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NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAM

Early in the 1950s it became apparent that the U.S. would experience increasing difficulty in mounting classical intelligence collection operations against the Soviet Union. The development of a Soviet nuclear capability significantly increased the urgency of the requirement for information concerning Soviet strategic forces. It was decided that overhead reconnaissance represented a feasible means of obtaining the essential strategic intelligence information.

Therefore, on August 4, 1955, after months of negotiations, the CIA and the USAF agreed to jointly sponsor and conduct the U-2 developmental and operational program. It was recognized that although the U-2 was initially highly survivable, the Soviets would eventually be capable of interdicting U-2 and other airborne overflight missions, thereby denying us the primary source of strategic intelligence.

Faced with the eventuality of losing our airborne reconnaissance capabilities, the USAF began the overt development of a reconnaissance satellite system in September 1956. This development became the SAMOS program.

As development activity on satellite reconnaissance systems progressed, it became apparent that openly operating a satellite espionage system would be inconsistent with the stated U.S. "space

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for peace" policy. In recognition of the potential international sensitivity to reconnaissance operations, satellite vehicles notwithstanding, the USAF and the CIA were made joint sponsors of a covert satellite reconnaissance program. Thus began the CORONA (KH-4) program under the cover of the DISCOVERER research project.

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The incentive for development of an alternative reconnaissance capability heightened when on May 1, 1960 Gary Powers' U-2 was shot down on a mission targeted against Plesetsk.

The President's decision to terminate overflights of the Soviet Union following the Powers incident essentially shrouded the Soviet Union until August 19, 1960 when the first intelligence photography was returned from space. Although the mission lasted only one day and returned comparatively poor quality imagery (about 35 feet ground resolution versus the 2-3 feet for the U-2), a capability was demonstrated.

~~Fortunately,~~ ^{to recall} an NSC meeting had been scheduled for August 26, 1960 to review the management of the SAMOS program. The photography from the first successful CORONA satellite mission lent substantial evidence to the potential of satellite reconnaissance systems. The President directed ^{the Air Force} that the SAMOS project be re-oriented along lines similar to the CORONA project, and ^{to re-structure} that special SAMOS management procedures be established.

A week later the Secretary of the Air Force delegated the management authority for satellite reconnaissance to the Under Secretary of the Air Force. It became increasingly apparent, however, that the importance of satellite reconnaissance products dictated that the collection program be conducted at a national level.

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In September 1961, the Secretary of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence signed an agreement establishing the National Reconnaissance Program. The agreement established the Under Secretary of the Air Force and the Deputy Director (Plans), CIA, as co-directors of the NRO. While this agreement laid the groundwork for succeeding NRP agreements, the NSC 5412/2 Group (now the 40 Committee) recommended against the co-directorship concept ^{and} in essence the agreement never operated.

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On May 2, 1962 a second agreement was signed which established a single Director of the NRO and developed the following responsibilities and relationships^{Some of} which have carried through to the present:

1. The NRP will be solely and directly responsive to the requirements and priorities of the USIB.
2. The NRP will consist of all overt and covert satellite and overflight reconnaissance projects.

Specifically licensed here are those overt and covert satellite



This provision, in May 1962, formalized in a national charter the responsibilities outlined on October 20, 1961 by the Secretary of Defense in his directive "Space Vehicle Electronics Intelligence Program" in which he:

- a) defined the utilization of space vehicles as a means for collection of electronic signal (COMINT and ELINT) information as a special augmentation to other signal intelligence resources of the U. S. Government and,
- b) assigned to the NRO the sole responsibility for the research, development, planning and operations for electronic signal collection by space vehicles.

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3. The resources of the DOD and the CIA will be used to conduct the NRP.
4. The DNRO will be responsible for funding the NRP.
5. The DCI will establish security policy for the protection of the NRP.
6. The DNRO will be responsible for the scheduling of all NRP projects.
7. The NRO will be responsible for first-phase processing of NRP projects.
8. Public release of information will be the responsibility of the DNRO.

The above roles and responsibilities have remained essentially unchanged to date despite the ensuing agreements.)

On July 6, 1962 the NSC 5412/2 Group and the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board non-concurred in the May 1962 agreement and directed the development of a more definitive "permanent documentary basis for the National Reconnaissance Office."

On March 13, 1963 a third agreement was signed by the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the DCL. While this agreement was more specific than the two previous attempts and was concurred in by the PFIAB, the agreement was considered unworkable by the CIA. This agreement very clearly established the authority and responsibilities of the DNRO; however, acceptance of the agreement by the CIA was less than enthusiastic. During this period and until 1965, CIA and

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DOD relationships were at a very low ebb. Finally, in May 1964, following an intensive study, the PFIAB sent a memorandum to the President recommending that he approve a directive establishing a framework for the National Reconnaissance Office. In response to the President's direction in 1964, the current "DOD/CIA Agreement for Reorganization of the NRP" was signed on August 11, 1965. This agreement, which currently charters the NRP, is directly responsive to the concerns expressed by the PFIAB in 1964.

Following a discussion of the national policy supporting the NRP, the present NRP charter will be discussed in detail.

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During the two-year period following the first successful CORONA mission, the President was subject to many national and international forces with respect to satellite reconnaissance systems. In response to the increasing pressure for a national position on satellite reconnaissance activities, on May 26, 1962 the President (via NSAM 156) directed the State Department to chair an Ad Hoc committee to formulate a U.S. position on satellite reconnaissance 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 committee was (as it is today) chaired by Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson and had high-level representation from DOD, NASA, the White House staff, CIA and ACDA.

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On July 10, 1962 (via NSC action 2454) the President approved as national policy the NSAM 156 Committee report on the political and informational aspects of satellite reconnaissance. The key elements of this policy:

1. Satellite reconnaissance activities are considered to be legitimate and peaceful.
2. Avoid public reference to "reconnaissance" satellites.
3. Resist Soviet pressure to outlaw space reconnaissance.
4. Control public statements.
5. Do not disclose the status, extent, effectiveness or operational characteristics of the NRP.
6. The U.S. cannot agree to:
 - a. Declaring the purpose of all satellites
 - b. Advance launching notification
 - c. Pre-launching inspection.

This policy has undergirded the NRP since 1962 and has been reaffirmed by the NSAM 156 Committee on several occasions. For example, in 1966, the NSAM 156 Committee addressed

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the impact on the NRP of NASA's earth resources survey activities and provided guidelines for its development while reaffirming the basic satellite reconnaissance policy established in 1962.

In summary, the current national policy enjoins the United States to operate its reconnaissance satellites with great discretion while working toward developing tacit acceptance of the operation and avoiding embarrassment to our allies or confrontation with our enemies. The continued acceptance of this policy was recommended to the President in the NRP Annex to the Space Task Group Report and approved by the President on September 30, 1969.

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The National Reconnaissance Program is conducted in accord with national policy and is executed in accordance with the August 11, 1965 DOD/CIA Agreement. This agreement, ~~as previously mentioned~~, was developed in response to the concerns of the PFIAB and in essence represents Presidential desires concerning the conduct and management of the most significant strategic intelligence program.

~~Key elements of the Agreement:~~

The Agreement recognized the need for a single, national program to meet the intelligence needs of the U.S. Government (as opposed to DOD needs only). The Agreement established the NRO as a separate agency of the DOD. The Secretary of Defense ^{was} ~~is~~ designated as the executive agent for the NRP and will:

1. Be ultimately responsible for the management and operation of the NRP and the NRO.
2. Choose the DNRO.
3. Review and approve the NRP budget.

~~In practice these functions have regularly been performed by the Deputy Secretary of Defense.~~

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The Agreement also recognizes the varied roles of the Director of Central Intelligence as senior U.S. intelligence advisor, co-sponsor of the NRP and the Chairman of the USIB. Under the terms of the ^{present} Agreement the DCI will:

1. Establish collection priorities and requirements.
2. Review the product of NRP operations.
3. Be a member of the NRP Executive Committee.
4. Review the NRP budget.
5. Provide NRP security guidance.

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The Agreement also delineates the responsibilities and commensurate authority of the DNRO, who will:

1. Manage the NRO and execute the NRP subject to the direction and control of the Secretary of Defense and the guidance of the ExCom.
2. Initiate, approve, modify, redirect or terminate any or all research and development projects in the NRP.
3. Report to the ExCom on the status of all NRP projects or activities.
4. Prepare the NRP budget.
5. Establish fiscal control and accounting procedures for the NRP.
6. Sit with the USIB on matters affecting the NRP.

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Of particular significance in this Agreement was the establishment of an NRP Executive Committee very similar in composition to that recommended by the PFIAB in 1964. In essence the ExCom acts as a board of directors for the NRP. It ^{was} composed of the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the DCI as co-sponsors of the Program, while the President's Science Advisor represents the White House. The ExCom is tasked to:

1. Recommend to the Secretary of Defense an appropriate level of effort for the NRP.
2. Approve or modify the NRP and its budget.
3. Approve the allocation of research, development, and operational responsibilities between the DOD and CIA program elements.
4. Review the essential features of the major program elements of the NRP.

In practice, the ExCom acts for the Secretary of Defense to review the NRP and provide guidance to the DNRO on the conduct and execution of the NRP. The existence of the ExCom and its composition were directed by the President in 1964 to replace the system of DOD and CIA NRP monitors which was chartered in the 1962 and 1963 agreements. The individual agency monitor concept interfered with the direct chain of command envisioned for the NRP.

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In addition to the ExCom functions, the NRP is presently reviewed quite substantially. The USIB, as the requirements generation agency, evaluates the degree to which NRP activities satisfy stated requirements. The "Land Panel" under Dr. DuBridge monitors the development of sensors pertinent to reconnaissance systems and identifies promising areas for study and exploitation. The PFIAB also takes an active role in assessing the effectiveness of the organization, management, and operation of the Program in response to national needs and priorities.

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The August 1965 charter has proven to be a good one. It establishes a program and an organization which are responsive to changing intelligence needs and a Program whose effectiveness is readily and frequently measured by the requirements community.

Several constructive changes within the tenets of our charter have been made from time to time. In April 1969 the DNRO established an analysis capability on the NRO Staff to provide a basis for selecting among alternative approaches to meeting stated user requirements. The current Deputy DNRO has a much stronger and more effective role than in the past. He has a strong technical capability and increased responsibility for program management has been delegated to him. He is, as per the charter, a CIA employee and is providing a stronger interface between CIA and DOD management on NRO matters.

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x⁴. A significant characteristic of the NRO is the marked difference between the two major program offices of the NRP -- CIA Reconnaissance Programs under ^{the DOST} Carl Duckett and the Air Force Special Projects Office under ^{General Office} Brigadier-General King. The CIA Program Office is very close to the intelligence community and has an excellent understanding of intelligence priorities and requirements. The CIA, while it recognizes the ultimate authority of the DNRO with regard to management of the NRP, ^{and the resource control,} operates its programs in a nearly autonomous fashion. ^{The DOST} Mr. Duckett and the DCI are continually involved in intelligence matters at every level of government and with many agencies. As is perfectly natural, they tend to favor the collection projects for which the CIA is responsible in many discussions outside the NRO and beyond ExCom. This influence tends to restrict the options for program decisions open to the DNRO.

Conversely, the Air Force Program Office is solely responsive to DNRO direction, since it reports in a direct line to the DNRO. This office is by geographical location (Los Angeles) and composition, however, removed from the intelligence community and looks to the NRO Staff to interface with the appropriate USIB committees.

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I believe the asymmetrical nature of the NRO, while not wholly desirable, can perhaps be exploited by the judicious assignment of responsibilities for various exploratory, development and operational projects. For example, in the field of near real time readout, it is to our advantage to have both the CIA Program Office and the Air Force Program Office continue the technology effort leading to systems definition some time in the future. Once these systems are defined, however, in our decision as to which office should have development responsibility, we should take into account not only the technical capability of the two organizations but also their management experience, as demonstrated on other NRO programs.

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A recent management action which affects the NRP is the Secretary of Defense memorandum, "Responsibilities for Intelligence in the DOD" dated August 6, 1969. This memorandum outlined the intelligence responsibilities of the ASD (A). The purpose of these new responsibilities is to assure the Secretary of Defense that all intelligence programs of the DOD are viewed competently and in mutual context to permit optimum allocation of resources. The need for such an overall view is doubtless valid and, to date, it appears that the clean organization and functional arrangement of the NRO offers a visibility sufficient for such a review without placing much additional burden on the NRO. However, the implementation of the authority delegated to the ASD (A) in resource allocation, requirements validation and line management, if applied to the NRP, can be in conflict with the present charter establishing the NRP. For example, the ASD (A) has expressed concern about over-classification and an intent to reduce compartmentalization of intelligence data. But the special security policies of the NRP are based on a national policy which has been reaffirmed a number of times and which designates the DCI as the responsible official for security policy.

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Proposals to change this policy must be carefully handled to account for the views of the several groups external to the DOD who have responsibility.

Similarly, the expressed intent of PFIAB in recommending to the President the organization of the NRO included the relief from internal review within DOD or CIA. The Board's study revealed "that the use of monitors by the Secretary of Defense and the DCI to review the conduct of the National Reconnaissance Program has interfered with the direct chain of command between the Secretary of Defense and the Director of the National Reconnaissance Office, and from the NRO Director to the CIA elements engaged in the Program." Consequently the Board recommended to the President that "in lieu of the monitor and review functions provided for in the present (March 1963) NRP Agreement, periodic reporting by the Executive Agent for the Program to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs and the President's FIAB, concerning all aspects of the Program, including organization, management, funding, programming, security, advance planning, research and development, production and operations." (From PFIAB Memorandum for the President, dated May 2, 1964, approved by the President on May 22, 1964,

[REDACTED] 1962/64). Management procedures which tend to add another layer of review and approval

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can cause concern within these groups and could easily undermine the good features of a national organization. At present, we have outstanding requests from both ASD (SA) and DDR&E for additional clearances for people who would conduct even more reviews of our programs.

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The present organization and management arrangement has been effective although it is a fairly delicately balanced arrangement between two agencies and influenced by several others. The NRO, like any organization, can be improved. But improved management arrangements should be considered carefully in view of the relationships with the CIA and others and executed in a straightforward, coordinated manner. A current fear is that a gradual process of normalization will occur which degrades the truly national character of the NRP. Such a degradation may well not be in the best interests of national security and may be viewed with considerable concern by various groups as soon as its effect becomes apparent.

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Whether or not organizational changes of a fundamental nature are implemented, it is essential that the DNRO have a clearly established line of authority. Unless and until inter-agency changes are made, it is strongly recommended that there be no ambiguity in the authority and responsibility of the DepSecDef as Chairman, ExCom over the DNRO. With regard to the NRP, it appears that the ASD(A) can provide all necessary advice to the Secretary of Defense and DepSecDef on resource allocation without interfering with the normal operation of the NRO. Budgets and other information normally supplied by the DNRO to the ExCom will be made available to ASD(A). The DNRO will, of course, cooperate with the ASD(A) in all activities essential to an overall review of DOD intelligence programs.

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