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THE WHITE HOUSE

2255-X

WASHINGTON

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INFORMATION
April 26, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: BRENT SCOWCROFT

SUBJECT: Soviet Anti-Satellite Capability

The Soviet test of an anti-satellite interceptor last week, the second such test in the last two months, has emphasized the need to reexamine our posture in space and the vulnerability of our space assets.

For the last few months an NSC Panel of technical consultants has been reviewing the direction of the future U. S. military related space program -- including the vulnerability of our space assets. The Panel has prepared an Interim Report (Tab A) assessing the capabilities and limitations of the Soviet anti-satellite program and possible near-term U. S. countermeasures. The Panel concluded that:

-- The Soviets have undertaken a broad based, well supported program to achieve an anti-satellite capability which could prevent U. S. satellites from overflying the Soviet Union. The Soviets probably already have a limited operational capability with their non-nuclear interceptor against U. S. low altitude satellites. There is no evidence as yet of a Soviet capability against U. S. high altitude satellites.

-- Even though the Soviet capability is limited, it is probably sufficient to completely deny U. S. satellite photo reconnaissance missions for periods up to years if the Soviets were willing to risk the serious repercussions such an attack in space would entail. They could also selectively deny several other critical U. S. low altitude missions, including the Navy ocean surveillance satellites and the submarine navigation satellites.

-- The lack of a clearly articulated statement of national security policy relative to the use of space has delayed U. S. development of available countermeasures for years and has contributed to our current vulnerable posture in space.

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-- There are a number of near-term countermeasures the U. S. could employ to minimize the impact of the Soviet anti-satellite program. The technology is in hand to provide these capabilities as soon as a decision is made to give increased protection to our satellites.

-- Development of a U. S. anti-satellite interceptor, while technically feasible, will not contribute to the survivability of U. S. space assets. Other U. S. responses are available to deter the Soviets from offensive actions in space.

The Panel has properly highlighted the problem we face today. We are very dependent on a relatively small number of low altitude satellite missions and have done very little to protect them from Soviet attack. There are certain near-term actions we can take to enhance the survivability of our critical military and intelligence satellites -- however, these actions have been delayed in the past, partly because of the lack of clear policy guidance in this area.

A draft NSDM is now being prepared to rectify the policy problem. This NSDM would direct: (1) the initiation of near-term survivability enhancement measures for the photo reconnaissance satellites and selected other critical space assets as soon as possible, and (2) the planning for longer-term survivability measures for all of our critical military and intelligence satellites. Coordination of this proposed NSDM with the major agencies involved will take another week or two, following which I will present it for your consideration.

The Panel of technical consultants is continuing its work and hopes to have a final report late this summer. The final report will expand consideration of U. S. space vulnerabilities and dependency, suggest a proper balance in the military use of space, analyze the need for a U. S. capability for offensive space operations, and review the implications of the space shuttle.

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