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~~(S)~~ NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE NRO STAFF

October 1, 1969



MEMORANDUM FOR DR. McLUCAS

SUBJECT: Quick-Response Capability for Sino-Soviet Border Coverage

On September 23, we learned of a "White House (Kissinger)" request that CIA look at the possibility of "pushing all satellite launchings forward."

On September 24, we were advised that this particular question was just a part of a request to CIA by Dr. Kissinger that he be provided a paper which described "our quick-response crisis capability for coverage of the Sino-Soviet border area."

We contacted Mr. McMahon (Mr. Duckett's deputy) immediately to learn more about the request. Mr. McMahon indicated that he had been asked to provide only the response to the earlier question, i.e., the possibility of telescoping missions over the short term to reduce the gap between missions. He stated further that he had provided such a response based upon information that he had obtained from our SOC (Colonel Sweeney).

I asked Mr. McMahon if it would be possible (and appropriate) for us to have a copy of the paper which had been delivered to the White House, in order that you might be apprised of the query and the response. He indicated that it was very unlikely that he could obtain a copy of the complete paper, but offered to obtain a copy of his particular portion of the response.

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On September 30, Mr. McMahon called and dictated the attached paragraphs, stating that he could not obtain a copy of the paper, since

1. as a DCI memorandum to the President, it was being held exceptionally closely
2. it was reported to contain information on CIA clandestine (and agent) type effort.

The caveat on the attached page was added by Mr. McMahon, since he was told that no dissemination of the information could be made.

It was our understanding that the paper contained a detailed account of new (or under consideration) NRO system developments including a summary of their capabilities for quick response to crises. This is not the case, at least, in the extract we have received. The only reference to an anticipated capability appears in the last sentence of Note 1.

William R. Yost
 WILLIAM R. YOST
 Colonel, USAF

It seems to me appropriate for you to see a paper of this sort which deals directly with your system. You may wish to ask Mr. Helms about it
L. Allen

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Present overhead reconnaissance capabilities would be targeted to the maximum extent against the area of hostilities and advanced planning should be undertaken to be sure that this can be accomplished with a minimum of delays. The telescoping of missions over the short term to reduce the gap between missions, as currently planned, has limited possibilities. (See notes)

Note 1. The two photographic satellite reconnaissance systems now in use do not provide a significant capability for quick reaction use in a crisis situation. Even if all components are readily available about 15 days are required from the decision to the actual launch. Both systems can be assembled and set on the launch pad in readiness for launch but can only be held that way for a few days and then must be recycled; i. e., batteries recharged, booster purged and refueled, rechecking certain components and some retesting. Neither program provides more than one payload at a time which could be used in advance of a scheduled launch date. Even with maximum contractor effort and additional funds no more than four photographic reconnaissance satellites could be launched between now and January 1, 1970. New programs are under consideration which would provide much improved crisis capability but they are several years away from any possible use.

Note 2. An additional limitation on use of reconnaissance satellites in crisis situations is the time between launch of the system and the availability of photographs. Weather conditions might prevent photographs of the desired area for at least several days. The film must then be received, returned to the U. S., and processed. As an example, the minimum time from the taking of a photograph in China to viewing of the film is about two to two and one-half days.

Caveat:

Even though this is part of an overall paper there are very strict restrictions in the intended use of this document.

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