

Information
ACTION

April 21, 1969

SECRET

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: PUEBLO

During the Friday press conference, in explaining the difference between PUEBLO and the EC-121 incident, you stated "...in the case of the PUEBLO, the North Koreans had warned and threatened the PUEBLO for a period of several weeks before they seized it." Because subsequent questions may be raised concerning the matter of these "warnings" I have summarized our previous position on this issue.

The PUEBLO sailed from Japan on January 11, 1968, arrived off the North Korean coast on January 12, and was seized on January 23. Immediately upon her capture, there was press speculation that there had been a "warning." Subsequent investigations did not confirm any specific warning, particularly against the PUEBLO. There had been a long history of North Korean charges against "U.S. imperialist aggressors and reckless provocations, "associated mainly with South Korean fishing boat and DMZ incidents.

When Dick Helms appeared before the committee on March 5, he refuted the allegation that we had been specifically warned about the PUEBLO operation. An extract of his statement follows:

"Shortly after the seizure of the PUEBLO, the allegations was made that the North Koreans had warned they would seize such reconnaissance ships, and that the warning had been disregarded.

- A. We immediately ordered the Foreign Broadcast Information Service to make a complete review of any North Korean statements which might be susceptible of such an interpretation, from the time of President Johnson's visit to South Korea in November 1966, until the time of the PUEBLO's seizure.

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- "B. During those 15 months, there were dozens of North Korean references to incursions into their waters, but the review showed only statements which applied broadly to South Korean naval and fishing boats.
- "1. A reference to 'reconnaissance' in January, 1967 for example, one year prior to the PUEBLO incident, concerned a South Korean patrol boat sunk two days earlier by a North Korean shore battery.
 - "2. In the two months preceding the start of the PUEBLO'S mission, all remarks were generalized referring to 'spy boats' or 'agent boats.'
 - "3. On January 11, 1968, as the PUEBLO reached North Korean waters, North Korea charged that 'U. S. imperialist aggressor troops early this morning again dispatched hundreds of fishing boats and spy boats into the coastal waters on our side.'
 - "4. Such references require further explanation. A correlation of North Korean propaganda with the actual events referred to shows that the communists routinely described incursions by South Korean ships -- whether fishermen, naval ships, or actual agent infiltrations -- as 'provocations by U. S. imperialism' or by 'the U. S. aggressor.'
 - "5. The repeated assertions that North Korea had issued a warning in regard to the PUEBLO mission, as far as we can determine, must have arisen from the January 11 broadcast which definitely referred to movement by a South Korean fishing fleet into waters north of the dividing line.
- "C. At this time, the North Koreans had not observed or identified the PUEBLO.

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"D. As a matter fact, the PUEBLO was not approached by communist ships until the evening of January 20, less than three days before the actual seizure, when a submarine chaser passed within about two miles without incident."

In view of the foregoing, you may wish, if subsequently asked, to refer to those warnings as generalized in nature.

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