

Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on Nuclear Testing

December 19, 1985

The Soviet Union has both publicly and through confidential diplomatic channels continued to press its proposal for a moratorium on all nuclear explosions that it made public on July 29. For our part, the President has long advocated a dialog with the Soviet Union to arrive at the improved verification procedures necessary for any testing limitations. It was the President who extended an unconditional invitation to Soviet experts to visit the U.S. nuclear test site to measure the yield of a U.S. nuclear test, with any instrumentation devices they deemed necessary. This initiative was designed with the hope that it might set in motion a process that could increase confidence and cooperation between our nations regarding limitations on nuclear testing. The U.S. would, of course, welcome Soviet willingness to agree to reciprocal visits to nuclear testing sites.

It is through measures of this type that a basis could be created to develop and institute the type of verification measures needed to make effectively verifiable the pending treaties dealing with nuclear testing, namely, the threshold test ban and peaceful nuclear explosions treaties. This is an issue, however, quite separate from that of a moratorium on nuclear explosions.

As we have stated many times previously, the U.S. has learned through experience that moratoria cannot be counted on to lead to the enhanced security desired. The Soviet Union broke a nuclear testing moratorium a quarter of a century ago with the most intensive nuclear test series in history -- some 40 explosions over a period of several weeks. We made clear when the Soviets announced their moratorium the reasons for our nuclear testing limitation policy, as well as for continuing the U.S. testing program. U.S. testing is required to ensure the continued credibility and effectiveness of our deterrent and to ensure the reliability and safety of the U.S. arsenal.

While we are actively investigating technologies that may one day make the U.S. less dependent on offensive nuclear weapons for our security, nuclear weapons will remain, for the foreseeable future, the key element of our deterrent. In such a situation, where both the U.S. and our allies must rely upon nuclear weapons to deter aggression, nuclear testing will be required. A comprehensive test ban, however, is a long-term objective of the U.S. in the context of achieving broad, deep, and verifiable arms reductions; substantially improved verification capabilities; expanded confidence-building measures; greater balance in conventional forces; and at a time when a nuclear deterrent is no longer as essential an element as currently for international security and stability. The United States is currently involved in discussions with the Soviet Union in most of these areas.