

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

8 February 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. PLUMMER

SUBJECT: Operational Control of Intelligence-Related
Reconnaissance Aircraft over Non-Combat Areas

FOIA(b)(3), 10 U.S.C. 425

1. Lt. Colonel [redacted] has put an exhaustive paper together which reviews the history of activity but provides few answers on how things evolved from total NRO authority and operation to total NRO responsibility but extensive (and soon total) JRC operational authority. It shows that various proposals (such as Attachment A) to accomplish this transition have been made but there is no evidence that they have been consummated. However, JRC apparently has assumed some control which has been most recently demonstrated by their SR-71 activity over the Mid-East.

2. As recently as 26 October 1973, Dr. McLucas discussed the subject at the Friday Breakfast. As a result of these discussions, he asked that the NRO Staff explore transferring full responsibility for aircraft overflights to the JCS (Tab 1). The subject was discussed with the JRC but the action not consummated (Tab B). Ostensibly, the responsibility still rests with the NRO.

3. The fact that the NRO has the responsibility but does not exercise it is the crux of the problem. There will be few problems as long as there are no complications, but with the occurrence of an international incident, it is likely that this office would find that much of our authority and responsibility had suddenly returned. It is thus incumbent on us to clear the lines of responsibility as well as of authority.

4. Basic to the decision is a determination of where the task can best be served. There can be no argument on the actual operation of the aircraft as they will remain in the same operational organizations no matter what the operational control situation; they will respond in the same manner. The argument must be made on three other bases:

I believe we seen this under

can

FOIA(b)(1)
E.O. 12356
§ 1.3(a)(4)

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- a. The rapid assurance of top policy concurrence. *Dissemination of special census using NRO procurement method*
- b. Prior preparations to assure successful accomplishment of missions, and
- c. The need to assure selection of the appropriate collection platform to acquire the needed intelligence.

5. Historically, the NRO has been able to assure concurrence by top policy levels, formally through the 40 Committee or informally by direction of the WSAG (same controlling personalities as the 40 Committee), or some reasonable consortium of people involved in those groups. Occasionally, the decision is already made prior to NRO involvement and it then becomes our job to assure that all bases have been touched. It is simply a matter of being overrun by higher authority but still having the responsibility for assuring that the job is done right. Timeliness requirements have always been a matter of minutes or a few hours.

6. In making preparations for the completion of successful missions, this office has been pre-eminent. We have maintained a complete inventory of suitable cameras which have been constantly upgraded, as well as assured compatible upgrading in mounts and other related equipment. Because of good maintenance, reliability has never been a problem. Defensive measures are developed on the basis of all current intelligence available but particularly on the basis of system collected ELINT. Response for development is extremely rapid, the equipment is of excellent quality, and the cost is relatively reasonable. Research and development on films and techniques are regularly pursued and the results apply to both aircraft and satellite programs. Virtually all developments have been available to the military and many have been adopted.

To estimate this requires very min of resources and apparatus!

7. Finally, through the daily requirements channels, involving ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~, and through the production and quality-control channels, involving NPIC, the NRO is in a position to match the most appropriate equipment to the requirement and assure that its mode of operation will assure the highest quality product.

8. As a result of the above reasoning, I would recommend that we initiate discussions aimed at assuring that the NRO authorities are recognized and follow this with a reaffirmation of proper procedures. I would assume that an initial

or clear reassignment to some other equally capable group.

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discussion with the ExCom members would be appropriate once specific ground rules are developed. With concurrence in that quarter assured, discussions would be opened with the JCS.

9. With your concurrence in the above or with your additional guidance, we will proceed with developing ground rules and appropriate implementing papers.



FOIA (b)
16 U.S.C. 4

Attachment

CONCUR:

J. W. Plummer, DNRO

Date

* FOIA (b)(1)
E.O. 12356
§ 1.3(a)(4)

* FOIA (b)(3)
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