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BYEMAN

13 February 1969

Ed:

You have made a very good statistical case for questioning the happy notion held by many that the NRTPS, once it is operational, will give us an iron-clad guarantee against a massive Soviet attack now and forever more.

You yourself have said (para 16) that your paper is not a definitive discussion of the effectiveness of the NRTPS for strategic warning or other possible purposes and that additional studies are in order. Among the additional studies, I would think that one on Communist China would be of high priority. I say this because, given the lead time required to get a NRTPS fully operational and the estimated speed of Chinese advances in sophisticated weaponry, the worth of such a surveillance of China might well exceed that of one over the USSR. I would guess that a statistical study of coverage of China similar to that you have done on the USSR would show quite different results (no winter dark zone in China, for example). In other words, it seems to me that in judging whether the extreme cost of the NSTPS is worth it (for warning only), we should consider other countries with developing threat capabilities beyond just the USSR.

Regarding your point about the target sampling requirements for achieving 90 percent assurance of detecting changes in the status of base alerts. It seems to me that if the applicable factors conspire to reduce the sample well below that necessary for 90 percent assurance, the sample that was obtained would at least alert us to any unusual enemy behavior and would trigger off the use of other collection systems (like maybe the OX, Black Shield or U-2) to get the full story--with, of course, the attendant political risks. I believe, and I am sure you agree, that no one collection system should be relied on by itself for our strategic

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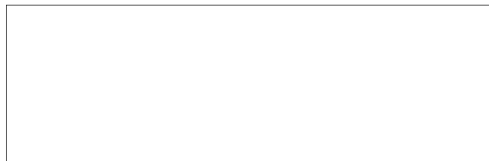
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warning information. I would, therefore, regard any future NRTPS as an addition to our collection arsenal, not as a replacement for those systems we already have. The question then is how valuable an addition; is it enough to warrant the cost?

An important point in assessing the NRTPS question, it seems to me, is what sort of problems the system would pose for the intelligence community in terms of information handling, analysis, and reporting. Your paper does not consider this nor, to my knowledge, has any serious detailed thought been applied by anyone. For all I know, a study of this aspect could wash the whole idea out.

My apologies for these hasty and sketchy notes. I do think that your paper will serve a very good purpose--to give people in the business pause and to raise the question in their minds, "Is the NRTPS really the panacea I have been led to believe?"

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14 February 1969

At this stage it is important to understand that:

High confidence strategic warning-indications of intercontinental attack probably still is not in the cards, from NRTPS or any other reconnaissance system.

On the other hand, warning of conventional ground forces attack-movement probably is feasible.

While the utility of a NRTPS may be insufficient to justify its cost in a strictly indications-warning context, it may nevertheless provide a degree of routine search-surveillance capability which would make it worthwhile as an all-purpose rather than special-purpose system. This aspect will require considerable study beyond any undertaken to date.

Finally, it seems clear that the tasking, collection, processing, and intelligence production loop for a NRTPS will be quite different from that now in use with recoverable-film systems.