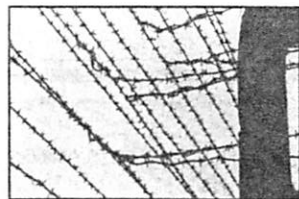


Commentary



Books

'The Holocaust Encyclopedia' / B8

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SECTION 7

JAMES HACKETT

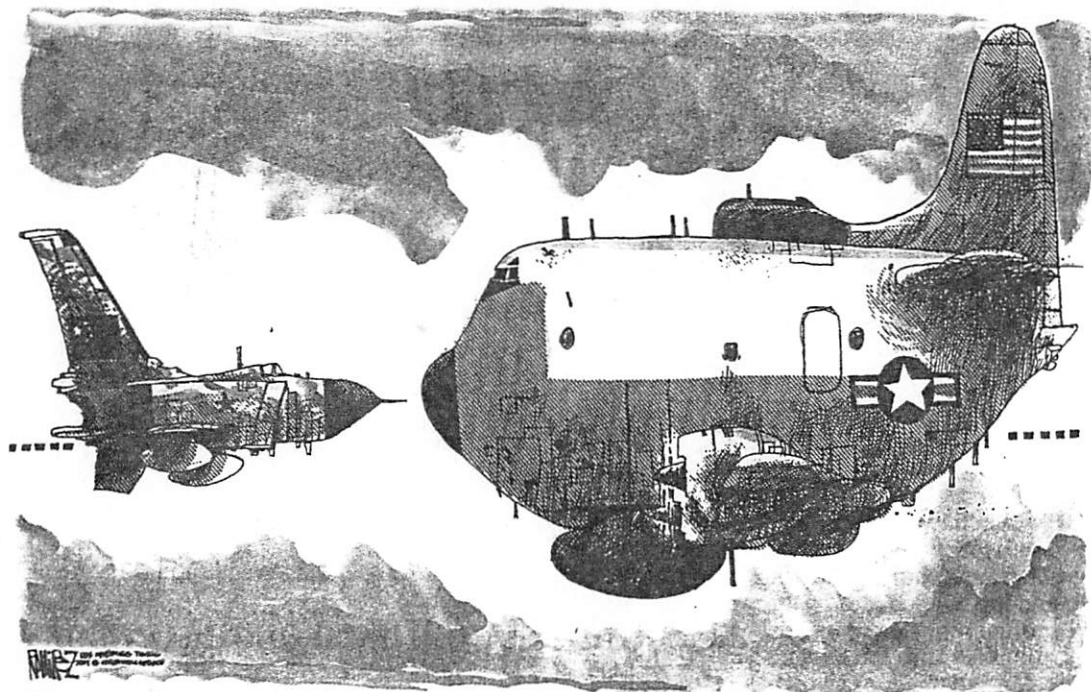
Forty one years ago a Soviet surface-to-air missile shot down a U-2 spy plane, leaving pilot Francis Gary Powers captured and imprisoned. The crisis caused cancellation of a U.S.-Soviet summit, forced the U.S. to admit it had lied about conducting reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union, and ruined President Eisenhower's last year in office. Powers later was exchanged for a Soviet master spy.

Not much has changed in 41 years. The propeller-driven EP-3 plane forced down two weeks ago by an aggressive Chinese pilot flies much lower and slower than the U-2 did in 1960. Unlike the U-2 and its SR-71 big brother, which the Air Force retired prematurely to save money, the EP-3 does not fly over hostile territory. It just goes around the edges, picking up communications and other signals intelligence from over international water.

The U.S. armed forces conduct a variety of intelligence flights. In addition to the Navy's EP-3 Arietis planes, the Air Force flies Rivet Joint EP-135 flights that also collect communications and signals intelligence. The Navy's P-3 Orion aircraft fly patrols to track submarines, and Air Force Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) aircraft conduct overhead surveillance of military operations.

These are low and slow aircraft that make good targets for anti-aircraft missiles and fighter planes. While they should be safe in peacetime, nothing is guaranteed if they go near countries such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea (in 1968 North Korea held the crew of the spy ship

More room for spies in outer space



Pueblo for nearly a year). And China, which claims a 200-mile exclusion zone and considers the international waters of the South China Sea a Chinese lake, is determined to keep them away.

But these flights are needed to monitor military maneuvers and

movements, and the administration is equally determined they will continue. Communist China keeps threatening Taiwan and is operating its new Russian destroyers and submarines in waters near that country. It is important for U.S. and allied security to keep track of those

vessels and monitor their operations.

But why can't more intelligence be gathered from space? The U.S. long has had on orbit Keyhole satellites with optical cameras and Lacrosse radar satellites that can see through clouds. They are to be

replaced starting in 2005 by a new generation of spy satellites known as the Future Imagery Architecture, which can collect more and better electronic images and distribute them faster to more end-users.

The National Reconnaissance Office also operates satellites that collect communications and signals information. Their work is highly classified, but it may be possible to upgrade some of their satellites to do part of the job now being done by slow-flying aircraft. The vulnerability of the planes and the possibility of their crews becoming hostages is an incentive to find a better way to collect intelligence.

Last year, Donald Rumsfeld chaired a commission that studied the U.S. role in space. The commission's report, issued in January, said, "Space provides a unique vantage point for observing objects across vast reaches of air, land, and sea." It called on the armed services to develop "innovative space technologies," and to deploy space systems "to defend U.S. interests on Earth and in space." Now that Mr. Rumsfeld is defense secretary he is expected to begin moving the U.S. military more rapidly into space operations.

One high priority cited by the space commission is the need to develop a space-based radar that "could provide military commanders, on a nearly continuous and

global basis, with precise and timely information on the location of adversary forces and their movements." The services have been pressing for such a space-based radar that can track the enemy day and night, in all kinds of weather, and transmit information directly to units in the field. Such a capability also would protect U.S. and allied forces, and the surveillance would be conducted by unmanned satellites with no crew to be endangered or held hostage.

Last year, congressional appropriators killed a program to develop and test a new radar satellite on the grounds that it was superfluous, technically risky and too expensive. Tell that to the crew of the Navy EP-3. After killing the program, however, Congress then asked the defense secretary to evaluate the options for a space-based radar and report his findings by May 1. The report needs to satisfy congressional concerns about cost, technical issues and the need for such a capability.

May 1 is the anniversary of the downing of the U-2. Congress should keep that in mind and support the effort to move intelligence collection from manned aircraft to unmanned satellites.

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