



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

WASHINGTON

HANDLE VIA TALENT-KEYHOLE-COMINT CHANNELS

8 August 1966

IN REPLY REFER TO:

~~TOP SECRET~~

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN, COMOR

SUBJECT: NSAM 156 Committee Report

At the last special meeting of COMOR you asked for a more detailed view from INR on the question of whether the fact of an American satellite reconnaissance program might be held at SECRET or TOP SECRET classification rather than in the TALENT-KEYHOLE system.

We take it from the discussion that you would like to have a rather precise list of specific problems at our end which we might proceed to fix with as little disturbance to the rest of the community as possible. Actually, our concern is a broader one.

INR's concern is not so much with in-house problems here at State as it is with the state of the TALENT-KEYHOLE system as a whole. Obviously, in purely quantitative terms we are very modest participants in the system. We do not handle yards upon yards of film, make maps, count silos, etc. However, we do seem to be in a unique position among the members of the community to see the growing problems of how the TKH system relates to things outside it. I suppose that some of our colleagues who work with the film in their hands may tend to look inward somewhat more than we do. And we can appreciate that, when one regards the system as neatly self-contained, one is conservative about proposals for changing anything about a system which has cost a lot of time, money and ingenuity and out of which enormously valuable results have been obtained.

From our vantage point it is increasingly clear that the system is diverging from its original purpose, and that the divergence is likely to grow in the next five years or so. We are neither advocates for early disclosure nor unmindful of security considerations. Indeed, these very considerations underlie our concern over the anomalies which are developing in the system.

At the time of the September 1960 Presidential Directive there was a critical need to hold very closely all evidence of the operation and the product in order to conceal the existence of the program. You doubtless recall the context. The U-2 incident was still fresh, and it was prudent to impose elaborate controls over products in order to keep the fact that the program was getting underway from becoming another international cause celebre. At the time the US was concerned lest any revelation

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of the fact of a satellite reconnaissance program lead to Soviet efforts 1) at interference, 2) at camouflage, or 3) to use it to bring pressure on the US to desist or to embarrass the US at international forums. Thus, the objective of the elaborate measures begun in 1960 was to exercise careful control over the knowledge of the fact of satellite reconnaissance in order to prevent leaks and premature disclosures from interfering with a long range goal of getting the Soviets to accept satellite reconnaissance as a fact of life, and ultimately as a legitimate and perfectly legal activity.

Somewhere along the line, things have gotten turned around, and we now hear it argued that elaborate secrecy about the fact of satellite reconnaissance is to be maintained for the purpose of concealing the quantity and quality of the product. I am not enough of an historian to know precisely how this reversal of purposes came about. I suppose that there never was a sharply defined crossover point, but that the distinction may have seemed immaterial as a matter of day-to-day business during a period when the whole program was under wraps. Moreover, I appreciate that some practical problems have arisen as a consequence of this reversal of purposes. At the COMOR meeting it was noted, for example, that certain contracts have been let at CONFIDENTIAL classification for components on the assumption that the supplier would not know the ultimate purpose of the items he was delivering.

The original purpose for elaborate control of the fact that the program existed was to protect the program from adverse foreign, and especially Soviet, reaction. Our basic goal of gaining world-wide acceptance of satellite reconnaissance as a fully legal and desirable activity has not been fully met. But today that purpose would be better served by a far less restrictive classification on the fact that the program exists. The danger today is not of clandestine compromise, but of ill-considered public statements. The Soviets know we have a program; we are not concealing that fact from Brezhnev or from the readers of his speeches. We do, however, want to protect the program from public statements which could elicit adverse foreign reactions or generate pressures for disclosure of detailed information.

A large and growing number of American officials who are not privy to the TKH system know or can very reasonably infer that there is an American satellite reconnaissance program. What they do not know is that they are not supposed to talk about it, and they may not understand how considerations of that program bear upon their own work.

One suggestion -- it was mentioned again at the COMOR meeting -- has been to clear more people. This seems imprudent, and even self defeating. The people I have in mind -- there would be some in State, in ACDA and

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doubtless others in the increasing number of civilian agencies which are developing an interest in satellite photography -- do not have a need to know the highly sensitive aspects of the TKH system. And some may for a variety of reasons not qualify for clearance to TKH materials.

It seems much more logical to adjust the classification to meet the needs. Namely, we would suggest a SECRET classification for these three propositions: 1) the US has a classified satellite reconnaissance program, 2) because this program is a valuable national security asset, details are kept highly classified and are not available to personnel without special clearances, and 3) it is a matter of national policy that the subject of satellite reconnaissance not be discussed in public by American officials.

As to the question of whether a SECRET or TOP SECRET classification would best serve the purpose, we believe that SECRET/CONTROLLED DISSEM might meet the problem. It would permit flexibility with respect to different categories of contractors. Those likely to be knowledgeable could be cautioned, while the information could be kept from those who were limited to supplying components.

Another suggestion made at the COMOR meeting was for a sort of junior TKH clearance, consisting of a statement about the fact that the program exists to be read to individuals whose names would be recorded. Upon reflection, we are convinced that this would be needlessly restrictive. We believe that it would be much more useful to permit reference to the existence of the American program to appear in classified papers as required. This will be useful here in State as well as in other agencies where considerations of how certain programs or policies may touch upon the reconnaissance program will have to be reviewed. We believe that clarity in internal government papers at the SECRET level will be extremely useful in assuring that the national interest in the reconnaissance is borne in mind by all those who might otherwise neglect that consideration. The fact of the American program is already rather clearly implied whenever the Soviet program is mentioned at the SECRET level. I think that we can well afford to be as candid about the existence of the US program as we are about the existence of the Soviet program. The fact of satellite reconnaissance is already known at the SECRET level; we are not contributing materially to security by keeping specific reference to the existence of a US program to be made at that level, so much as we are risking muddling questions on which we have the greatest interest in clarity.

Finally, I think a word should be said about the analogy with COMINT which was adduced at the last COMOR meeting. True, the TKH control system most closely resembles the COMINT control system in its forms and techniques. But, I believe that the essential problem of what information needs protection resembles much more closely the atomic energy field. In COMINT it is

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true that the existence of operations is essential, and we have never set ourselves the goal of gaining worldwide acceptance of COMINT operations as legal and legitimate activities. I believe that a clearer analogy can be drawn with the atomic energy field. Obviously weapons design information must be very closely held -- the sensitive TKH follow-on systems would seem to require similar extremely tight security. We actively work at giving away to foreign governments some aspects of peaceful uses of atomic energy, and we may well find ourselves using mapping or resource surveys as a valuable foreign aid resource in a few years. Finally, we have spent twenty years fending off Ban-the-Bomb propaganda and seeking foreign acceptance of our nuclear strength. We have just such an interest in framing policies which will minimize any chance of developing pressures against our satellite reconnaissance program.

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