

# THE RUSSIAN BOMB

**Soviet atomic discoveries speed U.S. arms aid for Europe—and underscore problem for humanity**

Summer was officially over last week—and so was America's dream world of atomic security.

That world had begun at 8:15 on the morning of Aug. 6, 1945, when the atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima, Japan. It ended at 11 on the morning of Sept. 23, 1949, when from the White House in Washington, D.C., came a terse announcement by the President.

"We have evidence that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the USSR.

"Ever since atomic energy was first released by man, the eventual development of this new force by other nations was to be expected. This probability has always been taken into account by us. . . .

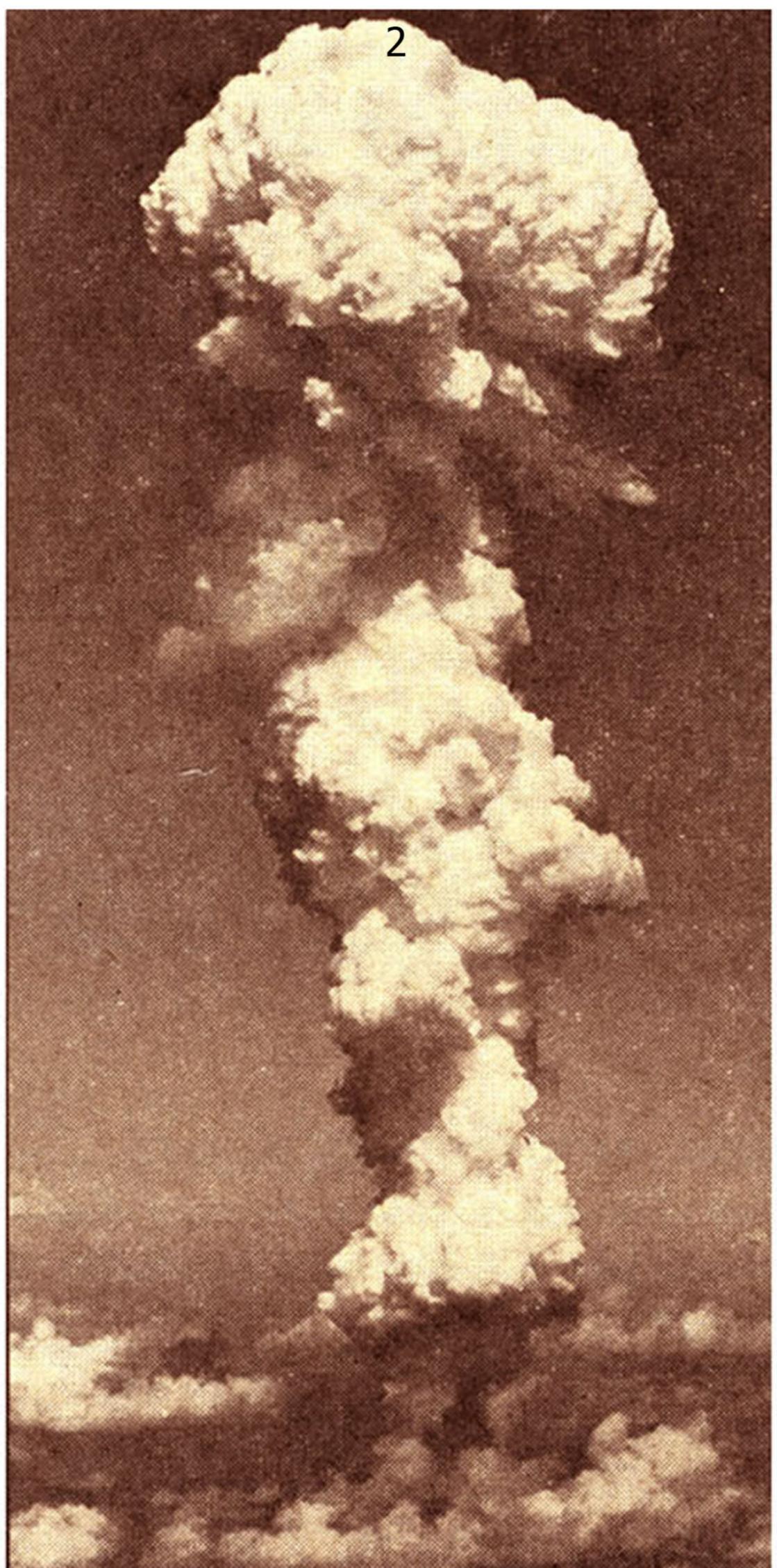
"This recent development emphasizes once again, if indeed such emphasis were needed, the necessity for that truly effective and enforceable international control of atomic energy which this Government and the large majority of the members of the United Nations support."

**Fools' Paradise Lost.** Now all the confident boasts about U.S. know-how and Russian stupidity, about U.S. production and Russian lack of it, about U.S. strength and Russian weakness were so much chaff on the wind. Four years of false optimism were ended—and with very little to show for them by way of preparation for this moment.

Apparently—although there was no official explanation—American discovery of the Russian blast had come about through intelligence reports and delicate scientific instruments that could detect an atomic explosion no matter where it occurred.

Perfecting and testing such devices was an important part of the A-bomb tests held last year at Eniwetok atoll in the Pacific. Best guess was that they work by detecting radioactivity borne world wide, after every A-bomb blast, by the steady winds of the stratosphere. Confirmation might come from seismographic, or "earthquake," recorders.

But explanations of how the Rus-



Acme

**U.S. bomb. Russian counterblast destroyed 4-year monopoly.**

sians got the "secret" differed. South Dakota's spy-hunting Sen. Karl E. Mundt (R.) spoke for some Red-scared Americans when he blamed it on "earlier and prevailing laxity in safeguarding this country against Communist espionage." Sober scientists, who had been patiently predicting since the first experimental burst at Los Alamos July 16, 1945, that Russia would soon have the bomb, pointed out dryly that, just possibly, Russian science and engineering skill might have had something to do with it, too.

The President's timing of the announcement, confirmed by the Russian press last Sunday morning, also caused some conjecture. Some thought it was an attempt to head off a Russian propaganda offensive. Others thought it was to assure added funds for military aid to Europe. And some were convinced it was designed to win Congressional approval for complete sharing of atomic knowledge with Britain and Canada—because, as *The Washington Post* remarked editorially, "what is imperative now is full partnership."

**Somber Silver Lining.** Full partnership, in fact, might be the one good result to come from the new development. No longer could it be argued that it would broaden the target-area for Russian spies hunting the big secret. And the only remaining U.S. "secrets" were technical matters which the British and Canadians were amply equipped to share.

For the average American, whose wife, kids and home were now directly on the firing-line, the news seemed to bring a shock, quickly rationalized by comforting thoughts of the U.S. lead in atomic weapons and its presumably sizable atomic stockpile (whose size no American outside the White House and the Atomic Energy Commission knows). This soothing reaction was speedily encouraged by official spokesmen and others who carefully minimized Russian potentials, confidently predicted that it would be years before Russian production could be a threat to the United States. Government scientists probably knew, but didn't say, whether the Russian bomb had been a "primitive" (uranium) or "advanced" (plutonium) type.

Only one top U.S. military man, the Air Force's Gen. George C. Kenney, was sufficiently alarmed to call for an around-the-clock radar alert to protect the country. Others kept quite calm. Frederick Osborn, chief U.S. representative on the U.N. Atomic Energy Commission, said the news should put U.N. discussions "on a more realistic basis." Gen. Omar N. Bradley played golf. Defense Secretary Louis A. Johnson, in the understatement of the week, cautioned newsmen not to "overplay" the story.

**Way Out?** In the A-B-C conferences and in the U.N., men hoped the announcement would prompt a renewed determination to seek really effective controls. But adding up Russia's sworn hostility to the Western World, her postwar imperialism and her apparent determination to strike when ready, it seemed impossible to overplay one basic fact which from now on would condition the lives of all the world's two billion people:

Never again would anybody, anywhere, be really safe—unless men could somehow manage to use, with real success, the only real defense against destruction: reason.

## Pathfinder

Vol. 56, No. 20

October 5, 1949

p. 15

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)