

Diplomatic Tempo Picking Up

New East-West Accords Probable

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By Chalmers M. Roberts
Washington Post Staff Writer

An intricate international diplomatic game is now under way, chiefly between Washington and Moscow. It affects the war in Vietnam, the future role of West Germany in the Atlantic Alliance and hopes for a treaty to halt the spread of nuclear weapons.

In short, major moves are now possible after a long period of diplomatic freeze. And despite all the caution flags being hoisted by senior American officials there is a new sense of excitement among the diplomats.

Three visitors to Washington this past week have played a major role: Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko, smiling a new smile; British Foreign Secretary George Brown, hoping a new hope; West German parliamentarian Kurt Birrenbach, the eyes and ears of Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, fearing old fears.

Gromyko started it with indications that Moscow now feels it has new leverage in Hanoi and with statements that the Kremlin is not objecting to present arrangements affecting Germany within the Atlantic Alliance.

Negotiations Seen

The intimations from Gromyko and from other more secret channels are that the time is drawing closer when North Vietnam will be prepared to negotiate. One factor appears to be the increasing pressure of the American military effort on Hanoi's forces. The other is the apparent American willingness to keep the fighting within the present ground rules; that is, not to escalate.

The most hopeful indications are that a break in the long impasse will be possible sometime in 1967.

Soviet Communist Party boss Leonid Brezhnev felt it necessary yesterday to rebuff President Johnson's diplomatic bear hug because of the war in Vietnam.

But Brezhnev did not de-

News Analysis

mand that American troops leave Vietnam before negotiations. And he welcomed what he called "certain changes and shifts" by the United States on the nuclear weapons treaty, joining President Johnson in the view that prospects for an agreement have improved.

The President said last week that only "two nations," meaning China and North Vietnam, are now blocking peace in Vietnam. And there is reason to believe that Hanoi is slowly shaking itself free of Peking's grip.

Moves Possible

Thus, while Brezhnev thunders publicly about American policy in Vietnam, the Soviet Union appears privately to be operating on the assumption that the war can and will be liquidated, thus opening the way to new East-West moves.

Gromyko and Brezhnev talk optimistically about the chances for a non-proliferation treaty. Gromyko indicates, as some of his listeners heard it, that Moscow will accept the so-called McNamara Committee substitute for a "hardware" solution on the German nuclear weapons issue.

If so, the Soviets are inviting the Americans to put the heat on the West Germans to accept the McNamara consultative arrangement and to forget any idea of taking part in any form of multilateral nuclear force.

On this issue Brown appears to have been pushing the United States to agree. But to the Erhard regime in Bonn it begins to smell like a proposal for a deal with Moscow—help to end the war in Vietnam in exchange for a limitation on Germany's nuclear role.

Issue Not Closed

So far the United States has insisted, as it did to Gromyko, that it has not

foreclosed a German role in a multilateral force. Erhard is insistent that Washington never foreclose the so-called European option, that is, the possibility that someday Western Europe would be so politically unified that French and British nuclear arms might form the basis of an all-European force.

But that is a highly unrealistic prospect now. More immediate is the Atlantic nuclear force idea in which West Germany would have a role. And here there are signs of wavering in Bonn.

Optimists think that next year Bonn on its own accord may drop the Atlantic option and thus permit a non-proliferation treaty. Pessimists see only Soviet trouble making in Germany. All factions deny any possibility of a Washington-Moscow deal involving Vietnam and the nuclear treaty.

Yet the Germans find strange what they call the gap between Gromyko's hopeful remarks and Administration assurances. At a minimum, then, Moscow already has created new suspicions in Bonn of Washington.