

Special Handling

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
Washington, D. C.

6 September 1961

The Honorable Allen W. Dulles  
Director of Central Intelligence  
Washington, D. C.

Re: Management of the National Reconnaissance Program

Dear Mr. Dulles:

This letter confirms our agreement with respect to the setting up of a National Reconnaissance Program (NRP), and the arrangements for dealing both with the management and operation of this program and the handling of the intelligence product of the program on a covert basis.

1. The NRP will consist of all satellite and overflight reconnaissance projects whether overt or covert. It will include all photographic projects for intelligence, geodesy and mapping purposes, and electronic signal collection projects for electronic signal intelligence and communications intelligence resulting therefrom.

2. There will be established on a covert basis a National Reconnaissance Office to manage this program. This office will be under the direction of the Under Secretary of the Air Force and the Deputy Director (Plans) of the Central Intelligence Agency acting jointly. It will include a small special staff whose personnel will be drawn from the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency. This office will have direct control over all elements of the total program.

3. Decisions of the National Reconnaissance Office will be implemented and its management of the National Reconnaissance Program made effective: within the Department of Defense, by the exercise of the authority delegated to the Under Secretary of the Air Force; within the Central Intelligence Agency, by the Deputy Director (Plans) in the performance of his presently assigned duties. The Under Secretary of the Air Force will be designated Special Assistant for Reconnaissance to the Secretary of Defense and delegated full authority by me in this area.

OSD Review Completed

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NRO review(s) completed.

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4. Within the Department of Defense, the Department of the Air Force will be the operational agency for management and conduct of the NRP, and will conduct this program through use of streamlined special management procedures involving direct control from the office of the Secretary of the Air Force to Reconnaissance System Project Directors in the field, without intervening reviews or approvals. The management and conduct of individual projects or elements thereof requiring special covert arrangements may be assigned to the Central Intelligence Agency as the operational agency.

5. A Technical Advisory Group for the National Reconnaissance Office will be established.

6. A uniform security control system will be established for the total program by the National Reconnaissance Office. Products from the various programs will be available to all users as designated by the United States Intelligence Board.

7. The National Reconnaissance Office will be directly responsive to, and only to, the photographic and electronic signal collection requirements and priorities as established by the United States Intelligence Board.

8. The National Reconnaissance Office will develop suitable cover plans and public information plans, in conjunction with the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs, to reduce potential political vulnerability of these programs. In regard to satellite systems, it will be necessary to apply the revised public information policy to other non-sensitive satellite projects in order to insure maximum protection.

9. The Directors of the National Reconnaissance Office will establish detailed working procedures to insure that the particular talents, experience and capabilities within the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency are fully and most effectively utilized in this program.

10. Management control of the field operations of various elements of the program will be exercised directly, in the case of the Department of Defense, from the Under Secretary of the Air Force to the designated project officers for each program and, in the case of the Central Intelligence Agency from the Deputy Director (Plans) to appropriate elements of the Central

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Intelligence Agency. Major program elements and operations of the National Reconnaissance Office will be reviewed on a regular basis and as special circumstances require by the Special Group under NSC 5412.

If the foregoing is in accord with your understanding of our agreement, I would appreciate it if you would kindly sign and return the enclosed copy of this letter.

(Signed)

Roswell L. Gilpatric  
Deputy Secretary of Defense

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Chart "Single Mgmt for  
National Reconnaissance  
Programs" (TS)

CONCUR:

(Signed) C. P. Cabell  
General, USAF  
Acting Director, Central Intelligence Agency

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