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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: January 11, 1972

SUBJECT: Venting of Underground Explosions

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PARTICIPANTS: Victor F. Isakov, Counselor, Embassy of the
 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
 Jack F. Matlock, Country Director, Soviet
 Union Affairs
 John J. Kadilis, Multilateral Political
 Relations Officer, Soviet Union Affairs

TIME AND PLACE: January 10, 1972, 2:00 PM, Mr. Matlock's Office

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Mr. Isakov called at his request on Mr. Matlock to present, inter alia, the following oral statement in response to our Aide Memoire of December 16 (State 226692) calling the Soviet Government's attention to the venting of their underground nuclear explosion of November 27, 1971:

"On September 27, 1971, an underground nuclear explosion was set off in the Soviet Union, which was accompanied by an insignificant

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leakage of gaseous radioactive products into the atmosphere. This explosion, like all previous ones, was set off under conditions precluding penetration of radioactive products beyond the boundaries of the USSR. The responsible Soviet agencies took, and are taking, all measures required for strict compliance with the Moscow Treaty of 1963 banning nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water, pursuant to which explosions causing fallout of radioactive products outside the limits of national territory are banned.

"Thus the assertion of the American side, to the effect that in a series of cases when nuclear explosions were set off in the Soviet Union radioactive products were discharged beyond the limits of its territory, does not correspond to the facts.

"Such assertions can hardly be considered as serving the interest of both States in enhancing the role and significance of the Moscow Treaty.

"The Soviet side feels that it must call attention to the following fact.

"On November 24, 1971, the United States set off an underground nuclear explosion in the State of Nevada as a result of which, according to a statement by the Chairman of the United States Atomic Energy Commission, radioactive products were discharged into the atmosphere and in the area of the explosion there ensued a perceptible increase in radiation. Moreover, there were no official estimates of the possibility of the escape of a radioactive cloud beyond the limits of the national boundaries of the U.S.A. In view of this, the Soviet side would like to receive an explanation from the American side in the light of the Moscow Treaty banning nuclear tests in the three media."

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Mr. Matlock said he would convey the Soviet reply to the proper authorities. He commented that the Department's Aide Memoire of December 16 was based on evidence collected outside the Soviet Union and that, therefore, we feel that the venting of the Soviet test of September 27, 1971, is an established fact. Mr. Matlock asked whether the Soviet Government had evidence of venting beyond US borders of the November 24 test conducted in Nevada. Mr. Isakov replied that he was not familiar with the technical information. He could only refer to the statement made by the Chairman of the United States Atomic Energy Commission. Mr. Matlock stressed that the difference between the two events was that debris from the Soviet test had passed beyond Soviet borders. In his personal view, there would seem no basis for the Soviet Government's request for information regarding the November 24 test in Nevada unless the Soviet Government has evidence that radioactive debris passed beyond the US border.

Mr. Isakov went on to say that he thought an understanding had been reached not to keep making reference to small events, and that to continue pressing on this subject in that way would work to undermine the importance of the Moscow agreement. Mr. Matlock responded that this had not been a small event. In fact, much more radioactive material had been collected outside Soviet territory after the September 27 test than had been the case in venting occurrences for several years. Mr. Isakov replied that Soviet technicians had not established that fact. In any case, he said he was not an expert, and this was a matter for technicians. Referring to Mr. Isakov's statement about undermining the importance of the agreement, Mr. Matlock said that, on the contrary, not calling the attention of the responsible party to events of this nature would undermine the Limited Test Ban Treaty.

The conversation then turned to other subjects which are reported separately.

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