**The U-2 Incident**

**United States Note to the U.S.S.R.**

**May, 1960**

#### (Dept. of State Bulletin, May 23, 1960, p 818.)

The Embassy of the United States of America by instruction of its Government has the honor to state the following:

The United States Government has noted the statement of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, N. S. Khrushchev, in his speech before the Supreme Soviet on May 5 that a foreign aircraft crossed the border of the Soviet Union on May 1 and that on orders of the Soviet Government, this aircraft was shot down. In this same statement it was said that investigation showed that it was a United States plane.

As already announced on May 3, a United States National Aeronautical Space Agency unarmed weather research plane based at Adana, Turkey, and piloted by a civilian American has been missing since May 1. The name of the American civilian pilot is Francis Gary Powers, born on August 17, 1929, at Jenkins, Kentucky.

In the light of the above the United States Government requests the Soviet Government to provide it with full facts of the Soviet investigation of this incident and to inform it of the fate of the pilot.

[Return to top of the Page](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/u2.asp#top)

#### (2) State Department Statement, May 7, 1960.

#### (Department of State Bulletin, May 23, 1960, p. 818-819)

The Department has received the text of Mr. Krushchev's further remarks about the unarmed plane which is reported to have been shot down in the Soviet Union. As previously announced, it was known that a U-2 plane was missing. As a result of the inquiry ordered by the President it has been established that insofar as the authorities in Washington are concerned there was no authorization for any such flight as described by Mr. Khrushchev.

Nevertheless it appears that in endeavoring to obtain information now concealed behind the Iron Curtain a flight over Soviet territory was probably undertaken by an unarmed civilian U-2 plane.

It is certainly no secret that, given the state of the world today, intelligence collection activities are practiced by all countries, and postwar history certainly reveals that the Soviet Union has not been lagging behind in this field.

The necessity for such activities as measures for legitimate national defense is enhanced by the excessive secrecy practiced by the Soviet Union in contrast to the free world.

One of the things creating tension in the world today is apprehension over surprise attack with weapon of mass destruction.

To reduce mutual suspicion and to give a measure of protection against surprise attack the United States in 1955 offered its open-skies proposal - a proposal which was rejected out of hand by the Soviet Union. It is in relation to the danger of surprise attack that planes of the type of unarmed civilian U-2 aircraft have made flights along the frontiers of the free world for the past 4 years.

[Return to top of the Page](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/u2.asp#top)

#### (3) Statement by Secretary of State Herter, May 9, 1960.

#### (Dept. of State Bulletin, May 23, 1960, pp. 816-817.)

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 Viet- nam 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 in the U.S., the U.S.S.R., 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 measure 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 or our repeated proposal 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 people 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.

[Return to top of the Page](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/u2.asp#top)

#### (4) Soviet Note to the United States, May 10, 1960

The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics considers it necessary to state the following to the Government of the United States of America.

On May 1 of this year at 5 hour 36 minutes, Moscow time, a military aircraft violated the boundary of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and intruded across the borders of the Soviet Union for a distance of more than 2,000 kilometers. The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics naturally could not leave unpunished such a flagrant violation of Soviet state boundaries. When the intentions of the violating aircraft became apparent, it was shot down by Soviet rocket troops in the area of Sverdlovsk.

Upon examination by experts of all data at the disposal of the Soviet side, it was incontrovertibly established that the intruder aircraft belonged to the United States of America, was permanently based in Turkey and was sent through Pakistan into the Soviet Union with hostile purposes.

As Chairman of the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers N. S. Khrushchev made public on May 7 at the final session of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, exact data from the investigation leave no doubts with respect to the purpose of the flight of the American aircraft which violated the U.S.S.R. border on May 1. This aircraft was specially equipped for reconnaissance and diversionary flight over the territory of the Soviet Union. It had on board apparatus for aerial photography for detecting the Soviet radar network and other special radio-technical equipment which form part of U.S.S.R. anti-aircraft defenses. At the disposal of the Soviet expert commission which carried out the investigation, there is indisputable proof of the espionage- reconnaissance mission of the American aircraft: films of Soviet defense and industrial establishments, a tape recording of signals of Soviet radar stations and other data.

Pilot Powers, about whose fate the Embassy of the United States of America inquired in its note of May 6, is alive and, as indicated in the aforementioned speech of Chairman of the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers N. S. Khrushchev, will be brought to account under the laws of the Soviet state. The pilot has indicated that he did everything in full accordance with the assignment given him. On the flight map taken from him there was clearly and accurately marked the entire route he was assigned after take-off from the city of Adana (Turkey): Peshwar (Pakistan) - the Ural Sea - Sverdlovsk - Archangel - Murmansk, followed by a landing at the Norwegian airfield at Bude. The pilot also stated that he served in subunit number 10-10 which under cover of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration is engaged in high altitude military reconnaissance.

This and other information revealed in speeches of the head of the Soviet Government completely refuted the U.S. State Department's concocted and hurriedly fabricated version, released May 5 in the official announcement for the press, to the effect that the aircraft was allegedly carrying out meteorological observations in the upper strata of the atmosphere along the Turkish-Soviet border.

After the complete absurdity of the aforementioned version had been shown and it had been incontrovertibly proven that the American aircraft intruded across the borders of the Soviet Union for aggressive reconnaissance purposes, a new announcement was made by the U.S. State Department on May 7 which contained the forced admission that the aircraft was sent into the Soviet Union for military reconnaissance and, by the very fact, it was admitted that the flight was pursuing aggressive purposes.

In this way, after two days, the State Department already had to deny the version which obviously had been intended to mislead world public opinion as well as American public opinion itself.

The State Department considered it appropriate to refer in its announcement to the "open skies" proposal made by the Government of the United States of America in 1955 and to the refusal of the Soviet Government to accept this proposal. Yes, the Soviet Government, like the governments of many other states, refused to accept this proposal which was intended to throw open the doors of other nations to American reconnaissance. The activities of American aviation only confirm the correctness of the evaluation given to this proposal at the time by the Soviet Government.

Does this not mean that, with the refusal of a number of states to accept this proposal for "open skies," the United States of America is attempting arbitrarily to take upon itself the right "to open" a foreign sky? It is enough to put the question this way, for the complete groundlessness of the aforementioned reference to the United States of America "open skies" proposal to become clear.

It follows from the aforementioned May 7 announcement of the U.S.A. State Department that the hostile acts of American aviation, which have taken place numerous times in relation to the Soviet Union, are not simply the result of activity of military commands of the United States of America in various areas but are the expression of a calculated U.S.A. policy. That which the Soviet Government has repeatedly declared in its representations to the Government of the United States of America in connection with the violations of U.S.S.R. national boundaries by American airplanes has been confirmed, namely, that these violations are premeditated. All this testifies that the Government of the United States of America, instead of taking measures to stop such actions by American aviation, the danger of which has more than once been pointed out by the Soviet Government, officially announces such action as its national policy.

Thus, the Government of the United States of America, in the first place, testifies to the fact that it answers to representations of the Soviet Government were only for the sake of form, behind which were concealed an effort to avoid the substance of the issue, and that all violations by American aircraft of the national boundaries of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics represented actin conforming to U.S.A. policy.

In the second place, and this is the main point, by sanctioning such actions of American aviation, the Government of the United States of America aggravates the situation even more.

One must ask, how is it possible to reconcile this with declarations on the part of leading figures of the United States of America, that the Government of the United States of America, like the Soviet Government, also strives for improvement of relations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America, for relaxation of international tension, and strengthening of trust between states. Military intelligence activities of one nation by means of intrusion of its aircraft into the area of another country can hardly be called a method for improving relations and strengthening trust.

It is self-evident that the Soviet Government is compelled, under such circumstances, to give strict orders to its armed forces to take all necessary measures against violation of Soviet boundaries by foreign aviation. The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics regretfully states that, while it undertakes everything possible for normalization and improvement of the international situation, the Government of the United States of America follows a different path. It is impossible to exclude the thought that, apparently the two Governments view differently the necessity for improving relations between our countries and for creation of a favorable ground for the success of the forthcoming summit meeting.

The Soviet Government, as well as all of the Soviet people, considered that the personal meetings and discussions with the President of the United States of America and other American official figures which the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Rep7ublics had during his visit to the United States of America, made a good beginning in the cause of normalizing Soviet-American relations and therefore the improvement of the entire international situation as well. However, the latest actions of American authorities apparently seek to return the state of American-Soviet relations to the worst times of the "cold war" and to poison the international situation before the summit meetings.

The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics cannot avoid pointing out that the State Department's statement, which is unprecedented in its cynicism, not only justifies provocative flights of aircraft of the armed forces of the United States of America but also acknowledges that such actions are "a normal phenomenon" and thus in fact states that in the future the United States intends to continue provocative invasions into the confines of the airspace of the Soviet Union for the purpose of intelligence.

Thus the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics concludes that the announcement of the State Department that the flight was carried out without the knowledge and permission of the Government of the United States of America does not correspond to reality, since in the very same announcement the necessity for carrying on intelligence activities against the Soviet Union is justified. This means that espionage activities of American aircraft are carried on with the sanction of the Government of the United States of America.

The Government of the Soviet Union makes an emphatic protest to the Government of the United States of America in connection with aggressive acts of American aviation and warns that, if similar provocations are repeated, it will be obliged to take retaliatory measures, responsibility for the consequences of which will rest on the governments of states committing aggression against other countries.

The Soviet Government would sincerely like to hope that the Government of the United States of America recognizes in the final analysis that the interests of preserving and strengthening peace among peoples including the interests of the American people itself, whose striving for peace was well demonstrated during the visit of the head of the Soviet Government, N. S. Khrushchev, to the United States of America, would be served by cessation of the aforementioned dangerous provocative activities with regard to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, by cessation of the "cold war," and by a search through of joint efforts with the Soviet Union and with other interested states for solution of unsettled international problems, on a mutually acceptable basis, which is awaited by all peoples.

[Return to top of the Page](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/u2.asp#top)

#### (5) News Conference Statement by the President, May 11, 1960

I have made some notes from which I want to talk to you about this U-2 incident.

A full statement about this matter has been made by the State Department, and there have been several statesmanlike remarks by leaders of both parties.

For my part, I supplement what the Secretary of State has had to say with the following four main points. After that I shall have nothing further to say - for the simple reason that I can think of nothing to add that might be useful at this time.

First point is this: the need for intelligence-gathering activities.

No one wants another Pearl Harbor. This means that we must have knowledge of military forces and preparations around the world, especially those capable of massive surprise attack.

Secrecy in the Soviet Union makes this essential. In most of the world no large-scale attack could be prepared in secret. But in the Soviet Union there is a fetish of secrecy and concealment. This is a major cause of international tension and uneasiness today. Our deterrent must never be placed in jeopardy. The safety of the whole free world demands this.

As the Secretary of State pointed out in his recent statement, ever since the beginning of my administration I have issued directives to gather, in every feasible way, the information required to protect the United States and the free world against surprise attack and to enable them to make effective preparations for defense.

My second point: the nature of intelligence-gathering activities.

These have a special and secret character. They are, so to speak, "below the surface" activities.

They are secret because they must circumvent measures designed by other countries to protect secrecy of military preparations.

They are divorced from the regular, visible agencies of government, which stay clear of operational involvement in specific detailed activities.

These elements operate under broad directives to seek and gather intelligence short of the use of force, with operations supervised by responsible officials within this area of secret activities.

We do not use our Army, Navy, or Air Force for this purpose, first, to avoid any possibility of the use of force in connection with these activities and, second, because our military forces, for obvious reasons, cannot be given latitude under broad directives but must be kept under strict control in every detail.

These activities have their own rules and methods of concealment, which seek to mislead and obscure - just as in the Soviet allegations there are many discrepancies. For example, there is some reason to believe that the plane in question was not shot down at high altitude. The normal agencies of our Government are unaware of these specific activities or of the special efforts to conceal them.

Third point: How should we view all of this activity?

It is a distasteful but vital necessity.

We prefer and work for a different kind of world - and a different way of obtaining the information essential to confidence and effective deterrence. Open societies, in the day of present weapons, are the only answer.

This was the reason for my open-skies proposal in 1955, which I was ready instantly to put into effect, to permit aerial observation over the United States and the Soviet Union which would assure that no surprise attack was being prepared against anyone. I shall bring up the open-skies proposal again in Paris, since it is a means of ending concealment and suspicion.

My final point is that we must not be distracted from the real issues of the day by what is an incident or a symptom of the world situation today.

This incident has been given great propaganda exploitation. The emphasis given to a flight of an unarmed, nonmilitary plane can only reflect a fetish of secrecy.

The real issue are the ones we will be working on at the summit - disarmament, search for solutions affecting Germany and Berlin, and the whole range of East-West relations, including the reduction of secrecy and suspicion.

Frankly, I am hopeful that we may make progress on these great issues. This is what we mean when we speak of "working for peace."

And, as I remind you, I will have nothing further to say about this matter.

[Return to top of the Page](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/u2.asp#top)

#### (6) UnitedStates Note to the U.S.S.R., May 11, 1960.

The Embassy of the United States of America refers to the Soviet Government's note of May 10 concerning the shooting down of an American unarmed civilian aircraft on May 1, and under instruction from its Government, has the honor to state the following.

The United States Government, in the statement issued by the Department of State on May 9, has fully states its position with respect to this incident.

In its note the Soviet Government has stated that collection of intelligence about the Soviet Union by American aircraft is a "calculated policy" of the United States. The United States Government does not deny that it has pursued such a policy for purely defensive purposes. What it emphatically does deny is that this policy has any aggressive intent, or that the unarmed U-2 flight on May 1 was undertaken in an effort to prejudice the success of the forthcoming meeting of the Heads of Government in Paris or to "return the State of American-Soviet relations to the worst times of the cold war." Indeed, it is the Soviet Government's treatment of this case which, if anything, may raise questions about its intentions in respect to these matters.

For its part, the United States Government will participate in the Paris meeting on May 16 prepared to cooperate to the fullest extent in seeking agreements designed to reduce tensions, including effective safeguards against surprise attack which would make unnecessary issues of this kind.