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(S) NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

5 March 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ELLSWORTH

SUBJECT: Compartmentation of Satellite Reconnaissance Products

In response to your request for my comments on the JCS recommendations to decompartment all satellite collected imagery and ELINT, I am providing the following views:

The NRO enthusiastically supports the timely dissemination of NRP satellite collected data. We are eager to see the data in the hands of those who need it. We, therefore, are in total agreement with the JCS objectives in this regard.

We do not feel, however, that wholesale decompartmentation is the prudent step at this time. We believe a more careful delineation of relaxation of security constraints is warranted. As you are well aware, the situation is clearly a one-way street -- once secrecy has been relaxed there is no way to recover the situation.

Our main differences with the JCS paper include the following:

1. Whereas we wish imagery to be available to users at useful classifications, we do not recommend decompartmentation of our best resolution imagery which would indicate the ultimate capabilities of our satellites. This could lead our adversaries to utilize successful concealment and deception methods that would deny us the ability to obtain high quality imagery applicable to tactical and national users alike.

2. We do not feel that the collateral security system, because of its lesser investigative and adjudicative personnel security standards, is sufficient to protect the most sensitive aspects of our concerns.



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3. We believe that the "fact of" for imagery as well as ELINT satellites should not be classified below the SECRET level. The CONFIDENTIAL classification is not adequate in our opinion. We are worried, of course, that national sovereignty issues and widely publicized UN debates would result if the "fact of" becomes widely discussed.

4. We believe that the "fact of" satellite COMINT should be retained in compartmented systems because of the extreme sensitivity to easy countermeasures.

5. We believe that information about our sensors should be retained wholly in compartmented systems. The case for decompartmenting this data has not been convincingly made. In this regard, the near-real-time aspects of [redacted] should remain compartmented at least until actual experience implies this is not necessary.

Inherent in all of the above concerns is the realization that as NRP satellites move from national intelligence collection systems to supporting tactical needs that the systems may more readily become targets for information denial through techniques such as camouflage, deception, concealment, jamming, EMCON, etc.

I have taken the liberty of preparing a proposed memorandum to the DCI which would replace the one forwarded by the JCS. It requests that JCS military and tactical needs be given higher priority for use of the current and continually improving NRP capabilities. (Attached)

[redacted]
W. Plummer

Attachment
As noted above
TCS-566778-75/6 excerpt

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