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TS-158610 ✓

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence 15 November 1956

SUBJECT : Briefing Notes on AQUATONE for 15 November

1. It is recommended that you make the following three requests at today's meeting.

a. Authority to launch just as soon as weather permits two missions to obtain strategic intelligence on the Soviet atomic energy and guided missile programs.

b. Authority to overfly the Satellites and peripheral areas of the USSR in search of tactical intelligence if and when such intelligence is urgently required.

c. Authority to overfly Communist China.

2. The first grant of authority is for missions specifically recommended on their own initiative by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The fundamental consideration which justifies raising again at this time the issue of deep penetration flights is that, in the present state of world tension, an unacceptable risk is involved in postponing or abandoning altogether any attempt to obtain harder and more extensive intelligence on two of the most critical military programs of the USSR. A special urgency derives from the fact that declining sun angles will compel the postponement of these missions until spring if they cannot be undertaken soon.

3. The second request is more complex (covering as it does both Satellite and Russian areas) but a fundamental consideration relevant to the collection of tactical intelligence is that when it is needed, it is needed just as quickly as possible and the DCI (perhaps in conjunction with the JCS and the Secretary of State) should have a broad enough grant of authority to authorize tactical reconnaissance missions without delay. It might be pointed out in this connection that we can now launch such missions in less than 24 hours notice and will shortly be able to process and interpret the take in a matter of hours. This high state of readiness will be of limited value if clearance procedures prevent its prompt use.

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4. It is recommended above that the authority to authorize tactical reconnaissance missions covering both the Satellites and peripheral areas of the USSR. In support of this request it might be pointed out:

a. That in the recent European crisis and in any future one it will be difficult to obtain good evidence on Soviet troop movements or on Soviet ground forces mobilization unless it is possible to overfly installations and transportation routes at least up to 25 to 30 miles within the borders of the USSR proper.

b. That it will be impossible to accomplish the same objectives without overflights of East Germany since it normally contains the largest Soviet concentration of ground forces outside of Russian borders.

c. That with respect to the present Middle East crisis, the Soviets might logically be expected to base an airlift of equipment and personnel in Bulgaria or the Caucasus area or possibly at airports north of the Black Sea and that this region is therefore an urgent target for tactical intelligence.

d. That useful tactical intelligence on air and ground forces OB and on the movement of goods and personnel will usually require repeated coverage of the same targets.

It is recommended that although you seek a rather broad grant of authority, you state the most urgent requirement for tactical intelligence is that which would be met by missions over the Caucasus area, Bulgaria and selected airfields north of the Black Sea.

5. With respect to overflights of Communist China, the main point to be made is that these involve minimum political risks since a [REDACTED] and that there is valuable strategic intelligence to be obtained. The point might also be made that the AQUATONE capability should be in position for the contingency of any unforeseen crisis in the Far East. It is recommended, however, that this grant of authority not be made a major issue at this time but simply that the views of the political authorities be explored.

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6. An argument which applies to any and all overflight activity at this time is that the political risk has been greatly diminished by recent events. It has been stressed in the past that continued overflights would elicit diplomatic protests from the USSR and the Satellites, that these would be embarrassing in that they would be difficult to answer and that regardless of the answers given the Communist allegations would be believed widely in other countries with consequent political disadvantages. It is submitted that in the face of Soviet intransigence with regard to Hungary and the Middle East protests might not be made and if made would attract less attention and be less capable of exploitation by the Soviets. Basically, it is this lower political risk combined with the heightened urgency of the need that justifies a change in policy at this time.

SIGNED

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