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5 March 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT : [redacted] Capabilities to Process and Exploit Middle East Photography

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1. The following information about the status of [redacted] emerged at today's COMIREX meeting:

[redacted]

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a. DNRO has not yet formally authorized activation and certification of [redacted] primarily because it would entail about [redacted] special commo facilities. A tie-in, on a non-dedicated basis, to USAF commo a number of miles away is being explored as a less expensive alternative. Until a decision is made USAF is marking time on major equipment programs or changes.

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b. Improved film processing equipment is required to provide optimum quality consistent with that available in U.S. processing facilities. Such equipment has been procured but not yet installed.

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[redacted]

c. I was told that SR-71 operations cannot be handled [redacted] without the improved communications facilities. I understand this is in part related to navigation-type data peculiar to SR-71 operations.

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d. As of this moment, the only airborne capability which could be handled in the field would be U-2R materials.

2. The USAF member indicated that, if special Middle East collection were initiated, he would anticipate immediate parallel decisions to augment the field's processing capabilities by means of NRO fly-away equipment on standby

3. The field has been queried by the USAF regarding availability of target information and other data which would be necessary for immediate exploitation purposes if readout were performed at [redacted] now receives all NPIC data generated on Middle East targets and maintains an up-to-date data base. I was told that there are PI's who are familiar with these targets and that the 497th regularly reviews and updates target files and contingency plan data related to the Middle East. Because of the indeterminate status of the [redacted] we have not yet firmed up plans for COMIREX/NPIC-related personnel to visit and review. USAF has indicated, however, that it will be feasible.

4. The [redacted] question appears to boil down to one of whether the likelihood of needing to utilize [redacted] for processing and exploitation of nationally tasked reconnaissance over the Middle East is sufficiently urgent to warrant the decision to proceed immediately with modifications which could cost the NRO as much [redacted] and require in any case some months to complete. In the interim the field facility would be able to handle U-2R film on a somewhat ad hoc basis and could be augmented by special processing equipment.

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[Redacted]

5. If the purpose behind special collection were primarily to obtain information on non-time-sensitive developments in the Middle East, I would, at this time, recommend that processing and exploitation be performed in the U.S. [Redacted] NPIC, even though initial readout would be at least six to 12 hours later than would be possible through [Redacted] means. Delays could be greater if flying weather was particularly unfavorable. The time delay between photography and readout would be balanced somewhat by the improved control which could be exercised over the entire film processing and exploitation cycle.

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