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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

5 November 1958

*OK'd at
top level
as revised*

MEMORANDUM FOR: Andrew J. Goodpaster
SUBJECT : Project CORONA



Herewith is the paper I promised you on certain problems affecting the security of CORONA and the handling of press inquiries. I am also enclosing a copy of a proposed initial press release which may be subject to further change but will give you an idea of what we plan to announce. The basic paper was seen by and is satisfactory to Mr. Quarles and Dr. Killian and has been cleared with ARPA and the Air Force.

R. M. Bissell, Jr.
RICHARD M. BISSELL, JR.

2 Attachments:
COR-0159
Proposed Initial Press Release

DECLASSIFIED
Authority MR 94-353#1
By BBM NLDDE Date 3/8/05

COR-0202
Copy No. 1

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5 November 1958

SECURITY OF PROJECT CORONA

1. In order to conceal the true purpose of CORONA, it is necessary not only to prevent disclosure of classified information but also to minimize revealing public speculation, especially in the trade press, about the extensive series of Thor launchings that will begin next month at Vandenberg Air Force Base. These activities can readily be observed from outside the Base by the public and will inevitably, in view of the current interest in space, attract wide attention. Accordingly, the desired concealment can be effected only by first developing and then giving appropriate circulation to a logical account of the nature and purpose of the series differing from the true purpose, that of aerial reconnaissance of the Soviet Union.

2. Though there has never been an official announcement concerning the Lockheed-developed 117L satellite reconnaissance system, a large amount of publicity has appeared in the daily press and trade publications over a period of many months which has revealed its development to the general public. These stories have been based on Congressional testimony, unofficial statements made in confidence or in public, and on unclassified technical discussion of the feasibility of such a system. Most of the stories have referred to the original SENTRY reconnaissance program scheduled for early 1960 rather than the 1959 CORONA (Thor) phase. They have never been denied for to have done so would merely have stimulated more uncontrolled and damaging discussion.

3. Although it would be impossible convincingly to deny that a satellite reconnaissance system is being developed for possible future use, it is believed that appropriate cover stories can explain the CORONA part of the program as a wholly separate activity directed to a number of legitimate scientific and technical purposes. These would be described as purposes which will contribute to the development of military technology but are not military in character. To further this plan several payloads are being developed that will actually be carried on certain flights in the Thor series so as to "live out" the cover story.

4. To give public circulation to the desired explanation it is deemed vital that at least a minimum amount of information be released and that normal announcements be made. To attempt to deny the press any information regarding the launchings will not only invite a penetration effort on the

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part of the opposition but create an air of mystery and encourage damaging speculation. At the same time it will be necessary to give consistent but much more complete technical explanations (which will be at least in part classified) to the considerable number of persons who do not need to know the true purpose of CORONA but are in a position to guess what it is unless they are provided with a convincing alternative explanation. These are mainly military and company personnel working at the launch site, in the recovery force, and in the companies and military organizations concerned with the series. (The cover stories are outlined in Attachment A.)

5. To accomplish the above, it is believed that a pre-series announcement should be made in the immediate future by ARPA describing the contemplated series in broad terms in accordance with the cover plan. It is also believed that each launching should have concomitant limited publicity.

Attachments:

A-Cover Plan Summary

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COVER PLAN SUMMARY



1. Objectives:

- a. ARPA participation must be logically explained.
- b. Any intelligence community interest or association in CORONA must be concealed.
- c. Any scheduled or contemplated military reconnaissance effort, photographic or otherwise, must be concealed.
- d. A logical explanation must be given for the required polar orbit, stabilized flight and recovery.
- e. Cover missions must satisfy professional curiosity by a logical sequence of technical effort and the production of a product having military application.
- f. A relationship must be maintained with the press.

2. Separation: The true nature and purpose of WS-117L has already been the subject of such extensive public discussion and the number of persons in various contractor companies and in the Military Services knowledgeable of this program is so large that it is believed to be wholly infeasible to deny that a satellite reconnaissance system is being developed. Accordingly, to secure acceptance of an explanation of the CORONA firings which denies any connection with reconnaissance or with other inherently military activities, it is proposed that the whole Thor-boosted series of flights be described as an activity entirely separate from the WS-117L program. The Thor (CORONA) series will be named "DISCOVERY" and its purpose will be explained as the development of a practical laboratory for the conduct of experiments leading to improved military systems. The Atlas series will continue to be known as SENTRY and no attempt will be made to conceal or deny the true nature of at least certain of the payloads to be carried. To explain the association of Lockheed, which is the prime contractor for the SENTRY system, with the DISCOVERY series, it will be stated accurately that, on the basis of a variety of technical and scheduling considerations, the basic vehicle chosen for the DISCOVERY series is a Thor first stage combined with a SENTRY second stage. It is believed that the public is now fully familiar with the practice of using hardware originally developed as missile components to put scientific payloads into space.

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3. Explanation of DISCOVERY: The major stated purpose of the DISCOVERY series will be the development of hardware ultimately useable for either military or peaceful scientific purposes. Specifically it will be said to involve the study of stabilization, orbit ejection, recovery techniques, vehicle separation as related to re-entry, and engine-fuel reliability. All of these investigations are necessary for the development of space vehicles and to advance the state of the art in pilotless space operation. Included in the explanation will be the statement that several of the DISCOVERY series are to carry biomedical payloads to test environmental conditions of the upper atmosphere. These flights will be reported as contributing to the joint NASA/ARPA Man-In-Space program.

4. Additional Explanations:

a. Patrick Air Force Base is crowded and new facilities will be available at the Pacific Missile Range so launchings will be conducted from the latter location. Range safety considerations make it impossible to launch in an easterly direction and take advantage of the speed of the earth's rotation. To launch in a westerly direction would be to accept too large a speed penalty. Accordingly, it is necessary to accept the 165° - 180° direction of launch which implies a polar orbit.

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b. The use of polar orbits will have the further advantage of permitting an exercise in the near future of the early warning net established to guard against enemy attack.

c. Later launchings will contain equipment to study solar power, infra-red early warning and terminal guidance control, and to conduct model testing of maneuverable space vehicles.

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PROPOSED INITIAL PRESS RELEASE:

The Department of Defense will launch its first satellite from the Pacific Missile Range late this year or early next year, it was announced today by Roy W. Johnson, Director of the Advanced Research Projects Agency. This satellite is part of a series of missile and vehicle launchings designated "DISCOVERY" which will be ^{performed} conducted under the direction of ARPA by the Ballistic Missile Division, ARDC, Department of Air Force.



The purpose of this series is to further the development of a number of systems and techniques which will be employed in the production and operation of space vehicles (~~for either peaceful or military purposes~~) Initial launchings will have as their primary objective the testing of the vehicle itself and of vehicle subsystems including propulsion and guidance. Later vehicles in the series will carry biomedical specimens and will obtain valuable data on environmental conditions useful to the NASA/ARPA joint Man-in-Space program. Recovery of the live animals carried aloft in these launchings will be attempted and they will therefore serve to develop the techniques involved in carrying out the recovery of a payload from an orbiting vehicle.

Much of the data expected to be derived from the "DISCOVERY" series, such as the results of the biomedical flights, will be of general scientific interest and will be unclassified. (~~Other results which will be highly significant for the development of later systems and techniques for space navigation, may be of potential [military] significance and as such will be classified.~~)

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The "DISCOVERY" vehicle was developed under contract with the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation for this project by ARPA directive issued early this year and will be placed in orbit by a Thor booster. The combination is believed capable of orbiting considerably heavier satellites than any previously launched by the United States. Initial versions of the "DISCOVERY" will orbit for short periods of time at relatively low altitudes.