

DEPARTMENT OF STATE FOR THE PRESS

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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

On May 7 the Department of State spokesman made a statement with respect to the alleged shooting down of an unarmed American civilian aircraft of the U-2 type over the Soviet Union. The following supplements and clarifies this statement as respects the position of the United States Government.

Ever since Marshal Stalin shifted the policy of the Soviet Union from wartime cooperation to postwar conflict in 1946 and particularly since the Berlin blockade, the forceful takeover of Czechoslovakia and the Communist aggressions in Korea and Vietnam the world has lived in a state of apprehension with respect to Soviet intentions. The Soviet leaders have almost complete access to the open societies of the free world and supplement this with vast espionage networks. However, they keep their own society tightly closed and rigorously controlled. With the development of modern weapons carrying tremendously destructive nuclear warheads, the threat of surprise attack and aggression presents a constant danger. This menace is enhanced by the threats of mass destruction frequently voiced by the Soviet leadership.

For many years the United States in company with its allies has sought to lessen or even to eliminate this threat from the life of man so that he can go about his peaceful business without fear. Many proposals to this end have been put up to the Soviet Union. The President's "open skies" proposal of 1955 was followed in 1957 by the offer of an exchange of ground observers between agreed military installations in the U.S., the USSR and other nations that might wish to participate. For several years we have been seeking the mutual abolition of the restrictions on travel imposed by the Soviet Union and those which the United States felt obliged to institute on a reciprocal basis. More recently at the Geneva disarmament conference the United States has proposed far-reaching new measures of controlled disarmament. It is possible that the Soviet leaders have a different version and that, however unjustifiedly, they fear attack from the West. But this is hard to reconcile with their continual rejection of our repeated proposals for effective measures against surprise attack and for effective inspection of disarmament measures.

I will say frankly that it is unacceptable that the Soviet political system should be given an opportunity to make secret preparations to face the free world with the choice of abject surrender or nuclear destruction. The Government of the United States would be derelict to its responsibility not only to the American people but to free peoples everywhere if it did not, in the absence of Soviet cooperation, take such measures as are possible unilaterally to lessen and to overcome this danger of surprise attack. In fact the United States has not and does not shirk this responsibility.



In accordance with the National Security Act of 1947, the President has put into effect since the beginning of his Administration directives to gather by every possible means the information required to protect the United States and the Free World against surprise attack and to enable them to make effective preparations for their defense. Under these directives programs have been developed and put into operation which have included extensive aerial surveillance by unarmed civilian aircraft, normally of a peripheral character but on occasion by penetration. Specific missions of these unarmed civilian aircraft have not been subject to Presidential authorization. The fact that such surveillance was taking place has apparently not been a secret to the Soviet leadership and the question indeed arises as to why at this particular juncture they should seek to exploit the present incident as a propaganda battle in the cold war.

This government had sincerely hoped and continues to hope that in the coming meeting of the Heads of Government in Paris Chairman Khrushchev would be prepared to cooperate in agreeing to effective measures which would remove this fear of sudden mass destruction from the minds of peoples everywhere. Far from being damaging to the forthcoming meeting in Paris, this incident should serve to underline the importance to the world of an earnest attempt there to achieve agreed and effective safeguards against surprise attack and aggression.

At my request and with the authority of the President, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Honorable Allen W. Dulles, is today briefing members of the Congress fully along the foregoing lines.

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State--RD, Wash., D.C.