



ADDRESSEE:

SUBJECT: Program Management (CORONA)

6 Sept. 1961 -

1. The first NRO Agreement (DCI-D SEC/DEF) was signed. With Air Force personnel directing and controlling the NRO activities, the mechanism of that organization has proven a most useful instrument for the Air Force to implement its desires.

22 Nov. 1961 -

2. The Air Force inadvertently decreed its intention to eliminate CIA from the satellite reconnaissance program when the Chief of the NRO Staff, [redacted], proposed to CIA the NRO functions and responsibilities for satellite reconnaissance, which specified that the technical management responsibility for all projects, black and white, should be vested in the Air Force. He submitted that the Air Force should generate appropriate directives to transfer the total technical responsibility for ARGON, (MURAL), CORONA and Navy programs to the Air Force. Since there were only two more launches scheduled in CORONA, and one unassigned payload, [redacted] conceded that no change should be made in the present technical management structure of the program, thereby reaffirming the fact that the CORONA program should remain the complete responsibility of the CIA.

29 Nov. 1961 -  
7 Dec. 1961

3. Additional documentation which clearly establishes the CORONA payload responsibility is in evidence in the papers of Messrs. Kiefer and Bissell, wherein not only was CIA charged with the primary cognizance for management and technical direction of the hardware aspects for photographic payloads and nose cones, but also for operational planning and control of the payload operation and target coverage. Specifically, the delineation of responsibilities were as follows:

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In Accordance with E. O. 12958

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- (1) launch scheduling and launching
- (2) orbit and recovery operations
- (3) development and procurement of boosters, orbiting vehicles, and [redacted] payloads.

- (1) targeting
- (2) operational planning and control of payload operations
- (3) development and procurement of photographic payload and nose cones, and
- (4) security

4. In spite of CIA'S clearly defined history for the responsibility of CORONA payloads there have been repeated efforts by the Air Force to divest the Agency of this role. Dr. McMillan, on his appointment as D/NRO, directed that the entire CORONA program including the CIA assets be placed under the control of the Air Force, specifically, Director of Program "A", [redacted]

13 Dec.1963 -

5. In answer to D/NRO'S Program Management direction and as a result of the ambiguous and conflicting direction issued to the CORONA contractors, the DCI advised Dr. McMillan that he considered it essential that no action be taken within the NRO or its contractor structure until he could consider the matter further. He further cautioned that any advice issued to the associate CORONA contractors either as a result of a directive of a procurement official or a subtle hint concerning the free exchange of program information from the contractors to the Agency would, in his opinion, violate the basic tenet of the NRO agreement which provided for full utilization of both the Air Force and the CIA.

6. An example of the referenced ambiguous and conflicting direction occurred during the spring of 1963 when, prompted by a desire to meet the launch schedules established for CORONA, the then [redacted] of [redacted] staff directed the contractor to deviate from proven environmental tests on the CORONA

cameras M-25, M-26 and M-27. The normal environmental testing of four days, at [redacted] directions, was reduced to one. Notwithstanding the CIA'S representative's refusal to certify M-26 for flight until valid environmental testing was conducted, [redacted] of [redacted] staff directed M-26 and M-27 to be shipped and ultimately flown without additional testing, and thereby placing the burden of responsibility for System flight readiness on the director of Program "A". M-26 was flown as Mission 9052. The results of this Mission were largely unuseable due to corona discharge marking.

Dec. 1963 -

7. Had the proper environmental tests recommended by the CIA Technical Representative been conducted a mission failure would have essentially been avoided. M-27 was returned for further environmental testing, as per existing procedure, and the results confirmed that a bad roller which was not discovered in the one-day environmental tests conducted was in evidence. This roller would have caused a repeat of the 9052 mission failure.

13 Mar. 1964 -

8. Dr. Wheelon reported to the DCI/DDCI that although two requests from Dr. McMillan had been disapproved by the DCI regarding the transfer of the program [redacted] (heretofore a small group of personnel at SSD who operated under the title of "Program [redacted]" who interacted with the Agency personnel on the CORONA program), action was taken to dissolve this office and permit it to be subordinated to Director Program "A", and that [redacted] be named the CORONA program director, under a new title of "Program [redacted]". An obvious subterfuge. This position was admitted in Dr. McMillan's memorandum.

18 May 1964 -

April 1964 -

9. As a result of the ambiguous and conflicting directive issued to the CORONA contractors, the director of Program "B" cabled the following to D/NRO:

"Recent events and communications force me to request formal clarification and definition of my responsibilities and functions concerning the A/P Facility and CORONA payload management."

No answer has yet been received concerning this requested clarification.

- August 1964 - 10. The directive was issued by D/NRO to insert the [REDACTED] in the role of Systems Engineering in the CORONA program with full authority to effect the implementation of technical directives affecting the entire program. The program, a result of the parasitic actions of this new, uninformed corporation, has been further confused, primarily due to its attempt at over-centralization of procedures for what has heretofore been declared an operational program. Specific instances, one of which occurred in November 1964, demonstrated [REDACTED] lack of understanding regarding the program in that they unilaterally attempted to obtain information regarding the payload to include operational information from the LMSC contractor at the A/P Facilities. The Agency's reluctance to permit [REDACTED] representatives to acquire operational information resulted in a directive from the D/NRO that CIA issue instructions to the A/P manager to release the requested information to the [REDACTED] personnel in their capacity as General Systems Engineers.
- Nov. 1964 - 11. The NRO issued cabled instructions to both the Air Force and the CIA, outlining new communications procedures and mission responsibilities. The effect of this cable deleted the A/P Facility from the communications network and transferred all of its responsibilities to the space tracking center under the command of [REDACTED]. Concurrently, STC was granted not only the technical assessment and analysis of the payload, but also the on-orbit camera and target information.
- 30 Nov. 1964 - 12. As a result of the petition issued by the DDCI to the D/SEC/DEF and D/NRO, this directive was reversed temporarily until such time as a solution to the CORONA program organization could be achieved. Notwithstanding the DCI/DDCI'S and D/SEC/DEF'S decision to permit the continuation of the existing procedures, D/NRO subsequent to his reversal officially, of such procedures continued sending this information to the STC.

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2 Dec. 1964 -

13. Lt. Col. Vern Webb, CIA Technical Representative at the A/P Facility, who had acted during the entire tenure with but one aim in mind, specifically the successful conduct of the CORONA program, was reassigned with military orders directing that he report on 3 December for duty at the STC.

Jan. 1965 -

14. While undergoing a routine test a [redacted] recovery vehicle forebody (ablative shell) failed. Upon investigation the Air Force learned that the forebody's age since manufacturing was 27 months. The contractor cited a shelf life of 12 months. Without further consideration or regard for programmatic impact, the Air Force directed that no forebodies which exceeded a calendar life of 12 months would qualify to be flown in the CORONA program. It should be noted that no forebodies had ever failed in flight although many used in both CORONA as well as [redacted] had ranged as much as 20 months old. CIA advised the Community immediately of the catastrophic effect which the Air Force direction would have on the CORONA program; in essence, standing that program down from operation for at least 3 to 4 months. The Agency undertook an investigation to assess the facts at hand and to ascertain the actual limitations on forebodies calendar life. CIA noted that in a study approved by both Air Force and CIA contractor personnel the calendar life had been established at 36 months. CIA then commenced a test program to investigate the aging effects of forebodies. As a result of this test, forebodies calendar life has been established conservatively at 17 months. Again, uncoordinated and unilateral direction by the Air Force threatened a catastrophic impact on the CORONA program.

4 Feb. 1965 -

15. Col. Buzzard of the NRO staff indicated that the CORONA launches would take place according to the established schedule. A point of conflict voiced by [redacted] of CIA which established that the CORONA program was primarily an intelligence reconnaissance program and the launches would be flown in response to intelligence requirements, not precisely against arbitrary launch schedules. The recent mission flight 1013 is a prime example of the result of uninformed unilateral action. During the course of this vehicle's

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initial orbit, an unexplained anomaly caused the camera to make excessive unprogrammed cycles on its first revolution about the earth. The quality of the telemetry, however, was poor and the camera status could not be precisely established until after Rev 2. It was learned that although the camera system had started prematurely on Rev 1, it had turned off normally when the "off" signal was received from the stored camera program in the vehicle. The next revolution on which the vehicle would be acquired by a tracking station was Rev 6. During the ensuing five hours, the CIA representative meticulously studied all available data. From this data and his intimate knowledge of his payload, he concluded that the camera was operating normally and that if the targeting requirements demanded it, he would activate the system on Rev. 6. He instructed the STC Field Test Force Director (FTFD) to send the appropriate command instructions to the tracking station; however, the Air Force FTFD, acting upon telephone instructions from [redacted] organization and on the advice of [redacted] called the controller and directed that the payload be put in the "off" mode. Before the CIA representative could counter these instructions the vehicle faded over the horizon.

18. Evaluation of the telemetry confirmed that the CIA analysis had been correct and that the payload had been performing normally. In fact, it continued to perform normally throughout the mission. It is difficult to assess the resultant loss of intelligence information by this improper interference of Air Force and [redacted] personnel. However, it is known that there was an important intelligence requirement on Rev 14 which passed over Cuba. This pass was lost due to the fact that the Air Force had allowed a new and inexperienced man to be on duty alone in the STC during the active operation of the camera. Because this newly assigned officer obviously did not understand the workings of the system he failed to send the requested command and, in fact, sent one that had not been authorized. The NRO immediately charged the CIA representative and directed an investigation by [redacted] and [redacted] into CIA communications practices.

Although CIA was never officially advised as to the findings regarding this specific incident, we have subsequently learned from Col. Murphy, of [redacted] staff, that the error did not rest with CIA but with the Air Force.

17. On Mission 1014 it was learned that the orbital ephemeris developed by the Air Force proved unuseable for the mission. The orbit was to have been designed for maximum Cuban coverage, but due to the Air Force's contractor using a wrong orbital decay factor in their computation, the orbit developed had serious gaps in the primary areas of interest. By the time the error was discovered, it was too late to correct without slipping the flight. CIA proposed a new orbit, went to work with its computers, and on the same day produced the desired orbit, thereby achieving a minimum delay.

15 Mar. 1965 -

18. D/NRO proposed to DDCI that the Agency be directed to release all information on the condition and operation of the payload to the Director, Program "A", or to any CORONA-cleared person as the Director, Program "A" may designate. DDCI did not concur in this proposal, but asserted that CIA is responsible for the operation and control of the CORONA payload and that he would not be a party to any directive which would dilute the effectiveness of the payload control, confuse the chain of command decisions, or permit unnecessary distribution of payload and operational information. Had the Agency not held its ground regarding this point, the major NRO/AF goal would have been achieved; namely, the targeting information already being supplied to STC by the NRO could be tied together with the payload telemetry readings and hence the Air Force would have the means at hand to duplicate the Agency payload command functions.

23 Mar. 1965 -

19. To insure that there would be no further interference during the scheduled launch of Mission 1018, the Agency sent a cable reaffirming the responsibilities of CIA vis-a-vis the payload, yet assuring the Air Force that information regarding the payload which could in any way affect the health of the vehicle or bear on the decision

to de-orbit would be provided the Air Force. When Dr. McMillan received this word, he cancelled the scheduled launch of Mission 1018 on the grounds that CIA was not providing the Air Force with information essential for the conduct of the operation. He stated that since August 1964 CIA had been withholding payload data from the Air Force and that two incidents occurred during Mission 1017 which could have had serious effects on the health of the vehicle yet CIA continued to withhold the data. In subsequent discussions between the DCI, DDCI, Secretary Vance and Dr. McMillan, it was ascertained that Dr. McMillan's statements were inaccurate and incorrect.

23 Mar. 1965 -

20. Dr. McMillan's willful cancellation of the CORONA Mission 1018 launch culminates a series of actions dating back to the early days of the NRO as outlined above to force the Agency either out of the satellite reconnaissance business or submit its activities to the desires and control of the Air Force.

21. In reviewing the history of the CORONA Program, it becomes apparent that CIA does not claim any more for itself than that which it originally held and developed from the outset of the CORONA Program. Specifically, this centers about the technical responsibility for the payload and the on-orbit control of the camera program. On the other hand, the Air Force and the NRO have worked incessantly in challenging CIA'S foothold in satellite reconnaissance. The Agency has deferred from highlighting the failures and misdirections perpetrated by the Air Force, though history will testify that the failure of hardware under the Air Force's responsibility dramatically exceeds the minor mishaps in the camera operation. For the sake of the program, the Agency has attempted repeatedly to seek a mutual solution to CORONA management. Unfortunately, to date these efforts have been thwarted, rebuffed or ignored by the NRO/Air Force. During the latter part of 1964 and in early January 1965, members of the CIA staff in Washington conducted informal and without portfolio negotiations with [REDACTED] of the NRO staff. It was hoped that these negotiations could lead to



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a CORONA agreement which would be acceptable to both parties. On 12 January 1965 General Carter tabled at the NRO Executive Committee meeting an agreement on CORONA management which was taken word for word from an agreement proposed by [REDACTED]. Dr. McMillan has yet to concur with this agreement, but in its place seeks piece-meal solutions which would strip the Agency of its present responsibilities.

It is submitted that the Agency has done everything to reach a satisfactory solution in CORONA yet preserve its original responsibilities. Air Force response, however, would suggest that unless the Agency agrees to total submission, an agreement is not desired.