

~~TOP SECRET~~

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October 28, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Management of the CORONA Project

After reviewing the series of CORONA difficulties we have experienced throughout most of this year, I recently directed Major General Greer to convene a small group of highly qualified technical and contractual personnel and conduct an investigation into the assembly, test, and check-out procedures being followed, with particular emphasis on all items connected with failures in this project. I specified that the group should be composed of highly qualified personnel already cleared but who have not been involved in the actual project. The findings of this group, which I reviewed during my recent visit to the West Coast, highlight some serious deficiencies in our present management arrangements, and in this regard, confirm the independent conclusion to which I have been led by my own consideration of CORONA problems throughout recent months. I am convinced that we must centralize and strengthen the management of this project and clarify the associated responsibilities within the NCO.

The technical problems of concern have changed from those originally associated with making the first CORONA cameras work at all, with what, today, would be considered very poor photographic results, to those associated with cameras now operating at a high level of performance. In fact, at present the achievement of consistently good performance, and the realization of further improvement in quality of results, involve an extremely close tie-in between the camera and the vehicle with its associated stabilization and control system. The structure of divided management which was suitable at the time the project originated has not evolved with technical progress. At the present time, the several "black" contracts which relate to the payload, its engineering, and check-out, are the responsibility of a CIA contract officer

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~~TOP SECRET~~

5 of 6
 1 of 3
 537-63

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at Langley, in the organization of Program "B." "White" contracts for the vehicle, its engineering, check-out, and launch, are the responsibility of Program "A." General Greer's inquiry revealed that the totality of these contracts does not cover all of the tasks that should properly be performed by the contractor. At the same time, the contracts allow room for duplicative effort within different parts of the contractor's organization; this is expensive and has, I believe, actually been detrimental to reliability.

I feel that we must establish a single authoritative point of contact between the MRO and the contractor on this program. To him would be assigned full responsibility for conduct of the program; one of his first tasks would be to review the present contracts as to consistency and completeness, and to amend them as required. I would expect him to exercise continuing technical and contractual surveillance over the contractor, as well as over the Service agencies involved, to maintain standards of performance and to be sure that gaps or inconsistencies do not develop in the operation. At the present time there is no single authority for this complete surveillance in the MRO, short of my office.

I am convinced that the Director, MRO Program "A," because of the direct authority he has over necessary Air Force resources, is the only one to whom I can assign the full management responsibility of which I speak. This can be arranged with what I consider to be relatively minor changes from the present situation, by following the same pattern that we have used in the LANYARD and ARGON programs. There is a CIA contract officer now attached to General Greer's staff who administers the CIA "black" contracts on LANYARD and ARGON, under the management direction of General Greer as Director, Program "A." This has been a very successful arrangement, and I propose that we handle CORONA in the same way, by assigning a CIA contract officer to General Greer's staff to administer the "black" contracts under his management direction.

I expect the Director, Program "A," to continue to use the Configuration Control Board (CCB) as a principal management tool.

TOP SECRET

Control System

It seems to me that the CCB is the best way to bring the combined technical talents of the CIA and the Air Force to bear on the CORONA program, and at the same time to insure that those management and technical people in both organizations who have a broad knowledge of all of our programs are kept abreast of the current operational and technical problems of CORONA. We should both be sure that members of the CCB are selected with this in mind.

I will expect Program "B" to continue to supply security support and film courier support, as is done for all of the NRO programs.

The "white" part of the CORONA program is presently organized just as it was in the days of the DISCOVERER project. Since DISCOVERER is no longer used as a cover, there is no longer a need for this arrangement. Even though General Greer, as Deputy Commander, Space Systems Division, now has full authority over [redacted] (ex-DISCOVERER), it may be desirable to bring it more closely under the view of his staff and of the CCB. These are changes to be accomplished in steps, however, carefully planned to avoid publicity or speculation.

I think that by these means we can strengthen the management of the CORONA project with a minimum of disruption to established practice. I am completely convinced that a strengthening is required. If you are in agreement with this approach, may I suggest that you indicate your concurrence on the attached memorandum.

Signed

BROCKWAY McMILLAN

Director

National Reconnaissance Office

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TOP SECRET

5 of 6 Topius
Page 3 of 3 Pages
537-63

~~TOP SECRET~~

Control System

MEMORANDUM FOR DIRECTOR, WFO PROGRAM A
DIRECTOR, WFO PROGRAM B

SUBJECT: Responsibility for the CORONA Project

At the present time, and for historically valid reasons, the management of the CORONA project is divided, with the Director, Program B, responsible for "black" contracts, and the Director, Program A, responsible for the remaining contracts, and for launch operations. Under this arrangement, there is no place in the WFO, short of my office, where the authority resides to review all applicable contracts for consistency and completeness, to exercise continuing contractual and technical surveillance over contractors and over the Service agencies, and to issue direction to contractors on all aspects of the program.

I feel that it is essential for me to establish a single point of authority within the WFO for the CORONA program, to which I can then assign full responsibility for the successful conduct of the program. I am convinced that the Director, WFO Program A, because of the direct authority he has over the necessary Air Force resources, is the only one to whom I can reasonably assign this responsibility. Accordingly, I hereby make this assignment to him, under arrangements similar to those we have used in the case of LANTARD.

Specifically, the "black" contracts associated with the CORONA program will be administered by a CIA contract officer who will serve on the staff of the Director, Program A, in El Segundo, California. He will administer these contracts under the management direction of the Director, Program A. I will hold the Director, Program A, responsible for conduct of the entire program; one of his first tasks will be to review all applicable contracts, black and white, for their consistency and completeness, and amend them as may be necessary.

Control System
~~TOP SECRET~~

Copy 5 of 7 Copies
Page 1 of 2 Pages
Control System 538-63

I consider it essential that the technical resources and experience of the whole NRO be made available to the CORONA program as needed. I expect the Director, Program A, to continue to use the Configuration Control Board as a principal management tool, and I expect the Director, Program B, to make available to Program A the advice, consultation, and assistance of appropriate Program B personnel as members of the CCB and as individual consultants.

Program B will continue to provide Program A with security support and film courier support.

The Director, Program A, will review the present management of the white aspects of the CORONA program, and recommend any changes needed to strengthen and centralize authority.

I want it clearly understood that the changes here directed are strictly and solely for the purpose of creating an adequate focus of authority and responsibility for the continuing management of this important program. It is my intention by these changes to make the CCB a more effective instrument for technical guidance to the program, by providing a strong management within which the whole program can be brought into view, and through which all aspects of the program can be controlled in an integrated way. In addition, I intend that, through the medium of the CCB, the technical people in both Program A and Program B will be kept informed of the technical and operational problems of the program. It must be understood, however, that technical and contractual direction to the contractors involved in this program will flow only through the Director, Program A, and the responsible contract administrators on his staff.

BROCKWAY McILLAN
Director
National Reconnaissance Office

Concur:

JOHN A. McCONE

2
Control System
~~TOP SECRET~~

5 of 7 copies
2 of 2 Pages
38-63