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

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

21 June 1974

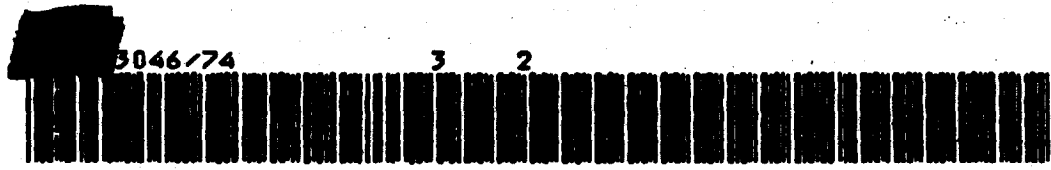
MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, NRO Program D  
NRO Comptroller

SUBJECT: NRO Control of Aircraft Assets

The attached paper is self-explanatory.  
Mr. Plummer has reviewed it and SS-5 of this office  
is now preparing the implementing actions.

*Robert D. Singel*  
Robert D. Singel

Attachment  
(Same Subj. and Cont. No.)



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Studies:

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

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

6 May 1974

Jim,

Attached is the review of NRO interest in aircraft. While I think this sets forth our position, I am not really relaxed on the matter of a contingency capability. What is in the paper is factual; it is now the National Estimate position that our satellites will not be neutralized. However, if at any time the Soviets intended any drastic action, it seems to me that they would utilize their capability to neutralize as their first move. Granted we still have the U-2s and SR-71s in the Air Force which we can call on but we have seen the bureaucracy that got involved in this Mid-East deployment as compared to the one with NRO assets which took two days. However, I don't think we can muster the support to do other than recognize the situation as it now stands. If this paper meets with your approval, I will disseminate to the Program Office and to Colonel Bailey.

  
Robert D. Singel

Attachment  
NRO Control of Aircraft Assets

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NRO RESPONSIBILITIES  
FOR  
AIRCRAFT AND DRONE RECONNAISSANCE

Introduction

This paper is divided into two main parts--the first dealing with the operational aspects of air-breathing platforms deployed over denied territories, and the second with the RDT&E aspects of these systems.

Air-breathing overflight vehicles available today include the U-2 and SR-71 aircraft and the 147 Series drones. The NRO presently "owns" only four aircraft--the U-2Rs assigned to the CIA Office of Special Activities (OSA)--and these aircraft are expected to transfer to the Air Force in 1974. Thus the NRO soon will own no air-breathing assets.

Aircraft Operations

The upper part of the chart at Tab A is intended to show the aircraft and drone overflight process as it is specified in the NRO 1965 Agreement. The blocks in yellow will drop out when the OSA U-2R aircraft are turned over to the Air Force. The blocks in red represent activities in which the DNRO has a direct interest or responsibility and require a deliberate approval or decision. This baseline case does represent the present situation for the OSA-managed IDEALIST/TACKLE Chinese peripheral flights and the JRC-managed OLYMPIC FIRE Cuban flights. These flights are conducted on a routinely scheduled basis and are relatively non-controversial. The point can be made for these flights that maintenance of political presence on Taiwan and over Cuba is as important as the intelligence collected. For example, there is no plan for peripheral photography of China following withdrawal of the U-2Rs.

The process for generating, approving, and executing overflights in time of crisis or intense national interest is considerably different from the norm. There appears to be no one focal point for all overflight requirements short of Dr. Kissinger. Specifically, all requirements for any Mid-East overflight in the period from 1969 to the present

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itself of all interest in air-breathing reconnaissance systems,  
we will begin the steps necessary to:

- a. Revise the 1965 Agreement.
- b. Terminate activities no longer needed.
- c. Transfer operational responsibility and contingency planning for aircraft to the JCS.
- d. Provide for the call-up of Air Force aircraft resources by the NRO as agreed by the Secretary of the Air Force.


e. 

If you believe the NRO still should retain an aircraft capability for denied area reconnaissance for contingency use or for monitoring benign areas, we will initiate appropriate actions. Because of the trend of the past several years, these actions will require considerable negotiation.

  
Robert D. Singer

Attachment  
NRO Responsibilities  
for Aircraft and Drone Reconnaissance

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

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

3 May 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. PLUMMER

SUBJECT: NRO Control of Aircraft Assets

Attached is a paper which sets forth the arguments for and against maintaining an aircraft capability in the NRO. The general conclusion is that we should completely terminate our interests and take the appropriate organizational steps to clarify authorities and responsibilities as well as to clean up our organizational structure. These steps would include revising the 1965 Agreement and terminating the CIA aircraft program as well as some functions of Program D. To accomplish this will require coordination with ExCom principals and PFIAB in regard to policy and with CIA, JRC, and the Air Force in regard to operations.

The only major loss will be the losing of a contingency capability that is dependable. NRO assets have always responded immediately and with the very best in photographic or SIGINT equipment and have carried electronic warfare equipment tailored to the specific job. Foresight and planning were the hallmarks of these programs. However, current judgments that our satellites will operate in a benign environment coupled with political decisions not to penetrate denied areas of the Soviet Union and China indicate no need that a major contingency capability exist. Monitoring operations that have been agreed to by both sides and which require no speed of deployment certainly cannot be considered to be a contingency. Denied area reconnaissance of countries not deemed politically forbidden generally fall into the area of tactical intelligence although occasionally a need will exist for this kind of capability, i.e., the Middle East situation.

It is suggested that you review the arguments in the attachment. If you agree that the NRO should divest

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originated at the approval level which circumvented the normal approval chain. The lower part of the chart at Tab A shows several different paths by which overflight requests have been submitted and approvals granted. These are examples of what has occurred; since there is very little formal documentation in some of these cases, the actual process may have been different than shown.

This situation presents a potentially serious problem. The mechanism leading to 40 Committee approval dates to the U-2 shoot-down incident of 1 May 1960 and the subsequent confusion within the U.S. Government on a consistent public story for the conduct and control of overflights. Certainly Dr. Kissinger in either his role as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (and, therefore, Chairman of the 40 Committee) or as Secretary of State can and does establish the requirement for overflights. The operating agencies of the DOD or CIA respond, but when requirements are generated this way the DNRO has historically never been consulted nor asked to give any advice, guidance, or direction. And yet the DNRO is charged not only with overflight operations, but also with contingency planning.

The NRO is in the aircraft operational business for several reasons:

- a. Because CIA was charged with denied area reconnaissance and operated a fleet of U-2s and OXCARTs at the time these operations were merged with Air Force operations to form the NRO.
- b. Because this responsibility was recognized in the 1965 Agreement--a "legal" requirement.
- c. This recognition allowed the DNRO to use covert assets for denied area reconnaissance in order not to place the Air Force in a position of allegedly committing military aggression.
- d. It theoretically permits one agent to present all overflight requests to the 40 Committee and assures full coordination of assets and decision makers.
- e. It functionally concentrates overflights in one organization.
- f. It protects the covert nature of overflights.

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g. It facilitates a coordinated U.S. Government contingency plan.

h. Historically, the NRO has developed the platforms, the sensors, the defensive sub-systems, and the life support systems.

The intelligence collection problem has changed considerably over the years. The vast capabilities of satellites have greatly reduced the need for aircraft and drone overflights, and the foreign air defense environment has critically limited our flexibility to fly aircraft or drones when and where desired. Of most importance is that these two factors, plus foreign policy initiatives for closer ties with Russia and China, virtually preclude aircraft overflights of those two countries where intelligence needs are the greatest. In considering whether the NRO should retain control of an aircraft overflight capability, the following points are pertinent:

For

- a. Satisfies the 1965 Agreement and thereby maintains clear lines of authority.
- b. Provides a mechanism for aircraft versus satellite collection system trade-offs.
- c. Provides for coordinating aircraft and satellite collection activities.
- d. Provides for aircraft and satellite contingency planning by one interdepartmental group.
- e. Provides for a quick-reaction capability to meet overflight needs (a need recently demonstrated by the U-2 deployment fiasco).
- f. Provides for a quick-reaction [REDACTED]

Against

- a. Initiation of aircraft reconnaissance proposals have recently been originating at top echelons of Government rather than in the NRO.
- b. Must rely on support assets of the Air Force in accomplishing a deployment.

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c. Chances of conducting a truly covert mission over any territory we are vitally interested in is minimal.

1. Only the U.S. owns U-2s, SR-71s, and 147 drones--and the world knows it.

2. Detection is virtually certain.

d. Without owning aircraft assets, there is no apparent contribution which the NRO makes to overflight operations.

Some of the factors which are presently unfavorable could be corrected. For example, the provisions of the 1965 Agreement could be reapplied but it would require reaffirmation at the highest levels.

What would be necessary if the NRO were to divorce itself totally from aircraft overflight operations? Major items include:

a. Recognize the change to the 1965 Agreement. This would require the concurrence of the DCI, the Deputy Secretary of Defense (as the office of signature on the 1965 Agreement), and notice to the PFIAB (they obtained the President's direction for the 1965 Agreement).

b. Formally transfer the operational responsibility to the JCS.

c. Transfer the aircraft contingency (cover stories) planning function from the NRO to the JCS for aircraft overflights. The NRO would retain the satellite contingency planning function only and would not need to be represented on the aircraft committee.

d. Provide a mechanism, such as an NRO-JCS agreement, for coordinating satellite and aircraft coverage to include a provision for NRO call-up of Air Force aircraft resources.

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Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation

The NRO has evolved and used streamlined management techniques for air-breathing system development which date to the early days of the U-2 program and which have been used for the U-2R, OXCART (and initially for the SR-71), and TAGBOARD programs as well as for system studies.

Some of the major features of this management method have been:

- a. Very direct lines of decision making and resource allocation, from the ExCom through the DNRO to the Program Director.
- b. Covert contracting techniques. While the basic provisions of law were adhered to, the Air Force implementing management documents have been waived and normal audits and inspections were precluded.
- c. Compartmented security controls. These have kept all except people with a need-to-know from becoming involved in the Program or its management.

The NRO normally has developed not only collection platforms, but also the associated optical and electronic sensors, defensive subsystems, and life support systems. While the 1965 Agreement implies that the NRO has this development responsibility, it is not specific as it is in the case of spacecraft. The Program D Charter, at Tab B, is more explicit.

The TAGBOARD drone was the last NRO airframe acquisition program, and recently only sensors, defensive subsystems, and some life support developments have been pursued. For example, Program D is developing the 70-inch optical bar camera. Defensive subsystem work for all U-2 aircraft, both NRO and USAF, has been performed by the CIA Office of ELINT although,

[REDACTED]

Recently Program D has acted [REDACTED]

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The absence of an NRO air-breathing system development can perhaps be attributed to one of two main factors--either fiscal pressures to keep the NRP budget down or, perhaps, no compelling reason for these vehicles to collect intelligence through overflight. The latter factor may have been dictated by several previously established facts:

- a. Satellites perform the intelligence collection requirement well enough.
- b. Although intelligence acquired is often not significant, it is deemed politically necessary to show a U.S. presence.
- c. The lack of support for denied area penetration of major countries overrides the need for intelligence.
- d. Since overflights can rarely be considered really covert, it matters little what agency carries them out.
- e. Finally, there are both aircraft and drone assets available in the Air Force inventory which can be called upon to fly missions when needed.

Reasons for the NRO to be involved in air-breathing system developments appear to be largely based on historical precedence:

- a. The U-2, OXCART, and TAGBOARD were all developed in the covert world, using streamlined management methods.
- b. The 1965 Agreement implied an NRO responsibility.
- c. Functionally concentrated all overflight systems development in one agency.
- d. Permitted covert development of platforms for covert flights.

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GROUP 1  
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DECLASSIFICATION

Today, there does not appear to be any compelling reason for the NRO to maintain an aircraft or drone development capability. There are, however, several factors to be considered in this decision.

For Retaining a Capability

- a. Historically, some of the most significant advances in electronic warfare have been made by this program.
- b. Historically, all denied area reconnaissance vehicles, with the exception of the 147 drone, have been conceived and built under this program.
- c. It maintains a well-established, effective, streamlined management development capability for quick-reaction responses.
- d. Keeping an in-being resource is perhaps more efficient than terminating and re-establishing it if needed in the future.
- e. It can continue to serve to support the U-2 and SR-71 fleets.
- f. Can serve as a streamlined management vehicle for non-BYEMAN studies for the Air Force.

Factors Against Retaining a Capability

- a. There is no pressing need today to develop a new overflight system.
- b. Development of air-breathing overflight vehicles and subsystems by covert methods is viewed as a dubious requirement at this time.
- c. Aircraft development, operations, and support funding has been deleted from the NRP.
- d. Maintenance of a capability for unidentified future contingencies is costly and can probably not be fully utilized for necessary tasks.

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What would be required to terminate NRO aircraft and drone activities? Major items include:

a. Since there are no platform developments under way, no action is required here.

b. Defensive subsystem developments will all be funded by the Air Force effective 1 July 1974. Future contract actions could be accomplished through non-covert channels. Provisions would need to be made for the Air Force to assume all U-2 and SR-71 management functions.

c.

supported--

d. The ExCom and the PFIAB should be informed of the action.

Attachments

Tab A - Chart

Tab B - Program D Charter (BYE-12921-68)

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