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DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

HANDLE VIA TALENT-KEYHOLE CHANNELS

9 September 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~

MEMORANDUM TO:

DOD	- Mr. Paul C. Warnke	
	Dr. Alexander H. Flax	
ACDA	- Mr. Adrian S. Fisher	
CIA	- Mr. Carl Duckett	
White House	- Mr. Spurgeon Keeny	
	- Mr. Charles E. Johnson	
NASC	- Mr. Edward C. Welsh	
NASA	- Mr. Thomas O. Paine	
State	- Mr. Thomas L. Hughes	

SUBJECT : Meeting of NSAM 156 Committee

Attached is a draft report which I wish to submit for consideration of the NSAM 156 Committee. I have rescheduled the meeting for Monday, September 16, at 3:30 p.m.

Charles E. Bohlen

Charles E. Bohlen

Enclosure:

"Disarmament Aspects of
Satellite Reconnaissance Policy"

WORKING PAPERS

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D R A F T 9 September 1968 HANDLE VIA TALENT KEYHOLE CHANNELS

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DISARMAMENT ASPECTS OF SATELLITE RECONNAISSANCE POLICY

THE PROBLEM

The United States Government is prepared to enter negotiations with the USSR with the aim of reaching an agreement to limit strategic arms. The United States will propose that the agreement would be enforced by maximum, or, if necessary, exclusive, reliance on national means of verification, meaning all types of observation satellites, as well as other surveillance activities carried out by one side -- either unilaterally or in conjunction with its allies -- outside the territory or territorial waters of the other side.

The problem is to permit such negotiations to proceed on this basis, and, at the same time, develop a policy which will sustain, if not reinforce two basic objectives in regard to United States reconnaissance programs:

(1) The maintenance of our freedom of action unilaterally to conduct reconnaissance satellite operations; and

(2) The prevention of foreign political and physical interference with the conduct of these operations.1/

DISCUSSION

Introduction: The President has approved a United States position for negotiation with the Soviets on limiting strategic arms, which includes the

1/ See "Report on Political and Informational Aspects of Satellite Reconnaissance Policy," NSAM 156 Committee, June 30, 1962.

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following provision:

"VIII. VERIFICATION

"The limitations described in paragraphs I through V are proposed to be verified by external [national] means."

In other documents detailing the United States negotiation position, it is provided that efforts be made to obtain Soviet assent to "supplementary means" (i.e., limited on-site inspections) of verification. However, given the traditional Soviet opposition to on-site inspections, the United States must be prepared -- and is prepared -- to rely exclusively on national means of verification if there is to be an agreement in the vital field of strategic arms limitations.

Indeed, it is only the development of such means which has made a realistic consideration of a limitation on strategic arms possible. Aside from likely Soviet objections to provision for on-site inspections, national means of verification, in particular observation satellites, provide the only feasible means of policing an agreement of the type and scope the United States has in mind. Briefly put, the United States proposal would prohibit the initiation of further construction of fixed land-based offensive strategic missile launchers and sea-based carriers, would limit the further construction of ABMs to a set and equivalent number on each side, and would ban altogether land-based mobile launchers, both offensive and defensive, and sea-based ABMs. It is apparent that on-site inspections could only play a supplementary role in the verification of such an agreement.

At the same time, it is vital to United States security interests to preserve the full integrity of its intelligence operations, particularly, in this instance, the unimpeded operation of observation satellites. The unique value of observation satellites in this regard has been amply demonstrated in recent years, and needs no further elaboration.

Since its inception in 1962, this Committee has established policy and information guidelines which, it is believed, have effectively accomplished this purpose. However, it is evident that these guidelines will have to be altered if the United States is to pursue the significant undertaking of reaching an agreement on limiting strategic missiles. We will have to discuss "national means of verification" with the Soviets. Congress and our Allies will have to be convinced that reliance on such means can effectively verify an agreement and thus safeguard Western security interests. And the American public and press will have to be given similar, though less explicit, assurances.

Formal Security Procedures. While not essential to the conduct of the disarmament talks, it would be highly desirable to downgrade the fact that the United States conducts reconnaissance satellite operations from its present classification of "TOP SECRET - TALENT KEYHOLE" to "UNCLASSIFIED". This action would greatly facilitate consultations with our Allies and with Congress; would ease the conduct of the negotiations themselves (e.g., in the preparation of reporting cables and the transmission of instructions); would simplify the preparation and dissemination of intelligence analysis; and would be necessary at some stage in presenting the proposed agreement to the press and public. The disclosure will hardly come as a surprise to readers of the American press, as this fact is becoming common knowledge.

Otherwise, no change in the present T-KH and related classification systems is recommended. The information on the results of reconnaissance satellite operations, and information relating to those operations, should continue to be subject to the restrictions of existing classification systems, except where departures from these restrictions are presently permitted. It is important to preserve the present degree of secrecy concerning the effectiveness, e.g., the degree of photographic resolution, of observation satellites. And while the fact of observation satellite operations is common knowledge in the press, it is equally important to safeguard the secrecy of certain aspects of operations.

Negotiations with the USSR. In previous reports, the recommendations of this Committee have been based on one over-riding tactical consideration: to avoid an open confrontation with the Soviets over the issue of reconnaissance satellites. It has been reasoned that if the Soviets, who have knowledge of our satellite operations, were not forced publicly to challenge these operations, they would be more inclined tacitly to accept them. This has so far proven to be the case.

The danger of a confrontation has also been diminished by the development by the Soviets of their own, extensive, observation satellite program.

Even so, it is still sound policy to avoid a confrontation. There is some evidence that the planned disarmament talks, while they will involve an exchange of views, will not undercut this policy; indeed, they could enhance the political and physical security of the United States observation satellite program.

In the first instance, the United States has repeatedly communicated to the Soviets its intention to place "maximum reliance on national means of verification." The Soviets must be fully aware of the meaning of this phrase, and have given no indication that they object to the proposition. Secondly, the talks, if they result in an agreement, would have the effect of formalizing Soviet acceptance of the US program (and vice versa). No agreement would be possible without such acceptance.

Leaving aside, for the purposes of this report, the question of how we handle tactically possible supplementary means of inspection, the Delegation is authorized, at a time of its choosing, to indicate to the Soviets that the term, "national means of verification," includes the use of observation satellites. No further effort should be made to define this term without instructions from Washington. The Delegation should establish a negotiating history to the effect that our willingness to conclude an agreement of this scope with maximum reliance on national means of verification is based on the assumption that one side will not impede the operation of the other's observation satellites. In discussing the withdrawal article, the Delegation should emphasize that any action by one party which interferes significantly with the other's verification capability or otherwise affects the capability of the other party to verify compliance with the agreement would constitute one of the grounds for withdrawal. While all of these points should be made in the course of discussions, the Delegation should bear in mind the desirability of avoiding an unnecessary confrontation and should proceed with appropriate caution.

In discussing our proposal with the Soviets, the Delegation should avoid revealing the effectiveness of our satellite photography. This applies both to discussion of verification per se as well as to the elaboration of our proposal which, in certain aspects, could reveal indirectly more than we would wish to regarding our capabilities. The matter will be blurred somewhat by the introduction of proposals for on-site inspection in regard to certain gray areas, such as ABM radars. And the Soviets can readily deduce a great deal concerning our excellent capabilities from numerous statements by United States officials concerning Soviet strategic forces. But this is a problem to which the Delegation will have to give careful attention. The best approach would be: (1) confine discussion of our positive capabilities for unilateral verification to generalities; and (2) limit discussion of details concerning our verification capabilities to those areas of the proposed agreement where there is some doubt as to full effectiveness of unilateral means and concerning which we might want to propose supplementary means of verification.

Consultation. It will be important to assure our most important Allies (NATO members, Japan) that the proposal we are advancing will protect United States and Allied security interests, in regard to both the substance of the proposal and the capability to verify effectively adherence to an agreement through national means. In consultations with our Allies, we should initially not volunteer an explanation of the meaning of "national means of verification" (this should be self-evident to our Allies, anyway),as these consultations should occur before the talks begin. We should also not initially indicate our willingness to accept, as a fall-back position, exclusive reliance on such means. However, once we have explored the question of verification with the Soviets, we should make our position explicit in regard to the first point.

The same considerations apply to consultations with Congress, and even more so. It will be important to hold these consultations at an early date, and on a more candid basis than with our Allies. Otherwise the proposed talks could create misunderstanding and possible controversy. However, the precise timing and scope of these consultations is a matter to be decided by the Secretary of State.

Presumably the briefing on our approach to, and the problem of, verification would be limited to a group of key members of Congress, and would take place within the context of a general discussion of our disarmament proposal. The briefing could include a general review of the findings of SNIE 11-13-68. These members of Congress should be advised not to reveal publicly our approach to verification until a clearer picture of Soviet attitudes emerges from the talks.

Statements to the Press and the Public. Although the likelihood of publicly provoking the Soviets into a confrontation over the operation of observation satellites should diminish once talks begin, it would still be desirable to maintain initially, if possible, a discreet silence in public on this subject. The problem of verification will be the object of secret negotiations for some time to come, and, as indicated above, we will want to sound out Soviet attitudes before publicly commenting on the verification issue.

Accordingly, we initially should not volunteer statements to the press concerning means of verification of a strategic arms limitation agreement. Our standard response to press inquiries should be that "the problem of verification is a matter currently under negotiation with the Soviet Union."

Eventually, however, information concerning our negotiating position will probably leak to the press. At this stage, we should be prepared to acknowledge that "the United States is prepared to place maximum reliance on national means of verification." If, by this time, it is clear that no adverse Soviet reaction would be expected, we should also acknowledge that "national means" includes the use of satellite photography.

Any public statements by United States officials on this subject should follow the same guidelines set forth above for the press.

CONCLUSIONS

The Committee recommends the following:

1. That the fact the United States is conducting operations of observation satellites be classified as "UNCLASSIFIED". If this recommendation is accepted, the present report should be downgraded to a classification of "TOP SECRET" in order to facilitate its use as an instruction to our Delegation in the strategic arms limitation talks and to Government spokesmen.

2. That the present classification system remain in effect in regard to the acquired intelligence, capabilities, and operations of observation satellites.

3. That the Delegation explain to the Soviets that we understand "national means of verification" to include the use of observation satellites but avoid a more complete definition of the term. At the same time, the Delegation should avoid disclosing information which would reveal the full capabilities of our observation satellites.

4. That the Delegation, while avoiding a confrontation, establish a negotiating history to the effect that our willingness to conclude an agreement of the type contemplated is based on the assumption that one side will not impede the operation of the other's observation satellites. The Delegation should emphasize that any such effort by one side which significantly interferes with the other's verification capability would give the latter grounds for withdrawal from the agreement.

5. That we initially inform NATO only in general terms of our negotiating position on verification. Further disclosure will be necessary as the talks progress.

6. That key members of Congress be given a briefing on our position on verification and our capabilities for verifying the proposed agreement through national means. They should be advised not to divulge publicly the information until soundings with the Soviets indicate that this is advisable.

7. That we initially maintain as discreet a position as possible in response to press inquiries and in public statements by United States officials.

Our initial standard response, or statement, should be that "the problem of verification is a matter currently under negotiation with the Soviet Union". Eventually, we should be prepared to acknowledge that "the United States is prepared to place maximum reliance on national means of verification," and that such means includes the use of satellite photography.

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