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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Science and Technology
SUBJECT : Purcell Panel

1. There appears to be considerable attention of late devoted to the Purcell Panel recommendations, and I understand that [REDACTED] is preparing a paper for the Director on this subject.

2. Although it may be heretical to suggest this, it is conceivable that the Purcell Panel Report has outlived its usefulness, particularly in timeliness. I feel that considerable argument could be brought to bear in assailing the point why the limitation of technology in June 1963 should govern as a factor molding the technology of 1965. Actually, there is a major failing in the Purcell Panel Report in that it fails to identify or state the basis for its conclusions. Any individual reviewing the report now could not necessarily deduce the extent or the validity of the considerations which were taken into account at the time the conclusions were reached. It must be remembered that the report was based upon the presentations which the Government and private industry made to the Panel and, hence, the awareness of the state of the art known to those specific contractors forms the basis for the representation which they made to the Panel. It is not unkind to suggest that possibly the Panel was not made aware of the totality of American ingenuity and know-how in satellite reconnaissance systems.

3. Particular attention has been drawn to the Panel's recommendation that rather than try to build a new search system, we should improve the one we have, i.e. CORONA. The Panel arrived at this conclusion upon the following presentations:

A. CORONA/M had not as yet achieved its full potential in that its resolution varied from 9 to 20 feet during the course of each mission.

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SUBJECT: Purcell Panel (continued)

B. The [REDACTED] system had yet to fly, and LANYARD (a five-foot system with 40 miles swath width) was being held as a back-up should [REDACTED] falter.

C. The briefers admitted to the Panel that the state of the art did not permit high resolution and wide area coverage at the same time. And, if ever possible, the weight would demand a tremendous booster such as the TITAN III-C.

D. As a follow-on to CORONA, Itek was proposing the M-2 system, with five-foot resolution, and the Air Force was proposing [REDACTED] or some derivative thereof.

E. Though it may be difficult to get anyone to admit it at this time, there was a strong suggestion from NPIC that a five-foot system does not necessarily increase our library of knowledge much more than a nine-foot system. To interpret this further, with [REDACTED] in the wings to do spotting assignments and CORONA already developed, it would be greater to have CORONA work at the optimum all the time.

4. It is not surprising then, in view of the back-of-the-hand "support" which a five-foot system received, that the Panel chose the economical approach that it did in discouraging the building of a follow-on search system.

5. I think, at this point in time, the Purcell Panel Report has served its purpose. It cancelled several interim search systems, encouraged the economy-minded in the National Reconnaissance Program, and brought attention to the fact that CORONA was not performing as well as it should. With these accomplishments behind it, I submit that the time is ripe to lay the Purcell Panel Report to rest, recognizing that its recommendations and the information on which they were based is now outdated and behind the times. One might suggest, and I think correctly so, that the Purcell Panel

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SUBJECT: Purcell Panel (continued)

was, in fact, updated by the convening of the Land Panel last June when the Agency received the wholehearted endorsement to proceed with the [REDACTED] concept, i.e. pursue a follow-on search system far more attractive than the concepts and capabilities presented to the Purcell group.

John N. McMahon
JOHN N. McMAHON

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