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Chrow

COMMITTEE ON IMAGERY REQUIREMENTS AND EXPLOITATION

NRO REVIEW COMPLETED

31 January 1973

25X1A

MEMORANDUM FOR: DIA Member, COMIREX

SUBJECT : Change in [redacted] Airborne
Imagery Collection Platform

REFERENCE : USIB-D-46. 4/35 (COMIREX-D-24. 3/1)
20 March 1970

1. This memorandum responds to your 24 January 1973 request for my views concerning the proposed use of SR-71 photographic reconnaissance aircraft over Cuba in place of the long-employed U-2R aircraft.

2. The main point of concern for the intelligence community is that its basic needs for overhead photographic reconnaissance coverage of Cuba--as set forth in the USIB's statement of standing requirements (reference)--be met. These include periodic coverage at specified quality, the maintenance of airborne reconnaissance presence, and provision for quick reaction standby capabilities to meet special needs as they arise. Within this general framework the type of airborne collection platform employed in achieving these ends is largely a matter of discretion, based on optimum balance of all factors involved--operational and political as well as intelligence.

3. I believe the political implications and possible repercussions with regard to Cuba that may be involved in the shift to SR-71's for the [redacted] program are important--and perhaps, determining--factors in assessing this proposal. I urge they be given very careful consideration and thorough coordination before any final decision is reached.

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4. From the more immediate and local perspective of the intelligence consumer, I believe the SR-71 product would meet minimum needs, although somewhat less well than the U-2R product. Long experience shows us that the quality of Cuba coverage returned by the present collection platform--the U-2R.

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U-2R, of course, provides a broader operational flexibility in responding to needs for limited objective, special target coverage as called for under paragraph 9c of reference, but that presumably could be balanced by other factors.

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