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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence 24 January 1957

SUBJECT : Status of Project AQUATONE

1. We do not seem to be making much progress with AQUATONE. I have just reviewed the record and find that we made a firm and formal request for facilities in the Far East on last October 25th, at a meeting attended by yourself, General Cabell, Admiral Radford and General Twining. Immediately thereafter we dispatched a survey group to the Far East, to whom it was made clear that facilities could be provided if there were a desire to do so and who received encouragement from General Lemnitzer. On 13 November you addressed to General Twining a written review of the problem and formal request for facilities [redacted] On 15 November this matter (among others) was reviewed with the President who acquiesced in our deployment to the Far East and implied that AQUATONE, having the superior capability, should have a priority over Black Knight. On 5 December, having still had no reply from the Air Force, this matter was further discussed by you and General Cabell with Generals Twining and Everest and it was agreed that we would approach Admiral Burke with a request for facilities at Atsugi. This approach was made on 6 December and Admiral Burke indicated that facilities could and would be provided at Atsugi unless the Air Force objected to this arrangement and it was felt desirable to secure the approval of the JCS. On 12 December you dispatched a further memorandum to General Twining with a copy to Admiral Burke restating our request for facilities at Atsugi.

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2. About 18 December Black Knight conducted an overflight which was protested by the Russians. This incident is said to have given rise to new doubts in the minds of Admiral Radford and General Twining about security at bases in Japan and we have been told that the matter of the deployment of Detachment C to the Far East would have to be discussed with the JCS. It is now the 24th of January and it has not yet proved possible even to set a date for such a discussion, much less to obtain any assurance that a favorable decision, or indeed any decision, will be reached if and when

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such a meeting is held. Since there is an important Air Force Commanders' meeting at Maxwell Air Force Base beginning on 26 January, the meeting probably cannot be held for at least another week. All in all, this is one of the worst cases of bureaucratic foot-dragging and executive indecision I have witnessed in some 13 years of Government service.

3. While this long drawn out interchange has been going forward on what should be the relatively minor and easy issue of deployment, the prospects for a favorable decision on the major issue of authority to perform overflights seem to have deteriorated. You report that the attitude toward overflights both in the White House and the State Department is very different than what it was a year or even six months ago. The President's Inaugural address reaffirms a policy of peace at almost any price and those in authority seem to regard an overflight as a dangerously provocative act, a distinctly more alarmist view than that expressed in the special National Estimate on the probable Soviet reaction to overflights. At a minimum it must now be anticipated that any detected overflight will provoke a diplomatic protest, partly as a consequence of decisions on our part that have rendered preceding Soviet protests highly effective as a means of halting this activity.

4. Along with the discouraging developments reviewed above, you should be aware that the attitude of the Air Force toward this Project has undergone a marked change since mid-autumn from one of full and open support and partnership toward one of increasing jurisdictional jealousy. The most important manifestation of the change has been the long continued effort to prevent AQUATONE from "competing" with Black Knight in the Far East.

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Still another was the time-consuming and contra-productive insistence that any processing of AQUATONE film in the field should be done by units under Air Force command rather than by personnel attached to the AQUATONE field Detachments. Finally, I am convinced that much of the pressure behind the SAC follow-on program involving the U-2 aircraft has as its purpose not the creation of a much needed hot war reconnaissance capability but the readying of Air Force units having the same capability as AQUATONE so as to undermine any argument for the retention of this capability by the CIA. This whole attitude of increasing competitiveness, suspicion and unconcealed eagerness (in some quarters) to have AQUATONE terminated is not only unpleasant in itself but is beginning to interfere with our activities and with necessary security arrangements.

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5. Rightly or wrongly, these circumstances--the inability to obtain any decision in the Far East, the growing fear that overflights will never be resumed and the increasingly evident Air Force disfavor--are having a major effect on the morale of the personnel assigned to this Project. The fact that a definitive meeting on the Far East problem, which has been looked for each week since before Christmas, has not yet been scheduled is taken as evidence that this Project no longer has a high priority claim on the time and attention of senior officials. The failure to use the capability for so many months after the Russians were alerted to its existence is deeply discouraging to everyone but especially to the pilots who know well that the Russians are working hard to develop the means of interception. The increasing Air Force disfavor is particularly hard, of course, on Air Force personnel assigned to the Project. There are several senior officers who already feel that their Air Force careers have been prejudiced by their loyalty to this Project which has aroused the criticism of Generals Lewis and Everest (and quite possibly of General LeMay). I must remind you that for many of the personnel concerned, their assignment to this Project has involved real discomforts and disabilities, including separation from their parent organizations (unwelcome even to many Agency employees who have been pulled out of their regular offices where they must make their careers), a long period of duty overseas or at locations remote from recreational facilities, and long separations from their families. By and large they were freely accepted in the belief that this is an urgent and enormously important enterprise, and that hardships will be put up with cheerfully as long as this belief is maintained. But when these circumstances are compounded by long inactivity, the loss of a sense of urgency, and the beginning of organizational jealousies, the effect on morale can be extremely serious. It is all very well to argue that in our business people must cultivate patience and accustom themselves to uncertainty but it is difficult to make this demand of people if they feel that delay and uncertainty are the products of indecision rather than of unavoidable circumstance.

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6. This review of the situation is a plea that you make a major effort to get the main policy decisions concerning this Project just as soon as possible. My specific recommendations to this end are presented in the following paragraph. Before making them I want to call your attention to a broader issue, on which I believe General Cabell will disagree with me. I believe it has been and is his opinion that our job is to maintain and further to develop the AQUA-TONE capability (at least for another year) as long as there was or is any chance that it will be used and that we should in effect continue to make it easy

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for the President to postpone any affirmative decision as well as to postpone a definitive negative decision which would permit us to liquidate the enterprise. Perhaps this was wise last summer and autumn (especially in view of Rainbow) but I feel very strongly that the next time you approach the President you should do everything in your power to get a definitive decision and not merely a postponement. Quite aside from the considerations reviewed in this paper, I believe it to be a fact that our technological lead has only a few more months of life and I believe you will be misrepresenting the nature of the choice that is open to the President if this fact is not made crystal clear. Moreover, he should be told that ground-to-air missiles will probably increase their defensive capability faster than aircraft can be improved in altitude and range and that our present technological advantage in reconnaissance may be the last chance we will have to obtain good photography. If as I urge, you press for a decision either to overfly or to liquidate, you may well be told to liquidate. I am convinced that at this late date that would be better than hanging on for another six months under steadily more difficult circumstances with no reason to believe any change will be made.

7. In the light of this review my recommendations are as follows:

First, I urge that you give a high priority to settling the question of our deployment to the Far East. I do so in full realization of the fact that this has now reached a point where nobody but you can obtain a decision and that to do so will require more of your attention, energy and time than you have been able to devote to this matter in recent weeks.

Second, if this issue can be promptly resolved in our favor I believe our next approach to the President should be made when the results of definitive tests of Rainbow are in hand. If that program proceeds as we hope, these tests should be conducted soon after the middle of February and the approach to the President should be possible around the 20th. I believe an earlier approach is undesirable because you should be in a position to report definitively on this new development when you ask for a final decision on the future of this Project.

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Third, in the event that no decision can be obtained to deploy Detachment C, I believe an approach should be made to the President within the next three weeks at which time the whole problem should be laid before him. I am convinced that further obstruction to our deployment will be evidence, in part, of the Air Force's jealousy I referred to above and in part of general discouragement in all of the Services concerning the possibility of overflight activities during the next year. This is a state of mind I think we cannot live with. If, therefore, we find evidence of this state of mind I do not believe we can afford to wait for another six weeks before obtaining clarification of our position. Although it would be better if the Rainbow program could be further advanced when we seek a decision, I believe that by, say, 10 February we will know pretty well what is going to come out of it so this development can be taken into account.

RICHARD M. BISSELL, JR.
Project Director

cc: Deputy Director