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By \_\_\_\_\_  
MAY 5 30/73

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ARGO

ISSUE: How should the ARGO function be carried out now that OST is out of business?

BACKGROUND: Since the late '60's, OST has chaired a group called ARGO to bring the US government user agencies in touch with the capabilities and products of the NRO program. Membership included selectively cleared members from DOI, DOA, DOC, Engineers, AID, EPA, and NASA. Most meetings have been information exchanges, but the key functions of the group have been to levy civil agency requirements upon the NRO systems and to establish mechanisms for "sanitizing" the products so they could be used by the civil community without compromising or revealing the covert intelligence collection programs. This aspect included interagency use of the USGS Reston facility already established to permit some use of NRO products for civil mapping.

PROBLEM: Dr. David Elliott of the NSC staff has recommended that the ARGO files and functions be transferred to the Inter-agency Coordination Committee on Earth Resources Survey Programs (ICCERSP), and that ICCERSP establish a "black" subcommittee (whose existence would be classified) to manage the day-to-day aspects of this activity.

FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED:

- a. OMB mapping study.
  - 1) This study is believed to recommend reorganizing all Federal civil mapping functions into a new Federal Mapping Agency, paralleling the new Defense Mapping Agency.

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- 2) The rationale is that this would save money.
- 3) Emphasis is placed on use of NRO systems and on downgrading the classification of their products.
- 4) ERTS-type systems (and civil ERS in general) are treated quite negatively.
- 5) The report is to be presented to  this week;  is reportedly favorably inclined.
- 6) Colby and Schlesinger are not thought to oppose such classification downgrading to increase utility of NRO products.

b. Operational ERS implications.

- 1) Interior still plans to put forward an operational ERS system in the FY 1975 budget.
- 2) If OMB approves the new Federal Mapping Agency idea and its focus on use of NRO products, this could provide a rationale for denying an Interior operational system. It could also place NASA's experimental ERS programs in jeopardy.
- 3) The new agency might come to be considered the logical operator of any eventual civil system; NASA might then be its R&D arm (as it is for NOAA).

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## c. ICCERSP implications.

- 1) To be effective, an ICCERSP ARGO subcommittee would have to be able to levy data requirements through COMIREX on the NRO systems. This pre-supposes authorities far beyond the scope of the present ICCERSP charter and could lead to potential conflict with the priorities of the intelligence community.
- 2) If effective, ARGO would be meeting some or many user requirements with NRO products, potentially weakening the support for NASA-type ERS systems.
- 3) Since the ICCERSP is solely the creature of OMB, OMB would have to direct the addition of the ARGO function.

## d. International implications.

If the existence of a classified ERS activity became known, it would taint both NASA and the civil ERS program at home and abroad.

## e. Economic implications.

- 1) Widespread use of NRO products in ERS by Government agencies would create a dichotomy between them and other users (commercial, state, local, university).
2. Use of classified data permits easy classification of the results, analyses, or resultant information to protect US economic interest, real or imagined.

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ARGO OPTIONS:

- a. ICCERSP subcommittee.
- 1) This could be suggested by correspondence to Kissinger and Ash, noting needs for a requirement-levying authority, for protection from disclosure, and for downgrading of current security constraints.
  - 2) This could result in improved information exchange, wider use of existing Federally funded systems, and an interim approach to the Federal Mapping Agency.
  - 3) This would result in new, potentially severe, security responsibilities for ICCERSP and NASA.
  - 4) Success might impact the NASA program.
- b. NSC subcommittee.
- 1) This could be recommended in lieu of an ICCERSP function; all above comments apply.
  - 2) It is not an appropriate function for the NSC, which is not designed for a program management role but rather for program review and policy evaluation functions.
- c. OMB committee.
- 1) This alternative could be recommended by OMB or the NSC; all the points in a, above, still hold.

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- 2) It would run the risk of placing OMB even further into the agencies' decision-making loops at levels well below the agency heads.

d. Additional COMIREX responsibility.

- 1) The Committee for Imagery Requirements and Exploitation is an interagency group of the USIB charged with sorting out the priorities for NRO collection systems.
- 2) The current Chairman is sympathetic to civil applications, to easing of security constraints, and to the needs for other than NRO capabilities (i.e., ERTS-type coverage).
- 3) This alternative might place user agencies at some disadvantage relative to the intelligence community, since the users are not USIB members.
- 4) There would be some danger of constraining operational ERS developments by overfocusing on intelligence-type functions.

e. Additional NRO responsibility.

- 1) This could be recommended as an alternative to c, or d, above.
- 2) It would certainly bias the civil program toward the use of NRO systems.
- 3) The precedent would be set for a permanently classified program without NASA participation.
- 4) International ERS implications could be severe.

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f. Take no initiative.

- 1) This could lead Dr. Elliott toward some unilateral recommendation of his own.
- 2) If nothing is done, what values existed in ARGO would evaporate with time and loss of momentum.
- 3) If nothing is done, it might accelerate OMB's decisions on a Federal Mapping Agency.

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