

~~TOP SECRET~~BYE-0457-65
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ON THE APPROPRIATE UTILIZATION
OF THE
OXCART RECONNAISSANCE CAPABILITY

McGeorge Bundy has raised the thoughtful question to which this memorandum is directed:

"Granted that OXCART now represents an operationally ready reconnaissance with unique capabilities, under what circumstances and in what areas should we commit this new resource?"

The OXCART was conceived as a successor to the U-2 for conducting overflights of the Soviet Union. With its evolving defensive electronic capability, it is now able to perform this task. However, with current satellite reconnaissance of the Soviet Union, it is not necessary to consider running the risk of such a provocation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The OXCART could provide a limited replacement for present satellite photography. It could not duplicate the general search coverage of CORONA, but could give high resolution coverage of known targets, such as is now provided in part by [REDACTED]. It is as a hedge against this contingency that the OXCART might be held, rather than committing it to more immediate intelligence collection requirements discussed below.

If the OXCART is not to be held in reserve for Soviet overflights, it is urgently needed in the [REDACTED] Southeast Asia arena. This assertion may seem surprising in view of the variety and number of photographic reconnaissance systems now being applied to this area. Photography is a vital intelligence ingredient; both for

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HANDLE VIA
BYEMAN-TALENT-KEYHOLE-COMINT
CONTROL SYSTEMS JOINTLY

following the tactical situation in North Vietnam/
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

2. The U-2 coverage of both North Vietnam [REDACTED] is constrained to avoid SA-2 defenses. This is a particularly serious limitation for NVN. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

targeted against the U-2 and poses a growing problem. On the other hand, [REDACTED] U-2 operations are responsive to rapidly changing weather limitations, are able to generate many missions*, and lend themselves to prompt photographic exploitation. They are the principal resource at present, but have serious and increasing limitations on their area of operations.

3. The drone program is the last major element of our capability, and is important because its use
[REDACTED]

can be attempted over heavily defended areas. Sixty drone missions have been launched thus far in 1965 in Southeast Asia with 25 losses: 11 to enemy action and 14 to system malfunction. Although its vulnerability to enemy action is increasing, it still represents an important adjunct to the present U-2 capability.

Against this varied background of collection capabilities, one must examine the present needs for intelligence information and the likely trend of those requirements and their urgency.

We judge that our first need is for substantially improved reconnaissance in the area of NVN north of the Red River [redacted] We must be able to cover this area promptly in response to need and weather, and to exploit the product quickly. We need resolution significantly better than the present Drone/SAC U-2/satellite capability [redacted]

[redacted] establish occupancy of SA-2 sites and support areas. For example, 51 SA-2 sites have now been identified in NVN but we tentatively estimate that only about a dozen can be equipped. [redacted]

[redacted] We should like to be able to cover the entire area with one reconnaissance system in as few missions as possible, without reference to defended areas or national borders. It may be necessary to repeat this coverage as often as the weather will allow. OXCART based at Kadena can meet all these requirements in early 1966. The relevant area of NVN [redacted] can be covered by two or three OXCART missions in good weather, and provide one foot resolution of all the important targets to one national processing center.

[REDACTED]

however, if this reliance is to continue for some years, it is important to have the highest resolution possible so that the lines of projection can be laid through sharp points rather than smudged circles. We have gone to some labor to examine the specific improvement in our analysis and their projections by going from the present resolution levels [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We have the option of achieving this very high resolution coverage over our target of greatest uncertainty now at no additional cost. Furthermore, periodic very high resolution photography [REDACTED] targets can be exploited to enhance the value of satellite photography with lower resolution and probably reduce the number of OXCART flights which must actually be made.