

18 NOV 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: CORONA Management

1. The following information and views are provided for your background use in framing a response to Dr. McMillan's request (see attached) to transfer complete control of the CORONA Program to [redacted] in Program A.

2. The CORONA Program was originally intended as a backup to SAMOS, but has now come to represent our only national capability for doing photographic search of denied areas. It has done so with increasing quality for a reasonable cost and is likely to remain our basic capability in this area for several years. It was originally constructed as a completely covert program, using the Discoverer series as a launching cover story. A Special Program Office [redacted] was created at the Space Systems Division of AFSC under General Ritland to run the overt portion of the program. The black payload was handled by CIA/DPD. Security cover was a major factor in this construction and its residual accounts for the present management structure.

3. CIA originally took the lead in this partnership between Bissell and Ritland, but there has been a steady reversal until today. The AF feels that it is their program if we buy off on McMillan's proposal. The current structure is about as follows. The Program [redacted] office at SSD still contracts for the Douglas THOR, Lockheed AGENA D, launching, vulnerability studies, and auxiliary (i.e., [redacted]) payloads. This office was well run by Colonel Lee Battle until this summer when Colonel Worthington took over. The CIA has contracted for camera development at ITEK, the GE recovery vehicle, and payload integration at Lockheed. Approximately [redacted] of the [redacted] CORONA total is budgeted for the payload portion in FY 1965, which gives one a sense of the dollar split. Actually, our participation in the payload contracts is not now one of technical direction

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to the contractors. Rather, we have two administrative people in Los Angeles who supply contract and security support to Colonel Worthington and give an appearance of CIA participation in the program. At Dr. Charyk's request, a systems engineering contract was let to Lockheed to supervise itself and the other contractors, and although funded by CIA, is responsive to the Program [REDACTED] office. It is my understanding that [REDACTED] (Program A) now has no formal responsibility for CORONA and that it has been a partnership between Colonel Worthington at SSD and CIA/OSA.

4. The general history of the CORONA program has been marked by both remarkable success and failures. The distressing series of losses last spring and the current hiatus in both M and J launches suggests that your problems are not over. However, it is my impression that only a few of the 26 mission failures thus far can be laid to the CIA supervised payload. In addition, we have all had good reason to be disappointed in the CORONA Improvement Program put forward by Colonel Worthington this summer. The current technical difficulties and possibility of total cancellation of the CORONA J double recovery system as indicated by recent NRO cables, gives me serious cause for concern over the technical stewardship of the program provided recently by the Air Force. Certainly there was no forward looking system consideration for this search mission evident until we began to press for it at the recent NRO budget hearing. Under the circumstances, I agree that some change in the present management structure is required.

5. However, I cannot agree that assigning the CORONA program to [REDACTED] will solve the recurring problems. Rather, it seems that more vigorous CIA participation on the technical and programmatic front is required. It is my thought that we return to a genuine partnership between the CIA and Air Force on this program. I propose that CIA establish a strong project office which will once again actively direct the camera, recovery vehicle and payload integration contractors. This office would be headed by a senior CIA officer, with appropriate technical and administrative support, who would carry the complete responsibility for the payload programs. The booster, AGENA launching and orbital operations are properly the responsibility of the

[REDACTED]

Air Force. The interface between the CIA Payload Office and the Air Force Vehicle Office is a crucial one which I would hope could be worked out on the partnership basis which first characterized this program. The Lockheed contract to perform SETD is involved in this interface and I believe that it should be re-examined to see if they are really able to provide an impartial and critical service to the program.

6. Of course, all of the above is consistent with your general policy guidance to McMillan that the Air Force should not monopolize the satellite reconnaissance program. As you indicated on several occasions, we are anxious that CIA participate actively in future satellite systems, as the Air Force has in CIA aircraft programs. There is no more natural place to start than the scene of our first joint success. To this end, it is important that CIA establish a strong technical and administrative capability for working in this area at the first opportunity. I feel strongly that such a capability should be created on the West Coast so as to ensure that the Air Force and CIA components can work closely together on a daily basis in all aspects of joint satellite programs. However, before we proceed with a specific plan, I should like to visit all of the facilities and organizations involved in the CORONA Program. In the meantime, it is important not to disturb existing relationships between CIA and its contractors, and I believe that McMillan should so advise [REDACTED]


ALBERT D. WHEELON
Deputy Director
(Science and Technology)

Attachment
As stated

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