

NIXON MAY CANCEL

ALEUTIANS A-TEST

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Aides Say He Weighs Halt
or Delay—Other Nations'
Concern Called Factor

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 8 —

President Nixon, according to knowledgeable officials in the White House and the State Department, is giving serious consideration to canceling or postponing the underground test of a five-megaton antimissile warhead scheduled for next month on Amchitka in the Aleutians.

At San Clemente, Calif., last week, officials said, Wayne Smith of the National Security Council staff discussed with Henry A. Kissinger, the President's assistant for national security affairs, the reasons advanced by the Defense Department and the Atomic Energy Commission for going ahead with the test, code-named Cannikin.

The two men were also reported to have discussed the reasons advanced by the State Department, the White House

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Council on Environmental Quality, the Environmental Protection Agency and the White House Office of Science and Technology for cancelling it.

Weighing heavily in the President's consideration, officials suggested, was the opposition of the Canadian and Japanese Governments.

Last February, Mitchell W. Sharp, the Canadian Minister of External Affairs, sent a formal protest to the State Department about the planned explosion, which would be by far the largest ever detonated by the United States under ground, because of environmental risks.

The Japanese Government, officials said today, while registering its concern, has not lodged a formal protest.

The Atomic Energy Commission, in an environmental impact statement last June, said that "Cannikin is expected to have only a minimal long-term impact on the environment" because the radioactivity released "will be trapped underground," because the triggering of an earthquake in this area of geologic faults is "very unlikely" and because "a damaging [seismic sea wave] is even more unlikely."

U.S. Is Concerned

Despite these assurances, there is concern here that something might go wrong, with consequent impairment of relations with Canada and Japan.

President Nixon is to greet Emperor Hirohito in Anchorage Sept. 26 when the Imperial plane makes a refueling stop on its way to Copenhagen for the first tour abroad of a ruling Japanese Emperor.

The Emperor's plane will also stop in Alaska on his return trip. Between the two dates, the Cannikin explosion is expected to take place if the President approves it.

In response to questions yesterday, Charles W. Bray 3d, a State Department spokesman, said the President had not yet made a decision.

When asked if this could be interpreted as meaning the President was considering cancellation, Mr. Bray said his answer could be so read.

No Date Is Set

In response to further questioning today, Mr. Bray emphasized that no date for the explosion had been set.

These remarks, coming on top of Mr. Smith's visit to San Clemente last week, have given rise to speculation that the President might announce a cancellation just before, or during, his meeting with the Emperor.

The President, according to officials, is not greatly concerned about environmental risks because of reassurances by A.E.C. scientists. But, the officials said, he is attaching much importance to the contention of scientists with long experience in nuclear weaponry that this test is not necessary.

This argument, advanced in Congressional hearings by Dr. Jeremy J. Stone, director of the Federation of American Scientists, is that the warhead to be tested was designed for the long-range Spartan missile in the Sentinel system, which was designed to defend cities against a light Chinese attack.

When Mr. Nixon in 1969 scrapped the Sentinel system for the Safeguard system, designed to defend Minuteman offensive missile sites against a heavy Soviet attack, Dr. Stone argues, the justification for the large Spartan warhead disappeared because the primary reliance of Safeguard should be placed on the smaller, short-range Sprint missiles.

Officials here say that this argument has considerable support in the Office of Science and Technology and the Office of Management and Budget.

Effect on Arms Talks

Mr. Nixon was also said to be "weighing the possible effect of the Cannikin explosion on the strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union in Helsinki.

On May 20, Mr. Nixon announced that the two Governments had agreed to "concentrate efforts this year" on a treaty limiting antiballistic-missile systems. There have been reports that both sides are talking of limiting such systems to the defense of capital cities and, in the case of the United States, to a few Minuteman sites.

Scientists say that Spartans with the large warhead to be tested would not be necessary if such an agreement were reached and that going ahead with Cannikin might impede such agreement.

Another consideration for the President, officials said, is the intense opposition to Cannikin in Alaska. Gov. William A. Egan and Senator Mike Gravel, both Democrats, and Senator Theodore F. Stevens, a Republican, oppose the test.