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QUESTION OF MEASURES TO PREVENT SURPRISE ATTACK

Note dated 22 January 1959 from the Permanent Representative  
of the United States of America, addressed to the Secretary-  
General

22 January 1959

The Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to transmit the attached text of a note delivered to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 15 January 1959 concerning the problem of minimizing the possibility of surprise attack.

The Representative of the United States has the honour to request that the Secretary-General arrange to circulate the text of this note of 15 January as a document of the United Nations.

TEXT OF A NOTE DELIVERED TO THE SOVIET MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 15 JANUARY 1959

The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and has the honour in behalf of the Governments of the five countries from which the Western experts were drawn to refer to the report of the conference of experts to study possible measures which might be helpful in preventing surprise attack, which by agreement suspended its meetings on 18 December 1958 in view of the Christmas and New Year's holidays and in order to report to Governments on its work.

While the meetings of this conference were helpful in clarifying for each side the views of the other side, it is a source of deep regret to the United States that more substantive progress was not made in joint technical-military analysis of the problem of minimizing the possibility of surprise attack.

For their part, the Western experts at the conference suggested a plan of work designed to facilitate a logical technical-military analysis of the problem by assembling the facts necessary for evaluating the effectiveness of various systems of inspection and observation. To facilitate the discussions the Western experts presented technical papers on the significant instruments of surprise attack, and on the techniques which would be effective in observation and inspection of such weapons. The Western experts also presented technical papers on illustrative systems of observation and inspection for certain instruments of surprise attack, as well as a technical analysis of the value of warning systems and of factors to be considered in the integration of such systems.

The experts from the other side refused to join the Western experts in a technical-military analysis of measures of observation and inspection which would minimize the possibility of surprise attack except within the context of political proposals considered by the Western experts to be beyond the competence of the experts conference. It was thus not possible to conduct a joint analysis of the type of measures most likely to bring the greatest amount of security against surprise attack and of the nature and value of various possible preliminary measures which Governments might wish to institute.

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It thus became apparent that the experts from the two sides were operating under two different terms of reference and that this difference was preventing the type of joint technical analysis that would give real meaning to the discussions.

It also became clear that future discussions of the surprise attack problem could not be productive until Governments had resolved these differences. Referring to the Soviet Government's note of 10 January, the Government of the United States, for the reasons cited above, does not believe it useful or desirable to set a date of 15 January for reconvening the conference. The Government of the United States will continue to consult on this subject with the other Governments to which the Soviet Government's note has been addressed.

The United States believes that the problem of reducing the danger of surprise attack is so important that renewed efforts must be made. The United States Government, therefore, is giving high priority to continued study of this problem, and is carefully studying the record of the conference in order to determine whether the terms of reference for future discussions can usefully be clarified. Thereafter further reviews of this question will be transmitted to the Soviet Union.

The United States Government has reason to believe that the Governments of the other four countries from which the Western experts were drawn are also studying the record of the conference for the same purpose.

It is hoped that the Soviet Union will also carefully review the records of the conference and study means of resolving the present differences and of reaching an agreed basis for early and fruitful resumption of discussions of the surprise attack problem.

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