

Former Senator and Co-Chair of SSCI Bob Kerrey Expresses His Support of the NRO

11 August 2003

The Honorable Peter B. Teets
Director, National Reconnaissance Office
14675 Lee Road
Chantilly, Virginia 20151

Dear Mr. Teets:

Every person involved in collecting, analyzing, producing and disseminating national intelligence understands the great risk of discussing successes in public. Mistakes and failures, on the other hand, are subject to public discussion, debate, examination, criticism and investigation.

Sometimes the examination of error is done responsibly and leads to improvements in our capabilities. Too often the investigation is either sloppy, politically motivated, or both. These outbursts of outrage have destructive consequences not least being the lowering of the morale of those who give their best to keep the United States at the leading edge of technologies, methodologies and systems.

A recent news analysis of the National Reconnaissance Office entitled "Lack of Intelligence" was of the second category. Those who researched and wrote this story were guilty of inferior journalism. In my view, their use of the phrase "lack of intelligence" could more accurately be applied to the authors and editors of the story itself.

For the record I have been willing to criticize the National Reconnaissance Office when I believed it served the public to do so. To that end, and believing that organizational change was needed, I wrote the 1999 Congressional Act that authorized the creation of the National Commission for the Review of the National Reconnaissance Office. After President Clinton signed this into law, I asked Congressman Porter Goss to co-chair this effort with me.

He agreed, and from the first meeting on February 1, 2000, until the release of its report on November 15, 2000, the Commission examined in detail the NRO's roles and missions, organizational structure, technical skills, contractor relationships, use of commercial imagery, acquisition of launch vehicles and services, acquisition authorities, and relationships with other agencies and departments across the Government.

With regard to its findings, the Commission's unanimous report speaks for itself. The Commission's findings are captured in descriptions such as: "For 40 years the NRO has pioneered technical marvels in support of space reconnaissance" and "Over time, the NRO has gained a well-deserved reputation as the preeminent research, development, and acquisition

organization in the Intelligence Community and DoD." The Commission noted the challenges confronting the NRO, but it did not find the type of organization described in the recent article.

On a more personal note, as a member and later as the Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, I had frequent and in-depth interaction with the National Reconnaissance Office. In all cases, I found the NRO to be a community dedicated to excellence in space reconnaissance and dominance in intelligence collection. Their dedication, patriotism, and intelligence have created an organization envied by all foreign intelligence services and even envied by many in our own intelligence community. It is unfortunate that because the NRO must operate behind a curtain of secrecy, they will not be able to respond comprehensively to the charges made publicly against them.

Of particular concern to me, however, are the personal attacks contained in the news article. In my long experience with this organization, personal accountability has been fundamental to the NRO's success. It is unfortunate that through uninformed innuendo, the article's author makes charges that are unfounded. I want to make clear that I am certain the American people are well served by the NRO and that because of its ability to reach globally into areas otherwise denied to us, our adversaries are ultimately doomed.

Please extend my best wishes to your team as they continue to be the global leader in space reconnaissance.

Sincerely,

Bob Kerrey