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THE NRO STAFF

19 Apr 67

MEMORANDUM FOR GENERAL BERG

SUBJECT: Program D Functions and Responsibilities

You recently asked me for my comments on the proposed papers (attached) regarding the functions and responsibilities of Program D.

BACKGROUND:

The loose, irregular management practices of (then) Colonel Geary's Program D were a source of alternating irritation and amusement to previous Directors of the National Reconnaissance Office. Leo operated without a charter and stated many times that he (1) didn't want one and (2) would ignore one if it were served on him. To his great credit, he did get his job done and, as long as Leo produced, Dr. Charyk saw no need to worry about Program D's exact franchise. Dr. McMillan found Leo's habits somewhat more irritating, particularly his refusal to prepare studies or memoranda, even when given a flat order to do so. Although Dr. McMillan realized that attempts to reform Leo would probably be useless, he frequently spoke of the need for preparing an exact functional statement for Program D. Subsequent major problems with the CIA diverted Dr. McMillan's attention and Leo's charter was never written.

CURRENT STATUS:


Clay Saunders, taking over Program D vice Leo Geary, recognized that he would not be permitted to operate in the grand style of the old master. In his search for a legitimate role, he asked General Stewart (then Director, NRO Staff) to define the responsibilities of Program D. The attachments represent General Stewart's effort to arrive at such a definition.

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DISCUSSION:

There have been very significant changes within (and surrounding) Program D, since General Stewart drafted his proposal. First, the "Geary syndrome" has practically disappeared from the office, which now seems to have found its role in the dual area of CIA support and TAGBOARD development/testing. Second, OXCART will soon be starting its phase-out from the CIA inventory; this has had a major influence on the current and prospective Program D workload (even the responsibility for conducting the phase-down has been removed from Program D). Third, the disassociation of TAGBOARD from OXCART has suddenly placed the drone in a security regime where it can be considered as a possible non- and therefore non-NRO - activity.

Under these new circumstances, it is probably not to our advantage to enter into a serious dialogue with either Program D, the Chief of Staff, or the CIA regarding roles and missions. It is perhaps more profitable to predict the course of Program D over the next year or two, and to plan its activities around that prediction.

OPTIONS:

Program D has two main functions:

To support the CIA's aircraft activities

To develop and flight test TAGBOARD

1. With regard to the support of the CIA's aircraft activities, three main choices are available to us over the next year or two; (1) we can leave everything as is, i. e., in Program D, (2) we can transfer the function to the NRO Staff, or (3) we can transfer the function to the Air Staff.

a. Leave everything as is, i. e., in Program D.

This is an attractive solution. The mechanism for carrying out the necessary support is already in being and works fine. On the other hand, with a diminishing level of activity (OXCART phasing down and only a few IDEALIST flights per year), one wonders if this a sufficiently broad function to require an NRO Program Office.

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b. Transfer this function to the NRO Staff. The function could indeed be picked up as an added duty by the Aircraft Branch of the NRO Staff (one additional officer and a secretary would probably be required). Such action, however, would lead to serious inter-office problems, since the assets and resources required to support the CIA are not the NRO's but the Air Force's. From a security point-of-view, there is a second disadvantage. The NRO Staff is recognized, by the "white" world, as a [REDACTED] Office. Associating [REDACTED] with aircraft would lead to a great deal of unwholesome speculation. Additionally, many supporting locations, such as Warner-Robbins and Wright-Patterson, are now dealt with in the white; shifting their source of contact to a [REDACTED] activity would be most difficult to explain.

c. Transfer this function to the Air Staff. This action would have none of the disadvantages and all of the advantages cited above. The Air Staff office could function like a Tab 6 office, receiving requirements directly from the CIA and relaying them to appropriate points of contact. The office could look and operate just like the present Program D office (somewhat smaller). The only difference would be that it would not be part of the NRO.

2. With regard to the flight testing of TAGBOARD, three choices are available to us over the next year or two: (1) we can leave everything as it is, i.e., in Program D, (2) we can transfer this function to the NRO Staff, or (3) we can transfer the function to the Air Staff.

a. Leave everything as is, i.e., in Program D. This has the attraction of any mechanism which is in being and already working. On the other hand, wasn't TAGBOARD made an NRO activity originally because of its very close association with, and dependence upon, OXCART? Now that the B-52 is to be the carrier, does the original security rationale still apply? Furthermore, what about operations? Will TAGBOARD actually be employed over denied territory? Or will it have the same 303 Committee problems as OXCART? If TAGBOARD is to be employed over denied areas, it should remain within the NRO; if not, it should go elsewhere.

b. Transfer this function to the NRO Staff. The NRO Staff could handle this function by adding several officers and a secretary to its Aircraft Branch. Functionally, however, developmental/testing responsibilities should not be assigned to a staff, per se. Additionally, there would again be the problem of explaining why a drone aircraft is found in a [REDACTED] Office". Third, there is no reason to assume

that the TAGBOARD would be tested more efficiently or less expensively by the NRO Staff than by the present Program D.

c. Transfer this function to the Air Staff. The Air Staff, through its field units, could handle the TAGBOARD program nicely. The resources being tasked are all Air Force resources. The Air Force would be particularly adept at operations planning. On the debit side, if the Air Force performance were "normal", the developmental/testing costs would rise, the operational readiness date would slip, and more people would be required. As regards operations, if the drone should be used in the overflight of denied areas, the NRO might find itself in an awkward position, at the last minute, in attempting to reassume operational control of the activity.

CONCLUSIONS:

With regard to supporting the CIA's aircraft activities, it is probably most efficient to leave that support as it presently stands - in Program D - but to plan for an eventual transfer of the activity out of the NRO into a bona fide Air Force office at a later date.

With regard to testing TAGBOARD, all signs but one indicate the desirability of transferring this project to the Air Force; the exception lies in the awkwardness of re-establishing last minute operational control if the drone is to be flown over denied areas. Since the 303 Committees attitude will not be known definitely for sometime, it seems prudent to keep TAGBOARD where it is - in Program D - but to plan for its possible transfer to the Air Force at a later date.

With respect to a definite statement of functions and responsibilities for Program D, experience shows that such a statement is not absolutely essential for this activity. Under present circumstances the statement should probably not be issued. If there is an overriding reason that it should be issued, a simple, straight-forward memorandum could serve the purpose. This memorandum would go directly from Dr. Flax to Colonel Saunders; intermediate negotiations with the CIA or Chief of Staff, USAF do not appear necessary or advisable at this time. Colonel Saunders should be advised privately to prepare two contingency plans against the day when his functions may be transferred to the Air Staff. These plans should be reviewed semi-annually by the Director, NRO Staff.

[Redacted]

PAUL E. WORTHMAN
Colonel, USAF

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