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2 JUL 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Robert M. Gates
Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT: Seabed Mining [redacted]

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1. Action Requested. None. ~~This memorandum responds to your query of [redacted] regarding the mining of "autumnine sulfides."~~ [redacted]

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2. Background. Attached is an OGI report on the mining of deep ocean sulfide deposits that was prepared during the Spring 1982 Session of the Law of the Sea Conference in New York. Sulfide deposits are rich in a variety of minerals and are known to be very extensive, but their value vis-a-vis manganese nodules cannot be judged at this time; only isolated deposits have so far been intensively investigated. Mining of these metals is a long way off. The technology for mining hard rock at 2,000 to 4,000 meter ocean depths in the face of often violent ocean weather may not even be on drawing boards. No reliable cost estimates have been made since a recovery system has yet to be designed. The potentially most profitable deposits, however, appear to be those containing substantial amounts of gold, silver, platinum and gallium; deposits less rich in these high-value metals may not meet the test of profitability for commercial enterprises. [redacted]

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Significant sulfide deposits were not identified until 1978, long after the Law of the Sea Conference was under way. Assays were not available until 1980. Polymetallic sulfides thus received little notice at the Conference until last spring. In addition to the United States, the USSR, France, and West Germany appear to be interested in these deposits. [redacted]

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The deposits off the Oregon coast that Bob Keating mentioned lie on a seabed ridge about 250 miles from the coast in 2,100 meters of water (manganese nodules are commonly found at depths of 6,000 meters). A similar geologic ridge a few miles to the south and lying within 180 miles of the Oregon coast will be investigated for sulfide deposits this summer. This latter structure, the Gorda Ridge, would lie within US mineral jurisdiction

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should the United States declare a 200-mile economic zone. The effects of seabed mining on the rich west coast fishing grounds will have to be considered, however, before any sulfide deposits in this area are exploited.



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Robert M. Gates

Attachment:
As stated

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