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Possible Consequences for Intelligence Capabilities of
Revealing Detection of a Violation

General

This discussion of the possible consequences of revealing the detection of a violation of a strategic arms limitation agreement is based on the assumption (contained in the paper "Strategic Missile Talks: Related Aspects of Satellite Reconnaissance Disclosure Policy" approved by the NSSM 28 Steering Committee on May 14, 1969) that a private U. S. -Soviet understanding will be negotiated to the effect that overhead reconnaissance by satellite vehicles is a legitimate means of verification and that neither country will interfere with the other's satellite reconnaissance systems. A private revelation to the Soviet Union of the detection of a violation which confirms the existence of U. S. satellite reconnaissance activities is, therefore, of little concern.

If this basic assumption, i. e., that the U. S. and the Soviets will reach such a private understanding, does not hold then an official acknowledgement of the existence of satellite reconnaissance activities is of considerable concern, since it could result in a third country protest based on national sovereignty. Similarly, public pronouncements concerning satellite reconnaissance activities could produce significant destabilizing pressure on the Soviet Union from its people and its allies. The ensuing confrontations which could result from a disclosure of satellite reconnaissance as the means by which a violation were discerned could lead to severe restrictions on continued verification by satellite and, moreover, on normal U. S. intelligence collection activities.

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