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September 3, 1992

Memorandum for Record

**Subject: Meetings with Secretary of Defense and Director of Central Intelligence
Regarding Declassification of the National Reconnaissance Office**

On September 2, 1992, I met with the Secretary of Defense and later with the Director of Central Intelligence regarding the possible declassification of the National Reconnaissance Office.

The meeting with the Secretary of Defense was attended by Deputy Secretary Atwood; Assistant Secretary (C3I), Duane Andrews; General Counsel of the Department of Defense, David Addington; and Executive Director Intelligence Community Affairs, Richard Haver. Secretary Cheney indicated that he had met with DCI Gates on Monday, two days prior, regarding declassifying the NRO but was uncertain that he understood the reasons why this might be done and what the downsides might be. I provided information from a talking paper which I had prepared and provided to the Secretary (copy attached). The key points I made are that the declassification is now almost accomplished, in that existence of the NRO is well known publicly and frequently discussed - including by officials of the Government and former officials, members of Congress, and others; that maintaining classification does not meet any intent of the executive order on classification, and that the increasing internationalization reconnaissance and related remote sensing activities makes it difficult for our Government to engage while it tries to hide the very fact of these activities. On the down side, I pointed out that release of this information would probably lead to further revelations and that oversight and bureaucracy would increase.

The Secretary sought the views of others in attendance which were generally as above. The largest concern, which was expressed by the Deputy Secretary and agreed by all, is that increased public exposure may make it more difficult to operate with streamlined acquisition procedures. The Deputy Secretary pointed out that the

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/s/ Martin C. Faga

MARTIN C. FAGA
Director

Attachment

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DECLASSIFICATION OF THE NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

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BACKGROUND

- In December 1991 I suggested to DCI that declassification of the NRO be considered.
- In February 1992 House bill on reorganization called for creation of a Reconnaissance Support Activity. Senate later created Office of Reconnaissance Support.
- In March 1992, Fuhrman Panel to consider reorganization of the NRO recommended declassification of the NRO. They wrote: "While current guidelines require the existence of the NRO to be maintained within SCI channels, the fact of an NRO is an "open secret," with many references in open literature. We believe that attempting to preserve such "open secrets" without strong and compelling rationale is inconsistent with the DCI's push for greater openness, weakens the case for preserving "real" secrets, and needlessly angers congressional and other critics. By admitting the "fact of" the NRO, we remove many needless points of controversy. Of course, simply admitting "fact of" without providing additional information accomplishes little. Rather, we believe that certain "facts about" should be declassified to improve the NRO's ability to interact with customers and users."
- SECDEF and DCI agreed to consider but asked for review of implications if implemented which has been provided.

PROS

- Existence is known and widely reported. Even government officials and many former officials refer to it frequently in public. For example, Frank Carlucci recently testified that he didn't see why the NRO should be reorganized. The compartmented secret doesn't meet the test of EO 12356 that SECRET information cause serious harm if revealed.
- Publicly acknowledging existence, may help improve respect for the real secrets and allow us to speak out publicly against those who say more than the "fact of". Today, it is very hard to comment at all because we don't acknowledge even existence.
- Public and international activity in reconnaissance and allied remote sensing activities is increasing rapidly. It will make our government's interactions in these arenas more productive if we do not try to hide existence. Other nations do not, yet fear of reaction from other nations was the primary reason for constructing a covert (vice classified) NRO.

CONS

- Greater exposure may increase interest in more detail and declassification of product.
- Public existence will bring more oversight and bureaucracy.
- There are infrastructure costs to the NRO to create a public affairs, FOIA and similar functions.

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