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27 July 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR : Director of Special Activities

SUBJECT : Comments to W.R. Thomas III Memorandum
to the Director, BOB

1. That time of the year approaches when we must take up the cudgels and do battle with Mr. Thomas over whether the OXCART program shall continue or be smothered for lack of funds. Since it can be said safely that Mr. Thomas will most likely carry into the fray the same attitude towards the OXCART program that he had last year, it behooves us to be prepared for his attack this year. Assuming his attitude remains unchanged and not knowing what tack he will take this year, our best preparation is to closely examine his memorandum of 10 November 1965 for errors in fact and rationale. Thus armed we will be in a better position to meet his assault on the OXCART program's existence.

2. Since the Thomas memorandum is somewhat disjointedly organized, all comments will be arranged in the same sequence.

(Lines 1-6) In his opening paragraph Mr. Thomas states that the

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state his figure includes the YF-12A and its fire control and missile hardware; the TAGBOARD program with its expensive

modification costs for two mother ships and the purchase of 20 drones; and all the sensor procurement for the OXCART,

25X1D SR-71 and TAGBOARD programs.



(Lines 20-32) In comparing the flight capabilities of the SR-71 and the OXCART vehicle Mr. Thomas does not tell the whole story.

What the paper in question seems to avoid is the demonstrated fact that the A-12 is an operational, proven system in being. The statement that the SR-71 will suddenly achieve operational readiness in July 1966 was highly assumptive and, in fact, not achieved. As indicated by Mr. Thomas, the SR-71 in-flight test has yet to demonstrate performance which would tend to validate design specifications. The SR-71 is 20,000 pounds heavier than the A-12, which fact alone dictates the SR-71 will attain about 3,000 feet less than the A-12 at any given point in a profile of missions of the same range. Furthermore, the SR-71 project office itself holds to a December 1966 date for anything approaching full

operational readiness with a deployment capability.

According to the SR-71 model specification, the planned altitude for a maximum range of 3,800 n.m. using 60% afterburner is 74 - 85,000 feet. Range for a 100% afterburner maximum altitude profile of 80 - 91,000 feet is 3,048 n.m. According to Lockheed Aircraft Corporation Aerodynamic Report SP-237A, the planned A-12 altitude for a maximum range of 4,351 n.m. using 60% afterburner is 77,500 - 89,500 feet. Range for a 100% afterburner maximum altitude profile of 85,500 - 97,000 feet is 3,706 n.m. A maximum A-12 altitude of 90,000 feet with full afterburner has been demonstrated. An A-12 maximum unrefueled range of 2,800 n.m. at altitudes of 75,400 - 81,300 feet has been demonstrated. We feel that the figure of 90,000 feet in the Thomas paper for the SR-71 is grossly unfair and misleading, and that the 3,800 n.m. range for that aircraft is in the same category.

(Lines 34-52) No comment, other than an up-date of the figures.

Delivery date of last SR-71 should be noted, September 1967, thus limiting the full fleet SR-71 capability until early 1968.

(Lines 53-74) In treating Proposed Utilization it is apparent that Mr. Thomas is unaware of the fact that there is a prohibition against U.S. military aircraft violating the air space of any nation be it in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, or elsewhere

without a filed flight plan or the explicit approval of the President to so do, e.g., Cuba or North Vietnam and Laos. Except for Cuban and Vietnamese reconnaissance, the SR-71 is constrained to peripheral missions in peace time.

While not specifying the number of missions projected for the OXCART capability they would appear significantly fewer than those projected for the SR-71. Assuming that four SR-71 test aircraft will become operational aircraft (for a total then of 26 operational SR-71's) and holding six SR-71's on "hard alert for crises reconnaissance....," it would appear from Mr. Thomas' paper that 20 SR-71's would be capable of flying 134 missions in a 60 day period as opposed to 16 missions with an operational fleet of seven (not 10) OXCART vehicles. The OXCART projection is based on best professional judgment resulting from a great deal more flight experience than has been gathered in the SR-71 program. Thus, the projected ratio is somewhat out of balance with the SR-71 flying at a factor of 6.7 and the OXCART at a factor of 2.3. Obviously, the projections were pulled out of thin air. Moreover, no mention is made of the immediate availability of the OXCART as opposed to the severely limited SR-71 capability in being.

Mr. Thomas assigns, as one of three overflight missions to the SR-71, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and to the OXCART he assigns Southeast Asia as one mission. Except for

appear. To the reader, who would not examine closely the assigned missions, it would be ^{implicit} ~~implicit~~ that the SR-71 has reconnaissance responsibility for China. Unless there have been major policy reversals by the NSC, 303 Committee, or high authority, this responsibility resides on the covert
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(Lines 101 - 104) It is neither for Mr. Thomas or the writer to determine whether overflights are to be attributed to clandestine or military departments. That is a decision for the President to make in consultation with the highest councils in government. To measure the value of a covert reconnaissance asset in dollars is a difficult chore. Certainly the people of the United States would not quarrel with the cost of the U-2 program from conception through that day, 14 October 1962, when the


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Thus I cannot but disagree with Mr. Thomas when he writes that reductions in projected budget requirements "...would not affect the basic economics of the alternatives which are discussed below."

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(Lines 123-162) Alternative 1 - No comment to recommendation to procure more SR-71's since a decision has been made since the memorandum was written. No comment to the predicted attrition rate of the SR-71, except to mention that the first SR-71 loss has been experienced since Mr. Thomas wrote his memorandum. Mr. Thomas writes: "The only thing that will be lost is the A-12's (OXCART) claimed distinction of covert overflights."

As indicated in our discussion above, we do not believe this distinction is meaningful. It is certainly not worth the cost of maintaining the A-12 program." The initial assignment of responsibility for covert overflight of hostile territory to the CIA was a Presidential decision based on the strong recommendation of the so-called Land Committee which concluded that it was "dangerous for one of our military arms to engage directly in extensive overflight." The 1 May incident of 1960 and its aftermath provide no evidence which would indict the validity of that decision. On the contrary, the Soviets engaged in extravagant, but unsuccessful, efforts to link Powers with the military in order to strengthen their propaganda position. His documentation and identity with CIA, however, had been too well established for them to make even a superficially convincing case. It is our strong conviction that we would be doing a considerable disservice to the President ~~where~~ were we to permit the OXCART capability to be lost. As has been demonstrated over the last nine years, the flexibility of choice between committing a military asset or a non-military asset with non-military attribution has been most advantageous... It also should be pointed out that, when advised of OXCART's operational status and readiness to deploy to Kadena in late 1965, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, while feeling the time was not appropriate then for such a move, stated it was an ace we should keep up our sleeve.

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When Mr. Thomas speaks of disposing of the OXCART aircraft, he does not suggest the method of disposal. To mothball the OXCART fleet under this proposal would be a scandalous waste of an asset. He also suggests disposing of them at a time (September 1966) when there will not be a fully operationally ready capability to assume the OXCART role.

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A decision to close [REDACTED] is unwise for several reasons. It denies to TAGBOARD any semblance of covertness. Simply to state that as great a degree of security can be afforded to that program at [REDACTED] as is afforded the IDEALIST program at Edwards AFB is not the complete story. Undoubtedly, physical security could be maintained, but speculative conjecture on the part of base and off-base personnel could not be contained. The TAGBOARD, fully rigged, is an unusual configuration, to say the least, and its mission could be surmised easily. The same would obtain with the OXCART program by basing the A-12 fleet at an accessible airfield facility. At the present rate of expenditure, the

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[REDACTED]

is not a firm figure. It is a paper savings having no relation to actual dollar volume for the years covered.

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In summary it should be noted that the OXCART program is and will be the only integrated supersonic reconnaissance asset available to the United States Government through calendar 1966. To phase out the OXCART now or in 1967 would be to deny the President and indeed the United States a non-military (covert) overflight capability. The lack of intelligence information available only from high resolution overhead reconnaissance severely restricts policy and decision making ability of the Chief Executive.

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