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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

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OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY

October 28, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR The Director of Central Intelligence
Declassified and Released by the NRO

SUBJECT: Management of the CORONA Project in Accordance with E. O. 12958

on NOV 26 1961

After reviewing the series of CORONA difficulties we have experienced throughout most of this year, I recently directed [redacted] to convene a small group of highly qualified technical and contractual personnel and conduct an investigation into the assembly, test, and check-out procedures being followed, with particular emphasis on all items connected with failures in this project. I specified that the group should be composed of highly qualified personnel already cleared but who have not been involved in the actual project. The findings of this group, which I reviewed during my recent visit to the West Coast, highlight some serious deficiencies in our present management arrangements, and in this regard, confirm the independent conclusion to which I have been led by my own consideration of CORONA problems throughout recent months. I am convinced that we must centralize and strengthen the management of this project and clarify the associated responsibilities within the NRO.

The technical problems of concern have changed from those originally associated with making the first CORONA cameras work at all, with what, today, would be considered very poor photographic results, to those associated with cameras now operating at a high level of performance. In fact, at present the achievement of consistently good performance, and the realization of further improvement in quality of results, involve an extremely close tie-in between the camera and the vehicle with its associated stabilization and control system. The structure of divided management which was suitable at the time the project originated has not evolved with technical progress. At the present time, the several "black" contracts which relate to the payload, its engineering, and check-out, are the responsibility of a CIA contract officer

CORONA
ARGON

[redacted] EXECUTIVE REGISTRY
LANYARD ROOM 7-E-12

EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC REGRADING;
DOD DIR. 5200.10 DOES NOT APPLY

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at Langley, in the organization of Program "B." "White" contracts for the vehicle, its engineering, check-out, and launch, are the responsibility of Program "A." [REDACTED] inquiry revealed that the totality of these contracts does not cover all of the tasks that should properly be performed by the contractor. At the same time, the contracts allow room for duplicative effort within different parts of the contractor's organization; this is expensive and has, I believe, actually been detrimental to reliability.

I feel that we must establish a single authoritative point of contact between the NRO and the contractor on this program. To him would be assigned full responsibility for conduct of the program; one of his first tasks would be to review the present contracts as to consistency and completeness, and to amend them as required. I would expect him to exercise continuing technical and contractual surveillance over the contractor, as well as over the Service agencies involved, to maintain standards of performance and to be sure that gaps or inconsistencies do not develop in the operation. At the present time there is no single authority for this complete surveillance in the NRO, short of my office.

I am convinced that the Director, NRO Program "A," because of the direct authority he has over necessary Air Force resources, is the only one to whom I can assign the full management responsibility of which I speak. This can be arranged with what I consider to be relatively minor changes from the present situation, by following the same pattern that we have used in the LANYARD and ARGON programs. There is a CIA contract officer now attached to [REDACTED] staff who administers the CIA "black" contracts on LANYARD and ARGON, under the management direction of [REDACTED] as Director, Program "A." This has been a very successful arrangement, and I propose that we handle CORONA in the same way, by assigning a CIA contract officer to [REDACTED] staff to administer the "black" contracts under his management direction.

I expect the Director, Program "A," to continue to use the Configuration Control Board (CCB) as a principal management tool.

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It seems to me that the CCB is the best way to bring the combined technical talents of the CIA and the Air Force to bear on the CORONA program, and at the same time to insure that those management and technical people in both organizations who have a broad knowledge of all of our programs are kept abreast of the current operational and technical problems of CORONA. We should both be sure that members of the CCB are selected with this in mind.

I will expect Program "B" to continue to supply security support and film courier support, as is done for all of the NRO programs.

The "white" part of the CORONA program is presently organized just as it was in the days of the DISCOVERER project. Since DISCOVERER is no longer used as a cover, there is no longer a need for this arrangement. Even though [redacted] as Deputy Commander, Space Systems Division, now has full authority over [redacted] (ex-DISCOVERER), it may be desirable to bring it more closely under the view of his staff and of the CCB. These are changes to be accomplished in steps, however, carefully planned to avoid publicity or speculation.

I think that by these means we can strengthen the management of the CORONA project with a minimum of disruption to established practice. I am completely convinced that a strengthening is required. If you are in agreement with this approach, may I suggest that you indicate your concurrence on the attached memorandum.

Brockway McMillan

BROCKWAY McMILLAN
Director
National Reconnaissance Office

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