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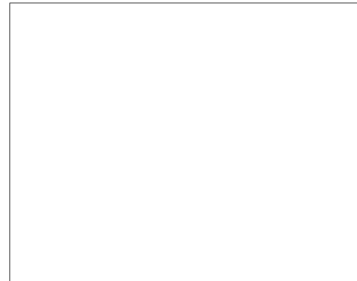
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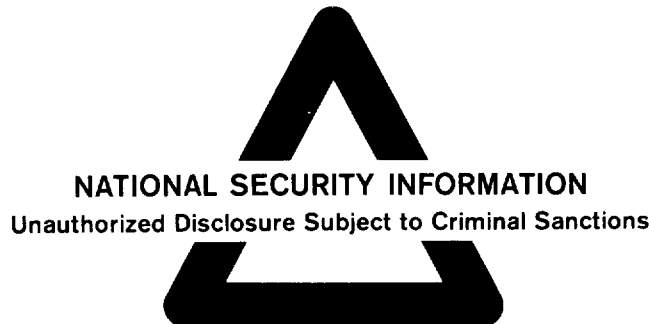
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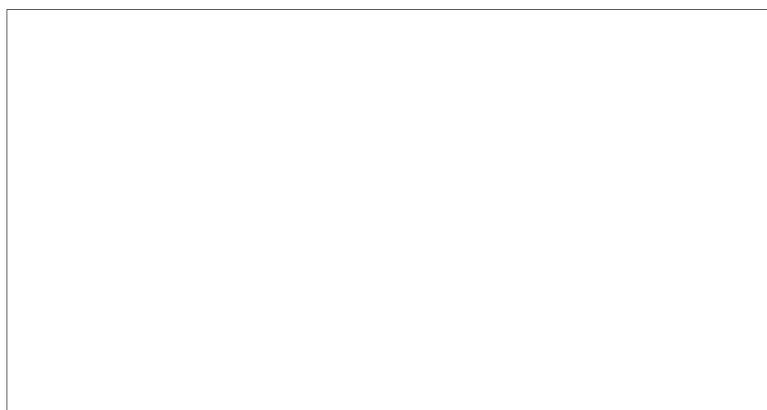
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NSF, NSC History, Pueblo Crisis, "Vol. 6, Part 10," Box 29, #22



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**Top Secret**



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# The Pueblo Incident

Briefing Materials  
for  
Ambassador Ball's Committee

**Top Secret**

5 February 1968



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NORTH KOREAN SEIZURE OF THE  
PUEBLO--PLAN OR OPPORTUNITY?Summary

The seizure of the USS Pueblo by units of the North Korean navy was almost certainly taken as a result of a decision at the highest levels of the North Korean government. The evidence does not permit a conclusive finding on when this decision was made--while the Pueblo was being investigated off Wonsan or some time prior to her first actual encounter with the North Korean ships. It seems likely, however, that the North Koreans had identified the ship and her mission at least a day in advance, if not sooner and had made some plans to deal with her. It is possible that the original intent was only to harass and drive off the Pueblo; the final decision to take the ship into Wonsan may have only been taken when it eventually appeared that US forces were not coming to assist the Pueblo.

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[REDACTED] the actions of the North Korean naval vessels indicate a deliberate course of action. Following a short period of initial uncertainty, the North Koreans acted boldly and did not hesitate to fire warning shots or to actually board the vessel. At some later points the North Koreans appeared somewhat uncertain how to proceed or exactly how their mission could best be performed, but in general they seemed sure of themselves and prepared to take whatever action was necessary to achieve their objective.

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2. It is less clear, however, how much--if any--preplanning was involved in the seizure. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we do not know how far in advance of the seizure they were actually aware of her presence. Further, we cannot determine from the material available when or at what echelon the decision to seize the Pueblo was made. It does seem that the North Koreans were fully ready to take such a decision and it is more likely than not that they were aware of the Pueblo's presence for at least 24 hours prior to the seizure.

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3. The North Koreans clearly have the capability to have detected the Pueblo when she reached her station off the coast on 12 January. They have five coastal radar stations on the east coast, backed up by a string of visual observation posts. The radar have normal ranges of 30-50 nm, covering the entire coast, and the North Koreans are very alert to intrusions. They could have easily detected the Pueblo-

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[REDACTED] but we do not know whether in fact they did track (b)(3)  
her during her voyage.

4. We also do not know whether, if detected, the Pueblo was identified. The North Koreans fly air training missions off the east coast and maintain naval patrols in the area. Either an aircraft or a naval vessel could have identified the Pueblo at any time during her voyage.\*

5. The first time, however, that the Pueblo knew she was under surveillance was on 21 January at 10:25 PM EST, about 24 hours before the seizure. Two fishing trawlers sighted the Pueblo and approached to within 30 yards. At this time the Pueblo was located east of Wonsan and was to sail southeast and then northwest again before being seized. (Early on the 20th a subchaser had passed the Pueblo in the dark, but had shown no obvious interest in her.) It is likely that the fishing boats reported the Pueblo's presence, at least as an unidentified, non-North Korean ship, and that the North Koreans were aware at this time that there was something worth investigating.

6. In the radio conversation among the naval units and the shore station involved in the seizure, the subchaser which ordered the Pueblo to heave to was quite concerned to pass her hull number to the other naval vessels involved and to identify her as a radar and electronics ship. The subchaser also asked several times for instructions, a decision, and "countermeasures."

[REDACTED] we do not know (b)(1)  
when or at what echelon a decision was made to seize the Pueblo. (b)(3)  
When the subchaser first encountered the Pueblo, she had acted decisively to halt her with threats, probably as a result of

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\*Of course, the North Koreans could have been tipped off to the Pueblo's presence and mission by the USSR. Whether the Soviets--with their greater experience and resources--knew the Pueblo was off North Korea is unknown, but we have no indication that the Soviets detected the Pueblo.

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orders. By an hour later, the subchaser was announcing a plan to take the Pueblo into harbor, indicating that a definite decision had been made.

7. It is likely that a decision to seize the Pueblo was taken at a very high level in the North Korean armed forces or government, although there is no direct evidence to support this supposition. The naval officers afloat and the controlling shore authority probably would not make such a decision on their own, especially since the Pueblo had not actually violated North Korean territorial waters at the time and no on-the-spot decision was called for.

8. From all the evidence currently available, it is possible that the North Koreans were unaware of the Pueblo's presence until the day before the seizure, when she was sighted by the fishing trawlers. The report which the trawlers probably made would have been enough to justify making plans to deal with the Pueblo and sending a naval vessel out on patrol, although it would not necessarily be enough to warrant giving precise instructions to the subchaser beyond, for example, ordering her to halt the Pueblo while she was identified and a final decision made.

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NORTH KOREAN PROPAGANDA ON  
ALLEGED US-ROK NAVAL "INTRUSIONS"

1. North Korean policy toward all vessels in nearby waters has been uniformly hostile. Ever since the Korean War Pyongyang's propaganda has used a variety of epithets to denounce these vessels' activities. In December 1964, for example, North Korean representatives at the Military Armistice Commission in Panmunjom accused the "US side" of engaging in "hostile" and "provocative" acts through the "dispatch . . . of its naval vessels on a big scale into the territorial waters of our side along the east coast."

2. The term "spy boats," which has stimulated considerable press speculation since the Pueblo's capture, is merely the latest variant and has been in use for over two months. Charges have recurred again and again in contexts that clearly indicate Pyongyang equates the "US side" and "US imperialists" with South Koreans. (For examples during the two weeks before seizure of the Pueblo see annex.)

3. Since both US and South Korean government ships traditionally make it a point to steer clear of North Korean waters, Pyongyang's main target has been privately owned South Korean fishing vessels which follow the fish northward during certain seasons and do not observe Pyongyang's unilateral seaward extension of the Military Demarcation Line. The South Korean government sometimes dispatches armed patrol-boat escorts to try to keep these vessels from straying into Pyongyang-claimed waters; one of these was sunk in January 1967. It is to the escorts that Pyongyang is clearly referring in its use of the term "spy boats."

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4. Pyongyang's actual treatment of captured fishing-vessel crews shows clearly that it does not consider them spies, although a few recent crews--to lend credibility to the "spy boats" charge--have been forced to "confess" to such activities before returning home. Most captured crews are taken on a "Cook's Tour" of North Korea, wined and dined, shown propaganda films, given new clothing, and sent back home.

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On 8 January Pyongyang radio charged that "the US imperialist aggressor troops, who had lately been engaged in ceaseless provocations on the east coast, infiltrated many armed boats mingled with fishing boats, under the escort of armed warships, into the coastal waters of our side off the east coast on 6 January and perpetrated provocative acts. . . . The provocations of the US imperialist aggressors are becoming ever more frequent and growing in scope as the days go by."

Minju Choson, the second-ranking newspaper, on 9 January also referred to the 6 January "infiltrating" of "many armed boats" and commented that "the US imperialist aggressors have all along been engaged in provocative, hostile acts and lately have gone so far as to unhesitatingly perpetrate the vicious criminal act of infiltrating into the coastal waters of our side boats carrying espionage and subversive elements, mingled with fishing boats of South Korea."

On 11 January Pyongyang radio accused "US imperialist aggressor troops of dispatching hundreds of fishing boats and spy boats into the coastal waters of our side."

At a Military Armistice Commission meeting on 20 January, commented on by the Pyongyang's International Service the same day, it was charged that "In the period from 23 December last year to 20 January this year, the US imperialist aggressors openly perpetrated the provocative act of infiltrating a total of over 5,400 South Korean fishing boats and armed spy boats on 24 occasions into the coastal waters of our side along the eastern coast." North Korean Maj. Gen. Pak Chung-kuk demanded that the "enemy side take immediate measures for stopping the hostile acts of infiltrating fishing boats including armed vessels and spy boats into the coastal waters of our side."

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North Korea's Military EstablishmentGeneral

1. North Korea's military forces total 373,000. These force levels have been maintained at levels up to 4 percent of the population despite North Korea's chronic manpower shortage. They are a major limiting factor on contingency mobilization plans and economic development plans. All North Korean military units are being maintained at full authorized strength levels, and there is no known capability for immediate expansion of these forces except by augmentation with personnel of the country's paramilitary forces, and mobilization of its limited reserves.

2. North Korea is dependent upon Soviet armament and equipment, although Communist China provides some limited aid, to maintain and increase its inventory of sophisticated weapons. North Korea over the years has developed the capability for production of Soviet small arms in limited types and quantities, and can now produce copies of Soviet individual and crew served weapons up to the 120-mm. mortar, as well as ammunition for these weapons and motor vehicles including tank parts. There are also indications that the North Koreans have begun native design and production of new types of naval patrol craft. Communications equipment factories in North Korea can fabricate the simpler electronics necessary for its modern weapons inventory.

The Army

3. The North Korean Army is an effective, modern, well-balanced, rigidly disciplined force of 345,000 men organized into 19 active infantry divisions, a tank division, and five infantry brigades which are considered division equivalents. They are armed with 430 tanks and 450 assault guns, and some 3,500 artillery pieces above 75-mm., including about 1,400 120-mm. and 160-mm. mortars considered as artillery by the North Koreans. Its current primary mission is defense of the Korean peninsula and

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the coastal areas from the DMZ northward to the borders of Communist China and the Soviet Far East. Its combat effectiveness is considered to be good.

4. During 1966 the army underwent a major re-organization, in which the corps headquarters concept was eliminated, and five army groups were created. The development of this force structure, which is similar to the Soviet Army group concept, permits personnel savings in the elimination of unnecessary headquarters units. It also gives greater flexibility of command since each army group is now capable of executing independent tactical missions.

5. The army has been re-equipping itself with more modern Soviet arms in recent years. Firepower has been increased in all army units but particularly in the infantry corps where antitank battalions have been added as organic units and separate rocket companies have been attached to the infantry regiment, thus improving its artillery capability. The addition of 85-mm. AA guns has increased the efficiency and firepower of the AAA batteries. Recent organizational changes in the howitzer and mortar units have reduced total strengths but have increased weapons inventories in individual battalions. Airborne training has received greater attention and a parachute battalion has been organized. The North Korean Army poses a formidable threat which necessitates continued heavy US support to the South Korean military forces.

#### The Air Force

6. The North Korean Air Force is a self-contained, highly proficient, well-manned, and well-equipped small tactical jet air force of 18,400 personnel and 650 aircraft. It is organized into five fighter divisions, two independent bomber regiments, an air transport battalion, a Civil Air Bureau, and an air school. Its forces are stationed on 14 of the 15 active airfields in North Korea. The aircraft inventory comprises 67 to 69 supersonic fighters in the MIG-21/MIG-19 class, 62 MIG-17 all-weather fighters, 258 MIG-15/17 daytime fighters, 80

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IL-28 jet light bombers, two IL-18 and two AN-24 turboprop transports, one IL-14, and 12 IL-2 transports, 12 MI-4 helicopters, 34 YAK-18 trainers, 26 AN-2s, and six miscellaneous aircraft.

7. The primary mission of the North Korean Air Force is to provide air defense for the mainland and for coastal waters, support ground forces, and conduct bombing missions. It is a modern air force capable of fulfilling its assigned missions, of defending against hostile intruders, and having a limited ability to launch attacks against South Korea.

8. The North Korean air defense posture has been improved with the activation of more SAM sites, bringing current North Korean inventories to 14 SAM sites in two clusters around the industrial-military complexes on the east and west coasts. The acquisition of Soviet radar for the improvement of its early warning ground control intercept and height finding capability enhances North Korean interception capabilities.

9. The majority of the equipment used by the air force is of Soviet origin, and much of the technical training for this force has been provided in Soviet technical training centers. Communist China still provides some limited support in the provision of less sophisticated equipment; it is believed that China is presently in the process of transferring up to 39 AN-2 propeller driven transports to North Korea.

10. The North Korean Air Force began current modernization training in 1965. It has concentrated on extensive mobility exercises, the development of intercept techniques against intruding--notably US reconnaissance--aircraft off the coasts of North Korea, and more recently the firing of air-to-air missiles. Air units have thus reached a high degree of combat effectiveness in their fighter forces. While the North Korean Air Force is essentially targeted for defense, with adequate outside logistical support it would be possible for it to engage in offensive operations with little difficulty.

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The Navy

11. The North Korean Navy is a small defensive force closely integrated into the over-all defense structure. It has two major fleets: one assigned to the defense of the east coast, and one assigned to the west coast. There are approximately 10,200 personnel manning 200 vessels including four "W"-class submarines, eight Komar guided-missile patrol boats, two Shershen-class PTFs, two or more modified Soviet Artillerist-class submarine chasers, 39 units of the Soviet P-2, P-4, P-6 class motor-torpedo boats, two Soviet SO-1 class submarine chasers, 13 YUK-TO and Soviet MO-1 class motor-boat submarine chasers, seven K-48 and Chicom Swatow-class motor gunboats, three Chicom modified Shanghai-class fast torpedo boats, and approximately 128 miscellaneous units including minesweepers, amphibious warfare craft and service vessels. The North Korean Navy operates from four main bases and eight subsidiary stations about equally divided on the two coasts.

12. The navy in the past year has begun a modernization program of its minor combat patrol units previously received from the USSR and Communist China, and [REDACTED] it has begun an ambitious program for the production of native designed new patrol types. The four "W"-class submarines were first noted in 1963 when the first units were received from the Soviet Union, while the Komars were first noted in 1965 with an additional four identified in 1967.

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13. Although the North Korean Navy is essentially a defensive force, some of the boats in the North Korean inventory have limited antisubmarine warfare capability. It appears, however, that a lack of adequate training by the "W"-class submarines limits these units as an effective force. Finally, the North Korean Navy is not a deep water navy, and its operations are limited to coastal operations.

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COMPARATIVE ORDERS OF BATTLE FOR NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA

<u>Military Forces</u>	<u>North Korea</u>	<u>South Korea</u>
Army	345,000 men 19 Infantry Divisions 1 Tank Division 5 Infantry Brigades (Division equivalents)	534,000 men (plus 50,000 men in South Vietnam)
Marines		31,000 men
US Forces		48,000 (2 Infantry Divisions)
Navy	10,000 men	18,000 men
Submarines	4 W-class	
Guided-Missile Boats	8 KOMAR-class	
PTF boats	2 Shershen-class (latest Soviet PTF-class)	
Destroyers		4
Old Subchasers	2	
Torpedo boats	39	
Patrol boats		32
Motor Gunboats	4	
Motor Boats, subchaser	13	
Minesweepers	6	11
Amphibious		133
Miscellaneous	(over) 100	(approx) 90
Air	18,500 men	25,500 men
Total Jet Fighters	(approx) 500	* 246
Modern Fighters	27 MIG-21 7 MIG-19 34 u/i supersonic	57 F-5 A/B
Older Fighters	62 MIG-17 358 MIG-15/17	30 F-86D 105 F-86F
Bombers (Jet Light Bombers)	80 IL-28	

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Comment: South Korean ground forces are superior in size and probably are about equal in training, morale, and equipment to North Korean force. The South Korean Air Force is heavily outnumbered and hampered by inadequate aircraft control and warning radar system. North Korean Navy is better equipped, but unlikely to play a major role.

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