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Purcell's Work Helping the Government

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I worked closely with Ed Purcell from 1956 through 1975 or so, largely through our joint membership on and consulting with the President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC) and working with the "Land Panel" on reconnaissance satellites. Purcell's work with the government had begun long before, with his 5-year service at the MIT Radiation Laboratory, and his advisory role had included, in particular, important work of the Technological Capabilities Panel (TCP) of the predecessor to PSAC. I will try to capture the flavor of Ed's contributions and the context of the times in which he was involved. His style and impact are well characterized by this quote from the book of Eisenhower's Science Advisor and PSAC Chair, James R. Killian, "When Eisenhower was later to speak in memorable tribute of 'my scientists' he was surely recalling among others this quiet, modest, lucid man. Robert Kreidler [one of Killian's staff], in an interview I had with him in preparing for this memoir spoke almost with awe of his [Purcell's] impact on PSAC, 'Ed Purcell did not speak often,' he said, 'but when he did there would be enormous silence in the room, because everybody knew that whatever he said was going to be worth listening to with careful attention.'" I give some examples why it was so worthwhile listening to Ed Purcell.