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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND ENGINEERING
SUBJECT: DISCOVERER - Considerations

Within the context of the memorandum for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, subject, Coordination of Satellite and Space Vehicle Operations, dated 18 September, there is a basis for considerable concern about the status of the DISCOVERER Program. This concern involves the urgency associated with the acquisition of intelligence data, and more particularly, the security aspects pertaining thereto. Based upon information available to ARPA, it seems to me that the CORONA and ARGON portions of the DISCOVERER program should be retained as a complete program entity. If DISCOVERER program management is assigned to the Air Force, this must involve both CORONA and ARGON. Conversely, if the DISCOVERER program is retained by ARPA, the complete program must be retained, with the exception of the boosters which can continue to be handled as off-the-shelf procurement from the Air Force.

From the cover standpoint, transfer of the DISCOVERER program to the Air Force would raise public questions concerning the objectives of the program, since all of the publicity released to date on transfer of space programs from ARPA has dealt with, or has emphasized, the operational connotation. In addition, if the DISCOVERER program is transferred on the basis of providing broad research and development with application to all military space programs, the Navy and the Army might insist on an apportionment of the research and development shots for their space programs, navigation and communications being examples. Such action would interfere with the conduct of this high priority program or conversely, to assure proper understanding of the covert implications, might require considerable extension of the numbers of cleared individuals, and thereby jeopardize security.

The transfer of the DISCOVERER series to the Air Force, with the ARGON payload responsibility being transferred to the Army, would

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be difficult to explain from the aspect of cover, and would upset the present management arrangement which has been negotiated so as to ensure the success of the program with minimum explicit service rivalry. More specifically, there exists an overlapping interest and responsibility for mapping and target location which has resulted in considerable difficulty in obtaining agreement with respect to how the program should be conducted and managed. Assignment of responsibility for the mapping payload directly to the Army, without the role of ARPA as a mediator, almost certainly would intensify this management difficulty and confuse channels of authority and responsibility.

There is also another consideration, namely the stated preference by the Air Force for the SAMOS E4 system in place of ARGON. It is most likely that the proposed reassignment of ARGON would re-open this issue and might lead to a delay in acquisition of geodetic data for at least one year, and at the worst might imply the entire elimination of the opportunity to acquire the urgently needed data because of political or diplomatic considerations associated with SAMOS.

Based upon the above, it appears that maintenance of good security and timely acquisition of the intelligence data required suggests that the DISCOVERER program continue under ARPA management. This conclusion is consistent with earlier press releases and those recently concerned with the transfer of operational space programs to the services. Future releases to the press could indicate that since DISCOVERER is a basic research and development program with application to service space missions across the board, this program is being retained in ARPA to provide such basic data for use by all three services.

Also it should be noted that the cited memorandum states that, prior to assumption of responsibility by the services for any particular satellite and space vehicle program, there will be a series of data submissions culminating in a review by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Application of this process to the highly sensitive DISCOVERER program is undesirable from a security standpoint. Moreover, this process could be time consuming and the DISCOVERER program conceivably could have achieved its program objectives prior to actual transfer of the various space programs.

cc:



Not signed FJI CWR
Roy W. Johnson
Director

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ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY

September 29, 1959

MEMO FOR [REDACTED]

It is anticipated that this letter will probably not be sent to Dr. York since the transfer of the DISCOVERER Program to the Air Force appears now to be almost a dead issue. This letter will be used in case the issue is re-opened at which time [REDACTED] plans to coordinate it with Mr. Bissell prior to delivery to Dr. York.

[REDACTED]
Staff Assistant
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