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"MOL Policy Background Material"
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13 July 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Department of Defense Manned Orbiting Laboratory
Program - A Consideration of International
Political Factors

The Department of Defense MOL Program complicates the U. S. satellite reconnaissance program because it renews the concept of a man (in this case a military man) engaged in reconnaissance activity over denied areas. Since the space vehicle will be larger than those currently used in unmanned operations - and since military man is, after all, a soldier, it is natural that high-level U. S. government consideration be given to the question as to whether or not continued secrecy with respect to such activities might not provoke concern on the part of foreign governments that the U. S. may be embarking upon a system of orbital weaponry (i.e., atomic bombs or death rays). On the surface it would appear that an admission to the observation mission would create a far less problem to the national image. It must be additionally recognized, however, that an admission to a mission of reconnaissance from MOL would render pointless any practice where such admission with respect to unmanned satellite missions is scrupulously avoided.

Since the advent of the cold war, there have been two basic disturbing issues in East-West negotiations. One has been the existence of a super weapon capable of destroying all humanity; the second has been the Iron Curtain, or the Soviet fetish for secrecy. The first problem has been temporarily neutralized because both sides possess the weapon in such volume as to cause its usage to be a catastrophe to both. Soviet secrecy on the other hand, has provided them with a poker player's advantage in any instance where threat of possible use of force entered into negotiations. Satellite reconnaissance has ^{done} much to detract from this advantage enjoyed by the Soviets. If the [REDACTED]



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photographic resolution design criteria of MOL are achieved, it will have a major impact upon the effect of existing Soviet secrecy techniques and for all practical purposes render them useless.

The anticipated [redacted] photographic resolution of MOL therefore is the most sensitive aspect of the program. The Soviets will, in all probability, go to great lengths to preserve the advantage resulting from their policy of secrecy. If they do not, it will negate their ability to bluff - and, since going beyond a bluff ~~might~~ might mean a catastrophe which would bring about their own destruction, a stalemate would result under which they can only lose - not gain - in international influence.

I suggest that the time is not yet appropriate for the U. S. to admit to its satellite reconnaissance activities.


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