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Lobbying for real-time-mappings: cartographic ideologies and surveillance technologies for counterinsurgency operations in the Third World during the 1960's

Today, satellites and drones -at least according to the popular imaginary – provide automated and real time "remote sensing" information (data and imagery) for military reconnaissance and surveillance. But in the mid-1960s, the transformation of military aerial photographs into readable maps, useful to ground forces in the area of operations, was the result of several labor-and-time- consuming processes, completed by different teams of specialists. The processes involved photo-recognition flights, in which specialized crews took aerial photographs of the area of operations. Then the photographic film reels had to return to land facilities to be developed, photo-interpreted, glossed and ultimately transposed into maps with diverse communication and coding systems. The process required many hours of work -or even days- by different teams of technicians and professionals, before the results could be even forwarded to the area of military operations, and actually used there by ground forces.

My presentation examines how in the mid-sixties, in the framework of the U.S. counterinsurgency operations in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America, defense contractors promoted the idea of producing real time - or "almost in real time" – military maps for counterinsurgency operations. The U.S. Department of Defense contractors were also marketing the conversion "of large, obsolete commercial aircrafts [...] relatively easy to maintain in primitive environments" -the tropics, actually-, into Airborne Photo-Reconnaissance Intelligence Platforms (APRIP.) Designed "for operation in areas of the world where sophisticated technology is in short supply, if it exists at all," the APRIP pledged to provide a "self- contained and independent of ancillary ground facilities" flying real time mapping platform for counterinsurgency. The APRIP promised, "in one package," aero-photography capacity, film processing, photo interpretation, preparation of positive transparent overlays printed to scale (1:25,000), and aerial delivery of "real time maps" and data to the final users -the counterinsurgency forces in the ground— "all in minutes." As its promoters highlighted, video tape recording and Light Level Television would additionally deliver "twilight and night-time surveillance" and data to ground stations "in near-real time frames."

Focusing on the APRIP project, my presentation explores the business of real-time-mapping for the counterinsurgency operations of the U.S. in the so called Third World in the mid-1960s. I analyze documents of the contractors lobbying the APRIP (see for example figure 1). In doing so I examine their promotion of new mapping technologies, products, and services, as well as the cartographic imaginaries and ideologies they developed to access more clients, users, and consumers for real-time counterinsurgency mappings.

Sebastián Díaz Angel holds a BA in Political Science, a BA in History and an MA in Geography. His PhD dissertation focuses on geographical engineering development programs in Latin America during the Cold War, combining his interest in the history of cartography, science and technology studies, environmental history and digital humanities. **Contact Information**: sd785@cornell.edu