

S-E-C-R-E-T

2 April 1970

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Soviet Reactions to Public Disclosure of Satellite  
Photography of Soviet Military Installations

The main point contained in the following paragraphs is that, while the Soviets would be annoyed and embarrassed by the US disclosure and would react in propaganda, the most important effect would be on their attitude toward SALT negotiations. Mistrust of US seriousness and tactics in those negotiations would be considerably increased.

1. In the case of reconnaissance satellites, the Russians have found it impracticable to keep completely intact the taboos with which they traditionally surround questions of security and intelligence gathering. While the Soviet Government can, and by-and-large does, maintain a virtually complete blackout on the subject of satellite photography in its public media, the question has inevitably come up in Soviet-US discussions of arms control. Even where this is so, as in the private and confidential meetings at Helsinki, the Russians shy away from direct references in favor of euphemisms such as "national" or "unilateral" means of inspection.

S-E-C-R-E-T

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S-E-C-R-E-T

2. Soviet reticence on this score is partly visceral and partly a matter of conscious policy. It is felt that this is one of those delicate subjects which should be mentioned as little as possible. It is embarrassing to the Russian government that its territory lies exposed to the prying eyes of foreigners even though it has equivalent means itself. It believes instinctively in minimum disclosure of information pertaining to its own affairs, even of the most mundane kind, and in its right to maintain strict control of such disclosure as there is.

3. Plainly the Russians have no taste for explicit discussion of satellite reconnaissance, even in private. They may have come to believe on the basis of recent practice that there is a kind of tacit understanding between them and the US to keep the wraps on in this sensitive area. Public disclosure of satellite photography by a high-ranking US official would clearly say that such an understanding no longer exists. If only for this reason, Moscow would be surprised and discomfited by the US action.

4. In reacting, however, we think it most likely that Moscow would be inclined to stand pretty much mute with respect to its own reconnaissance capability. It will probably limit itself to expressing scorn for the cheapness of US propaganda

- 2 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

tactics, coupled with a generalized affirmation that the USSR is capable of holding its own in the fields of intelligence and security. It would do this on the assumption that, though some knowledge of the US disclosure would filter through to the Soviet people, there would be slight chance that widespread anxiety about Soviet security would be aroused. The Soviet military establishment, being well-informed about the Soviet reconnaissance program, would have no need for further information nor, presumably, for reassurance.

5. The Chinese would, of course, do what they could to add to Soviet embarrassment, probably pointing out that both of the great powers, not just the Americans, were constantly spying on other nations. These charges would be echoed in other quarters, and present Moscow with an awkward propaganda problem. This would, however, hardly measure up to the humiliating implications of the U-2 affair and would not require the same violent Soviet reaction.

6. More important than propaganda and political considerations, which would affect Soviet reactions at any time, would be the fact that this episode occurred close to the opening of the Vienna negotiations on SALT. Moscow's reading of the meaning of

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

a US disclosure at this time in terms of the US position with regard to SALT would have a crucial bearing on their reaction to such a US action. The mere fact of disclosure would raise in Soviet minds questions about US motives. Those in the USSR opposed to the talks or doubtful about the sincerity of the US in entering the talks would use this disclosure to slow down or in other ways seek to prevent a successful outcome.

7. Disclosure of a kind which would appear to Moscow to be designed to build public and Congressional support in the US for further deployment of ABM systems or for the inauguration of MIRV deployment would at least create confusion in Moscow among those supporting the talks, and it would probably create serious doubts in their minds about US good faith in the SALT talks. Some of these would tend to regard the act of disclosure simply as an attempt by the so-called military-industrial complex to scuttle SALT, but they would probably also reserve judgment as to whether this group had become dominant. In any event, skepticism about the possibility of negotiating an arms control agreement with the US would grow considerably.

- 4 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

**SECRET**  
**EYES ONLY**

OLC 70-0243

2 April 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Proposal to Surface Satellite Photography

1. Speaking parochially, I think the proposal will create problems on the Hill:

a. We have emphasized in congressional briefings that this material is probably our most precious remaining secret and urged all concerned to treat it accordingly.

b. If it is surfaced now to serve a "partisan" purpose, the one who does so may be exposed to charges of playing fast and loose with vital security information.

c. At the same time the Agency may be vulnerable to charges of excessive and unnecessary secrecy in trying to keep the lid on in the past.

d. In any event it will be hard to keep the lid on anything from here on out--the obvious lesson which many will draw is that the most sensitive "sources and methods" are expendable whenever the political or policy stakes are high enough.

e. Lastly, it will be hard to hold the line after the first act of the striptease--the audience with its whetted appetite may be expected to cry for more and yet still more in the days ahead.

**SECRET** **EYES ONLY**

EYES ONLY

2. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, I'd also like to venture some personal comments on the likely Soviet reaction:

a. In the present state of apparent division, uncertainty, and instability in the Soviet leadership such a move at this point in time might have a traumatic effect.

b. For one thing, our action will be seen as a move to embarrass and discredit the Soviet State. This in turn would play into the hands of the "hard-liners" who presumably have been arguing in Kremlin councils that true accommodation is an illusion.

c. It may also spur the Soviet leadership to some sort of sharp overt reaction. Historically Soviet leaders have put up with quite a bit of annoyance from abroad provided it isn't unduly publicized. Like the wife of an errant husband, they'll sometimes tolerate a lot so long as there is no publicity, but they cannot stand the humiliation of public taunts.

d. The breakoff of the Paris talks in the wake of the U-2 affair is but one typical example of the characteristic Russian response in such circumstances. Also relevant, I think, is the fact that following our gleeful publication of Khrushchev's secret speech the Kremlin apparently closed ranks in the face of public humiliation, thus delaying by many months Khrushchev's attempts to introduce a more rational and flexible foreign policy. And it is my impression that the Kremlin tried initially to keep its difficulties with the Chinese under control, but eventually felt compelled by the public provocations of Peking to retaliate in kind.

2

SECRET


EYES ONLY

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EYES ONLY

3. In sum, I think anyone who has spent much time pondering Russian behavior would agree that for generations these people have considered secrecy perhaps their most important strategic weapon. This secrecy is, I am sure, designed quite as much to cover up weaknesses and failures as to conceal strength. But in any event, to the Russian mind the foreigner who attempts to tear away this secrecy, and advertise his success in doing so, is not seeking an accommodation, but an advantage. So I fear that one of the most unfortunate ramifications of the actions proposed might concern the SALT talks. It would be easy for the hard-liners in Moscow to argue that this U.S. ploy was a sort of threat or blackmail--a public proclamation that we had succeeded in breaking through their shell of security and that they had therefore better do business on our terms.

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John M. Maury  
Legislative Counsel

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EYES ONLY





MEMORANDUM FOR: DDC  
DDI

I gave this to the Director this noon, as  
he requested.

ABBOT SMITH  
Director  
National Estimates

**Attachment:**

Memo for Director, dtd 2 Apr 70  
"Soviet Reactions to Public Disclosure of Satellite  
Photography of Soviet Military Installations"  
2 April 1970

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(DATE)