

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

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29 April 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: OXCART Deployment Proposal

1. I want to invite your attention to the critical need for adequate intelligence in order to detect a possible Chinese Communist strategic buildup in South China and North Vietnam which might lead to their direct involvement in the Vietnam war. I consider foreknowledge of any Chinese intent to intervene in the Vietnam war to be so vital to the national interest that the full collection resources available to the United States Government should be committed to the acquisition of intelligence in this connection.

2. The collection of intelligence to give early warning of possible Chinese Communist intervention in the Vietnam war has been assigned highest priority by the Intelligence Community. It is my conviction, shared by the United States Intelligence Board, that high resolution overhead photography is essential to obtain such intelligence. The Joint Chiefs of Staff likewise are on record that every means be exploited as a matter of highest priority to obtain high resolution photographic coverage of ground force installations, major complexes, and key lines of communication in the South China and North Vietnam areas. The collection task involves adequate initial coverage and subsequent periodic coverage of 29 heavily defended targets in North Vietnam and 137 targets in South China. Present coverage is inadequate both as to extent and timeliness.

3. Currently, satellite photographic missions are being programmed to achieve the maximum coverage of key targets in South China and North Vietnam. However, because of design characteristics of the vehicle and weather conditions in the

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area, satellite photography has only a very limited capability to provide the desired intelligence. In South China, GRC (Chinese Nationalist) U-2 missions are being scheduled and it is expected that they will provide some useful coverage; however, the survivability of this aircraft against strengthened Chinese air defense facilities is becoming increasingly doubtful. Heavy concentrations of air defenses have rendered many of the highest priority target areas in North Vietnam relatively inaccessible to U-2's. Drone missions into this area have provided some coverage, but the reliability of continued coverage is uncertain. I am of the firm belief, therefore, that we cannot rely on the presently committed collection assets to provide the timely data base line and the subsequent periodic coverage we need to determine change.

4. In December 1965 the OXCART aircraft and systems, including countermeasure defensive systems, were deemed operationally ready. This is the most advanced capability for collecting high resolution photography available to the U.S. Government. It is judged to be virtually immune to air defenses in the South China and North Vietnam areas. It is ready for action and I believe it should be committed to help fill this urgent intelligence need. The OXCART can be deployed to a base in Okinawa and be ready for operational missions approximately three weeks from go-ahead.

5. An obstacle to achieving agreement to commit the OXCART vehicle has been the belief that such a step might be misinterpreted by the Chinese Communists as preparation by the U.S. for aggressive moves against China. The United States Intelligence Community and I do not share this belief. It is my view that the Chinese probably would soon come to regard the OXCART as another stage in a continuing U.S. collection program, and that they would not be led to take any drastic new military action unless there were other simultaneous U.S. overt actions which could be interpreted by them as an intent to attack China. Barring the loss of an OXCART aircraft over Chinese territory, I would not expect the Chinese to react in a way as to significantly affect U.S. national interests. We have also assessed probable reactions of other countries to the use of OXCART and I am attaching a Special National Intelligence Estimate on this overall subject.

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6. From the standpoint of the urgency of the intelligence requirement, I would prefer to recommend to you that the OXCART vehicle be committed as soon as possible for operational missions over both South China and North Vietnam. I am presently proposing, however, immediate use of OXCART principally over North Vietnam with but minor penetration of South China. I am doing this because the GRC U-2's still offer some prospect of adequate coverage in the South China area and I believe it prudent to assure that this capability cannot fulfill the requirement before recommending full commitment of the OXCART in this politically sensitive area. In the event the GRC U-2, together with satellite photography, proves incapable of fulfilling the requirement, I would expect to recommend to you the full operational commitment of the OXCART over South China.

7. A factor which significantly affects the collection of overhead photography in South China and North Vietnam is the weather. The climate in this area deteriorates sharply in the summer months from June through August. This condition limits the capability of all overhead reconnaissance assets. At the same time, however, it points up the need for a relatively invulnerable, reliable, quick reaction capability, such as OXCART, to maximize the exploitation of decreasing opportunities for photographic coverage during the summer months.

8. In summary, then, I am recommending to you:

- a. That the OXCART vehicle be deployed immediately to Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa.
- b. That the OXCART vehicle be used as soon as possible following deployment for photographic coverage of highest priority intelligence targets in North Vietnam.
- c. That the OXCART vehicle be held in readiness for backup photographic coverage of China should GRC U-2 and satellite missions

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-3-

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prove incapable of fulfilling the intelligence requirements.

9. I am attaching additional data to support the conclusions and recommendations above.



W. F. Raborn
Director of Central Intelligence

Attachments:

- A. SNIE #10-2-66: "Reactions to Certain US Courses of Action"
- B. Briefing Book: "OXCART Deployment Proposal"

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