

28 August 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT : Proposed Article, "Development of the Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird"

REFERENCE: DDS&T 3675-81, dated 3 August 1981, with Attachments and Photos

1. I have read the referenced proposed article, subject above, and the accompanying letter from Kelly Johnson, with care and a high degree of interest.

2. Bearing in mind the self-imposed constraints Mr. Johnson exercised, and which he sets forth in his letter of 3 August, 1981, I believe that the proposed article presents no basic problems of an operational, technical or security nature as far as CIA is concerned. Mr. Johnson's request to disclose the Agency's role in SR-71 development also comes after the 20 year classification duration provided in the DDS&T Classification Guide for Security Information, Section 9c. (1) and (1.1), though no formal declassification date has been set. It should be noted that aside from CIA participation, no specific technical information is being released.

3. Having said that, I feel obligated to note that this article, if published, will constitute the first authoritative admission that the A-12 aircraft, predecessor of the SR-71, was, in fact, developed by and for the CIA. Since the existence of the "A-11" aircraft was publicly announced by President Johnson in 1964, all the media sources have speculated from time to time that CIA was the father of the SR-71, but there never has been official confirmation of such parent-hood.

4. Even though Kelly Johnson's article is designed for publication in the Lockheed technical house organ "HORIZONS", I submit that because it has been written by Kelly Johnson, it will obtain far greater distribution than otherwise would be the case, since editors and writers will quickly zero in on the CIA aspects of the story, realizing that Kelly must have received concurrence from the U.S. Government in its content. Extending this reasoning somewhat, I would predict that there might well be a large number of FOIA requests stemming from such a disclosure, with a resultant burden on this Agency to contend with them.

5. On the other hand, I understand from a personal conversation with Kelly Johnson on the phone the evening of 26 August, that the cognizant USAF SPO has agreed with the text and photos. I interpret this to mean that for the first time the Air Force is not interested in concealing the fact that the SR-71 stemmed from the loins of CIA! I think that the resultant effects of the publicity that will attend publication will definitely be favorable to the image of the CIA. Incidentally, the text and photos have been reviewed by [redacted] Deputy Director of Security, who interposes no objections on the part of his office.

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6. On balance therefore, I come to the conclusion that publication of Kelly Johnson's article represents no compromise of CIA's responsibilities, given the passage of time and today's environment. I further believe, as I have said, that any fallout from it will be generally favorable to this Agency. Additionally, logic for years has led to the conclusion that, having developed the U-2 in the first place, CIA would have been derelict in its duties if it had not been responsible for an improved reconnaissance system to follow the U-2.

7. Because of the implications of publication to which I have alluded above, I would recommend that DDS&T seek the concurrence of the DCI or DDCI in the decision to tell Kelly Johnson to proceed. Thereafter, I would also suggest that Kelly be asked to furnish CIA with a dozen or so copies of the magazine "HORIZONS" containing the published article. I would hope that after publication there might be no elaboration attempted on the article by any Agency spokesman, at least in a public forum.

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