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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

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7 April 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, National Reconnaissance Office  
SUBJECT: HELIX Program Proposals

1. I have received your memorandum of 1 April, together with the package of documents relating to the HELIX Program. I have certain views on various proposals which you have made, but at this time I want to limit my comments to one aspect which I consider to be of fundamental importance to the successful execution of the program. I refer to your proposal for a management plan and organization responsibilities. I believe this proposal raises a problem of such magnitude that it must be resolved before other aspects of the program can be meaningfully reviewed.

2. Specifically, I am concerned about the problem of interface between the responsibilities assigned to SAFSP (Air Force) and CIA. If I understand your proposal correctly, the Director, SAFSP, as System Project Director, is assigned overall responsibility for an integrated engineering system, including the definition of interface specifications. At the same time in your rationale paper you have stated that the SPD "in exercise of his interface responsibility is required to meet the basic structural, dynamic and thermal requirements of the sensor sub-system". I assume the latter is intended to imply the primacy of the sensor system requirements in interface relationships, however, your enacting directive does not make this point clear and could be subject to a contrary interpretation. In any case, I believe the concept of an integrated system with two partners in a project as complex as the HELIX Program elevates the interface problem to one of major proportions involving continual

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negotiation between the SPD (Air Force) and the SSSPO (Sensor Sub-System Project Office, CIA) in matters ranging from those of minutest detail to those of basic importance. If the SSSPO (CIA) is to obtain for the sensor system the priority of requirements it should have, I can foresee that many conflicts will evolve at the working level and could result in repeated appeals at higher level. Such a situation not only could impose an intolerable strain on the fabric of cooperation between the partners, it would also raise the serious risk that the sensor sub-system would be subordinated to other requirements of the overall system. Further, I feel that the multitude of interface problems which your proposal brings with it will seriously jeopardize an effective working relation between CIA and the contractors.

3. I strongly urge that you reconsider your decision on the assignment of management responsibilities and that you adopt in its place a plan based upon the module concept. Such a plan would conform to the recommendations of the Technical Task Group and the Management Task Group convened at your direction last fall. It would continue to permit the assignment of a single project director if you so desire. At the same time the division of the space vehicle into modules for the assignment of responsibilities would reduce the interface problem to a minimum. It would enable assignment of full responsibility for the sensor to a single partner, in this case, CIA, from the developmental stage to full operation. It would assure that the requirements of the sensor system are in no way degraded. I cannot emphasize this last point too strongly.

4. The successful implementation of the HELIX Program is of vital importance to the future security of the United States. I am sure you will agree that the very heart of this program is the sensor system and that the degree of success the program may achieve will depend primarily upon the technical capabilities and proficiency of that system. The basic NRO Agreement of last August states explicitly that "design requirements of the sensors will be given priority in their integration within the spacecraft and reentry vehicles". We will be guided by the terms of this agreement in working towards a successful implementation of the NRP. It is my conviction, therefore, that the HELIX management

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plan must unequivocally recognize the fact that the requirements of the system are dominant. I have discussed this matter with Admiral Raborn and he believes that the module concept would be much more workable and further that the element of the NRO Agreement mentioned above should be reflected in the management plan.

5. In conclusion, I would like to point out that with CIA's in-house technical personnel and its relationships with contractors built up over the years, it possesses a capability of program management which, in all modesty, is at least commensurate with that of SAFSP. This capability has been amply demonstrated in the management of the CORONA, as well as other NRO programs. Therefore, I cannot accept your statement that "SAFSP is the only NRP component of the NRO possessing the personnel, facilities, operational resources, experience, and technical competence" to be designated as SPD for the new general search and surveillance satellite system. I would hope that any of the decisions referred to in the foregoing paragraphs were not influenced by a depreciation of CIA capabilities indicated by this statement.

6. I would appreciate an early opportunity to discuss this matter with you personally.

  
HUNTINGTON B. SHELDON  
Director of Reconnaissance, CIA

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