

April 4-6, 1972

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(original in research project files)

VISIT TO MOSCOW, APRIL 1972, TO DISCUSS
COMPATIBLE DOCKING SYSTEMS FOR US AND
USSR MANNED SPACECRAFT

Summary

In early April 1972, Arnold Frutkin, Glynn Lunney and I went to Moscow to meet with representatives of the Soviet Academy of Sciences on the subject of compatible docking systems for US and USSR manned spacecraft. The specific purpose of the trip was to determine whether the US side was ready to make a commitment to a joint test flight in 1975 involving a rendezvous and docking of US and USSR spacecraft in earth orbit. Such a commitment could be made in the forthcoming summit talks at the end of May 1972.

As a result of three days of meetings, we reached agreement on technical matters, as well as on the principles of managing and scheduling and conducting a 1975 joint test flight. Both sides affirmed the desirability of such a test flight and are ready to proceed with preparations for the flight on the basis of a prospective government-to-government agreement.

Background

Initial discussions concerning compatible docking systems for future manned spacecraft took place in October 1970. Following those discussions, Bob Gilruth, who headed the US team to Moscow in October 1970, recommended that an early test flight using Apollo and Soyuz hardware would be highly desirable. After discussions with Henry Kissinger in San Clemente early in January 1971, I proposed such a joint test flight to Keldysh in Moscow when I was there to negotiate the Low/Keldysh agreement. During the next set of talks on the compatible docking systems in Houston in June 1971, the Soviet side agreed that an early test flight would be highly desirable, but suggested that the Salyut space station (which was then on its first and only flight) be used instead of the Soyuz spacecraft. Detailed work on an Apollo/Salyut mission for the 1975 time period continued into the Fall of 1971, and during meetings in Moscow in November/December 1971, the US and USSR agreed that such a mission would be technically feasible and desirable.

In the Fall of 1971, NASA also recommended to the White House that a final agreement on a test mission might be included in the agenda for the May 1972 summit meeting. As a result of several discussions on the subject, we were asked to make a firm recommendation by April 15, 1972, concerning the feasibility of conducting such a mission.

Lunney recommended that in order to assure this feasibility, we should get agreement in principle at least on three basic documents: a project technical proposal document, an organization plan, and a project schedules document. Draft versions of these documents had been prepared by MSC and had been transmitted to Moscow in late March 1972. At the same time, we asked for a meeting with Keldysh to explain the purpose of the documents and to establish a firm basis for discussing them. It turned out, however, that Keldysh had just entered the hospital and would not be available until early April.

We therefore decided that Frutkin, Lunney and I would go to Moscow during the week of April 2nd to discuss the documents, to reach agreement on the most important points, and especially to determine whether the Soviets really understood what we were talking about.

We decided that we would not publicize this trip,^{*} and it took pains to make sure that only the smallest possible number of people would know that we had gone to Moscow. For example, insofar as MSC was concerned, Lunney was visiting Washington. In my own case I was on leave "to take care of family business." Then, on the day we left the United States, the New York Times carried a front-page story of an interview between John Noble Wilford and Petrov. In this interview, Petrov stated that there would be meetings in Moscow during the coming week on the compatible docking systems. Fortunately, however, at least at the time of this writing, nobody has yet asked whether anyone had indeed gone to Moscow or who had gone.

Chronology of Events

We left Washington via TWA on Easter Sunday, April 2, 1972, and arrived in Paris early the following morning. From Paris to Moscow, we were on Aeroflot (an Illyushin 62) and arrived

* This was at the request of the White House, because we were to discuss a possible agenda item for the forthcoming summit meeting.

(Footnote added 1-10-76)

in Moscow approximately 5:30 Monday evening, Moscow time. There we were met by Petrov, Vereshchetin, and Bushuyev. On the way to Moscow, Petrov told me that Keldysh was still in the hospital but that I would meet with the Acting President of the Academy, Academician Kotelnikov; however, Kotelnikov would not be available until Tuesday noon, and our meetings would start at that time.

Tuesday morning we had a brief meeting with Ambassador Beam, during the course of which he invited us to a luncheon on Thursday. I later found out that one of the invited guests was Bob Kaiser, the Washington Post correspondent in Moscow. I went back to see the Ambassador and told him in view of the White House and State Department desire not to publicize our trip, I felt this was a bad idea. The Ambassador assured me that this would be a purely social occasion, that he would take personal responsibility, and that Bob Kaiser would not know the purpose of our trip nor would he say anything about it. Although I was extremely skeptical about this, I had no way of avoiding the invitation.

Tuesday from noon to approximately 2 o'clock, we met with Kotelnikov, Petrov, Bushuyev, Rumyantsev, Vereshchetin, with Zonov as their interpreter. (We had also brought along our own interpreter, Cyril Murumcev.) From that session, we went to a typical Moscow luncheon at the Club of Scientists, which, I guess, is Moscow's Cosmos Club. After lunch we continued the discussions, with Petrov taking charge on the Soviet side and without Kotelnikov. We adjourned at close to 7 p.m. that evening.

We reconvened at 9:30 Wednesday morning, held discussions until approximately 2 o'clock, at which time we adjourned for lunch. The American party went to the U.S. Embassy for a quick lunch in their snack bar, as well as a complete reworking of our final document. The afternoon session started at 4 p.m. and lasted only until about 6. However, as a result of the document we had prepared during lunch, and as a result of the basic understandings reached in previous discussions, we were able to conclude the substance of our talks at that time.

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On Thursday morning, Frutkin and Vereshchetin worked on the editing of the final document, with the help of Jack Tech, who is the Science Attache at the American Embassy. Lunney and I continued our discussions until about 1 o'clock. This was followed by luncheon at the American Embassy Residence (Spaso House) while the English version of the summary of the results of the talks was being typed at the Embassy.

Following lunch, we returned to the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences (where all of the discussions had been held) in order to sign the documents. This was the usual signing ceremony in which each of us signed two English and two Russian texts. Incidentally, this signing ceremony took place in Kotelnikov's office, which he claims Napoleon used as his bedroom during his last night in Moscow on the way back to France. I also learned that the large table that I used in signing the Keldysh/Low agreement had been a desk used by Napoleon.

Thursday evening we had a farewell dinner with Kotelnikov, Petrov and the rest of the Russian delegation. There were the usual toasts, as there had been at the luncheon on Tuesday afternoon. (At the Tuesday luncheon, I had made a toast, stating that we here had an opportunity to make history and that the results of what we were trying to accomplish would probably be much more far reaching than any of us could at that time even imagine. During the Thursday evening dinner, Kotelnikov said in a toast that the true importance of what we were doing was that this could be an important step in bringing peace to men everywhere.)

Early Friday morning we left Moscow via Aeroflot to London, PanAm to New York, and then back to Washington.

Highlights of the Talks

Tuesday Noon. This was the meeting with Kotelnikov, Petrov, Bushuyev, and Romyantsev. After a brief welcome by Kotelnikov, I gave a brief opening statement in which I reviewed the history of 18 months of technical discussions and that the possibility now existed to reach a government-to-government agreement, perhaps during the forthcoming summit talks. I went on to say that before such an agreement can be reached, it is essential that we both understand that

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this mission can indeed be carried out and that my specific assignment in these talks was to determine whether we are now ready to proceed. I pointed out that we had high confidence in understanding each other on technical matters, but that I was still less sure of a complete understanding on matters of schedule and organization. I concluded by stating that it was my hope that in these talks we could gain a common understanding of the basic principles for organizing, developing, scheduling and conducting a test mission so that I can advise the White House that we are indeed ready to commit to such a mission.

Kotelnikov, in his opening statement, said that they had reached a very important conclusion that they would like to lay on the table at this time. The conclusion was that they would use the Soyuz spacecraft instead of the Salyut space station for their rendezvousing vehicle.

This, of course, came as a major surprise, and we had a long discussion on the subject. The reasons for the switch, they said, were "technical and economic." They explained that the Salyut space station only had one docking port and that it would have to be redesigned completely to accept a second docked vehicle. This was a major redesign that would be extremely costly. They then took a close look at the Soyuz and found that it could be modified with all of the modifications that had already been discussed for the Salyut, and that they were prepared to do so. They were quite strong in stating that there would be no difference in any of the things that had already been agreed to. (My own assessment is that there are three possible reasons for the switch. These are: (1) the actual reason given by them; (2) major difficulties with Salyut identified during its first flight; and (3) the "political reason" that since we will not have a Skylab available for a future flight, they are unwilling to commit a Salyut to such a mission. My inclination is to believe that the reason they gave is the actual one.) I stated that barring any technical difficulties, Lunney would have to certify that the switch from Salyut to Soyuz would be acceptable to the United States and, in fact, reminded the Soviets that this was the vehicle that we had recommended in the first instance in January 1971. From the technical point of view, Lunney was unable to identify any difficulties with this mission and, in fact,

pointed out that operationally this could present a simpler problem, since it would involve only two coordinated launches (Apollo and Soyuz) and not three (Apollo, Salyut and Soyuz). I also tried to think through any "political" implications and found none. It would still be possible to exchange crews, which will have the major public impact of this mission. And having a Soyuz, instead of a Salyut, will have the added benefit of not calling attention to the fact that they have a space station flying at the time when we do not.

After we had settled this issue, I stated that I wanted to bring up another matter; namely, that of the lack of the Soviet responsiveness to our proposals concerning direct voice communications between the two project managers on a regular basis. (For background, this item had been proposed by us during the November/December 1971 talks and was supposed to be confirmed by the Soviets when the agreement of those talks was confirmed. This was not done, and I sent a telegram to Keldysh asking for confirmation. As of now, we have not received a response to that telegram.) I mentioned that I was not only interested in the substance of the issue but also concerned about the lack of responsiveness on their part which, if indicative of future relationships, would make it difficult to conduct the joint mission. Kotelnikov quickly understood why I attached importance to the issue and said we should settle it right then, which we did after considerable debate and discussion.

Finally, during the first session, we determined the agenda for the remaining stay in Moscow. Specifically, we agreed that we would attempt to reach an agreement on the basic principles of the "organizational plan"; the level of detail to be included in the schedules; and any technical matters that might have come about as a result of the switch from Salyut to Soyuz. Both sides also agreed that with the exception of any new technical problems that might have resulted from the switch, we knew of no other outstanding difficulties.

Tuesday Afternoon. The discussion proceeded after lunch, with the same participants with the exception of Kotelnikov. Lunney had prepared a document entitled, Apollo/Salyut Test Mission Consideration, dated March 23, 1972, a

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copy of which is attached to these notes. This document essentially is a summary of the organizational plan, and we had hoped to agree to this plan in detail to make it part of our agreement of these Moscow talks. At this point, however, things got to be quite confusing, and we started spending an inordinate amount of time quibbling over the exact wording of each sentence. We quickly saw that we would be in Moscow for weeks rather than days were we to proceed in this way.

We had also brought along a "Summary of Results" which was to be the basic document of agreement concerning these talks. At this point in our proceedings, we, therefore, called for a quick recess to discuss our strategy for the meeting and to show the Soviets that what we really intended to sign was something like the Summary of Results. Further, we indicated that the document which I previously discussed we had hoped to make part of this summary and to include it as an appendix. Finally I pointed out that it would be most important to reach agreement and a full understanding of the "twelve principles governing mission conduct" which were an enclosure to the Apollo/Salyut Test Mission Consideration document, and that I felt it would be best if we started discussing those. The Soviet side agreed with this recommendation.

We had no problems in reaching a very quick understanding and agreement on the first six of the principles, which concern command, control, and communications. By that time, however, it was getting late, and we decided to review the remaining six principles only very quickly for subsequent discussion in tomorrow's meeting. In this quick review, however, we determined that we might have major problems on item seven concerning astronaut training and item 12 concerning public information release.

Wednesday Morning. On Wednesday morning, we continued the discussions of Tuesday afternoon, starting out with a detailed discussion of astronaut familiarization and training. After an in depth discussion, we did agree that it would be essential to identify candidate crews one to two years before the flight and that these crews would have to be trained in the other country on the other country's normal training equipment. The discussions continued then

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with a relatively quick understanding on the need to transmit television downlinks from one control center to the other; the need to gain participation by flight operational personnel in the talks; and the need to have the flight crews understand the other country's language. We did have some difficulty in the discussion concerning the desire to locate a small team of flight-oriented personnel from each country in the other country's control center during the flight, but, on our side, decided this was not essential and, therefore, did not pursue the point but rather left it for further discussion by the project managers. Finally, on the point of public releases we again held a rather lengthy discussion. The Soviets agreed that everything during a normal flight should be released immediately and also pointed out that during a major disaster they would be willing to have speedy releases just as they did in the case of the deaths of the Soyuz 11 cosmonauts. Their main concern seems to be with minor abnormalities during a flight, which, in their words, might be misunderstood by the general public. They indicated, however, that in all areas of public information, they were loosening up and cited the recent announcement of the intended objective of the Venera 8 as an example. I, in turn, pointed out absolute need for us to continue to disclose publicly all information that is available at the American control center and received at American tracking stations. At the conclusion of the discussions, we agreed that we would develop a public information plan which would take into account the obligations and practices of both sides.

After we finished discussing the 12 basic principles, it became time to start thinking about the wording in the summary of the results of the talks. In the meantime, the Soviets had translated our draft summary and had made a number of changes in it, and then retranslated it back into English. This was to be the basis for our joint document. However, we quickly found that the document had been weakened to the point where it really said nothing of substance. To be a little more charitable, it said that we understood each other, but it didn't say that we had agreed to anything. After a long discussion on this point, I said that the document as written by the Russians was totally unacceptable to us and that unless we could come out of this meeting with a firm agreement on at least basic principles of organi-

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zation, as well as on the need to firm documentation and schedules, I would be in no position to recommend that we are ready to proceed with a test mission, and, in fact, would make a negative report when I returned to the United States. I further stated that I was prepared to stay in Moscow until we had hammered out the necessary words; that I believed that we did understand each other and it was now time to put all of this down on paper. Thereupon we adjourned for lunch.

Wednesday Lunch. We had a quick bite to eat in the Embassy snack bar, and then Frutkin, Lunney and I each took a piece of the summary of results that we had prepared before we left Washington and modified it to include all of the 12 basic principles, together with any changes that we had made in these principles during our previous discussions in Moscow. All of this, of course, had to be done in a great hurry, and the document was retyped before we returned to the Presidium at 4 o'clock for the afternoon session.

Wednesday Afternoon. When we returned with our new document, this came as a complete surprise to the Soviet side. It was just unthinkable for them that anybody could have recast the entire document so quickly. After a quick verbal translation by Zonov, the Soviets called for a recess of half an hour. During the course of that recess, they studied the document in detail, and when they returned, told us that the document was completely acceptable to them with the exception of some minor editorial changes. We then adjourned for the evening and agreed that Frutkin and Vereshchetin would form an editorial committee of two that would meet in the morning to go over the final document.

Thursday Morning. While Frutkin and Vereshchetin were editing the document, Lunney and I continued the discussions with Petrov, Bushuyev, and Rumyantsev. First, Bushuyev responded to the schedules document and gave an excellent discussion of his views of the need to control schedules. During the course of the scheduling discussion, we also discussed design reviews, which were understood and agreed to by both sides; joint testing, which was also understood and agreed to; and finally, the Soviet side stated that they agreed in principle to the entire organizational plan.

Next I raised a question concerning the Soviet organization to do this mission. I pointed out that they knew clearly where each of us fit into our organization and what our responsibilities were. I asked if it would be possible to get the same kind of understanding of their organization. Petrov responded in some detail, but really said nothing. He said that Keldysh, as President of the Academy of Sciences, reported to the Council of Ministers, and had been charged with being responsible for the US/USSR cooperation in space. Petrov, in turn, reported directly to Keldysh, and Bushuyev to Petrov. I asked whether the same organization would be in force during the hardware and flight operational phase, and the answer was in the affirmative. Petrov indicated that they would bring additional people into the organization at that time, but that these people would still report to Bushuyev.

By this time, Vereshchetin and Frutkin had finished editing the "Summary of Results" and had prepared identical documents in English and in Russian. We reviewed these documents, had a few questions but no major hangups. Both sides agreed with the documents as they had been prepared.

Finally, Thursday morning Bushuyev discussed technically the Soyuz system and gave Lunney a document describing those systems. For the test mission in 1975, the Soyuz would fly only two men for a five-day period, plus one day in reserve. They proposed also that the Apollo spacecraft should be launched first and that the Apollo would be active in the rendezvous and docking maneuver. (In subsequent discussions with Lunney, I told him that from a policy point of view, I would actually prefer to have the Apollo launched first as the Soviets now recommended and that unless there is a good technical reason not to do so, we should accept this recommendation.)

Thursday Afternoon. After lunch at the American Embassy Residence, we returned to the Presidium to sign the Summary of Results. After the signing ceremony and after making the usual speeches, I discussed with Kotelnikov and the group the public posture relative to the meetings we had just completed. I mentioned, first, that we intended no public release of the meetings at all; second, that we do not intend to mention the fact that we were now discussing Soyuz instead of

Salyut; third, I indicated that if pressed and if we had to admit that meetings took place in Moscow during this week, we would say that we were preparing the agenda for the July meeting but that we could not discuss the content of the agenda; fourth, that if we were to take any different action from the above, we would so notify Petrov; and, fifth, that we would intend to remain in this posture until after the summit meeting. Kotelnikov completely agreed with this proposal, and with this we ended our formal discussions in Moscow.

Conclusions

A copy of the Summary of Results that was signed in Moscow is attached. From this, and particularly from the discussions that went along with the agreements that were reached and documented, I have reached the conclusion that we are ready to undertake this test mission. Insofar as hardware matters are concerned, we have reached an understanding and agreement on all issues which have been identified so far, and, furthermore, don't see any issues that we will be unable to agree on. On the management side, we have reached agreement on such matters as regular and direct contact through frequent telephone and telex communications, as well as visits; the requirement for and control of formal documentation; joint reviews of designs and hardware at various stages of development; the requirement for joint tests of inter-connecting systems; early participation by flight operations specialists; the development of crew training plans; and the training in each country of the other country's flight crew and operations personnel. We also reached agreement on the requirement for and the level of detail of project schedules. Finally, in the area of flight operations, we reached agreement on the principles of communications command and control of the flight; the requirement for flight plans and mission rules for both normal and contingency situations; the immediate transmission of flight television received in one country to the other country's control center; the language problem; and the need to develop a public information plan, taking into account the obligations and practices of both sides.

Based on all of these agreements, it was my recommendation that the United States is ready to execute a government-to-government agreement and should now do so.

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May 30, 1972

ADDENDUM
MOSCOW TRIP, APRIL 4-6, 1972

This is an Epilogue to the special notes I prepared after my trip to the Soviet Union on April 4-6, 1972.

During the course of that visit to Moscow we reached an agreement (signed by Kotelnikov, the then Acting President of the USSR Academy of Sciences and myself) on matters concerning the technical details, the organization, management, operational details, and scheduling of a possible joint docking mission involving the United States Apollo spacecraft and the Soviet Union's Soyuz spacecraft. Upon my return from Moscow we recommended to the White House (Henry Kissinger) that, from NASA's point of view, we were prepared to proceed with such a mission in the 1975 time period, that no further NASA/USSR Academy meetings would be required, and that the form of the agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union could be a relatively simple and straightforward one. A copy of our proposed wording for that agreement is attached.

Between the middle of April and the middle of May (the summit meeting started on May 22), there was a great deal of interest by the press in the possibility of having a joint docking mission on the summit agenda, and a large number of interviews with NASA people was held. In all of these interviews, there was a great deal of speculation about the possibility of an agreement on the docking mission at the summit, but there was never any hint of the April 4-6 meeting, nor was there ever any hint that during that meeting the Soyuz spacecraft was substituted by the Russians by the Salyut. In other words, from NASA's side we were able to avoid any discussions of NASA's preparation for the summit meeting or of the form that any agreement might take. This was possible only because such a very small number of NASA people had been involved in the activities leading up to the summit.

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It was only during the week before the summit meeting that the State Department worked on the specific wording of the agreement and made only minor changes in our previously submitted wording. Apparently State and the White House started coordinating the words with the Soviet Union only on the 18th or 19th of May (we have no idea in NASA why this was undertaken only at this late date). On May 20, the USSR responded to our proposed wording with a much lengthier document, which among other things, included the Keldysh-Low agreement of January 21, 1971, in addition to the docking agreement. Furthermore, with respect to the docking agreement, the Soviet words did not include by reference our previous meetings and, instead, some rather cumbersome wording was substituted.

Apparently when the Soviet response was received by our State Department, it was immediately discussed with Kissinger and Rogers, who were at the time over the Atlantic on their way to Salzburg, a stop on the way to Moscow. Kissinger asked that we prepare an appropriate response but that insofar as possible, we should not change the wording in the Soviet text. All of this was done in a meeting at State Department starting at 2:30 Saturday afternoon, the 20th, and ending in the middle of the night. During that time we straightened out the wording in the Preamble but kept by and large the Soviet meaning. With respect to the Keldysh-Low Agreement, we did not make any significant changes, with one exception. The Soviet document had incorporated words concerning communications satellites which had not been part of the January 21, 1971, agreement, and we therefore deleted these words. Finally, with respect to the docking agreement, we selected words similar to those that we had proposed in April in our memorandum to Kissinger and especially incorporated in that article the April 4-6 agreement by reference. This document, together with the clarifying document, was forwarded to the White House/Salzburg late that night. In the clarifying document we stated that NASA had no objection to the inclusion of the Keldysh-Low Agreement in the government-to-government agreement, but

pointed out that this was not necessary, nor had it been the intent. State Department on the other hand felt that it should not be included because it would make our relationships with the Europeans even more difficult in light of our recent lack of enthusiasm for space cooperation with the Europeans. With respect to the April 6 agreement, we stated in the clarifying telegram that NASA insisted that it be included by reference.

Following the Saturday meeting we had no additional information except persistent signals that the space agreement was scheduled to be signed in Moscow on Wednesday, the 24th. On the 23rd, I left for the West Coast for a talk in San Diego on the evening of the 23rd, and then a visit to JPL on the 24th. During the course of the evening in San Diego (after dinner and during the preliminaries leading up to my talk), I received a telephone call, through the State Department Operations Center, involving Arnold Frutkin, somebody in State Department, and myself. State had just received a final text as it had been agreed to tentatively in Moscow. In this text the Keldysh-Low Agreement was still included and there were words acceptable to us with respect to the docking mission. The April 6th agreement was specifically included. I accepted the words as they had been read to me just in time to get back into the ballroom (I had taken the telephone call at a hallway outside) to hear myself introduced as the evening's main speaker. It is interesting to note that by this time it was 6 a.m. in Moscow on the day that the agreement was actually signed.

On the next day, May 24, I went to JPL and soon learned that the agreement actually had been signed in Moscow at apparently 11 o'clock a.m. EDT. At 2:25 p.m. EDT, the Vice President introduced Jim Fletcher, Jim McDivitt, and Glynn Lunney, who held a press conference at the Executive Office Building. Sometime thereafter, Fletcher held another press conference at NASA Headquarters, and simultaneously, I held one at JPL.

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There has been no adverse criticism in this country concerning the space agreement in general, or the Apollo/Soyuz test project in particular, and, in fact, there has been a great deal of overwhelmingly favorable editorial comment.

For completeness, a copy of the agreement signed in Moscow, together with a copy of the Kotelnikov/Low Agreement of April 6, 1972, and the covering press release is attached.

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Attachments

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