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Date: 24 Feb

FOR YOUR:

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APPROVAL _____
COMMENTS _____
COORDINATION _____
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SUBJECT: Fact of

Letter to O. Alexis Johnson

By WCS

YOUR COMMENTS/DIRECTION:

see inside

*SPD:
PHONE RECORDS
Dr. Richards
per Gen Gurney
V/1
3/45*

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THE UNDER SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

[REDACTED]

My view on this is that we want the President to make the decision of whether the pros outweigh the cons. Thus we want to keep open his option not to release "fort of". Thus the last paragraph, while covering the point, does not quite accurately express my view that only the President can decide how the pros & cons stack up. I'd like this discussed to next Ex Com meeting & then send an appropriate letter. M.C.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

MEMORANDUM

Fritz-

On this "Des Alex" matter -
From the EXCOM, it was decided that
the Verification Panel would be
the best place to air the "East of"
All agree that it is best to hold to
the present policy but that the
V.P. would eventually get the hearing
on the issue. Since the principals
of EXCOM see also VP principals,
no sense now in duplicating. No letter
is needed, I think. (ph)

(Yp) I feel that our visit to J. Walsh
might have been useful since we
are sure in a hurry to provide this
to a V.P. signed item. About
April 24 or so, I think that
I'll start preparing the paper for the
then to the strategy process (ph)
the signing of documents in May.

Bud



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(S) NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE NRO STAFF

February 18, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. McLUCAS

SUBJECT: Letter to Ambassador Johnson on "Fact Of"

Indications are that there is agreement between the U.S. and the Soviets to finalize a SALT ABM Treaty prior to President Nixon's visit to Moscow in May. There is also likely to be an executive agreement of some sort with respect to offensive weapons. Both will require Congressional review and approval shortly following the Moscow visit.

The Verification Panel still has not addressed a ratification strategy. The NSAM 156 Committee paper has been at a standstill since Ambassador Johnson entered the hospital.

In view of the "second thoughts" on "fact of" voiced by Mr. Helms recently and the fact that the NRO position on the table supports the release of "fact of", we feel that a letter with a restated NRO position should be sent without delay to Ambassador Johnson.

There is likely to be a very rapid effort to set a ratification strategy for SALT. We are fearful that the "fact of" issue will become lost in the desire to obtain unhampered ratification; the NRO position should be on the record.

[REDACTED]
HAROLD S. COBLE, JR.
Major, USAF

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(S) NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Dear Alex,

I understand that the 156 Working Group is divided in its thinking on how far to proceed in recommending revelation of "fact of" satellite reconnaissance by government spokesmen in response to public questioning about "national means of verification" for a SALT. When favorable reaction to this proposition was obtained from CIA, I instructed my representative to support the acknowledgement of "fact of," subject to certain constraints, should it become necessary.

Following recent conversations I have had with Dick Helms and others, I desire to restate my position on the "fact of" matter. I am apprehensive that many, not directly involved with the operation of the National Reconnaissance Program, tend to view the subject of "fact of" in too simplified a manner. There are two major points which should be made clear to all those deliberating this apparent dilemma. First, although one can read about "spy satellites" in the news, the largely speculative articles do not constitute official U.S. admission of the activity. Over the recent years, the official policy of protecting the "fact of" has been often viewed as fatuous in its original context. This is accurate, in a simplistic sense. However, what is ignored or not perceived is that the "fact of" policy today literally serves to constrain severely a propensity for less guardedly discussing the scope and the nature of our reconnaissance activities. Thus, the original purpose of not revealing the "fact of" in order to minimize provocation or the scope of the program is indeed still effective, but in a more indirect fashion.

Second, and less subtle than the above, the admission of the "fact of" as a practical response to public questioning about "national technical means" may not serve a useful purpose in the long run. Other forms of "national technical means" might also come under scrutiny. Further, those who

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would be initially skeptical or disbelieving about utility of a SALT or about our abilities to verify a SALT likely would not be satisfied with a limited statement of admission of "fact of." The alternative--going beyond a limited statement with details--seemingly would be counterproductive since, if capabilities become public knowledge, intricate countermeasures might be devised to hinder the actual monitoring of a SALT.

Thus, even for such an important concern as assuring unified support and successful ratification of a SALT, it seems impractical, in my view, to admit to "fact of" without considering the depth of implication. At this time, at least, the risks still appear too great and official silence, in the face of questioning--difficult as it is to maintain--appears to be a sound policy.

Sincerely,

John L. McLucas

The Honorable U. Alexis Johnson
Under Secretary for Political Affairs
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

cc: Mr. Helms
Dr. David
Dr. Tucker

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