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CONFIDENTIAL

Draft

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20 January 1972

Dear Mr. Nixon:

It was with gratification that I learned you will be having a meeting with the Soviet leaders in Moscow in the latter part of May 1972 to review all major issues with a view toward further improving bilateral relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and enhancing the prospects of world peace.

I would like to take advantage of the opportunity thus provided to bring to your attention and to the attention of the Soviet leaders a matter which has been of great concern to all members of the world community and to me personally. I refer to the question of achieving a comprehensive nuclear test ban agreement or, more specifically, a treaty to ban all underground nuclear weapon tests.

As you are aware, the United Nations has been discussing this matter ever since Prime Minister Nehru first proposed a halt to nuclear weapon tests in 1954. Resolutions calling urgently for an end to all nuclear weapon tests have been adopted at virtually every session of the General Assembly since 1957. No other question in the field of disarmament has been the subject of such extensive study and discussion. I believe that all the technical and scientific aspects of the problem have been <sup>so</sup> fully explored that only a political decision is necessary in order to achieve final agreement. I detect a growing feeling amongst the nations of the world that an underground test ban is the single most important measure, and perhaps the only feasible one within the near future, to halt the nuclear arms race as regards its qualitative aspects. There is also a widespread feeling that the lost opportunities that have existed in the past for reaching agreement should not be repeated, and that the question can and should be solved now.

Arguments have been put forward that an underground test ban by the Soviet Union and the United States must depend upon success or substantial progress in the bilateral Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between the Soviet Union and the United States. Others have argued that the reverse is true. According to unofficial reports, these talks have been mainly concerned with the quantitative rather than the qualitative aspects of the nuclear arms race. There is a growing belief that an agreement to end all underground testing, which has far exceeded the number and rate of previous testing in the atmosphere, would facilitate the achievement of agreements at SALT on qualitative

as well as quantitative limitations to the nuclear arms race. It might also facilitate agreement on reducing and not merely on establishing limits to the number of existing nuclear weapon systems.

While I recognize that differences of views concerning the effectiveness of seismic methods of detection and identification of underground nuclear tests still remain, experts of the highest standing believe that it is now, or soon will be, possible to identify all such explosions down to the level of a few kilotons. Even if one or two such tests could be conducted clandestinely, it is most unlikely that a series of such tests could escape detection. Moreover, it is doubtful whether there would be much military significance to tests of such small magnitude.

When one takes into account other existing national means of verification and the possibilities provided by international procedures of verification such as consultation, inquiry, and what has come to be known as "verification by challenge" or "inspection by invitation", it would seem that the possible risks of an agreement for an underground test ban would be small indeed.

It is, moreover, questionable whether new information of much military significance about nuclear weapon design can be obtained through further testing, and whether for the foreseeable future there are any important strategic reasons for continuing such tests. Recently, a new argument has been raised that continued testing is necessary to ensure the reliability of existing weapons. Such "confidence testing" could presumably go on without end. But if such tests were halted, even if this were to result in some deterioration in the reliability of nuclear weapons, this would apply more or less equally to the over-large stockpiles of both the Soviet Union and the United States; there would therefore be no substantial change or threat to the nuclear strategic balance.

Many governments regard the cessation of underground nuclear weapon tests by the Soviet Union and the United States as proof of the intention of the two governments to live up to the moral and political obligations they have undertaken in the Preamble to the Moscow Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the legal obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons of 1968. A number of governments are also convinced that the ending of such tests might provide some inducement to the two nuclear powers which are not parties to the Moscow Test Ban Treaty at least to reduce the number of

their nuclear weapon tests and eventually to stop them entirely. I feel confident that the moral and political consequences that would follow from a decision by the Soviet Union and the United States to halt all nuclear weapon tests could have a beneficial effect on the possibilities of halting all tests by everyone, everywhere.

In any case, it appears to have become customary to include in arms limitation treaties provisions for withdrawal and for holding review conferences; these would provide additional safeguards in case any country considered its vital interests were affected or threatened.

As you are aware, considerable disquiet has been generated by the recent underground nuclear tests, reportedly of several megatons, conducted by the Soviet Union in Novaya Zemlya and by the United States in Amchitka. Indeed, there appears to be widespread and growing dissatisfaction by non-nuclear weapon states with the failure of the two powers to stop nuclear weapon tests. At its recent 26th session, the General Assembly adopted three resolutions, in stronger and more specific language than ever before, calling for a halt to all nuclear weapon tests at the earliest possible date.

A comprehensive test ban treaty would strengthen the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It would be a major step towards halting what has been called "vertical proliferation", that is, the further sophistication and deployment of nuclear weapons, and would also strengthen the resolve of potential nuclear weapon states not to acquire nuclear weapons and thereby help to prevent the "horizontal proliferation" of such weapons. On the other hand, if nuclear weapon tests by the nuclear powers continue, the future validity and perhaps even the viability of the Non-Proliferation Treaty may be jeopardized. I need not describe the greatly increased dangers that would confront the world in such event.

In the light of all these considerations, it would seem that the potential risks of continuing underground nuclear weapon tests would far outweigh any possible risks from ending such tests.

I am bringing these considerations to your attention in the hope that your forthcoming meeting may provide a renewed opportunity for you to review the question at this time, so that it might be possible for your Government and the Government of the Soviet Union to agree at your meeting in Moscow to concentrate on the achievement of a complete cessation of all nuclear weapon tests. My predecessor has appealed publicly to the Soviet Union and the United States to announce that they would concentrate on achieving a comprehensive

test ban in 1972. I would now like to appeal privately to both Governments to endeavor to take such decisions during their bilateral talks as would ensure the achievement of an underground test ban at the earliest possible date in 1972, and perhaps to announce at their meeting in May their agreement, at least in principle, to this effect.

I am sending a similar letter to Premier Alexsei N. Kosygin.

I take this opportunity, Mr. President, to extend to you the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.