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February 6, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: JCS Paper 2150/284-1, "Program Concept" [for Assuming Responsibility for TAGBOARD]

On 4 February, the attached JCS paper was referred to us for coordination by a member of the Air Staff. We recognized at once that we were going to have serious problems with the paper, since it outlined a total assumption of TAGBOARD by the JCS.

Ever since the beginning of the NRO, we have failed to form a clear concept of just how our aircraft reconnaissance is to be conducted when the operator is the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Our charter spells out NRO responsibilities clearly: we are to be the federal manager of any operation involving overflight of denied areas. In practice, however, we have permitted the JCS to move closer and closer to a complete takeover of all assets we furnish to them. The Cuban episode, of October 1962, was the beginning of an odd arrangement between the NRO and JCS. Thus, when SAC flies U-2 aircraft over Cuba, the operation is conducted without a clear understanding of JCS and NRO roles. Vietnam hostilities have confused the situation even more; the JCS operates U-2 aircraft and drones in that theater, and occasionally in areas contiguous to that theater, without a clear definition of JCS and NRO responsibilities.

The NRO Staff members have believed for some time that they should clarify relationships with the JCS. The best resolution seems to be one in which there is an understanding that the JCS has total responsibility for all peripheral overflights and for all flights in a theater of conflict. The NRO, on the other hand, should have management responsibility for all flights of bona fide denied territory. Since the NRO is not capable of exercising operational responsibility (this would require an Aircraft Operations Center equivalent to our Satellite Operations Center), it is sound pragmatism to delegate operational responsibility to the JCS.

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We have edited the JCS paper to reflect this distinction, our comments taking the form of strikeovers and add-ons. Every change on the attached paper is a change proposed by the NRO Staff.

During the afternoon of 4 February, General Berg persuaded General Steakley to have the JCS paper withdrawn from scheduled consideration on 5 February. During the morning of 5 February, General Berg and I met with General Steakley and [] to discuss our proposed changes. General Steakley accepted all of the changes except for a paragraph in which we specify the DNRO as the person who will obtain approval for TAGBOARD missions. General Steakley indicated that this change would cause heated debate in the JCS. He said that by "higher authority," in his text, he had specifically meant the DNRO. He assured us that if we allowed his original sentence to stand, he would adhere to the letter of our present approval arrangement. When General Berg pointed out that both he and General Steakley would be gone "one of these days," and the next participants might not know about this arrangement, General Steakley advised him that upon such occasion the new principals would have a heavy backlog of precedent to guide them.

On the afternoon of 5 February, General Steakley called me to his office to review a new draft and I found it to be exactly in accordance with the agreements he had made with General Berg that morning.

I believe that these innocent-looking changes are an important milestone in NRO aircraft reconnaissance policy. Now, for the first time, we have a formal statement of roles for the JCS and the NRO, built around the definition of "management responsibility" and "operational responsibility."

Jr.
PAUL E. WORTHMAN
Colonel, USAF

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