

The 1963 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

A Missed Opportunity for Détente?

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Was the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) of 1963 a watershed in the Cold War? The historian Marc Trachtenberg has argued that the treaty was the capstone of the “constructed peace” he believes had been in the making since the onset of the Cold War and subsequently ensured peace for the remainder of the Cold War and even beyond. Other authors have regarded the treaty as a Berlin settlement in disguise and therefore a decisive step toward the solution of the German question. John Van Oudenaren depicts the LTBT as having “dramatically” improved the prospects for the later signing of the Nonproliferation Treaty—the only other arms control treaty of the Cold War era that has retained importance afterward. Because the LTBT inaugurated nuclear arms control, the British negotiator Quintin Hogg (Lord Hailsham) hailed it as “the biggest step forward in international relations since the beginning of the Cold War.” He acknowledged, however, that no lasting détente ensued.¹ The treaty may have helped “détente” to become a household word by the end of 1963, but the East-West conflict kept dragging on for another quarter of a century.

The nuclear standoff that was a hallmark of the Cold War befuddled the relationship between military power and politics. Common sense suggests that an arms race is a symptom rather than the cause of political rivalry, but the nuclear arms race had its own momentum that defied common sense. Arms control seemed to be conducive to détente, but in retrospect it appears

1. Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 382–402; Christof Münger, *Ich bin ein West-Berliner: Der Wandel der amerikanischen Berlinpolitik während der Präsidentschaft John F. Kennedys* (Zurich: Forschungsstelle für Sicherheitspolitik und Konfliktanalyse, 1999), pp. 190–199; John Van Oudenaren, *Détente in Europe: The Soviet Union and the West since 1953* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 172; and Lord Hailsham, *The Door where in I Went* (London: Collins, 1975), p. 219.

to have been a poor substitute for the superpowers' failure to address the underlying political causes of their ongoing rivalry. Avis T. Bohlen, the former U.S. assistant secretary of state for arms control, admits that arms control did not substitute for political, diplomatic, or military action, even though it did help to shape superpower behavior in all these areas.²

The story of the LTBT is a case study of interaction between arms control and détente. Did the conclusion of the treaty foster political rapprochement or divert the superpowers' attention in a wrong direction? Was it one of those "missed opportunities" that historians bent on chastising politicians are so fond of discovering with the benefit of hindsight? If so, what exactly was the opportunity and why was it missed? What did the 1963 détente amount to and why did it not take hold? Did it at least pave the road toward the more lasting détente that followed a decade later? What, if any, is the enduring significance of the still valid treaty?

The negotiations that led to the LTBT are among the most extensively documented episodes of the Cold War. They even served to establish a model, whatever its worth, for studying Soviet "bargaining behavior." Yet the very abundance of sources, overwhelmingly of Western origin, has tended to hide the forest behind the trees, making it difficult to relate details to the larger picture. This article attempts to clarify that picture by supplementing U.S. and British sources with new evidence from the Soviet side.³

The article shows that the more important political obstacles were on the Soviet rather than the American side. On the American side, the obstacles were mostly of a technical nature. The article illustrates how the weakness of Nikita Khrushchev in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis served as an impediment rather than incentive to negotiating. The article highlights the reasons for his indecision in assigning the treaty the priority it deserved as well as the reasons for his eventual embrace of the concept of a limited treaty in

2. Avis Bohlen, "The Rise and Fall of Arms Control: What Did It All Mean?" Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, 22 October 2002.

3. To get a sense of the wealth of detail that became known soon after the LTBT was signed, see Harold Karan Jacobson and Eric Stein, *Diplomats, Scientists and Politicians: The United States and the Nuclear Test Ban Negotiations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966). The most important documents are surveyed in William Burr and Hector L. Montford, eds., "The Making of the Limited Test Ban Treaty, 1958–1963" (n.d., posted 8 August 2003), available as of 2007 on the National Security Archive website, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB94>. The latest account, based on extensive knowledge of U.S. sources, is Marilena Gala, *Il paradosso nucleare: Il Limited Test Ban Treaty come primo passo verso la distensione* (Florence, Italy: Polistampa, 2002). Gala's work is supplemented by a study based on documents from British archives by Kendrick Oliver, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Nuclear Test-Ban Debate, 1961–1963* (London: Macmillan, 1998). For two recent accounts by insiders, see Keith Hansen, *The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: An Insider's Perspective* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); and James E. Goodby, *At the Borderline of Armageddon: How American Presidents Managed the Atom Bomb* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), pp. 54–69. See also Christer Jönsson, *Soviet Bargaining Behavior: The Nuclear Test Ban Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

order to attain a success he badly needed. New sources from Eastern Europe reveal the Soviet Union's inability as well as unwillingness to use the treaty as the starting point toward a deeper détente.

In the Shadow of Cuba

By 1962, support for an end to nuclear testing was increasingly widespread. Not only had tests fouled the atmosphere, but they had also been unexpectedly disruptive. In late 1961 the Soviet Union had exploded a hydrogen bomb so powerful that it could not be of any conceivable military use and instead merely created unanticipated environmental havoc. In July 1962 the detonation of a U.S. nuclear device 280 miles above the Pacific—the only such experiment in outer space—caused extensive power and communications failures in Hawaii.⁴

U.S.-Soviet-British negotiations on the cessation of nuclear testing had been held on and off since 1958 but were an exercise in exasperating futility. The respective governments were reluctant to make the necessary concessions to reach an agreement. They believed they had higher priorities, particularly the German question, which was aggravated by the unresolved Berlin crisis. Moreover, the weapons designers and armament bureaucracies on both sides had a vested interest in keeping their programs going and growing, although significant minorities of scientists in both the United States and the Soviet Union had come to believe that the programs had already gone too far.⁵

The weaker of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union, insisted that it would accept only a comprehensive ban that would impede further development of nuclear weapons, thereby reducing the value of America's superior nuclear arsenal while preserving the value of the larger Soviet conventional forces—traditionally the bedrock of the USSR's military security. The United States, for its part, saw the need for continued testing to keep its nuclear arsenal up to date as an indispensable deterrent of what it perceived as a perennial threat of Soviet aggression.

The test ban negotiations were closely connected with the similarly sluggish nonproliferation talks aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to additional countries, particularly West Germany and China. West German

4. Viktor Adamsky and Yuri Smirnov, "Moscow's Biggest Bomb: The 50-Megaton Test of October 1961," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 4 (1994), pp. 3, 19–21; and Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), p. 281.

5. Robert A. Divine, *Blowing on the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Debate, 1954–60* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 75–89.

access to the weapons seemed implied in the “multilateral force” (MLF) project for nuclear sharing within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a scheme promoted by the United States to allay its allies’ doubts about the strength of its commitment to common security. The allies were eager to be reassured but otherwise remained skeptical about the merits of the project, which, predictably, was decried by the Soviet Union.

By contrast, China—as France before—was pursuing the acquisition of its own nuclear weapons as an independent safeguard of its security as well as a putative attribute of great-power status. Chinese leaders opposed anything that would hamper the attainment of this goal. When notified in August 1962 of Moscow’s intention to conclude a nonproliferation treaty, Beijing suspected a ploy “to bind China by the hands and feet through an agreement with the USA.”⁶ Together with France, China objected to a test ban treaty in principle.

The Soviet Union’s numerous disarmament initiatives suffered from a lack of credibility. Moscow’s September 1962 proposal for general and complete disarmament impressed some Western experts as the “most feasible” to date.⁷ Yet it could have hardly been meant seriously at a time when Khrushchev was surreptitiously introducing nuclear missiles into Cuba to confront the United States with an unprecedented threat to its security. Nor was the subsequent exposure of this secret deployment—a disclosure that provoked the Cuban missile crisis—reassuring about Soviet intentions.

Conversely, the peaceful resolution of the crisis after both sides had turned away from the brink has retrospectively been judged as having created the best conditions for détente since the onset of the Cold War. But this was not self-evident at the time, when the consequences of the crisis seemed to point in the opposite direction. Regardless of the U.S. posture, Khrushchev for his own internal reasons could not easily afford to be accommodating to the West. He had badly damaged his leadership reputation by having indulged, in the pregnant Chinese phrase, “in adventurism, and then, showing confusion in the face of nuclear blackmail from the USA, . . . capitulated.”⁸ The Chinese had been staging mass rallies in support of Cuba, pointedly denouncing “those who were frightened in the face of imperialist

6. “Meeting of the Delegations of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party,” 8 July 1963, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 10 (Spring 1998), p. 178.

7. Lincoln Bloomfield, Walter C. Clemens, Jr., and Franklyn Griffiths, *Khrushchev and the Arms Race: Soviet Interests in Arms Control and Disarmament, 1954–1964* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), p. 140.

8. “Meeting of the Delegations of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party,” 8 July 1963, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 10 (Spring 1998), p. 178.

aggression” and who “bartered with the freedom and independence of another people.”⁹

Nor were Moscow’s otherwise docile East European allies reassured about the wisdom of Soviet policy. Only after the crisis was resolved did Khrushchev at a secret briefing see fit to inform them that the outbreak of war had been averted by only “a few minutes.”¹⁰ Romanian defense minister Leontin Sălăjan later recalled how at the height of the crisis the Soviet commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact, Marshal Andrei Grechko, had “ordered an increase in the combat readiness of our army, while party and state leaders were not informed and did not give their agreement.”¹¹ So great was the shock that Romania, in a stunning breach of loyalty to the Soviet alliance, reportedly proceeded to reassure Washington in deepest secrecy that in the event of another such confrontation between the superpowers Romania would remain neutral.¹²

The Cuban experience weakened NATO as well.¹³ The European allies were willing to credit President John F. Kennedy for having managed the crisis wisely, but they were less willing to excuse him for having allowed it to develop in the first place and for having threatened to embroil them in a war not of their making. French President Charles de Gaulle felt confirmed in his view that the U.S. “nuclear umbrella” was full of holes and needed to be replaced by France’s own impermeable shield. As Kennedy’s “grand design” for Europe was faltering, a confrontation between Washington and London was looming because of the approaching climax of the “Skybolt” controversy, which also involved a deterrent to Soviet attack. Regardless of how improbable such an attack may have become, the two countries kept quarreling about the Kennedy administration’s failure to provide Skybolt missiles, originally intended to prolong the life span of Britain’s aging nuclear bombers, and its offer to transfer more advanced, submarine-based Polaris missiles that would make the bombers obsolete.¹⁴

9. Mikhail Yu. Prozumenshchikov, “The Sino-Indian Conflict, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1962: New Evidence from Russian Archives,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 8–9 (Winter 1996–1997), p. 255.

10. Novotný, speech to the Czechoslovak party central committee, 2 November 1962, Český Národní Archiv, Archiv Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa, 01/98/85.

11. Sălăjan to Ceaușescu, 9 May 1966, Romanian Military Archive, V2, File 4/34, pp. 124–125.

12. Mircea Munteanu, ed. *Romania and the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1989*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, 2002), p. 280; and Raymond L. Garthoff, “When and Why Romania Distanced Itself from the Warsaw Pact,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 5 (Spring 1995), p. 111.

13. Pierre Melandri, “D’une crise américano-soviétique aux malentendus transatlantiques,” in Maurice Vaisse, ed., *L’Europe et la crise de Cuba* (Paris: Colin, 1993), pp. 225–241.

14. Richard E. Neustadt, *Report to JFK: The Skybolt Crisis in Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

Thus, even though Kennedy wanted a rapprochement between the superpowers, he, like Khrushchev, could not easily afford it. The European allies, while favoring détente in principle, were nervous about a superpower deal over their heads. Within the United States, members of Congress pilloried the Soviet Union for its behavior in Cuba and cited it as evidence that Khrushchev could not be trusted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were dead set against a nuclear test ban, arguing that it would compromise the U.S. strategic deterrent. Senator Everett Dirksen branded the talks on nuclear testing an “exercise not in negotiation . . . but in give-away.”¹⁵ Within NATO, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer denounced the test ban as an invitation to Soviet blackmail. Among Washington’s major allies, only the British favored the ban, urging U.S. concessions to make it possible.

The issue had accidentally gained urgency at the peak of the Cuban missile crisis. On 28 October, a U.S. reconnaissance plane strayed into Soviet air space while on a mission monitoring nuclear tests in the Far East. Khrushchev immediately conveyed his alarm to Kennedy, who promptly apologized—all in one day. Kennedy used the occasion to propose resuming the test ban negotiations, to which Khrushchev responded two days later by suggesting that “we have now conditions ripe for finalizing the agreement on signing a treaty on cessation of tests of thermonuclear weapons.”¹⁶

In reality, the conditions were not so ripe. Khrushchev hedged his statement by insisting that “we shall not accept inspection, this I say to you unequivocally and frankly.” He wanted to resist anything that might pierce the secrecy that Soviet rulers deemed indispensable to protect their closed society along with their arbitrary power. Khrushchev also declared that he would not agree to a partial ban that would allow the United States to continue testing underground. He claimed that “we [in the USSR] do not carry on underground tests, we did it but once and we are not going to do it anymore,” and he challenged Washington to accept a comprehensive ban. Unlike his American adversaries, Khrushchev approached the ban as a political rather than technical issue.

That same day, 30 October, U.S. disarmament negotiator Arthur H. Dean hinted to Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister Vasilii V. Kuznetsov that

15. On the president’s role in negotiating the LTBT, see Andreas Wenger and Marcel Gerber, “John F. Kennedy and the Limited Test Ban Treaty: A Case Study of Presidential Leadership,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (June, 1999), pp. 460–487. Dirksen is cited in Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 896.

16. Khrushchev to Kennedy, 28 October 1962, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Vol. VI, p. 186 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers); Kennedy to Khrushchev, 28 October 1962, in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. VI, p. 188; and Khrushchev to Kennedy, 30 October 1962, in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. VI, p. 192.

the United States might go along with as few as two to four annual inspections. The president's special assistant for science and technology, Jerome B. Wiesner, spoke along the same lines with other Soviet interlocutors. Because the British were ready to move toward a treaty without belaboring the issue of inspections, it may seem that "in the immediate aftermath of the [Cuban] crisis, the three states came very close to the conclusion of a comprehensive test ban."¹⁷ This, however, was not the case.

For Khrushchev, the Cuban missile crisis did not end with his accession to the U.S. demand for the removal of Soviet medium-range missiles from the island. He still had to cope with the furious Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, who chafed at the humiliation and sought to assert control of the additional Soviet tactical missiles that had escaped the Americans' attention. If these deadly weapons, whose only purpose was use in combat, had come to light at the time, the U.S. government would have interpreted their deployment as evidence of Soviet treachery, nipping in the bud any chance of détente. Moscow's further diplomatic initiatives had to await the elimination of this potentially embarrassing nuclear secret in Cuba.¹⁸

The Deadlock

On 22 November 1962, Khrushchev's troubleshooter in Havana, Anastas Mikoyan, reestablished Moscow's control over its remaining missiles and arranged for their shipment home by the end of the year. Only at this point did Khrushchev begin to specify the conditions under which the Soviet Union would be willing to sign a test ban agreement. While continuing to oppose on-site inspections, he notified British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that the Soviet Union would accept unmanned seismic stations as the basis of a "mutually acceptable compromise."¹⁹

At the same time, Khrushchev insisted that an "urgent solution" was needed in Berlin and that it would be "dangerous madness" to expect the Soviet Union to retreat there. He maintained that his country's tactical and strategic position in Berlin was much stronger than in Cuba and that "if people think the Cuban affair will restrain us, they don't know us."²⁰ He thus pos-

17. "Editorial Note," in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. 7, pp. 623–625; and Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 133.

18. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964* (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 311–313.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 313–315. See also "Current Intelligence Review," 7 December 1962, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, p. 593.

20. "Current Intelligence Review," pp. 590–591.

ited a link between a test ban treaty and a settlement in Berlin, on which he professed no readiness to compromise.

In fact, the Berlin question had largely been resolved even before the test ban treaty became topical. As early as 26 February 1962, Khrushchev tried to convince the unhappy East German leader Walter Ulbricht that plans for a separate Soviet–East German peace treaty, which had been a major irritant during the Berlin crisis, were no longer needed. Khrushchev explained to Ulbricht—although he chose not to say as much publicly—that the intended goal of a separate treaty (the stabilization of East Germany) had already been accomplished through the building of the Berlin Wall. The Wall provided a *de facto* solution to the Berlin question, though not to the larger German question, prior to the test ban treaty and independent of it.²¹

Before heading back to Moscow from Havana, Mikoyan stopped in Washington, DC and met with Kennedy at the White House, but made no mention of either Berlin or the test ban. Instead, Mikoyan raised the subject of a non-aggression treaty between NATO and the Warsaw Pact—Khrushchev’s pet project since 1955.²² Non-aggression treaties figured prominently in the Soviet diplomatic repertory. It may seem puzzling that the hard-nosed Kremlin leaders—as other Communist dictators at other times—craved a paper promise from their presumably untrustworthy capitalist foes. What they were really craving was to offset their deficit of legitimacy by being recognized as equals.

The non-aggression pact was a non-starter. The Western powers regarded it as redundant and potentially dangerous. By duplicating the commitments that all major countries had already assumed by subscribing to the United Nations (UN) Charter, the pact might cast doubt on the strength of those commitments. More to the point, Western governments suspected a Soviet ploy to convince NATO member-states that the alliance was no longer needed. When Mikoyan claimed that Kennedy had previously shown interest in the project, Secretary of State Dean Rusk reminded him that “the United States has not been delegated authority by the other countries to negotiate a pact on their behalf.” The Soviet maneuvering made NATO’s experts conclude that Moscow was not ready for *détente*.²³

21. Douglas Selva, “The End of the Berlin Crisis, 1961–62: New Evidence from the Polish and East German Archives,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 11 (Winter 1998), pp. 224–226.

22. “Memorandum of Rusk-Mikoyan Conversation,” 30 November 1962, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, p. 589.

23. *Ibid.*; and Anna Locher and Christian Nünlist, “No Easy Road to *Détente*: Conflicting NATO Perceptions of *Détente*, 1963–66,” paper presented at conference “NATO, the Warsaw Pact and the Rise of *Détente*, 1965–1972,” in Dobbiaco, Italy, 26–28 September 2002, p. 8.

With the Cuban problem defused, however, Khrushchev seemed more ready than before to drop his political preconditions. He hinted to the visiting American anti-nuclear activist Norman Cousins that the USSR would be willing to accept “reasonable inspections.” Polish and Romanian diplomats floated the same idea in casual conversations with Western counterparts. The Soviet leader then informed Kennedy that he would go along with an annual quota of two to four inspections, previously hinted at by Dean and Wiesner during similar such conversations. But the president, under pressure from opponents of the ban, replied that eight to ten inspections would be needed, thus raising technical impediments to an agreement.²⁴

The disagreement about inspections was not as deep as it may seem. It was certainly unwise of Kennedy to up the ante before negotiations had even started and thereby give Khrushchev a pretext to charge that the United States had been acting in bad faith. Moreover, because other means of verification were becoming available, the difference in the number of inspections was negligible. In any case, no number of inspections could guarantee compliance unless the Soviet Union regarded the cessation of testing as being in its interest—something that remained an undecided question for the country’s leaders, as did that of whether seeking accommodation with the capitalist adversaries would be better than trying to exploit disputes among them.

The resumption of the test ban negotiations coincided with dramatic developments within NATO that affected the “correlation of forces”—the traditional guiding formula of Soviet foreign policy. Moscow chose to revive its non-aggression proposal at a time when Kennedy was facing difficult discussions with Macmillan at Nassau about the Skybolt issue. By the end of December, however, the successful outcome of the Nassau meeting, after the United States offered the Polaris missiles not only to the British but also to the French, defused the NATO crisis and created opportunities to resolve differences with both of these key allies.²⁵

As 1963 began, the Soviet Union became more accommodating. Moscow’s relations with the United States took a turn for the better as the two governments announced publicly that their dispute over Cuba was resolved. On a visit to the White House, Kuznetsov expatiated on the Soviet Union’s

24. Oliver, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Nuclear Test-Ban Debate*, p. 145; “Current Intelligence Weekly Review,” 25 January 1963, in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. V, p. 614; Khrushchev to Kennedy, 19 December 1962, in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. VI, pp. 234–240; and Kennedy to Khrushchev, 28 December 1962, in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. VI, pp. 234–240.

25. Jan Melissen, “Pre-Summit Diplomacy: Britain, United States and the Nassau Conference, December 1962,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (September, 1996), pp. 530–562.

desire for a further improvement of relations.²⁶ All these developments were good omens for the test ban talks that resumed in New York on 14 January.

Nonetheless, on the same day that the negotiations restarted, the intra-NATO crisis flared up again because of de Gaulle's "double non" to both the Polaris and Britain's entry into the Common Market. As the Soviet media rejoiced with Schadenfreude, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko displayed to U.S. Ambassador Foy Kohler his usual sour face, brooding thoroughly pessimistic about the prospects of the talks. Gromyko had reason to be pessimistic, knowing that his own government the next day was to make public, without consultation with Washington, the secret correspondence between Khrushchev and Kennedy regarding the test ban. On 31 January the Soviet delegation walked out of the New York talks and proposed to continue negotiations at the UN Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) in Geneva, where they had been languishing for years.²⁷

The opening session in Geneva on 20 February was discouraging. Kuznetsov delivered a "long, propagandistic, and inflexible speech" putting forth an even less acceptable draft of a NATO–Warsaw Pact non-aggression pact intended to complement the test ban. Unlike earlier variants, the new version of the pact specifically envisaged that it would be signed by all members of both alliances, including the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Because this would amount to the GDR's international recognition, which both Bonn and Washington were known to rule out in principle, the test ban was doubly deadlocked by being linked to the intractable German question as well as the inspection issue. Commenting on the implications for détente, Rusk observed that a pact between the two military groupings should be a crowning achievement of détente rather than the first step toward it.²⁸

Neither superpower regarded the test ban treaty as a high enough priority to separate it from other military and political issues. For the United States, the military balance was central and was the reason for insisting so strenuously on inspections, which Moscow could not afford for political reasons. For the Soviet Union, the political balance was more crucial, spurring attempts by Soviet officials to extract concessions from the West on the test ban issue that would be politically beneficial to the East. The political balance was

26. Rusk to Embassy in France, 10 January 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, pp. 600–601.

27. "Current Intelligence Weekly Review," 25 January 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, pp. 614–615; and "Memorandum of Thompson-Dobrynin Conversation," 20 January 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, pp. 610–611.

28. Rusk to U.S. Embassy in Paris, 28 February 1963, Def 4, 2/1/63, Box 3697, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); and Arms Control and Disarmament Agency to U.S. Embassies, 1 April 1963, Def 4, 4/1/63, Box 3697, RG 59, NARA.

more malleable than the military balance, making it easier for Khrushchev than for his American adversaries to break the deadlock if he wanted and could afford to.

Khrushchev Finds a Solution

In mid-March 1963, Ambassador Kohler noted “an unmistakable change in the Soviet posture during the past six weeks”—for the worse. He saw Khrushchev as “a tired man . . . overwhelmed by his burdens . . . [and suffering from] depression [that] seems clearly to result from his difficulties with a complicated world which no longer fits his earlier confident analysis.” Khrushchev’s son Sergei confirms that his father was indeed “tired . . . immensely tired, both physically and psychologically.” Yet Sergei describes his father as acting in February 1963 with his customary vigor in clashing with military commanders during a Defense Council meeting at the army base of Fili.²⁹

When one of the commanders, Marshal Grechko, advocated mass production of tactical nuclear missiles and artillery, Khrushchev reportedly snapped: “Two cannons are enough for you, Marshal, and for the Americans.” Marshal Matvei Zakharov, the chief of the Soviet General Staff, apparently fared no better. His plan for a nuclear war with weapons directed against hundreds of targets evoked Khrushchev’s comment that “even a dozen missiles with thermonuclear warheads are enough to make the very thought of war senseless.” Khrushchev must have sent chills down the generals’ spines by suggesting, as he had before to the CPSU Presidium, that a small professional army, supported by territorial militia, was all that the country might need.³⁰

Khrushchev, for all his dangerous antics and other shortcomings, was ahead of his time in deprecating the military utility of nuclear weapons. Whatever illusions he may have previously entertained on this matter had been dispelled by the embarrassment such weapons had caused him in Cuba. Unlike Kennedy, who was in thrall to the fanciful theories of U.S. “defense intellectuals” about the increasingly complex nuclear postures required to deter the Soviet Union from attacking, Khrushchev was more open to the simple but sound view that the mere possession of nuclear weapons sufficed as a deterrent. This made him more inclined to separate the test ban issue

29. Kohler to Department of State, 16 March 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1962, Vol. V, p. 644; and Sergei N. Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of a Superpower* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 732.

30. Remarks by Khrushchev for meeting of the CPSU Presidium, 8 December 1959, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii, Fond 2, Opis’ 1, Delo 416, Listy 3–11.

from military considerations if only he could manage to overcome political obstacles.³¹

Keen contemporary observers of the Soviet scene were able to detect the political pressure Khrushchev was encountering in Moscow as well as from Beijing. Kremlinologists identified intra-party opposition animated by the CPSU Presidium member Frol Kozlov. "Seldom has anyone produced so little with so much," a U.S. State Department analyst paraphrased the putative reasoning of Khrushchev's critics. With regard to the test ban talks, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) concluded that "the present unyielding Soviet stand is based on the judgment that, with the Chinese charging a sell-out and the Soviet populace being called upon for sacrifices, this is no time to encourage hopes for an East-West détente."³²

U.S. State Department experts saw "presently strong forces operating on the Soviet leaders to make them *want* a change in relations with the US, but not to *compel* them to seek that change," a situation that also obtained on the American side. The experts believed that the United States must not miss a window of opportunity, as it had supposedly done in 1953 when "we stood as a mere onlooker while the Soviet leaders went through a bewildering succession of policy innovations and reversals." Accordingly, the situation called for negotiations without a rigid agenda to find common ground rather than searching in vain for a breakthrough on matters on which agreement was most difficult, such as disarmament or the Berlin question.³³

Whatever the doubtful similarity of the situation in 1963 to that of a decade earlier after Stalin's death, contradictory signs indicated that disagreements existed at the highest levels in Moscow and that Khrushchev was finding it difficult to make up his mind. On the one hand, the secret Soviet decree of 30 March, which provided for mass production of intercontinental ballistic missiles, contradicted Khrushchev's reasoning at the recent Defense Council meeting, thus signaling the strength of the opposition he was facing. On the other hand, the insulting message he sent to Kennedy through Ambassador Anatolii Dobrynin a few days later was vintage Khrushchev. Echoing the rumblings around him, the Soviet leader ruminated about America's disrespect for his country's status as a great power. He complained about having

31. On Khrushchev's "nuclear learning," see Vladislav M. Zubok and Hope M. Harrison, "The Nuclear Education of Nikita Khrushchev," in John L. Gaddis, Philip H. Gordon, and Ernest R. May, eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 161–168.

32. Alfred Goldberg, ed. *History of the Strategic Arms Competition, 1945–1972*, Pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1981), pp. 686–687 (available in National Security Archive); "Khrushchev at Bay," 21 March 1963, Pol US-USSR, 2/1/63, Box 4121, RG 59, NARA; and Memorandum by Central Intelligence Agency, 18 March 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, p. 648.

33. "Khrushchev at Bay."

been misled by Washington about the number of inspections it wanted to control nuclear testing. “Give them an inch and they take a mile,” his son remembers him as having fumed.³⁴

In mid-April 1963, the obstructionist Kozlov was incapacitated by a stroke, thus easing the pressure on Khrushchev. At the same time, Kennedy and Macmillan chose to respond with restraint to Khrushchev’s outburst.³⁵ In accordance with the U.S. State Department analysis, the two Western leaders focused on the test ban treaty while ignoring the Berlin question. They assumed that Moscow had already acquiesced in the status quo of Berlin—an assumption now vindicated by evidence from the archives.

After receiving the Kennedy-Macmillan message from the U.S. and British ambassadors on 24 April, Khrushchev nevertheless told the envoys that Germany was the key to everything and that the test ban treaty no longer mattered. He meant precisely the opposite. The next day he secretly proposed to the CPSU Presidium that the two sides move ahead with the treaty but limit it to tests in the atmosphere, outer space, and under water—not the comprehensive ban he had been insisting on thus far. To justify this reversal, he referred to the view of unnamed “military comrades” that atmospheric testing was no longer necessary for defense purposes. He saw continued utility of underground explosions for peaceful purposes.³⁶

Khrushchev’s argumentation on this point, however, bore close resemblance not to anything advocated by the military but to the position laid out in a memorandum several months earlier by a leading Soviet nuclear scientist, Viktor Adamskii.³⁷ Although there is no evidence that Khrushchev actually read the memorandum, the idea of a limited ban had been circulating for some time, initially in the West. Now Khrushchev decided to endorse the idea as not only mutually beneficial but also good for public relations. He continued, however, to keep this important decision secret, subject to tactical considerations and proper timing.

The evidence of Khrushchev’s reversal in April 1963 changes the prevailing view of how the treaty became possible. Because Khrushchev had already

34. Robert F. Kennedy to John F. Kennedy, 3 April 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. VI, pp. 262–265; and Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of a Superpower*, pp. 671, 693.

35. Kennedy and Macmillan to Khrushchev, 15 April 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. VI, pp. 268–270.

36. Kohler to Department of State, 24 April 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. VII, pp. 685–686; and Minutes of CPSU Presidium Meeting, 25 April 1963, in A. A. Fursenko et al., eds., *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954–1964* [Presidium of the CC CPSU, 1954–1964], Vol. 1, *Chernovoye protokol’nye zapisi zasedanii, stenogrammy* [Draft Minutes and Stenographic Records of Meetings] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), pp. 702–715.

37. Yurii N. Smirnov and Roland M. Timerbaev, “K istorii zaklyucheniya moskovskogo dogovora 1963 goda o chastichnom zapreshchenii yadernykh ispytaniy,” *Byulleten’ po atomnoi energii*, No. 2 (2001), pp. 147–168.

decided to accept the limited ban favored by Washington, the subsequent three months of Soviet haggling about the terms of the treaty amounted mostly to posturing. The tactics and timing were no longer primarily influenced by what the Western powers did or neglected to do but by the mounting crisis in Soviet relations with the rest of the Communist world.

The Difficult Allies

The day after Khrushchev confided his plan to the CPSU Presidium, he told Kennedy's special envoy, W. Averell Harriman, that because "Berlin is no longer a source of any trouble, . . . I will find a basis for a test ban agreeable to both sides provided you agree to work out the basis of a German settlement which would recognize the two Germanies as they now exist." In reality, Khrushchev had already found the basis for the ban and separated it from political issues. His effort to link it again with the elusive German settlement, described as the key to *détente*, was a delaying maneuver at a time when he was increasingly preoccupied with cracks in the unity of the Communist camp—cracks that were much more serious than outsiders realized.³⁸

In April 1963, a senior CPSU official, Yurii Andropov, traveled to Bucharest on an urgent mission to placate Romanian leaders, who were upset about Khrushchev's plan for an international "division of labor" within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the Soviet bloc's agency for economic cooperation. The Romanians particularly resented the feature of the plan that would have provided for economic zones in disregard of national boundaries, paving the way in their view for the creation of "advanced socialist zones and backward socialist zones." Although Andropov pledged Soviet respect for national sovereignty, the Romanians bluntly told him that "sovereignty does not live only through declarations but through facts and specific actions." Andropov's proposal for a summit to settle the disagreements elicited no more than a noncommittal Romanian response.³⁹

Meanwhile another difficult ally, Fidel Castro, came to the Soviet Union at the end of April for a month-long stay. The visit started inauspiciously as Castro demanded massive economic aid and security guarantees for Cuba, including admission into the Warsaw Pact. Khrushchev balked at this last

38. Memorandum of Harriman-Khrushchev Conversation, 26 April 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. XV, pp. 510–511; and Khrushchev to Kennedy, 8 May 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. XV, p. 280.

39. Minutes of talks with Andropov at the Romanian Communist Party Central Committee meeting, 3 April 1963, pp. 2–25, 18/1963, Central Committee Chancery, National Archives of Romania.

request but otherwise granted most of Castro's wishes, so that in the end the visit could qualify as a success. On 7 June, Khrushchev stressed this achievement to the CPSU Presidium, alluding to the Kennedy administration's intent to destroy Cuban Communism: "Who suffered defeat? Who did not get what he wanted? We attained our goal; so they lost, we won." Khrushchev's listeners nodded in agreement as he added: "What an enormous accomplishment! This should be known in all countries, especially those countries that are close to the Chinese."⁴⁰

The Chinese, however, were unimpressed. As the verbal sniping between Beijing and Moscow went from bad to worse, Khrushchev placed his remaining hopes on inviting China's top leaders for a brainstorming session in the Soviet capital. He proposed 15 May as the starting date, but the Chinese were in no hurry to accept the invitation. Khrushchev egged them on by moving closer to the test ban treaty that, much like the proposed nuclear nonproliferation treaty, was intended in part to counter China's ambition to become an independent nuclear power.

On 8 June, a day after the upbeat meeting of the CPSU Presidium, Khrushchev notified Kennedy of the Soviet Union's readiness to resume the test ban talks without indicating his own willingness to accept a limited treaty, as proposed by the West. Instead, Khrushchev kept fulminating against inspections and lecturing the president about the need to treat the Soviet Union as an equal. Kennedy responded on 10 June with his celebrated American University speech that has often, if wrongly, been credited with swaying Khrushchev in favor of the ban. The president specified his preference for a limited rather than comprehensive treaty and went out of his way to proclaim respect for the Soviet Union as an equal partner.⁴¹

Kennedy's speech, by all accounts, was well received in Moscow, but no change in Soviet policy ensued for another three weeks. During the interval, the Sino-Soviet split reached the point of no return. Four days after Kennedy spoke, Beijing's blistering 25-point denunciation of Khrushchev's "revisionist" sins reached the Soviet capital, and copies were sent to the "fraternal" parties. Not only the pro-Chinese Albanians but also the ostensibly uncommitted Romanians promptly published a summary of the inflammatory document. The Chinese had taken Romania's side in the intra-CMEA dispute, posing as a champion of national sovereignty against Soviet encroachments. On 24 June, Khrushchev rushed to Bucharest to discard his ill-conceived plan for

40. Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, p. 335.

41. "Speech at American University," 10 June 1963, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 459–464; and Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 900–902.

an international division of labor and apologize for his failure to consult with the allies on the Cuban missile deployments.⁴²

A week later, Khrushchev traveled to Berlin, where Kennedy had just appeared before cheering crowds and delivered a memorable speech reaffirming the U.S. commitment to defend freedom in the city's western part. Khrushchev, in his own Berlin speech on 2 July, ignored the challenge, choosing instead to respond to the president's earlier remarks at American University by finally revealing his acceptance of a limited test ban treaty. Although Khrushchev no longer linked the test ban with the German settlement, he revived his demand for a non-aggression pact as the supposedly necessary complement to the treaty. He harped on this specious linkage in a conversation with the visiting former secretary general of NATO, Paul-Henri Spaak.⁴³

What finally cleared the way for the LTBT was the collapse of the Sino-Soviet talks held in Moscow from 5 to 20 July. Mao's emissary, Deng Xiaoping, lambasted Soviet leaders for assorted "revisionist" treachery and singled out for special condemnation their readiness to pursue disarmament agreements with the American enemy. In anticipation of the collapse, *Pravda* had disclosed on 15 July the full text of the 25-point Chinese statement along with a Soviet rebuttal, and Khrushchev had summoned the Warsaw Pact allies for an urgent meeting. A day later, the test ban negotiations resumed in Moscow and swiftly moved toward conclusion. The treaty was signed on 25 July, just as the leaders of the Warsaw Pact were convening in the Soviet capital.⁴⁴

The East-bloc gathering, its agenda hidden from contemporaries, was not about the treaty, which all the participants welcomed, but about China. The conferees included Yumjaagiyn Tsendenbal, the party chief of neighboring Mongolia, an observer state within the Warsaw Pact. Attesting to the recent worrisome turn in Sino-Soviet relations, Tsendenbal had applied for his country's admission as a full-fledged ally, and Khrushchev, in contrast to his

42. Raymond L. Garthoff, *A Journey through the Cold War: A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), p. 165; and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 177–181.

43. Speech by Kennedy in Berlin, 26 June 1963, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963*, pp. 950–953, available on-line at <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/003POF03BerlinWall06261963.htm>; "Speech by Khrushchev in Berlin," 2 July 1963, in *Documents on Disarmament, 1963* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), pp. 244–246; and Spaak to Kennedy, 11 July 1973, cited in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. VII, p. 793.

44. Vladislav M. Zubok, "Look What Chaos in the Beautiful Socialist Camp! Deng Xiaoping and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1956–1963," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 10 (Spring 1998), pp. 152–162. Of contemporary analyses, the CIA memorandum of 9 August 1963 (in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. V, No. 347) came the closest to grasping the reasons for Khrushchev's turnabout on the treaty.

handling of Castro's same request, supported the application, which he may have commissioned in the first place. The danger of a confrontation with Beijing over the LTBT made the difference.⁴⁵

Unlike during the Cuban events, this time the Warsaw Pact allies were being consulted, and they were alarmed. The Romanians did not want to say yes or no but highlighted the likely adverse consequences of Mongolian membership. "The imperialists will be glad, and howls of satisfaction will be heard," party chief Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej predicted. In a spirited memorandum, Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki argued that Mongolia's admission to the alliance would bring no advantages but only risks while giving Beijing an excuse to charge that the USSR was militarizing the thus far mainly ideological conflict. He pointed out the inconsistency of extending military guarantees to Mongolia but not to North Korea, North Vietnam, or China itself—all of which were presumably threatened by the "imperialists." Because any alteration of the Warsaw Pact's terms would require unanimous consent from the existing members—something that Rapacki broadly hinted could not be taken for granted—he concluded that the unity of the alliance was at risk.⁴⁶

It is unclear whether the East European allies had communicated their objections to Moscow before the Soviet Union itself, after rethinking the matter, decided to withdraw its support of Mongolia's application, ending further consideration of it. Soviet officials justified the reversal to the conference by suggesting that, in view of the reassuring impact of the test ban treaty, the expansion of the alliance would send the wrong signal—to the West rather than to China. The promise of an uncertain *détente* with Washington took precedence over the certain deterioration of relations with Beijing.

Back home from the conference, the Hungarian party chief János Kádár told his comrades how surprised he was to find that even the Warsaw Pact's hardline commander-in-chief, Grechko, had had "encouraging things to say." In summing up the results of the deliberations for the public, Grechko had prepared "a draft resolution that went far beyond all previous resolutions." Although the final version was much less bold, it at least expressed hope that

45. Tshednal to Cyrankiewicz, 15 July 1963, in Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1991* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), pp. 152–153; and Khrushchev to Gomułka, 15 July 1963, in KC PZPR, 2662/523–26, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN); Khrushchev to Ulbricht, 15 July 1963, in ZK SED, J IV 2/202–245 Bd 2, DY 30/3387, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR im Bundesarchiv; and Khrushchev to Gomułka, 10 July 1963, in KC PZPR, 2662/521–22, AAN.

46. "Record of Romanian Communist Party Politburo Meeting," 18 July 1963, in Munteanu, *Romania and the Warsaw Pact*, Vol. 1, pp. 177–183; and "Memorandum by Rapacki," 20 July 1963, in Mastny and Byrne, eds., *A Cardboard Castle?* pp. 154–156.

the “treaty will be conducive to a relaxation of international tension.”⁴⁷ Because this was also the prevailing hope in the West, détente would seem to have been dawning. As it turned out, the dawn was deceptive.

The Disappointing Aftermath

The LTBT was initialed on 25 July, but the actual signing was postponed at Soviet request until the three powers’ foreign ministers would meet two weeks later. In the meantime, Moscow could assess the repercussions of the treaty, particularly the reactions of the two recalcitrant outsiders, China and France. The signatories could also decide whether they should proceed from the limited treaty to a comprehensive ban.

The day after the initialing, Khrushchev answered Harriman’s query about a follow-up by suggesting that the two sides move “from [the] particular to [the] general.” He did not mean a comprehensive treaty, nor did he want to entertain Harriman’s worthwhile proposal to cut the production of fissionable materials and start dismantling nuclear weapons. Instead, the Soviet leader returned to his vintage calls for a non-aggression pact and a German settlement. Harriman was sympathetic. Back in Washington, he spoke in favor of signing the pact as well as recognizing the GDR and the Oder-Neisse Line as Germany’s eastern border, as Moscow desired. Such far-reaching concessions presupposed that the Soviet Union was firmly committed to détente.⁴⁸

The majority opinion in Washington was skeptical about the firmness of that commitment. Charles Bohlen, who, like Harriman, was a former ambassador to Moscow and an expert well attuned to Soviet thinking, wrote a memorandum that is worth quoting at length:

We should recognize that in itself the Soviet agreement to a test ban in the three environments represents no concession whatsoever. . . . We have therefore no moral or any other obligation to make any quid pro quo in any other field. . . . It is extremely important that we so comport ourselves with our Allies to avoid any semblance of impression that we have incurred any indirect obligation with the Soviets in regard to non-aggression arrangements. We should also avoid any appearance of indecent or anxious haste in an attempt to move forward in the entire field of relations with the Soviet Union. It has never been true in Soviet

47. Report by Kádár to Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party Politburo, 31 July 1963, in Magyar Országos Levéltár, M-K-S 288, F. 5/309 őrzési egység.

48. David Kaiser, “Men and Policies: 1961–69,” in Diane B. Kunz, ed., *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations during the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 23.

policy and is not now true that certain occasions must be seized or the opportunity is lost. Soviet policy is too realistic and based upon long-range considerations for that. It is therefore not a question of seizing a temporary fleeting opportunity. In fact I should think that we should proceed very cautiously with any further discussions with the Soviet Union and wait for them to give us indications of any serious change in current Soviet policy and not feel that we must take the initiative in order "to show good faith."⁴⁹

As usual, Bohlen's analysis was compelling. His contention that the test ban was no unilateral Soviet concession conformed to Khrushchev's own reasoning at the CPSU Presidium meeting in April. What was missing from the analysis, however, was any suggestion that making the limited ban comprehensive would be worth trying on its own merits. Once the political obstacles to the partial treaty had been removed, the remaining technical impediments to its completion were rendered more manageable as the divisive issue of inspections was losing its relevance. Rather than moving in that direction, both sides preferred scrutinizing each other's "good faith" in *détente*.

Rusk went to the August 1963 conference of foreign ministers in Moscow with the "primary aim . . . to probe Soviet intentions and to try to ascertain in what particular field further progress in resolving issues with the Soviet Union might be made." He found Khrushchev ill-prepared, repeating standard Soviet positions, and obviously unwilling to address the "difficult issues" he had been saying should be addressed, particularly Germany. Gromyko continued to harp on the non-aggression pact.⁵⁰

U.S. officials took the sensible view that consolidation of the recent gains was more important than moving ahead fast. Rusk believed that, instead of a "comprehensive discussion . . . looking toward some negotiated *détente* across the board," they should explore specific issues. He meant, for example, issues "in the surprise attack field," which had become particularly topical now that the National Security Council had reached the sobering conclusion that a preemptive strike was no longer an option for the United States. Neither was such a strike feasible for the Soviet Union, thus making the reduction of the increasingly superfluous nuclear weaponry all the more imperative, regardless of the unresolved political problems that underlay the lack of trust between the superpowers.⁵¹

49. Bohlen to Department of State, 27 July 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, p. 719.

50. Memorandum on Rusk–van Roijen Conversation, 14 August 1963, Pol US-USSR 6/1/63, Box 4121, RG59, NARA; and Kohler to Department of State, 10 September 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, p. 761.

51. Memorandum on Beam-Kornienko Conversation, 6 August 1963, in Pol US-USSR, 6/1/63, Box 4121, RG59, NARA; *Department of State Bulletin*, 2 September 1963, p. 358; and "Summary

To advance beyond the limited ban, NATO members discussed a proposal that would include an agreement on observation posts while accommodating the Soviet desire for a non-aggression pact, but the Western allies could not reach a common position. Moscow was not helpful by linking any such agreement with the reduction of foreign troops in Germany and the creation of a nuclear-free zone there—both of which were controversial issues within NATO. The UN General Assembly, too, favored steps toward making the limited test ban comprehensive, but found the superpowers unresponsive.⁵² As a result, the prospects for a comprehensive treaty fizzled.

Once the LTBT came into effect, the superpowers' interest shifted to the related but more complex problem of nonproliferation. Because this issue involved not only the nuclear haves but also the have-nots, it was more politically charged than the test ban and hence more intractable. The negotiation and signing of the Nonproliferation Treaty took another five years. The hurdles to the NPT included not only China's pursuit of the bomb but also the MLF, and with it the German question. The Soviet Union evaded Washington's overtures about possible joint action to check Beijing's nuclear ambitions and remained publicly hostile toward the MLF as well. By October, Rusk found it "premature to speak of détente."⁵³

This assessment may have been unduly pessimistic. Unbeknownst to Rusk, Khrushchev at that very time began to feel out Moscow's East European allies about the possibility of a qualified acceptance of the MLF—perhaps in return for a qualified acceptance of East Germany. On 2 October the Soviet Foreign Ministry informed the Polish leader Władysław Gomułka that the Soviet Union would not insist on including a prohibition of joint nuclear forces in a nonproliferation agreement that was to be negotiated with the United States. Gomułka was appalled, and he wrote to Khrushchev that tolerating Bonn's access to nuclear weapons in any form would not only violate the spirit of the test ban treaty but also threaten Poland's security and undermine the Warsaw Pact, not to mention Soviet prestige. The decline of Moscow's standing among the previously docile Eastern European Communists became evident when Gomułka added the unsolicited advice that if the MLF were to come into effect, the Soviet Union should create a joint nuclear force with China.⁵⁴

Record of the 517th Meeting of the National Security Council," 12 September 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. VIII, p. 502.

52. Jacobson and Stein, *Diplomats, Scientists and Politicians*, p. 465.

53. Dimitris Bourantonis, "The Negotiation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, 1965–1968," *International History Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May 1997), pp. 347–357; and "Memorandum of Rusk–Couve de Murville Conversation," 7 October 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, p. 779.

54. Douglas Selva, "The Warsaw Pact and Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1963–65," CWIHP Working Paper No. 32, Washington, DC, 2001, pp. 20–29.

Although an official Soviet declaration on 21 October described the MLF as contravening the spirit of the treaty, the tone of the statement struck American officials as “notably restrained.” Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was continuing to canvass its allies about acceptance of the MLF. In response to Ulbricht’s warning that any such step would endanger East Germany’s stability, the Soviet emissary, Kuznetsov, pointedly warned him that the earlier Soviet “proposal to withdraw all foreign troops from West Germany and the GDR” might “have to be resuscitated.” Rusk’s intuition was right that “we might be on the threshold of important developments” if “the real problems the Soviets were facing would lead them to seek genuine détente.”⁵⁵

Kennedy’s assassination on 22 November was a blow that has retrospectively been judged a setback for détente. Contemporaries, however, saw it differently. Khrushchev appeared genuinely shaken by this sudden reminder of the fragility of power, including his own. He eulogized the late president for having “laid down the unseen bridge of mutual understanding which, I venture to say, was not broken to the very last day in . . . [his] life.” Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, tried to maintain the link by promptly agreeing to create a confidential channel to Khrushchev through Dobrynin. An upbeat Rusk sensed that the United States now had a “hunting license for means to develop a détente.”⁵⁶

By the end of 1963, détente was in the air far more so than it had been in the wake of the test ban treaty or ever before. Uncharacteristically, the Soviet Union refrained from trying to take advantage of the discord within NATO that had been deepened by the MLF, as a result of which “the Atlantic Community had largely ground to a halt.” Soviet officials were prepared to consider the none-too-forthcoming December 1963 communiqué of the North Atlantic Council as an invitation to promote détente. As 1964 began, the Soviet Union announced a 4.5 percent cut of its defense budget, to which Washington responded with a 2 percent cut of its own budget and a 25 percent reduction in the procurement of enriched uranium needed for manufacturing nuclear weapons. Khrushchev reciprocated by stopping the construction of two new plutonium plants that served the same purpose.⁵⁷

55. “Current Intelligence Weekly Review,” 25 October 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, p. 803; Selvaige, “The Warsaw Pact and Nuclear Nonproliferation,” p. 35; and Memorandum on Rusk–Cecil King Conversation of 29 October 1963, Pol 1 General Policy US-USSR, Cen1 For. Policy Files, Box 4122, RG59, NARA.

56. Khrushchev to Lyndon Johnson, 24 November 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. VI, p. 312; and “Memorandum of Johnson–Mikoyan Conversation,” 26 November 1963, in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. V, pp. 836–837; and “Memorandum of Rusk–Paul Martin Conversation,” 4 December 1963, Pol US-USSR, 10/1/63, Box 4121, RG59, NARA.

57. Jeffrey Glen Giauque, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955–1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 123;

If the budding détente did not bloom, this was for reasons independent of the lost momentum of the test ban treaty. Both sides soon became distracted by other issues. The Johnson administration was sinking ever more deeply into the morass of the Vietnam War, and in Moscow a conspiracy to unseat Khrushchev was already under way. His overthrow in October 1964 by leaders committed to reversing his innovations put the brakes on détente for the remainder of the decade. The resurgence of détente in the 1970s, independent of arms control, did not build on the foundations of 1963 but on what came to be considered common values and political interests.⁵⁸

The Missed Opportunity

The 1963 détente went further than any of its predecessors but not far enough. U.S. officials' inclination to think of the Cold War in terms of a potential military confrontation rather than the actual political competition was an obstacle, though not one that varied. In that sense, the more important obstacles were on the Soviet side, including those posed by such extraneous issues as relations with Cuba and China and political infighting in the Kremlin.

In Khrushchev's scheme of things—which suffered from improvisation and inconsistency—the test ban treaty was not a goal in itself but a way toward achieving more important political objectives. The nuclear standoff over Cuba did not make him more willing to conclude the treaty, but the humiliation he had suffered increased his need for a success. Hence he tried to link the LTBT to progress toward a settlement in Germany and accommodation between the alliances. Once the treaty was signed, however, its value as a tool for achieving political goals, which had never been high for the United States, diminished for the Soviet Union, as well.

At issue in the treaty's follow-up was not making détente permanent, much less ending the Cold War. The Berlin question had already been effectively solved by Soviet acquiescence in the continued division of the city, though without a solution to the larger German question. Nothing happened to satisfy either the West's demand for guaranteed access to Berlin or Moscow's demand for the recognition of the GDR—the two points that facilitated the emergence of détente in the early 1970s. What did happen in 1963

and Memorandum of Manning-Zinchuk Conversation, 20 December 1963, Def 4, NATO, Box 3696, RG59, NARA.

58. Andreas Wenger and Jeremi Suri, "At the Crossroads of Diplomatic and Social History: The Nuclear Revolution, Dissent, and Détente," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (April 2001), pp. 1–42.

was the separation of arms control from the political agenda, making the test ban possible without deeper détente.

In 1963 the systemic crisis that eventually resulted in the demise of the Soviet bloc and, with it, the end of the Cold War was still nowhere in sight. In particular, simultaneous upheavals in different parts of Eastern Europe that were so crucial in 1989 were notably absent in 1963. It is intriguing, if pointless, to speculate whether the end would have come earlier if the 1968 Soviet-Czechoslovak crisis had occurred while Khrushchev was still in power. The reason he was no longer in power is that the system was still strong enough to block him. No opportunity for détente, much less for the Cold War's termination, was therefore missed.

What *was* missed was a unique opportunity for making the limited ban complete. For a brief period, the eclipse of the inspection issue, which had previously been the main stumbling block, would have made it easier for both superpowers to proceed toward a total ban. Had this goal received the priority it deserved in the immediate aftermath of the LTBT, a comprehensive treaty could have been signed before further testing allowed for technological advances that would fuel the arms race and make its reversal more difficult. This missed opportunity not only prolonged the Cold War but also multiplied the stockpile of useless nuclear weaponry that remains its most deplorable legacy.