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Statement by Ms. Linda Hathaway  
To the Public Interest Declassification Board (PIDB)  
On the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) Declassification Program  
Friday, 15 December 2006  
National Archives Building, Washington, DC

(U) As Chief of the Information Access and Release Team (IART) at the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), I welcome this opportunity to describe for you the declassification program of the NRO.

(U) With me today are key personnel involved in the NRO declassification program. Dr. Robert A. McDonald is Director of the Center for the Study of National Reconnaissance (CSNR), where among other things, he oversees the History Section of CSNR and has responsibility for historical review activities. The CSNR is charged with gathering, documenting, and maintaining all NRO historical information and artifacts, plus the analysis and the review of proposed information for declassification. Dr. McDonald will be speaking to you later about the CSNR perspective pertaining to declassification. Mr. Stephen Jung is the Chief of the Information Management Services Center and has the overall responsibility for all facets of records management and records release within the NRO.

(U) The Secretary of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence established the National Reconnaissance Office in 1961 to manage the National Reconnaissance Program, a program that brought together all of the nation's satellites and over-flight reconnaissance projects. The enabling directive made the NRO a classified organization whose existence was known only to those directly involved. For many years even the office name was classified Secret within compartmented channels; indeed, "the fact of" the organization's existence was not acknowledged publicly until 1992. The NRO remains responsible today for the acquisition, launch, and operation of American reconnaissance satellites. The NRO mission thus has turned on employing advanced technology in overhead systems to collect both signals and imaging intelligence worldwide. Back on earth, the National Security Agency and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency are responsible for the analysis, classification, and dissemination of the NRO-collected products.

(U) Much of the satellite reconnaissance technology developed over the years at the NRO, and the methodologies for employing this technology against extremely perishable targets, are judged sensitive and remain classified. It is classified because knowledge of this technology and the accompanying intelligence techniques, when acquired by an adversary, can be employed in countermeasures that deny or negate our collection investment. Nevertheless, in compliance with Executive Order 12958, as amended, in 1995 the National Reconnaissance Office established a 25-year declassification program along with an on-going activity that responded to the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act. These two elements comprise the Information

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Access and Release Team (LART) at the NRO, and since 1995 they have reviewed, declassified, and released a significant number of NRO records. I will describe each of these declassification activities for you, in turn.

**NRO FOIA and Privacy Act Program**

(U) After the NRO was publicly acknowledged in 1992, a Freedom of Information and Privacy Act (FOIA/PA) office was created to handle requests from the public about the NRO. While serving the NRO, this office follows the rules and guidelines set forth by the Department of Defense (DoD).

(U) For the public at large, the NRO FOIA and Privacy Act program is a one-stop shop for declassification review and release of information. In addition, this office conducts all NRO Mandatory Declassification Reviews; Prepublication/Security Reviews; State Department Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) reviews; and special searches. The total amount of cases that the office handles per year is approximately 500 of which 120 of these cases are FOIA/PA.

(U) The Privacy Act program has become robust with the institution of a biannual survey to NRO offices to find if those offices are keeping record systems about NRO individuals that can be retrieved by personal identifier. Once a system of this nature is identified, it becomes an official NRO Privacy Notice and is reported to the Defense Privacy Office for publication in the Federal Register.

(U) Since the FOIA and PA cases at the NRO are small in number compared with other government agencies, our backlog is minimal. What backlog we experience is largely due to waiting for coordination responses from other agencies.

(U) The NRO maintains a public reading room at our visitor center which contains the declassified Corona collection. An index of the Corona collection is listed on the NRO/FOIA public website that enables the public to write in and ask for copies of the records that they find of interest to them. The web page also shows the telephone number for the FOIA Requester Service Center, instructions on how to fill out a FOIA request, and the name and telephone number of the NRO public liaison.

**NRO Automatic Declassification Program for 25-Year Old Records**

(U) The NRO established a records declassification program in August 1995 and charged it with reviewing all 25-year old and older retired, permanent records per Executive Order 12958, as amended, to determine whether they required continued protection or could be declassified and made available for release to the public. The NRO when formed, however, consisted of three major, dispersed elements: an Air Force satellite effort, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) satellite effort, and a Navy satellite effort. This birthing posed a serious challenge for the declassification program when it began work many years later because the organization's 25-year old records were scattered among these elements. NRO management stepped up to the challenge and built a state-of-the-art archive that opened in 1997. Permanent records from all

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locations were retrieved and retired to the NRO archive, and records retrieval remains an ongoing effort to meet the annual deadlines imposed by Executive Order 12958, as amended that take effect this year.

(U) An additional challenge to finding permanent records was the fact that the NRO did not have a records management program and records were not retired appropriately to the Records Center. A vigorous program was started and the NRO population was extensively educated in records management. Although the new records program was of great assistance, records were still coming in the records center from locations throughout the United States that had no continuity as to subject or date. To overcome this situation, and with the clock ticking, the Declassification Program instituted the pass/fail program and partnered with the Records Program to have the records sorted, and retired which has produced excellent results.

(U) Many of the retired permanent records fell into NRO Records Control Schedule file series approved by the President as exempt from declassification, or into the categories of information exempted under Section 3.3 of Executive Order 12958. Therefore, declassification work focused on identifying permanent records outside these exempted categories that documented the NRO's origins, organization, functions, and significant transactions and activities. Once identified, these records were reviewed line-by-line with redactions made only to eliminate classified text. The redacted, declassified records then were printed and made available to the public via the NRO public Reading Room. Moreover, to emphasize historical value, the declassification unit selected record collections associated with reconnaissance satellite programs already declassified in part by the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI). These include Corona, the first successful imaging satellite program, a collection retired by the NRO headquarters staff, and a collection inherited by the NRO from the Air Force, the WS 117L/Samos reconnaissance satellite series of records.

(U) Concurrently, to guide this effort, the unit prepared an NRO declassification guide, known formally at the *Review and Redaction Guide*. The NRO Director submitted a first draft to the Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) in 1999, and it has been updated and approved by the NRO Director each year since that date to account for declassification actions taken by the DCI or by his successor, the Director of National Intelligence, who are (or were) responsible for the classification and declassification of all activities in the National Reconnaissance Program. In July 2006 the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel formally approved the NRO declassification guide Version 1.0.

(U) Responding to Executive Order 12958, as amended, the Information and Access Release Team also refer for declassification review those records that contain the information equities of other government agencies. These agencies, in turn, refer their documents containing NRO information equities, including those accessioned at the National Archives, to the NRO for declassification review. To date, our office has received, reviewed, and returned over 71, 000 pages of referrals from other government agencies. And we have referred over 8,000 pages of NRO records to other agencies for their review, primarily through the Document Declassification Support System (DDSS).

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(U) By the end of January 2007 the NRO will finish declassification review and release publicly the NRO Staff and WS 117L record collections, which will be added to the Corona satellite collection released previously. Processing of these records should be completed by February 2007 and, shortly thereafter, become available for public viewing. At present the total page count for declassified 25 year-old declassified records is approximately 46,000 pages. This total does not include the WS-117L records which should augment the sum of declassified pages significantly. E. O. 12958 has served as the catalyst to enable the NRO to recover our records, execute a dynamic records program, and educate the public on NRO programs.