

HANDLE VIA [REDACTED] TALENT/
KEYHOLE CONTROL CHANNELS
JOINTLY

Copy No. 5 of 62
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USIB-D-46.2/36
11 July 1974
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REVISED 18 July 1974

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

MEMORANDUM FOR USIB PRINCIPALS

SUBJECT: Modification of Security Classification

REFERENCES: a. USIB-D-46.2/34, 21 June 1974
b. USIB-D-46.2/35, 24 June 1974

1. In restricted session with the Deputy Director, National Reconnaissance Office, in attendance, Mr. Colby noted that, because of the policy aspects of the subject proposal, he had invited representation from the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). He welcomed Mr. Amrom Katz to the USIB deliberations on this agenda item.

2. Mr. Colby said that the subject of modifying the security classification of the photographic satellite reconnaissance program for foreign intelligence collection had been discussed by the Board at an earlier date. This had resulted in Presidential approval to classify the "fact of" photographic satellite collection as SECRET. Mr. Colby observed that there now appeared to be several factors which suggested that the "fact of" photographic satellite reconnaissance need not be classified SECRET. He thought it would be useful to raise this subject for discussion to see if the community was ready to move in the direction of declassifying the "fact of" satellite coverage. He said it was not his intention, as reflected in the draft letters (reference a), to make this an official public announcement. He was aware, however, that several of the Principals might not agree with the declassification proposal, noting in particular the letter from Mr. Plummer (reference b).

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Classified by [REDACTED]
Exempt from general
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USIB-D-46.2/36
11 July 1974

3. Mr. Singel explained the reason for the different views between the Working Group and Mr. Plummer. The Working Group addressed this problem from a purely intelligence impact point of view and concluded that declassification of only the "fact of" would not adversely affect the program. Mr. Plummer, on the other hand, was concerned with possible political repercussions and advised against declassification.
4. Mr. Denney said that State had examined the pros and cons of the issue and, on balance, preferred to retain the program in classified channels because there were certain advantages to not having to discuss the "fact of" in international forums.
5. Mr. Colby then invited Mr. Katz of ACDA to comment from his Agency's point of view. Mr. Katz read from a memorandum sent from Mr. Ikle to the Secretary of State (a copy is attached).
6. Admiral de Poix acknowledged that there were indeed two sides to this question and that it was a matter of balance. He said that he had not obtained a Secretary of Defense position on this matter, but that he and the three Service Representatives to USIB favored declassifying the "fact of." He said that taking the initiative on this matter, that is to release what is already a non-secret, could be to our advantage. The most persuasive argument, from his point of view, was that declassification might allow for selected publication in the news media of photographs on major world issues which would tend to prove the U. S. position. For example, possible Soviet violations of SAL, and/or new weapons systems developed by the Soviets which could be released to Congress. He said we should support "freedom of space" in the same way we support "freedom of the seas."
7. General Allen commented that the existing policy which regards satellite reconnaissance as a covert activity has helped to create a favorable security environment for over a decade. He said that it was not his understanding that officials are required to deny the existence of the program, but rather that they are enjoined to avoid discussion of it in an unclassified forum. He noted that this policy has been effective in reducing public discussion of the program in such areas as Air Force procurement activities, launch activities, industrial association, technical societies and contractor activities. General Allen said that a fundamental change in this policy, while appearing to be only realistic, will be another "opening wedge" in the security of these programs.

HANDLE VIA [REDACTED] TALENT/
KEYHOLE CONTROL CHANNELS JOINTLY

USIB-D-46.2/36
11 July 1974

8. General Allen believed that the issue is not whether the existence of a U. S. satellite reconnaissance is "secret"; the issue is whether we intend to continue the policy of restraining public discussion of a vital and sensitive intelligence program. He said that continuing the present policy is the only effective way he knew of obtaining such restraint. He felt that the situation is analogous with the DCI's discussions with the Senate on a total intelligence budget figure and the arguments there generally apply. General Allen commented that however discreetly the DCI intends to implement this change, it will prompt many knowledgeable people (cleared or not) to speculate and experiment in new discussions. General Allen said that there is the danger that the change in policy at the Washington level will be misinterpreted the farther one is removed from the top policy levels. The result of this pyramidal situation is cause for concern that lower echelons will not feel constrained from discussing other classified aspects of the program. He said that although the DCI intends now to apply the change in policy only to photographic satellites, it will further degrade our ability to maintain security on SIGINT satellites. General Allen said that these "wedges" go only one way. He felt that the success of our SIGINT satellites is extremely vulnerable and yet we are taking major action to place great reliance on their collection. He could not see sufficient merit in the DCI's proposal to warrant such a profound change in policy. General Allen requested that his objection be noted to higher authority.

9. Mr. Collins observed that Treasury had no institutional responsibilities in this matter, but that he personally had been in favor of declassification. He said, however, that the arguments presented at the Board, particularly by General Allen, carried considerable weight with him.

10. General Giller also was impressed with General Allen's arguments. He was concerned, however, with the impact on the U. S. public and Congress of not admitting the "fact of" and that this would be used as a foolish example of overclassification. He supported the proposal to declassify, citing the current feeling that classification in government is overdone and vulnerable to criticism.

11. Mr. Colby asked the Services if the declassification would have any impact on the way they do business. The Service Representatives did not identify such impact. They indicated they were in favor of declassification although all noted that persuasive arguments had been made against it.

12. Mr. Cregar said that the FBI was not directly involved with the program, but from a security point of view would support General Allen's position.

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HANDLE VIA [REDACTED] TALENT/KEYHOLE-
CONTROL CHANNELS JOINTLY

USIB-D-46.2/36
11 July 1974

13. General Walters also agreed that General Allen had many good points, but that he was also impressed with General Giller's comment that we have to operate with Congress and it is important to keep only secrets which are really secret. He supported the DIA and AEC comments and favored declassification.

14. Mr. Colby said he did not intend to come to any final conclusions at this meeting. He expressed appreciation for the points made and noted that both sides have a solid basis for their positions. He said he was impressed with General Allen's concern about people down the line misinterpreting Washington-level policy on the matter but that he was also impressed with the problem of dealing with the U. S. public and the need for keeping only those secrets which we have to keep. Mr. Colby concluded by stating that he would present the various views of the USIB Principals to those with whom he will consult further on this matter.

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Executive Secretary

Attachment

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No ATTACHMENT