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14 December 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT : References to the Purcell Panel [REDACTED]

1. Sporadically during the past year or so, I have heard several derogatory comments made concerning the Purcell Panel and its obvious shallow approach or lack of true understanding of the satellite reconnaissance requirements. I think that such observations are made unjustly due to lack of understanding by the commentators of exactly what the Purcell Panel was supposed to do; what it had been briefed during the course of its meeting; and, on what basis the Panel drew its conclusions.
2. I direct this memorandum to you, since I believe you are in a pretty good spot where such comments will focus, or the results of such comments will pass through. For instance, the very recent FIAB Report by Dr. McMillan refers to the Purcell Panel Report, and one would draw the conclusion that upon reviewing the world at large, Purcell said simply that the best thing to do is stay with CORONA. This is not really the case. The Purcell Panel was briefed by various contractors, military and Governmental personnel, as to what the present satellite reconnaissance systems were and what systems were in design development or undergoing conception. They were further briefed by James Reber as to the latest COMOR requirements at that time; and thirdly, they were briefed by Mr. Art Lundahl, Director of NPIC, as to what resolution is desirable for a Photographic Interpreter to do his job. At that time, the Panel was advised that as far as a PI was concerned, there was no difference in acquiring intelligence from a 10-foot system or a 5-foot system. The Purcell Panel had also been briefed that the present CORONA system varied in its resolution from 9 feet to as much as 20 or more. Additionally, it was briefed that the last thing down the pike as far as reconnaissance system to the then [REDACTED] was the [REDACTED] system, which accordingly would acquire two-foot resolution over a wide swath. However, this 10,000 lb. monster would require a TITAN IIIC to place

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it in orbit. The Panel felt that rather than bankrupt the U.S. Treasury by launching the [REDACTED] system to acquire our area coverage, that we turn to CORONA and make CORONA work well all the time, i.e. optimize the CORONA system to the 9-foot resolution that it had proven it was capable of.

3. Where the Purcell Panel Report falters is the fact that the Panel's recommendations are not preceded by a thorough documentation of the presentations made to the Panel, which form the basis for its recommendations. I am confident that should you convene the same group and present them with the current systems underway and advise them of the facts of the true resolutions required, you would get a different recommendation than that of July 1963.

4. You may file this in your Things to be Remembered."

JOHN N. McMAHON

Distribution:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

HANDLE VIA [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]