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15 July 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: MOL "Posture" Paper

This afternoon I completed the attached rough draft of a MOL "Posture" Paper. It leans heavily on Mr. Friedman's ISA Project No. 2, a paper prepared in 1964 for Dr. McMillan's use in connection with NSAM 216, and the "Eighteen Points." Essentially, it advocates a conservative approach to MOL security and publicity.


PAUL E. WORTHMAN
Colonel, USAF

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RECOMMENDED POLICY REGARDING
POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS
OF THE MANNED ORBITING LABORATORY PROGRAM

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1. THE MANNED ORBITING LABORATORY AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY

The proposed Manned Orbiting Laboratory will have as its initial objective the development and demonstration at the earliest time of an operationally useful high resolution manned optical system. MOL is scheduled to make its first manned reconnaissance flight in 1968.

Since 1962, it has been the announced policy of the United States Government to "avoid situations, statements, or actions which, in the context of our satellite reconnaissance program, could later be exploited as evidence either of alleged U.S. aggressiveness or duplicity." This policy has been advanced through carefully planned security measures: by never openly revealing the nature or extent of our satellite reconnaissance activities we have not forced other nations (particularly the USSR) to react publicly against our space overflights.

Considering this background, what is the most favorable context for introducing the MOL program to the American and international public? Will growing world-wide interest and enthusiasm for manned space flight minimize the possibility of international protest? Or will the fact that MOL is a military spacecraft carrying military pilots

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make it more objectionable internationally than current unmanned satellite reconnaissance activity? Will the USSR allege that MOL contains weapons? If so, how could or should the claim be countered? Will the growing tacit acceptance of unmanned satellite reconnaissance develop to a point where by 1968 MOL is entirely acceptable internationally? These questions must be answered with great care, since the answers will affect the success of MOL operations as well as the total national security.

II. GENERAL BACKGROUND

In recent years satellite reconnaissance has been the major source of United States strategic military intelligence of the Soviet Union and Communist China, supplying information upon which the United States has relied greatly in evaluating international military capabilities and in determining its own force structures. Satellite reconnaissance intelligence has been particularly important to the United States' evaluation of Soviet strategic missile and other offensive weapon capabilities and of Soviet and Chinese strategic military research and development programs.

Denial of satellite reconnaissance information to the United States, or a reduction in the program's effectiveness, would have a significant adverse impact on United States national security.

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III. BACKGROUND ON THE PROBLEM OF "LEGITIMIZATION"
AND DISCLOSURE

"Acknowledgment" of U. S. satellite reconnaissance capability has typically been treated in the past in terms of the problems of "legitimization" and disclosure. There has been extensive consideration within the Executive Branch of what United States policy toward legitimization and disclosure should be.

NSAM 156, dated May 26, 1962, expressed the first formal U. S. concern about the legitimacy of satellite reconnaissance (Tab A). Recognizing the great national security importance of the program, the President directed an inter-agency committee to formulate policies that would enable the U. S. to carry on an effective military program while at the same time permitting the nation to work for disarmament and international cooperation in space. Subsequent inter-agency discussions led to the issuance of NSC Action 2454, July 10, 1962 (Tab B). Many of its 18 policy points rested upon the premise that limited and regulated disclosure of the U. S. program would be required in order to persuade international opinion that satellite reconnaissance was lawful and did not violate national sovereignty. In part to this end, point 3 directed the public use of the terms "observation" or "photographic"

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in lieu of "reconnaissance;" point 4 directed the release of appropriate data (e. g. , mapping information) that would help create public acceptance of space observation; point 6 directed that "where feasible" the U. S. should seek to have the legitimacy of space reconnaissance accepted; point 11 directed strict control over "public statements and backgrounding" on reconnaissance satellites; point 13 authorized discreet oral disclosures about the U. S. program to certain "allies and neutrals."

There have been further inquiries within the Executive Branch on the subject. In January 1963, NSAM 216 initiated a study of whether the U. S. should formally disclose its program to the Soviets. The inter-agency committee concluded that no such action should be taken. In mid-1964 the same group again reviewed the question of disclosure in light of then-current statements by Khrushchev on satellite reconnaissance. Although a formal paper was not prepared, it was decided that no significant action should be taken other than to provide secret briefings on the U. S. and Soviet programs to high-level European allied leaders. This was done by the Director of Central Intelligence in September 1964. As part of the committee effort, initial drafts were prepared of "contingency" white papers for possible use in a public disclosure should this become necessary or advisable.

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During the years since the U. S. program was begun there have been a variety of partial disclosures:

1. In 1960-61 (prior to NSC Action 2454) the first launchings of U. S. reconnaissance satellites were announced.
2. The satellite reconnaissance program was discussed publicly by high-level government officials during the 1960-61 period.
3. The U. S. has engaged in extensive "official" discussion of other uses of space "observation" or "photography," e. g. , weather, mapping, geodesy.
4. There has been considerable press coverage referring to the possibility -- or to the fact -- that important U. S. intelligence information has been obtained from satellite reconnaissance.

The Soviets have also taken limited steps that indicate an uncertain intention to have satellite reconnaissance accepted as lawful. As early as 1960, following the U-2 incident, Khrushchev implied that he would not object to satellite overflights of the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1964 he stated privately to persons whom he had reason to believe would repeat or publicize his statements that the U. S. should cease U-2 reconnaissance of Cuba because satellites could be used instead. Referring to the Soviet program, he offered to "exchange" pictures

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with the United States. Other Soviet officials have also commented favorably on satellite reconnaissance and have implied that it is a legitimate reconnaissance means. Most important perhaps is the fact that in the past two years the Soviets have in effect abandoned their early effort in the U. N. to condemn the use of space for military "spying or intelligence."

In short, there has as of now been considerable public disclosure about the existence of both the U. S. and Soviet satellite reconnaissance programs. The existence of the program is common knowledge certainly among most of the world's interested governments and probably among many of their peoples. No significant recent efforts have been made by any nation explicitly to bar satellite reconnaissance. In a sense, therefore, a degree of legitimacy -- admittedly uncertain -- has been achieved.

IV. THE PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF THE MANNED ORBITING LABORATORY: POSSIBILITY OF DISCLOSURE

The growing tacit acceptance of unmanned satellite reconnaissance could be endangered by adverse international reactions to MOL. Would other countries, for example, acquiesce to unmanned satellite overflight and object to manned or military overflight? Could the reaction

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be sufficient to bring all military satellite overflights under debate? Will MOL be caricatured as a weapon system? What precautionary steps can be taken now to avoid an international issue over the Manned Orbiting Laboratory?

The United States' satellite reconnaissance program is a national program, conducted in secrecy. The character of the program is based on five major objectives developed in response to NSAM 156, expressing the desire to:

1. "Maintain our freedom of action unilaterally to conduct reconnaissance satellite operations."
2. "Prevent foreign political and physical interference with the conduct of these operations."
3. "Prevent accidental or forced disclosure of details of the operations or end products of the U. S. satellite reconnaissance program."
4. "Avoid situations, statements or actions which, in the context of our satellite reconnaissance program, could later be exploited as evidence either of alleged U. S. aggressiveness or duplicity."
5. "Facilitate the resolution of any conflicts which might arise between the essential technical and security requirements of the U. S.

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satellite reconnaissance program and the international commitments and foreign policy objectives of the United States in a manner which is in the over-all best interests of the national security of the United States.

The primary objective, abstracting those listed above, is to forestall international or unilateral actions that would prevent the United States from using satellites for reconnaissance. This objective is not changed by the advent of MOL.

Would we enhance the acceptability of MOL by private disclosure to hostile nations? There is great danger in disclosing MOL's essential secret - the high resolution of its photography - to hostile nations. Such a disclosure would arouse apprehensiveness over our intelligence capability and stimulate those nations -- especially the Soviets -- to renew their historic opposition. Disclosure is such an incredible action that the Soviet would presume -- naturally and logically -- that the true characteristics of a photographic system had been degraded to some extent. As a result, any announcement of high resolution photographic capability would have an unsettling influence upon hostile nations, with protest, camouflage, and even physical counteraction as possible responses. There is no point in announcing

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a poor photographic capability, for the deception would be recognized immediately. In short, there is no definable "good" accruing to the United States from a disclosure of the MOL mission.

Do we enhance acceptability by public disclosure? The existence of a U. S. requirement for effective intelligence of the Sino-Soviet area is generally clear to the governments of the free world. In spite of this acceptance it is unlikely that the U. S. could gain widespread support in any international forum for a positive affirmation to conduct satellite reconnaissance, especially with the introduction of a manned vehicle. The newly emerging small nations are strongly nationalistic. Their representatives could view a Soviet/U. S. debate over manned or unmanned reconnaissance with quiet detachment, but if faced squarely with a vote on the "space rights" of their own nations they would very probably choose to affirm total sovereignty. Friendly, large nations are no exception to this rule; they simply enter the debate at an earlier point. Even arguments for "common defense" would normally yield in the face of arguments for sovereignty. The United States could, if necessary, debate the issue of free space in any forum without apprehension. But it should carefully avoid any situation which forces a nation-by-nation roll call on photographic overflight.

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As in the case of private disclosure, public disclosure would have the additional effect of forcing hostile nations to react, since the announcement would be construed as a deliberate flaunting of a provocative capability. The Soviet reaction to U-2 overflight is well known; public disclosure could provoke Soviet leadership into placing the U-2 and MOL in the same category.

Does continued secrecy create a bad image of the United States?

Secrecy does not mean illegality. The practice of conducting legal, secret operations in international waters and air space is well established. There is no reason for the United States to assume the lack of disclosure of details, timing, and results of satellite reconnaissance to be taken as a concession to illegality. The fact that these details are not disclosed becomes relevant only as the United States allows it to become relevant (for example, by reacting defensively to criticism in this regard).

V. THE FEASIBILITY OF CONDUCTING MOL FLIGHT OPERATIONS
WITHIN THE EXISTING FRAMEWORK OF NATIONAL POLICY

From the foregoing discussion it can be seen that private or public disclosure of the MOL capability is an irreversible step which would have profoundly adverse effects on enemies, allies, and neutrals. No force toward gain would be created by such action.

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There is every reason, on the other hand, for operating MOL within the guidelines of existing national policy and within the carefully-ordered security environment which already exists for military space programs. Such an environment enhances the achievement of the primary national objective indicated above, "...to forestall international or unilateral actions that would prevent the United States from using satellites for reconnaissance," avoiding unnecessary provocation in the international arena.

Successful achievement of this objective will require a firm position on several points.

First, there must be determined governmental resistance to any suggestion that MOL requires elaborate justification. MOL requires no more public justification than any other military space projects. The United States has announced that it will have a military space program and it has one. The United States has never made a secret of the fact that a number of its space projects are under military control and have military objectives. MOL must be treated as part of the mainstream of a continuing U. S. military space program.

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Second, and corollary to the above, the public information program associated with MOL must be kept modest, low-key, and carefully planned. Particularly at the time of program approval, it will be in the best interest of the program -- internationally -- to avoid fanfare. Contractor publicity must be controlled. All public information releases must continue to flow through a single DOD point-of-review -- ^{the} Assistant Secretary of Defense/Public Affairs. Public information stories will deal exclusively with the non-sensitive technological aspects of MOL, such as the booster system, the life support system, engineering for long life on orbit, launching technology, communication plans, biomedical experiments, etc. Operational goals will not be discussed in news releases.

Third, the publicity-announced mission of MOL must continue to be expressed solely as "the investigation and development of manned orbital capabilities essential to the national defense." When pressed, the statement should be made that some aspects of MOL are unclassified; others are classified. The classified elements may be acknowledged periodically, under query, but will not be explicitly identified, discussed, or explained.

Fourth, only one minor modification to NSC Action 2454 is required because of the special nature of MOL. Point 9: "The present practice

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of not identifying individual military space launchings by mission or purpose is sound" must be waived for manned flight operations in light of the intense public interest in manned space launchings. While the press will be advised of launching dates, launchings will continue to be "closed."

Fifth, (if subjected to intolerable international pressure,) the United States ~~may~~ ^{should} re-affirm its abhorrence of orbiting weapons and advise that no U. S. satellite -- operational or developmental -- carries weapons of any kind. In view of its present agreement to ban weapons of destruction from orbit, this re-affirmation is somewhat trivial in impact; the believers will believe and the accusers will remain unconvinced.

Sixth, the tight security surrounding MOL's mission capability must persist regardless of comments and speculation (however accurate or inaccurate) by U. S. trade journals and the public press. Public information experience with unmanned satellite reconnaissance operations has shown that the most "devastating" publicity carries very little impact if completely ignored.

VI. POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY FOR THE MOL PROGRAM

A. GENERAL

1. The United States should maintain the legal position that

the principles of international law and the U. N. charter apply to activities

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in outer space and, specifically, that outer space is free, as are the high seas. (NSC Action 2454)

2. The United States should continue to avoid any position implying that reconnaissance activities in outer space are not legitimate. Similarly, we should avoid any position declaring or implying that such activities are not "peaceful uses." (NSC Action 2454)

3. It is recognized that the United States cannot entirely avoid or disclaim interest in reconnaissance, so that where feasible the U. S. should also seek to gain acceptance of the principle of the legitimacy of space reconnaissance. (NSC Action 2454)

4. When confronted by specific international pressure to outlaw reconnaissance activities in space, the United States should continue to take a public stand for the legitimacy of the principle of reconnaissance from outer space, the precise form and extent of which would depend upon the circumstances of the confrontation. (NSC Action 2454)

5. The United States should, to the extent feasible, seek to avoid public use of the term "reconnaissance" satellites, and where appropriate use instead such broader and neutral terms as "observation" or "photographic" satellites. (NSC Action 2454)

6. The United States should not, at this time, publicly disclose the status, extent, effectiveness, or operational characteristics of its reconnaissance program. (NSC Action 2454)

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7. Strict control over public statements and backgrounding concerning reconnaissance satellites should be exercised to ensure consistency with the policy guide-lines suggested in these recommendations. (NSC Action 2 454)

8. The United States should discreetly disclose to certain allies and neutrals selected information with regard to the U. S. space reconnaissance program, making each disclosure orally and at a time while impressing upon them its importance for the security of the Free World. Disclosures should be made in a manner that will preclude acquisition by the Communist Bloc of usable evidence of an official U. S. acknowledgment that we are conducting a satellite reconnaissance program. Proposals for such disclosures should include clearance by the National Reconnaissance Office. (NSC Action 2454)

9. The United States should in private disclosures emphasize the fact of our determination and ability to pursue such programs because of their great importance to our common security, despite any efforts to dissuade us. (NSC Action 2454)

10. The United States should note in connection with private disclosures that, except in some cases for specifically defined disarmament agreements, the U. S. cannot agree to (a) declarations of the

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precise purpose of all satellites, (b) declarations of the equipment of all satellites, (c) general requirements for advance notification of all satellite launchings and the tracks of satellites, (d) pre-launch inspection of the satellites, or (e) a specific definition of peaceful uses of space which does not embrace unlimited observation. (NSC Action 2454)

B. SPECIFIC

1. The United States should continue to preserve the security of the National Reconnaissance Program by conducting Manned Orbiting Laboratory development and operations within a carefully conceived and disciplined security environment consonant with the spirit of NSC Action 2454.

2. The mission of MOL will be described solely as the investigation and development of manned orbital capabilities essential to national defense. When pressed, the statement may be made that some aspects of MOL are classified; others are unclassified. The classified elements may be acknowledged periodically, under query, but will not be explicitly identified, discussed, or explained.

3. The MOL program will not be justified publicly. MOL is a logical element of a continuing U. S. military space program; as such, it requires no more public justification than any other space program.

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4. Public information on MOL will be carefully planned at a modest, low-key level. This will be especially important at the time of program approval and prior to the first launchings. All public information releases or statements on MOL made by representatives of any Executive Department or Agency will process for approval through the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/Public Affairs. Such news stories as are required will deal exclusively with non-sensitive technological aspects of MOL; operational goals will not be discussed.

5. The present practice of not identifying individual military space launchings by mission or purpose is waived for MOL; however the policy of maintaining "closed" launchings for all military satellite flights will continue.

6. All MOL launchings will be included on the U. S. portion of the United Nations registry of satellite launchings.

7. MOL reconnaissance products will be controlled in the TALENT-KEYHOLE security system after exposure, during processing, and throughout exploitation. The National Photographic Interpretation Center will exploit this product jointly with the Defense Intelligence Agency.

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8. The United States will promote, within the bounds of security, the free exchange of bona fide non-sensitive data accruing from MOL experiments

9. If subjected to intolerable pressure, the United States may re-affirm its abhorrence of orbiting weapons and advise that no U. S. satellite -- operational or developmental -- manned or unmanned -- carries weapons of any kind.

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