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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.



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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

29 AUG 1966

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The Honorable Robert S. McNamara
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C.

Dear Bob:

In his summary memorandum on OXCART deployment dated 12 August 1966 (see Att. A), Mr. Rostow has asked that we consider what measures might be taken to shorten the present twenty-one day deployment interval in case OXCART were later needed on short notice.

Our people believe that they can now be prepared to begin operations 15 days after a decision to deploy is made; and an emergency capability would be available after 13 days. You will remember that the original deployment schedule called for the first operational capability for overflight 21 days after go-ahead and involved a mixture of subsonic and supersonic ferrying together with a layover in Hawaii. The improvement to 15 days is due primarily to our confidence that we can ferry the three OXCART aircraft at MACH THREE non-stop to Kadena. This would also reduce the publicity associated with deployment since there has been interest in the SR-71 type aircraft in the Honolulu press. We would further plan to load and dispatch the six C-141 transport aircraft committed to the deployment with materiel and personnel on the second and third days after go-ahead. I am told that all of this can be accomplished within the context of the [redacted]

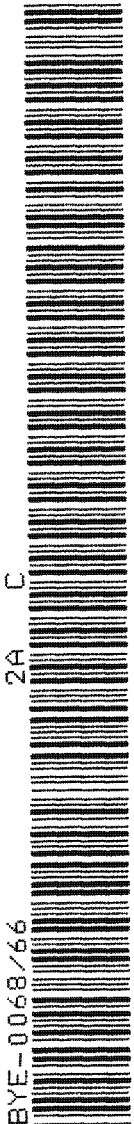
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~~Page 2~~ of 12

adequate safety margin for recovery of the OXCART aircraft at designated en route bases in case of engine failure or other emergencies, which we consider highly unlikely. This revised plan would also provide for adequate rest for deployed personnel and for exercise of operational procedures at Kadena prior to launching the first overflight. A revised deployment schedule and route map is included in Attachment B, together with some essential comments on the operational plan.

Since we will apparently not be deploying at an early date, the Secretary of State and I have discussed the possibility of using OXCART over Cuba, both to gain experience and to acquire higher resolution photography at less risk. I believe that this is a sound course, since it would exercise the operational capability in an SA-2 environment and build confidence in our ability to use the OXCART over heavily defended territory when the need arises. We judge that four flights per month flown out of Area 51 with two inflight refuelings would fill the present intelligence need. I do not believe, however, that we should relieve SAC of their present responsibility for obtaining this coverage with U-2's until we establish what the Cuban capability to track and hear the flights and know what their air defense or political reaction will be. If it is agreeable to you, I should like to propose to the 303 Committee that it approve such OXCART flights over Cuba in addition to the present SAC U-2 coverage.

Sincerely,

/s/ Richard Helms

Richard Helms
Director

✓ cc: D/NRO

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