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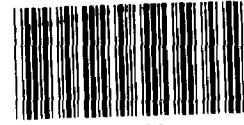
UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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FEB 27 1979

INTERNATIONAL DIVISION

Mr. John Thomas
Assistant Secretary for
Administration
Department of State



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Dear Mr. Thomas:

As agreed with you and Mr. Read, we have made a limited review of the Department's computer operations. The following observations are based on a review of documents supplied to us and on discussions with you and Mr. Francis, the Director of the Information Systems Office.

Need for a top-level ADP Steering Committee

The Department's ADP resources have continued to expand and increase over several years and additional increases appear to be contemplated in the future. The importance of an effective and efficient ADP system to meet the Department's needs and the sizable investment in ADP resources suggests the need for an ADP Steering Committee with the active participation of top management and user management and formal development of a long-range ADP plan. The plan as a minimum should include (1) objectives, (2) manpower requirements, (3) personnel responsible for systems development, testing, and data conversion, and (4) estimated completion dates for segments of development and implementation.

Such a Committee with active participation of top and user management to initiate, guide, and review the Department's data processing needs (i.e., systems proposals, hardware requirements, etc.) would lead to ADP projects with clear objectives, well-defined responsibilities, and end products that meet overall Department objectives. It would also ensure that the Department obtains optimum benefits from its ADP resources.

Need for a system analysis review of existing and proposed systems

The large number of operational systems or subsystems (about 53) and the development of 15 more suggests that an analysis is needed to eliminate systems duplication and proliferation. The

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analysis should be directed toward eliminating duplicate data files and/or systems by using basic information already contained in a given operational system or subsystem. For example, it appears that the PER/PR system contains data that can be modified for use by M/MO rather than creating a new system to supply data contemplated by the M/MO system. It also appears that some duplication may exist in the other systems that use some of the same basic data and files, such as the Post Property and Supply, FBO Inventory, Real Property, Post Residential Property, and VISA Systems.

We also suggest that the Department review all existing reports emanating from the present systems to determine whether any reports can be combined or modified and still meet the requirements of the users and that it eliminate unnecessary reports being produced by the systems (i.e., who uses the reports, does the data contribute to better management of Department resources and programs, etc.). We believe that any expansion or improvement of accounting and disbursing systems should be tied in with the development of systems leading to approval by GAO.

Merger of State, AID, and ICA data processing facilities

The GAO has advocated a merger of the ADP facilities of State, AID, and ICA (formerly USIA) for a number of years for more economical and effective use of computer hardware without unnecessary proliferation. Also, we believe that such a merger would improve system design and programming of computer applications and achieve more effective management of ADP operations. We made a cursory review of the latest Joint Working Group study on the feasibility of such a merger and basically agree with the recommended approach outlined in the study that the hardware be merged into a single facility but that the systems staff remain independent. The merger of the hardware would accomplish some of the objectives, such as more effective use without unnecessary proliferation. However, we do not agree that the systems staffs should remain independent, as this could lead to each staff developing systems independent of the other and lose the advantage of developing the most efficient system to be used in processing common housekeeping applications. We believe that the systems staff needs overall direction in the development of systems, and suggest that an interagency systems staff be established.

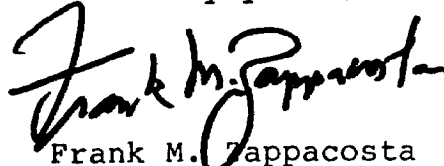
Thus, based on our cursory review of the Joint Working Group's study, we suggest that top-level management of the respective agencies move ahead with the merger, starting with the computer hardware.

Location of State's Information Systems Office

This is basically a management decision within the Department. If the Department establishes the suggested ADP Steering Committee, there is no compelling reason to relocate the Information Systems Office in the organizational structure from reporting to the Assistant Secretary for Administration as it is a support function.

We trust that the foregoing will be helpful, and we will be available to discuss any contemplated action on our suggestions.

Sincerely yours,



Frank M. Zappacosta
Assistant Director