

## **President Orders Declassification of Historic Satellite Imagery Citing Value of Photography to Environmental Science**

24 February 1995

CIA Headquarters (Langley, Va.) -- President Clinton today signed an Executive Order that directs the declassification of imagery obtained by the first generation of photo-reconnaissance satellites; the CORONA, ARGON and LANYARD systems. The order will cause the declassification of more than 800,000 satellite images of the earth's surface, collected by these satellites between 1960 and 1972. By the end of an eighteen-month transition period, the public will be given access to this imagery that can be used to assist environmental studies and other civilian applications.

Early imagery collections were driven, in part, by the need to confirm purported developments in Soviet strategic missile capabilities. Worldwide photographic coverage was also used to produce maps and charts for the Department of Defense and other US Government mapping programs. Declassification of the imagery follows recommendations made to the White House by the Director of Central Intelligence on the basis of a study by a Classification Review Task Force led by the Central Imagery Office. This task force consisting of Intelligence Community, military and civilian government officials examined imagery security policy and evaluated national security risks in the post-Cold War era as well as the potential utility of satellite photo reconnaissance imagery to the US Government and the public.

The first successful satellite imagery was collected in August 1960 using a panoramic camera. The declassified imagery provides extensive coverage of the earth. The best resolution of the imagery is 6 feet; the poorest resolution is approximately 560 feet. Areas of land coverage for individual satellite images are approximately 10 miles by 120 miles, although coverage varied somewhat over time. The attached fact sheet gives details about these obsolete systems.

Early reconnaissance coverage will allow environmentalists to establish a baseline in the 1960s for assessing environmental changes. Experts believe the declassified imagery will contribute significantly to the analysis and understanding of global environmental processes. They point out that the Landsat system began producing imagery for scientific use in 1972, so that release of this archive of 1960-1972 images will extend into the past by more than a decade the timeliness for systematic and comprehensive coverage of the earth's surface available to environmental researchers. These were among the conclusions of an Environmental Task Force that was convened in 1992 at the request of Vice President (then-Senator) Gore and former-Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates to examine the usefulness for historic imagery archives for scientific studies.

These valuable materials will become declassified upon transfer from the Intelligence Community to the National Archives and Records Administration and copies will be sent to the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The public will be able to access these records at the National Archives facility at College Park, Maryland. Additionally, by connecting to the USGS' EROS Data Center in Sioux Falls, SD via the Internet, the public will be able to browse an electronic index that includes reduced resolution pictures of the early satellite imagery, as well as

Landsat and other Federal image holdings, and place orders for delivery of film duplicates to home or office.

Inquiries for information on the declassified imagery should be directed to:

- NRO Public Affairs (703) 808-1015

Inquiries for availability or purchase of the declassified imagery should be directed to:

- National Archives at College Park, MD (301) 713-7030
- EROS Data Center Customer Service, Sioux Falls, SD (605) 594-6151, or electronically as follows: the Internet address for text-based queries is [\\$TELNET glis.cr.usgs.gov](mailto:$TELNET glis.cr.usgs.gov). Those having an X terminal can access over [\\$TELNET xglis.cr.usgs.gov](mailto:$TELNET xglis.cr.usgs.gov). Modem users can directly dial into the text-based system by setting their modem to 8 bits with no parity and 1 stop bit and dialing 605-594-6888.