

Background to the Proposal

"Open Skies" was first proposed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the Four Power¹ Summit held in Geneva in July of 1955. The proposal was conceived by a select group of analysts working for Presidential Advisor Nelson Rockefeller. Early in the spring of 1955, Rockefeller had asked these men to come up with some bold new initiatives which the President might use at the Summit. In June, the group spent five days at the US Marine base at Quantico, near Washington. During the meeting, the idea of proposing mutual, unarmed overflights was advanced. Daring in its simplicity, this scheme would have been a tremendous benefit to the US at the time because satellite reconnaissance systems were not yet in operation, and the Americans had very little idea of the true state of Soviet military preparations. The Quantico panel was further attracted to the "Open Skies" idea because it was simple and stressed the Western value of openness in a way that the common man might readily understand and contrast with the more secretive nature of the Soviet Union.

"Open Skies" did not enjoy a smooth passage through the American bureaucracy, however. Opposed by the then Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles (as much because of his constant fight to eliminate Rockefeller as a foreign policy advisor, as for

¹USA, USSR, Great Britain, France