

September 26, 1959
**Report by Chairman of the Committee for State
Security on American "Discoverer" Satellites**

Citation:

"Report by Chairman of the Committee for State Security on American "Discoverer" Satellites", September 26, 1959, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Translated for CWIHP by Daniel Rozas. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/120750>

Summary:

A report to the CC CPSU on six American "Discoverer" model satellites with speculation about the satellites' military or surveillance purposes.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

U S S R
Committee of State Security
Top Secret
Copy #1
USSR Council of Ministers
26 September 1959
#2981-sh
Moscow

CC CPSU

I report that, according to official information, the war ministry [sic] of the United States of America has, from March to September 1959, launched six artificial Earth satellites of the "Discoverer" model and plans to launch an additional 15 by the end of 1960.

It is significant that the official information on "Discoverer," in contrast to information on other USA satellites, displays a refrained and clearly contradictory character. Frequencies and other technical information of radio transmitters, as well as orbit parameters, are not being announced.

According to information from the American press, the launches of the first nine "Discoverer" satellites are being carried out by the "Thor" medium-range combat missiles, while subsequent launches will be carried out by the "Atlas" intercontinental combat missile. The launch program represents only a part of the larger effort to create surveillance satellites for studying the earth surface with the aid of television and other cameras. At the same time, work is being completed on methods of detaching and dropping containers (capsules) in specified regions of the Earth, with devices containing research and observation results.

In this regard, it appears that certain positive results have been achieved, since the military administration has already announced the successful separation of device-bearing containers from a satellite.

In the opinion of Soviet specialists - academician L.I. Sedov, physics and mathematics doctor G. S. NARIMANOV and others - the "Discoverer" satellites can be successfully used by the Americans for military and surveillance purposes.

In particular, academician L. I. SEDOV believes that containers with ionizing substances dropped on the USSR from a satellite could disrupt our defensive installations that rely on electronic devices distributed over a large territory.

They suppose that the accuracy of the container dropped by the Americans on a specified region may reach approximately +/- 150-200 km in distance [along the trajectory] and +/- 50 km to the side [of the trajectory].

With the aid of devices on-board the satellite, it is entirely possible, from a height of 200-300km, to effectively photograph sectors of the Earth 50-90 km in width and with a range of 150000 km.

Some scientists lean toward the idea that "Discoverer" is being used by the Americans to tie together the triangulation markers of the USA geodesic survey with the necessary geodesic points within the territory of the Soviet Union, with the goal of

obtaining initial data for firing ballistic missiles and "Snarok"- type plane-projectiles.

At the present time, the "Discoverer" satellites are not being observed from the Soviet Union territory due to the absence of information on their orbit and the frequency range of their radio transmitters, as well as due to the lack of the necessary controlling radio-devices with the frequency range to 1000 MHZ.

Noting the ever-growing scope and speed in the development of military and surveillance satellites by the United States of America, the Committee for State Security under the USSR Council of Ministers deems it necessary to organize a systematic observation of the "Discoverer" Earth satellites, with the goal of determining the frequency range of their radio transmitters and obtaining other information.

For this purpose, one should engage the resources of the Chief Surveillance Department of the USSR Ministry of Defense, the Committee of State Security under the USSR Council of Ministers, the technical radio control network of the USSR Ministry of Communication, and other departments. In order to maximize success, the tasks of observing the USA military satellites and determining their frequency range should be divided among these [organizations], while one of them should be assigned the task of coordinating their operations.

The entire network of optical observation points must also be engaged in the observation of the American "Discoverer" satellites, with the goal of gathering data about their orbits. This will, in turn, simplify the task of determining the frequency range of their transmitters.

The State Committee on Radio-Electronics of the USSR Council of Ministers should be instructed to expedite the development and production of highly sensitive controlling radio devices with a frequency range to 1000 MHZ.

CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE FOR STATE SECURITY under the USSR COUNCIL OF
MINISTERS

[signature] TELETYPE