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Corona file
Answers para 3 of
27 Oct EXCOM mtg.

29 October 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
The Deputy Secretary of Defense

1. I have examined the question of USIB requirements for CORONA missions which were briefly discussed in the NRO Executive Committee meeting yesterday. I find that the following actions have taken place.
2. Prior to the development of the CORONA J, USIB had established a requirement of one CORONA M per month as being necessary to cover targets of interest in the Soviet Union and China with a frequency to meet COMOR requirements.
3. In early September 1963, immediately after the first successful CORONA J mission 1001 (August 25, 1963 - one bucket recovered), I asked for a study of the number of CORONA J missions necessary to meet COMOR requirements. This group, composed of representatives of several interested offices in CIA who are in support of the Board of National Estimates, examined the question in depth studying, among other things, requirements for current photographic reconnaissance of such target categories as missile deployment, anti-satellite missile production facilities, VW/CW facilities, etc. This group found that coverage of most categories of targets at least once every six months was required although certain high priority targets such as the Tyuratam launching range required coverage quarterly.
4. Translating these requirements into frequency of CORONA J missions proved difficult because of uncertainties as to reliability, weather, exact position of orbit, etc.
5. Nevertheless, the panel recommended that "at least 12 successful M-type satellite missions per year or, alternatively, 6 successful J-type missions would be required to satisfy the requirements for current photographic intelligence.

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6. After studying the problem personally, I raised the number of missions from 9 per year to 12 per year and so recommended to USIB. The reason I raised the number of missions was because of lack of experience with the CORONA J, uncertainty over the technical problems of accomplishing a gap of several days between the first and second bucket (this we have not yet accomplished), therefore I felt we should oversaturate the targets rather than risk a deficiency.

7. On Monday, September 23rd, I gave this information to Dr. McMillan personally for guidance in planning the NRO schedule. This has been accepted ever since. Some weeks later (on November 14th) USIB, with Dr. McMillan present, reviewed the schedule for the ensuing 12 months and gave approval of a program of one CORONA J launch per month.

8. Satellite schedules have since been discussed by USIB on 10 separate occasions and on each occasion the extent to which NRO have either met or failed to meet the "one per month schedule" was examined.

9. For your information, there have now been 12 attempted CORONA J missions. Six successful (both buckets recovered), 4 partially successful (one bucket recovered, except mission 1012 where the second bucket was recovered after the mission was reduced because of malfunction), and two missions failed.

10. A serious gap developed between September 25, 1963 and June 4, 1964 during which period we have had only one successful CORONA J mission. It is for this reason that USIB requested that the mission rate in the summer be increased from one per month to two per month, in order to provide the input into the intelligence inventory necessary to permit completion of estimates which are quite dependent on photographic reconnaissance.

11. COMCOR is now examining the question since the year has elapsed since USIB made the original decision of one per month and its recommendation should be in my hands in a few days. In the meantime, the decision of one mission a month taken in September 1963 stands as a USIB requirement.

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JOHN A. MCCONE

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