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BYRNE-TALANT-KEYHOLE  
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12 September 1968

Colonel Yost:

The attached was written during and after several readings of the memo proposed by Mr. Bohlen for NSAM 156 Group consideration. In the cold light of another day, I think the following are the major points (which you and Col Worthman undoubtedly have already enumerated):

1. Whatever the Russian position with regard to on-site inspection, I cannot see how "admission" of satellite reconnaissance activities on the part of the US will influence them to agree to strategic arms limitations. On the other hand, I feel that "admission" (which constitutes official US confirmation, no matter how discrete, secretive, etc.) poses a grave risk to the continuance of NRP activities.

2. My rationale behind the belief of the risk involved in "admission" is as follows. In the past, the US has carefully avoided any statement or action that might literally force the Russians into an open confrontation with us (politically or militarily) on this issue. The stringent security surrounding the NRP is designed to protect the fact, extent, and technical capabilities. Secretive "admission" would not force the Russians into confrontation; but would

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give the Communists the option of forcing the US into a confrontation if they so desired. Public confirmation would give every nation in the world the option of forcing at least a political confrontation on this sensitive subject.

3. It is not necessary to figuratively "bare our souls" to negotiate arms limitations with the Russians. The problem is separable into two issues: a. What are the limitations; and b. How any agreement will be policed. With regard to the "how policed", the US should first propose that this be done by UN on-site inspection teams; if that is not acceptable, the next alternative should be US-Soviet inspection teams; and the final offer should be self-policing - e.g., a "pact of honor" (realizing full well, we are signing a treaty with the "devil"). At the same time, we should intend to supplement the "police" force (whether UN; US/USSR; or the self-policing honor system approach) with hard intelligence acquired by unilateral and covert satellite reconnaissance.

4. If the US is reasonably close to some kind of strategic arms limitation agreement with the Soviets, the US should plan on increasing the frequency of NRP coverage, press on with MOL, and start technology/development of a

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satellite camera whose resolution is [redacted]  
[redacted] as well as other earth sensors. With regard to very high resolution, it would be needed as much in positive identification of weapons for arms control (e.g., no change) as it is now for technical intelligence.

5. If high Government authorities do not share ~~with~~ my para 2 assessment of the risk and a decision is made to make the "admission" (e.g., confirmation), then three changes are recommended in the proposed memorandum: a. it would seem prudent to keep at least certain allies fully informed of our plans/dealings with the Soviets; b. rather than threatening withdrawal from the agreement if the Soviets interfered with US recce satellites, such interference should be considered "an act of war of gravest consequence"; and c. official releases or statements to the press should be kept on the "no comment" level as long as possible.

6. Also in the paper, the verification "by external (national) means" portion could have serious ramifications. The Communist world generally uses the 12-mile limit to mean external as far as the sea is concerned; and they clearly consider airplane overflight as an intrusion on national

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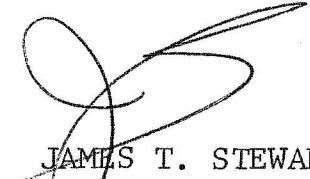
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sovereignty. Since where space begins has never been defined, what assurance do we have that the Communists will not argue for a vertical wall upward from their borders or 12-mile limit boundaries?

7. The authors of the paper place great reliance on satellite inspection capability and downgrade the importance of on-site inspection. I do not believe the National Intelligence Community or the JCS agree with them.

8. JCS views on para 7 above and on the "admission" aspect of the proposed paper should be solicited by the NSAM 156 Group.



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Vice Director, MOL Program

P.S. I think the threat to MOL's future is not as great -- or at worst, no greater -- than to the NRP in general; and the latter is time-wise more urgent.

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late p.m.

11 September 1968

Colonel Yost:

This paper literally terrifies me. I would be inalterably and violently opposed to any such "admission" by the US (which would constitute "official" confirmation no matter how secretive, discrete, or informal). The risk to future NRP operations seems terribly high (more on the risk aspect later); the gain to the US seems questionable (e.g., "official" Soviet acceptance of reconnaissance activities vs their tacit acceptance now); and why such an admission should induce the Soviets to enter an arms limitation agreement is incomprehensible to me.

On page 1, the paper properly identifies and agrees with US objectives of freedom from political or physical interference to unilaterally conduct satellite reconnaissance. On Page 4, the paper notes we have always been guided by the overriding desire to avoid an open confrontation and, on the same page, that it is still sound policy to avoid a confrontation. The US has generally implemented this policy by carefully avoiding any actions or statements (formal or informal) which might force the Soviets -- for political or

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other reasons -- into a reaction of almost any kind. There is another and subtle facet to this US policy; we must also be extremely careful to not provide gratis the wherewithal to the Soviets for a confrontation should they desire to do so at some future date. I think this aspect is very important and should be explored fully by the NSAM 156 Group; the paper completely overlooks such a possibility.

Any risk of an open confrontation on satellite reconnaissance, and a possible limiting or banning of such activities, is a grave risk to US national security but would not be terribly serious to the Communist World. They can learn more about the US from Congress, press, journals, travel, etc., than we can ever hope to learn about them from satellites -- and satellites provide almost all of the "hard" intelligence information on Russia (for example, each and every known or suspect ICBM launches in the USSR was discovered by satellites; each year, the DIA summary to the FIAB states that the information acquired came almost exclusively from satellites, etc.).

Some miscellaneous thoughts follow:

1. If such a step is taken by the US, we had

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better accelerate MOL and start work on even better resolutions -- arms limitation agreement enforcement solely by satellite invitation is risky, even if we have super resolution, and would be comparatively easy to evade. A combination of on-site inspection and satellite reconnaissance is needed.

2. I certainly agree with the objective of arms limitation but not the approach. There are two steps which can be taken sequentially: a. what weapons will be limited by mutual agreement; b. and how to enforce such agreement. Item b should not be discussed until item a is settled; then, "admission" should never be a part of b. We should first propose UN enforcement with on-site inspection by neutral nations (intending to unilaterally supplement their inspections with covert satellite reconnaissance). If this were unacceptable, we should next propose a bilateral US-Soviet agreement for on-site inspections of each other (still intending to unilaterally do covert satellite reconnaissance). As a last resort, we should propose a "pact of honor" (still intending to covertly observe their activities from space) . . . that is as far as we should go.

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3. On page 2, too much capability is credited to satellites and too little to on-site inspections. Both would be needed for a high assurance of compliance.

4. On page 3, it is not at all "evident" to me that the US must alter past space-security policies to pursue an agreement on arms limit. There is no reason why we have to discuss "national means of verification" with the Soviets. Our only source is satellites and/or on-site inspection; they need neither.

5. The "scenario" on page 5 is rather one-sided. If the Soviets interfere with our one source, we are "blinded" and merely withdraw from the agreement. How could the US interfere with their open sources -- create a closed Communist-like society?

6. On pages 6 and 7, how can we expect to keep the trust of our Allies if we unilaterally trade secrets with the Soviets.

7. Re second para on page 7, the "precise timing and scope" would be a matter for the President, in consultation with the NSC -- not the Sec State.

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8. Re the press, past experience should have taught us by now that "no comment" would be the best approach until an agreement was reached.

9. Have the JCS been invited to comment on this specific paper? They should be consulted immediately.



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