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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

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WASHINGTON

September 25, 1969

BA
to OSA

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. John Mitchell
Mr. David Packard
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson
Mr. Richard Helms

SUBJECT: Air Reconnaissance of South China

Following the discussions on drone reconnaissance over South China in the 303 Committee on September 23, 1969, Dr. Kissinger asked that I prepare a memorandum for the President setting forth the respective views of the Committee members.

Dr. Kissinger also asked that I afford each of the members an opportunity to see the memorandum before it goes forward in order to be sure each member's view is fairly presented.

I attach a copy of the proposed memorandum to the President and ask that you give me your concurrence, comments or suggestions for changes at your early convenience.

Frank M. Chapin
Frank M. Chapin

Attachment
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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

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WASHINGTON

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Air Reconnaissance of South China

On March 22, 1969, you approved resumption of aerial reconnaissance over South China which had been suspended since March 27, 1968. This authority was limited to overflights by the 147 H/T drone and all missions were subject to prior approval by the 303 Committee on a monthly basis.

Since that time, for a variety of reasons, including the altered situation following the EC-121 shootdown off of North Korea, your trip to Southeast Asia and the easing of trade and travel restrictions with Communist China, no drone missions have actually been flown over South China.

The question of authorizing four 147 H/T drone overflights of South China during October has been the subject of considerable deliberation in recent meetings of the 303 Committee.

No drone penetrations deeper than 200 miles across the Chinese Communist border are proposed. The risk of a shootdown of the new improved version of the 147 H/T drone is considered slight, but the Chinese will clearly know their territory is being overflowed for the first time in 18 months.

The Department of Defense strongly desires these four drone overflights to obtain priority tactical intelligence on military units, installations, logistics lines and equipment in the areas of South China bordering North Vietnam, Laos and Burma. While some intelligence has been obtained from satellite reconnaissance, Defense considers that its basic tactical intelligence holdings on Chinese Communist activities in the border areas are seriously depleted and urgently need updating.

CIA agrees with and supports the Department of Defense requirement for updated priority tactical intelligence but notes that drone overflights of South China will not add substantially to outstanding strategic intelligence requirements in that area.

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The Department of State opposes resumption of the drone overflights at this time for the following reasons:

- a. It is not persuaded that the intelligence requirements and prospects of successful collection override the political considerations.
- b. The normal heavy cloud cover in the area which precludes obtaining much successful satellite photography also mitigates against productive photographic drone missions even though the drones are much more flexible in their scheduling.
- c. Politically, the Administration has repeatedly publicly expressed its desire for more friendly relationships with Communist China and has taken steps to ease trade and travel restrictions. Resumption of overflights after an 18 month stand-down and following the expressions of desire for better relations might be interpreted by the Chinese as a sudden harsh reversal in the U.S. attitude toward them.

The Attorney General and I support the Department of Defense and CIA view that drone overflights of South China should be resumed in order to collect priority tactical intelligence. The United States has continued to fly U-2 and other peripheral intelligence collection flights along Communist China's coastal areas during the drone stand-down period. We believe the Chinese will recognize that the drone overflights are an extension of this activity designed to collect tactical intelligence on their activities related to Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Burma. We do not believe the Chinese would be seriously concerned about tactical collection in these border areas, as they surely would be in the case of overflights of their strategic installations in other areas.

The Committee is in agreement that the 147 H/T drone is a valuable vehicle for obtaining the type of military tactical intelligence desired. Manned U-2 or SR-71 overflights would be considerably more provocative than drones. Satellite reconnaissance has failed to fill the need.

Hence, the options resolve into two:

- a. Authorize resumption of drone overflights of South China for tactical intelligence collection purposes; specifically, four overflights in October 1969.

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- b. Deny authorization for drone overflights and forego tactical intelligence collection except for that which can be obtained by satellite reconnaissance.

APPROVE: Option a. _____

Option b. _____