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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON  
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OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY

December 12, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Possible NRO/CIA Issues

Mr. McCone will make some, if not all, of the following assertions.

1. The NRO is dominated by the Air Force.
2. The historic role of the CIA in satellite reconnaissance has been eroded away, and is threatened with extinction.
3. The resources of the CIA, the imaginativeness and flexibility that created our present satellite capability, are not being effectively employed.
4. He will "liquidate the NRO" rather than have the CIA's capability frustrated or destroyed.
5. It is essential that the CIA be given responsibility to develop a new broad-coverage satellite system.

He may also cite specific illustrations. The two current and most likely ones will be covered later.

With respect to the first five assertions, the facts as I see them are thus: The CIA did control the early development of the present CORONA camera and reconnaissance system. They built on, and depended on, Air Force contributions, but it was by their leadership that the U.S. achieved successful satellite reconnaissance as early as it did. The Air Force SAMOS program was ill considered, undisciplined, and poorly managed. It would have, at best, floundered into success at a much later date.

The CIA's contribution to CORONA was not primarily technical, nor to management in the broad sense. They set and enforced a

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disciplined set of requirements which focussed the Air Force's efforts, and they provided a simplified management structure which kept the military bureaucracy out of the critical parts of the program.

The CORONA system has now long been an "operating" system in which reliability, efficiency, and responsiveness to intelligence needs are primary considerations. Management is not faced with major decisions. Contracting for the program is split between Air Force and CIA, with the latter responsible for payloads and their integration into the spacecraft. Technical control of these latter contracts is vested in a committee, the Configuration Control Board (CCB), on which CIA has two members.

At the present time, as far as I know, no one in the CIA who played a significant role in the creation of CORONA now has any responsibility associated with its routine operation. It is not clear that Mr. McCone realizes this.

Since I became DNRO, the CIA has made no unique contribution to satellite reconnaissance. That part of the CIA which reports into the NRO structure has no special capability in the satellite field, and is so busy with necessary activities elsewhere as to have little interest. Such unique capabilities as CIA may have reside in the large and expanding organization of Dr. Wheelon, Deputy Director for Science and Technology, and are outside the NRO program organization.

Systems or capabilities which are candidates for new development efforts in 1965 are the following:

- a. A very high resolution pointing system;
- b. A quick-reaction capability for crisis management;
- c. A survivable version of (b) for post-attack use;
- d. A better broad-coverage or search system;
- e. A radar/readout system for bomb damage assessment.

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Mr. McCone will sooner or later propose item (d) as essential, and will ask that it be developed by the CIA outside the NRO structure, or at best under merely nominal control of DNRO. He will advance a so-called "M-2" system - a scaled-up CORONA, - as the proper way to go.

Neither Dr. Fubini nor I believe that item (d) is first in priority, by far. Furthermore, there are two competitors to the M-2, both based on hardware which has already flown, that must be considered: an improved SAMOS E-6, and an adaptation of the LANYARD.

Mr. McCone may also bring up the following specific issues.

6. The DNRO is trying to eliminate the last element of CIA contribution to the CORONA project.

7. He, McCone, has been trying to get a unified staff in the NRO, but the difficulties are insurmountable.

The facts here are simple, and are covered in detail in separate correspondence to you. Briefly:

I have proposed a clarification of responsibilities and a simplification of the CORONA management which puts the NRO West Coast project director, General Greer, in control of the CIA contracts for such technical matters as in his judgment are minor and are necessary for the health of the system. I have also verbally proposed four specific additions to the NRO management organization which could profitably be manned by qualified and experienced CIA personnel. This proposition is confirmed in writing by a memorandum dated today.

By way of comment:

I am sure that the final price of peace with the CIA, considering the temperament of its leaders, is at least to give them carte blanche for development of a new general search system. Until this is done, or the leadership changes, there will be continued obstruction of the NRO and contests of its actions, on many subsidiary issues. I see no reason now,

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however, to compromise our judgements or voluntarily liquidate the NRO. I have by no means exhausted my means to resolve the specific issues presently being contested.

We can probably temporize up to the time, a few months away at most, that the main issue is forced upon us, either by an explicit NRO decision to develop something other than an improved general search system, or by a specific recommendation from the CIA that they be authorized to do something.

I recommend meanwhile that we continue to temporize by negotiating all ancillary issues on their merits. When the main issue comes up, we should not compromise in any manner that denies to the country the benefits of that development which in our judgement is most needed.

  
BROCKWAY McMILLAN

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