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PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY BOARD

July 5, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE BUNDY

You will recall that beginning in October 1961, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board made recommendations relating to acceleration of the national satellite reconnaissance program for the collection of photographic intelligence concerning Soviet nuclear capabilities and the deployment of Soviet missiles.

As a result of the President's action on the Board's recommendations, there has been an intensification of the program, particularly with regard to the seeking of improvements in camera systems and the increased procurement and launching of photographic reconnaissance satellites.

In the course of the past year and a half the Board has been informed on a regular basis of the scheduling of photographic reconnaissance satellite missions and of the successes and failures encountered in the programs of the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) to obtain photographic intelligence by these means. At the Board meeting of June 25-26, we again reviewed the subject in separate discussions with the Director of the NRO and with the Director of Central Intelligence, for the purpose of arriving at a current appraisal of the adequacy of our capability to maintain photographic coverage of the Sino-Soviet bloc through the use of reconnaissance satellites.

Information provided by the NRO discloses that during 1962 twenty-seven photographic reconnaissance satellites (exclusive of weather satellites) were launched on intelligence missions. Sixteen of these missions were successful in that they produced photography of a quality described by the NRO as ranging from fair to good. The eleven unsuccessful missions were due to: a) failure in one instance of the Agena vehicle to achieve orbit, b) malfunction in four instances of the vehicle while in orbit, and c) failure in six instances to recover the camera payload upon re-entry.

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In 1963, up to the time of our June 25-26 meeting, seven additional launchings of photographic reconnaissance satellites (exclusive of weather satellites) had been attempted. Two of these missions were successful in that they produced photography described by the NRO as ranging in quality from good to excellent. The five unsuccessful missions were due to: a) failure in three instances of the vehicle to achieve orbit, b) malfunction in one instance of the vehicle while in orbit, and c) failure of the camera to operate in one instance due to electrical power malfunction of the vehicle.

As indicated above, the assigned causes of failure in most instances involved booster and other systems failures rather than failure of the camera systems. (We note that similar causes of failure were encountered in satellite missions launched for other purposes.) One responsible official informed the Board that in his opinion the responsibility for the failures rests upon the principal contractor, Lockheed. Another responsible official tended to assign the responsibility to the U. S. Air Force, questioning the adequacy of its pre-launch systems-check-out procedures. The Board also heard expressions of the view that the onus for the failures may well rest on both Lockheed and the U. S. Air Force.

We are heartened to learn that, subsequent to the Board's most recent meeting, another launch was successfully made and that it produced photographic results whose general quality is assessed preliminarily as promising. While this is encouraging, the Board is deeply concerned lest a continuance of the incidence of failure in 1963, as contrasted with the achievements in 1962, deny us vitally-needed intelligence essential to the estimative and policy formulation processes, particularly in areas relating to the Sino-Soviet bloc.

Accordingly, the Board suggests that the President's office appropriately re-emphasize the urgent need for achieving and maintaining a dependable and continuing photographic reconnaissance satellite capability.

Clark M. Clifford
Chairman