

13 March 1969

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## MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Meeting of the 303 Committee, 11 March 1969

PRESENT: Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Packard, Mr. Mitchell, and Mr. Helms

Brig. General Donald H. Ross, Captain Merriwell W. Vineyard, USN, Colonel Alexander Haig, and Mr. William Trueheart were also present.

1. U-2 Photographic Reconnaissance of China (BYE 8666-69)

a. General Ross provided a briefing on the proposed U-2R photographic reconnaissance mission over northeast China and responded to questions concerning the importance of the proposed targets, camera resolution vis-a-vis satellite photography, risks involved, cover contingencies and weather considerations.

b. Mr. Helms discussed the intelligence requirements, the recent COMIREX study of intelligence priorities and coverages, and the current gaps in coverage, particularly with regard to the suspect advance weapon related facilities (SAWRF). He stated that CIA recommends the proposed mission on its intelligence merits.

c. Mr. Packard initially questioned the intelligence justification but after further discussion concluded that the hoped-for insight to be obtained concerning MRBM construction and deployment might make the mission worthwhile.

d. Mr. Johnson pointed out that satellite photography had covered the SAWRF targets as late as December 1968 and that he did not believe that advanced weapons developments in China were moving so fast as to justify an overflight mission at this time. He also observed that he was motivated by the fact that the Chicoms have been quiescent lately and have been withdrawing some of their military units from North Vietnam. He questioned the advisability of irritating the Chinese at this time unless there is a strong intelligence justification.

e. Mr. Kissinger raised the question of just what would the Chinese think of this mission. He noted that if the U.S. wanted to make a political demonstration to the Chinese it should be in the south near the border with North Vietnam.

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f. Mr. Helms replied that basically no country enjoyed having the aircraft of another country overflying its domain. He expressed the view that perhaps the one secret left within the U.S. Government is the resolution of U.S. satellite photography--he thought that the Chinese just did not have a conception of how good, or bad, it is. Therefore, in his estimation, the principal Chinese reaction to this proposed overflight mission would be that the new Administration was more aggressively engaged in collecting intelligence not immediately available to it through satellite photography or other means.

g. The Chairman concluded the discussion with a request that Mr. Helms provide a clearer statement of the rationale for this mission and the intelligence purposes to be achieved and that Mr. Johnson submit a paper expressing State Department reservations concerning it. The Chairman will then present the problem to higher authority for resolution.

2. Discussion of Aerial Reconnaissance Policy for South China  
(BYE 77880-69)

a. Mr. Packard proposed approval of SR-71 flights in varying patterns of penetrations up to 200 miles into Communist China in the border areas adjoining North Vietnam. He noted recent movements of Chinese fighter aircraft into this area and various logistic and support facilities as intelligence objectives, as well as the fact of penetration as a signal or indicator to the Chinese Communists as a demonstration of U.S. political concern.

b. Mr. Johnson questioned whether or not we really need a political demonstration against the Chinese at this time. He noted that they are currently withdrawing both militarily and politically from North Vietnam, and he questioned the advisability of a political demonstration under these circumstances.

c. The Chairman wondered about the reactions in Hanoi when they observe on their radars that SR-71 flights which have been regularly overflying North Vietnam suddenly go on into Communist China.

d. Mr. Helms commented that certainly Hanoi would be startled; they would construe this as foreshadowing some kind of change in U.S. policy but would not know what kind of change. He went on to observe that he considered the intelligence objectives of the proposed SR-71 flights over South China to be somewhat lower in priority than the objectives outlined in the U-2R proposed mission over northeast China. He then drew the attention of the members to the fact that if an SR-71 should perchance be lost over China for any reason that it is the most sophisticated piece of equipment in the world in many varying respects. Neither the Chinese nor the Russians have anything like it.

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e. Mr. Packard conceded that perhaps the gains in the proposed South China missions were not so great as to warrant risking the loss of an SR-71 and he would study this further.

f. The Chairman, referring back to possible reactions in Hanoi to recognized U.S. overflights of South China, requested Mr. Helms to provide an estimate paper on how Hanoi might react under these circumstances.

g. The discussion then turned to the use of the 147 H/T drones for photographic missions over South China.

h. Mr. Johnson stated that he had no objection to any necessary drone missions over China and the others also concurred, although recognizing the greater vulnerability of drones to being shot down.

i. The Chairman stated that he would submit a recommendation to higher authority for approval of re-institution of drone flights over South China and advise him of the considerations given to the use of other vehicles for this purpose.

5. SAFSS Forecast for March 1969

The SAFSS Forecast for March 1969 was telephonically approved by Committee principals on 28 February with the following restrictions: All overflights of the China mainland continued to be stood down, but the proposed Photo and ELINT IDEALIST/TACKLE missions were approved with the understanding that there be no approach closer than 20 miles to the China mainland.

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(EXTRACT  
Paras 1, 2 & 5)