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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

29 September 1969

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Air Reconnaissance of South China

1. We have been asked to comment on a draft memorandum to the President on the views of the 303 Committee regarding reconnaissance needs against South China and the use of 147 H/T drone. We have also received a request to review two route tracks over South China which are proposed for the TAGBOARD drone. In addition there is a proposal being prepared to resume U-2 coverage. If 303 Committee considerations of coverage of South China proceed along these lines, we will be dealing piecemeal with a problem which deserves broad consideration. This memorandum outlines the various needs for reconnaissance against targets in South China and the assets available to satisfy them. Paragraph 10 recommends a course of action for consideration by the 303 Committee.

The Intelligence Problem

2. South China is the most difficult area of the Communist world to cover adequately [redacted] This is due partly to weather--cloud cover averages about 70 percent over the year [redacted]

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3. There are three major South China intelligence problems on which existing coverage is deficient:

a. Strategic missile search Photography of the strips along selected rail lines in South China is needed to perform the continuing intelligence search for initial Chinese deployment of medium range ballistic missiles. There are 2,600 miles of the rail net in South China which are judged particularly suitable for such deployment.

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[Redacted]

b. The border region Continuing surveillance of tactical intelligence targets along China's border with Vietnam, Laos, and Burma is needed to detect changes in army, air, and logistic facilities and to monitor road building. The draft Presidential memorandum deals primarily with this intelligence problem and requests a decision on four 147 H/T flights for October.

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c. Military installations Surveillance of [Redacted]

[Redacted]

South China is needed to determine current posture and, over time, force levels and capabilities. Photography is also badly needed on facilities suspected of association with the nuclear weapons program, [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

Photographic Collection Assets

4. There are four reconnaissance platforms available [Redacted] the U-2R and SR-71 manned aircraft and the 147 H/T and TAGBOARD drones. These systems,

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[Redacted]

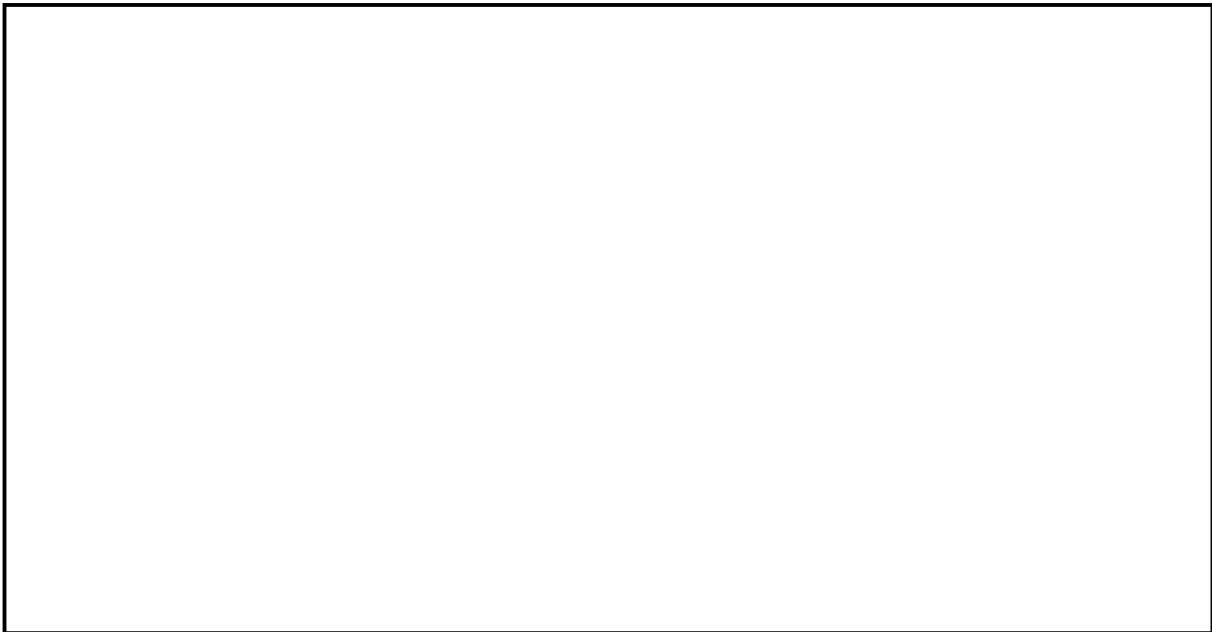
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in varying degrees, can take advantage of weather breaks in the South China area, and they all provide photography of relatively high resolution.

5. During a single mission the U-2R can cover an area 63 by 2,100 miles, or about 132,000 square nautical miles. Both the SR-71 and the TAGBOARD can photograph a strip approximately 30 by 3,000 nautical miles--about two-thirds the area photographed by the U-2R. The 147 H can photograph an area about 20 by 1,200 miles. Four 147 H/T missions would be needed to cover the area photographed during a single flight of either an SR-71 or TAGBOARD, and five 147 H/T flights would be needed to equal the coverage provided by one U-2R.

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8. It is questionable whether the Communist Chinese would make a major distinction between the provocativeness of the 147 drones and the U-2R--both have been used over China before.

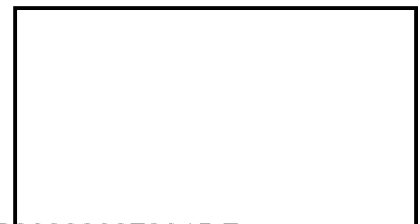
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In each case the resumption of airborne reconnaissance would probably outweigh consideration of the particular systems. Because the other vehicles have not been used before over China, the Chinese may consider them more provocative. Furthermore, the use of more than one type of vehicle over a short period of time may appear more provocative to the Communist Chinese than extensive use of a single type.

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9. The U-2R is the least provocative in terms of number of penetrations required to provide a given amount of coverage. It is able to obtain on two missions the approximate area obtained on three TAGBOARD or SR-71 missions or on ten 147 H missions. In terms of seriousness of loss, a 147 drone would be the least serious and an SR-71 the most serious.

10. It is apparent from the foregoing discussion that the problem of airborne photo reconnaissance of South China should be considered as a whole, not piecemeal.

it appears that the U-2R is the most suitable system to employ against South China at this time.

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