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11 August 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR : Deputy Director (Plans)

SUBJECT : Possible Utilization of CORONA Capability in Berlin Crisis

1. At the time of your special CORONA briefing in DPD on 8 August, I thought I detected an element of qualified surprise in your reaction to [redacted] and [redacted] statement that a twenty-one-day period is normally required prior to the launch of a CORONA vehicle in order to properly prepare the intelligence inputs for the memory tape system which is the basic element in programing the vehicle. At the same time I began to speculate personally as to whether recent CORONA successes may not have led some elements in Administration circles to conclude that CORONA might be a valuable and immediately available tactical surveillance tool in the event of any future hardening of positions between the Soviet Union and the West over Berlin later this year.

2. This line of thinking prompted me to suggest to you for your evaluation possible ways in which some usable tactical information could be extracted from the CORONA capability if Berlin warms up by year's end. Alternatives seem to me to run along these lines:

a. Two CORONA payloads are programed tentatively for November and December of this year. A third vehicle of the ARGON type with a CORONA backup is tentatively scheduled for late October. It might be worthwhile to consider cranking into their programs primary mission emphasis upon western USSR and the Satellite Bloc areas against the possibility that certain gross information regarding changes in AOB, MOB, ROT, etc., might be derived from their payloads. Decision on this matter, if made promptly now, could cut the normal twenty-one-day lead time period to from six to eight days, since memory tapes can be precut using precomputed sun angles and suggested tracks.

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on

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b. A MURAL shot is tentatively programed for 15 January 1962, the first in its series. If the criticality of the Berlin situation demanded, efforts might be made now to step up this firing in order to give us an additional vehicular capability before the end of the calendar year. This shot could also presumably be programed with major emphasis upon the western USSR and Satellite Bloc.

3. In any event it might be useful to let the policy makers know that CORONA in its present stage of development does not represent a "push button" type of surveillance weapons system that some people may feel it is. On the other hand, it could be stated that the normal three-week lead period could be reduced to approximately one week if decisions are made now to concentrate the CORONA capability on anticipated tactical targets in western USSR and the Satellite Bloc. I realize that if a Berlin flap does occur in the November through January period, it will be in the least desirable period technically as far as CORONA is concerned from the weather and sun angles standpoint, but any usable gross information that could be derived from this source, using say two-day orbits, would be better than none at all. In view of the lesser political liabilities attached to CORONA when compared to IDEALIST, its employment should not necessarily excite the Soviets to the same degree. There is also the possibility that were CORONA to reveal evidences of dramatic changes in Soviet or Satellite Bloc Orders of Battle, such information would be extremely valuable as pathfinder data for programming any EWP utilization of the U-2. I assume, of course, that this whole matter would require exposure to the Special Group approvals process after it had been duly considered by the COMOR.

Acting Chief, DFD-