

MEMORANDUM ~~THE~~ PRESIDENT HAS SEEN . . .

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

December 16, 1976

~~TOP SECRET/XGDS~~

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: BRENT SCOWCROFT *BS*
SUBJECT: U.S. Anti-Satellite Capabilities

As you know, an Ad Hoc Panel of NSC technical consultants has been studying a number of aspects of U.S. military use of space. An interim report on their study of U.S. anti-satellite capabilities was forwarded to you last July. They have now completed their final report on this subject. (Tab A)

Summary of Panel Views

The Panel concluded that there is an urgent need for a U.S. capability to destroy at least some militarily important low altitude Soviet space systems. The Panel points out that during the last few years the Soviets have started to use satellites for direct support of their military forces-- support that is greatly increasing their force effectiveness. The Panel is convinced that this Soviet trend will continue and that real-time space capabilities will become even more important to the effective use of military forces in the future.

Typifying this trend, the Panel points to the Soviet use of electronic intercept and radar ocean surveillance satellites. These satellites today have a worldwide operational capability to locate major U.S. naval surface combatants and provide this location data in real-time to Soviet surface ships and submarines for use in targeting long-range anti-ship missiles. The Panel believes that this long-range missile threat to the U.S. surface Navy is of great concern and will continue to improve.

If the U.S. had the capability to destroy the critical target-locating satellites, which are at low altitude and are few in number, the ability of the Soviets to find and target U.S. ships at long-range would be greatly degraded. In the opinion of the Panel, the capability to nullify this ocean surveillance threat alone provides sufficient motivation to undertake an anti-satellite development program. There are, however, other low altitude Soviet space systems such as the low-altitude communications satellites and possibly the photo-reconnaissance satellites, which are important to Soviet military operations and could also become targets for an anti-satellite. This list is expected to grow as the Soviets continue to expand their space capability in the future.

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The Panel concluded that a limited anti-satellite capability sufficient to conduct six to ten low altitude intercepts within a week and to respond to a new Soviet launch inside one day, could be developed by the end of CY 1980 using available technology, if sufficient priority is applied. However, budgetary pressures, arms control considerations, and other international policy factors could impede progress in this area unless a clear statement of U.S. national policy is made emphasizing the need for anti-satellite development.

The Panel also concluded that there is a need for a parallel effort to achieve

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The Panel further concluded that space-based lasers as anti-satellite weapons will not be feasible as an operational anti-satellite capability before the late 1980's or early 1990's.

Next Steps

The Panel has highlighted the value of a U.S. anti-satellite system and has helped to clarify possible program objectives. One of the reasons for lack of progress in the past has been the absence of clear policy guidance on national objectives in this area. Recently DOD has moved more aggressively toward obtaining a limited near-term anti-satellite capability, and has budgeted substantially more funds for FY 1978 through FY 1982. A clear statement of national policy on U.S. anti-satellite capabilities would help to maintain this momentum.

Toward that end, a draft NSDM is now being prepared which would (1) clearly state the need for a limited near-term U.S. low-altitude anti-satellite capability, (2) clarify the objectives of such a capability, and (3) explore complementary arms control measures to restrain growth of anti-satellites to high altitudes. Following agency review and comments on the study effort, I will present the NSDM to you for consideration.

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