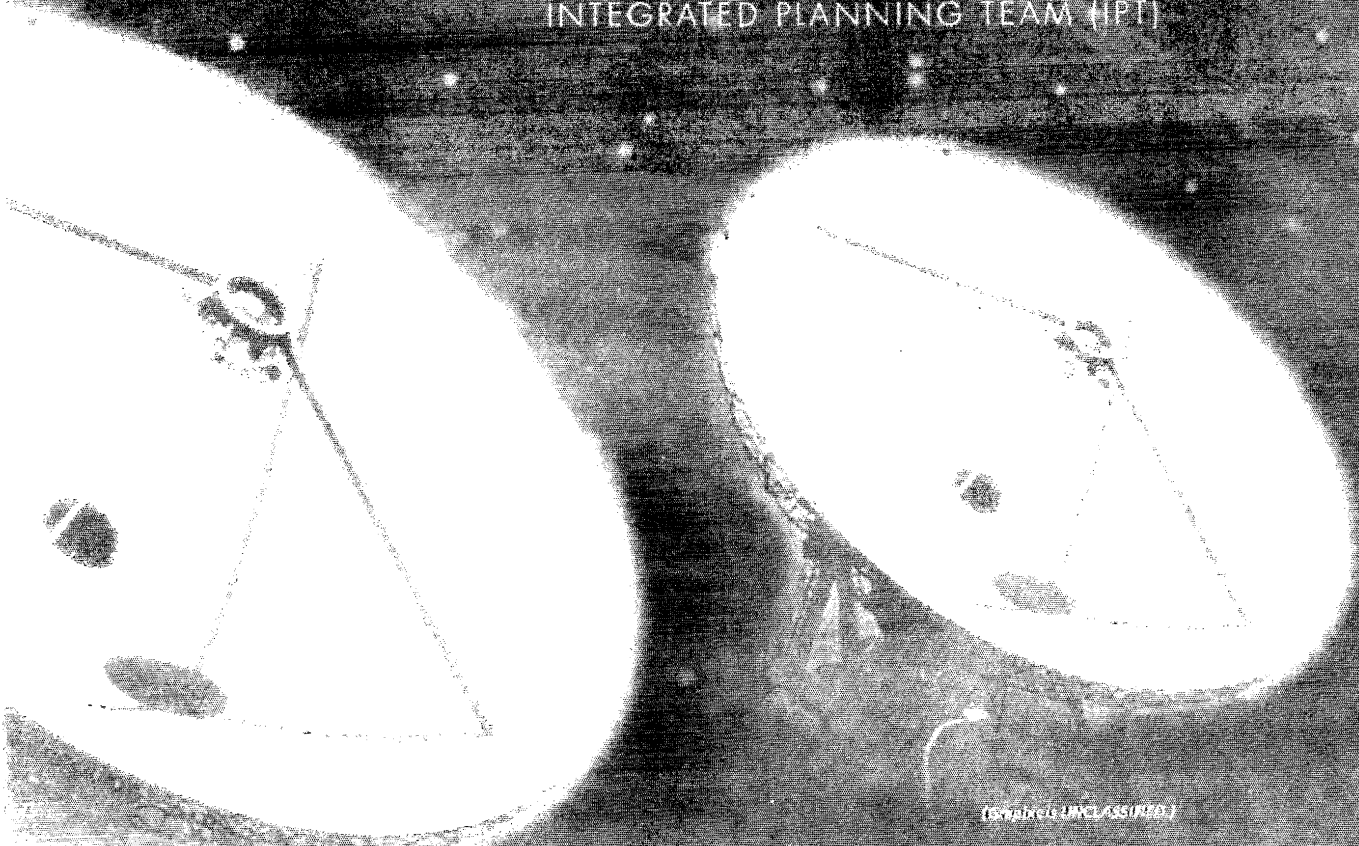


# INSIDE THE MISSION GROUND STATION

b3 b6 b1

# DECLASSIFICATION

INTEGRATED PLANNING TEAM (IPT)



(Source: UNCLASSIFIED)

~~(S//TK//REL)~~ ON OCTOBER 15, 2008, THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE (DNI) approved a National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) recommendation to lift the NRO **b1 b3**

~~(S//TK//REL)~~ To delineate the change in classification, NRO renamed the facilities as the Aerospace Data Facility-East, Aerospace Data Facility-Colorado, and Aerospace Data Facility-Southwest, respectively. The DNI also approved the recommendation to declassify an NRO presence at the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap, Australia, and the Royal Air Force Menwith Hill Station, United Kingdom. This decision is an important milestone in the NRO's efforts to be more responsive to user needs and adapt to the new global environment. It also offers the Intelligence Community an opportunity to document the two-year declassification initiative, examine the complex issues involved in the decision, and identify lessons learned for future, significant, multi-agency declassification projects.

### **Impetuses for Declassification**

(U) During the past 40-years, many people have speculated about U.S. space-based intelligence collection capabilities, which have led to a plethora of non-attributed and uncorroborated open-source information linking the NRO to its mission ground stations. This speculation has provided a trail of NRO involvement at these locations and established lines of association among multiple, non-associated defense contractors, government organizations, and mission types. The NRO has maintained a "do not deny or confirm" position when the public requests information about NRO's involvement at these locations, but by mid-2006, many Intelligence Community members believed that continuing the cover for NRO ground stations merely perpetuated a widely known secret.

(U) In September 2006, Dr. Donald M. Kerr, Director of the NRO, created an Integrated Planning Team (IPT) to review options for acknowledging the locations of NRO's ground stations. Dr. Kerr believed this decision was a strategic move in keeping with the Intelligence Community's need to provide on-demand, real-time reconnaissance for policy and military decisionmakers. His stated intent was to position the NRO to support new technical and policy initiatives developed across the defense and intelligence communities and stay abreast of dynamic, expanding mission requirements. He also acknowledged that declassification would be consistent with the already-open presence of NRO's mission partners, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) and the National Security Agency (NSA), at these sites.

(U) The three-phased IPT reviewed declassification options that addressed many issues involved with undoing decades of classification and cover mechanisms supporting ground station operations. The team acknowledged at the outset that certain support mechanisms employed for cover, logistics, contracting, finance, and a host of related activities had significantly eroded over the years and could possibly be more of a security liability than an asset. The team also used a "cause and effect" methodology to mitigate perceived or real deficiencies, and used this approach as the cornerstone for all considerations of known variables to maintain the effectiveness of intelligence tradecraft.

### **Phase 1: Consideration**

~~(S//REL)~~ During Phase 1, which ran from September 2006 to May 2007, the IPT identified subject matter experts, internal to the NRO, to review the feasibility and costs of potential declassification, and conduct a preliminary assessment of the risks involved. Led by **b3 b6** Deputy Director, Systems Operations, NRO Imagery Intelligence Systems Operations Directorate, the primary focus of this phase was to present a balanced view of the benefits, risks, mitigation options, and top-level steps required to acknowledge NRO ground stations. The team evaluated three potential approaches: 1) the *status quo*, in which NRO ground stations remain unacknowledged; 2) acknowledge the "fact of" NRO personnel at

the ground stations, and 3) declassify "fact of" the three ground station **b1 b3** and an NRO presence at two overseas facilities.

~~(S//TK//REL)~~ The first phase involved extensive coordination with domestic and foreign mission partners, and included a detailed plan to communicate the team's intentions with stakeholders and give them an opportunity to express their concerns. The team explored the risks and proposed mitigation strategies, and addressed stakeholder concerns to gain support for declassification. The Air Force, a principal source of NRO support, also conducted a 30-day "quick look" assessment during this period. This assessment focused on known or potential impacts to the Air Force that may result from declassification. The report found nothing that required immediate notification or appeared to result in unintended consequences. Although this assessment focused on potential impacts on Air Force equities, it agreed with previous studies that some cover methodologies used by the defense and intelligence communities had eroded over the years and had become a liability, given today's rapid exchange of information and financial tracking systems. The report cited **b1 b3** Department of Defense, Intelligence Community, and ground station relationships. The NRO Office of Security and Counterintelligence's Risk Assessment Branch conducted several risk assessments between August and December 2007 that fully corroborated the Air Force's findings.

~~(S//TK//REL)~~ In October 2007, the IPT reported that option three was advisable if the Intelligence Community created a mitigation strategy that addressed several complex cover, financial, transportation, personnel, and policy issues. **b1 b3** illustrate the complexity of the issues involved with declassification. **b1 b3**

**b1 b3** It is an extremely reliable, integral, contributor to the NRO mission, which many people describe as a model of efficiency. **b1 b3**

**b1 b3** Before declassification, those who met the aircraft were either **b1 b3**

**b1 b3** Since declassification could potentially expose other **b1 b3** and

**b1 b3**

RAF-MH



Royal Air Force – Menwith Hill  
Menwith Hill, England

ADF-C



Aerospace Data Facility –  
Colorado  
Buckley Air Force Base,  
Colorado

JDFPG



Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap  
Alice Springs, Australia

ADF-SW



Aerospace Data Facility –  
Southwest  
White Sands Missile Range,  
New Mexico

b1 b3

completed.

(S//REL) In addition to b1 b3 the IPT examined the complex issues surrounding the b1 b3

The team also addressed the long-standing b1 b3

To maintain operational security, service members assigned to b1 b3 likewise, consistent with the declassification decision, in future appraisals b1 b3 can be acknowledged as NRO-affiliated personnel from the date of declassification forward. The IPT agreed that any declassification decision could not adversely affect personnel assigned to NRO ground stations, alter the infrastructure support provided by other organizations, or expose classified mission aspects.

**Phase 2: Coordination**

(S//REL) On May 13, 2007, Dr. Kerr directed the IPT to focus on implementing option three, in accordance with the team's recommendation, which initiated phase two of the process. During this phase, led by Col. James "Jay" Chambers, Deputy Director of the NRO Office of Security and Counter-Intelligence, the IPT brought the disparate pieces together to create a coordinated implementation plan. Stakeholders and mission partners supported the implementation plan although some agencies, like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), had specific issues that required resolution. The CIA's concerns focused mainly on the long-standing policy of requiring cover for CIA employees assigned outside the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Discussions and phased implementations, coordinated and directed through the CIA Director of Science and Technology, Chief of Operations, resolved the CIA's concerns. The Agency concurred, based on the understanding that the declassification would be limited to the "fact-of" NRO ground stations b1 b3 and an NRO "presence" b1 b3

(Photos are S//REL TO USA, FVEY)

**(U) What Remains Classified about Ground Stations**

(U) All other "facts about" National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) mission ground stations remain classified, including information about, but not limited, to:

- > Operations information
- > Mission capabilities
- > Satellite tasking and targeting
- > Vulnerabilities
- > Legacy documents
- > History of NRO MGS missions and facilities
- > Locations of other classified NRO sites
- > Intelligence information or data collected
- > Specific details of partnerships with foreign entities
- > Specifics of staffing
- > Budget, cost, or expenditures

(U) You can find additional classification guidance, including a list of questions and answers, at [www.nrosecurity.com/mgsdeclassification](http://www.nrosecurity.com/mgsdeclassification) or contact your program security officer.

ADFE



Aerospace Data Facility – East  
Fort Belvoir, Virginia

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b1 b3 [REDACTED] but not the specific assignment or identification of CIA employees. In a July 15, 2008 concurrence memorandum to the Director NRO, CIA Director Michael V. Hayden reaffirmed

b1 b3 [REDACTED]

~~(S//REL)~~ With concerns mitigated, on February 22, 2008, Scott F. Large, who succeeded Dr. Kerr as Director NRO in October 2007, recommended the declassification of the three b1 b3 [REDACTED] ground station locations and acknowledgment of an NRO presence at two overseas locations. Mr. Large then sought concurrence from the Director of National Intelligence. Dr. Kerr, who left NRO to become the Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence, approved the NRO Declassification Plan on August 13, 2008, with direction for implementation it within 60 days. Phase 3 of the IPT began.

### Phase 3: Implementation

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Because the NRO Transformation realigned the ground stations under the new System Operations Directorate, the Office of Security and Counterintelligence and the System Operations Directorate jointly managed the implementation stage of the declassification. This phase continued to mature the concept, risk-mitigations, and guidelines regarding declassification, and began the final implementation throughout the operational and user communities. During this period, the team informed stakeholders and designated audiences of the goals, policies, and extent of declassification. Working with the NRO Office of Strategic Communications and International Affairs, the team accomplished this through a series of notifications, which involved disseminating specific, detailed classification guidance and communications through electronic, written, and video means to the NRO workforce, Department of Defense, Intelligence Community, Congressional, and Commonwealth personnel. To support declassification, the Office of Security and Counterintelligence prepared a thorough awareness-training package and assured the update of appropriate NRO and mission partner classification guides. The Office of Strategic Communications published a list of questions-and-answers in the event of public inquiries.

~~(S//REL)~~ On October 15, 2008, the Director of National Intelligence officially lifted the cover from the NRO b1 b3 [REDACTED] ground stations and declassified an NRO presence at two overseas facilities. In accordance with the implementation plan, the NRO acknowledged that the domestic facilities operate as multi-mission stations responsible for supporting worldwide defense operations and multi-agency collection, analysis, reporting, and dissemination of intelligence information. As such, they provide data to defense, intelligence, and civil agencies supporting the U.S. Government and its allies. Consistent with the approved mission statements of the overseas facilities, the NRO acknowledged that it supports the joint missions at these locations through the provision of technical systems and shared research and development. The U.S.

b1 b3 [REDACTED]

### Lessons Learned

(U) This is an excellent time to offer some thoughts on lessons learned, in deference to the fact that the

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decision has been made and declassification has proceeded according to plan. First, changes to processes in place for upwards of 40 years do not just happen; they need to be understood and advocated from the highest levels within an organization, and adopted by many internal and external stakeholders, some of which may not be apparent at the onset. The extended acceptance process the IPT used helped many stakeholders, who may have been wary about declassification, understand that the mitigation plan was well planned and served their individual organization's best interests.

(U//~~FOUO~~) Early outreach with stakeholders was essential to the IPT's success. The team first socialized declassification at the highest echelons within various organizations, which garnered early support and minimized bureaucratic stalling or efforts to preserve the status quo. In a memorandum dated February 21, 2007, Vice-Admiral Robert B. Murrett, Director NGA, wrote to the Director NRO, "NGA supports the rationale behind the effort and agrees that the IPT findings will facilitate the NRO's ability to support the new technical and policy initiatives being developed across the Intelligence Community." Early outreach also assisted the NRO in identifying the many unintended consequences of potential declassification, and allowed early development of mitigation strategies.

(S//~~REL~~) Coordination gave the IPT a better appreciation of specific concerns external organizations had on the working level, and afforded several opportunities to modify approaches to understand and respond to concerns early in the process, before elevated to higher levels. For example, at the IPT's first meeting with the CIA, the Agency apparently believed the group had recommended declassification without considering personnel cover and specific equities, and implementing agreements unique to the CIA. Once the IPT heard the CIA's concerns, the team was in a better position to explain that this was not the case. In reality, the IPT had been sensitive to these issues from the beginning and proposed nothing, that ran counter to CIA policies and expectations. Another example occurred when the IPT briefed the NRO Commander's Conference in September 2008. The attendees were under the impression that **b1 b3** would continue without change after declassification, which would put military members at a disadvantage for promotion, based on limited substantive mission data in their evaluations. The Commander's Conference venue allowed the team to present the facts and adjust their communication strategy to reduce fallacies.

(U) In line with the first lesson, it is abundantly clear, from an organizational perspective, that a thorough review and revalidation of classification and cover practices is healthy. Deep dives, conducted on a regular basis for the purposes of assessing the overall effectiveness of security processes, might improve mission performance. Operational cover has a finite shelf life and attempting to sustain classification or cover mechanisms beyond a reasonable period is difficult, if not impossible, in today's internet-linked society.

(U//~~FOUO~~) In the future, similar declassification efforts might consider initiating the implementation phase earlier in the process, opposed to the end, as was evident with this case. During the two-year effort, the IPT understandably confronted significant external and internal opposition to declassification. Completing the implementation plan sooner may have made the process more efficient. Furthermore, identifying team members at the highest levels who could be dedicated to the team for the duration of the task might also improve continuity. For most members, the IPT was a collateral assignment in addition to their daily duties. Nevertheless, the ground station declassification project was well suited for an IPT process and the IPT serves as a model for many other interagency efforts. Assigning specific areas of responsibility and identifying functional leads addressed issues at appropriate levels, fully coordinated decisions with stakeholders, and, as a result, facilitated decisionmaking. ■ (This is S//TK//REL TO USA, FVEY.)

(C//~~REL~~) **b1 b3 b6** has worked at the NRO since 2002. He led the implementation phase of the ground station declassification IPT, concurrent with his new assignment as the Director of Security, NRO System Operations Directorate (SO/SEC).

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