I am sending you, herewith, an assessment of the work of the First Committee of the General Assembly that has been prepared by the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs.

DATE: 20/12  FROM: V.P. Suslov
It has been said that the undefined but great expectation with which the eighteenth session of the General Assembly began, failed to produce any concrete results. Such an assessment is incorrect for two reasons. Admittedly, the international détente triggered initially by the signing of the Moscow treaty, and strengthened by the promise of further bilateral talks, provided an atmosphere conducive to meaningful negotiations and gave rise to a sense of hope and optimism which was understandable. However, to expect the Assembly to produce all-around satisfactory solutions to all the major issues before it was to ignore or fail to comprehend fully the extremely complex nature of the problems. Secondly, the proposals adopted by the Assembly on the recommendations of the Political Committee not only served their essential purpose of helping to maintain the détente but in some cases the decisions indicate substantial progress on important issues. In other cases the decisions, despite their limited scope helped to bring out clearly the highest common denominator of agreement among the major powers. It is certain that these decisions will have a definite positive impact on future negotiations.

The debate in the First Committee, more than anything else, reflected clearly the desire on the part of delegations to avoid as far as possible bringing controversial issues to the fore. This favourable atmosphere prevailed with a few interruptions until the end of the session. On the major issues of disarmament and outer space, there was little attempt to score debating points or to adopt resolutions by the force of sheer majority in voting. Controversial issues were either postponed, as in the case of the Romanian item on actions on the regional level with a view to improving good neighbourly relations among European States having different social and political systems, or was played down as in the case of the Korean item.

Among the resolutions adopted, two stand out clearly because of their possible impact on future negotiations, either bilateral or within the framework of the UN. These two resolutions will emerge as perhaps the most outstanding achievements of the eighteenth session. The first of these related to the agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union on the non-stationing in outer space
of objects carrying nuclear weapons or other kinds of weapons of mass destruction. The second resolution, embodying legal principles covering the activities of States in the exploration of uses of outer space, was the result of long and determined negotiations and will help to clear the way for constructive discussions in the Committee on Outer Space. These two resolutions, which were adopted in the Committee by acclamation, augur well for future co-operative efforts in the field of outer space and also in the field of disarmament.

On the question of general and complete disarmament, it was obvious from the start that the United States and the Soviet Union, like on other issues, were anxious to secure a unanimous resolution. The non-aligned Powers failed in their attempt to give specific directives to the 16-Nation Committee, but their efforts did result in a compromise resolution adopted by acclamation. The desire of the United States and the Soviet Union to preserve their freedom in negotiations and, as far as possible, to keep matters in their own hands, emerged more clearly than before. The resolution which was finally adopted was almost entirely procedural in nature. On the question of collateral measures, some progress had been expected, and although at one stage there were efforts to include in the resolution certain collateral measures which held out maximum promise of fruitful negotiations their efforts were not pursued in order to obtain a text that would command general approval.

The one collateral measure that was debated at some length was the question of nuclear-free zones. This was the first occasion when this issue was discussed in the UN as a specific item. The debate did not disprove the thesis that agreement among the major nuclear Powers was a pre-requisite of any significant step towards disarmament. However, it
did confirm that opportunities exist for smaller States to take initiatives for limited or regional disarmament arrangements. The resolution that was adopted was also procedural in nature but in a sense the Assembly, by the adoption of this resolution, gave its blessing to a "declaration of intention" by some of the Latin American States. The difficult phase will come when the countries concerned try to translate their intention into a concrete agreement and the co-operation of the nuclear Powers may have to be sought much sooner than envisaged in paragraph 3 of the resolution which "trusts that at the appropriate moment, after satisfactory agreement has been reached, all States, particularly the nuclear Powers, will lend their full co-operation for the effective realization of the peaceful aims inspiring the present resolution". There is no doubt that the active co-operation of the nuclear Powers will be needed not only after an agree- ment has been reached but to help achieve the agreement. This resolution asks the Secretary-General to "extend such technical facilities as may be required in order to achieve the aims set forth in the resolution". What these "technical facilities" involve is not clear at this stage, but one should interpret this phrase in a broad sense, and not merely restrict it to providing conference services.

On the issue of nuclear testing, there was, as had been expected, widespread support for the Moscow treaty on a limited test ban. There were at the same time strong warnings from a large number of delegations, and particularly those of the non-aligned Powers, that the Moscow agreement would be ineffective unless additional progress was made in two directions: (1) the partial treaty is transported into a comprehensive one since intensive underground testing might lead to the resumption of testing in other environments; (2) France and the People's Republic of China are persuaded to reconsider their negative position and accept the obligations
of the test ban treaty. The debate confirmed that there are still serious obstacles in the way of a comprehensive test ban agreement and, in spite of the commitment by the three original signatories in the preamble of the treaty to make efforts to achieve the discontinuance of all tests for all time and the continued insistence of the non-nuclear Powers on the need to achieve this goal, it was generally felt that there was no early prospect of the conclusion of a comprehensive treaty on testing. This view is confirmed by a remark made by the representative of the United Kingdom during the course of a statement when he said that the world must "digest" the partial test ban treaty before work can be started on a comprehensive agreement. The United States and the Soviet Union reaffirmed their respective positions on the question of verification of a ban on underground testing. The resolution that was adopted is extremely mild in character and, without laying down any directives on how to proceed in order to achieve the next step, calls for universal adherence to the partial treaty and for continued negotiations.

The debate on the original Ethiopian item for the convening of a conference to ban the use of nuclear weapons was perfunctory. This was not unexpected, since this issue evoked very little interest even during the previous session.