

MATTER OF FACT

By JOSEPH ALSOP

Dialogue of Giants

PARIS.

The Kremlin has begun a drive for a wholly new kind of East-West talk—a "dialogue of the giants" between the U. S. and the U. S. S. R., with all others excluded from the conference table.

The decision whether to embark on such a dialogue is just about the most serious purely diplomatic decision that can be imagined. The question has not been even tangentially discussed with the other Western allies. Yet some sort of a decision is going to have to be made rather soon, if only because the Kremlin's drive is rather well advanced.



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Ludicrously little attention has as yet been paid to this immensely significant and quite novel development. Yet the Kremlin's opening gun was fired some time ago. To be specific, Nikita Khrushchev reportedly told Aneurin Bevan, when the latter visited Russia, that tete-a-tete talks between the U. S. and the U. S. S. R. offered the one really hopeful way out of the world's present impasse.

The same statement was far and away the most striking feature of the letter that Khrushchev recently wrote to "The New Statesman and Nation," purportedly in answer to a published plea for nuclear disarmament by Lord Russell. In the entire population of the British Isles, Aneurin Bevan and "The New Statesman" editors are the people most likely to be alarmed and outraged by the prospect of exclusive U. S.-U. S. S. R. talks. One can only guess that Khrushchev wished to appeal to their not inconsiderable vanity by choosing them as his confidants, in the hope of winning them to his side in this manner.

More recently, these informal indications in the best Khrushchev manner have been reinforced by a formal and public statement. At the meeting of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow, in their official comments on the recent NATO conference, both Khrushchev and Andrei Gromyko rather elaborately pooh-poohed all the ordinary forms of East-West negotiation. But after remarking that the Soviets had often proposed a meeting between the heads of government of the capitalist and socialist states "to solve the problems of humanity," Khrushchev blandly added:

"If an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union can be achieved without prejudice to the interests of other countries, good results for peace will be achieved."

Short of sending a written invitation to President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles to join in a huddle with him, Stalin's heir could hardly have been more specific. If no sort of answer to his invitation is given, the silence will be taken by the Kremlin as the most chilling negative answer. This in turn can sharply affect Kremlin policy. So the question should at least be carefully considered in all its aspects, instead of being settled by mere default, as seems to be the present tendency.

Curiously enough, Secretary Dulles himself appears to be of two minds about this question. He certainly did not want the NATO conference to include an invitation to renewed East-West negotiations. During the first two days of the conference, he sat mute and grim, while both Prime Minister Macmillan and France's Foreign Minister Pineau insisted that such an invitation must be issued. He finally realized that he had to pay for NATO agreement on military questions

—especially the medium range missiles—by his own agreement to the invitation to East-West talks.

Yet when the form of this invitation was being discussed, Secretary Dulles strikingly remarked that there really were only two kinds of East-West talks that could possibly do any good, talks within the framework of the United Nations, and exclusive talks between the U. S. and the U. S. S. R. alone. Thus even the American Secretary of State is not sure that a dialogue of the giants would be wholly fruitless.

Whether anything could be achieved by such a dialogue is quite simply a question that cannot be answered until and unless a dialogue has been attempted. The Soviets are now giving two different kinds of signs. They are giving signs of great self-confidence and increased aggressiveness, founded on their conviction of their own strength. But they are also giving signs of quite genuine concern for the future of a world in which the whole scene will be dominated by the new weapons that can destroy life on earth.

In these circumstances, if the Soviets could get down to business in a corner with the Americans, could they conceivably be induced to agree to a peaceful future of live-and-let-live? No one can tell.

But there is one thing that can be told, here and now, with absolute certainty. While John Foster Dulles is Secretary of State a dialogue of giants is impossible. For any such dialogue in which Dulles is the American spokesman or the President's chief adviser will almost automatically break up the Western alliance. The distrust of Dulles, the lack of confidence in Dulles are too great and too profound among our allies. They would expect to be sold down the river. They would hurry to try to make their own bilateral deal with the Kremlin. And so the alliance would come to grief for good.

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