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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

9 MAR 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. GILPATRICK

SUBJECT: SAMOS Contingency Plan

Although we take all possible precautions, it is technically possible that a malfunction on orbit may cause re-entry of a SAMOS capsule to occur in such a way that the full reconnaissance capability of the particular vehicle could be exposed to a hostile or foreign power. I believe it would be wise to have a contingency plan agreed to which would insure clear assignment of responsibilities should such an event occur. I am therefore enclosing a proposed draft SAMOS Contingency Plan, which I suggest be distributed to the appropriate people and discussed at the next meeting of the Special Group.

Joseph V. Charyk
Under Secretary of the Air Force

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SAMOS CONTINGENCY PLAN

SITUATION:

Although all possible precautions are taken, it is possible that a malfunction on orbit may cause re-entry of a SAMOS capsule to occur at other than the prescribed time and place, exposing the full reconnaissance capability of the particular vehicle to a hostile or foreign power. In addition to the possibility of the capsule re-entering via parachute, there is also the possibility of the capsule re-entering with a ballistic impact in the event the particular malfunction(s) allow re-entry to occur with the heat shield retained and the parachute inoperative. In this case, although the capsule would be crushed at impact, tests have shown that the film would not be damaged beyond usefulness, and would thus also expose the full reconnaissance capability of that particular vehicle system.

CONTROL OF PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Director of Special Projects, OSAF. Whenever the possibility exists that any type of capsule re-entry is likely to occur at other than the prescribed time and place, the Director of Special Projects, OSAF, will immediately notify the Under Secretary of the Air Force and keep

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him continuously informed of the situation until such re-entry is certain, or the danger is past. The Director of Special Projects will arrange for standby recovery forces to remain in place or in readiness to handle unforeseen situations leading to a possible subsequent retrieval in those cases where the capsule re-enters over ocean areas. If it can be determined through evidence that re-entry would occur outside the prescribed area but over the ocean area, search will be initiated by the Director of Special Projects through available air-sea rescue facilities.

Headquarters U. S. Air Force. No Air Force or Department of Defense press announcement will be made except by specific authorization of the Under Secretary of the Air Force (Dr. Charyk). If statements are to be released, they may be released by the Air Force Space Systems Division, but only at the direction of the Under Secretary of the Air Force.

Department of State. When it is determined or suspected by the Under Secretary of the Air Force (Dr. Charyk), after clearing with the Secretary of Defense or the Deputy Secretary of Defense, that a foreign power is involved, the responsibility for all action and public announcements will transfer to the Department of State. No comment will be made by the Department of Defense or Hq USAF unless released by the Department of State (Mr. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, or his alternate, Mr. Roger Hilsman). Should it prove that the capsule has been retrieved by a possible foreign power (Soviet or Soviet Bloc

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country) and their reaction is hostile in regard to the reconnaissance contents, the attached statement should be made to the press in response to a query, by the person designated by the Department of State.

There will be no further comment other than what may be necessary by the Department of State to effect return of the capsule and contents to the United States Government.

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statement for press

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General's OK

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We long ago announced our intention to develop the SAMOS reconnaissance project to exploit photographic potentialities of satellites. The details of the research and development efforts of this nature have naturally been classified and not given public release, however our general intent was publicly known even before the earliest successful earth satellite vehicles were flown. A recoverable capsule of this project re-entered the atmosphere and apparently was retrieved by the authorities of _____, containing photographic reconnaissance equipment.

Our satellite reconnaissance program is entirely peaceful in intent and poses no threat to any nation. Its objective is to help maintain World peace by reducing the possibility of surprise attack from closed societies.

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