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26 JUL 1965

File MOL Policy

POLICY ON PUBLIC INFORMATION ASPECTS
AND INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS TO THE
MANNED ORBITING LABORATORY

1. THE MANNED ORBITING LABORATORY AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY

The proposed Manned Orbiting Laboratory will have as its initial objective the development and demonstration at the earliest time of an operationally useful high resolution manned optical system. MOL is scheduled to make its first manned reconnaissance flight in 1968.

Since 1962, it has been the announced policy of the United States Government to "avoid situations, statements, or actions which, in the context of our satellite reconnaissance program, could later be exploited as evidence either of alleged U. S. aggressiveness or duplicity." This policy has been advanced through carefully planned security measures: by never openly revealing the nature or extent of U. S. satellite reconnaissance activities we have not forced or influenced other nations (particularly the USSR) to react publicly against our space overflights.

Considering this background, what is the most favorable context for introducing the MOL program to the American and international public? Will growing world-wide interest and enthusiasm for manned space flight minimize the possibility of international protest? Or will

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the fact that MOL is a military spacecraft carrying military pilots make it more objectionable internationally than current unmanned satellite reconnaissance activity? Will the USSR allege that MOL contains weapons? If so, how could or should the claim be countered? Will the growing tacit acceptance of unmanned satellite reconnaissance develop to a point where by 1968 MOL is entirely acceptable internationally? The answers to these questions may affect the success of MOL operations as well as the total national security.

In recent years satellite reconnaissance has been the major source of United States strategic military intelligence of the Soviet Union and Communist China. The United States has relied greatly on this information in evaluating international military capabilities and in determining its own force structures. The information has been particularly important in the United States' evaluation of Soviet strategic missile and other offensive weapon capabilities and of Soviet and Chinese strategic military research and development programs.

Denial of satellite reconnaissance information to the United States, or a reduction in the program's effectiveness, would have a significant adverse impact on United States national security.

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II. BACKGROUND ON THE PROBLEM OF "LEGITIMIZATION" AND DISCLOSURE

NSC Action 2454 (Tab A), with its "Eighteen Points", forms the basis for the existing policy of secrecy and carefully controlled efforts to gain acceptance of satellite reconnaissance. In varying circumstances, this policy has been reviewed and re-affirmed periodically since its promulgation in July 1962. The advent of the MOL, with its primary reconnaissance function, has generated concern and comment from various U. S. government agencies concerning the security of existing and future satellite reconnaissance activity.

III. THE PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF THE MANNED ORBITING LABORATORY: CONSEQUENCES OF DISCLOSURE

The United States' satellite reconnaissance program is a national program conducted in secrecy. The character of the program is based on five major objectives developed in response to NSAM 156, expressing the desire to:

1. "Maintain our freedom of action unilaterally to conduct reconnaissance satellite operations."
2. "Prevent foreign political and physical interference with the conduct of these operations."
3. "Prevent accidental or forced disclosure of details of the operations or end products of the U. S. satellite reconnaissance program."

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4. "Avoid situations, statements or actions which, in the context of our satellite reconnaissance program, could later be exploited as evidence either of alleged U. S. aggressiveness or duplicity."

5. "Facilitate the resolution of any conflicts which might arise between the essential technical and security requirements of the U.S. satellite reconnaissance program and the international commitments and foreign policy objectives of the United States in a manner which is in the over-all best interests of the national security of the United States."

The primary objective, abstracting those listed above, is to forestall foreign or domestic actions that would prevent the United States from using satellites for reconnaissance. This objective is not changed by the advent of MOL.

Would we enhance the acceptability of MOL by private disclosure to hostile nations? There is great danger in disclosing MOL's essential secret -- the high resolution of its photography -- to hostile nations. Such a disclosure would arouse apprehensiveness over our intelligence capability and might stimulate those nations -- especially the Soviets -- to renew their historic opposition. Further, since Soviet military astronauts overfly the United States routinely,

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a reconnaissance disclosure by the United States would be a confusing defensive action. The Soviets might presume that the true character of the MOL must be quite different from that offered in disclosure. Therefore, any announcement of high resolution photographic capability could have an unsettling influence upon the Soviets with protest, camouflage, and even physical counteraction as possible responses. No definable "good" would accrue to the United States from a private disclosure of the MOL mission.

Do we enhance acceptability by public disclosure? The existence of a U.S. requirement for effective intelligence of the Sino-Soviet area is generally clear to the governments of the free world. In spite of this acceptance it is unlikely that the U.S. could gain widespread support in any international forum for a positive affirmation to conduct satellite reconnaissance, especially with the introduction of a manned vehicle. The newly emerging small nations are strongly nationalistic. Their representatives could view a Soviet/U.S. debate over manned or unmanned reconnaissance with quiet detachment, but if faced squarely with a vote on the "space rights" of their own nations they would very probably choose to affirm total sovereignty. Friendly large nations are no exception to this rule; they simply enter the debate at an earlier point. Even arguments for "common defense" would normally

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yield in the face of arguments for sovereignty. The United States could, if necessary, debate the issue of the free use of space in any forum without apprehension. But it should carefully avoid any situation which forces a nation-by-nation roll call on photographic overflight.

As in the case of private disclosure, public disclosure would have the additional effect of forcing hostile nations to react, since the announcement would be construed as a deliberate flaunting of a provocative capability. The Soviet reaction to U-2 overflight is well known; public disclosure could provoke Soviet leadership into placing the U-2 and MOL in the same category.

Does continued secrecy create a bad image of the United States?

Secrecy does not mean illegality. The practice of conducting legal, secret operations in international waters and air space is well established. There is no reason for the United States to assume the lack of disclosure of details, timing, and results of satellite reconnaissance to be taken as a concession to illegality. The fact that these details are not disclosed becomes relevant only as the United States allows it to become relevant (for example, by reacting defensively to criticism in this regard).

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IV. THE FEASIBILITY OF CONDUCTING MOL FLIGHT OPERATIONS WITHIN
THE EXISTING FRAMEWORK OF NATIONAL POLICY

From the foregoing discussion it can be seen that disclosure of the MOL reconnaissance capability is an irreversible step which would have profound adverse effects on enemies, allies, and neutrals. Furthermore, no gain would appear to flow from disclosure.

MOL should therefore be operated within the guidelines of existing national policy and within the carefully-ordered security environment which already exists for military space programs. Such an environment *facilitates* enhances the achievement of the primary national objective indicated above, "...to forestall international or unilateral actions that would prevent the United States from using satellites for reconnaissance," avoiding unnecessary provocation in the international arena.

Achievement of this objective will require a firm position on several points.

First, there must be determined governmental resistance to any suggestion that MOL requires elaborate justification. MOL requires no more public justification than any other military space projects. The United States has announced that it will have a military space program and it has one. The United States has never made a secret of the fact that a number of its space projects are under military

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control and have military objectives. MOL must be treated as part of the mainstream of a continuing U. S. military space program.

Second, and corollary to the above, the public information program associated with MOL must be kept modest, low-key, and carefully planned. Particularly at the time of program approval, it will be in the best interest of the program -- internationally -- to avoid fanfare. Contractor publicity must be controlled. All public information releases must flow through a single DOD point-of-review -- the Assistant Secretary of Defense/Public Affairs. Public information stories will deal exclusively with the non-sensitive technological aspects of MOL, such as the booster system, the life support system, engineering for long life on orbit, launching technology, communication plans, biomedical experiments, etc. Operational goals will not be discussed in news releases. Public releases and response to questions should be designed to cover the flurry of interest which will be associated with a decision to go ahead with the program. This will permit deferral of releases and discussion of the launching phase until we get closer to those events, at which time the then existing circumstances can be taken into account. *↗*

Third, the publicly-announced mission of MOL must continue to be expressed solely as "the investigation and development of manned

It should be recognized that at the time the first MOL is launched the NASA Apollo program will be at its peak of manned earth orbital activity. Public interest in the MOL will be very little.

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X orbital capabilities." It should be noted that MOL is not a break with the past military space program. Dynasoar, which was a manned military space program since the 1950's, was cancelled because it was aimed toward the development of advanced reentry techniques and replaced by MOL to study man's capability in space. MOL should therefore produce no new objection. The MOL program was announced in December 1963 and \$150 Million was included in the FY 66 budget.

But not in direct association with MOL. Don't protest too much.

Fourth, the United States should be prepared to re-affirm its abhorrence of orbiting weapons and advise that no U.S. satellite -- operational or developmental -- carries weapons of any kind.* In view of its present agreement to ban weapons of destruction from orbit, this re-affirmation is somewhat trivial in impact; the believers will believe and the accusers will remain unconvinced.

Fifth, the tight security surrounding MOL's mission capability must persist regardless of comments and speculation (however accurate or inaccurate) by U.S. trade journals and the public press. Public information experience with unmanned satellite reconnaissance operations has shown that the most "devastating" publicity carries very little impact if completely ignored.

VI. POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY FOR THE MOL PROGRAM

A. GENERAL

1. The United States should maintain the legal position that the principles of international law and the U. N. charter apply to

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activities in outer space and, specifically, that outer space is free, as are the high seas. (NSC Action 2454)

2. The United States should continue to avoid any question implying that reconnaissance activities in outer space are not legitimate. Similarly, we should avoid any position declaring or implying that such activities are not "peaceful uses." (NSC Action 2454)

3. It is recognized that the United States cannot entirely avoid or disclaim interest in reconnaissance, so that where feasible the U.S. should also seek to gain acceptance of the principle of the legitimacy of space reconnaissance. (NSC Action 2454)

4. When confronted by specific international pressure to outlaw reconnaissance activities in space, the United States should continue to take a public stand for the legitimacy of the principle of reconnaissance from outer space, the precise form and extent of which would depend upon the circumstances of the confrontation. (NSC Action 2454)

5. The United States should, to the extent feasible, seek to avoid public use of the term "reconnaissance" satellites, and where appropriate use instead such broader and neutral terms as "observation" or "photographic" satellites. (NSC Action 2454)

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6. The United States should not, at this time, publicly disclose the status, extent, effectiveness, or operational characteristics of its reconnaissance program. (NSC Action 2454)

7. Strict control over public statements and backgrounding concerning reconnaissance satellites should be exercised to ensure consistency with the policy guide-lines suggested in these recommendations. (NSC Action 2454)

8. The United States should continue to discreetly disclose to certain allies and neutrals selected information with regard to the U. S. space reconnaissance program, making each disclosure orally and at a time while impressing upon them its importance for the security of the Free World. However, no information should be provided on the MOL at this time. If the program is questioned, the response should emphasize the non-aggressive nature of the program. Disclosures should be made in a manner that will preclude acquisition by the Communist Bloc of usable evidence of an official U.S. acknowledgment that we are conducting a satellite reconnaissance program. Proposals for such disclosures should include clearance by the National Reconnaissance Office. (NSC Action 2454)

9. The United States should in private disclosures emphasize the fact of our determination and ability to pursue such programs because of their great importance to our common security, despite any efforts to dissuade us. (NSC Action 2454)

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10. The United States should note in connection with private disclosures that, except in some cases for specifically defined disarmament agreements, the U. S. cannot agree to (a) declarations of the precise purpose of all satellites, (b) declarations of the equipment of all satellites, (c) general requirements for advance notification of all satellite launchings and the tracks of satellites, (d) pre-launch inspection of the satellites, or (e) a specific definition of peaceful uses of space which does not embrace unlimited observation.

(NSC Action 2454)

11. The United States should continue to describe the MOL program as a Department of Defense program. Provision in the design has been made to support general technological experiments and NASA will consider the capability available in conjunction with its needs. Separate ETR launches for general scientific purposes could be made and NASA could include experiments in the WTR launches. However, the classified military objectives will continue to have top priority and no steps should be taken to use any possible NASA interests as a cover.

B. SPECIFIC

1. The United States should continue to preserve the security of the National Reconnaissance Program by conducting Manned Orbiting Laboratory development and operations within a carefully conceived and disciplined security environment consonant with the spirit of NSC action 2454.

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2. The mission of MOL will be described solely as the investigation and development of manned orbital capabilities essential to national defense. It should be described as improved substitute for Dynasoar and no break from the earlier program of manned military activities.

3. The MOL program will not be justified publicly. MOL is a logical element of a continuing U. S. military space program; as such, it requires no more public justification than any other space program.

4. Public information on MOL will be carefully planned at a modest, low-key level. This will be especially important at the time permissible information on the operational phase will be released at or near launch times. All public information releases or statements on MOL made by representatives of any Executive Department or Agency will process for approval through the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/Public Affairs. Such news stories as are required will deal exclusively with non-sensitive technological aspects of MOL; operational goals will not be discussed.

5. All MOL launchings will be included on the U.S. portion of the United Nations registry of satellite launchings.

6. MOL reconnaissance products will be controlled in the TALENT-KEYHOLE security system after exposure, during processing,

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and throughout exploitation. The National Photographic Interpretation Center will exploit this product jointly with the Defense Intelligence Agency.

7. The United States will promote, within the bounds of security, the free exchange of bona fide non-sensitive data accruing from MOL experiments.

8. It may become desirable for the United States to re-affirm its abhorrence of orbiting weapons and advise that no U.S. satellite -- operational or developmental -- manned or unmanned -- carries weapons of any kind.

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