

~~SECRET~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

25 March 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Psychological and Political Effect of Soviet Progress
in the Field of Rocketry

1. Much of the initial world reaction to Soviet progress in the field of rocketry, and especially to the launching of the first Soviet earth satellite, was that the USSR was far more advanced industrially and technologically than people had realized. There was also initially a widespread feeling that perhaps the USSR had a slight lead over the US in the ICBM field, but that the USSR had simply beaten the US to the draw and gotten its earth satellite up first. In sophisticated circles there continued to be faith that the US could match Soviet achievements and maintain its superior world power position.

2. However, the launching of the second Soviet sputnik and the failure of the US vanguard early in December were a rude shock. It came to be believed that the US was falling seriously behind. The public debate in the US over management of the missile program added credence to this view. There developed a growing conviction that soon the entire strategic situation in the world would be changed. People in allied countries who had gained a sense of security from US military superiority

~~SECRET~~

 **SECRET**

began to doubt US ability to protect them. There developed a general sense of vulnerability to nuclear attack from the air, without warning and with no hope for defense.

3. Some of this malaise has been dissipated as a result of our two recent satellite launchings and a result of the NATO decision to deploy ICBM's in Europe. These developments have been regarded as indications that the US is not hopelessly behind, and that something is being done to prevent the USSR from gaining a military advantage.

4. Nevertheless, in the strategic field, our allies — and particularly those in allied countries who think and write about these things — do believe that the military situation will soon be substantially altered. They believe that the US soon will be under the gun and that, as a result, they are not as well protected by US military power as they thought they were in the past. This sense of insecurity, and vulnerability to missiles launched without warning and carrying nuclear warheads instead of scientific instruments or dogs, has probably been a contributing factor to the pressure for negotiations with the USSR, and to the resurgence of neutralist thinking, especially in Western Europe.

- 2 -

 **SECRET** 

~~SECRET~~

5. Aside from the impact upon strategic thinking in other countries, there have been effects upon people's receptivity to Soviet proposals and to Communist doctrines. Soviet scientific achievements in the field of rocketry have lent credibility to Soviet claims in other fields. The enhancement of Soviet prestige has dimmed people's memories of past Soviet misdeeds. Soviet foreign policy pronouncements and proposals have consequently won, at least a better audience, at best a greater acceptance. In particular, we feel that the receptivity of underdeveloped countries to Communist doctrine and to Soviet subversion has been increased. We believe that there are probably many more African and Asian peasants and workers who will say to themselves — if the Communists have not already said it to them — that "a system and a country which in forty years can develop fast enough to put a dog in the sky can probably do something for me."

William C. Matthews

³
~~SECRET~~