

Source: National Security Council, "Discussion at the 347th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, December 5, 1957," 6 December 1957, NSC Series, Box 9, Eisenhower Papers, 1953-1961 (Ann Whitman File), Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

An initial assignment for the President's Science Advisory Committee, which was formed in the aftermath of the launches of Sputnik 1 and 2, was to assess the appropriate direction and pace for the U.S. space program. PSAC focused heavily on the scientific aspects of the space program. With the president's endorsement, on March 26, 1958, it released a report outlining the importance of space activities, but recommended a cautiously measured pace.

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Present at the 347th Council meeting were the President of the United States, presiding; the Vice President of the United States; the Secretary of State; the Secretary of Defense; and the Director, Office of Defense Mobilization. Also present were the Secretary of the Treasury; the Attorney General (participating in Item 1); Mr. Louis Rothschild for the Secretary of Commerce (participating in Item 1); the Director, Bureau of the Budget; the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission (participating in Items 2, 3 and 5); the Federal Civil Defense Administrator; the Director, International Cooperation Administration; the Director, U. S. Information Agency; the Chairman, Civil Aeronautics Board (for Item 1 only); the Chairmen, Interdepartmental Intelligence Conference and Interdepartmental Committee on Internal Security (for Item 1 only); Under Secretary of State Dillon; the Deputy Secretary of Defense; Assistant Secretary of State Smith; Assistant Secretary of Defense Sprague; the Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Director of Central Intelligence; The Assistant to the President; the Deputy Assistant to the President; Special Assistants to the President Cutler, Stassen, Dearborn, Killian and Larson; the White House Staff Secretary; the Executive Secretary, NSC; and the Deputy Executive Secretary, NSC.

There follows a summary of the discussion at the meeting and the main points taken...

3. PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS OF LAUNCHINGS OF U. S. SCIENTIFIC SATELLITES

Growing out of the discussion of the previous item, Secretary Dulles said that he was about to be obliged to leave the meeting, and before doing so he had a word to say about the postponement yesterday of our attempt to launch our first scientific satellite. He earnestly hoped that in the future we would not announce the date, the hour, and indeed the minute, that we were proposing to launch our earth satellite, until the satellite was successfully in orbit. Speaking very earnestly, Secretary Dulles said the effect of the publicity of the last few days, culminating in the final decision to postpone the attempt to launch our first earth satellite, had had a terrible effect on the foreign relations of the United States.

The President commented that he was all for stopping such unfortunate publicity, but he had no idea how we could stop it.

Secretary Quarles then undertook to explain what had happened yesterday. He stated that we were, in a sense, hoist by our own petard. We had in our earth satellite program dedicated ourselves from the beginning to work upon this program as a scientific experiment. We had accordingly promised the IGY scientists throughout the world that we would inform them when we proposed to try to launch our earth satellite and to give them all the desired information about it. It is too bad that yesterday's test had to be postponed, but we had promised the scientists of the world to inform them when we made our attempt to launch the satellite, so that they could all be ready at their various stations to receive the scientific data coming from the earth satellite. Secretary Quarles said that these remarks constituted not an excuse, but an explanation.

Still speaking feelingly, Secretary Dulles asked whether we could not possibly avoid further announcements of launchings until we were assured that they were successful. Secretary Quarles replied that we could only do so by changing our policy with respect to the fundamental purposes of our scientific satellite program. Secretary Dulles commented that what had happened yesterday had been a disaster for the United States.

The President inquired whether the scientists of the world would lose very much significant data if they were unaware that the United States had actually successfully launched a scientific satellite until it had orbited the world at least once.

Dr. Killian likewise inquired whether, in our next try to launch a satellite, we could not assure ourselves of its successful orbiting before we notified the world that we were attempting to launch such a satellite.

The President inquired whether what had happened at the Florida grounds yesterday constituted a failure to launch the scientific satellite. Secretary Quarles replied that it had not been a failure, but that a delay had occurred in the course of the countdown. The President then went on to inquire whether there were not other launching sites available for the earth satellite. Couldn't we launch our satellite from some desert region rather than from the thickly-populated Florida coast? Secretary Quarles replied that while it might well be desirable to have additional launching sites for the earth satellite, none had been prepared. The President then inquired whether it was not possible to shield the activities and the installations from which the satellite would be launched. Could not something be done so that not everyone within miles of the Florida base could see the rocket?

Secretary Dulles continued to express his irritation at our practice of giving out such precise announcements of the days, hours, and minutes of our launching attempts. What had happened yesterday had made us the laughing-stock of the whole Free World, and was being most effectively exploited by the Soviets. Secretary Quarles again replied that our announcement policy had been drawn up in terms of a certain philosophy about our scientific satellite program. Perhaps we should change this philosophy.

Dr. Killian then suggested that he and Secretary Quarles, together with Dr. Bronk and Dr. Waterman, should sit down and try to figure out how best to deal with the timing of our announcements of attempts to launch our earth satellites.

Mr. Allen stated that from the point of view of the U. S. Information Agency, he emphatically believed it would be best if the President were to order that no announcement was to be made next time until the scientific satellite was actually in its orbit.

The National Security Council:

Noted the President's request that the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Special Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, in consultation with the Director, National Science Foundation, and the President, National Academy of Sciences, study whether public announcement of any attempted launching of a U. S. scientific satellite could be postponed until a successful launching had been assured.

NOTE: The above action, as approved by the President, subsequently transmitted to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Special Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, the Director, National Science Foundation, and the President, National Academy of Sciences, for appropriate implementation.

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