

UNCLASSIFIED TOP SECRET

February 12, 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

At a meeting held after NSC today, attended by Secretary McElroy, Secretary Quarles and General Twining, Mr. McElroy brought up the question of aerial reconnaissance over the USSR. He pointed out that in the recent Congressional investigations he had been successful in blunting much of the attack on the U.S. posture relative to ICBMs. However, the Congress was continually concerned over the basic premises employed by the Department of Defense, that is, our intelligence estimates. He pointed out that we know the location of no launching platforms within the USSR. He therefore requested the President to consider the matter of additional overflights of the USSR, citing the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that our planes will not be shot down. General Twining reinforced this request by stating that the Joint Chiefs of Staff would certainly like more information. Mr. McElroy would like to obtain permission to do some planning with State and CIA.



The President mentioned the project, to build a more advanced plane to replace the U-2, which he thinks is coming along nicely. He feels that our activity along these lines should be held to a minimum pending the availability of this new equipment. To this Mr. Quarles pointed out that the new equipment will not be available for eighteen months to two years. This argument did not appear to sway the President, however, in that he discounts the capability of the Soviets to build many launching sites within a year. This he bases on the corresponding construction capability within the U.S., observing that we generally overestimate the capability of the USSR to outperform us. He reviewed the controversy of two years ago over the number of BISONs and BEARs available to the Soviets. As it turned out, the threat from these aircraft has been far less than had been initially estimated. The President conceded the great advantage held by Mr. Khrushchev over himself, accruing from the dictatorial methods which Mr. Khrushchev is able to follow.

The President is reserved on the request to continue reconnaissance flights on the basis that it is undue provocation. Nothing, he says, would make him request authority to declare war more quickly than violation of our air space by Soviet aircraft. He stated that while one or two flights might possibly be permissible he is against an extensive program. A brief discussion followed with respect to the role of reconnaissance satellites. It was agreed that the satellite, since it does not

UNCLASSIFIED TOP SECRET

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UNCLASSIFIED TOP SECRET

[2/12/59]

- 2 -

violate air space, cannot be considered in the same light as reconnaissance aircraft. It was agreed that the satellite represents the greatest future in this reconnaissance area.



At this time General Goodpaster pointed out that an aerial reconnaissance mission in the North had been considered and approved, but had not been flown as the result of unfavorable sun angle and unfavorable weather. This cannot be implemented until March. It is rated No. 1 priority. However, after this delay, a new consideration will be necessary. General Twining agreed that the area of the USSR to be covered by this planned reconnaissance mission in the North is extremely important. (As a side issue, the President pointed out that we will at least learn from the next reconnaissance flight whether the Soviets have an adequate surface-to-air missile at that time. General Twining pointed out that the Soviets have never fired a missile at one of our reconnaissance aircraft.)

In closing, Mr. Quarles noted that there are eight operational reconnaissance satellite flights scheduled for the calendar year 1959. These will be cleared on a case-by-case basis with the President. This was agreeable to the President.

As the group was leaving, the President pointed out the close relationship between these reconnaissance programs and the crisis which is impending over Berlin. As May 27th approaches, the President believes it would be most unwise to have world tensions exacerbated by our pursuit of a program of extensive reconnaissance flights over the territory of the Soviet Union.

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