CORONA: Success for Space Reconnaissance;
A Look into the Cold War, and a Revolution for Intelligence

ABSTRACT

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This article was published as part of the CORONA Program's Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Commemoration, which was celebrated at the Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum on May 24, 1995. The celebration was cosponsored by the National Reconnaissance Office, the National Air and Space Museum, and the National Space Club. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the United States Air Force (USAF), and the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS) were cooperating organizations.

CORONA was America's first operational space reconnaissance project. Its first successful mission was on August 18, 1960, and it operated for almost twelve years during the Cold War. It was developed as a highly classified program under the joint management of the CIA and the USAF, a relationship that evolved into the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO).

This article offers an historical framework for CORONA's development, a discussion of the involved camera systems, a review of CORONA's contributions to US national security, and a survey of the potential use for declassified CORONA imagery in applications associated with environmental and other traditional civilian remote sensing tasks. Seven appendices to the article provide detailed tables with information about CORONA's missions and camera systems. The article includes fourteen figures that depict original CORONA images plus seven other figures that are photographs, diagrams, and charts. Nine of the figures that are CORONA images are included as part of this abstract:

Figure 3: An SA-2 Launch Site Near Chelyabinsk, USSR
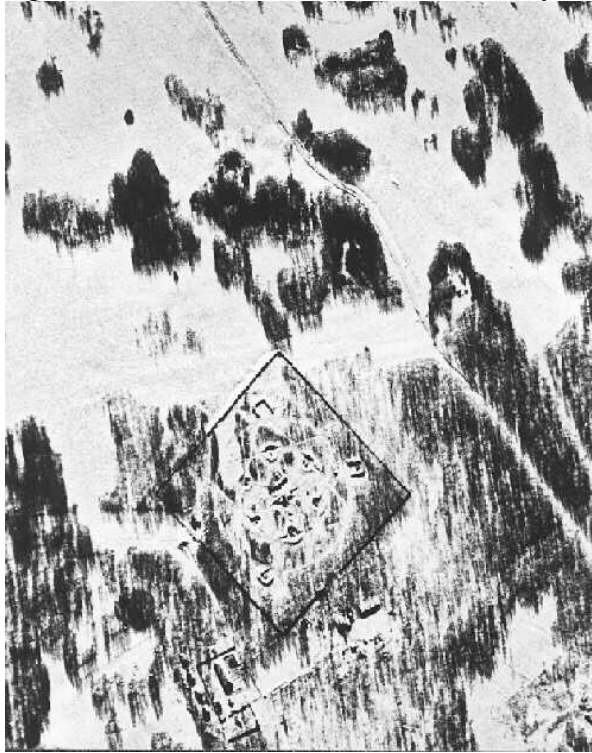

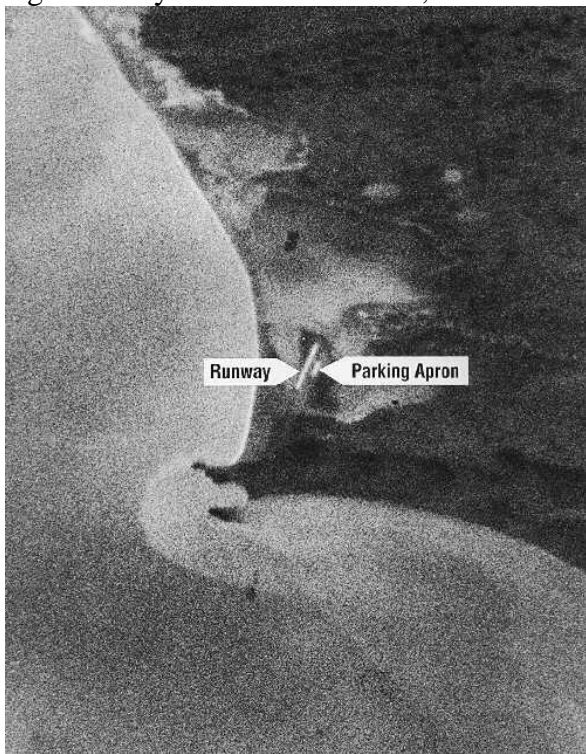Figure 4: Mys Shmidta Air Field, USSR

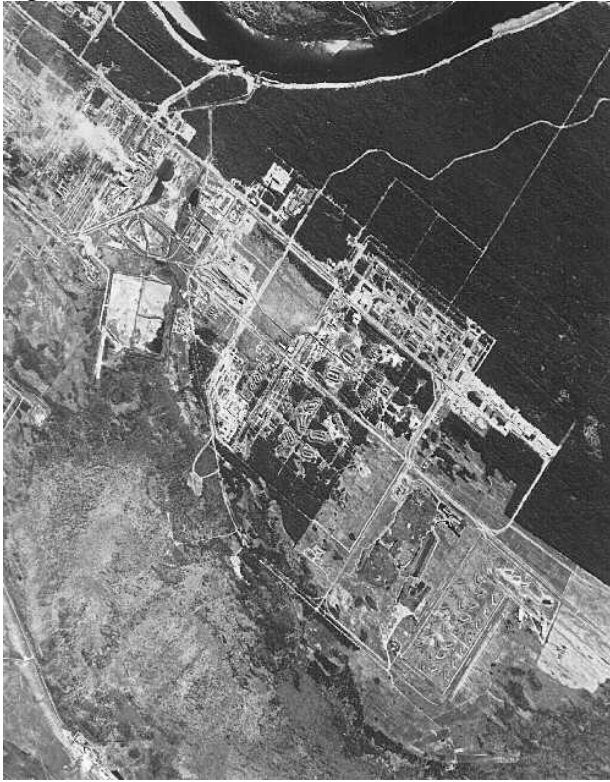Figure 5: Soviet Solid Rocket Motor Production Plant Near Biysk, USSR

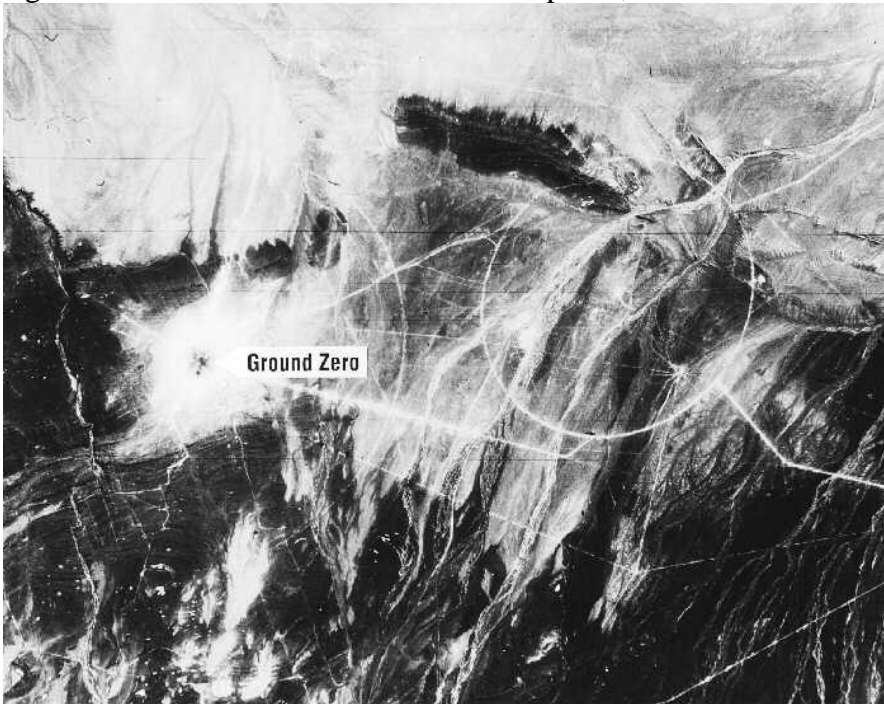Figure 12: Chinese Nuclear Test Site at Lop Nor, China

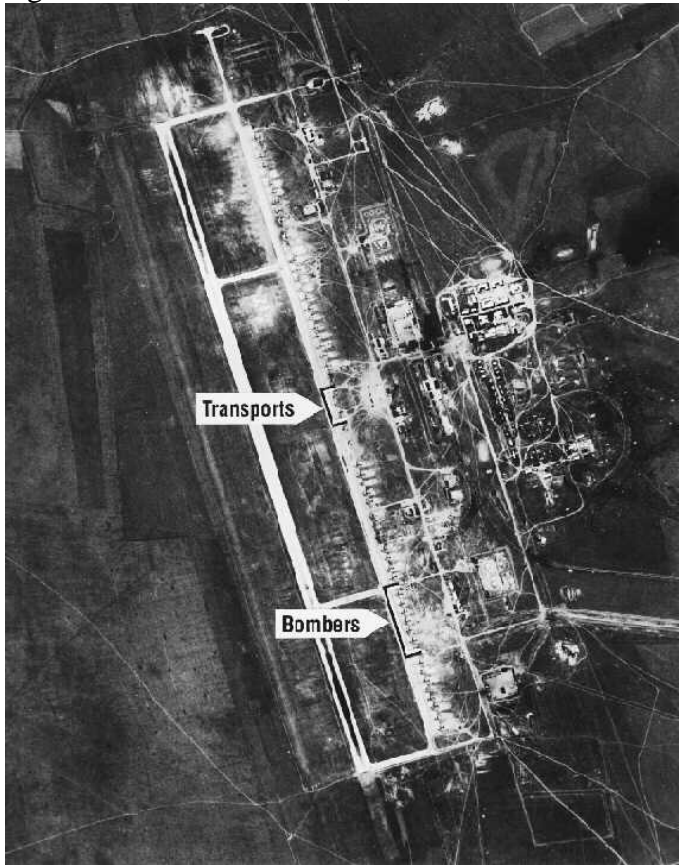Figure 19: The Pentagon, Washington, DC

Figure 20: Dolon Air Field, USSR

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