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(S) NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE NRO STAFF

17 August 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. MARK
DR. COOK

SUBJECT: Protection of NRO Identity

An issue of continuing interest is the protection afforded the NRO identity. A chronology and summary of media exposure of the NRO is provided for your information. From the NRO Staff's perspective, continuation of current policies of keeping NRO identities [redacted] TK, as appropriate, appears prudent.

[redacted signature]

Director

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Chronology (2) [redacted]

I believe this confirms what I told you several weeks ago about official acknowledgment of the existence of the NRO.

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GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULE OF
EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652 EXEMPTION CATE-
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PAGE 1 OF 1 PAGE

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SECURITY POLICY REGARDING EXISTENCE OF THE NRO

1. Chronology of Media Discussion of NRO:

- 1962: Upon establishment of the NRO as a covert organization, the existence of the NRO and NRP was classified SECRET and TOP SECRET, respectively, and admissible only within ~~_____~~ TALENT-KEYHOLE channels.
- 1965: Policy reaffirmed in the DOD directive pertaining to the NRO.
- Early 1970s: Occasional references to the NRO began to appear in major Eastern papers (Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, New York Times).
- 9 Dec 73: During Congressional debate over Mr. Plummer's confirmation as SAFUS and possible conflict of interest issues accruing from LMSC affiliation, the Washington Post correctly identified Mr. Plummer as being responsible for the spy satellite activities and the NRO. No inquiries were received.
- 10 Dec 73: The NRO Staff recommended to the DNRO and SECAF (McLucas) that we preposition a statement that "As a matter of policy, the DOD does not discuss reconnaissance activities" to be used in direct response to expected inquiries. The DNRO discussed with Mr. Schlesinger (SECDEF) who contacted DCI (Mr. Colby). They agreed to the statement, in response to query, "Yes, there is an NRO. It is administered by a senior Air Force civilian official. All other details are classified." The statement was prepositioned with the OSD(PA) to be released by him if asked about the NRO.
- 13 Dec 73: DCI summary on the National Foreign Intelligence activity to Congress reflected CIA, NSA, NRO line entries. A Congressional staffer included in the Congressional Record the fact that the DCI had reported budgets for the CIA, NSA, and NRO. He accurately determined the figures were classified but was unwitting of the need to avoid admission of the existence of the NRO. "The Congressional Quarterly," a local paper, initiated numerous

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PAGE 1 OF 3 PAGE

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inquiries about the NRO. Reportedly, all contacts resulted in an "I don't know" answer. The probe did not result in a story because no information was available.

- 27 Feb 1974: Following a routine OSD(PA) news conference, Mr. Friedheim was privately asked by Mike Shanahan (AP), "What can you tell me about the NRO? Mr. Friedheim responded, "Yes there is an NRO. It is an office through which certain intelligence matters are administered. It is administered by a senior Air Force civilian official. We will not discuss any specifics about the office." No report by AP resulted from this response.
- 14 Apr 1975: CBS's "60 Minutes," Steve Steinberg, made an official inquiry to SAFOI with the following questions: "Is there an NRO? Is it in the Air Force? Will its people talk to CBS? Even in confidence? What is its budget? How many people are in it? Please provide more details." The coordinated reply was, "Yes, there is an NRO. All details are classified." The "60 Minutes" show which was broadcast on 20 July 1975 noted that it was in the Pentagon without further details.
- 1975: During the CIA/Marchetti litigation over the Marchetti/Marks book, the court contested the CIA classification of several hundred items of Marchetti's manuscript. The NRO was included. The CIA dropped their protest over many items during the negotiations, including reference to NRO. The court never ruled on the classification of "NRO."
- Later 1975-76: Several FOI requests for details about the NRO resulted in responses that "as a matter of policy, the DOD does not discuss reconnaissance activities."
- August 1976: The SSC/CIA asked the NRO Staff to review the requirement for classification and compartmentation of "NRO" and "NRP." SECRET ██████████ or TK protection was revalidated.

2. Discussion:

Since the NRO is a covert organization, and its affairs are conducted using covert principles and procedures,

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PAGE 2 OF 3 PAGES

identifying the organization would not be consistent with basic security principles and would result in revelation of additional details. Such revelations would encourage a more rapid erosion of even more details. The process by which this would occur is as follows. Such a policy change would facilitate and encourage references to "NRO" or "NRP" in the context of personalities or organizational identities. Allowing non-compartmented usage of the initials would focus abnormal attention on them. It could lead to transgressions (as readers made marginal or oral notes in order to flesh out what "NRO" or "NRP" meant), thereby precipitating an erosion of the security protection. This would provide an undesirable level of visibility into NRP management. Our ability to conduct our affairs in an obscure (covert) fashion would be severely impaired and would result in a much more easily targetable activity for Soviet intelligence collection activities.

The current policy of no discussion of the NRO/NRP outside ~~Delete This~~ channels unequivocally restricts all discussion to those who have legitimate needs and secure communications. Comprehension of the policy is easy. Any change will result in considerable confusion as to how much detail is permissible.

In the absence of an imperative to change, present policy should continue until specific amplifying data, such as location, organization, people, etc., can be released.

3. Recommendation:

It is recommended that the DNRO continue to support as necessary the prohibition of discussion of NRO and NRP except ~~██████████~~ and TK channels.