

~~TOP SECRET~~

1412
21
12/23/68 for
Nina Hamilton

THE NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAM

What the Program Is

The National Reconnaissance Program is a single, national program dedicated to the collection, through overflight, of intelligence to meet the needs and objectives of the United States Government. The Secretary of Defense is the Executive Agent for the Program, managing resources of the CIA and DOD in carrying out the mission. The entire Program is covert and comprises the development, management, and operation of satellites, aircraft, and drones for visual, photographic, or electronic reconnaissance of denied areas of the world (peripheral reconnaissance is a separate responsibility managed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff). The cost of the Program is close to [REDACTED] per year.

The National Reconnaissance Program is responsive directly and solely to the intelligence collection requirements and priorities established by the United States Intelligence Board. The National Reconnaissance Office sends its plans and schedules for both satellite and aircraft reconnaissance overflights directly to the ⁴⁰303 Committee of the National Security Council for operational approval.

HANDLE VIA
[REDACTED]
CONTROL SYSTEM

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULES

CONTROL NO. _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

GROUP 1
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION

Program Background

The essential background of the National Reconnaissance Program begins shortly after the May 1, 1960 loss of a U-2 aircraft engaged in overflight reconnaissance of the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of this event, faced with the loss of reconnaissance capability over the USSR, President Eisenhower called a special meeting of the National Security Council to review possible alternatives, such as satellite reconnaissance systems. As a result of this review, the Department of Defense was directed to accelerate and re-orient its overt satellite reconnaissance project -- known as SAMOS -- and to establish a streamlined management structure and special procedures for enhancing its successful development and operation. Within a few weeks, a CIA-managed, DOD-funded covert reconnaissance satellite was also placed within the special management structure. Further procedural adjustments, extending through the spring of 1962, culminated in the establishment of a National Reconnaissance Program which was to be managed by a National Reconnaissance Office -- a single, national agency with a charter covering satellite photographic and signal intelligence collection operations, satellite mapping and geodesy, and aircraft/drone overflight reconnaissance.

GROUP 1
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION
DOD DIRECTIVE 5200.10 DOES NOT APPLY

CONTROL NO _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~CONTROL SYSTEM~~

What the Program Does

During the years from 1962 to the present, the National Reconnaissance Program's capabilities have developed to a point where satellites photograph [redacted] square miles of the Sino-Soviet land mass annually. A typical broad-coverage satellite photographic mission produces, on the average, [redacted] cloud-free photography of about [redacted] square miles of land mass at ground resolutions of seven to ten feet. A high resolution photographic mission returns, on the average, [redacted] cloud-free photography of 3500 high priority targets, with ground resolutions [redacted].

[redacted] National Reconnaissance Program electronic signal intelligence collection vehicles routinely provide detailed information on Soviet and Chinese electronic order-of-battle locations, surface-to-air missile-related radars, and Soviet ABM radars in a virtually continuous electronic surveillance of the entire Sino-Soviet land mass.

Today, the United States depends on the National Reconnaissance Program for most of its tactical and strategic information on closed societies.

Policies Supporting the Program

When the first U-2 photography of the USSR was produced (in 1956), President Eisenhower directed that it be protected -- as an ultra-sensitive

~~CONTROL SYSTEM~~

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION

CONTROL NO _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

CONTROL SYSTEM

espionage product -- in a special security system. In 1960, when the first satellite reconnaissance photographs were produced, President Eisenhower directed that they be similarly protected and placed them in a compartment of the same special security system.

During 1961 and early 1962, the Soviets made a number of private overtures to the U.S. protesting the use of satellites for reconnaissance. In 1962, the question of the legitimacy of satellite reconnaissance began to appear as an important pre-condition to international negotiations on disarmament and on the peaceful uses of outer space. In response to increasing pressure, the President asked a Committee of Principals to formulate a national policy which would (1) maintain United States freedom of action to conduct reconnaissance satellite operations unilaterally, (2) prevent foreign political and physical interference with those operations, (3) prevent accidental or forced disclosure of the details of the operations or end-products of the United States reconnaissance program, and, at the same time (4) permit the United States to continue to work toward disarmament and international cooperation in space.

The recommendations of this Committee were approved by the President on July 10, 1962 and issued as national policy in NSC Action

CONTROL SYSTEM

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULES

CONTROL NO. _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

2454. This policy statement* provides that the U.S. will:

1. Maintain the legal position that the principles of international law and the U.N. Charter apply to activities in outer space.
2. Continue to avoid any position implying that reconnaissance activities in outer space are not legitimate.
3. Avoid public use of the term "reconnaissance satellites."
4. Seek to create wider public acceptance of space observation and photography.
5. Seek to gain acceptance of the principle of the legitimacy of space reconnaissance.
6. When confronted, continue to take a public stand for the legitimacy of the principle of reconnaissance from outer space, the precise form and extent of the stand depending upon the circumstances of the confrontation.
7. Continue the present practice of not identifying individual military space launchings by mission or purpose.
8. Refrain from publicly disclosing the status, extent, effectiveness, or operational characteristics of our satellite reconnaissance program.

* The statements which follow are abstracted from the very comprehensive basic policy paper.

~~TOP SECRET~~
CONTROL SYSTEM

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULES

CONTROL NO _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

9. Exercise strict control over public statements and backgrounding concerning reconnaissance satellites.

10. Direct no public attention toward development of anti-satellite capabilities.

11. Discreetly disclose to certain allies and neutrals selected information with regard to the U.S. space reconnaissance program.

12. In private international disclosures emphasize the fact of our determination and ability to pursue such programs, as well as their great contribution to the common security.

13. Not agree to (a) declarations of the precise purpose of all satellites, (b) declarations of the equipment of all satellites, (c) requirements for advance notification of all satellite launchings and the tracks of satellites, (d) pre-launching inspection of satellites, or (e) a specific definition of peaceful uses of space which would not embrace unlimited observation.

These policy statements have undergirded the National Reconnaissance Program from 1962 to the present, have been a primary element in the success of the Program, and have been a remarkably effective influence in protecting a major espionage activity from the public spotlight. For while it is true that there is a general public awareness of the likely existence of a United States-sponsored satellite reconnais-

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~CONTROL SYSTEM~~

sance program, the awareness is latent, rather than active. A modest level of awareness also extends internationally; because of the carefully subdued manner in which this awareness has been allowed to generate, it has been accompanied by a gradual tacit acceptance of satellite overflight as a reasonable national venture. By continuing to surround satellite reconnaissance with a unique security system, the U. S. has been able to avoid embarrassment to other nations (particularly important in the case of its allies), and has muted the threat of international confrontation on the "legitimacy" of space espionage.

Vulnerability of the Program

As a result of careful satellite reconnaissance policy planning, the United States is enjoying, at this time, an international political atmosphere which contains all the advantages of tacit acceptance without any of the hazards inherent in open discussion or confrontation. It is critically important to nourish the conditions which contribute to this atmosphere, for reconnaissance satellites require a completely permissive environment -- political and physical -- for their successful operation. Lacking such an environment, they could be interdicted on the floor of the United Nations or in the skies of any nation which desired to demonstrate against space espionage. Modern laser technology has

~~CONTROL SYSTEM~~

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULES

CONTROL NO. _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

CONTROL SYSTEM

placed a powerful anti-overflight weapon within easy reach of all nations. In the face of such technology, the reconnaissance satellite stands as a fragile vehicle which cannot be protected against any determined assailant.

The Influence of Other Governmental Activities

Two United States agencies -- the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency -- have recently shown an increasing interest in "earth-sensing" satellites, and, by their interest, have stimulated a re-examination of the reconnaissance policies developed in 1962. NASA has been exploring the use of photographs to locate and study natural earth resources. Early experiments, involving hand-held cameras operated by GEMINI and APOLLO astronauts, have not been controversial, largely because the photographs are at a fairly gross resolution, the "targets" are carefully selected, the film is reviewed by an inter-agency security panel before it is released to the public, and hostile states such as the USSR and Red China are either not overflown or not photographed. Future NASA applications involving oceanography, forestry, geology, and agriculture must be controlled carefully, for the line between economic research photography and economic intelligence photography is very thin and

CONTROL SYSTEM

~~TOP SECRET~~

EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULES UNLESS INDICATED OTHERWISE

CONTROL NO. _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

CONTROL SYSTEM

careless experimentation could trigger an international confrontation on the legitimacy of overflight observation/reconnaissance. Recognizing this potential problem early in 1966, the President's Science Adviser has been sponsoring policy studies and requirement conferences in an effort to develop a civil earth-sensing program which will meet the needs of science without hazarding the security of the National Reconnaissance Program or offending the sovereignty of other nations. These studies and conferences have been a strong positive influence in coordinating the needs of the civil community and assisting it to plan a reasonable program. In addition, the Department of Defense and the CIA coordinate on NASA's plans for "earth-sensing" activities, working in consonance with special National Security Council policy guidelines adopted in July 1966.

The US-USSR discussions of 1968 regarding a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty brought the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency directly into satellite reconnaissance policy considerations. Convinced that the USSR would never agree to on-site inspection, ACDA proposed to negotiate with the USSR on the assumption that the United States was prepared to accept "enforcement by maximum, or if necessary, exclusive reliance on national means of verification. . . ." For the United States, this expression means "satellite reconnaissance."

CONTROL SYSTEM

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION

CONTROL NO _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

GROUP 1
CONTROL SYSTEM

In addition, in order to support its proposal, ACDA recommended declassifying the fact that the U. S. is conducting satellite reconnaissance, disclosing to the Soviets that reconnaissance satellites are our main reliance for verification, briefing Congress on our reconnaissance capabilities, and informing the press and public, gradually but officially, along the same lines. After discussion within the United States Intelligence Board and key affected government agencies, it was decided that disarmament discussions with the USSR could proceed effectively, and possibly more effectively, by restricting the U.S. delegation to use of the expression "national means of verification" with no reference to our satellite reconnaissance program. It was pointed out that disclosure is an irreversible step which would have profoundly adverse effects on national security. Furthermore, to single out one or some intelligence collection methods now and to pass only that or those to the Soviets, Congress, and the American public would be dangerous and misleading and could evolve a genuine "credibility gap."

The Department of Defense and NASA proposed an alternative approach which, they felt, gave ACDA all the advantages of satellite-borne inspection with no impingement on the security protection required by the National Reconnaissance Program. Both agencies recalled a proposal made by ACDA, in January 1963, which envisioned creation of an

GROUP 1
CONTROL SYSTEM

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION

CONTROL NO _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

CONTROL SYSTEM

internationally supervised or operated arms control satellite system. It had been suggested that the United States would provide technical and other support for the system, as would the Soviets and other interested nations. The photography would be retained and used by an international disarmament body.

This proposal, whether conducted internationally, bilaterally (NASA and the Soviet Academy), or nationally (NASA alone) is very attractive. By working outside the National Reconnaissance Program, the ACDA would avoid confronting the Soviets (and the rest of the world) either publicly or privately, with the reality of the U. S. program, avoiding an unsettling episode with other nations, with Congress, and with the American public. This approach would also enable the United States to continue its own covert disarmament reconnaissance program until it unilaterally decided, if at all, to rely upon the international program. Finally, a separate program would protect existing intelligence security and would very likely achieve a measurable step toward "normalizing" satellite observation at little or no risk to U. S. national activities.

In Summary

The United States government is deeply dependent on overflight reconnaissance, and particularly satellite reconnaissance, for information on closed societies. Satellites are fragile, vulnerable vehicles

~~TOP SECRET~~

EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULES

CONTROL NO. _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

which must have a totally permissive environment for successful operation. National satellite reconnaissance policy, begun at the instance of President Eisenhower and continuing to the present, recognizes the need to (1) operate reconnaissance satellites with great discretion, (2) develop tacit acceptance of these operations as a reasonable national activity, and (3) avoid embarrassment to our allies or confrontation with our enemies in carrying out our operations. These policies, and the special security arrangements resulting from them, have been primary forces in protecting United States reconnaissance operations from the threat of international confrontation. NASA's and ACDA's interests in "earth-sensing" satellites pose special problems which can be, and are being, solved through close coordination and cooperation.

~~HANDLE VIA
CONTROL SYSTEM~~

~~TOP SECRET~~
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING
AND DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULES

CONTROL NO _____
COPY _____ OF _____ COPIES
PAGE _____ OF _____ PAGES