

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

BUREAU OF THE BUDGET

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.



June 20, 1958



MEMORANDUM FOR GENERAL CUTLER

With reference to our previous discussions concerning the status of approval of the 117-L advanced reconnaissance satellite program, which is to be discussed at the National Security Council meeting July 3, 1958, we think the following points are pertinent to NSC considerations and action on this program:

1. Objectives of the program. General Schriever's recent presentation to the Planning Board made it clear that the program contemplated by the Air Force includes not only a system for collection of intelligence data but also such other related and unrelated activities as early warning of ballistic missile attack, weather reporting, use of satellites for communications purposes, and conduct of research in support of a man-in-space program. We think it important that whatever action is taken by the NSC should make quite clear what specific objectives are being approved and avoid giving a blanket approval to the entire program. In view of the current state of planning of national space programs, some of which are to be the responsibility of the new National Aeronautics and Space Agency now being established, we suggest that approval of the 117-L program by the NSC at this time should be clearly limited to intelligence-gathering objectives and research related to possible future use of satellites for early warning. Discussions on other aspects of the program being proposed by the Air Force do not appear to require NSC action or approval at this time and should be handled through other regular channels in the formulation of the details of the "space" programs.

2. Schedule of the program. In addition to the above, the NSC should, we believe, consider the Air Force's proposed schedule for initiating satellite launchings in support of developmental as well as operational aspects of the program. The form of NSC Action No. 1846, requiring Presidential approval only of the "scope of the operational capability," was based primarily on experience with the ballistic missiles programs in which there is a recognizable distinction between research and development and operational capability. We doubt that such a distinction is as meaningful in the case of satellites because every successful satellite launching is in a sense "operational." In the case of the 117-L project the first 23 launchings are described as "test firings," but, as General Schriever pointed out, the Air Force plans to launch its first 117-L "test" satellites from Camp Cooke into an orbit passing over the Soviet Union. Such launchings, if successful, would definitely be operational as far as policy implications are concerned. We believe that it is highly important that NSC consideration and action be specifically focused on the policy and international impact of the first launchings in the 117-L program, as well as on the scope, objectives, and time schedule of the overall program.

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3. Scope of program. For program planning and budgetary purposes, it would be helpful to have at an early date a Presidential decision as to the level of operations he desires in this program. However, we feel that approval of specific numbers of test and operational vehicles would represent a premature commitment to a program the total cost of which is likely to exceed greatly the current estimates. If the NSC action provides a clear statement of objectives and an approved schedule for initiating developmental and operational launchings, a sufficient basis will be available for implementing the program, and the exact number of vehicles can be arrived at in the course of regular budgetary determinations.



W. H. ...
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