MEMORANDUM FOR DR. ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
FROM: DR. FRANK PRESS
THE WHITE HOUSE

October 14, 1978

Subject: Reactions to President's Acknowledgment of the Fact of Satellite Photoreconnaissance

The following is a summary of reactions to the President's announcement contained in his October 1 speech on space policy.

Congressional

Beginning on September 27, State Department/ Congressional Relations contacted the following congressional offices about the decision to declassify and acknowledge "fact of" in the President's October 1 speech: Bayh, Byrd, Church, Clark, Cranston, Culver, Glenn, Hamilton, Hart, Kennedy, Mathias, Pell, Proxmire, Stennis, and Zablocki.

The general reaction was that this announcement would be a bit of a non-event, but they were glad the Administration was finally officially acknowledging what had been an "open secret" for some time. They did recognize that this would make the Administration's job easier in explaining verification of SALT. There were no negative responses on the Hill during the consultations nor following the President's speech.

US Public Reactions:

Verification is probably the paramount public concern about SALT. We must be able to deal with this issue in a concrete and easily understood fashion if we are to avoid the untenable position of saying "trust us."

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The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Vassev, on September 21, 1979, speaking at the United Nations, said that the Soviet Union is acknowledging the problem of satellite verification and that the President of the United States is acknowledging that the United States has never been a party to the Outer Space Treaty. Vassev said that the United States is acknowledging that the outer space world is the responsibility of both sides, and that verification agreements are essential. He also mentioned that the United States is planning to send a selective and phased release of satellite information by the end of the year.

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The State Department officials have had about 4,000 additional steps in their decisions to develop a plan for verification of the treaty's provisions. They have met with other countries and have discussed the possibility of using as verification agreements. The official policy of the United States is to work towards a more open and transparent system of international relations. The Secretary of State has indicated that the United States expects to achieve more confidence and a better understanding of the treaty's provisions through public concern about verification and a clear indication of the United States' intention to continue working towards this goal.

The preliminary agreement indicates that the fact of satellite verification has not been completely 'qualified'. This preliminary agreement to broaden aspects of the treaty which enhance wide agreement on verification, elements of the treaty which enhance public concern about verification and a clear indication of the United States' intention to continue working towards this goal, indicates that the United States has taken steps to broaden aspects of the treaty which enhance public concern about verification and a clear indication of the United States' intention to continue working towards this goal.

The intelligence community has received and reviewed this document.
The French DCM to NATO was informed privately that declassification of the fact of satellite photo-reconnaissance does not change the unfavorable US view of the French proposal for an international verification agency. The French DCM expressed disappointment.

Except for Australia, the other allies who were informed made no comment or reaction. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs requested additional information, including the text of the President's speech, to ensure that they could fully brief government ministers.

Special Australian interest is due in part to the Government's need to be able publicly to explain and defend US defense policies and practices that may involve Australia. It also reflects the aftermath of a recent episode in which the Minister of Defense was uninformed about an aspect of our relationship when queried by the Opposition in Parliament.

The Australian actions primarily were precautionary. Department of Foreign Affairs officials predicted no particular problems and none have arisen as a result of the President's speech.

United Nations

Thus far, there has been no delegate reaction to the President's announcement. It is likely, however, that interested governments still are considering what public position they should take. They may express their interests and possible concerns as early as October 16 when the UN Special Political Committee addresses outer space issues. Work is underway to formulate a US presentation.

We also are likely to encounter related issues in the weeks and months ahead.

French proposal. The USG has been trying to dissuade France from tabling a proposal at the UNGA calling for the creation of international satellite verification. Now that the US has publicly acknowledged the role of satellites in verifying compliance with arms control agreements, we will face the task of making a persuasive public case for opposing international verification if the French go ahead with their plan.
Accusations of "Spying". There may be an effort in the UN to condemn as espionage or a violation of international law either (a) all satellite photo reconnaissance undertaken without the permission of the sensed State or, more likely, (b) all such reconnaissance except in the context of verification of arms control agreements or with the sensed State's prior approval. If such charges are made or a resolution along these lines is proposed, our response will be to reiterate the need for satellite verification of arms control agreements and to stress that no principle of international law prohibits remote sensing of the earth from outer space.

UN Outer Space Committee (OSC). If the issue of "fact of" is raised in the OSC, we will distinguish between remote sensing of the earth and its national environment and photo-reconnaissance for arms control verification, and will try to get the latter issue referred to other UN forums.

Certain of our positions on principles relating to remote sensing, including our stance on a long-standing Soviet proposal on resolution limits for open dissemination, will need to be reassessed in time for the meetings of the Legal Subcommittee and the Scientific Subcommittee which begin in February. That review will begin soon.

Foreign Media Reaction:

A review of FBI reports indicates that the President's acknowledgment of satellite photo reconnaissance was reported in a wide variety of countries, but was not covered extensively. A few stories were supportive, most were simply brief news reports, and some were critical. No pattern of reactions is apparent; the story was covered by the East European press in about the same way as the Western European and Third World press. The President's acknowledgment apparently was not covered by Soviet media. There is no evidence of continuing foreign media interest.

The content of most of the stories appeared to be drawn from Jody Powell's backgrounder which drew attention to the fact that this was the first time that the US had officially acknowledged satellite photo reconnaissance. Many stories noted that this was the first official confirmation of what was already well known.
The tone of most of the stories was "matter-of-fact reporting." The number of explicit commentaries and editorials was negligible. On the other hand, the overwhelming proportion of reports referred to "spy" satellites, several referred to "espionage," and some characterized the President as "admitting" or "confessing" the fact of satellite photoreconnaissance. A large number of stories simply reported that the US had officially admitted that it uses satellites to "spy on the Soviet Union and other countries" and failed to make the connection to SALT and arms control verification.

Notwithstanding these apparent pejoratives, there was little explicit criticism. This may simply reflect a cynical resignation about the conduct of great powers. The context, however, suggests that in many cases, reporters simply used "spy" as a synonym for "reconnaissance." To some extent, use of these terms also may be artifacts of translating the President's speech into the native language and then translating the resulting foreign language reports back into English.

No ICA posts have reported significant local media reaction nor have defense attaches detected major media attention to the announcement. The Bureau of Intelligence and Research has not received any reactions or responses through its channels.

Peter Turnoff
Executive Secretary