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8 August 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR ; Director of Central Intelligence *

SUBJECT : Decision on Project AQUATONE

1. Present Status: Reflecting the discussions and decisions of the past three weeks since AQUATONE operations were halted on 11 July, the following is the present status of the Project.

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a. Detachment A is at Wiesbaden in complete state of readiness with four aircraft operational. It has been advised that no missions will be flown over denied areas until after 15 August at the earliest but in the meanwhile infrequent weather missions and certain test missions are being flown over friendly territory. Work is still proceeding on a permanent base, originally intended for this unit, at [redacted]

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b. Detachment B has completed training and its deployment to Adana from [redacted] will start on 13 August. It should be fully operational with four aircraft at Adana by 25 August.

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c. An advance party is surveying available facilities at [redacted]. Plans are being completed and airlift scheduled for the redeployment of Detachment A from Wiesbaden to the Far East beginning about 21 August. (The same airlift will be used for the initial deployment of Detachment B and the redeployment of A.) It is understood that the final decision to leave Detachment A in Germany or redeploy it to the Far East will not be made until about 15 August and it will remain in a state of operational readiness until that date. If redeployed this Detachment should be operational in the Far East about 15 September.

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d. The assembly, equipping and training of a third detachment (Detachment C) is going forward on schedule at [redacted]. Most of its senior personnel have already entered on duty and eight pilots have been recruited. The Detachment should be ready for deployment in the first half of November.

e. As a result of slippage in the development of the most advanced cameras and much of the electronics equipment, considerable

(* The Bissell version with changes suggested by General Cabell.)

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development remains to be done. The C camera cannot be expected to be operational much before the end of the year and electronics system #4 will not be operational until late winter. On the basis of present plans these development programs and some training activities will continue at [redacted] until 1 February. Thereafter [plans are being made for] [redacted] will [to] be shut down and the remaining development activities will be handled at an Air Force base/ [subject to decision subsequent to 25 August.]

2. Decisions Required: By 15 August it will be necessary to decide:

a. Whether Detachment A is to resume operations in Europe, be redeployed promptly to the Far East, or remain inactive at Wiesbaden awaiting a later resumption of operations or redeployment.

b. Whether Detachment B is to start active operations from Adana when it is operational, fly "probing" missions or remain inactive there [other than for flying its cover missions,] awaiting later decisions.

Immediately after 15 August it would seem desirable to review procurement and development programs in the light of the above decisions with a view to [determining whether or not to] curtailing development and procurement [which might be] no longer required for this Project. At the same time it would likewise seem wise to review the requirement for a third detachment.

3. Considerations Bearing on these Decisions: What are here listed as considerations bearing on the problem are believed to be reasonably clearly established and objectively stated circumstances which in no way determine the major policy decisions but which do have clear implications for the form and timing of these decisions.

a. If [it is determined that there is no reasonable prospect that] Detachment A is not going to be used in Europe either at Wiesbaden or along with Detachment B at Adana, it ought to be put to work as soon as possible in the Far East [after that determination is made]. If a decision is not made by 15 August either to let it resume operations or to redeploy it, the opportunity for a prompt redeployment would be lost and more time would be wasted to no good purpose.



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b. The organization which has been built up to carry out AQUATONE has been designed to conduct operations for a period of slightly more than a year. It is not a permanent organization and is ill-adapted to the task of maintaining in a routine manner a standby capability to be used in the event of war or of unforeseeable sharp change in the political climate. Its personnel, both civilian and military, have been recruited for short tours of duty, assigned overseas on a TDY basis without their families, and every effort has been made to develop the motivation for an intensive temporary undertaking. If the decision is made that a part or all of the capability that has been developed is to be placed on a standby basis, with no prospect of active use at any foreseeable time, we would have serious problems in keeping the present organization would lose from losing its morale, many of its best people, and its effectiveness.

c. Development and procurement are currently going forward on a scale adequate to support three detachments on a fully active basis for a continuous period of 15 months. Savings of some millions of dollars (part of which would accrue to the Agency and part to the Air Force) could be achieved by prompt cutbacks in these programs. Such cutbacks would, however, prevent the development of the full capability originally planned. Under the circumstances, failure to achieve any clear-cut decision as to the scale on which and the time period for which this capability will be actively employed is bound to might result in the waste of substantial sums as well as the wasteful tying up of technical manpower which may be needed in other national security programs.

d. It must be repeated that well-informed technical opinion allows the existing reconnaissance system less than a year before the probability of interception of the U-2 aircraft starts to increase. It would of course be longer before there could be generally effective deployment of advanced interceptors.

4. Conclusions: All of the above considerations argue powerfully in favor of an attempt to secure reasonably clear-cut decisions on the future of this Project by the middle of August. The most desirable decision is that authorizing a concerted effort against the top priority targets. Failing this, CIA and the Air Force should consider what the probabilities are of eventual favorable action. ~~The broad decision that needs to be made is whether this capability is going to be used-~~

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~~(a) against the USSR, (b) against China, (c) against the European Satellites, or (d) not at all. It /can be argued/ is difficult to believe that /no/ any facts not now available are required as the basis for such a decision or that the passage of a few more weeks would /not/ greatly alter an evaluation of risks to be incurred and benefits to be gained. In particular it is difficult to see what good can come of "probing" missions which will merely alert the defense and stimulate more political protests without accomplishing any really important purpose.~~

5. Proposed Procedure: In order to secure a decision it is believed that two kinds of staff work should be done:

a. First, a specific plan of operations should be proposed as the desired course of action ~~and the more sensible alternative courses of action should be defined in equally specific terms so that a clear choice is presented to the political authorities.~~ A specific proposal has been prepared in the form of a plan for some fifteen missions over the western USSR which would cover the highest priority intelligence targets. It is ~~believed that for practical purposes there are only two alternative courses of action:~~

~~(1) - Operations limited to China and the European Satellites.~~

~~(2) - The placing of the capability on a standby basis.~~

b. Second, the proposal should be staffed out with the interested military authorities (the Air Force and the JCS) and with the Department of State in the hope that it can be presented with their concurrence. To this end, a military assessment of AQUATONE is being prepared by the Air Force and it is believed that support will be forthcoming both from General Twining and from Admiral Radford on behalf of the Joint Chiefs. It had been hoped that the Secretary of State's views could be obtained well in advance of 15 August.

6. Recommendations: It is strongly recommended:

a. That the recommended plan of operations over the USSR from the west, ~~together with the two alternative courses of action,~~ be presented to the Secretary of State at the earliest opportunity and the plan be modified if necessary so as to obtain his concurrence or at least acquiescence.

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b. -- That in the event of his non-concurrence in any further operations, steps be taken forthwith to turn over all the assets of the Project to the Air Force to be maintained as a standby capability.

c. / b That in the event of his concurrence in a plan of operations, this be presented to higher authority as a joint recommendation of the DCI and the JCS with the concurrence of the Secretary of State.

RICHARD M. BISSELL, JR.
Project Director

cc: DDGI

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