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June 30, 1967

Dear Dick:

A gas bottle from a Soviet satellite was picked up last fall in Wisconsin and shipped to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base for investigation. At Wright-Patterson, the bottle was cut into a number of pieces as part of the process of gathering intelligence data. The Department of State first learned of the acquisition of the gas bottle when our public affairs office was asked to clear a press statement on this subject for use in Dayton, Ohio. Subsequently, we decided that the remaining pieces of the bottle should not be returned to the Soviets.

The handling of this Soviet space fragment had many foreign policy implications. A 1963 United Nations Resolution calls for the return of foreign space objects to the government of the state of registry, and Article VIII of the recently concluded Outer Space Treaty similarly requires their return. It was primarily because of the fear that interpretation of the Treaty would be affected that the decision was made not to return the remaining pieces of the fragment to the Soviets.

SP 12 USSR

The Honorable
Richard Helms, Director,
Central Intelligence Agency,
Washington, D. C.

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In addition, the United States on a regular basis seeks return of our own space fragments that have fallen in various countries around the world. To the extent it becomes known, our conduct with regard to a foreign fragment in the United States is certain to be subject to the scrutiny of governments from whom we are seeking or have sought cooperation.

Once the Space Treaty enters into force, actions taken within the United States Government with regard to recovered foreign space objects will have even greater foreign policy significance.

By mentioning these considerations I do not mean to prejudge intelligence considerations. However, I do believe that it is essential that our obligation to return space objects and other foreign policy considerations be weighed before irrevocable actions are taken such as the total dismemberment of the Soviet gas bottle in the recent case. I propose, therefore, that the Department of Defense take steps to assure that the Department of State is promptly informed of the recovery in the United States or by United States authorities anywhere, or of the receipt from a third country of a space object of foreign or questionable origin and that the object is not physically altered prior to consultation with the Department of State. In order to ensure that the United States is not accused of collusion in the violation of the Space Treaty, I also propose that the Department of State be notified should the United States be given access to such space objects by a third country. I am making similar proposals to the Department of Defense and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

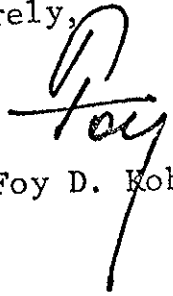
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Mr. Scott George will act as my staff contact on these matters.

Sincerely,



Foy D. Kohler

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