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2 April 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT : Soviet Sensitivity to Publicity
on Satellite Reconnaissance

1. The most direct Soviet statement on the subject of acknowledging satellite reconnaissance was made in December 1969 by a diplomat at the UN, Mendelevich, in a conversation with Buffum of the US Mission. In the context of peaceful uses of outer space, Mendelevich opposed a US draft resolution because, among other things, it formally raised the fact that at least one superpower is photographing "secrets" of other states. Although Mendelevich said that Soviet and US activities in this field were well known, the USSR would not acknowledge this fact publicly, and thought it would be an error for the US to do so, and urged us to desist from our resolution.

2. Apart from this conversation, the record of private Soviet statements on the subject of satellite reconnaissance reveals two things: (1) the Soviets simply have had very little to say on the matter; and (2) when they have, they have either been boastful (as Khrushchev was) or highly elliptical.

3. On at least two occasions in 1964, Khrushchev raised the issue of satellite reconnaissance with Western officials. Both times, Khrushchev's primary motive was to relay to the US that it should call off its reconnaissance overflights of Cuba and rely instead on satellite photography. On the first occasion, he even offered to exchange photographs of military installations with Washington.

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4. Since Khrushchev, however, the Soviets have been relatively reserved in private. In 1966, Ambassador Goldberg reported, in his talks with Soviet diplomats at the UN, he got the impression that they thought that open discussion of the matter might be damaging.

5. More recently, at Helsinki, the Soviets regularly shied away from the subject. They did, of course, refer to national means of verification and occasionally gestured overhead, but they did not raise the matter specifically in formal discussion. One delegate, Shchukin, mentioned the word "satellite" twice in technical discussions about verification. Otherwise, the Soviets behaved as though an explicit acknowledgment of this activity -- even in secret negotiations -- would be injurious.

6. It is interesting to note that references to satellite reconnaissance in Soviet propaganda have ceased since the Helsinki talks got underway. Prior to that time, there were occasional mentions of US launchings of "spy satellites" and of American scientific developments in this field. Long ago, however, Moscow dropped its charges that satellite reconnaissance violated international law.

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