

June 20, 1959

**Letter from the Communist Party of the Soviet
Union Central Committee to the Chinese Communist
Party Central Committee on the Temporary Halt in
Nuclear Assistance**

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Summary:

The Soviet Central Committee informs their Chinese counterparts that, in light of the arms reduction talks taking place in Geneva, Soviet nuclear assistance must cease. The Chinese had requested a sample atomic bomb and technical data, but the Soviet feared that doing so would imperil the efforts of the socialist countries in Geneva.

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Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
20 June 1959

Letter to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on Not Giving China Samples of Nuclear Weapons and Technical Information

(Given to Comrade Zhou Enlai on 26 June 1959 by Soviet Embassy Counselor Sudalikov)

To the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party

Dear Comrades!

We think it necessary to inform you about the situation in the Geneva talks regarding a universal and permanent prohibition of the testing of nuclear warheads and, moreover, to exchange some ideas with you regarding how the Soviet Union will henceforth assist technically the plan of People's Republic of China to produce nuclear weapons.

As you know, in the struggle to attain peace, reduce arms, and prohibit the testing and use of nuclear weapons, the initiative for many years has been in the hands of the socialist countries.

We have attained this result: Under the pressure of world opinion, the United States and Britain have been forced to engage with us in talks on halting the testing of nuclear warheads.

Prior to this meeting [i.e., the ongoing Geneva talks], an experts meeting that was held in Geneva in 1958 drafted a joint proposal on how to supervise implementation of an accord.

In the talks now in Geneva on prohibiting the testing of nuclear warheads, we have already reached agreement on most of the articles of an accord.

In the past there have been great differences on the issue of supervising underground nuclear testing, since instruments are still not able to reliably detect these kinds of explosions.

When [British Prime Minister Harold] Macmillan was in Moscow, he put forward a compromise proposal, namely that it be stipulated that, based on the request of the concerned parties, a set "number" of inspections be carried out in each country every year. We agreed to this proposal.

[President] Eisenhower at first refused to accept this proposal, but after a time he was forced to announce that the United States was willing to study this proposal.

During the Geneva foreign ministers' conference, the Soviet, U.S. and British foreign ministers met several times, discussing the negotiation process with respect to the prohibition of nuclear testing. In these meetings, [U.S. Secretary of State Christian] Herter and [British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Selwyn] Lloyd both hoped that experts from the three countries could meet in the near future to exchange views, study ways to detect high atmospheric testing, and formulate standard rules with respect to how to dispatch monitors.

We agreed to convene this type of meeting of specialists in Geneva.

As a result, it is now all the more difficult for the Western countries to avoid reaching an accord on the prohibition of the testing of nuclear warheads.

As you can see, we are now doing all we can to achieve success in our efforts to prohibit nuclear testing and, moreover, the situation is now developing toward the possible signing of an accord on the universal and permanent prohibition of nuclear testing. This will be a great victory for the socialist camp and the cause of peace.

Therefore, we believe it is necessary for us to convey our thinking to you with respect to measures regarding present Soviet assistance to China in producing nuclear weapons.

China's Minister of the Second Machine Building Ministry has now requested that we turn over a sample atomic bomb and bomb design technical data to China.

This request has been raised just as the Geneva Conference is drafting an accord prohibiting nuclear testing and just as a summit meeting is about to be convened. At the summit meeting, the issue of prohibiting nuclear testing will certainly be studied, if this issue has not already been resolved before the [summit] meeting.

We must consider that if the Western countries should learn that the Soviet Union is giving a sample nuclear weapon and design technical data to China, they may seriously wreck all the efforts undertaken by the socialist countries to strive for peace and to relax the tense international situation.

Therefore, we believe it is necessary to convey the following several points to you:

Under present conditions, we believe that we should concentrate the efforts of Soviet experts on helping China to establish a nuclear industry (including the production of fissionable material), [since] this will become the basis for producing nuclear weapons. At the same time, based on the opinion of Soviet experts carrying out technical assistance in China, it will still take China at least two years to produce fissionable material, since it is necessary to complete a great deal of work to mine uranium ore and establish an atomic industry. Only at that time will a whole tranche of nuclear weapons technical data be necessary.

We hope during this period of time to thoroughly clarify the attitude of the Western countries on the issue of prohibiting nuclear testing and relaxing the international situation. After that, it will be possible to make a decision on how we should jointly act.

If, we are finally able to sign an accord on the universal and permanent prohibition of the testing of nuclear warheads, then, under these conditions, the implementation of nuclear weapons testing by the People's Republic of China or other socialist countries is likely to give Western countries grounds to abrogate the testing accord and declare that the Soviet Union has destroyed this accord.

Of course, based on the fraternal relations among us, should war break out, the nuclear weapons in the possession of the Soviet Union will be used to counterattack the encroachment of any aggressor and protect all countries in the entire socialist camp.

Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

20 June 1959