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



THE NRO STAFF

19 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Disclosure of "the fact of" Satellite Reconnaissance

On 16 June 1967, General [redacted] Mr. Reber, and I met with Dr. Flax to discuss, once again, the recent USIB action to allow disclosure of "the fact of" satellite reconnaissance at the Secret level.

Mr. Reber presented a new try at a memorandum to the DCI (see attached). After a brief discussion, it became clear that (1) Dr. Flax's conditions for the memorandum make it very hard to write and (2) it would be much more effective to talk about the problem than to write about it. Mr. Reber volunteered to visit the DCI and discuss this matter, setting up a subsequent visit by Dr. Flax. Dr. Flax concurred in this proposal.

[redacted]
FRANCIS B. BERTHMAN
Colonel, USAF

Attachment



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June 16, 1967

Dear Dick:

I am writing to discuss with you my concern regarding the impact of the United States Intelligence Board's recent agreement to "acknowledge under a SECRET classification the fact that a satellite photographic reconnaissance program existed" and actions related which will permit reference in SECRET and TOP SECRET intelligence publications to satellite reconnaissance as a source of information published therein. I had not anticipated the Board would take an action whose effects would be as sweeping as I believe this to be.

The impact of this action on operational security (the ~~System~~) bears directly on my obligation to you. It is extremely difficult to assess exactly the impact which I anticipate. However, I will try to do that and to explore the possible measures which we might take at the beginning to ameliorate adverse effects.

Three major problem areas have occurred to me. The first has to do with the operation of the existing ~~System~~. In spite of the ready association of the ~~System~~ with hardware, it is a fact that its major role was

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been to protect the fact of satellite reconnaissance. Phase I briefings are, by definition, confined to "disclosure that the United States Government is engaged in a highly sensitive program." Perhaps eighty percent of our industrial effort is conducted under a security system where "the fact of" is the essential element of compartmentation. Phase II briefings do essentially the same thing as Phase I, except that the codeword name of a program is revealed, as well as a one-sentence statement of "the fact of." Phase III briefings--the general Governmental level of access--consist of a Phase II briefing plus the option to learn details on a need-to-know basis. Very frequently this option is not invoked. Unless the application of the Board's action is carefully regulated, we will immediately find ourselves in a position where thousands of specially investigated individuals are under [redacted] path regarding sensitive information which their colleagues are acquiring under the relatively relaxed standards of SECRET. It is quite likely that Phase I of the present [redacted] System could no longer be effectively administered.

Next, I am concerned that a wide variety of Federal agencies will be offered the right to expose the fact of a satellite reconnaissance program. Almost certainly such information at the SECRET level in NASA, Commerce, Interior, and Agriculture, among others, would find this information

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under the SECRET classification would be moving to people who have no interest except curiosity. We can expect as a commonplace a situation in which a SECRET-cleared person will make the disclosure to another. A standard response is predictable; the person being briefed will automatically raise more questions: Who does the reconnaissance? Where is it done? How is it done? What does it look like? Where may I see it? I see no way to prevent these questions being raised. A logical response is not to answer. I find no way to ameliorate this anticipated situation given the premise that "the fact of" will be made SECRET under present United States Government regulations.

The foregoing presents an ever-widening audience. The news of official confirmation of a satellite reconnaissance program will diffuse very rapidly, bringing the existence of the program to the attention of literally thousands of new people. Each of these persons will feel strongly the right to know more, the right to ask questions, and the right to "contribute." These individuals, as we all know from experience, can exert irresistible pressures to "normalize" whatever they touch. Up until now much of the vigor of the NRP has derived from its built-in protection against such normalization.

Let me now turn to the paper currently before the Board for action by vote slip, "Decontrol and Downgrading of Satellite Photography" (USIB-D-41.12/28), I feel that the guidance

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in paragraph I.B. as amplified in paragraph V.B. permitting attribution "when it is necessary to indicate the degree of confidence associated with the intelligence" will be construed loosely and the attribution will become a familiar footnote in intelligence publications. Since photo interpretation reports referred to in paragraph V.F. normally can be expected to be more attractive to the reader when illustrated, I would anticipate that such illustrations will appear when really not necessary. By virtue of the amount of information, supplemented by drawings and photographic illustrations even with the ten-foot on a side restriction, it will be possible for one who wishes to get a very good appreciation of the scope of our intelligence collection--at least in terms of subject matter and of geographic extent.

In paragraph V.G. is an invitation to be precise on the date of a mission to the extent permitted by the language. The connection with specific missions is readily identifiable inasmuch as there is public information with regard to launches. The launch schedule being maintained could be extrapolated without too much difficulty.

I realize, though perhaps not fully, the pressures which have been building up to reduce the security compartmentation surrounding our satellite activities. These pressures range from pleas of inconvenience and more importantly financial cost of compartmentation to the desires

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for the application of satellite reconnaissance for peaceful uses including detection related to disarmament. I make no pretense of sitting in judgment as to the validity and critical importance of claims for downgrading which are related to these pressures. I would prefer that they be met as we have in fact thus far met them through an effective sanitization policy and procedure. If this approach is no longer tenable, we should make every reasonable effort to preserve the integrity of the [REDACTED] System.

Perhaps after you have had an opportunity to consider my observations you would like me to visit you so that we could discuss this matter at greater length. I would be pleased to do so.

Sincerely,

Alexander H. Flax

Honorable Richard Helms
Director of Central Intelligence
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C.

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TAB 2

The effect of the foregoing is to permit a recognition at the SECRET classification level that the United States has a satellite photographic reconnaissance program and that, because it is a very valuable national security asset, details are kept highly classified and are not available to personnel without special clearances. Furthermore, all participants are reminded that it is the national policy that the fact of such a program is not to be discussed publicly by officers of the United States Government.

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