

Alternative 1. We could reject the Soviet proposal, regardless of acceptance by all other powers and the possible views they might have regarding items for discussion.

This approach would have the advantage of avoiding what might be a fruitless conference if we conclude that no useful agenda could be arrived at. It would also avoid whatever concerns non-nuclear states, including principally our allies, might have regarding the nuclear "directorate" implications of the proposal.

It would have several drawbacks: (1) it would hand the Soviets a propaganda victory and would be contrary to the preliminary line we and the British have taken to date in an effort to avoid such an eventuality; (2) it would deny us one possibility for establishing initial contacts with the PRC

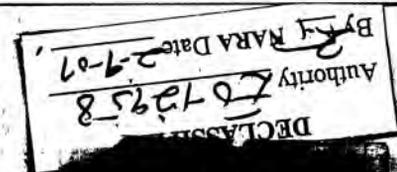
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in the field of arms limitation, as well as the possibility of eventually achieving some worthwhile agreement whatever our initial estimates, and (3) it would probably be viewed with misgivings by at least some of our non-nuclear allies and by neutrals. . France would oppose.

Alternative 2. We could accept the Soviet proposal on the condition that all other nuclear powers agreed to it and that something resembling a reasonable agenda could be agreed to; if either condition were not met, the proposal would be turned down.

This approach would have the twin advantages of avoiding, to the extent possible, playing the Soviet game of isolating China in the event the Chinese reject the Soviet invitation, and of seeking some assurances before agreeing to a conference that it might produce concrete results. This alternative would be in line with the preliminary approach we have taken to date and the tentative views of the UK. On the other hand, if the Chinese accept, rigid insistence on a reasonable agenda as a precondition could deprive us of useful initial contacts in this field with the PRC and might incur charges of US obstructionism from the USSR, neutrals, and perhaps even from some of our allies, in particular France.

The preferred manner of reaching some degree of agreement on an agenda would be through diplomatic channels; this would avoid being locked in to an open-ended conference by agreeing to a preliminary conference on agenda. However, this latter



[REDACTED] approach could be considered in the light of initial diplomatic exchanges.

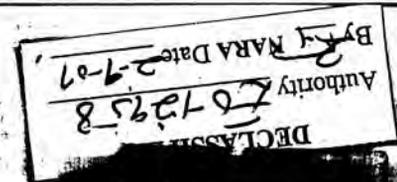
Alternative 3. We could accept the Soviet proposal with the only precondition that all other nuclear powers agreed to it, even if no prior agreement could be reached on a useful agenda, whether through diplomatic channels or at a preliminary conference.

This approach would have the advantage of maximizing the possibility of a dialogue with the Chinese and by demonstrating flexibility in regard to the terms for a five-power conference. On the other hand, it would run the greatest risk of participating in a conference which had little likelihood of producing fruitful results, and which could degenerate into an acrimonious propaganda debate whose result might be a hardening, or even widening, of national positions (or both), and a delay in the possibility of engaging in a useful dialogue. It is likely, however, that we will have to face some propaganda slings and arrows as a function of getting the PRC--and even the French--through the initial educational process and into a useful arms control dialogue. In this sense it is arguably to our advantage to accept the Soviet proposal if all the other nuclear powers do, even without agreement on a useful agenda.

Alternative 4. We could accept the Soviet proposal even if the Chinese did not accept (i.e., agree to a Four-Power Conference).

This would be contrary to the line which we and the UK plan to take on a preliminary basis. The position would

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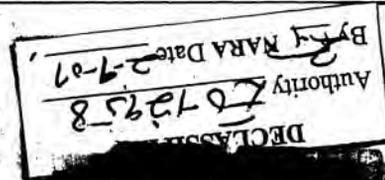
expose us to PRC charges and renewed suspicion of US-Soviet collusion in attempting to isolate the PRC. Such a conference, if held, could direct Soviet efforts against the UK and French nuclear program.

Alternative 5. Without accepting or rejecting the Soviet proposal, we could propose an initial conference of the five nuclear powers at the expert level devoted solely to exploration of one question, for example, measures to guard against accidental nuclear war, including "Hot Line" communication arrangements, provided all five powers agreed to such a meeting. At the same time, we could indicate that we would continue to consider a five power conference at a higher level.

Although the subject of measures to guard against accidental nuclear war has significant political content, a proposal for an "experts" meeting would underline its exploratory and ad referendum character. It would also underline our intent to rule out extraneous political issues.

The five nuclear powers are more likely to have a common interest in this subject than in any other nuclear arms control subject. There might be a fair chance of a useful outcome. The Chinese might be more receptive to such an idea than to the Soviet idea of a conference with a wider agenda. They may correctly believe the Soviets are designing the latter to put them on the spot. Also, major non-nuclear powers, such as Japan and Germany, might find this alternative more acceptable than a conference of the nuclear powers with an

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agenda which included matters of nuclear disarmament which they feel they have deep security interests.

On the other hand, introduction of this proposal prior to the successful conclusion of bilateral US-Soviet talks on this subject in SALT might affect these negotiations in exchange for what might be ephemeral prospects in the five-power context. The risk of affecting SALT might be minimized or avoided through preliminary soundings of the Soviets. Alternatively, introduction of this proposal could await successful conclusion of the accidents question in SALT. In addition, other powers (e.g., France, the USSR) might oppose an experts meeting with a narrow agenda, particularly if they thought we were attempting in this way to preclude a meeting on major nuclear disarmament issues. Further the Soviets might feel it would not accomplish the political purposes they may have in mind vis-a-vis China.

Alternative 6. We could avoid so long as feasible accepting or rejecting the Soviet proposal, and stand on the initial oral reply that we are considering\*, which does not commit us

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\* Text of initial oral reply from State 119361: "The US Government is studying the proposal of June 15 of the Soviet Government to convene a five-power conference on nuclear disarmament and will be prepared at a later date to give its formal reply to the proposal. At this time, it can be stated that the United States considers the subject raised by the USSR as worthy of serious consideration. Such a conference would require careful preparation and a consensus among all five powers on what measures were feasible for discussion. Such a conference, if it were held, should in no way prejudice the current bilateral negotiations between the US and USSR on limiting the strategic arms of the two countries. The United States Government presupposes that all five powers would be willing to attend such a conference." An additional point is to be added, to the effect that the US understands as implicit in the Soviet proposal that the interests and concerns of non-nuclear states should be taken into account in considering ways to make progress on arms control measures.

to any particular course of action. It does, however, that careful preparation and participation of all five powers would be preconditions to any eventual conference.

This approach is attractive on several counts. It would not involve offering agenda suggestions of our own, nor comments on the possible venue and a preliminary conference as requested in the Soviet statement. It has been characterized by the British Embassy as being "very similar" to the views of the UK. It would not be inconsistent with--although different from--the French June 16 oral response to the USSR. It would provide greater protection than a US conditional acceptance against Soviet exploitation to the detriment of the PRC, including the possibility that the Chinese would view our conditional acceptance as part of a joint US-Soviet pressure tactic. Further, this approach would leave us free to take no action if the PRC does not reject the proposal, but without appearing, for our part, too negative.

Although the Soviets might want us "to fish or cut bait," it would probably be difficult for them to object to the fence straddling that would be involved in this alternative. What it says is cautious, but in general terms positive; however, The Soviet problem would arise from what is not said. It does not say that the US accepts the Soviet proposal. Having made such an oral statement, however, we would be in a good position further to probe Soviet views to see what in specific terms the USSR may have in mind.

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A possible pitfall with this approach relates to further probing of the USSR. The problem is shared with Alternatives through 5, and relates to the fact that the Soviets will wish to put us in a position in which it would be difficult for us eventually to refuse to accept their proposal. They would certainly attempt to narrow our flexibility (to their advantage) on that central point, as well as on other issues such as venue or possible discussion topics.

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