



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR



PROF 5

28

21 APR 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: Science Adviser to The President

SUBJECT : Near-Real-Time Photographic System Requirements

1. Thank you for passing along your understanding of what the primary users of the NRT system require.

2. As you noted, elements of the USIB have been re-evaluating these requirements very thoroughly. Those elements which have looked carefully into all aspects of its applications are unanimous as to the characteristics which such a system should have to be fully effective. While your outline coincides with these views in most respects, I cannot agree with your statements about timeliness and access. I feel that if we were to take your opinion on these points literally we would be running a serious risk of overlooking some of the major benefits of an NRT system.

3. The new and unique contributions of a near-real-time system will be to provide intelligence for strategic indications/warning, and for crisis situations where timeliness is critical. A system which can meet needs in the most demanding circumstances obviously can also perform effectively in those where immediate timeliness of response is beneficial but less critical. The opposite is not true. A system having only minimal capabilities may be found wanting at the very time it is most needed.

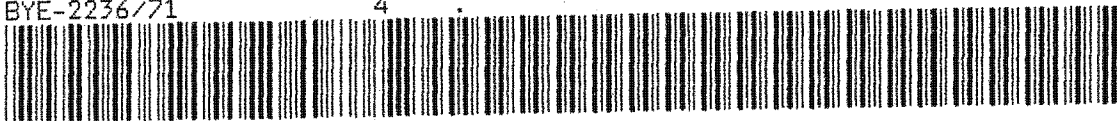
BYE-2236-71

Copy 4

5

BYE-2236/71

4



ONLY

104-21-002

4. With respect to your statements about return time of images, I doubt that a system having one or two accesses per day to a crisis region but a nominal return time for images of 24 hours is really what policy levels should choose, as you suggest. I recognize that it is only a hypothetical example but even in that case it is potentially misleading. I frankly think you would be hard pressed to find concrete examples of critical situations where such a combination is desirable or even adequate from among alternatives available. In crisis situations where it is truly important to see a target frequently it is also important to have that information quickly. It is important to note also that data return time is only one of the several time-consuming phases involved in the imagery taking, response, and use cycle. In this connection, it often takes a considerable amount of additional time to interpret imagery and merge this information with that from a variety of other sources before a full and confident assessment can be presented to the highest levels of Government for their consideration in formulating a course of action in a crisis.

5. With respect to resolution, there is total agreement as to what an MPT system must provide to be effective, that is, two to three feet. I share your view that because resolutions down to one foot or less are required only infrequently in crisis situations it should not be attained for that purpose alone at costs severely impacting other MPT system needs. It is important to recognize, however, that there are times when the higher resolution is needed and that there are many other repetitive applications, besides crises, for which such resolution is valuable.

6. With respect to the area requirement of an MPT system, every USIB statement and study over the years has acknowledged the need for area coverage in relation to crises.

BYE-2236-71

There has been a good deal of semantic confusion over the adjectives describing the size of the areas, that is, whether it should be called "limited", "substantial", etc. As you noted, there is agreement on the size of the area--4,000 square miles--needed; and all candidate NRT systems can provide this or more.



Richard Helms  
Director

Cy to  
Assistant to The President for  
National Security Affairs  
Deputy Secretary for Defense  
✓ Director, NRO