

S E C R E T

USIB-D-41.14/13  
(COMOR-D-24/48)  
21 February 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT: Requirements for Low-level Reconnaissance of Cuba

1. The minute of the meeting of the Special Group on 15 February 1963 requested a comprehensive study of low-level reconnaissance of Cuba. The minute stated that "such a study would include consideration of the strategic significance of proposed targets." COMOR has reviewed its previous recommendations for low-level photography and sets forth below its present thinking pursuant to the above injunction.

2. Of major concern to the United States Government is the introduction into Cuba of offensive weapons (MRBMs or IRBMs and bombers) or the release from concealment of any such equipment which may not have been removed from Cuba and which might be deployed to already prepared basic installations. There is therefore a continuing requirement to investigate suspect and unexplained military activities which might be associated with offensive weapons systems and nuclear energy activities.

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3. Two categories of targets which might give us information concerning the presence or introduction of offensive weapons in Cuba are ships suspect of carrying military equipment and personnel, and a number of unidentified installations, which include underground or unusual facilities.

a. Ships: We consider the monitoring of large-hatch ships (suspect of carrying offensive weapons) and other ships designated of "special interest" (e.g., troop carriers) entering Cuba to be of major importance.

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these ships are in port they should be covered during the day-time by low-level photography to supplement high-level coverage. In addition and based on recent experience, COMOR is convinced that suspicious military equipment will be unloaded at night and, therefore, believes that nighttime photography will likewise be required.

b. Unidentified Installations: A number of unidentified installations, the majority of which include underground facilities,

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have been isolated by high-level coverage. These installations (listed at Tab A) are strongly suspect as being established for weapons storage of some sort. With high-level coverage and with some low-level coverage in the past we have not been able to explain the enigma which these facilities present. However, we do know that in many cases an appraisal of the photography over a period of time shows the growth and expansion of such facilities. We consider their existence and continued development as sinister. We also believe that low-level photography can contribute to explaining the uses for which these facilities are intended. We again recognize that in due course, depending upon the nature of our findings, nighttime or other types of photography (such as camouflage detection) may be required and justifiable.

4. In addition to surveillance of any offensive threat, the number of Soviet personnel and the amount of ground forces equipment presently located in Cuba is a cause of major concern. Order of battle for ground forces, including the presence of such modern weapons as the FROG, cannot be fully established from high-level photography or apparently from collateral sources. Low-level photography if carried out comprehensively and simultaneously might enable us to make a more

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valid appraisal of the extent of Soviet deployment including indications of the introduction or pullout of personnel and equipment or turnover of equipment to the Cubans.

5. Surface-to-air missiles are not an offensive threat although the nature of their deployment may indicate they are intended for the protection of offensive installations. Originally this was the case for some of the SAMs in Cuba but such redeployment as has been accomplished since the departure of the IRBM-MRBMs for the most part suggests strategic defense of the territory of Cuba. At the moment we do not nominate SAMs as low-level targets although this may change.

6. Cruise-missile sites have been covered regularly through high-level reconnaissance and no ominous force level changes have been revealed. As for the crates which have been associated with cruise missiles, a comprehensive and simultaneous low-level coverage of all crate sites, periodically repeated, would be needed to be more conclusive on this question. It is our opinion that, at this time, the cruise-missile activity is only a defense against invasion and is not significant in terms of an offensive threat against the continental United States. This may change in which case targets in this category may be recommended.

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7. If cruise-missile sites are deployed so as to pose a threat to Guantanamo, the Board may wish to include this within the concept of an offensive threat against the United States. In that case cruise-missile sites in the vicinity of Guantanamo might be justified for low-level reconnaissance.

8. Recommendations:

a. That high-level photography of activities related to impending movement of Soviet personnel and equipment be supplemented by low-level photography and, where particularly required, photography at night. This coverage should include the ships in port identified as suspect and the associated encampments listed in Tab B. There is an immediate need to cover 4 passenger and 4 cargo ships.

b. That high-level photography be supplemented by low-level photography of the unidentified installations listed in Tab A in the order of priority indicated as soon as practicable.

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