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18 December 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: 303 Committee

SUBJECT: Recommendation for Retention of the CIA IDEALIST Program

1. The Agency U-2 program provides the U.S. a flexible overhead reconnaissance system with unique capabilities for high resolution (9 inch) photography, elint collection, and sensor airdrop. The system can react rapidly to world-wide crisis situations cheaply, effectively, and at little political risk to the U.S. Government, especially in cases wherein third country bases and aircrews are utilized.

2. The Agency has developed a specialized organization and methodology for effectively carrying out covert U-2 operations unattributable to U.S. Government sponsorship. Agreements for joint operations are now in effect with the (b)(1)1.5c United Kingdom. With the cooperation of the Navy they can also be launched and recovered from carriers anywhere on the high seas.

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This U-2 capability can be utilized on short notice with a reaction time of approximately fifty hours anywhere in the world. The current

improved version of the U-2 has (b)(1)1.5c

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The actual

mission survivability can be made even higher by programming the flight path to avoid SAM installations. Direct costs are approximately

(b)(1)1.5c per operational mission.

3. This program provides the U.S. Government with a low cost option for meeting future crisis situations in areas other than the more heavily defended areas of the Soviet Union. The vulnerability of satellites makes such an option especially desirable, particularly when it is recognized that neutralization of these vehicles would deny this country a high percentage of its strategic intelligence. During non-crisis periods this asset is being used to collect ChiCom intelligence as well as to bolster (b)(1)1.5c and US/UK political relationships. All responsible U.S. officials (b)(1)1.5c feel that removal of the U-2 detachment would have serious political repercussions and might adversely affect other important joint intelligence projects. The program assets (airplanes, major equipment and

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facilities) are now paid for. The Agency program as now envisioned is projected to cost approximately (b)(1)1.5c per year, including NRO and CIA funds.

4. Agency U-2R's have a mission altitude capability of (b)(1)1.5c feet and a maximum range of 5850 miles, at a speed of (b)(1)1.5c. The standard camera configuration provides for a swath width of 63 n.m. with 2300 n.m. of coverage in the flight direction. They have a full complement of electronic sigint sensors and defensive equipment capable of operating successfully against all threats outside of the Soviet Union. They are the only covert reconnaissance vehicles in the NRO inventory. SAC aircraft of similar type do not now have adequate sensors for all missions and lack the defensive equipment to operate in a hostile environment. The SAC U-2's do not afford this government the option of non-attributability.

5. It is the opinion of CIA that the availability of this flexible, quick reaction capability for covert reaction to world-wide crises more than justifies the cost of retention. It is recognized that broad U.S. policy considerations must govern U-2 operations and decisions, especially as far as overflights of China are concerned. And it is true that for the past few years we have been reluctant to allow overflights

even with covert manned aircraft. However, it is important to note that in times of crisis our attitude in this regard can change rapidly. It is for such contingencies that a covert capability like the U-2 would become very important to the President. If we terminate this program now, this option will be lost.

6. It is therefore recommended that Project IDEALIST be continued.

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