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~~1ST~~ NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE NRO STAFF

June 9, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. McLUCAS

SUBJECT: Study on Utilization of Satellite Photography

PROBLEM

The Special Task Group of COMIREX appointed to study the problems inhibiting the effective use of satellite reconnaissance photography has been directed to pursue further development of an option that would classify SECRET the "fact of satellite reconnaissance" and permit release of KH-4, KH-8, and KH-9 photography at the SECRET level.

BACKGROUND

On June 11, 1970, Mr. Helms directed the Chairman of COMIREX to conduct a study concerning the utilization of satellite photography. As you know, this was prompted by General Bennett's letter requesting that KH-4 photography be selectively downgraded to the SECRET level. Mr. Helms specified three areas to be included in the study.

a. Review the problems that inhibit the effective utilization of the materials derived from satellite photography within the Department of Defense and other USIB agencies.

b. Develop various alternatives for increasing the utilization of such materials.

c. Outline the significant advantages and disadvantages of each of the alternatives with special attention to security, costs, and timeliness.

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This study was originally scheduled for USIB consideration in October 1970. Because of the overriding considerations of crisis response studies and presumably the letter from President Nixon in December concerning disclosures of sensitive information, the study lost momentum and was continuing on a pace to oblivion when DIA requested that action on the study be accelerated in April. The first draft was distributed on 12 May 1971. This draft offered four possible alternatives:

a. Broaden utilization within the existing security control system. This would be accomplished by modifying standards for physical security and/or personnel access and increasing the sanitization and decontrol authorizations.

b. Downgrade to SECRET the fact of the U.S. photographic satellite reconnaissance program and adopt as an "initial test" downgrading and decontrol of KH-4 satellite photography and derived substantive information (DIA proposal).

c. Downgrade to SECRET the fact of the U.S. photographic satellite reconnaissance program and release from TALENT-KEYHOLE control both information and photography derived from KH-4, KH-8, and KH-9 systems except for specified sensitive information, not to reveal a resolution factor of three feet (tentative figure) or less.

d. Blanket downgrading to SECRET and decontrol of essentially all film and derived information from the KH-4, KH-7, and KH-9 systems and selective downgrading to SECRET of KH-8 film and derived information which do not reveal a resolution capability better than three feet. Original negatives would be automatically classified SECRET except for the KH-8.

The draft of the study as released supported the first alternative to maintain the TALENT Control System with only minor internal modifications. These modifications would have included revision of the physical security standards (allowing

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greater latitude in physical protection requirements), improved sanitization and decontrol procedures, and updating of the TALENT security manual, published in 1956. The study also discredited the second alternative primarily on the grounds that the KH-4 is going out of the inventory and the requirement is for a current product.

On May 20, 1971, a Task Group meeting was held to review the initial draft. At this time it was remarked by the Chairman, [] that Mr. Roland Inlow, Chairman of COMIREX, had requested that the third alternative be expanded and fully explored by the Task Group.

CURRENT SITUATION

On May 21, 1971, I met (at his specific request) with [] Executive Secretary of COMIREX and Chairman of the Task Group. He advised that the third alternative was not included in the original text of the Task Group but was added after the paper went to typing. It was personally prepared and recommended by Mr. Inlow for inclusion. [] stated that the alternative did not, at this time, have the support of CIA since it had not been reviewed by their senior officials.

He agreed that the study (now 83 double spaced pages) did not deal with the new alternative and as written supported the first alternative. This will require a complete study rewrite to incorporate sufficient data from which to base an analysis of the third alternative in parallel with the other three alternatives of the study. Also of concern is the fact that the other two alternatives do not appear to cope with the problems cited by the USIB agencies. The problems cited are general in nature and further definition of the problems appears to be essential for insuring validity of the study.

The real issue of the study is classification of the "fact of" photographic satellite reconnaissance. This is also the issue that is of paramount concern to the NRO.

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As a result of the Task Force meeting and the private session with [] the following status is available:

a. The Task Group is primarily limited to providing information that would update the 1967 study when Mr. McNamara stated it was not the appropriate time to downgrade "fact of."

b. There is a consensus within the Task Force that "operational matters and capabilities" require continued compartmented protection (i.e., no move to change the BYEMAN system); however, the NRO could emerge as a "SECRET" fact.

c. According to [] the Task Group and COMIREX are responsible for developing the study, possible alternatives, and significant advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives. They will not make any recommendation and the final decision will rest no lower than USIB and Mr. Helms. Since the DCI is charged with the security protection of intelligence, he may override a USIB decision, if warranted, in his opinion.

d. The Utilization Study, as written, is deficient in explicitly stating what is sensitive and what must be protected and the degree of dependency by the United States on satellite photography.

e. During my private session with [] he requested that the NRO, to the extent possible, provide authoritative information on the following points for inclusion in the study.

1. Problems experienced by NASA in regard to international reaction to ERTS and other programs involving space photography.

2. Any legal statements or opinions on legality and reaction to overflight by reconnaissance satellites.

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3. Vulnerability of satellite programs to interference by foreign powers.

4. Effect on SIGINT programs if photo programs are downgraded.

5. Cost impact if the program is declassified to any extent.

6. Counterintelligence value if photographs or original negatives are compromised.

7. Explanation of the security problems unique to satellite collection versus other intelligence collection operations.

OBSERVATIONS

Criticism of the security restrictions placed on satellite collected intelligence dates back almost to program inception, and has been a continuing biannual subject on the USIB agenda since November 1964. Traditionally, the military departments have pushed for lessening of restrictions and the NRO has attempted to forestall any such action. Unfortunately there is no pat answer -- no one can predict Soviet or third party reaction, or what the U.S. would do if "they" insisted we cease these collection efforts. Indeed, the problem is much more complex than the reaction of the present governments, but the reaction of future governments confronted with growing evidence of U.S. collection against their sovereign territory. The Soviets, despite so-called tacit agreement, have not officially agreed and we might force them into disagreement. This coupled with increased dependency upon satellite collection as the primary, and in many cases sole source of collection by the U.S. places us in a most vulnerable position.

Another observation is the fact that the Special Task Force members are lower echelon personnel who would normally not have direct and immediate access to the principals considering the matter at the USIB level. The aspects of the international considerations are subtle, and there is the

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possibility that they could be overlooked in the course of the deliberations unless specifically and authoritatively made known. While the NRO has always assumed this responsibility, we are collection operators and while we may state our estimate of the impact on our portion of the program -- we are not international experts or users, and in that regard we must limit our judgments. However, as in the past, we have been called upon to serve as the bridge soliciting and reporting on these factors. This is a legitimate activity on our part, since the DNRO is responsible for operating the NRP which requires that a fine balance be sustained in terms of maximizing the intelligence collection and utilization in the face of minimizing the danger which would impair our continued ability to collect.

RECOMMENDATION

Since the last USIB review, there has been a significant change in the operating environment of the NRP (anti-satellite), a shift in our collection capability (more complex systems but fewer in number) and increased dependence on overhead means for collection. These factors and their impact on the collection capability must be taken into consideration at the time a decision is made whether or not to downgrade "fact of." At the present time there is little or no current authoritative documentation applicable to the subject. It is therefore recommended that you sign the attached letters to principals concerned in this area to insure that prior to the USIB decision all the relevant factors including impact on SIGINT, peaceful uses potential, as well as photographic are made known and considered.

Raymond D. Rose
RAYMOND D. ROSE
Major, USAF
Dep Asst for Security

Wade Hoffman

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