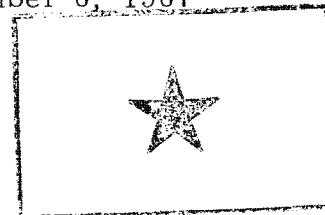


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WASHINGTON 20330

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

November 6, 1967



MEMORANDUM FOR DR. BROWN

SUBJECT: SR-71 Aircraft Attrition

Colonel Gunderson's note to me of 26 October stated that you desired a determination of how many SR-71 attrition aircraft we think we will need (and their cost) in order to maintain a 25 UE SR-71 force through FY 1977.

There are a number of considerations related to SR-71 "requirements" and attrition which should be outlined (and your reactions obtained) before we proceed with these determinations:

1. SR-71 attrition is running considerably ahead of that forecast by OSD when they previously rejected an attrition buy of 9 aircraft. OSD's forecast was two losses every three years. We have experienced four losses in the last 21 months, of which three have been in the last 9 months. Accordingly, we are now at an inventory point which OSD forecast would not result until FY 1972.

2. However, another factor in the decision not to buy attrition SR-71's at the time was Mr. McNamara's personal reaction to the JCS that OXCART aircraft would be available for mission coverage if needed.

3. In last year's BOB-OSD study of the OXCART and SR-71, which led to the President's decision to place the OXCART in storage, three particular factors are pertinent to your concern:

a. The OXCART were to be stored, rather than destroyed, with the principal reason for storing being that they would be available to replace heavier-than-expected attrition of SR-71's. (A secondary possibility of higher mission requirements was recognized.) The OXCART would be removed

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Page 1 of 1 Pages.
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*6 operational
2 test
1 modified to trainer*

from storage under the attrition replacement circumstances in lots (like 4 or 5), rather than individually. All of our OXCART storage planning has been on this basis. At the moment, there are six operationally-configured OXCART, and two test aircraft could be readily-configured to operational type (one is now in storage). The one OXCART trainer could be used for SR-71 training, but could not be modified to an operational configuration at reasonable cost. There is one other A-12, now in storage, which accrued from the old TAGBOARD drone program. This was modified extensively, and would require major rework to be useable for SR-71 attrition replacement--for all practicable purposes, it should not be considered as an additional aircraft source.

b. BOB-OSD did not, in the final analysis, rationalize a finite number of OXCART/SR-71 type aircraft required for missions. They indicated that the maximum need was for 30 aircraft, but that mission interchangeability could apply to reduce this number. Their approach, then, in the selected alternative was to forecast an inventory at end FY 1970 (26 operational/test and 2 trainer SR-71's), and reflect the possible mission coverage of this inventory. No projections beyond FY 1970 were included.

c. Satellites and drones (particularly the TAGBOARD) could cover a significant portion of target requirements.

4. At present, there are 25 test and operational SR-71's (the test are planned for operational use) and two trainers. We recently received OSD approval to modify one YF-12 to serve as a third trainer.

5. If we take a "worst case" situation that we could expect two SR-71 losses per year to continue, the SR-71 would be down to 6 operational aircraft by end FY 1977. If we used all 8 OXCART for attrition replacement, we would still have only 14 by that time, which would indicate a need to buy 11 more SR-71's to maintain 25 operational.

*Worst case is actually
somewhat worse than 2 per year -
4 in 21 mos. This means in 10 yrs 1/8 more lost = ~3 more*

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6. If we assumed one SR-71 loss per year, the SR-71's would be down to 16 by end FY 1977, but with 8 OXCART, could be an inventory of 24. In this instance, it would be difficult to make a case for buying more SR-71's.

7. One aspect we should consider is that if we made an open move to propose the procurement of additional SR-71's, the BOB (and probably OSD) would object to procurement until we had fully considered the 8 OXCART availability. This would delay facing up to SR procurement until FY 1970 or 1971 on the "worst case" basis. Also, we might expect a move by CIA to retain the OXCART in a flying status, to keep the aircraft ready, introduce improvements, etc. (No funds are budgeted in FY 1969 for OXCART—a minimum program for flying would be \$50 million a year, and could go up to \$80 million, depending on the program choices.)

8. Another aspect is the TAGBOARD Drones (and possibly the Compass Arrow type drones). Amidst the ExCom discussions on the OXCART/SR-71 Kadena operations discussions, Dr. Hornig raised a question as to the feasibility of reducing the FY 1968 TAGBOARD procurement to offset the OXCART extension costs. The general reaction was that if the OXCART or SR-71 became severely vulnerable to enemy action, the TAGBOARD might be the system to use. Accordingly, the TAGBOARD was not reduced.

9. Still another consideration developed on 27-28 October. This was the idea of modifying the A-12's for interceptor use. If this course were followed, it would result in some "F-12 type" aircraft at relatively-low cost, but delete the stated purpose for storing the A-12's (replacement of higher than expected SR-71 attrition), and more importantly, while saving on F-12 type of funding, create a situation of either accepting all future SR-71 attrition without replacement, or buying more SR-71's (which would probably cost more for investment than the F-12's).

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The preceding is furnished to bring you up-to-date on the principal considerations involved. The chances for approval of additional SR-71's in the FY 68/69 time period are probably extremely small. If we ordered 11 in either year (or in both years by lot buy), the investment cost could be at least \$275 million, and subject to the full funding rules).

Donald G. Greiner, Maj USAF
for Alexander H. Flax

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