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29 April 1957

AQUATONE/OILSTONE PROJECT

1. Status:

a. Weather conditions are generally favorable for aerial reconnaissance over Europe and most of Siberia from April through October and in the Far East are moderately good in summer and at their best during the autumn.

b. AQUATONE Detachments are now in place and operational in Germany and Turkey with four aircraft each and in Japan with three aircraft. They fly occasional weather missions in support of their cover and high altitude air sampling missions, all over friendly territory. The Detachment in Turkey carries out occasional reconnaissance over the Middle East.

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d. During the last nine months significant progress has been achieved through this Project in the development of radar camouflage. It is believed that the radar reflectivity of the U-2 aircraft can be so reduced as to create a good chance that a majority of overflight missions will avoid detection entirely. Nevertheless, it must be anticipated that at least a certain proportion of them will be detected, although their continuous tracking should be extremely difficult. Our plan is to equip the U-2 aircraft with this protection if and as it is operationally developed, which it is hoped can be by late June.

e. It now appears likely that, especially if this radar camouflage is effective, the U-2 will be relatively safe from interception at least through the next (i. e. 1958) reconnaissance season. Nevertheless, both its margin of advantage and the security surrounding this operation are subject to continuous erosion so the AQUATONE capability must be regarded as a wasting asset.

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2. Plans for the Current Season: Additional hard intelligence obtainable only through aerial reconnaissance is urgently required, especially on developments and installations having to do with Soviet guided missiles, nuclear weapons, and intercontinental bombers. To cover thirty-five specific targets which have been selected by the Intelligence Community as having the highest priority should require some twelve to fifteen successful missions, taking account of normal weather patterns. It is proposed that these be undertaken, but only as highly favorable weather materializes so as to obtain maximum coverage with a minimum number of sorties. This would imply a rate of operation of only one to three missions per week.

3. Maintenance of the Capability: The principal reason for developing the AQUATONE capability originally within a CIA framework (but as a joint Air Force/CIA Project) rather than in the Air Force was to maintain greater security, employ deeper cover, use civilian pilots, keep the aircraft outside of military control, and therefore, make possible more plausible denial of U.S. military responsibility in the face of any Soviet charges. Currently two SAC squadrons are being equipped with the U-2 aircraft in addition to the three AQUATONE Detachments. If this capability is, for the reasons just stated, politically more useable for overflights in the hands of the Clandestine Service than in the regular military establishment, it is proposed that the present joint Project be continued (probably with some changes in organization and cover) through 1958 and kept separate from the SAC squadrons (subject of course to the immediate transfer to SAC in the event of a war emergency). It is our view that such a political advantage does exist. If, however, it does not, then it is proposed that the CIA's equipment be transferred to the Air Force.

4. Decisions Required: It is becoming increasingly urgent to obtain answers to the following questions:

a. Will limited overflights be permitted over the highest priority targets in the USSR, preferably beginning now?

b. If such authority cannot be granted now, will overflights be permitted:

(1) Of specified peripheral areas of the USSR where high priority targets are located?

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(2) Of China, or

(3) Of the European Satellites ?

or is there a sufficient prospect for authority to overfly the USSR at some later date to warrant postponing operations over these lower priority areas ?

c. Whether or not overflights are to be authorized at this time, is it desirable to maintain an overflight capability outside of the regular military establishment ?

5. Proposed Modification of Operational Concept: The following modifications of present operational concepts are being considered. Their purpose would be to reduce the political hazards to which overflights give rise or to be prepared for unfavorable political developments and thus to render the U-2 capability politically more useable.

a. The use of non-U.S. pilots  in order to heighten the possibility of plausible denial.

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b. The modification of a few of the Agency's aircraft to permit basing them on an aircraft carrier and thereby to avoid the exposure of friendly governments to political and diplomatic pressures.

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*Cleared in draft by General Cabell 30 April*

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