

Spy-in-Sky Project's Fate Obscured By New Discoverer Satellite Plan

By Edward Gamarekian
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What happened to Project SENTRY, the project for developing reconnaissance satellites? The Defense Department quietly pushed this project into the background recently and announced, before a battery of newsmen and TV cameras, the beginning of a new satellite series called Project Discoverer. This would be primarily with the development of large satellites and launching rockets which might be used for any number of missions, said Roy Johnson, director of the Defense Department's Advance Research Projects Agency. It was an "open-ended" project he disclosed which would lead to manned satellites and early-

warning satellites capable of detecting the hot blast of an enemy missile as soon as it is fired.

No mention was made in the announcement about the use of these satellites for reconnaissance, although this would be an obvious application. The emphasis had shifted to applications that could not be considered aggressive.

The launching of a satellite capable of reporting the location of industrial and military installations would undoubtedly be considered a hostile act by the Communist bloc. Neutral and pro-Western nations might not feel this strongly about it but would certainly protest that a spy-in-the-sky was an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

The sudden awareness of the Administration to the possible international repercussions from the launching of military satellites was indicated a few days ago in a speech by T. Keith Glennan, head of the Government's new civilian space agency.

"Although weather and communications satellites, manned platforms, and the like have obvious military uses, their primary purpose should be

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New Project Obscures Fate of 'Spy-in-Sky'

declared civilian," Glennan stated.

"If we do not do this, we automatically commit the world of the future to the same stalemated life in armor which is lived by the world today."

Nothing Really Changed

So the Advance Research Projects Agency, the Government's military space agency, gave the appearance of implementing this policy by postponing Project SENTRY and starting Project Discoverer.

Actually, there was no postponement—only the shuffling of paper. Nothing really changed in the process. The development of a reconnaissance satellite is going ahead at the same pace as before with two projects instead of one.

ARPA Director Roy Johnson stated that Project Discoverer was spun off the overall satellite program known as WS-117-L, just as SENTRY had been spun off earlier, but there is not enough money for both. Funds for Project Discoverer apparently came from Project SENTRY, although ARPA's budget department will not admit there was a transfer of funds.

There is evidence of this, however. It was disclosed several months ago that SENTRY was the largest single item in the ARPA budget—\$152 million out of a total which now reaches \$460 million for the current fiscal year.

Johnson said recently that Discoverer is now the single largest item, although he did not disclose the amount allocated.

Additional Evidence

It is also evident from an examination of the two projects, that the SENTRY program has not been postponed, and the development of a reconnaissance satellite is not being delayed:

- They are under the same prime contractor—the Lockheed Aircraft Corp.
- Position-stabilized satellites will be developed under the Discoverer program, as was planned in Project SENTRY. These satellites, sometimes called stabilized platforms, will be capable of keeping detectors pointed toward the earth as they circle around it. (The satellites launched by the U. S. and Russia to date are not stabilized; they tumble end over end.)

• Project Discoverer, like SENTRY, will start off with the launching of 1300-pound satellites in polar orbits from Vandenberg Air Force Base which is part of the Pacific Missile Range. The same type of launching vehicle will be used, the first stage of which will be a Thor intermediate range ballistic missile. Project Discoverer, as was planned in Project SENTRY, will use the Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile, when ready, to launch satellites weighing up to 10,000 pounds.

• Tests that will lead to the development of early-warning satellites and recoverable capsules and satellites—also part of Project Discoverer—were once part of SENTRY. So were the bio-medical experiments needed to develop a manned satellite.

Detectors Left to SENTRY

Apparently, what was left in Project SENTRY was the development of obvious reconnaissance devices—scanners, detectors, cameras, and the like—the kind of equipment that can be developed in a laboratory under wraps.

That part of the original SENTRY project which cannot be kept secret, like the launching of satellites, will be kept out in the open but will be unrelated to specific military applications.

This move may forestall protests from other countries when these large satellites begin passing overhead but then again, it may not. The United States will probably be accused of having reconnaissance equipment in every satellite, whether it does or not. Many countries may not accept this Nation's assurances that this is not so, when such is the case, and demand that the satellites be brought down, or demand that they or some international body be permitted to examine subsequent satellites before they are launched.

Any attempt to launch these satellites secretly will be impractical for units this large can be spotted by the radar and radio units of other countries.

The House space committee warned a few days ago that the secret launching of satel-

lites might trigger an atomic missile war.

The 8800-pound satellite placed in orbit last week was the second stage of an Atlas missile. The Soviet Union had no way of knowing it did not carry an atomic warhead.

World reaction may force some international agreements on the use of the space above sovereign nations.

Insensitivity to the feelings of other countries was indicated by one of the early names Lockheed Aircraft gave Project SENTRY... "Big Brother."

Big Brother was the dictator in George Orwell's novel "1984" who maintained tight control by watching the movements of everyone with TV cameras, located everywhere.