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~~TOP SECRET~~ NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C.



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

May 25, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. FOSTER

SUBJECT: U. S. and Soviet Antisatellite Capabilities

Your area coordination paper on the referenced subject is certainly timely in view of the recent activity of the Soviets in the coorbital intercept area. The NRO is vitally concerned with antisatellite capabilities, both Soviet and U. S., because of the politically sensitive environment in which we operate.

I believe your paper covers many of the pertinent points, and I agree that steps should be taken to decide upon a course of action concerning development of an anti-satellite capability. One of the most important points is what level of effort should be expended in view of the current Special National Intelligence Estimate, reinforced by the National Intelligence Estimate of February 25, 1971, which states that an attack is extremely unlikely.

A response (BYE-6420-71) to you by Carl Duckett, CIA, necessarily covered much of the area of responsibility of the NRO. Since I am in agreement with his paper, I will only add some things which he did not cover.

National policy pertaining to reconnaissance from space and antisatellite activities is approved by the National Security Council and any serious consideration of new antisatellite policy must be reviewed by that body.

Our interpretation of the policies as they apply to NRO satellites is that the U. S. recognizes the vulnerability of satellites and considers the best posture to be one of constantly demonstrating that the programs are legitimate and necessary and that any interference will be dealt with by strong political reactions.

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The NRO has operated for a decade on the principle of tacit acceptance, low profile, nonprovocative action in a resolve to execute a legal, peacekeeping endeavor.

The subject of NRO satellite protection is addressed continually through the Interdepartmental Contingency Planning Committee (ICPC). The Committee was established to insure a fully coordinated national response to contingencies relating to overflights of denied areas.

Regarding the question of integral protection of satellite systems (as opposed to deterrent protection by an antisatellite system), we support the position that the former should be an essential part of the development and operational control of that system. As you know, the NRO has been actively engaged in a satellite countermeasures program since about 1963. Many systems and techniques for protecting our satellites have been evaluated and some have been carried to the operational stage. We intend to continue our own efforts in countermeasures technology to reduce the vulnerability of NRO satellites, and to include whatever maneuvering capability is considered necessary. As in the past, we will make the technology developed under the NRO programs available for DOD satellite programs.

The NRO is responsible, at ExCom direction, for those activities related to the NRO. The question of developing a U. S. antisatellite system is a separate and distinct issue, properly addressed by your office in cooperation with the military departments. We recognize its potential value as a deterrent no matter how austere.

M.L.
John L. McLucas

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