

~~TOP SECRET~~



MEMORANDUM FOR: Under Secretary of the Air Force

SUBJECT : Operational Utilization of the CORONA Program

1. To date there has been a noticeable reference throughout the CORONA program to the research and development aspect of the Discoverer program. However, the primary purpose of this orbital satellite is its intelligence-gathering capability. The intelligence-gathering capability has been subordinated because of the R&D requirements associated with the development of the program. The CORONA program has been characterized by R&D activities exemplified by four different camera designs, two major variants in Agena configuration as well as numerous other changes such as Agena engine, guidance system, etc.

2. The absence of current coverage of priority areas of the USSR, amplified since the grounding of the U-2, re-emphasizes the urgency of programming all efforts towards solving the Soviet enigma. It appears to me that with the present dependency on the CORONA program the R&D aspect must be de-emphasized and the operational aspects of the program must be given the greater priority. This action will increase the flexibility needed if this program is to best serve the national interest.

3. Every intelligence-gathering system must use to the fullest the principles of timeliness and need. To satisfy this requirement I suggest that the United States Intelligence Board Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance devise a system that will state requirements for desired time intervals for recoverage of areas of interest, target complexes as well as individual targets. I recognize that this can usefully be done only if the Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance is advised of the operational capabilities and limitations.



Declassified

In Accordance with E.O. 12958

on NOV 26 1997

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4. Suggested actions intended to improve CORONA system operational freedom and reliability:

a. Activate one additional launch pad for CORONA use exclusively;

b. Augment the present group which is investigating Agena producibility and reliability to obtain all possible help. (Very small group of possibly [redacted] and/or Rand.) Vehicle reliability must be improved to allow all-important four-day operation.

c. Investigate change to orbital inclination angle to cover on first and second days the areas not now covered until third and fourth day;

d. Set up a very small task force to investigate Mural status and to recommend within two weeks a continuance of Mural on first priority or to assemble a substantial number of single C<sup>III</sup> camera payloads, or to revert to C<sup>I</sup> design if present difficulties with C<sup>III</sup> design are not quickly solved.

5. It is realized that this concept requires the establishment of priorities within the nation's satellite program and may require that programs of lesser priority be subordinated to the needs of the Intelligence Community. With these priorities missions can be launched to take maximum advantage of the best forecast weather. Similarly, a scheduled back-up mission can be cancelled following a successful recovery to provide the Intelligence Community sufficient time to digest the information obtained. If this is not accomplished, then the CORONA program may not fulfill its ultimate purpose since areas of prime U. S. concern may never be weather free to coincide with the R&D timetable.

RICHARD M. BISSELL, JR.  
Deputy Director  
(Plans)

Signature recommended:

[redacted]  
Acting Chief, DPD-DD/P