

Nixon taking risks with Amchitka nuclear blast

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On Friday, November 5, 1971, pending legal appeals, the largest nuclear blast ever known to mankind may be detonated over a mile underground on the remote island of Amchitka, part of the Aleutian chain extending into the Bering Sea off the coast of Alaska. The five-megaton blast will be equal in force to five million tons of TNT and will constitute an explosion 250 times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Why?

That's the question scientists, environmentalists, conservationists, and citizens of two continents are asking. They predict the blast will cause earthquakes and tidal waves

to say nothing of atmospheric pollution and the destruction of the Amchitka ecology.

Unfortunately, the complete answer will not be known until after the blast. And there's the rub. What if the result is catastrophic? How do we know that the Amchitka blast will not end a cycle of atomic escalation that began back in 1946 in a world-wide holocaust?

Where does it all end? Even if this blast is "successful" will it be the last, or will there be further tests until a disaster vividly brings home to us what had best remained in our imagination.

Since the first Atomic Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6.

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1945, America has been confused about the use of nuclear power. At that time, the United States could have recognized the reality of the bomb (as reflected in the deaths and radiation injuries of its victims) and taken steps to bring atomic power under control for peaceful purposes.

The atomic bomb was the ultimate weapon—the one that could destroy the user as well as those toward which its fantastic power was directed.

But rather than admit this blatantly obvious fact, what did we do? We proceeded to expend all our resources on some method of cleaning it up so it could be deployed as a tactical measure in wartime.

A number of tests followed on the heels of each other in the late 40's. A-bombs were exploded underwater and in the atmosphere resulting in spectacular columns of water and huge balloons of fire. Bikini, a remote bed of coral in the South Pacific was immortalized as a euphemism for a scanty bathing suit.

Those tests proved one thing: that if bigger and more powerful atomic weapons were going to be employed in war, they could not be delivered to the target in a conventional bomber. But because the Air Force was then dominated by the "bomber generals," it wasn't until the early 50's that the concept of the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) began to take hold.

Nancy Lipton and Leonard S. Rodberg authored a chapter of "The Pentagon Watchers" called *The Missile Race—The Contest with Ourselves*, in which they state that one reason for the low priority of the ballistic missile had been the relatively low explosive yield of the atomic bombs available in the late forties and the consequent need for exceptionally high accuracy if the missile was to be an effective delivery system. In November of 1952, the Atomic Energy Commission staged a mid-Pacific test of thermonuclear, or hydrogen, bomb that proved one could be constructed with a very high explosive yield. This opened the way to new rocket technology and the rise of the ICBM. Curiously enough, Dr. Henry Kissinger, the Chairman of President Nixon's National Security Council

and a leading proponent of the Amchitka test, wrote in his tour de force *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* in 1957 "When the first megaton hydrogen weapon was exploded over Eniwetok, the degree of fall-out had *not been anticipated*, although the phenomenon was well understood. In retrospect, it appeared inevitable. *In a sense this is the dilemma of the nuclear period: each technological breakthrough liberates forces which reach so far beyond all previous experience that most of the experts are at a loss to interpret the probable consequences.*"

Where are you Henry, now that we really need you?

Reading Kissinger's book is an enlightening experience and a study in the psychological make-up of a man who yearns to wield power. He seeks to assess the meaning of the new atomic technology, regarding the task as "complicated by the very novelty of the challenge."

"Until power is used, it is what people think it is," he writes. "To a considerable extent the impact of the new (atomic) weapons on strategy, on policy, indeed on survival, depends on our interpretation of their significance."

And then, almost as if by accident, we run across Kissinger's rationale for the development of nuclear weapons; the justification of what generated a world-wide arms race and the harbinger of today's gigantic Amchitka blast. He writes: "Nuclear technology makes it possible, for the first time in history, to shift the balance of power solely through developments *within* (italics his) the territory of another sovereign state."

In other words, we don't have to go out and conquer territory through force of arms to achieve our ends in the world, we just have to keep exploding nuclear devices larger than the other guy to show him we have the capability upon demand! And same-o for them!

The entire world has had to live under the shadow of atomic extinction for 25 years. Except for a brief period when President Kennedy negotiated the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963, the tensions of escalation have permeated all elements of life. A Nuclear Generation was born, matured and

now awaits its fate.

President Kennedy's actions in halting the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons first and then calling on the Soviet Union to do likewise and thereby creating the conditions favorable for the Test Ban Treaty are of such tremendous magnitude it almost staggers comprehension. He literally saved this planet from destruction. The Atomic World experienced its first respite and was well on the way to a total ban of nuclear testing when those elements which profited by war and world tension ordered him assassinated.

And the race was on again.

David Wise and Thomas B. Ross in their book *The Invisible Government* detail the Atomic Energy Commission as one of the "elite" agencies in the web of CIA control: "The AEC is responsible for making estimates of the atomic-weapons capabilities of the Soviet Union and other nuclear powers. Since 1948 the United States has maintained round-the-clock monitoring of the atmosphere to detect radioactive particles from atomic tests. Samples are collected by the U-2 and from an analysis of the samples, the AEC can determine not only the fact that atomic explosions have taken place but also the type and power of the weapons detonated."

The AEC also plays an important role in assessing test-ban proposals. It carries out intensive experimentation in ways to shield atomic explosions from detection and ways to pierce the shielding devised by other nations.

"Because of the law which set it up and its close relationship to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy in the Congress, the AEC is one of the most independent branches of the Invisible Government."

It is becoming more and more evident these days that such agencies as the AEC operate outside of partisan politics, yet are in the mainstream of the development of overall foreign policy—even to the point where they *control* partisan politics. A study of such agencies and their relationship with the CIA, the Defense Department and the Department of State points to a well-orchestrated program for a Pax Americana predicted on this coun-

try's Nuclear Superiority.

This long-range plan was briefly interrupted and upset by the election of President Kennedy but proved ultimately more powerful as evidenced by the president's ruthless murder. While the Vietnam war raged and escalated, the different agencies reformed and cornered new powers. The election of Richard Nixon in 1968 marked the confluence of the destinies of all the proponents of a nuclear-based foreign policy and the enshrinement of their chief apologist, Dr. Henry Kissinger, as Chairman of the National Security Council.

The stage was set for Amchitka.

Because the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 banned atmospheric testing, the AEC went underground. Justified as vital to the nation's defense by President, Cabinet and Congress, the AEC began exploding nuclear devices in Nevada and hardly anyone noticed or even cared.

The Nevada tests finally culminated in the explosion of a one-megaton bomb on the island of Amchitka in 1969.

One can almost imagine the ensuing conversation: "Well, since they predicted disaster for a one-megaton test and it went all right, why not go for five?"

"O.K. Why not?"

So a five-megaton blast was scheduled for the fall of 1971 on the island that had successfully endured the smaller explosion. But the announcement was followed by an explosion of public protest five times greater than before and the Federal Government found itself with a public relations battle on its hands — on that it could not lose.

The first move was made by the Committee for Nuclear Responsibility, a Washington-headquartered group headed by Nuclear Physicist John Gofman and former US Senator Charles Goodell. They brought suit in Washington's US District Court against the AEC, charging that a 5-megaton blast would do irreparable harm to the environment.

Along with co-plaintiffs including the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and SANE, they specifically charged that the blast could trigger "a succession of earthquakes and tidal

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waves of unpredictable size and direction" and contaminate the surrounding ocean with radioactive materials and leak poisonous debris into the atmosphere.

The debris, they said, could travel outside the US, thus violating the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963. Their most serious claim was that the AEC had in fact broken the law by not filing an adequate environmental-impact statement on the test as required by the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act.

This brought to light the fact that of 253 underground nuclear tests held in Nevada, radioactive debris had escaped from 68 but had not crossed international boundaries. This was hardly a consolation to the Environmentalists who pointed out Amchitka Island's proximity to Russia and Japan.

While the suit was being studied in the courts, a change in personnel of the Atomic Energy Commission went almost unnoticed. AEC Chairman Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg resigned after ten years to return to the University of California at Berkeley as a professor of nuclear chemistry. President Nixon named James R. Schlesinger, an assistant director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, to replace Seaborg.

The significance of the shift was the replacement of a distinguished scientist with a full-time manager. *Time* magazine called the switch a "harbinger of a shift in the AEC's mission."

Nixon followed Schlesinger's appointment immediately with that of William O. Dobb to fill another vacancy on the five-man board and lo, the majority of commissioners on the AEC board were Nixon appointees. Moreover, they were men trained in administration rather than research.

The AEC immediately took on all the characteristics of a Nixon rubber stamp.

On August 31, 1971, US District Court Judge George L. Hart, Jr., ruled in favor of the government allowing that the atomic explosion planned for Amchitka Island was in the national defense interest. He said it would comply "with all relevant laws and treaties."

This ruling couldn't have been very pleasing to Alaska's Senator Mike Gravel who just a few days earlier charged that President Nixon was keeping secret a study that showed five of seven federal agencies opposing the planned nuclear test. The agencies opposing the test, Gravel said, were the Interior Department, State Department, Office of Science and Technology, Environmental Protection Agency and the Environmental Quality Commission.

Only the Defense Department and

the Atomic Energy Commission favored the blast.

Most frustrating to Gravel was the fact that the man in whose hands the final decision on the blast rested was the same man who had first ordered the 7-agency study and was now suppressing it under executive privilege: President Richard M. Nixon.

Gravel saw this imposing use of executive privilege as excluding the people from the decision-making process. In a forceful argument against the national security aspects of the blast he called the professed benefits "minimal" due to the fact that the entire system may be negotiated out in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between the US and the Soviet Union.

White House officials said they were studying the problem.

One of the most embarrassing aspects of Gravel's charges for the Nixon Administration was the revelation that the Environmental Protection Agency was against the blast. This was disastrous public Relations and had to be handled immediately. So, in a fantastic display of administration double-talk, EPA Chief William C. Ruckelshaus issued a statement saying he was "personally" opposed to the test and cited the potentials of earthquakes and tidal waves but quickly added that "national security arguments could outweigh environmental considerations!"

Obviously his conclusion must have been that in the event of earthquakes and tidal waves, there would be no need for national security.

To counter Gravel's charges, the White House quickly underlined the necessity of the blast as being to test a warhead for the Safeguard antiballistic missile. While not quoting President Nixon directly, White House "sources" revealed three reasons why the president would not consider canceling the tests. They will probably go down in history along with Vietnamization, Protective Reaction and the Defense of South Vietnam's Democracy as the greatest fallacies of all time.

Because such a device was scheduled to be the warhead of a Spartan missile, "it must be tested before we can deploy it," argued the White House. In addition, "we must convince the Soviet Union that the United States is serious about developing the ABM" and "a cancellation would set a bad precedent for future testing of large-sized weapons."

It isn't hard to detect the fine hand of Henry Kissinger in such illogical rationalizations. It's the old power play. Set off a big blast and scare the hell out of Russia. No matter we're in the middle of the SALT

talks. Hell, that's the best time to let 'er rip! We'll show those Commies we can set off a bigger blast than they can. Betcha Kosygin doesn't worry about the environment!

So we come down to the wire with Congressional charges and Administration counter-charges and neither side knowing for sure just what will happen.

And that's the real tragedy.

We're acting like a child whose mother has told him not to touch the stove because it's hot and he'll burn his finger. The child has two alternatives. To believe his mother and his empirical knowledge of testing the warmth of the stove. Or he can take a chance that his more experienced mother has somehow gone crazy and is lying to him. In a fit of megalomania the child touches the stove and — goddamn — it burns!

The Administration is made up of grown men acting like children. We can only hope that their atomic megalomania will not burn up too much of the world before they realize the infancy of their ways.

A handy warning is written in the Book of Revelations, Chapter 6, verses 12-17: And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Moral: Don't fuck around with Mother Nature.
