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## NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

14675 Lee Road  
Chantilly, VA 20151-1715

Office of the Director

25 July 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE  
 UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTELLIGENCE AND  
 SECURITY

SUBJECT: ~~(S//REL)~~ Limited Declassification of PARCAE as a Signals  
 Collection Satellite

REFERENCE: ~~(S//REL)~~ PARCAE Reconnaissance Assets - as a  
 Signals Collection Satellite ~~(S//TK//REL)~~

~~(S//REL)~~ Consistent with provisions of Executive Order 13526, Section 1.3, I am declassifying certain limited facts associated with the PARCAE signals collection satellite program. I have concluded that publicly acknowledging limited facts will not cause harm to our current and future satellite systems. Additionally, acknowledging the program is consistent with our obligation to the American public to be both open and transparent where possible through declassification of historic programs.

~~(S//TK//REL)~~ PARCAE was a Low Earth Orbit (LEO) signals collection satellite program and was the follow-on program to the already declassified POPPY and GRAB satellite programs. The satellites were developed by the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) as part of the National Reconnaissance Office's (NRO) Program C. The PARCAE satellites were initially launched in 1976 with the last satellites launched in 1996. The satellites performed admirably but were removed from the NRO's Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) architecture in May 2008, following coordination with National Security Agency (NSA) and the Intelligence Community.

~~(S//TK//REL)~~ [REDACTED]

Additionally, overhead collection of signals is no longer a government-only endeavor as several unclassified commercial ventures have launched signal collection systems whose capabilities are comparable if not superior to PARCAE.

~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Given the long and distinguished life of PARCAE satellites in support to the Nation, we will acknowledge the limited PARCAE declassification through a public announcement in conjunction with the NRL's 100th anniversary celebration in June 2023. After

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limited declassification, we will evaluate the program for a more complete programmatic declassification as time and resources permit. NRO will continue to coordinate with NRL on any future declassification of the PARCAE program. Declassification of PARCAE would thus enable the American public to understand the value of this system to the Nation and fulfill our obligation to declassify materials that no longer have bearing upon sources and methods in current use.

~~(S//TK//REL)~~ I have declassified the following with respect to the PARCAE program:

- a. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Terms "PARCAE" and "Improved PARCAE."
- b. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Associated mission numbers, 7108-7120.
- c. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that PARCAE and Improved PARCAE were programmatic follow-ons to POPPY under NRO's Program C launched from 1976 to 1996.
- d. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that NRL played a major part in the early development of PARCAE and throughout the PARCAE program's lifetime in support of NRO's Program C.
- e. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that PARCAE and Improved PARCAE were a satellite electronic intelligence collection system.
- f. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that the driver for evolution was the increased concern from the Soviet Navy.
- g. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that the evolution from POPPY to PARCAE was also based on the need for a system that was designed to primarily provide information on the Soviet Fleet and other foreign entities to the United States (US) Navy and US policy makers.
- h. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that PARCAE and Improved PARCAE downlinked data to ground process facilities located at selected locations around the world.
- i. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that Improved PARCAE added collection and recognition of selected foreign communications systems.
- j. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that PARCAE and Improved PARCAE operated in a LEO.
- k. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that NRO utilized the satellites from 1976 to 2008.

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l. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Fact that data was provided to, processed  
and reported by NSA.

m. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Release of an illustration of the early  
PARCAE vehicles.

n. ~~(S//TK//REL)~~ Release of early PARCAE models for display.

(U) Should you have any questions regarding this decision, please  
contact Ms. Carol Krumm, Chief, Information Review and Release Group,  
Information Management Services Office, Communications Systems  
Directorate at  (secure).

  
C.J. Scolese

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