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17 July 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR : Deputy Director (Plans)

SUBJECT : Intelligence Aspects of Project TIROS

1. The attached papers were received from Executive Secretary, USIB, on 15 July 1959 and have since been a matter of concern and considerable discussion by DPD staff.

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2. In summary, the papers concern Project TIROS which involves the launching in October 1959, from Vandenberg AFB of a Thor-boosted weather reconnaissance satellite having a payload consisting of two television cameras and one infra-red camera which will produce approximately 16,000 feet of film record in five days of orbit. The scheduled orbit will be polar in direction, to gain maximum coverage at an altitude of 400 miles producing a ground resolution of 500 to 600 feet. The mission is to conduct meteorological observations of cloud coverage on a world-wide basis and is being conducted by the U. S. Navy and U. S. Air Force, in accordance with requests made under joint ARPA/NASA programming. The project presently carries a CONFIDENTIAL classification and the ultimate classification will be controlled by NASA, which is oriented toward the free exchange of scientific information and generally unclassified projects.

3. A matter of immediate concern is the possible adverse effect that an unclassified launching of a camera-carrying satellite would have upon the forthcoming CORONA launches scheduled from the same location and within the same and subsequent time period. As you are aware, we have gone to great length to avoid any publicity in connection with the CORONA payloads and have attempted to control the speculation of the technical press that cover the series of launches and the Vandenberg site in general. Publicity centering around Project TIROS may cause speculation as to a similar capability in the CORONA or DISCOVERER series. An open revelation of even a limited quality resolution would indicate a capability in being which, with additional research, could be improved for military reconnaissance objectives. This is the type of speculation we had hoped to avoid or at least have delayed until the Thor-boosted DISCOVERER series was nearing a close, recognizing that it would eventually have to come to pass.

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4. There is, however, an alternate position with regard to this matter: the relatively poor quality of the resolution of TIROS would have little value to the purposes of military reconnaissance. This coupled with the willingness of NASA to give wide distribution to the results on an unclassified basis would indicate no military significance to the end product and convey a false impression as to the state of the art as developed in the CORONA program. Since the information TIROS is seeking to collect is equally important over South Polar regions, TIROS shots could commence when sun angles for CORONA become too low, as in November, December, and January. Additionally, this would clearly indicate that the U. S. was not photographing the Soviet Union since the sun angles would be prohibitively low over most of the U. S. S. R. and its satellites. Therefore the CIA position in this case should be to support the TIROS program provided launches are made during the time period mentioned above.

5. On the other hand, if TIROS is planned primarily for North Polar regions, the sun angles it would require would be similar to those for CORONA. In this event, launch schedules would be in approximately the same time periods each year and priority of pad time could conceivably create a problem as well as an increase in the number of camera-equipped vehicles being launched during the same period. If TIROS launches could collect as valuable weather data from South Polar regions, there would be a relatively easy scheduling problem.

6. CONCLUSIONS. Although presumably the President is aware of both TIROS approval and CORONA approval, there are scheduling problems to be resolved unless one has a clear priority over the other. Conceivably TIROS might be used to further cover the CORONA series of launches since weather reconnaissance is one of its objectives. In any event, detailed cover stories and relationships between the two projects must be discussed with the appropriate NASA and ARPA personnel.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS. It is recommended that the CIA position be established as follows:

a. That arrangements be made with ARPA and NASA to establish relative priorities as between the CORONA and TIROS programs.

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b. That schedules and appropriate cover stories be developed.

c. Since TIROS resolution will be of poorer quality than CORONA and of no particular value to the intelligence community, that this program be used on an unclassified basis to enhance the security of the CORONA program in the fields of cover and deception.

d. In the event that TIROS requires the same sun angles as CORONA, clear priorities must be established at the highest level since it might endanger the security of CORONA by requiring good sun angles. In this event, CIA should urge that TIROS be held in abeyance until completion of the CORONA series.

SIGNED

WILLIAM BURKE
Colonel, USAF
Acting Chief, DPD-DD/P

APPROVAL: Para. 7

LS
Deputy Director
(Plans)

Date: 20 JUL 1959

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