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13 April 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Results of the 12 April Meeting of the Special Group

1. This memorandum summarizes the debriefing given to General Curtin, Colonel Martin, and Colonel Herron by Dr. Charyk following his attendance at the 12 April meeting of the Special Group. Dr. Charyk attended in lieu of Mr. Gilpatric. The main subject of discussion was the question of U. S. registry with the U. N. of space launches, with State (Mr. Alexis Johnson) strongly recommending that the U. S. register all successful launches regardless of how long in orbit. There was also some discussion on the general question of national satellite reconnaissance policy, particularly in regard to questions and tactics of possible public disclosure of reconnaissance matters.

2. In regard to the U. N. registry question, the results of this meeting are as follows: There will be no change in the present U. S. practice of registering those satellites which are in sustained orbit or space transit on the dates of the semimonthly registry reports. Satellites not achieving a sustained orbit will be registered only if they happen to be in orbit on the dates of these regular registry reports. The word "sustained" in this connotation will not be defined, but in practice will include any short-lived satellite launched after one reporting date which is not in orbit as of the next reporting date. No reference will be made in the registry report of any satellites except those that are actually registered. The basic rationale for the U. S. registry actions will be that the purpose of the registry is to record objects in sustained orbit or space transit, as a sort of clutter account. This U. S. registry practice will not preclude submission to the U. N. or elsewhere of reports describing in any appropriate detail satellite flights regardless of whether they are registered or not.

3. Decision was made at this meeting that the U. S. will make occasional reports to the U. N. which give some information about launches which have not been registered. This report will not include the same information as the registry format. It will not be associated with registry itself, and care must be taken to prevent inadvertent establishment of this report as a supplemental registry action. This report will also include failures. The report will consist essentially of a simple statement to the effect that during the period from one date to another date the U. S. has launched X number of satellites which were of short unsustained orbit and not included in the register. During this period,

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X additional attempts resulted in failures to achieve orbit. Some additional details may be given with care that no precedent is set to include in this report the same type of detail for all as may be given for some. This report should also vary as much as possible so as to avoid setting any particular precedent. It should sometimes give the place of launch, but not always. It should never give the time of launch or the orbital characteristics. Dr. Charyk stated that we have the responsibility to develop a paper which would establish the guidelines to be followed in the preparation and submission of this report.

4. Dr. Charyk also stated that the present arrangement for NASA to prepare the U. S. submission to the U. N. is to be changed so that State will receive data from NASA and from Defense and prepare and submit the U. S. reports to the U. N. Dr. Charyk stated that it would be inappropriate for NORAD to submit these data for DOD directly to State, but that NORAD should be required to submit the basic data to a DOD staff office. This DOD staff office should have the responsibility to prepare the DOD submission to State, and should obtain SA FSS coordination on every report prior to submission to State.

5. The question of U. S. satellite reconnaissance policy was discussed in some detail. Decision was made to consider possible actions and the timing, manner, and details of such actions which would achieve the following objectives:

a. Occasional public acknowledgement of the fact of satellite reconnaissance through some form of suitable disclosure. The objective of this step would be to enhance and support the U. S. claim that satellite reconnaissance is a legal activity, that we have a legal right to do it. From a legal standpoint, a right that is claimed but never exercised loses its validity. This step would exercise the U. S. claim by carefully disclosing something which would establish and preserve this right.

b. Employment of observation satellite capability for selected acts of political maneuver. This may include offers to obtain photography for the U. N., if the U. N. desires such photography, with suggestions as to what this photography should be. For instance, this offer might include the obtaining of reconnaissance of some area in which great U. N. interest is centered at the time of the offer. Results might have already been obtained, and released later after a suitable delay; they might be obtained without fanfare or announcement or simply given to the U. N.; they might be obtained by publicly announcing a U. N. reconnaissance flight.

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c. Careful disclosure of erroneous and deliberately misleading reconnaissance capability for the purpose of deceiving the Soviets as to the probable effectiveness of the current state of the U. S. satellite reconnaissance art. This might include release to some appropriate country, other than one of the Soviet Bloc, of some photography for some plausible humanitarian reason. For instance, the U. S. might unilaterally announce to some country, say a Southeast Asian country, that in the course of our satellite reconnaissance developments we have obtained some photography which might be useful to them in considering flood control or water distribution problems of their country. Such photography would have been obtained previously, and would deliberately be of substantially inferior resolution from a reconnaissance viewpoint but good enough for the great mass of the public to be quite interested in the detail they could observe. Such resolution would probably be on the order of say 30-50 feet.

6. In the discussion of U. S. satellite reconnaissance policy, State's proposal that the U. S. would use satellite reconnaissance disclosure in an attempt to convince the Soviets that their policy of secrecy is a "wasting asset" was discussed and conclusively rejected.

7. Dr. Charyk stated that we should give consideration to a plan whereby the objectives outlined in paragraph 5 above may be met. He agreed that such actions would require a very detailed and carefully worked out plan in order to be safely undertaken. Presumably, this will be the subject of further meetings with State and CIA.

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12 Apr 62

U. N. Space Launch Registration and
the U. S. Satellite Reconnaissance Program

Reference: a. Paper entitled "National Policy on Satellite Reconnaissance(S)"; dated 10 April 1962

1. Statement of the Problem: Should the U. S. register with the U. N. all successful space launches? Specific alternatives are:

a. That all successful space launches be registered in accordance with the current format, regardless of how long in orbit.

b. That U. S. registration consist of those space objects in sustained orbit or space transit at the time of each semimonthly registry report, that the current registry format be continued unchanged and that no U. S. space launches be registered except those in sustained orbit or space transit, and that "sustained" in this case not be specifically defined but in U. S. practice be not less than two and sometimes up to four or five days. No restriction would apply to release of information and reports on appropriate launches regardless of how short-lived; however, they would not be registered with the U. N.

2. Background.

This problem must be considered in context with U. S. satellite reconnaissance developments and plans, with particular emphasis on

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problems of the relatively near term future. The following discussion of the registry question is a top secret supplement to the secret paper of reference a. which presents broader aspects of satellite reconnaissance

3. General discussion.

The several reasons that have been advanced by State in arguing FOR registry of all launches are listed separately in paragraph 7 below together with specific counterarguments in terms of factors set forth herein and in reference a. The general argument FOR is centered upon political embarrassment and awkwardness now. The argument AGAINST is related to the same basis, but later; the political problem is postponed from one to three years at the cost of serious impairment of U. S. satellite reconnaissance capability. It should be understood at the outset that registry of all launches using the present U. S. formula will not, per se, harm the satellite reconnaissance operations now being conducted. However, it will definitely have a serious effect upon relatively near-term (1-3 years) capability, an effect that is likely to be very far reaching, and which cannot be materially rectified without far more awkward and serious political difficulties than presently are posed by not registering all launches. This comes about because the U. S. must develop and operate satellite reconnaissance vehicles on a completely secret launch basis in the near term future in order to assure

effective reconnaissance in this period. Without such a capability, there is serious risk of substantial impairment of reconnaissance effectiveness at a time when its importance is even greater than at present. Furthermore, development of this capability cannot be carried out openly, or without conducting some orbital flights prior to beginning actual operations. These factors may be better understood after consideration of two basic reasons why secret operations will be necessary.

4. Need for Secret Reconnaissance Operations.

There are two reasons why secret operations will be required, and U. S. response to both would be affected by U. N. registry of all launches. Further, even after-the-fact registration using the present format would definitely assist Soviet attacks, political and otherwise, on these activities by the U. S. The orbital life of these secret operations will be relatively short, ranging from as little as a single pass or orbit to a maximum of four or five days. It should be noted that by "secret operations" it is not contemplated that the Soviets will not know that satellite reconnaissance operations are being conducted, or will never be able to detect such vehicles in transit over Soviet territory. However, it is contemplated that they will not be able to tell when or where such flights will be made in advance, and that they will not be able to detect

all flights due to not knowing the time or the direction to expect, and that many other flights that are detected will be tracked insufficiently to determine the orbit or the launch location. Such capability will require different launch capability than that being used at the present. Present possible reconnaissance orbits are constrained by launch location and existing boosters to a relatively narrow band. The secret operations will require the capability to launch on a wide variety of inclinations, and may include mobile launch sites via aircraft and/or naval vessels. The need for these secret operations arises from the following two reasons:

a. Satellite reconnaissance will have to be accomplished in this manner to be effective. Without surprise, the intelligence value of such operations will decrease sharply as Soviet ICBM initial deployment is completed and these missiles enter the operational stage. It will be necessary to obtain reconnaissance when the Soviets are not expecting it and cannot predict the time or general orbital track. After the construction of missile sites has been completed, relatively simple camouflage steps can greatly reduce the effectiveness of reconnaissance, and mask the move to or addition of new sites. Although such tactics have not yet been employed by the Soviets, there is evidence that they are currently planning such action. (For illustration of the scope of possible actions, see Top Secret CSDB-3/649, 839). Although some possible camouflage

actions would be difficult to carry out, much can be done to substantially reduce the intelligence value of reconnaissance. The only counter to such action will be to conduct such reconnaissance with as much secrecy as possible, using a wide variety of orbits so that the Soviets will not know when or where to expect such flights, and thus by surprise eventually penetrate the camouflage.

b. Satellite reconnaissance must be accomplished with secrecy to cope effectively with physical counteraction. This will require the same variety of orbits and launch locations and times as noted above. In addition, a variety of other provisions including [redacted] be required. In this connection, it is essential that the nature of the physical countermeasures problem be clearly understood. Although it is common to say "shoot down" when referring to action against a satellite, "shoot apart" would be more appropriate. Physical countermeasures against satellite reconnaissance could include [redacted]

[redacted]

(b)(1)

[redacted] This capability will require a very high degree of reliability and will take time to develop. It cannot be postponed until the actual start of physical counteraction without resulting in a substantial period of delay at a most critical time.

(b)(1)

5. Effect of U. N. Registry on Development and Operation of Secret Satellite Reconnaissance.

U. S. action to register all successful space launches, regardless of how long in orbit, would require that all launches of such secret operations be registered in the same detail as all other U. S. launches. Since the secret launches cannot be totally concealed, and since the U. S. could never be sure that very short orbits had not been tracked by the Soviets and others, there would not be any sound basis for denying that the activities exist and pretending that all U. S. launches were being registered. Consequently, all would have to be registered. If the present policy prevails of not registering those launches which do not result in sustained orbit, these flights will not have to be specifically admitted or denied. Further, the Soviets will be denied the use of the registry information on these flights, which, if available, would assist them in taking counteraction as noted below.

a. Short-lived satellites launched from secret mobile bases into variety of orbits will be much more susceptible to Soviet political and propaganda attack than those launched from mainland facilities. Even after-the-fact registry of these launches would publicly disclose launch date, time, and place, and publicly claim a variety of short-lived orbits all passing over Soviet territory, practically all of which would not be detected by anyone other than the Soviets, and many of which would not be detected by the Soviets in time to acquire sufficient tracking data to determine the orbit or point of launch.

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b. Registry of short-lived satellites would also require registry publicly confirming their existence which would not otherwise have to be admitted, and would materially aid Soviet political attacks.

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c. Registry would require public confirmation of such possible cover tactics as rendezvous of satellite reconnaissance vehicles with known orbital vehicles or debris.

6. Conclusions.

In view of the factors discussed above, it is considered that the U. S. should not register all successful space launches. The public rationale for this action should be that the registry has no bearing on the release of information. The registry serves to log those objects in sustained orbit or space transit; there is no point in cluttering up the register with very short unsustained flights. However, the U. S. releases unclassified information on all launches of significant interest regardless of time in orbit. As an example, the Glenn flight was not registered since it was a short unsustained orbit, but the widest possible public information policy was followed and the U. N. was given a full report. In this way, the U. S. would establish not only the precedent that short flights are not registered, it would also establish unequivocally that lack of registry does not mean that such flights are illegal. Future charges to this effect can always be answered by referring to the Glenn

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flight and other MERCURY flights as prima facie evidence of this fact, thus pointing the discussion away from classified aspects to unclassified aspects of the U. S. Program. It should be noted that the public "embarrassment" or "awkwardness" caused by press questions as to why the Glenn flight was not registered are actually an asset, not a liability; such future reference will be more effective because the public was pointedly made aware of the case at the time.

7. Summary of State's Arguments FOR U. S. Registry of all Launches with counterpoints

a. (1) FOR: Registration of all U. S. space launches would prevent accusations of bad faith and of attempting to conceal efforts to use space for military purposes.

(2) COUNTER: It would prevent these accusations at an unacceptable cost to the effectiveness of satellite reconnaissance. The U. S. can stand such accusations better than any decrease in intelligence concerning Soviet operational deployment and readiness available only through reconnaissance. The U. S. has publicly stated at the highest level that it does and will continue to have a military space program, and that this program is not inconsistent with the peaceful uses of outer space.

b. (1) FOR: Omission of any launchings (such as reconnaissance) makes them more, rather than less, conspicuous.

(2) COUNTER: This would be true if launches such as reconnaissance were the only ones that were omitted; it is not true if

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the policy is uniform and applies to all short-lived U. S. launches, including MERCURY flights.

c. (1) FOR: Refusal to register launches known by the press and public puts the U. S. in the position of explaining why they are not registered, invites accusations of noncompliance with U. N. resolution 1721(XVI).

(2) COUNTER: If the U. S. action is firm and unwavering, and applies uniformly to all such U. S. launches, there is no basis for the question to be a continuing one. The U. S. should state that it sees no point in cluttering up the registry with launches that do not result in sustained orbit or space transit. Since the U. S. proposed resolution 1721(XVI) and was the first to comply, there is no reason to fear accusations of noncompliance, if this position is consistently maintained.

d. (1) FOR: Refusal to register launches implies that they are clandestine and, by implication, illegal, prejudicing U. S. claim that there is nothing illegal about reconnaissance satellites.

(2) COUNTER: Since the U. S. policy applies to all U. S. launches, there is obviously no basis for this charge. The Glenn flight and other MERCURY flights prove that the lack of registry does not mean that the launches are clandestine or illegal.

e. (1) FOR: Registering all launches establishes background for more explicit revelations about observation satellites.

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(2) COUNTER: This argument is not valid unless and until a clear case is made that "more explicit revelations" are desirable. This question is discussed at length in reference a, with the conclusion that such revelations are definitely not desirable.

f. (1) FOR: Registering all launches avoids the awkwardness of presenting "special cases" like the Glenn flight.

(2) COUNTER: There will be no such awkwardness if the policy is firmly applied to all U. S. launches, and unnecessarily defensive tactics avoided. Flights such as the Glenn flight are simply not registered, they don't have to be labelled as "special". The registry has nothing to do with whether or not detailed reports of the flights are submitted.

g. (1) FOR: The possibility of physical counteraction by the Soviets should not affect the present^e UN registry; if the Soviets do take such action, the US can say that all bets are off, stop registering some launches, and proceed with secret launches and operations.

(2) COUNTER: This would be relying upon a trumpet that will sound. It is most improbable that the US will be able to prove before the world physical interference on the part of the Soviets. The most likely result of physical damage is lack of recovery. Any damage to vehicles that are recovered would be practically impossible to successfully attribute to Soviet action. Thus the US would be in a far more difficult political situation than at present, forced to take action without proof

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at a time when Soviet military strength will be greater and the US rationale substantially weaker after being forced to break the precedent it established without plausible public explanation. Furthermore, a considerable time would be required to develop the capability of secret operations before such operations would be effective.

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