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MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Special Project Branch, DFD

SUBJECT: Budgetary Considerations for CORONA and ARGON

1. Due to the requirement that has been generated by the rapid technological advancement by the Russians, a reconnaissance-intelligence satellite program that provides aerial reconnaissance in support of national intelligence objectives has been developed and is operational. This program is known as CORONA.

2. The system used to acquire this reconnaissance employs a two-stage earth-circling satellite vehicle, the first stage being a Thor boost and a Lockheed Agena Engine being the second stage. There is a recoverable nose cone portion carried that returns exposed camera film to the earth's surface for intelligence photo exploitation.

3. To date, the system has acquired photography over the USSR, portions of China, and the satellite countries. Average ground resolution has been 20 to 25 feet on a side and approximately 3,000,000 square miles of this territory has been photographed where the cloud coverage has been Category III or better (clear to 4/8 cloud coverage). Major items of intelligence significance include new airfields, new activity, build up and defense strengthening of major missile test sites and construction areas, and new SAM locations. The system has also demonstrated a capability for obtaining photography with extremely low sun angles.

4. Information to improve current maps and charts, target folders, and information to revise and support combat operations has also been obtained with this system. The data has augmented information available from other sources and should provide the basis for operational direction of other intelligence gathering activities.

5. There are currently eleven scheduled missions, utilizing this system, remaining to be accomplished by 1 January 1962. During this period a new camera and film will be used that will improve the ground resolution and quality of the returned product.

6. A follow-on program has recently been approved that will utilize the Thor-Agena recoverable payload vehicle which will carry the camera and film payload necessary to obtain stereographic photography. Six such missions have been approved and the first launching has been scheduled for the early spring of 1962.

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In Accordance with E. O. 12958

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Operationally, DPD has the capability to program the area over which the satellite vehicle will operate the camera; has established necessary control and communication procedures to implement command decisions as to when the camera will operate or not operate; and has organized and tied together the necessary channels to obtain weather forecasts and briefings on which to base such command decisions.

8. In addition to the CORONA program, DPD is also engaged in certain operational activities of the ARGON program. This program uses the same satellite vehicle and launch boost as the CORONA program and carries a film payload which is also recoverable. The primary mission of the ARGON vehicle is for geodetic survey and purpose, not as an intelligence gathering device. By charter agreement, DPD provides operational reports control procedures, headquarters control room coverage and action, security precautions, cover inputs, courier service, R & D assistance, PIC facilities, airlift, communications, and obtains necessary political approval for ARGON missions. Vital field support is also provided.

9. There has been one unsuccessful attempt to complete an ARGON mission since 1 January 1961. Five ARGON missions are scheduled for launchings during the months of April, June, July, and August 1961. No follow-on programs have been approved or presented.

10. Headquarters field trip considerations for these two programs should include one round trip commercial airline ticket for one person every two months for the remainder of the programs. These trips will be between Washington, D. C. and the West Coast. The purpose of the trips will be to provide a closer operational coordinating function between Headquarters and the field. This will allow a wider range of operational activity to be conducted at Headquarters level.



Major USAF
CORONA Officer