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NSC BRIEFING

SOVIET EARTH SATELLITE CAPABILITIES

I. In April 1955, the U SSR announced the formation of the Permanent Interagency Commission for Interplanetary Communications. There is other evidence indicating the existence of this Commission at least as early as the fall of 1954. The public announcement was the first official indication that the USSR was actively engaged on problems associated with the launching and orbiting of earth satellite vehicles.

II. The six commission members named are among the leading Soviet scientists; their competence in such fields as astrophysics and nuclear research is internationally recognized. One of the first tasks of this commission was stated to be the organization of work for the creation of an "automatic" laboratory for scientific research of outer space. This "automatic" laboratory is believed to be an unmanned earth satellite.

III. Since late 1955, numerous unofficial statements have been attributed to Soviet scientists concerning Soviet intentions to launch satellites during the International Geophysical Year (1 July 1957 to 31 December 1958). In September 1956, the Soviet IGY Committee announced its intention to participate in the IGY rocket and earth satellite programs. However, no detailed program was submitted and we still do not have firm information on the numbers of vehicles, their size, and the Soviet launching plans, although we do have some data which indicates that the numbers of vehicles involved in the Soviet program generally approximates those in our program.

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IV. The USSR will probably make a major effort to be the first country to orbit an earth satellite. On the basis of our estimate of Soviet guided missile capabilities, we believe that the USSR possesses the basic technical capabilities, skills, and other resources required to develop, build, and orbit an unmanned satellite vehicle. We believe that the USSR has the capability of orbiting, in early 1957, a satellite vehicle which could acquire scientific information and data of limited military value. A satellite vehicle possessing substantial reconnaissance capabilities of military value could probably be orbited in the period 1963-65.

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