



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

JUN 24 1966

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HANDLE VIA BYEMAN CONTROL SYSTEM

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT


SUBJECT: Disclosure of U. S. Satellite Reconnaissance.

In accordance with your request, a committee composed of U. Alexis Johnson, Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, Cyrus Vance, Richard Helms and General Andrew Goodpaster has prepared the attached memorandum commenting on the proposal on the foregoing subject submitted to you by Mr. Rostow on May 27.

You will note that, entirely apart from important security considerations, it was the conclusion of the group that, on the basis of political considerations alone, it would not be desirable at this time to disclose publicly or to the Soviet leaders our classified national satellite reconnaissance program. While Secretary Rusk did not have an opportunity to review the attached memorandum, he is also in accord with its conclusion, as am I.

You will note that the memorandum recommends that we should nevertheless keep this possibility in mind if and when we have a disarmament proposal for which a publicly acknowledged satellite surveillance capability would form an indispensable part.

This matter has not been discussed with Mr. Clark Clifford.


George C. Ball
Acting Secretary

Enclosure:

Memorandum.

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Disclosure of US Satellite Reconnaissance

Dramatic disclosure of our satellite photographic capability would have significant political and security consequences -- some adverse, and some advantageous. The discussion below sets aside the question of what degree of disclosure would so reveal technology that it would seriously contribute to Soviet capability in this field, and assumes that actual cameras and other classified components of the system would not need to be declassified. If a decision were to be made to carry out a policy of disclosure the foregoing security questions would require careful examination. In part this examination is now being carried out by the NSAM 156 Committee in connection with its study of proposed NASA satellite earth-sensing programs.

It may be useful to begin by noting the reasons why this system has to date been highly classified. First, it originally provided us a crucial source of intelligence presumably not known to the Soviets. Second, and related, was the avoidance of countermeasures. Even after the Russians, early in the game, learned that we were conducting satellite photography, uncertainties about the degree of our capability -- and probably a lag and underestimate of it -- has made various active and passive countermeasures less likely or less effective. Third, while the Soviets have charged the United States with space spying in their propaganda media and in international forums, they have not made a direct challenge. It has also been felt that an openly avowed US disclosure of the activity and insistence on the right to continue could provoke a serious confrontation between ourselves and the Soviets on the issue.

At present, the situation in this regard is considered to be quite satisfactory; any proposal which would precipitate the issue of satellite surveillance thus requires strong justification on political grounds.

The chief political gains which might come from public disclosure are:

- (1) a dramatic demonstration that we now live in an open world, and that the advance of

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science and technology has made many traditional ideas of military secrecy and security obsolete;

- (2) a reaffirmation of US military superiority and revelation of a basis for confidence in US knowledge of Soviet military strengths and weaknesses;
- (3) removing any restraints on non-military uses of satellite photography, and demonstrating major potential peaceful uses of this technique such as natural resources surveys, mapping, and the like;
- (4) providing a new basis for arms control and disarmament agreements where the surveillance capability of satellites would meet essential verification requirements;
- (5) making known, and potentially available, an overseeing eye to keep watch over regional local confrontations, such as in Kashmir or the Near East; and
- (6) gaining more open acceptance of satellite surveillance, thus too defusing possible future controversies over MOL.

The major political disadvantages which could result from such disclosure are:

- (1) the possibility of precipitating a major confrontation, if the Soviet Government should feel compelled to challenge strongly the right of the US to ferret out its military secrets by satellite surveillance;
- (2) a possible intensification of the arms race, if the USSR felt compelled to make claims (true or exaggerated or false) about its military capabilities which could prompt demands for more extensive US military programs to meet these alleged Soviet threats;

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- (3) undercutting the present substantial degree of world support for US insistence on necessary verification measures for disarmament agreements;
- (4) stimulation of suspicion and concern among parties to local regional confrontations, such as India and Pakistan, and Israel and the UAR, that the other party is being given information on its secret military activities; and
- (5) general psychological reaction against the loss of privacy and sovereignty, especially since it is the two superpowers who would be revealed as the arbiters of disclosure; even total disclosure and publicity would not dispel suspicions that there might be something more hidden, and in any case general disclosure without advance approval would of course compromise sovereign control over access to information.

A number of these points are obverse sides of the same coins. Thus, the advantages of an open world would be weighed against the disadvantages, and the balance of judgment would surely vary from country to country. By and large, most countries would probably accept and many would welcome a general disclosure of this capability where the results were available through an impartial international organization, and especially if the emphasis had been placed on peaceful scientific and economic purposes. There would, however, be pressures for international management and control of the satellite surveillance system, and for concentration on peaceful uses and even for the exclusion of military intelligence-gathering activities. Moreover, there might be greatly inflated expectations that the major powers -- and above all the United States -- would provide funds to exploit the unveiled natural resources of underdeveloped countries. Finally, there would be exceptions, and they could be significant; some countries would oppose unauthorized survey and publication of information on their countries, and perhaps some of the new nations would object on principle to infringement of their recently acquired sovereignty. Not everyone, even among non-communist countries, wants an open world.

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In general, from the standpoints of an "open world", and especially of economic advances, it would seem possible and preferable to launch new unclassified programs, unilateral or international, rather than surfacing the classified national US reconnaissance programs. This would avoid, or at least reduce, pressures for internationalization and "de-militarization" of the US reconnaissance program, since that program would remain classified (though no doubt much speculation and probably some further leakage about it would occur).

Effects in the disarmament field would be mixed. Current US disarmament proposals are already framed with an unawareness of, and some reliance on, our unilateral intelligence collection capabilities, including satellite reconnaissance. The change would, therefore, be limited to public explanation of the basis for US readiness to accept given levels and forms of formal verification. A dramatic disclosure of satellite surveillance capabilities, especially a full disclosure of KH-7 and more advanced future systems, would almost certainly lead many countries to be less sympathetic to US insistence on the need for many forms of extensive, and more visible and intrusive, verification -- little matter how well justified our position would be. Needless to say, it would be harmful to US security interests to become involved in public debate over the limitations to satellite reconnaissance and other forms of US intelligence, which is what such a debate on verification could become. On the other hand, public knowledge of the US satellite surveillance capability could of course provide a better basis for national consensus in this country in support of any disarmament agreement hinging strongly on this capability for unilateral verification. On balance, it would appear that from the standpoint of disarmament policy it would be preferable to see a gradual increase in world public awareness of the general capability of satellite surveillance rather than a disclosure of the unilateral US military reconnaissance program. There might, of course, be a need at some time to disclose publicly the fact that the US is capable of monitoring some given disarmament agreement by unilateral means, including satellite surveillance, but without necessarily opening up the classified program itself.

It is difficult to weigh the possible impact of disclosure on the military situation with confidence. In

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the first instance, public disclosure --even though with Soviet foreknowledge and tacit acquiescence -- could trigger Soviet countermeasures which would reduce the effectiveness of our surveillance, and thus require larger US military programs to hedge against greater uncertainties with respect to the Soviet military posture. While the Soviets are already aware of our satellite surveillance and probably its general present level of effectiveness, they have not instituted many direct passive (and active) countermeasures of which they are capable. In general, the Soviet political and military leaders, already privately aware of our surveillance, would presumably not be prompted to radically different approaches simply because of sudden public awareness of US surveillance. It is, however, not easy to judge their reaction. Having placed such very great emphasis on vigilance and secrecy as vital elements of national security, they might feel compelled to undertake not only political reactions but even some passive countermeasures such as large-scale camouflage efforts in order to offset the sudden impact on their general public and armed forces personnel in particular. (Moreover, countermeasures which the Russians might undertake for political and morale reasons might in fact limit US acquisition in ways which the Soviet leaders had failed to appreciate; for example, camouflage netting over strategic missile silos,

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More broadly, public disclosure could prompt any of a wide variety of demonstrative, declaratory, or even actual military moves by the Soviet Union designed to weaken the impression in the world (and at home) that the United States had in fact peeled away significant layers of Soviet military secrecy and security. Some such claims, demonstrations, or programs could prompt either popular or partisan pressure for unjustified more extensive US military programs, or conceivably could in fact require new programs. By and large, as in the case of countermeasures, present Soviet military programs have presumably been decided upon with knowledge of the US surveillance capability, so that significant new additions would not be expected. Even Soviet claims, however, for example with respect to mobile strategic missiles undetectable or unlocatable by overhead reconnaissance, could spur calls in the US for larger -- and parallel -- American programs. Moreover, if effective increased passive countermeasures were used, this might become a valid requirement.

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The effects of disclosure in countries other than the USSR has not received much past attention. As earlier noted, the effects might be favorable, unfavorable, or -- most likely -- varying. On the whole, it seems likely that there would be initial adverse reactions in a few cases, and general acceptance without enthusiasm. India, and especially Pakistan, would probably each be suspicious of what information on its military activities we might be providing to the other. The UAR would probably be suspicious that we were uncovering its military secrecy and that the information would be reaching Israel either officially, or otherwise. In short, from the standpoint of regional confrontations, particularly of non-aligned or semi-aligned powers, it is not clear that an "open world" necessarily would be a more stable world, if for no other reason than that some of the countries concerned might act on the basis of their own suspicions that it was not. It is, of course, quite possible that some regional conflicts could be deterred by knowledge of, or dampened down by knowledge gained from, satellite surveillance. But there would still be cases of conflicting versions of the truth in which satellite surveillance -- and its limitations -- might even be taken into account by an aggressor. For example, satellite surveillance could not be counted upon to detect infiltrators, but would detect mobilization prompted in the defending country -- which the aggressive party might then use as justification for escalation. Thus the United States, as the possessor of this surveillance technique, could be put on the spot to pronounce on disputes on which satellite surveillance might not apply impartially to the two sides, and knowledge of this fact could even play into the hands of the aggressor. Moreover, even in cases to which this consideration did not pertain, the United States could be drawn into disputes in which we did not wish to become involved. Automatic general disclosure of information would also make it harder for a pacifistically-inclined government to ignore certain actions by an aggressive neighbor than would be the case if it could choose to overlook and ignore such actions. Finally, the Soviets could embarrass us by drawing attention to sensitive US installations in third areas, particularly in neutral countries, but also for example in Pakistan.

We come now to the point that has usually been considered the main argument against disclosure: the Soviet reaction. The Soviet Government, more consistently in the Brezhnev-Kosygin period than before, has carefully avoided any explicit reference to or approval of satellite reconnaissance.

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Khrushchev's occasional private remarks (and those of his now demoted son-in-law Adzhubei) suggesting acquiescence in mutual unpublicized unilateral satellite surveillance were never printed in the Soviet press, nor have they been even informally repeated by the present Soviet leaders. Since 1963 the Russians have not insisted on branding satellite reconnaissance as illegal in international space agreements that they have desired, but they have not stopped referring to such activities directed against military objectives as espionage and illegal. Clearly, the Soviet leaders are willing tacitly to acquiesce in secret US and Soviet reciprocal surveillance. It is not, however, possible to draw from this fact the conclusion that they would agree to, or even acquiesce in, public revelation of this activity.

In our judgment, the Soviet leaders would react sharply against the idea of public disclosure of this US activity, and if we unilaterally disclosed it they would feel compelled at the least to launch a vigorous charge that the US was engaging in reprehensible, dangerous, and illegal military intelligence collection, and that the USSR was not. In this event, while they would probably not institute overt and extreme active countermeasures such as shooting at a US reconnaissance satellite, even that possibility cannot be excluded. It is our judgment that the Soviet leaders would not be prepared to join or to acquiesce in a disclosure which admitted to the Russian people and armed forces that an enormous portion of their vaunted secrecy had long been an open book to the United States -- and that they knew it. Nor could they feign not having known it, since this would imply that they had been caught vulnerable. And it would be highly embarrassing to Moscow to stand charged by Peking with collusion with Washington in sharing each others guilt in intruding on the sovereignty of many other countries.

There would also appear to be a problem in deciding whether to disclose all our capabilities, including future improvements, or only the less detailed ones with which the Soviets probably credit us. For example, if we did not disclose our full capability and this fact were later somehow revealed, we could be accused of withholding in order to claim requirements for verification in the disarmament field. On the other hand if we did, we would not only assist the Soviet program, but also we could place the Russians in the position of having somehow to compensate for their inferiority.

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If, nevertheless, a positive decision in principle was made, two specific questions of tactics are raised by the Memorandum of May 27. First, we believe the suggestion of a private approach to Moscow by a special Presidential Mission would require careful further consideration. It would probably be preferable to alert the Soviet leaders to our intention than to face them with a sudden public fait accompli, and it would give us the opportunity to test out the intensity of the negative Soviet reaction before finally deciding on a public disclosure. It might, however, be better to take a preliminary sounding in low-key rather than raise the issue suddenly with the Soviet leaders through a high-level Presidential emissary (whose presence in the Soviet Union would, moreover, require explanation). We believe that it is very unlikely that the Russians would favor or join in making such a disclosure, and they would of course be able to marshal their position for an ordered public counteraction if we did act anyway. The second tactical question is the possible role of the UN. Assuming our intention to keep our unilateral reconnaissance program, a hostile Soviet reaction, and mixed and varying reactions elsewhere in the world, it would seem undesirable to bring the matter into the UN or the UN into the matter. Photography could be offered to one or more appropriate UN or other specialized international agencies, but the modalities (and practical purposes) of such sharing need further consideration.

The general conclusion of this analysis is that it would not be desirable to surface our classified national satellite reconnaissance program on political grounds, even apart from questions of military security. Perhaps, however, many of the advantages could be gained, with considerably fewer disadvantages, by moving forward with peaceful applications of space observation. This subject, which requires careful consideration, is presently under interdepartmental study by the NSAM 156 Committee.

At the same time, the balance of advantage and disadvantage might be somewhat different if and when we had a new disarmament proposal in which an acknowledged satellite surveillance capability would form an indispensable part. We should keep such a possibility in mind.

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