

ered casualties. Full exploitation of the advantages to be obtained is dependent upon the adequacy and promptness of associated military and psychological operations. From the standpoint of our national security, the advantages of its early use would be transcending. Every reasonable effort should be devoted to providing the means to be prepared for prompt and effective delivery of the maximum numbers of atomic bombs to appropriate target systems.

*Political Implications of Detonation of Atomic Bomb by the U.S.S.R.*

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August 16, 1949

[Source: *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1949, I, 514-16*]

There was irony in the Policy Planning Staff's consideration of the implications of a Russian atomic detonation in August 1949, for in that very month the Soviet Union exploded its first test device, a fact not known, or even suspected, by American officials at the time. The American government had certain knowledge of the explosion early in September 1949, and President Truman announced the fact on September 22. Doubtless the Staff's reflections on the possible effects on public opinion of such a development aided in preparing an official announcement.

*The Problem*

To determine the political implications if this Government could know with certainty when the U.S.S.R. detonates an atomic bomb.

*Analysis and Conclusions*

The Department of State obviously cannot pass on the question whether scientific techniques or equipment can be developed to detect the explosion by the U.S.S.R. of an atomic bomb, and it cannot express judgment as between competing demands for research and development funds. It is clear, however, that *only if a high degree of certainty can be placed on systems of detection, would this Government be warranted in basing policy decisions on intelligence derived from them.*

Definite knowledge by this Government of the explosion by the USSR of its first bomb is considered by the Department to be important for the following reasons:

1. It would have a steadying effect on the American people and give them a sense of security if this Government could give assurance that the U.S.S.R. probably could not, without our knowledge, have a bomb or bombs for any length of time. With this knowledge, the Government would be able to combat intelligently defeatist or irrational attitudes arising from uncertainty as to whether the U.S.S.R. was capable of using atomic bombs, and would be in a position to refute with conviction false claims or rumors.
2. It would be of the utmost importance for us to know when the U.S.S.R. has successfully tested a bomb in order to anticipate and counter possible changes in Soviet foreign policy which might result therefrom, and to know whether a shift in its foreign policy was the result of the possession of atomic bombs. We cannot know whether the U.S.S.R. would make the knowledge public if it did possess the atomic bomb; however, we would be in a position to know the truth of what the U.S.S.R. said publicly.
3. The Soviet possession of a bomb or bombs may require a reevaluation of U.S. policy in the United Nations in our efforts to obtain effective international control.
4. Most of the free nations of the world are inclined at present to cooperate with the United States in view of the threat of Soviet aggression. A belief that we are now the sole possessor of atomic bombs and that the U.S.S.R. has none probably tends to increase their desire to collaborate with us and also their sense of safety in doing so. This tendency would probably be reinforced even further by certain knowledge that the U.S.S.R. does not possess the bomb and that we would have means of knowing if and when it did come into possession of the bomb. However, it is realized that knowledge that the U.S.S.R. did in fact possess the bomb also might tend to incline third countries toward a position of neutrality between the United States and the U.S.S.R.
5. If at some later time we should learn with certainty that the U.S.S.R. did possess the atomic bomb, this knowledge would be of importance in reevaluating the necessity for precautionary measures to reduce U.S. vulnerability to atomic attack. However, this is a matter of primary concern to the NME.

Knowledge of the rate at which the U.S.S.R. produces bomb fuel would be of even greater importance than knowing when a bomb has been exploded, but whether it is possible by scientific methods to obtain such information is entirely outside the competence of the Department of State.