

An Adaptation of Teller's "Open Skies" Proposal

As you are aware, the Open Skies Proposal -- that photographs derived from US satellites be made public at the convenience of the USG -- recently made by Dr. Teller is not new. A similar proposal was made in 1955 at the Geneva Conference and was rejected by the USSR. Alexis Johnson and others, per request of President Johnson, reviewed the open skies idea in 1966. They concluded that due to political considerations alone, it was not desirable at that time to take such an initiative but allowed it should be looked at again. President Nixon rejected the open skies suggestion in 1972.

Although previous proposals were rejected, many of the circumstances that were the basis for arguments against their adoption have changed over the years. Within the PRM-23 exercise, while the open skies issue was peripherally examined, a thorough examination in the broad policy sense has not been pursued. The proposal warrants further review and debate within the PRM-23 review context. The issue should not be raised until well into the PRC meeting, otherwise the entire meeting will be consumed on this issue.

Proposal

The US could openly admit to collecting imagery from space (Issue I, Option d), possibly marrying NRO Broad Area Search Collection with . Further, criteria could be established for the unclassified release of imagery meeting specific criteria (e. g. - photographic rather than electronic imagery, moderate (2 meter) or worse resolution, strict control of target and image content). Such images could be used for routine domestic civil needs, selected foreign civil requests, aids in times of emergency and natural disasters, releasable NTM products, and materials for pressing international legal issues.

This action could be taken independently or in conjunction with decisions on control of open civil imagery for wide distribution and control of sensitive intelligence data.

This option might be programmatically advantageous.

Although the continuance of KH-9 is in question, the NRO is investigating a quick-reaction system to satisfy the residual wide-area search mission not satisfied by the KH-11.

The basic camera could be modified for [] collection and flown on the shuttle, replacing []. Thus funds already programmed for KH-9 and [] might be converted, resulting in minimal additional cost to the government.

Advantages

- Would represent a major space policy initiative for this Administration in keeping with greater openness in government and the promotion of peaceful uses of space for universal peace keeping.
- The whole world is aware that both the US and USSR carry out continuous reconnaissance activities under the guise of National Technical Means of verification.
- Could provide enhanced survivability for our reconnaissance satellites and violations of disarmament agreements would be shared with the public as well as other governments, thereby further inhibiting violations.
- Would provide greater creditability to USG verification pronouncements and might provide warning to third and fourth countries where crisis situations and military mobilization would be seen and defused before resulting in conflict.
- Would provide imagery for domestic civil applications (crop forecasting, disaster relief, resource inventory, environmental protection); there is likewise an international need for such civil and peaceful applications. Such peaceful and economic applications will remain under utilization as long as current classification barriers remain.
- Would erode several issues currently under debate in PRM-23 ("fact of" and controls on remote sensing).

Disadvantages

- Unless carefully orchestrated, public disclosure of satellite photography would likely result in very negative Soviet reaction that would impact on overall US-USSR relations; however, their greatest concern would stem from the potential use of this imagery by the PRC for military purposes.
- Satellite photography is ambiguous and requires interpretation and argumentation from other intelligence sources. Treaty violations are difficult to determine from photography alone.
- An overzealous press and unconstrained bureaucratic interest could lead the public and foreign countries to conclude the worst (treaty violations or impending conflict).

~~TOP SECRET TALEN KEYHOLE~~

- Could, although an intriguing and thought-provoking notion, be construed as a gimmick proposal.
- Would be met with considerable bureaucratic opposition since it represents a radical departure from current policy.
- Would cause considerable implementation problems of Freedom of Information Act proportion.
- May cause the Soviets to reassess what constitutes NTMs and thereby increase the vulnerability of other satellites.
- Some reservation might exist in Third World countries seeking to protect their sovereignty and proprietary interests.

An open skies policy is not an issue that requires immediate resolution; however, more study is needed of the wisdom, feasibility and timing of the possible release of photographic (as well as narrative) data than has been pursued in PRM-23.

~~TOP SECRET TALENT KEYHOLE~~

~~TOP SECRET/BYEMAN~~

RECOMMENDATION

You sign the memorandum at Tab I to Ted Walkowicz thanking him for his proposal, indicating your interests and concerns, and advising him that you will be conducting an overall space policy review that will address, amongst other issues, his proposal. The memorandum does not address details of his proposal, as to do so would require BYEMAN/Codeword classification.

_____ APPROVE _____ DISAPPROVE _____ OTHER

Attachment

~~TOP SECRET/BYEMAN/XGDS2~~