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Dr. Flax sent  
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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY

September 30, 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Comments on NRO and NRI

This memorandum presents a brief report upon my retiring as Director, National Reconnaissance Office. The first section lists a number of events, and changes, that have taken place since February 1963 that appear to me to be significant. Several personal judgments are interpolated. Subsequent sections refer to the present status of the NRO and NRI. They concentrate on the problems as I see them.

Events and changes since February 1963

1. There has been a sharp increase in the pace of satellite reconnaissance activity. This is demonstrated by Chart 1 which lists all satellite launches, successful or not, for reconnaissance purposes or in support of reconnaissance, since February 1963.

2. There has been an even sharper increase in the rate of production of useable satellite photography. The qualifying word here is "useable" meaning "of useable quality." This results from an increase in satellite activity, an increase in the amount of film carried per launch, some improvement in reliability, some increase in the lifetime of our missions, and an improvement in our ability to forecast weather and to avoid useless photography of clouds. Chart 2 presents some statistics to indicate the general increase in productivity during the period. The modifier "useable" is to be distinguished from "useful," the latter referring to direct contributions of intelligence. Item (4) below suggests a specific reason for believing that there has also been an increase in the usefulness of some of our photography during this period.

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It is hard for me to believe that a rational analysis of the usefulness of telemetry data, in comparison say, to the direct usefulness of the ROE data to be gotten by other SIGINT activities, would justify so large an expense. In any case, no alternative collection schemes were compared, and no ways, other than SIGINT, for getting the basic information desired - booster sites - were considered.

Similarly, (b)(1)1.5c  
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In a separate memorandum for record I have commented in detail on this scheme. I note here only that it is expected to result in a (b)(1)1.5c and that no statement of intelligence collection requirements has been provided which (b)(1)1.5c specifically satisfies. Again, therefore, there is no clear basis for comparing the performance of this system with possible alternative means of collection.

The technology of intelligence collection from overhead vehicles is rich in opportunities. The most basic task of the NSO is to exploit this technology in a way that most effectively meets the country's further important needs. It is for this reason that I believe that the DNRD must be, as an individual, capable of making the critical technical judgments involved, and must have the authority, and the support, to make these judgments effective. It is the lack of intellectual rigor evident in the three examples of long-range "requirements" just listed, and evident also in many other instances, not cited here, that convinces me that the DNRD himself must exercise intellectual leadership for the NSO. Neither valid nor responsible leadership is available elsewhere.

Current problems

1. The OXCART program has been, and continues to be, complex technically and managerially. As DNRD, I controlled by gross, and often somewhat arbitrary, control of funds. Detailed control

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