IN PUEBLO’S WAKE: FLAWED LEADERSHIP AND THE ROLE OF JUCHE IN THE CAPTURE OF THE USS PUEBLO

by

JAMES A. DUERMeyer

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October 21, 2016
Abstract

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IN THE CAPTURE OF THE USS PUEBLO

James Duermeyer, MA, U.S. History

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2016

Supervising Professor: Joyce Goldberg

On January 23, 1968, North Korea attacked and seized an American Navy spy ship, the USS Pueblo. In the process, one American sailor was mortally wounded and another ten crew members were injured, including the ship’s commanding officer. The crew was held for eleven months in a North Korea prison. Today, the ship remains in North Korea as a gray, steel museum, glorifying the success of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s Navy in its struggle against the imperialist American aggressors.

This thesis examines two primary questions: How could the capture and retention of a U.S. Navy warship by a minor military state occur? What was the motive of the North Koreans? My conclusion is that the Pueblo incident occurred because of inadequate American leadership at multiple levels within the U.S. government and U.S.
Navy and because of North Korean leader Kim Il-sung’s strict adherence to the *Juche* ideology.

Congress and the U.S. Navy conducted exhaustive post-incident hearings and investigations, which became one of the issues that bedeviled and degraded Lyndon Johnson’s presidency. The *Pueblo* hearings and investigations, with their finger-pointing and attempts to deflect or attribute blame, became a sideshow that caught and held the interest of the media and the public. They distracted the president in the midst of the over-shadowing Vietnam War at the expense of Johnson’s greater interest and legacy, his social programs.

This study links failures in American leadership to Cold War political and foreign policy practices to disregard for North Korean ideology. Its conclusions offer a broader understanding of the causal factors surrounding the *Pueblo* incident.
The attack and seizure of the USS *Pueblo* by the North Korean Navy on a frigid day in January 1968 captured world attention and angered the American public during one of the most tumultuous decades in U.S. history. Further fanning national furor was the death of one crew member and the imprisonment of the *Pueblo*’s crew of eighty-three American sailors. The *Pueblo* incident was another of many distracting issues that sidetracked the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. Of course, the *Pueblo* incident assumed a low priority in comparison to the Vietnam War, the overarching geopolitical obsession of the Johnson presidency.

Within the command structure of the U.S. Navy, which I was part of for twenty years, never-ending debates swirled about where to place the blame for the loss of the ship and crew. Historical, hide-bound Navy tradition dictates that the commanding officer of a U.S. Navy ship is ultimately responsible for whatever happens to a ship under his/her command. This tenet serves well, unless the Navy has overloaded the command with numerous restrictive directives. Questionable leadership within the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Navy placed the *Pueblo* in an indefensible situation. Using the ultimate responsibility axiom, myopic Navy leadership took steps to punish Commander Lloyd Bucher and other crew members for what the Navy perceived as their lack of action against the North Korean captors. In their narrow focus, the Navy fell short of identifying other points of failed responsibility in the Naval chain of command. The Navy’s short-sighted tactic of blaming Bucher resulted in overwhelming
national public support for Bucher and his crew, and an embarrassment for the Navy.
Lieutenant Commander William Armbruster, a Naval Intelligence Officer, writing for the
Naval War College Review in 1971, examined the effect of public opinion on the Navy's
decision following the Pueblo Court of Inquiry and wrote, “The apparent public hostility
during the Court of Inquiry was possibly a factor in determining final disposition by the
Navy.”¹

Foreign policy blinders were not confined to the Navy. The White House and
Johnson cabinet, the National Security Agency (NSA), and Central Intelligence Agency
(CIA) all held the same short-sighted view of international relations, that is, a belief that
smaller communist nations could not act autonomously, but were instead, influenced by
either the Soviet Union or China. This global misjudgment reflected a lack of cross-
agency intelligence communication and poor leadership, thereby exacerbating an
already embarrassing situation played out on the world stage. Following the Second
World War and into the early part of the Cold War, the United States was the world's
most powerful nation. Yet, America, by the action of the North Koreans, learned a
discomfiting lesson from an isolationist, autocratic country of lesser global significance,
leaving members of the Johnson administration wringing their hands as they weighed
answers and responses to the Pueblo situation.

My research examined post-incident primary and secondary works, including
papers of President Lyndon Johnson, cabinet members of the Johnson administration,

CIA, NSA, Congressional hearing records, Congressional Records, first-hand accounts of USS *Pueblo* officers and crew members, as well as authors who have examined isolated leadership deficiencies regarding the *Pueblo* incident. North Korea remains an isolated, guarded country. Insight into the political actions of the country are not always evident. In order to gain perspective of the North Korean actions, Korean political and historical written sources helped to answer the question, “Why did the North Koreans capture and hold the USS *Pueblo*?” American leadership floundered in formulating its answer, attributing the action to covert instructions from one or both of the major communist powers, China or the Soviet Union. My thesis rejects that proposition. I contend that North Korea acted independently, with its leader, Kim Il-sung, strictly following a blind fidelity to the ideology called *Juche*, a philosophy that demands “independence in politics, self-sufficiency in the economy, and self-reliance in national defense.”\(^2\) The capture of the USS *Pueblo* can be attributed to the inadequacy of American leadership coupled with Kim Il-sung’s allegiance to the ideology of *Juche*, which remains the bedrock foundation of North Korea today.

Several excellent works have been written regarding the *Pueblo* incident, and some of their ideas are echoed in this writing. In addition, a review of the available literature on North Korean foreign policy and political thought reveals a distinct pattern in that country’s international relations and overt political actions, all of which demonstrate and confirm the adherence of North Korea’s leaders to the ideology of *Juche*.

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### Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGER</td>
<td>Auxiliary General Environmental Research</td>
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<td>AGTR</td>
<td>Auxiliary General Technical Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKL</td>
<td>Auxiliary Cargo, Light</td>
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<tr>
<td>CandC</td>
<td>Command and Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CINCPAC</td>
<td>Commander in Chief Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>CINCPACFLT</td>
<td>Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDR</td>
<td>Commander</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMINT</td>
<td>Communications Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNO</td>
<td>Chief of Naval Operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNFJ</td>
<td>Commander Naval Forces Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Commanding Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMSEVENTHFLT</td>
<td>Commander Seventh Fleet</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIA</td>
<td>Defense Intelligence Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMZ</td>
<td>Demilitarized Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPRK</td>
<td>Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTG</td>
<td>Date Time Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELINT</td>
<td>Electronic Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>HUMINT</td>
<td>Human Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFF</td>
<td>Identification Friend or Foe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCS</td>
<td>Joint Chiefs of Staff</td>
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<td>JRC</td>
<td>Joint Reconnaissance Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>KORCOM</td>
<td>Korean Communist</td>
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<td>KPA</td>
<td>Korean People's Army (North)</td>
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<tr>
<td>KWP</td>
<td>Korean Worker's Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>KGB</td>
<td>Committee for State Security in the Soviet Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBJL</td>
<td>Lyndon Baines Johnson Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT</td>
<td>Lieutenant</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTJG</td>
<td>Lieutenant Junior Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>Military Armistice Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIG</td>
<td>Mikoyan-Gurevich (Former Russian Aircraft Builder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MND</td>
<td>Ministry of National Defense (North Korea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NACSECGRU</td>
<td>Naval Security Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>NKN</td>
<td>North Korean Navy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NMCC</td>
<td>National Military Command Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSA</td>
<td>National Security Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Republic of Korea (South)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONI</td>
<td>Office of Naval Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONIP</td>
<td>Office of Naval Intelligence Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFIAB</td>
<td>President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>Students for a Democratic Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>SECDEF</td>
<td>Secretary of Defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIGINT</td>
<td>Signal Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>SITREP</td>
<td>Situation Report</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNC</td>
<td>United Nations Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USS</td>
<td>United States Ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<tr>
<td>WPK</td>
<td>Worker's Party of Korea (North)</td>
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INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 1960, a young Cuban political journalist, Antonio Prohias, learned he was on the verge of being arrested as a spy, accused of working for the CIA. In fact, he was an award-winning satirical political cartoonist who worked for the Havana daily newspaper *El Mundo*. His views, however, ran contrary to the Castro political machine and fearing incarceration, he fled to the United States. Three months later, he was hired by *MAD Magazine*, where for years, he drew a satirical cartoon called “Spy vs. Spy,” which depicted two spies at constant odds, attempting to outwit and assassinate one another. While the cartoon drawn by Prohias was political, tongue-in-cheek satire demonstrating the deadly and costly lengths superpowers would go to dominate an adversary, the satire mirrored the real-world political climate that flourished during the Cold War (1947-1991). In reality, the U.S. government was in an all-out covert war of espionage with the Soviet Union and China, with each nation attempting to learn tightly held political and military secrets and gather intelligence from their adversaries. The United States was also not above spying on its allies.

Following the First World War, the U.S. government ventured deeply into espionage, attempting to pry into the confidential affairs of other nations. Officials viewed government sanctioned espionage acts with ambivalence, some favoring them as valuable while others were critical of such “ungentlemanly practices.” The central office conducting these operations was a clandestine branch of the State Department.

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that functioned until 1929 when Henry L. Stimson became Secretary of State and promptly closed down the section. Stimson needed no prompting to take such action. In a later interview, he stated that his reason for closing down the cryptanalytic section was, “Gentlemen do not read each other’s mail.” Secretary Stimson might have been astonished at the evolution of covert data gathering in the 1960s and beyond.

“In intelligence is an institution as old as politics and war. It consists of knowing as much as possible about the opponent, his habits, resources and intentions, a reasonable aim in war, politics, business or personal affairs.” Without a doubt, the United States engaged in the clandestine and deadly spy business during the Cold War, and the two major agencies tasked with intelligence gathering were the CIA and the NSA. They were not alone, as individual agencies often formed one or more of their own intelligence branches. For example, military branches had their own data gatherers. The U.S. Navy’s intelligence arm was the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), charged with gathering intelligence for use primarily within the Navy.

Just how far had the spy business expanded since the days of Henry Stimson? Code writing ability expanded with the growth of the computer to the point that variations on encryption methodology could be nearly limitless. To break the encryption codes, a computer is required with the speed and capacity to test every possible solution, and NSA has such a computer with massive capabilities. NSA was established “by presidential directive in 1952 as a separately organized agency within

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the Department of Defense.” Its primary function is “monitoring secure United States communications and an intelligence information mission which involves manning listening posts the world over for monitoring the communications of other nations and processing this usable intelligence....” Because building and decrypting code is the primary function of NSA, today “NSA’s headquarters at Fort Meade, Maryland, is the computer capital of the world,” and occupies five and a half acres of computer machinery. In 1972, Patrick McGarvey, who worked in the U.S. intelligence community, estimated that NSA processed in excess of over one hundred tons of “paper per day [to] record the radio and Morse codes of other nations' communications intercepted by the National Security Agency.” The largest part of NSA’s mission is collecting and analyzing communications intelligence (COMINT), signal intelligence (SIGINT), and electronic intelligence (ELINT), data that is gathered using multiple methods. Human intelligence gathering (HUMINT) produced “spy versus spy” scenarios, where individuals dispatched to foreign sites mingled with the populace as on-ground eyes and ears. Airborne SIGINT and ELINT platforms include planes, balloons, dirigibles, and gliders used for aerial photography and to monitor ground activities as they collect messages of every conceivable type. Ships at sea, armed with ELINT equipment gather all forms of electronic communication. Passive listening

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8 McGarvey. 74-75.
9 Powers. 230.
devices are also used, such as those placed on the ocean floor to listen for passing ships and submarines.\footnote{Cheevers, Jack. \textit{Act of War: Lyndon Johnson, North Korea, and The Capture of the Spy Ship Pueblo}. New York: NAL Caliber div. of Penguin Group, 2013. 2. Print.} Of what use is this data to NSA and the military? By analyzing acquired reports, NSA is able to draw an electronic map that reveals the location of every adversary and “what he is doing.” This information has to be obtained “in advance,” and “can’t wait until a war begins.”\footnote{Powers. 237}

The Soviets initially led in the race to achieve espionage superiority at sea. By 1965, Razvedka, the loosely-translated Soviet term for intelligence and espionage, had thirty-six converted trawlers monitoring arrivals and departures of American nuclear submarines near U.S. bases in South Carolina, Scotland, and Guam.\footnote{Meyer. 18.} The Soviets also kept a trawler on station at all times “near the U.S. missile testing site at Vandenberg Air Force Base off the coast of California.”\footnote{Ibid.}

In an attempt to catch up, NSA began use of seaborne assets for gathering COMINT, SIGINT, and ELINT.\footnote{Meyer. 12-13. Author defines COMINT as intercepting signals and messages, which are then “sent to a central organization for analysis.”} The first ships were Navy assets, destroyers fitted with listening devices. Because clandestine operations took destroyers away from their primary duties, Navy officials objected to their continued use as spy ships.\footnote{Bamford. 242. Print.} As a result of this conflict and the fact that the Soviet Union had a fleet of spy ships already in operation, NSA, with the cognizance of the Joints Chiefs of Staff (JCS), secretly began building its own Navy fleet of spy ships in 1960. What followed was the conversion of five World War II liberty ships, fitted with sophisticated listening gear, crewed by Navy
personnel, and directed by NSA. The first of these ships was the USS Oxford, which was commissioned in 1961 and given the mission to spy off the eastern coast of South America. The last of the five was the USS Liberty, commissioned in 1964.\(^\text{17}\)

Spy ships occupied a unique role, as they could “park” at sea off the coast of another nation and listen continuously to gather intelligence data. But because the ships were directed by NSA with the concurrence of the JCS, the Navy was unable to move the platforms to targets of specific interest to the Navy’s intelligence staff. Adding another layer of bureaucracy in the tasking of spy ships, safety for the ships became the responsibility of the Joint Reconnaissance Center (JRC), an arm of the JCS.\(^\text{18}\) The JRC was responsible for coordinating all reconnaissance operations in the air, at sea, and undersea. Proper command and control of spy ships suffered from this multi-layered relationship between NSA, JCS, JRC, and the Navy. The situation, by its nature, contained too many levels of administrative and operational control, resulting in operational inefficiencies in timeliness and command. Peter Blau and Marshall Meyer in *Bureaucracy in Modern Society* write that too many layers of bureaucracy only serve to promote inefficiency: “The increasing subdivision of decisions intensifies problems of coordination....”\(^\text{19}\) The consequences of this lack of single-source command and control became glaringly apparent in both the USS Liberty and Pueblo incidents. The attack against the Liberty provides historical perspective for the later attack and seizure of the Pueblo.

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\(^{17}\) Ibid. 93-94.

\(^{18}\) Ibid. 187.

The USS Liberty (AGTR 5) was a converted World War II ship rigged by NSA to be a waterborne listening post. Its Navy-assigned hull classification, AGTR, designated it as an Auxiliary General Technical Research ship.\textsuperscript{20} The Liberty carried a complement of 294 men, including three marines for security duties and three NSA civilians. In late May 1967, it left its home port of Norfolk, Virginia, and headed for deployment off the coast of Africa. In an attempt to monitor the escalating hostilities that had begun in the Middle East among Egypt, Syria, and Israel, and lacking real-time intelligence information on the conflict, the “National Security Agency requested [concurrence from] the Joint Chiefs of Staff to move the Liberty” to the coast of Egypt. On June 2, 1967, the Liberty steamed to its assigned listening area thirteen miles off the coast of Egyptian-controlled Sinai and thirty-eight miles from the Israeli coast.\textsuperscript{21} On June 4, 1967, Israel declared war against Egypt. The Liberty was then in the middle of a regional war.\textsuperscript{22} Upon realizing the error in placement of the ship, the Navy sent five successive radio messages to the Liberty, all of which ordered the ship to depart the area and remain one hundred miles from the war zone. Through ineffectual leadership, leadership’s lack of attention to detail, bloated chains of command/communication, and lack of proper onboard radio equipment, the messages never reached the Liberty, and it continued to sit in the midst of a war. On the afternoon of June 8, the ship was attacked by the Israeli Air Force and Navy for reasons that are still debated. The attack resulted

\textsuperscript{21} Cristol. 12, 15.
in thirty-four U.S. Navy crewmen killed and one hundred seventy-three wounded. Miraculously, the Liberty was able to leave the area under its own power on June 9, and was met that day by three U.S. Navy warships that escorted the disabled ship to Malta for medical aid for crew members and dry dock for the ship.

Shortly after the attack on the Liberty, Clark Clifford, then Chairman of President Johnson’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, conducted an investigation of the incident and concluded that it was “not an intentional attack” by the Israelis. Clifford, however, concluded that “there were gross and inexcusable failures in the command and control of subordinate Israeli naval and air elements.” He added that “the unprovoked attack on the Liberty constitutes a flagrant act of gross negligence.” Both the Navy and the CIA conducted their own investigations into the incident with findings that echoed Clifford’s report. Thereafter, the Johnson administration adhered to the Clifford finding, as have the eight presidential administrations that followed. Yet, according to historian Robert Dallek, within the Johnson administration there may have been dissenters. Dallek writes, “Behind the scenes, the highest officials of the U.S. government, including the president, believed it ‘inconceivable’ that Israel’s ‘skilled’ defensive forces could have committed such a gross error.” Perhaps it was politically expedient to declare the attack a case of Israeli negligence. In truth, the evidence points to an unfortunate lack of due diligence on the part of the Israeli Navy and Air

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23 Cristol. 66, 155
25 Cristol. 164.
Force. Yet even today, conspiracy theorists contend that Israel and the United States colluded in an attack on the spy ship in an effort to blame Egypt and thereby bring the United States into the war on the side of the Israelis.27 While that seems unlikely, the Soviets also attempted to seize a propaganda moment in history. Yevgeny Primakov, who at the time was working as a journalist for Pravda, wrote that it was a case of collusion between the United States and Israel.28 Now, nearly fifty years after the incident, controversy still swirls as to whether or not the Israelis intentionally attacked the Liberty and what could be the possible reasons for doing so. On June 8, 2007, the San Diego Union Tribune carried an article written by retired Navy Captain Ward Boston, Jr., who served as legal counsel during the Navy Court of Inquiry into the Liberty attack. In his article and in a written declaration, he contended that the attack was certainly intentional.29 Why does the controversy continue? In the words of McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson’s chairman of a special committee in charge of the Middle East crisis, “The American people love conspiracy.”30 Whether or not the attack on the Liberty was unintentional or for some other unknown reason is immaterial. The point is that the ship was sent to an escalating war theater through faulty leadership decisions on the part of the Navy and NSA. Adding to the situation was the fact that the ship was not properly prepared with the best equipment (the ship had faulty

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27 Examples of dissenting opinions have been written by many persons. Political Analyst Maithc Cathail wrote an article entitled “Behind the USS Liberty Cover-Up” for the Jan/Feb 2015 issue of The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs pgs. 26-27 in which he makes a case for a cover-up. His article can be seen at https://consortiumnews.com/2014/11/12/behind-the-uss-liberty-cover-up. Another example is a British Broadcasting Corporation documentary which aired in 2002, titled “Dead in the Water,” also alleging a conspiracy.

28 Cristol, 103.


30 Cristol, 103.
communication capabilities) to receive instructions to vacate the area. This is an example of lack of attention to detail by leadership.

It is useful to study the Liberty incident because there is a striking similarity between factors that placed both the Liberty and the Pueblo in harm’s way even though the Liberty event was June 8, 1967, and the Pueblo incident occurred seven months later on January 23, 1968. Lessons learned from the Liberty debacle should have been applied to future spy ship missions, yet both incidents were the result of inadequate leadership oversight and attention to detail, coupled with inadequate communication capabilities that led both ships to disaster. As with the Pueblo incident, the Navy conducted a Court of Inquiry to investigate the circumstances that led to the attack on the Liberty. Rear Admiral Isaac Kidd, Jr. served as president of the board, whose findings on the Liberty incident included:

1. Command and Control of the Liberty was exercised by senior echelons in the chain of command, not at the ship level. Directing and planning of the ship’s actions and movements were discussed at higher command levels without including the ship and/or informing it by using immediate communication.

2. Radio traffic relay stations tasked with sending messages to the Liberty were inadequately staffed and were not briefed on the priority and mission of the spy ship. Nor did these stations send messages according to precedence order,

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31 The Navy message traffic containing the results of the Liberty board of inquiry, as well as the series of follow-up endorsements (6) are contained in copies of original naval messages initially classified as “Top Secret.” They have since been declassified and were accessed on line. Web. 15 Jul 2015. <www.thelibertyincident.com/docs/courtofinquiry.pdf>

meaning that Liberty did not receive its message traffic in a timely manner. If precedence protocol had been followed, Liberty may have been able to move from the area and avert the subsequent disaster.  

3. The Liberty had outdated radio equipment and lacked back-up signaling devices on board to communicate with the Israeli attackers.

4. Due to inadequate communication, senior echelon commands did not know where the Liberty was physically located as late as the fifth of June, only three days before the ship was attacked. Without that information, it may have been more difficult to immediately send aid to the disabled ship.  

Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., Commander of the U.S. Atlantic fleet, sent a summary message to the Chief of Naval Operations regarding the Court of Inquiry findings. In that message he stated, “Communications limitations continue with us. Improvements in equipment never seem quite able to fully offset load increases and the ever present personnel error. Where such combine with staffing delays and completely unexpected actions through mistake by another state, the results cannot be other than explosive in international potential.” The failure to provide proper communication systems was not lost on Congress. At a congressional hearing before the Subcommittee on Department of Defense held on April 8, 1968, Democratic Congressman Robert Lee Fulton Sikes of Florida had already discerned the leadership

33 Gerhard and Millington. 60.
shortcomings, especially failure to provide proper communication equipment for the Liberty, when he stated, “A general conclusion could be drawn from the staff reports that the use and operational capabilities of the Defense Communications system is nothing less than pathetic, and that the management of the system needs to be completely overhauled.”\(^{36}\) Republican Congressman John Jacob Rhodes of Arizona echoed this sentiment at the hearing when he stated that the handling of messages meant to be sent to the Liberty was “a comedy of errors.”\(^{37}\) And finally, as recorded in the *Congressional Record* on July 12, 1968, Republican Congressman Seymour Halpern of New York stated, “I was shocked to learn that a Navy communications ‘foul-up’ led to the presence of the U.S.S. Liberty off the Sinai coast in June 1967, where it was mistaken for an Egyptian vessel and attacked by Israel torpedo boats and planes.”\(^{38}\)

Inattentive leadership and lack of attention to detail within the Navy and NSA placed the Liberty in harm’s way. The ship was sent into an unstable and escalating war zone, unable to properly communicate with its chain of command or adequately identify itself to observers and subsequent attackers. Admiral McCain’s response to the Court of Inquiry seems to show little regard for the loss of thirty-four sailors and injury to one hundred seventy-three others. In addition, the Court of Inquiry found no American individuals responsible for this tragedy. This seems to be a case of senior Navy officers covering for their counterparts or failing to focus on essential details of the ship’s

\(^{36}\) Cristol. 157.
\(^{37}\) Ibid.
mission and subsequently pinpoint and take responsibility for these errors. Unfortunately, failure to accept responsibility and nearly-identical leadership foibles reoccurred in the *Pueblo* incident.

Off the coast of Egypt and Israel, the United States had been caught off guard. “Friendly forces” had failed to keep their friends informed of their operations and locations, resulting in tragedy. Historian Richard K. Smith offered a succinct summary when he stated that a lesson learned from the *Liberty* incident is that “nations do not have ‘friends.’ They have only interests....” The true interests behind the attack may never be known, but rather than addressing responsibility head-on, the U.S. government initially denied having any U.S. ships in the war zone area. Was this deliberate lie intended for the world community or the American public? What would have been lost if the truth had been revealed initially? I contend that it is a leadership flaw to deceive rather than to tell the truth when there would be no negative consequences to the security or safety of the audience. This flawed leadership only serves to exemplify incompetence.

The findings of the *Liberty* Court of Inquiry delineated several issues regarding spy ships that needed to be addressed and corrected in order to prevent such incidents in the future. While communication failure was one issue, poor leadership attention to detail was never mentioned. Glaringly significant, the fact that the capture of the USS *Pueblo* occurred only a matter of months after the attack on the *Liberty* demonstrates that American leadership, whether military or governmental, failed to examine its own

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40 Cristol. 84.
practices of command and control in addition to not providing adequate protection to the ships and men placed in harm’s way. Were the findings and recommendations just so much lip service? An examination of the *Pueblo* Incident may help answer that question.
Chapter One

The Ships
Clickbeetle - The Spy Ships

Even prior to the *Liberty* incident, Navy officials had become “disenchanted with the entire NSA ocean-going program,” seeing themselves as nothing more than “seagoing chauffeurs and hired hands for NSA.”\(^{41}\) The loss of the USS *Liberty* demonstrated the immense danger inherent in operating a spy ship, yet the Navy wanted its own surveillance ships, separate and apart from NSA intervention. NSA, of course, wished to retain control of the spy ships. At the Navy’s insistence, compromise was reached between the two agencies. Both the Navy and NSA would submit their mission requests to the JCS for consideration, and a portion of the data gathered by the Navy would ultimately go to NSA for “more detailed analysis.”\(^{42}\) But there was still the matter of the Navy’s wish for its own ships to carry out those missions. The project to obtain and outfit spy ships was given to a pentagon research team led by Dr. Eugene Fubini, a physicist and member of the Pentagon research staff.

Fubini, an Italian immigrant, worked on Pentagon initiatives in the early 1960s.\(^ {43}\) His spy ship project was code-named “Operation Clickbeetle” and involved the reactivation and refitting of three small, moth-balled Navy cargo ships that were designated by the Navy as Auxiliary General Environmental Research (AGER) vessels in a veiled attempt to classify the spy ships as ocean research ships instead of ELINT collectors. But in fact, they were “electronic and radio intelligence gathering, small non-

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\(^{41}\) Bamford. 240.

\(^{42}\) Ibid. 243.

\(^{43}\) Cheevers. 3.
combatant naval ships that” would operate “close to potential enemies.” The first built was the USS Banner (AGER 1), followed by the Pueblo (AGER 2) and the Palm Beach (AGER 3). At 176 feet in length, these ships were much smaller than their predecessor Liberty class spy ships, which were over 400 feet in length. Their mission would be to collect ELINT, electronic intelligence, for analysis by the Navy and NSA. The data included “radar frequencies, pulse repetition rates, IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) signals, and the location of radar sights,” as well as open communication. In an attempt to outfit the ships for the least cost, shortcuts were taken and budgets were cut, resulting in “appalling complacency and shortsightedness in the planning and execution of the Pueblo’s mission.”

The USS Banner was the first AGER to set sail. Her mission sent her to the Far East off the northern borders of the Soviet Union, where weather extremes coated the little ship with so much ice that the skipper, Lieutenant (LT) Robert Bishop, worried that the ship was so top heavy there was danger of it rolling over. Budget cutting measures in refitting the ships became more evident on the Banner as the crew experienced communication problems and mechanical woes, such as at “least one total breakdown of both her engines.” That danger was less significant than others experienced by the Banner, as the ship was harassed by the Soviets, who bumped the ship, buzzed it with

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46 Bamford. 241.
48 Cheevers. 3. For the most part, the same planning and building process was used for both the Banner and the Pueblo which resulted in similar problems being experienced in both ships.
MIGs and helicopters, and threatened it with cannon fire. At one point the Banner was surrounded by “Communist Chinese trawlers” in the Yellow Sea and aggressively rammed by a “Russian patrol vessel,” facts that were revealed in a conversation between Bishop, Banner’s commanding officer, and Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) Lloyd Bucher just prior to Bucher taking command of the USS Pueblo. This life-threatening harassment should have served the Navy and NSA as lessons learned; perhaps these spy ship missions were more dangerous than perceived by agency officials, facts that should have been considered in mission risk analysis. Operation Clickbeetle, as implemented by the Navy and NSA, sent small, lightly-armed, hastily reconstructed ships into harm’s way, into missions fraught with danger. In 1967, the USS Pueblo was the second AGER to sail, and her mission would prove catastrophic.

USS Pueblo - U.S. Navy photo - from USS Pueblo.org web site <www.usspueblo.org/Welcome.html>

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50 Bamford. 242.
51 Bucher. 4. Also note that Bucher was promoted to Commander after reporting to the Pueblo.
The Pueblo

Commander (CDR) Lloyd M. Bucher was ordered to the USS *Pueblo* and took command of the spy ship in 1967 as it was being refitted in the shipyard at Bremerton, Washington. The transition from its previous role as an inter-island, auxiliary cargo carrier to its new mission as a spy ship required nearly a year, with the ship finally commissioned in ceremonies on May 13, 1967. In *Bucher: My Story*, the commander described the multitude of problems associated with converting and bringing the *Pueblo* on line. Many of the budget-cutting measures became apparent during refitting, as the ship received scant attention from Washington Navy officials. Unnecessary and bulky equipment remained on the ship from its previous cargo-carrying role. The lifeboat was in the wrong place, the galley was too small, and the ship was lacking a proper interior communication system. Improper armament had been ordered, and the external communication equipment was balky. Lieutenant Junior Grade (LTJG) Carl Schumacher, the operations officer on the *Pueblo* in charge of the ship’s communication gear, summarized communication capabilities when he stated, “Communications had been a problem on the *Pueblo* ever since she had been commissioned.” He went on to write that, “The *Banner* had [encountered] great difficulty” in the same geographic area off the coast of Korea.52

One of the most telling examples of the poor leadership and lack of attention to detail by the Navy was lack of proper oversight of classified material, equipment, and

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documents assigned to the *Pueblo* during the fitting out of the ship. Not only did the Navy send all classified equipment and publications they believed were needed for *Pueblo* to carry out its mission, they also sent all classified material that would normally be assigned to a small Navy cargo ship. Apparently, in the Navy chain of command, not everyone knew that the former Navy cargo ship was now a spy ship and not a cargo carrier. Therefore, *Pueblo* received a double allotment of classified material, plus all secret material required by the on-board crypto personnel. In some cases there were as many as ten copies of superfluous publications sent to the ship. And while the *Pueblo* security officer had been able to return some of the shipments, the sheer volume was overwhelming. The ship even received another shipment of classified material the morning it set sail on its first mission. The ship had no choice but to carry an over-allowance of classified material. In addition, the ship did not have the equipment to properly destroy classified material, and the commanding officer and the security officer were well aware that they did not have enough weighted bags on the ship to properly jettison the material if an emergency situation occurred.53 Apparently the Navy did not see this as a problem, even though Commander Bucher had asked his chain of command for proper self-destruction capabilities while the ship was being fitted out. Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), in his testimony at later congressional hearings stated, “the ship [*Pueblo*] was provided with weighted canvas bags for use at sea, two paper shredders, and an incinerator. Gasoline was also

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available." Apparently, the CNO had no grasp of the sheer volume of classified material on the *Pueblo* nor the gravity of the risk involved in not having a proper means of destruction on the spy ship. This is not surprising considering the custom of delegation of authority within the Navy. And within the military, officers at the top of management pyramids exercised their influence “using relatively fewer rather than relatively more direct mechanisms of control....” When asked if he felt certain that all echelons in *Pueblo*’s chain of command were aware of the “lack of self-destruct capability for both the vessel itself and intelligence gathering equipment,” Moorer answered, “I am confident that they were.” If the top leader of the Navy and all of his subordinates were aware that the *Pueblo* did not have the capability to destroy the ship and its classified material, did anyone realize the consequences of this risk? Was any thought given to cancelling the mission until the self-destruction inadequacies could be remedied? Without proper risk analysis, the consequences were a gold mine of American military classified material confiscated by the North Koreans when they captured the *Pueblo*. Retired Navy Commander and government Intelligence Analyst Richard A. Mobley, writing for *Studies in Intelligence*, a CIA publication, quoted Admiral John Hyland, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT), who said, “Compromise of sensitive information can very well be turned against the United States and ultimately cause the loss of untold lives in other confrontations.” Hyland also called the incident a “tragedy.” At the time he made these remarks, the full extent of the loss

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55 Blau and Meyer. 94.
56 Hearings. 644.
of classified material on the *Pueblo* had not been fully assessed. Specifically, officials did not know that the "cryptographic hardware captured aboard the *Pueblo* might be married up with keying material being provided to the Soviet Union by the Walker spying...."57

The Soviets hastened to investigate the intelligence bonanza contained on the U.S. ship. On January 28, 1969, “the CIA reported that a Soviet Pacific Fleet aircraft had made a highly unusual flight into North Korea. The agency believed that the aircraft might have carried Soviet personnel to examine *Pueblo* and its surviving equipment.”58

In an article for *Military History*, historian Mitchell Lerner wrote:

> Shortly after the [*Pueblo*] seizure, a North Korean aircraft flew to Moscow carrying almost 1,000 pounds of cargo salvaged from *Pueblo*. Among the many items lost were a detailed account of top-secret American intelligence objectives for the Pacific; classified U.S. communications manuals, a number of vital NSA machines and the manuals that detailed their operation and repair, the NSA’s Electronic Order of Battle for the Far East; information on American electronic countermeasures; radar classification instructions; and various secret codes and Navy transmission procedures. Little wonder, then, that an NSA report


described the loss as a ‘major intelligence coup without parallel in modern history.’

Robert E. Newton, writing for the NSA Center for Cryptologic History, summarized the loss of classified material in the capture of the *Pueblo*: “the loss that resulted from the subsequent compromise of classified material aboard the ship [*Pueblo*] would dwarf anything in previous U.S. cryptologic history. It also gave the North Koreans and the Soviets a rare view of the complex technology behind U.S. cryptographic systems. Over the long term, the compromise would severely affect the U.S. SIGINT capability to exploit several major target areas for years to come.”

According to a report prepared by a joint team composed of members of the CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and Navy, Air Force, and Army intelligence personnel to assess the damage to U.S. intelligence programs caused by the loss of the *Pueblo*, the magnitude of the damage was immense. The data compromise divulged “U.S. intelligence capability to collect from multiple sources, process and evaluate, and disseminate large volumes of information on a near real time basis to military forces in the field and Naval forces afloat in time of war.” Additionally, U.S. SIGINT capabilities and technical operational data was revealed, including the existence, location, technical capabilities, manning, and coverage of “many SIGINT sites and detachments ....” As

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grave as those compromises were, NSA and Navy leadership did not consider the consequences of these losses in the risk analysis of the *Pueblo* mission.

The Navy simply did not want to hear about problems associated with the refitting of the small spy ship. The ship was a low priority item in the much bigger Vietnam War efforts of the Navy. As a result, inefficiencies and problems received little attention in Washington. Navy officials did take note when it was discovered during the refitting that all electronic intelligence gear on the *Pueblo* had been installed upside down in the communication spaces. Even so, when Bucher continued to demand that deficiencies be corrected before sea trials, Navy and shipyard authorities showed an impatience “that stemmed from their intense desire to be rid of a mess diverting their attention from servicing units urgently needed in the escalating Vietnam war.”

Problems persisted with the *Pueblo* during sea trials as the steering mechanism malfunctioned each of the first two days of testing, leaving the ship unable to steer itself and necessitating a tow back to its Bremerton berth. The same steering problems persisted as the ship was transiting to Pearl Harbor after leaving Bremerton, breaking down at least “twice a watch,” (twice every four hours). The Navy and NSA wanted sea-borne spy platforms. Mining electronic data was the priority, not the hazardous conditions inherent in the mission, the safety of the ship and crew, or how the platforms arrived on site. The cobbled together spy ships would remain a low priority of the Navy, and this lack of attention by appropriate officials would reap a calamitous result. “The

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62 Bucher. 61-65.

63 Bucher. 105.
Pueblo sailed into the Sea of Japan for operations off the North Korean east coast poorly prepared for its mission and subsequent actions by the North Koreans.\textsuperscript{64}

After reaching Pearl Harbor on November 14, 1967, Commander Bucher paid a visit to CINCPACFLT headquarters. While there, he spoke to an intelligence officer and later to Captain Charles M. Cassel, Chief of Staff of Operations for CINCPACFLT. Bucher learned that his first mission would be off the coast of North Korea. Perhaps Bucher was clairvoyant. He wrote, “I was moved to ask...what happens if they [North Koreans] attack us when on station outside their claimed twelve-mile territorial limit?” The answer he received from Captain Cassel was ironic. Bucher was told, “actual violence is considered highly unlikely to occur.” Cassel added, “In the unexpected event of a serious attack against Pueblo, it would probably happen beyond the range of immediate assistance. But you can count on everything being done as quickly as possible to come to your assistance and that in any case a retaliation would be mounted within twenty-four hours. Contingency Plans for such an occurrence are written and approved. We consider the risk to be nominal if not nonexistent.”\textsuperscript{65} Because we know the outcome of the Pueblo mission, we can adduce a pattern in the Navy approach to operational control of the spy ships. Responses to issues of operational importance border on arrogant and cavalier. The Navy’s “can do” attitude is admired when results are favorable. When results are unfavorable, or non-existent, there is a follow-up pattern of senior officials searching for scapegoats instead of accepting responsibility.

\textsuperscript{64} Newton. 43.

\textsuperscript{65} Bucher. 107-108. Emphasis added, as this final statement and others that echo this generalized risk assessment will be examined later in greater detail. It should be noted that according to Bucher, Cassel later attempted to recant his statement at the subsequent Court of Inquiry following the release of Bucher and the Pueblo crew.
Orders

On December 1, 1967, Pueblo reached Yokosuka, Japan, which was to be its home port. Bucher and the Pueblo would be under the operational control of the Commander Naval Forces Japan (CNFJ), led by Rear Admiral Frank L. Johnson. Johnson’s questionable leadership would play a significant role in Pueblo’s fate.

On December 31, 1967, Pueblo received its operating orders from CNFJ (Johnson), orders that described the overall mission of Pueblo’s first foray as a spy ship. The orders stated that Pueblo would operate in the Sea of Japan to monitor naval activity off the coasts of four North Korean ports while “sample[ing] the electronic environment” and “conducting surveillance of Soviet Naval Units.”

Pueblo was to remain thirteen nautical miles from the coast of North Korea. But in those same operating orders there were three other directives that deserve analysis.

First, the Pueblo was directed to intercept and conduct surveillance of Soviet naval units. In other words, Bucher and his ship were ordered to place themselves in harm’s way even as Navy and NSA officials were well aware that the Soviets had previously harassed, bumped, and threatened the USS Banner when it had conducted surveillance of Soviet naval units. Second, the orders stated that Pueblo was to “Determine KORCOM (Korean Communist) and Soviet reaction, respectively, to an overt intelligence collector operating near KORCOM periphery and actively conducting surveillance of USSR naval units.” In other words, go cruise in the Soviets’ back yard and see how they react. It would certainly appear to be flawed leadership to

66 Bucher. 406-410. Copies of Pueblo’s operating orders and its sailing orders are in appendices II and III respectively.
deliberately direct a U.S. ship and crew into the crosshairs of the Soviet Navy without measuring the risk involved and thoroughly preparing for the safety of the ship and its crew in all possible contingencies.

The *Pueblo* received sailing orders on December 18, 1967, directing the ship to sail on January 8, 1968, for the Tsushima Straits and move to an area off the northern coast of North Korea. From there it was to move slowly south along the North Korean coast.\(^{67}\) Directive H in those orders is interesting. It stated that “Injolled (definition unknown, perhaps a typo for ‘inhold’) defensive armament should be stowed or covered in such a manner as to not elicit unusual interest from surveying/surveyed units(s). Employ only in cases where threat to survival is obvious.”\(^{68}\) Admiral Johnson remained convinced that the .50-caliber machine guns, the only real armament that *Pueblo* carried, should be stowed below decks, out of sight. He repeated this to Commander Bucher in a meeting on January 3, saying, “I am against arming your ship. It could lead to trouble for you which you are not prepared for.” He continued, “I suggest you keep your guns covered and pointed down, or better yet, stow them below decks.”\(^{69}\) On the following day, Johnson inspected the *Pueblo* and told Bucher as he noticed the .50-caliber guns on their mounts, “Remember you are not going out there to start a war.” Referring to the guns, he said, “keep them covered and don’t use them in any provocative way at all. It doesn’t take much to set those damned Communists off and

<www.usspueblo.org/Pueblo_Incident/Sailing_Orders.html> The orders can also be found at Appendix III in Bucher’s book.

\(^{68}\) Bucher. 410.

\(^{69}\) Bucher. 134.
start an international incident. That’s the last thing we want.”

Perhaps Admiral Johnson was offering good advice, but either directly or indirectly, he was telling Bucher that the display and/or use of the only defense armament on the Pueblo was off-limits, an odd admonishment to give to the commanding officer of a U.S. Navy ship. It is flawed leadership, indeed, that directs a subordinate to sail into known danger where it is relatively certain that the adversary will be waiting and also directs him to leave any armament stowed. It is flawed leadership to ignore attention to detail, proper equipping, and defense of a ship with eighty-three men aboard. It is flawed leadership to send a defenseless ship and crew into a situation fraught with a multitude of possible catastrophic actions, any one of which could include sinking the ship and killing its crew. Hidebound Navy tradition, multi-layered disjointed bureaucracy, and flawed, shortsighted leadership put the USS Pueblo in harm’s way. One of the final statements in the operating orders message underscores this. It stated that the estimate of risk to the Pueblo for the mission was “minimal, since Pueblo will be operating in international waters for the entire deployment.”

More than anything else, this false assumption proved to be the undoing of the Pueblo. This minimal risk assessment derived from the Navy’s blind faith in the rule of the sea and faulty Navy and NSA leadership resulted in only a perfunctory attempt to properly analyze the risk associated with the mission of the USS Pueblo.

Throughout history, wars of words and swords have been fought over the extent of nations’ rights within their individual coastal waters. In the 1960s, a primary tenet

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70 Bucher. 134-137
71 Bucher. 406.
employed in the logic of the Navy and NSA when they formed the spy ship fleet and sent the ships on their missions was based upon articles of the 1958 Geneva Convention on the High Seas. Each signatory ratified article 8, which stipulated that “Warships on the high seas have complete immunity from the jurisdiction of any State other than the flag State,” and international law recognized the territorial waters of each country to extend twelve miles from a nation’s coast. The faith the Navy and NSA placed in this tenet cannot be overemphasized, because the two agencies, and indeed the entire U.S. government, fully relied on this facet of international law. The United States believed that in accordance with the Geneva Convention of 1958, all nations would comply with the coastal boundary rule. Thus, ships passing by coastal nations could transit unmolested as long as they remained twelve miles or more from that nation’s coast. So tightly did the U.S. government and the Navy cling to this point of law that it seemed inconceivable that any nation would flagrantly defy it to the extreme of attacking and/or capturing a U.S. warship. The fallacy in this reasoning was that there were some nations, including North Korea, that had not signed the document. North Korea paid little attention to world opinion. These facts, apparently, were immaterial to the U.S. leadership that sent the Pueblo on her deployment, yet certainly should have entered into the risk analysis preparatory to the spy ship mission, especially in light of the Liberty tragedy only seven months earlier. Faulty Navy and NSA leadership resulted in only a perfunctory attempt to properly analyze the risk associated with the

mission of the USS *Pueblo*. Couple this flawed leadership with multi-layered bureaucratic, fragmented responsibility, and it was a wonder that *Pueblo* ever left port. Clearly, poor risk analysis proved to be the primary cause of the capture of the *Pueblo*. The faulty risk analysis used for the *Pueblo* mission warrants further examination.
Chapter Two

Leadership and Risk Analysis
Leadership

To define flawed leadership, we must first understand the meaning of leadership. An all-encompassing, finite definition of leadership may exist in numerous dictionary sources. Multiple definitions prove that the ingredients of leadership may be rife with ambiguities and subject to sociological and political filters. Yet, hundreds of books, articles, and classroom courses are taught under the guise of defining leadership principles. Professor and former Air Force officer Phillip J. Hutchison has written in the Journal of Leadership Studies, that the term “leadership” is so broad that it may be an example of an “ideograph.” He wrote that an ideograph is, “a single highly recognizable word that acts as a repository for key values that reflect deeply ingrained cultural politics.”

Common values such as setting goals, leading the way to a goal, nurturing followers, perseverance, skill, respect for subordinates, and other commonly used leadership characteristics easily come to mind and can apply to the leadership ideograph. But there are other less obvious leadership values that bear examination and that were neglected by Navy and administration officials in the events surrounding the capture of the USS Pueblo.

A leader must be able to see “the big picture,” to see all aspects of the path to goal achievement. The responsible leader must examine the costs of reaching the goal in terms of risk to personnel and material. At what point does the risk of damage to personnel, material, or political image cancel the project or goal? The risk assessment in the case of the Pueblo was perfunctory at best. A rating of minimal risk was rubber

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stamped by “pedestrian functionaries” at all levels of Pueblo’s chain of command. Admiral James B. Stockdale used the term “pedestrian functionaries” to describe individuals who reside within a “business as usual” environment in which “bureaucratic procedure” is “the order of the day.” He continued, “In the military, for example, the fortunes of war have a way of throwing commanders into new decision-making territory where there is no one to issue philosophic survival kits.” 74 Such was the case with the Pueblo. Functionaries in leadership in the NSA and Navy chains of command did not carry out a proper risk assessment of the spy ship mission, instead choosing to rubber stamp the initially assigned minimal risk rating. The big picture was not analyzed by NSA and Navy leadership, and lessons from previous spy ship experiences were not incorporated in planning.

A leader must continue to search for variables by reading and studying the potential issues that could effect the progress toward reaching the goal in order to obtain all aspects of the big picture. The question must be asked, what new and unforeseen aspects might effect our progress? In Pueblo’s mission, a number of variables arose, most evident of which were the many warnings. A leader must be a student who strives to continually learn of and analyze all variables. The Navy, NSA, and Johnson officials neglected to carefully study geopolitical currents and classified material related to North Korea, and to ask probing questions prior to Pueblo’s sailing.

Next, leaders must always assume responsibility for their orders and actions. Stockdale raises the question, “Is the leader willing to commit him/her]self to the full

consequences implicit in his/[her] policies? There is always the temptation to better your own position by thinking only about yourself.” Navy leaders in the Pueblo chain of command and officials in the Johnson administration were unwilling to take responsibility and admit their mistakes following the capture of the spy ship. Instead, they frantically searched for scapegoats. Stockdale wrote, “You cannot use your profession as a shield from responsibility for your actions,” and the good leader needs “the ability to meet personal defeat without succumbing to emotional paralysis and withdrawal, and without lashing out at scapegoats or inventing escapist solutions.” In the case of the Pueblo, everyone in the Navy chain of command up to the White House searched for scapegoats to avoid accepting responsibility.

Leaders must be cognizant of history. Stockdale wrote that “to ignore this fund of wisdom is the epitome of vanity.” American officials knew the previous hostile actions of the North Korean government, which had frequently attacked South Korean fishing boats and launched numerous raids across the DMZ. They also knew the circumstances surrounding the attack on the USS Liberty only months before the Pueblo mission. History was ignored, as the Pueblo was sent into a hostile environment.

Finally, there is another often-heard adage that states that a good leader will not send his followers into a situation that he/she would not be willing to personally undertake. A leader is his/her brother’s keeper. The Navy knowingly sent a mechanically marginal, poorly armed ship with eighty-three crew members into harm’s way, seemingly daring the Soviets and the North Koreans to confront the Pueblo. NSA
and the Navy ignored the carelessness of such an order in light of the danger, whereas a good leader looks out for the followers and sees to the responsibility for ensuring their safety.

**Risk Analysis**

Over-confident reasoning on the point of international maritime law governing free passage to ships at sea, twelve nautical miles from an adversary’s coast line, was the bedrock that NSA and the Navy used as the basis for declaring the *Pueblo* mission to be one of minimal risk. While a calamitous action off an adversary’s coast had not occurred during the *Banner* missions, it should not have been excluded from consideration. The same flawed reasoning served as the first step in the equally slipshod risk analysis of the subsequent *Pueblo* mission. Assigning a risk label to a spy ship mission was not done unilaterally. Admiral Frank Johnson, in his role as CNFJ and administrative supervisor of the *Pueblo*, initially assigned the rating. Concurrence with the assigned rating, however, would be obtained from multiple levels of military leadership, the NSA, JCS, and sometimes ended with the Secretary of Defense for approval. That chain of command consisted of CNFJ, CINCPACFLT, Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC), JCS, and the super secret 303 Committee, an arm of the National Security Council. The 303 Committee included representatives from State and Defense Departments, JCS, and the White House. With multiple layers of military bureaucracy, opportunities for inattentive leadership and/or a cumbersome rubber-stamping process could occur. In the case of the *Pueblo* mission, a documented, 75

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75 Hearings. 638.
thorough analysis of risk was simply not completed. To be a proper analysis, the Navy and NSA should have first formed their own explicit definition of risk. Having done so would have enabled them to explore all the various consequences of a successful or unsuccessful mission. Knowing the possible consequences of mission failure, the Navy and NSA should have investigated and evaluated the effect of those factors and their bearing on the risk. “Yet, history has shown that the politicians [and military]...regularly undertake commitments incompatible with resources, and ... put forward propositions which are at times dangerous as well as irresponsible.”

During the house armed services subcommittee hearings that began on March 4, 1969, Admiral Johnson stated, “I personally made the initial determination of the risk evaluation.” Johnson further alleged that he considered such factors as geographical location, political climate, nature and scope of the task, a study of previous missions, whether friendly support forces were available, and if the mission would take place in international waters. Believing that his risk analysis was complete and thorough, Johnson assigned a rating of minimal risk to the Pueblo mission. Statistician Ralph Strauch, writing for the Rand Corporation, disagrees with Johnson’s assessment. He has concluded that the Pueblo risk assessment proved to be “...significantly deficient.” And while Strauch’s study was written two years after the capture of the

77 Hearings. 734.
78 Strauch, Ralph E. “The Operational Assessment of Risk: A Case Study of the PuebloMission.” Prepared for United States Air Force Project Rand. March 1971. Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA. Web. 1 Dec. 2015. <www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R691.html> Strauch, at the time of this article was a senior mathematician with the Rand Corporation, a think tank for NSA and the Department of Defense. Strauch holds a Ph.D. in statistics from U.C. Berkeley. Though his study was written in 1971, two years after Pueblo’s capture, his findings bolster and support my opinion that the Pueblo capture was caused in great part by the flawed leadership that gave no
*Pueblo*, his analytical study forms an excellent guide to what should have taken place in evaluating the risk involved in the spy ship mission.

Examining Johnson’s criteria, it is possible to see that the geographical location would indicate a hostile, frigid winter scenario, one in which *Pueblo* had never operated, and one where ice build-up on the ship would be a concern. Regarding the political and diplomatic climate, civilian and military officials knew that North Korea exhibited an overt hatred of the United States, a fact that should have served to caution U.S. officials considering spy ship missions off the North Korean coast. No support plan was available, and Naval assets were clearly too far away for assistance. If Johnson, in fact, considered these criteria, he gave little weight to any of them.

When pressed further, Admiral Johnson later stated that he initiated the requests for missions for the *Banner* and *Pueblo* and assigned a minimal risk classification to *Pueblo’s* mission primarily because *Pueblo* would be operating in international waters, there had been no “North Korean naval activity at sea in January and February (*Pueblo* was seized at the end of January)” and North Korea had not reacted to previous USS *Banner* missions off its coast. In hearings, Admiral Johnson admitted that when assigning the risk factor, no specific criteria were used. Upon learning that no criteria were used to assign the risk to a mission, Michigan Representative Lucien Nedzi, a hearing committee member, asked Johnson, “There is no formal definition of

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79 Lerner. 52-53.
80 Hearings. 737.
Johnson replied, “In effect.” Thus, contrary to recommendations outlined in Strauch’s post-incident report, the Navy did not have a grasp of the meaning or definition of the term “risk.” It seems incongruous that a risk classification could be assigned to a mission when the true meaning of the word “risk” was not defined. In further testimony, Johnson went on to say:

Minimal risk means to me that because the ship had the safety which was afforded to it by the right to operate on the high seas in international waters, there was minimal risk overall. However, in certain areas there was a greater degree of minimal risk, if you want to use that kind of a grading, and I tried to make this clear to the committee,...

Once again, Admiral Johnson remained fixed to the rule of the sea and admitted that this tenet formed the basis for his risk analysis and assignment of a risk classification. No consideration was given to potential consequences and, more importantly, to the effect of external and internal factors bearing on the possible risk. Apparently, the bulk, if not all, of the mission requests originating from Johnson were assigned a minimal risk classification. In Johnson’s defense, he was not alone in his lack of attention to detail. As his mission requests moved up the chain of command, the request and assignment of risk was generally rubber stamped by his seniors. For example, when Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, who was CINCPAC during the time of the Pueblo mission (and two levels above Johnson) was asked during later hearings if...
it was true that all mission requests that came to his desk were classified as minimal
risk, he replied, “I would say as a general statement that is probably right.” He went on
to say that he could not recall any mission being classified other than minimal risk.83
There is no indication in Sharp’s testimony that he ever changed any risk classification
that came to his desk. Admiral Thomas Moorer, CNO and member of the JCS at the
time of the Pueblo incident and four levels above the Commanding Officer of the
Pueblo, testified at the hearings that the risk assigned to the spy ship mission was
minimal because the Pueblo would be operating “totally in international waters.” When
asked who originally assigned the minimal risk classification to the Pueblo mission,
Moorer could not name the person responsible. He went on to say that because it was
a minimal risk assignment, “there were no dedicated forces” assigned to come to the
aid of the Pueblo if the ship got into trouble.84 This is, of course, contrary to what
Commander Bucher had been told by Captain Cassel in Japan prior to the Pueblo’s
sailing.

During the hearings, Admiral Moorer was pressed further by New York
Representative Otis Pike and subcommittee Assistant Chief Counsel Frank Slatinshek.
They continued to ask the CNO about the mechanics of assigning the risk factor to the
Pueblo mission. Moorer knew that the risk assignment was faulty and attempted to
have the hearings closed in an effort to keep the inadequate process from becoming
public knowledge.85 Yet, the damage had been done, and cracks in the risk

83 Hearings. 797-798.
84 Hearings. 648-649.
85 Lerner. 56.
assignment process revealed by Moorer would become wider after the subsequent testimony of Admiral Johnson.  

From testimony at the hearings, it is apparent that the risk classification was never questioned after it was assigned by Johnson and forwarded up the chain of command. It is also apparent that consequences were not considered nor were factors bearing on the risk considered. The Navy was blinded by its primary reliance on the international rule of the sea, which it used to set the risk classification, a reliance so strong that it was held from the lowest to the highest echelon in the Navy. These same officers naively believed that all nations would adhere to that rule of the sea. As a result, possible consequences of a U.S. ship’s electronic incursion into North Korean offshore waters were not considered. If consequences of an attack by an adversary had been considered, contingency plans could have been developed to protect the ship and crew, but, as attested to by Admiral Moorer, a well-developed contingency plan was not formulated. “Neither the U.S. Air Force nor the U.S. Navy had set aside any air cover for the ship, and their understrength local units could not scramble enough of the right type of planes in time to drive off the Pueblo’s tormentors.” As former political reporter and author Jack Cheevers wrote in *Act of War*, when under attack from the North Koreans, Bucher learned that, “The comforting

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86 During the hearings, Admiral Moorer’s testimony preceded that of Admiral Johnson.

mantra that international law would shield him on the high seas, so often repeated by Navy brass, had been exposed as a foolish illusion.”88

A second standard listed by Strauch stated that, “The effect of factors bearing on risk should be carefully evaluated and alternative explanations considered.”89 At the time of the sailing of the Pueblo, it was ironic that there were numerous external factors, or indicators, that warranted serious examination for their relationship to the Pueblo’s mission. None of these indicators was covert, and all can be categorized as chronologically, ever-escalating belligerence on the part of the North Koreans, incidents that should have been used in the risk analysis prior to assigning a risk classification to the mission.

If more attention had been devoted to the North Korean risk indicators, a bedrock fundamental voiced by Kim Il-sung in October 1966 might have been heeded. In a speech broadcast at the second Workers Party of Korea Conference, Kim repeated a goal that he had held since early in the decade. It was his intent to neutralize the United States in Korea, subvert and liberate ROK, and unify North and South Korea by any means possible, advocating the use of unconventional methods.90 Clearly, South Korea and its American ally were on notice from Kim.

The verbally hostile North Korean leader put his words into action throughout 1966 and 1967. Raids across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) skyrocketed, with 444

88 Cheevers. 71.
89 Strauch. v.
90 Bolger. 33-35. The CIA had access to Kim’s speeches and occasionally submitted excerpts from his speeches to the president in his daily briefings. CIA daily briefings can be seen at the CIA web site.
incidents in 1967 versus only 37 in 1966.\footnote{Bolger. 112.} During a visit to South Korea in November 1966, President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk awoke on November 2, and learned that seven American soldiers had been killed during the night by North Korean infiltrators.\footnote{Sarantakes, Nicholas Evan. “The Quiet War: Combat Operation Along the Korean Demilitarized Zone, 1966-1969.” \textit{The Journal of Military History}, 64, April 2000. 439-458. Web. 20 Mar. 2016. \textless www.usnwc.edu/Academics/Faculty/Nicholas-Sarantakes/Publications/QWar.aspx\textgreater \footnote{Sarantakes. 441.}}

The following year, in January 1967, North Korean aircraft crossed into South Korean air space, and North Korean shore batteries fired on and sank a South Korean ship. The North continued to test the defenses of the South by making several amphibious assaults. During one raid, the North Korean military attempted to reach a munitions depot where nuclear weapons were stored by the U.S. and South Korean military. “Korea had become a combat zone.”\footnote{Kriebel, Wesley P. “Korea: the Military Armistice Commission 1965-1970.” \textit{Military Affairs}, Vol. 36, no. 3 (Oct. 1972). 96-99. Web. UTA Library. 21 Sept. 2015. \textless http://www.jstor.org/stable/1985311\textgreater}

Infiltration raids across the DMZ rose steadily. The number of North Korean espionage agents captured or killed rose from 205 in 1966 to 787 in 1967. “Some 120 North Korean commando agents landed on the east coast of the Republic of Korea (ROK) between October 31 and November 2, 1968, the largest intrusion into the Republic since the end of the war.”\footnote{Kriebel, Wesley P. “Korea: the Military Armistice Commission 1965-1970.” \textit{Military Affairs}, Vol. 36, no. 3 (Oct. 1972). 96-99. Web. UTA Library. 21 Sept. 2015. \textless http://www.jstor.org/stable/1985311\textgreater} The South Koreans were naturally concerned about large-scale North Korean military and espionage intrusions. In early November 1967, ROK Foreign Minister Choe Kyu-ha met with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, relating to Rusk that the North Korean intent was to slow down the South Korean
economy and “stimulate tension within the country.” This plea to our state department should also have served as a warning of building North Korean aggression.

The number of South Korean and American military personnel killed by North Korean incursion patrols rose from 35 in 1966 to 131 in 1967. North Korean aggression was so serious that on November 2, 1967, Arthur J. Goldberg, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), wrote a six-page letter to the U.N. Security Council to “draw to the attention of the Council and all members of the United Nations the recent sharp increase in the scope and intensity of the North Korean military attacks and other armed activity in Korea in violation of the Military Armistice Agreement signed July 27, 1953.” Indications of risk could not have been more clear.

Warnings to top officials continued. On December 7, 1967, John S. Foster, Jr., Director of Defense Research and Engineering, submitted a memorandum to his boss, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara:

Kim Il-sung has embarked on a course of drastically increased conflict...

[Kim hopes to] cripple the ROK economy, cause the United States to withdraw, and eventually communize the country. A force of special agents is already operating in ROK. [In addition to other actions, Kim] might open the option of conventional air strike and ground

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attack...assuming we would not use nuclear weapons. This is expected to heat up considerably.... 97

With American involvement in the Vietnam War continuing to escalate in 1967, it is likely that McNamara paid scant attention to linking his research director’s memo to spy ship missions. 98

During 1966-68, North Korean officials became ever more confrontational, warning U.S. officials that espionage at sea and in the air would not be tolerated and that they would take defensive action. For example, on January 6, 1968, Radio Pyongyang warned the United States that it was aware of an increase in “provocative acts” by the United States in North Korea’s coastal waters. While not stating so directly, the North Koreans most likely were referring to U.S. spy ships sitting off their coast. This was clear warning that parking U.S. ships in North Korean coastal waters would not be tolerated.

Another strong warning that stands as a glaring example of flawed leadership and the consequences of multi-layered bureaucracy took place on December 29, 1967, approximately a week before Pueblo left on her ill-fated mission. This warning came from the director of the NSA and was sent to the CNO, cautioning him that the Pueblo mission might need to be reevaluated as to its risk. 99 Perhaps because the message was crossing agency boundaries (NSA to Navy), the originator did not want to infringe

99 Strauch. 12.
on another agency’s responsibility. As a result, the carefully worded caution did not carry the impact needed. The word “warning” never appeared in the message. Essentially, NSA’s message represented a “warning opportunity missed.” If the warning had been processed correctly and heeded, it could have prevented the Pueblo debacle. Compounding the problem, through human errors at multi-layered communication stations, the message was never seen by CNO, but was seen by the staff at CINCPAC. The message advised that both the North Korean Air Force and Navy were taking more aggressive actions against foreign military incursions into their territory. NSA also cautioned that North Korea was not following generally recognized international protocol pertaining to boundaries. With managerial inattention to detail, the inefficient Navy communication system mishandled the message. As a result, not only was it mishandled, but incorrectly prioritized, misrouted, and never forwarded to JCS, CINCPACFLT, or Pueblo. This was a warning that was bungled by the Navy, with the Navy later attempting to obfuscate knowledge of the message’s existence, a fact that was not lost on the house committee on armed services. In the summary report of the hearings, dated July 28, 1969, committee members wrote the following terse text:

The handling of the NSA warning message by the Joint Reconnaissance Center, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Office of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Office of the Commander in Chief Pacific, and the office of the Chief of Naval Operations is hardly reassuring. At best, it suggests an

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100 Mobley. 5.
101 Lerner. 58.
unfortunate coincidence of omission; at worst, it suggests the highest order of incompetence.

The committee added:

The incredible handling of the NSA warning message on the Pueblo mission is hardly looked upon with pride by responsible authorities in the Pentagon. It obviously is a proper source of considerable embarrassment. However, the subcommittee is as much concerned with the demonstrated lack of candor of witnesses on this subject as it is with the actual incident itself.\textsuperscript{102}

The bureaucratic layers over the Pueblo nearly ensured that messages and communication might be missent, and that was the case with the NSA message. Those that might have been able to come to the aid of the Pueblo as it operated off the coast of Korea were CNFJ in Japan, Commander of the Seventh Fleet in the Gulf of Tonkin off Vietnam, CINCPACFLT in Honolulu, CINCPAC in Honolulu, the National Military Command Center in Washington, and the JCS in Washington. In other words, the communication net stretched nearly half way around the world, a distance that “restricted easy and rapid military response to the Pueblo’s needs.”\textsuperscript{103} This message, if it had reached the proper recipient, at the very least might have prompted a more detailed examination of the risk to Pueblo before the ship sailed.


\textsuperscript{103} Newton. 73-74.
The seemingly clear warnings continued into January 1968. On January 11, Radio Pyongyang issued another warning, stating that as long as the “U.S. Imperialist aggressor troops conduct reconnaissance by sending spy boats, our naval ships will continue to take determined countermeasures.” The warning could not have been clearer, and yet the Navy continued to believe that Kim’s rhetoric meant little. After all, the spy boat missions were protected by the sovereignty afforded by sailing in international waters.

During the week of January 13, a North Korean statement was reprinted in a Japanese Newspaper, Sankei Shimbun. It stated that North Korea would take action against the USS Pueblo if it remained in North Korean waters. North Korea had actually named the Pueblo in its warning, yet American officials and the Navy took little notice, making no changes in Pueblo’s mission. Because Japan was a strong military ally of the United States, it would seem that the statement would be quickly forwarded through diplomatic and military channels to the appropriate Washington decision-makers, yet Pueblo’s mission would proceed as planned.

On January 17, 1968, Kim Il-sung attempted his most audacious act to that point. A 31-man North Korean Army detachment dressed in South Korean Army uniforms crossed the DMZ. Their mission was to reach the Blue House, the South Korean president’s residence, and “cut off the head of [South Korean President] Park Chung-hee.” South Korean authorities were warned by alert citizens, and the infiltrators were stopped short of their objective. After an intense gun battle, the attackers were

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104 Lerner, 61. and Armbrister, 27.
105 Ibid.
106 Bolger, 62.
tracked down and captured or killed. The attackers had come to within “eight hundred meters of Park’s residence, stopped more by luck and individual initiative than by grand design.”\(^{107}\) As serious as the attack had been, the event captured only moderate world attention, pushed to page 12 in the *New York Times*, for example.\(^{108}\) But the attack caused great unease in South Korea, so much so that South Korean President Park Chung-hee prepared for war against the North. But like so many other world issues at the time, President Johnson and Joint Chiefs Chairman, General Wheeler, saw the warning and the resultant dissatisfaction of the South Koreans only through the prism of the Vietnam War. They were greatly concerned that Park would pull his ROK divisions out of Vietnam unless the United States took retaliatory action against North Korea.\(^{109}\) Park “vehemently insisted on action” and retaliation.\(^{110}\) “Massive street demonstrations were staged by students and citizens of Seoul. They were demanding that Americans support [South] Korea by standing fast,” meaning to retaliate for the North Korean attacks.\(^{111}\) It took great American pressure from U.S. Army General Charles Bonesteel, commander of the U.N. forces in Korea, and U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, William Porter, to dissuade the ROK leader from his planned attack.\(^{112}\) Helping to calm Park, President Johnson’s envoy, Cyrus Vance, offered President Park $100 million in military aid, including a few new F-4 fighter planes, but Park had to agree not to initiate a new

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\(^{107}\) Bolger. 65.


\(^{109}\) Sarantakes. 451.

\(^{110}\) Sarantakes. 450.


\(^{112}\) Lerner. 60. and Sarantakes. 450.
war with the north.\footnote{Bolger. 75.} Park agreed to the deal, toned down his criticism, and South Korean fighters (2-3 divisions, 30-50 thousand men) remained in Vietnam. Park’s plans for retaliation would surely have reopened the Korean war front.

Vance related his meeting(s) with Park to President Johnson after returning from Seoul, telling Johnson that Park had been upset that the United States had not retaliated for the Blue House raid and the capture of the \textit{Pueblo}. Park had also told Vance that if retaliatory action would have been taken that the Soviets and Chinese would “stand aside.” Apparently Park was of the opinion that North Korea had acted unilaterally in both incidents. Vance also related that Park had told him that North Korea’s political plan was “to destroy morale and to harm us and the South Koreans.”\footnote{Tom Johnson’s notes. LBJL. February 15, 1968. Box 2.}

It was now apparent that Kim Il-sung had no qualms about reopening the war with the South and with the Americans. The Blue House incident was a flagrant North Korean military threat and should have concerned officials overseeing the \textit{Pueblo} operation. But it did not. Instead it was examined only from its possible debilitating effect on troop strength in the Vietnam War.

Perhaps the strongest and clearest warning occurred on January 20, 1968, when the North Korean representative at the 260th meeting of the Military Armistice Commission bluntly warned that America’s continued use of spy boats under the cover of naval craft, “will only result in disrupting the armistice and inducing another war.”
This warning could not have been misinterpreted. It was issued only three days before the North Koreans seized the Pueblo.115

The warnings from North Korea were clear. North Korea would not tolerate imperialist aggression in its coastal waters. Yet, throughout the Navy chain of command above the Pueblo, not one Navy official voiced concern or opined that the mission should be cancelled, as attested to by Admiral Moorer in the Pueblo hearings.116 “Admiral Johnson regarded the hostility of North Korea as a fact of the Cold War.”117 Even Secretary of Defense McNamara, testifying before the Appropriations Committee on the Pueblo incident, admitted that he was aware that cross-border attacks by the North Koreans in 1967 had increased over ten times the number during prior years. Yet, he and Navy leaders saw no reason to cancel the spy ship mission.118 In fact, no one associated with the Pueblo cast of officials capable of voicing concern for the ship and crew’s safety came forward with a specific recommendation to revise or cancel the mission.

It is apparent that Navy and NSA officials, while aware of the North Korean warnings and indications of hostile intent, chose to classify them as insignificant, dismissing them as typical Kim Il-sung rhetoric. Prudent leadership should have weighed the anticipated mission results against the consequences of Pueblo’s possible loss. In addition, American officials did not consider the potential for negative aspects of the mission, “such as harassment, attack or seizure of the ship, involvement of

115 Lerner. 60-61.
116 Hearings. 703.
117 Schumacher/Wilson. 79.
118 Ibid.
additional U.S. military forces[for protection]...", and made no "attempt to rate these consequences...." Finally, U.S. officials did not clearly define the risk and gave little thought to factors bearing on the risk. Those factors included clear warnings from North Korea, the nation that was obviously unafraid of reopening all-out war against the South and the United States, and a late warning to the Navy from the NSA. The Navy and the Johnson administration missed all indicators and warnings that such a fate could befall the Pueblo, even after recognizing that the Pyongyang regime had violated the DMZ more than fifty times, ambushed U.S. and allied ground forces, attempted to assassinate the president of the ROK (with a possible secondary target, the American embassy), and in the preceding months, seized twenty South Korean fishing vessels for "entering North Korean territorial waters." While Strauch’s Rand report was written two years after the seizure of the Pueblo, some of its findings are fundamental to planning for a spy ship mission. For example, Strauch contended that at each successive command echelon, a further assessment of risk to Pueblo should have taken place.

As revealed in the hearings, it did not. Instead, like a snowball rolling down a hill, the Pueblo mission gained speed and mass. Ex-intelligence agent Patrick McGarvey referred to this phenomenon as “bureaucratic inertia, the military’s [Navy’s] penchant for ‘positive thinking’” and “the failure of the entire intelligence community to organize itself to meet the needs of technical collection....” Enlightened, receptive leadership willing to properly weigh mission risks was found lacking at all levels within

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119 Strauch. 22-25.
121 Strauch. 25.
122 McGarvey. 27-28.
the *Pueblo’s* Navy chain of command and within the Department of Defense. Former British Foreign Secretary David Owen, in *The Politics of Defence*, wrote, “The details of the *Pueblo* mission and its authorization...reveal the weakness of the whole intelligence procedure in the planning and conduct of a highly sensitive mission.”123

The demonstration of flawed leadership within the military in general and the Navy specifically was not lost on members of Congress. On January 24, 1968, Democratic Representative Robert Sikes of Florida stood and addressed the House, stating, “It is inconceivable that an American intelligence vessel, loaded with highly classified equipment and documents would be sent into dangerous waters without nearby support of American forces.” Sikes continued, “The might of America’s power must be available wherever and whenever it is needed to protect American interests, but it should be obvious that studied and careful preparation can help to avoid dangerous incidents like this one, where a spark could ignite a war.”124 It was obvious to Representative Sikes that the Navy and the intelligence community had not demonstrated due diligence in their preparation for *Pueblo’s* mission.

Lessons learned were, of course, too late for the *Pueblo*. But only two months later, in response to a pointed set of questions in a March 7, 1968, memorandum from Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze to JCS Chairman, General Earle Wheeler, the Chairman responded on March 29, 1968, that he believed spy ship missions should be continued. He couched his answers by saying that protection should be provided “for operations in high risk areas.” He went on to say that an analysis should be made

123 Owen.15.
regarding the need for the intelligence data “versus the risk involved.” How ironic that the USS Banner was decommissioned a short time later, and the spy ship program was scrapped. Contrary to what General Wheeler believed, somewhere, someone in authority finally recognized that the risk was just too great for benefits received.

Chapter Three

Reactions
On the *Pueblo*

It would be difficult to generalize about the thoughts of the eighty-three *Pueblo* crew members as they experienced possibly the most terror-filled event of their lives, the North Korean attack on their ship. However, first-hand accounts by CDR Lloyd Bucher and his operations officer, LTJG Carl “Skip” Schumacher, present a clear picture of their own thoughts in those tense moments. Schumacher described January 23, 1968, as “My Longest Day.” When he was awakened at 0315 to dress and assume the 4-8 a.m. watch on the bridge, he thought that the day would be routine. The ship had been at sea for thirteen days, collecting very little intelligence data and experiencing no intervention from adversaries. The thought occurred to Schumacher that it was so cold that the “Koreans were smart enough” not to chase the *Pueblo* around in the Sea of Japan in the dead of winter. The frigid temperatures had forced the crew to chip ice from the deck and the superstructure to ensure that the ship did not become top heavy in its transit to North Korea.\(^{126}\) When Schumacher assumed the watch, he learned that due to inadequate electronic communications capabilities, the ship had been unable to report to CNFJ that the *Pueblo* had been observed by North Korean trawlers, a message that the ship had been attempting to transmit since the previous day. Because of prior experiences, the abilities of the *Pueblo* remained a concern to the crew. Still, on this frigid January morning, Schumacher and the crew believed that they “had the military backing of the United States...and the protection afforded by the internationally recognized right to sail on the high seas.”

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\(^{126}\) Schumacher/Wilson. 71-75.
While eating lunch on January 23rd, a day with freezing temperatures and “wintry clouds,” Bucher had been called to the bridge in time to see “a Russian-built, modified SO-1 class sub chaser” headed toward the Pueblo at full speed.127 Bucher stated that he was more annoyed than alarmed. Shortly thereafter, three DPRK high-speed torpedo boats arrived on the scene, and all four DPRK ships began circling the Pueblo, all with their guns pointed at the ship, and with armed personnel standing at their rails. Bucher now believed that a “full-fledged harassment operation appeared to be imminent.”128 He recalled that the same harassment tactics had occurred with the USS Banner, and he wrote that he now was “bracing for a test of nerves, not battle.” Bucher’s reaction became more acute as he recalled the inadequacy of the classified material destruction capabilities of the ship, and he asked his engineering officer if the ship could be scuttled “quickly if we had to.” He was told that it would take an inordinate amount of time. Still, Bucher began the destruction process to rid the ship of classified material. While doing so, he held to the thought that “the situation was not that critical and was unlikely to become so.” While the DPRK ships circled, Bucher exclaimed for the benefit of his crew, “We’re not going to let these sons-o’-bitches bullshit us!” According to Bucher, no sooner had he made that statement, when another torpedo boat and sub chaser joined the harassment. The Pueblo was now surrounded by six

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127 Bucher described the DPRK sub-chaser as a Russian-built SO-1 class ship. They are characteristically 171 feet long and heavily armed with an 85 mm (3 inch) cannon, two smaller 37 mm cannons, six heavy machine guns, other smaller machine guns, as well as mortars and rocket launchers. Web. July 28, 2016. <www.russianships.info/eng/warships/project_122bis.htm>

128 The USS Pueblo.org web site states that the torpedo boats were DPRK P-4 torpedo boats, modeled after a Chinese design. Although facts on the specific boats that attacked the Pueblo are not known for certain, characteristically they were roughly 63 feet long and carried torpedoes and 2 heavy machine guns. Web. July 28, 2016. <www.warboats.org/StonerFiles/TonkinCombatants/GulfofTonkinCombatants.htm> and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P_4-class_torpedo_boat>
North Korean war ships and two MIGs flying overhead. One of the lead North Korean ships was flying signal flags that spelled out, “Heave to or I will fire.” Bucher answered by flag, “I am in international waters.” The North Koreans persisted, moving closer to the Pueblo. Seeing that the North Koreans were preparing to come alongside in an attempt to board the Pueblo, Bucher swore, “I’ll be Goddamned if they are going to get away with it.”\(^\text{129}\) He then turned the Pueblo east to depart the area of conflict, ordered the ship to full speed (12 knots), and signaled the North Koreans that he was “departing the area.” Bucher considered ordering the ship to general quarters, but realized that placing crew members on the open deck in an attempt to uncover, man, load, and fire the .50 caliber machine guns would be certain death for the men. They would have been cut down by North Korean machine guns before they could man the Pueblo gun mounts.

While the North Korean Navy (NKN) had not yet fired on the Pueblo, it may have been that they were waiting for permission from their chain of command. “New evidence suggests that the [North Korean] Ministry of National Defense (MND) participated in the seizure. NSA judged that the MND might have been involved in the tracking and seizure, given references in NKN voice communications to ‘the comrade...from the top’ just prior to the seizure.” The North Korean sub chaser also received “orders from the top” to go “farther in toward Wonson before boarding Pueblo, which was still in international waters.”\(^\text{130}\) Shortly thereafter, the North Koreans began a

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\(^{129}\) Bucher. 171-181. The term, MIG is commonly used to describe Soviet-made jet fighter planes manufactured by the now-defunct Mikoyan-Gurevich (hence MIG) Aircraft Company.

sustained burst of cannon fire from the sub chasers, joined by machine guns on the torpedo boats. Several crew members were injured, and Bucher was wounded by flying particles from the shattered windscreen and was then struck by shrapnel. Bucher’s initial reactions had been annoyance, then resignation at being subject to harassment. This was soon followed by defiance and an attempt to move out of the area, only to have his ship and crew subjected to deadly gunfire.

Meanwhile, communication was finally reestablished with CNFJ, and Schumacher rushed to send an SOS message to Japan asking for assistance, alerting CNFJ that the Pueblo was surrounded by two North Korean sub chasers, four torpedo boats, and two circling MIGs. Shortly after the situation report had been sent to Japan, it became apparent that the North Koreans were going to attempt to board the ship. Bucher ordered the ship ahead at one-third speed on a course of 080 to depart the area. As he described his feelings, “a cold dread was building up inside me.” He also described the reaction of those within the crypto spaces as being full of fear. As the ship moved eastward, one of the sub chasers again began a barrage of firing upon the Pueblo. With a twelve to thirteen knot maximum speed, the Pueblo could never outrun her pursuers. But even as the ship was being fired upon by the North Koreans’ 57 mm cannon, Schumacher wondered if there was something more that he could do to speed the destruction of classified material before the ship was sunk, “or we were all killed.” Shortly thereafter, when he saw his commanding officer preparing to surrender the ship, Schumacher stated he could not speak to him. He wrote that if he had tried to speak to
Bucher, “I would have burst into tears. *Rigor mortis* set in in my spirit. My ship, my Navy, my captain, my crew, my life - all gone.”\(^{131}\)

Bucher’s attempt to take the ship and crew away from North Korea and to safety failed. By flag hoist, the *Pueblo* was again ordered by the North Koreans to heave to or suffer further gunfire. Realizing the situation was hopeless, Bucher stopped the *Pueblo*, and the ship was subsequently boarded by eight to ten North Koreans brandishing automatic weapons with fixed bayonets and led by two DPRK officers.\(^ {132}\) Control of the *Pueblo* had been seized by the North Korean Navy.

As a career Navy officer, Bucher knew that his choice not to send his men to the gun mounts was contrary to the Navy tradition of not giving up the ship without a fight. As commanding officer of the *Pueblo*, he was the only man who could make that decision. But in reality, Bucher did not have sufficient time to properly arm his ship for defense. He had previously been told to keep his guns below deck, been told that he would be protected by his being in international waters, and knew that hitherto the North Koreans had been complacent when American ships had neared their coast. He had been firmly warned that he was not to go into the North Korean waters “to start a war.” This advice and assurance contributed to the *Pueblo*’s inability to defend itself when the North Korean Navy arrived.

Bucher chose to protect the welfare of his crew instead of attempting to have his under-armed ship fight, and thereby risk additional injury or death to his sailors. He came to the conclusion that further resistance would only “result in our being shot to

pieces and a lot of good men killed to no avail.” He later recalled, “The feeling of utter loneliness and complete severance from any reliable support became suddenly so overwhelming that I wanted to cry out for help from anybody with a sensible suggestion about what to do! Four of my officers were on the bridge with me, but none of them came forward with a single word of advice.”\textsuperscript{133} Instead, Bucher devoted his energy to destroying as much of the classified material onboard as possible before the North Koreans boarded, his last attempt at defiance before being subjugated by the North Koreans. Bucher and his crew were helpless and forced to pilot the ship into Wonsan harbor. In Wonsan, Bucher and his crew were forced from the ship to be transferred to a North Korean prison.

The men were marched to two waiting North Korean buses. As they moved along, they were “showered with kicks and punches” by their captors who also poked the men with bayonets. “Rifle butts smashed into the prisoners’ heads with such force that some men almost lost consciousness,” while other soldiers inflicted karate blows to the Americans, “much to the delight of the cheering onlookers.” A crowd had gathered to watch the Americans being led to prison, with many of the North Koreans spitting on the Americans and shouting, “Kill Yankee, Kill Yankee.”\textsuperscript{134} The Americans were bused to a train depot where they boarded a waiting train. Several hours later, riding on the dilapidated train, the North Korean soldiers continued to beat the Americans as the train transported the American sailors to prison to suffer a nearly year-long incarceration, Schumacher came to the conclusion in his mind that he “…had to kill myself. Then I

\textsuperscript{133} Bucher. 187.
\textsuperscript{134} Lerner. The Pueblo Incident. 169-171.
would win. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea would lose.” Schumacher held on to this course of action for a time while being repeatedly beaten in prison, making half-hearted attempts to end his life, but later abandoned the idea. Schumacher wrote of his feelings as he rode to his fate in the North Korean prison bus: “Each of us was an island. Each of us was on his own. I had never felt so cut off, so alone, in my life. I was no longer a member of the huge American military establishment. I had been amputated from it by the Koreans.”

If that was the reaction of the *Pueblo*’s Operations Officer, imagine the feelings of the commanding officer, CDR Bucher. In the training of a naval officer, it is ingrained into each young ensign that the commanding officer of a Navy ship is ultimately responsible for everything that occurs onboard that ship. On January 4, 1968, before leaving on his mission, Bucher had spoken to the previous commanding officer of the *Banner*, Commander Charles Clark. They talked about contingencies and whether the North Koreans might attempt to board the *Pueblo*. Clark remembered Bucher saying, “…if those bastards come out after me, well, they’re not going to get me.” On January 23, 1968, in order to save the lives of his crew, CDR Bucher gave up the ship, for which he was ultimately responsible, to the North Koreans without firing a single defensive shot.

Only two days after the *Pueblo*’s capture, on January 25, the North Koreans broadcast an alleged confession by Bucher, in which *Pueblo*’s CO admitted to “criminal

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135 Schumacher/Wilson. 7-8.
136 Clark was succeeded by Robert Bishop in 1967.
137 Armbrister. 206.
Espionage activities.” Closer examination of the broadcast revealed many discrepancies and blatant untruths that Bucher likely inserted in order to indicate that he was being pressured by the North Koreans to write such a document. The confession was subsequently printed in the *Pyongyang Times* in February 1968. A second confession written by Bucher on September 21, 1968, is also interspersed with untruths and nonsensical phrases that show the commander was attempting to demonstrate defiance at being forced to write the confession(s). For instance, he made the statement, “The absolute truth of this bowel wrenching confession is attested to by my fervent desire to paean the Korean people’s Army, Navy, and their government and to beseech the Korean people to forgive our dastardly deeds unmatched since Attila. I swear the following account to be true on the sacred honor of the Great Speckled Bird.” The North Koreans did not, of course, understand Bucher’s subtle, insincere humor.

Bucher and the *Pueblo* crew were interrogated and physically beaten routinely during their eleven months in captivity. Both Bucher and Schumacher wrote of the beatings of the crew by their North Korean captors. The initial routine beatings were endured by the crew, but when the North Koreans learned that they had been humiliated by the *Pueblo* sailors by appearing in pictures and North Korean news

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139 Bucher. Appendix IV. Bucher and other members of the *Pueblo* crew were forced to write confessions which were then edited by the DPRK interrogators, who forced Bucher and the others to rewrite the confessions several times. Failure to comply would result in more beatings. 
140 Bucher. Appendix V. Reading Bucher’s confessions reveals the strange phraseology and tongue-in-cheek wording indicating Bucher’s attempt at defiance and to show the world that he was being forced to write the confessions.
conferences defiantly extending their middle fingers, the beatings became more severe. Being bloodied routinely by the DPRK guards led to several medical complications for the crew. Hospital Corpsman First Class Herman Baldridge was the Pueblo’s corpsman, but he too was a prisoner and was not equipped to administer proper medical aid in prison. The North Korean prison physician only aided the most seriously injured of the crew, and not always with favorable results. The crew’s injuries were the result of North Korean gunfire during the Pueblo’s capture, malnutrition while in prison, and the severe beatings inflicted by the prison guards.

**Within the Military Chain of Command**

The telephone in Admiral John Hyland’s Pearl Harbor quarters had been ringing incessantly for several hours. Hyland, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, and his aide, Captain Cassell, subsequently made their way to CINCPACFLT headquarters where they reviewed all available information regarding the Pueblo capture. The reaction of the U.S. Navy was predictable. “Naval officers were generally shocked that the Pueblo had been captured by the enemy without a serious fight and that she had been taken into Wonsan harbor apparently without any attempt by her crew to sink her.”

141 The attack and capture of a U.S. Navy ship had happened only once before, in 1807, when Commodore James Barron surrendered the USS Chesapeake to the British. 142 Aside from the fact that poor leadership had played a large role in the capture

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142 Cheevers. 125-126.
of the *Pueblo*, the predictable Navy reaction was that military retaliation must be strongly and swiftly administered.

From his headquarters, Admiral Hyland phoned Admiral Johnson, CNFJ, in Yokosuka, Japan, and learned that at 1:06 a.m. the Commander Seventh Fleet, Admiral William Bringle, ordered the positioning of the USS *Enterprise* closer to the Korean coast and was planning to move other Navy assets to the area in preparation for retaliation.\(^{143}\) Hyland then conferred with the CNO, Admiral Moorer, and sent a message to Bringle ordering him to place a destroyer in international waters off the port of Wonsan, in preparation for the destroyer to enter Wonsan Harbor, physically take back the *Pueblo* by force, and tow the ship back to sea. Hyland also discussed the idea of pin-point bombing the *Pueblo* to destroy the ship and its trove of classified material, keeping it from the Soviets. Air strikes on Wonsan and other North Korean targets were also discussed. But even the highest ranking officer in the Navy could not approve this daring rescue and coordinated air strikes against North Korea without authorization from the JCS and President Johnson. By 11 a.m. Washington time, the president had made his initial decision and passed it along to the JCS. With the orders of the JCS in hand, Hyland notified Bringle by message. "It is desired that no show of force be deployed in area of *Pueblo* incident."\(^{144}\) There would be no immediate retaliatory military action. U.S. Naval forces that had been steaming toward North Korea were ordered to go no farther north than the coast of South Korea. While the military had reacted by

<nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB453/docs/doc23.pdf> From the George Washington University NSA collection. This is a chronology of events of the Pueblo incident. A copy is also held in the LBJ Library in Austin, TX. Hereafter referred to as Chronology.  
\(^{144}\) Armbrister. 236-239.
requesting retaliatory action, its request was not granted. The *Pueblo* and crew would remain in the hands of the North Koreans.

**In South Korea**

While the attack on the Blue House had stirred the people of South Korea to advocate immediate military retaliation, the capture of the *Pueblo* further amplified that fervor. On the morning of January 27th, General Charles Bonesteel, commander of all U.N. forces in Korea, met with the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff. The South Koreans, at all levels, were incensed that the United States had made no statements nor taken any action following the Blue House attack. Now, North Korean aggression in taking the *Pueblo*, further angered the South Koreans. But as Bonesteel said later, “The damned *Pueblo* occurred two days later [than the Blue House raid] and that really put the fat in the fire.”

In meetings with Bonesteel, the ROK Joint Chiefs demanded that they and their U.S. allies take “clear, punitive action to teach Kim Il-sung a lesson.” It took a great deal of negotiation and smoothing of ruffled feathers on the part of Bonesteel and Ambassador William Porter to prevent the South Koreans from reopening full scale war on the Korean peninsula.

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145 Bolger. 65.
In the Situation Room, Washington

Walt W. Rostow, Special Assistant for National Security to President Lyndon Johnson, received a 12:15 a.m. phone call on January 23, 1968. The urgency of the call caused him to dress hurriedly and be taken to the White House where he went directly to the Situation Room. Before alerting the president, he checked all known data regarding the attack, boarding, and seizure of the USS Pueblo. Assured that he knew as much as possible about the situation, he called the president at approximately 2:25 a.m. On the phone, Johnson replied, “Thank you,” and hung up.

Following Rostow’s phone call, events in Washington quickly commenced. Secretary of State Dean Rusk cabled U.S. Ambassador William Porter in Seoul with orders to begin negotiations with the North Koreans. The initial negotiator for the United States would be Rear Admiral John V. Smith, chief spokesman for the Military Armistice Commission.

By 9:00 a.m. on the 23rd, a crisis team had formed and held the first of many meetings. Later, the number of attendees to Pueblo/North Korea meetings varied, but generally included the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Earl Wheeler, Walt Rostow, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, Assistant Secretary of State Samuel Berger, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, CIA

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147 Chronology. 3. Note - time difference between N. Korea and Washington is 13 hours.
149 The Military Armistice Commission was set up in July 1953 as part of the armistice agreement that closed the Korean War. The duties of the commission were to oversee the compliance of the North Koreans and the U.N. forces. Issues between the parties were to be resolved in meetings held at a facility that straddled the 38th parallel in Panmunjom. Admiral Smith was the first of the U.S. negotiators. After six months of talks, he was replaced by U.S. Army Major General Gilbert H. Woodward, who subsequently signed the actual agreement letters demanded by North Korea.
Director Richard Helms, Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board Chairman General Maxwell Taylor, Clark Clifford, and National Security Council Executive Secretary Bromley Smith. Clifford had served on President Kennedy’s President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) and transitioned onto President Johnson’s PFIAB, where he served as chairman prior to being named Secretary of Defense. Clifford was a trusted member of Johnson’s “kitchen cabinet.” On January 19, 1968, Johnson would name him Secretary of Defense to succeed Robert McNamara, only four days before the Pueblo incident. Because Clifford was not sworn in as Secretary of Defense until March 1, 1968, both he and McNamara attended the Pueblo strategy meetings. As a confidant of the president, Clifford’s influence with the committee was held in high regard. It was this select group of advisors that would ultimately present President Johnson with an array of possible actions that the United States could take in response to the capture of the Pueblo. First reactions of committee members centered on military retaliation. Ideas were discussed that included bombing the Pueblo, sending retaliatory raids on Wonsan or Pyongyang, knocking out a key military installation in North Korea, naval shore bombardment from outside the twelve mile limit, or enlisting the South Koreans to stage a large invasion into North Korea.

150 Absher, Kenneth Michael, and Michael C. Desch, and Popadiuk, Roman, and the 2006 Bush School Master in Public and International Affairs Capstone Team. Privileged and Confidential: The Secret History of the President’s Intelligence Advisory Board. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2012. Introduction and Chap.2. Print. 151 Armbrister. 258-259. 152 Ibid. It should also be noted that early in the White House discussions of the Pueblo incident, President Johnson also formed an ad hoc committee. That group was headed by former Undersecretary of State George Ball, and included retired Army General Mark Clark, retired Air Force General Laurence Kuter, and retired Navy Admiral David McDonald. They were tasked with analyzing the necessity of Pueblo-type missions, the design of those missions, and the operation of the [specific Pueblo] mission. Hereinafter, that group will be referred to as the Ad Hoc Committee.
At the first crisis team meeting in the Situation Room on January 23, the president joined the group at 10 a.m. and quite possibly at his insistence, a 10:25 a.m. call was made to Admiral Hyland in Hawaii, advising him to stand down and ordering that no immediate military action be taken. This was followed by a radio message to CINCPAC (Admiral Sharp) from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler, which stated that “The Administration is currently focusing on diplomatic actions to obtain return of the Pueblo and her crew.”¹⁵³ In the same message, Wheeler also informed Sharp that a large number of military assets would be moved closer to the Korean peninsula as a precautionary measure and to make them more readily available if military action ramped up.

At the White House

Examining the reaction of President Johnson and his closest advisors requires a situational perspective. It can be argued that 1968 was the most frustrating and complex year of the Johnson administration. “The Pueblo incident formed the first link in a chain of events - of crisis, tragedy, and disappointment - that added up to one of the most agonizing years any president has ever spent in the White House.”¹⁵⁴ Multiple factors leading up to 1968 derailed the intended social programs of President Johnson with most of those distracting factors centered around the Vietnam War. The United States had begun intensive bombing of selected North Vietnamese targets in 1965. At

almost the same time, anti-war protests grew from college campuses to “national prominence in 1965. Anti-war marches and other protests, such as the ones organized by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), attracted a widening base...peaking in early 1968....”155 “It was increasingly difficult to find public forums for the president that avoided disruption from the demonstrators opposing the war or demanding more money and programs for blacks and poor people.”156 In addition, Johnson was also subjected to growing anti-war arguments from his own party in Congress, led by the powerful voice of Senate Majority Leader, Mike Mansfield. Mansfield had been an opponent of the Vietnam War as early as 1962, when the United States was providing military advisors and lending financial support to South Vietnam, and later “became an implacable critic of the American position [concerning Vietnam].”157 By 1968, the media had also drifted away from their previous backing of the president’s war efforts. This was especially true after some reporters “went to Vietnam as supporters of U.S. policy and then, after witnessing the war, grew skeptical.”158 The television nightly news was broadcasting film footage of the war along with the daily American casualty numbers, giving rise to further public dissatisfaction in the manner in which the war was conducted.

By November 1967, nearly 500,000 American troops were in Vietnam, and U.S. commanders were asking for more personnel. With spending on the war at nearly $25

billion per year, military deaths over 15,000, casualties over 100,000, and nightly television broadcasts carrying the spiraling war costs, disillusionment with the war grew across the United States. “The mounting number of American casualties in South Vietnam [was] having a profound effect upon American opinion.”\textsuperscript{159} Fully 50 percent of Americans disapproved of Johnson’s handling of the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{160} The administration’s lack of transparency concerning the war resulted in 65 percent of the American public complaining “that [Johnson] was not fully informing the country about” the true details and figures of the war effort.\textsuperscript{161} The dissatisfaction peaked in January 1968 with the capture of the \textit{Pueblo} on January 23, and the psychologically disastrous Tet offensive carried out by the North Vietnamese on January 30, 1968. The lack of resolve concerning the war even reached the inner circle of the administration. In 1967, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had begun advising the president that troop strength in Vietnam should reach a ceiling number, bombing should be reduced or eliminated, and the United States should seek “a new American peace initiative.” Johnson would not hear of such “defeatism” and ousted McNamara (officially, McNamara resigned November 29, 1967), appointing him to a position at the World Bank, and naming Clark Clifford to the Secretary of Defense post.\textsuperscript{162} Secretary of State Dean Rusk also held some of the same sentiments and “recognized that Tet had sapped much of the remaining grassroots support for continuing the war.”\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{159} McMahon, Robert J. “Disillusionment and Disengagement in South Asia.” \textit{Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World}. 153.


\textsuperscript{161} Dallek. 462.

\textsuperscript{162} Immerman, Richard H. “Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam.” \textit{Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World}. 64-65.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid. 76.
Advised by Secretary Rusk, CIA Director Helms, and Under Secretary of Defense Nitze, Johnson was convinced that the *Pueblo* incident was linked to the Vietnam War effort, meant to divert attention to Korea, enabling the North Vietnamese to take advantage of the distraction to mount the Tet offensive.\(^{164}\) Regardless of Johnson’s thinking, the American public began retracting their support for the war, while wanting action taken to retrieve the *Pueblo* and crew, certainly a political dichotomy. Public dissatisfaction rose to the point that the Secret Service advised the president not to travel, and Johnson became a virtual “prisoner in the White House, losing his freedom to travel in the country.”\(^{165}\)

Historian Nancy Bernkopf Tucker wrote that President Johnson was “dominated by the Cold War stereotypes of his time.” The Cold War stereotype that the communists were attempting to carry out the “domino theory” of dominance over small countries was believed by President Johnson so fervently that he was determined to personally stop the spread of communism by its defeat in Vietnam. Perhaps wishing Vietnam to be his legacy for halting the spread of communism, instead it became his legacy for flawed leadership. As Tucker wrote, Johnson lost “his way in the jungles of Vietnam.”\(^{166}\) By 1968, Johnson and his advisors saw every world event and every decision made by the White House in its relation to the war in Vietnam. “Vietnam governed choices made,

\(^{164}\) Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum. Tom Johnson’s notes, *Pueblo* Box 2, Jan. 23-24. Mr. Tom Johnson recorded the official notes in most of the meetings held with President Johnson and his closest advisors. Those written notes are held in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum in Austin, Texas. They reveal a great deal about the thinking of the president and his advisors. They also serve as a window to the hand-wringing, the attempts to develop response plans, the attempts to attribute the blame, the disconnection from the incident itself caused by multilayers of bureaucracy, and the flaws in leadership at the pinnacle of the U.S. Government in time of crisis. His notes will hereinafter be referred to a Tom Johnson’s meeting notes, LBJL. Also Tucker, “Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia.” *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World.* 101.

\(^{165}\) Dallek. 452-453.

expenditures apportioned, and challenges accepted....” As a result, the seizure of the Pueblo was also looked at through the Johnson administration’s Vietnam filter, thereby coloring all Pueblo discussions and decisions, placing them in the context of the war in Southeast Asia.

On January 23, the president held his usual Tuesday luncheon meeting with his national security team. Notes from that meeting reveal the lack of knowledge of both North Korea and the USS Pueblo, and consideration of military retaliation options. President Johnson voiced his opinion that one of the options included, “Hitting the North Koreans with U.S. forces,” and perhaps “Capturing one of their [North Korean] ships.” The president also stated that he thought the incident a plot to disrupt actions worldwide, and that he “would not be surprised if something happened in Berlin to coincide with what is going on in Vietnam and Korea.” At the same meeting, General Wheeler informed the group that “the man who lost a leg [during the attack on the Pueblo, fireman Duane Hodges] was engaged in blowing up equipment.” Both the president’s and Wheeler’s observations were untrue and are perhaps indicative of their naivety and paucity of knowledge of North Korea and the Pueblo.

On January 24, a corollary Pueblo meeting was held at the State Department, with virtually the same attendees, along with George Christian, the White House Press Secretary. Taking notes at the meeting, Christian wrote that McNamara wanted the group to analyze the North Korean objective, suggesting that they may have wanted to

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168 Tom Johnson’s Meeting Notes, LBJL. Box 2, Pueblo 1. National Security Lunch, January 23, 1968, 12:58 p.m. Print. Wheeler’s statement was later proven to be false. Good leadership would not make such a statement without conclusive proof.
“tie down the United states.” Nitze believed that North Korea was trying to pressure the United States to negotiate an end in Vietnam. Katzenbach disagreed and suggested that the Pueblo was just “a monkey wrench,” and that the most “plausible conclusion” was that it was “simply a North Korean action.”

Surprisingly, though Nicholas Katzenbach was not considered a foreign policy expert, he correctly assigned responsibility: the North Koreans acted on their own. But Rostow, a firm believer in Soviet conspiracy, remained unconvinced. Referring to the North Koreans he said, “They were going for a vessel in which the Russians are much interested.” Everyone had an opinion and most proved incorrect. How was it that there was such a lack of knowledgeable leadership at the very pinnacle of American government?

At 1:00 p.m. that day, the president met once again with his National Security Council. This meeting was indicative of some of the brash, unfounded statements made by senior leadership as they advised the president. Secretary McNamara, for example, stated that “the Soviets knew of it [the attack and capture of the Pueblo] in advance.” Secretary Rusk echoed this sentiment, stating that he thought the “incident was pre-planned,” and that “The Soviets may have had advance notice of what was planned.” At the same meeting, the attendees also discussed the alleged confession made by CDR Bucher. Perhaps not surprisingly, finger pointing began. Secretary Rusk stated that he simply could not believe that the North Koreans could ever get a “U.S. Navy Commander to make statements like that.” He implied that something was amiss


170 Ibid.
in Lloyd Bucher’s record or character. The president jumped in with the same sentiments, stating, “Look very closely at his record.” This seems to be an unfair assertion considering that the Pueblo had broadcast SOS messages and requested military assistance. Why question Bucher’s character at that point in the investigation? Walt Rostow, ever believing the Soviets to be puppet masters, stated without evidence that the “confession by the [ship’s] captain appears to be written by the Soviets.” And finally, Richard Helms, Director of the CIA, stated that “It looks...like collusion between the North Koreans and the Soviets...to divert us from our efforts in Vietnam.”

However, if Johnson and his advisors had more closely studied Bucher’s alleged confession, they would have also been able to discern that the document was rife with untruths. For example, Bucher “confesses” that the CIA had promised him “a lot of dollars” if his “task would be done successfully.” North Korea also alleged that Bucher wrote that the Pueblo “did not hoist the U.S. flag and sailed at the highest speed....” Expert analysis of such statements would surely have raised doubt as to the veracity of Bucher’s forced confession.

The president’s top advisors made baseless assertions, convinced that they held substance. Subsequent analysis would not bear out any of their rash statements. Did each advisor wish to impress the president by appearing to have powerful information to

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171 Meeting Notes, National Security Lunch, January 24, 1968, 1:00 p.m. LBIL. Tom Johnson’s meeting notes. Box 2, Pueblo 2. Print. Bucher’s alleged confession is appendix A to this document. It should also be noted that while Dean Rusk voiced an opinion that the incident was pre-planned, two years later in an interview for Rusk’s oral history for the LBJ Library, he stated that he would “never fully understand just why the North Koreans seized the Pueblo. Apparently he still did not understand Kim Il-sung’s reasoning. Rusk’s interview is documented in Transcript, Dean Rusk Oral History Interview III, Jan. 2, 1970, by Paige E Muhhollen, Internet Copy, LBJ Library. Web. May 28, 2015. <www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/rusk03.pdf>

172 Ibid.

173 Bucher. Appendix IV.
Was it flawed leadership that led them to link known facts with speculation to project an assumed possession of powerful knowledge to please the president?

Later that evening, the president met again with Rusk, McNamara, Clifford, and Rostow. It was at this meeting that Secretary Rusk suggested that the *Pueblo* matter be taken to the U. N. Security Council. The president concurred, saying, “I think we should get [U.N.] Ambassador Goldberg down here tomorrow morning...” And while U.N. diplomatic efforts were discussed and formulated, military options were discussed in detail.\(^\text{174}\)

**\(^{174}\) Tom Johnson’s meeting notes. January 24, 1968, 7:50 p.m. LBJL. Box 2, Pueblo 3. Print.**
go to the Congress on this matter.” He was also concerned that this overt action might “jeopardize our position elsewhere, particularly in Berlin.” The president’s innuendo suggested that the Korean incidents were part of a world-wide Communist plot, with the next possible step being an attempt to take over all of Berlin. Perhaps because of this fear, President Johnson stayed the course of using diplomatic channels and sent a follow-up telegram to Soviet Chairman Alexi Kosygin, asking for his help in influencing the North Koreans, and reminding Kosygin of their shared objectives: “I am sure that we must agree that our common interests in preserving world peace would not be served by increased tensions in this area of the world.”

At the president’s luncheon meeting that day, while the same discussion points arose, several new items were considered. Rostow reported that he had received information that the Soviets had loaded a cargo plane with 792 pounds of cargo, allegedly with “equipment taken from the Pueblo.” This further reinforced his notion of a Soviet plot. President Johnson, showing a bit of impatience, asked the group, “what I want to know is how we are going to get that ship out.” Although the president preferred diplomacy, he still harbored the belief that somehow the Pueblo could be forcibly removed from Wonsan Harbor. CIA Director Richard Helms made a prophetic statement, saying that one of his [North Korean] sources had told him that the North Koreans “will exploit the incident and then turn the ship loose for humanitarian reasons.” Time would prove him correct on the first assertion, but wrong on the second. In the midst of military advisors still advocating military action, the most sage advice at the

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175 Tom Johnson’s meeting notes. January 25, 1968. 8:30 a.m. LBJL. Box 2, Pueblo 4.Print.
176 Ibid.
meeting was probably given by Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, who stated, "Mr. President, the only way to get that ship out with the crew is talking through diplomatic channels." His words would be proven partially true when after months of rigorous negotiations with the North Koreans, the crew members were released. During that same meeting, after a verbal discussion and suggestion by Clark Clifford, the administration agreed that the Pueblo incident would be submitted to the U.N. Security Council.

Another interesting meeting occurred the following day, January 26, 1968. In that meeting, President Johnson ordered General Wheeler to have General Andrew Goodpaster speak with ex-President Dwight Eisenhower to "ask Ike what is our best constitutional way to proceed." The president also related that he had received a response from Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, in which Gromyko urged restraint and cautioned against overreacting.

General Goodpaster reported back to the president on January 29. In his memo to Johnson, he wrote that ex-President Eisenhower had asked a number of questions. Perhaps not surprisingly, Eisenhower made military suggestions initially and then suggested a quarantine and a movement of military assets closer to Korea. He also suggested strongly that the administration "should do everything possible to press for action on the diplomatic front and in the U.N. Security Council, and should even ask for a special session of the General Assembly if we thought anything useful could be

177 Tom Johnson’s meeting notes. January 25, 1968. 8:30 a.m. LBJL. Box 2, Pueblo 5. Print.
178 Tom Johnson’s meeting notes. January 26, 1968. 11 a.m. LBJL. Box 2, Pueblo 7. Print.
achieved,” and concluded by expressing his “hope for the president’s success in this matter.”

Only one day later, on January 30, approximately seventy to eighty thousand North Vietnamese troops launched one of the largest military operations of the Vietnam War, the Tet offensive. Over one hundred cities in South Vietnam were attacked, with heavy losses inflicted on U.S. troops, South Vietnamese troops, as well as the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops. “U.S. losses were 3,895,” South Vietnam lost 4,954, and 32,000 communist soldiers were killed. The U.S. military and the Johnson administration had led the American people to believe that the United States was progressing in Vietnam toward ultimate victory. As a result of the Tet offensive, the backing of the United States public waned further as scenes from multiple Vietnam battlefields were televised, and American war casualties continued to mount. Walter Cronkite, the highly respected American TV journalist, and a “moderate and balanced observer of the war’s progress,” returned in February from the battlefield in Hue, and stated “that it seemed ‘more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate.’” 1968 was the year of the highest number of American deaths in Vietnam, reaching 16,899. The psychological and political fallout of the Tet offensive coupled with the mounting U.S. military death toll, forced the Johnson

administration to turn its full attention to the political nightmare caused by the quagmire in Vietnam.

Discussions of the Pueblo continued for a few more days with the same topics under discussion, but the Tet offensive moved the Johnson administration to place discussions of the Pueblo incident on the back burner, with Vietnam resuming the primary position. This is evidenced by Tom Johnson’s meeting notes. Immediately following the seizure of the Pueblo, discussions in meetings generally began with Pueblo issues. After the Tet offensive, discussions always began with items regarding the Vietnam war, meaning Pueblo issues received less discussion time and, if discussed at all, were placed later on meeting agendas.

Ideas from various planning meetings were consolidated and presented in a document to President Johnson and, as expected, they centered on military action. The top secret document included available options, their advantages and disadvantages, and the possible reaction of North Korea. The ideas included placing the USS Banner off the coast of North Korea, escorted by U.S. warships. Another idea was to make a show of force by repositioning military assets closer to North Korea and intensifying airborne reconnaissance over the Korean peninsula. Both the military and the president favored calling up reserve military forces in anticipation of further military conflict with North Korea. (This was done by Executive Order on January 25, 1968, the first time the reserves had been called up since the Berlin crisis of 1961). Another idea was to conduct military raids across the DMZ into North Korea using both American and ROK troops. Suggestions also included immediate action to use U.S. Navy divers to recover

\footnote{Chronology. 17.}
the classified material jettisoned by the *Pueblo* crew. Other ideas involved a quarantine or blockade against North Korean naval units, electronic jamming operations against the North Koreans, and seizing a North Korean merchant or fish factory vessel.

One of the more audacious suggestions involved sending a U.S. tug boat into Wonsan Harbor, grabbing the *Pueblo* by military force, and dragging her back to sea.\textsuperscript{185} A bold option came from Walt Rostow. He was so convinced that the North Koreans had acted on suggestions from the Soviet Union that he hatched a retaliation-in-kind idea, which he repeatedly referred to as a response of “symmetry.” His plan was to lure the Soviet spy ship *Gidrolog*, which was shadowing the USS *Enterprise*, into South Korean waters where the ROK military would then capture it.\textsuperscript{186} Rostow’s suggestion understandably received no traction from the committee.

It is of interest that these options considered the possible reactions of North Korea to U.S. action, but not possible repercussions from the Soviets or Chinese. Yet, it was believed by many within the administration that the *Pueblo* capture had hallmarks of possible instigation by the Soviets or the Chinese. On the surface, at least, this lack of consideration of Soviet or Chinese influence is another example of defective leadership.


Even though President Johnson also thought that the Soviets or the Chinese might have influenced the North Koreans, to his credit, in the first seven hours after Johnson learned of the *Pueblo*’s capture, his reaction was one of measured, deliberate consideration, carefully weighing all options. “President Johnson did not want to open a military conflict with North Korea.” Opening another war front would seriously undermine efforts in Vietnam where the United States was not faring well in a conflict that was already sapping American support and resources. According to Secretary of State Rusk, in an interview for the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Oral History Collection, Johnson had “made a prompt decision to try to get the ship and its men back by diplomatic means rather than by military means.”\(^\text{187}\) He consistently stayed with this course of action throughout negotiations with the North Koreans for the release of the *Pueblo* and crew. Aside from being his own man, his methodology may have been influenced by his lack of complete dependence on advisors. Just as his predecessor, President Kennedy, who “learned skepticism about intelligence estimates the hard way” (Bay of Pigs), President Johnson relied greatly on his own self-counsel, stating in 1966, “I can’t think of a thing I know that the press doesn’t know right now. There isn’t one important activity we are in that I haven’t seen in the papers or on TV in some way.”\(^\text{188}\)

President Johnson received a daily briefing from the CIA. In addition to daily briefings, the CIA would continue to monitor all aspects of the *Pueblo* incident, including efforts at the negotiating table and world-wide sentiment regarding the issue. These


\(^{188}\) McGarvey. 31-32.
findings were provided to the president in numbered “Pueblo Sitreps,” (situation reports). They offer insight on the multiplicity of issues brought before the administration at the time of the Pueblo incident. For example, the briefing book for January 23 contained a cryptic untimely remark, considering that the CIA and the president already knew that Pueblo had been captured. It read, “The North Koreans have long shown extreme sensitivity to U.S. and South Korean ‘spy ships’ operating in the area. Pyongyang’s propaganda during the past few weeks has taken a particularly harsh line against the US.”

The briefing on the following day contained discouraging news. Referring to negotiations that had begun with the North Koreans, the president read, “The US got nowhere at Panmunjom today.” The briefing also stated that the North Koreans were defiant regarding the release of the Pueblo and the crew of the spy ship. News on the 26th was no better. The CIA briefing stated, “Pyongyang is now talking about bringing the Pueblo’s crew to trial,” and that the crew must “receive due punishment.” This was certainly not news the administration hoped to hear, and the North Korean stance in negotiations would remain resolute for months to follow.

The CIA sitrep of January 27, 1968, reported that the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission, which had been established by the Korean Armistice Commission at the end of the Korean War, could do nothing to assist in the release of the Pueblo and crew, and that Communist East European nations were taking a pro-

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North Korea stance in the situation. The report also stated that on the previous day another U.S. soldier had been killed along the Korean DMZ by a North Korean infiltrator, and that the U.N. Security Council had devoted only two hours of debate on the Pueblo situation.\footnote{Central Intelligence Agency. Intelligence Memorandum. 27 January 1968. “Pueblo Sitrep No. 13.” Papers of LBJ. LBJL. National Security File. Country File, Asia and Pacific. Box 257. Print. Note also that the killing of another American soldier along the DMZ corroborates Daniel Bolger’s previously cited work on the continuing low-intensity conflict in Korea.}

In CIA sitrep #14 of January 28, the president learned that Pyongyang had flatly rejected the idea of “UN consideration of the Pueblo problem.” It also became apparent that the administration was attempting to solicit help from the Soviets in resolving the issue. Boris Batrayev, an operative for the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB) in New Delhi, had conveyed to the CIA that the “USSR is interested in working behind the scenes to resolve it” [the issue]. Batrayev also made it known that Chairman Kosygin was of the opinion that “the Pueblo incident could have been a ‘genuine mistake,’--without saying on whose part...”\footnote{Central Intelligence Agency. Intelligence Memorandum. 28 January 1968. “Pueblo Sitrep No. 14.” Papers of LBJ. LBJL. National Security File. Country File, Asia and Pacific. Box 257. Print}

The sitrep on the following day seemed to take exception to Johnson’s preferred one-on-one negotiations with North Korea. In fact, Ethiopia had proposed inviting North Korea to the United Nations to “tell its side of the story.” The idea of giving North Korea a world stage to tell their version of the Pueblo events was probably not well received by the Johnson administration. Further in the report, the CIA reported that the North Vietnamese had “voiced its [their] support for its North Korean ‘brothers and comrades in arms...” The CIA alleged that North Vietnam went on to claim that the “dispatch of
the *Pueblo* to Asian waters” was provocation “designed to provoke a new war....”

This language clearly illustrates the Johnson administration’s perceived link between the *Pueblo* and the war in Vietnam.

The CIA also had its hands in another aspect of the *Pueblo* capture. Apparently the Johnson administration found it hard to imagine a Navy commanding officer giving up his ship. Whether tasked by the administration or self motivated, the CIA began examining the record of the *Pueblo*’s Commanding Officer. By January 29, the agency had completed what it termed a “psychological and political analysis” of CDR Lloyd Bucher. It simply seemed inconceivable that a U.S. Navy ship had been taken without a single defensive shot fired. Did it follow that there must be something psychologically amiss with Bucher? The CIA drew certain “inferences” from their investigation, but those inferences are to this day redacted from the report. The other sections of the report revealed nothing out of the ordinary and stated that Bucher’s “performance was average.” It might be argued that the CIA tasking was another stab in the dark by the Johnson administration, another effort to find a culprit for blame.

President Johnson held an almost delusional belief in a world-wide Communist plot and tended to see each issue as it related to the war in Vietnam. Hence, he looked at the Blue House attack and the capture of the *Pueblo* as further evidence of a Communist master plan. He was certain that both events were intended to infuriate the South Koreans, inducing them to bring home their two divisions that were fighting

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alongside the Americans in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{196} The president was correct that both incidents infuriated the South Koreans, but there was no proof of that being the intent of the North Koreans.\textsuperscript{197} Meeting notes of initial discussions reveal that like the president, some of his advisors were of the opinion that either the Soviet Union or China was behind the North Korean actions.

On February 7, 1968, Under Secretary of State George Ball’s ad hoc committee had completed their work and produced the sixth draft of their “Report to the President.” After weeks of work, their report in some instances appeared sophomoric, and, if it were not for the seriousness of the subject, almost comedic in its efforts to avoid any direct accusations. The committee report stated that “a balance must be struck between the need for...the intelligence, and the risk involved in obtaining it.” After writing that they believed that the spy missions were essential for intelligence collection, they also wrote that “the responsible officials had at the time a valid basis for approving the mission,” and that “North Korean warnings...were in form and content simply the latest reiteration of familiar North Korean charges that hundreds of ‘fishing boats and armed espionage boats' were intruding in North Korean waters.” The report also warned that “[spy vessels] should not be used near North Korean territorial waters without protection.” That advice seems self-evident. And finally, the committee advised that perhaps there should be “a gradual erosion of secrecy in order to produce greater mutual understanding between nations...[thereby] dispelling suspicion, [and] creat[ing] a

\textsuperscript{196} Bolger. 69. Author’s source is quote on pgs. 533-534 in The Vantage Point authored by President Johnson. Also Lerner. The Pueblo Incident. 126.
\textsuperscript{197} Lerner. The Pueblo Incident. 131-133.
condition of greater mutual confidence.”\textsuperscript{198} One can only wonder what President Johnson, the NSA, and the JCS thought of that nugget.

The war in Southeast Asia overrode the president’s thought processes on every issue brought before him. Not only did the president struggle to find a solution to the \textit{Pueblo} problem, but with the exception of two or three advisors, he was surrounded by well-meaning hand-wringers, leaders who were hampered by their narrowly focused solutions, which did not always consider inherent risks. Yet in their defense, those advisors had never before encountered the seizure of an American warship by a foreign state and, therefore, could only speculate on a resolution. Yet each man was convinced that he held the best solution to President Johnson’s spy ship problem.

\textbf{Reaction of Congress and the Public}

It was not long after the capture of the \textit{Pueblo} that the world learned of the plight of the American spy ship and its crew. The State Department, Department of Defense, and the White House all held news conferences on January 23, 1968. After Rostow’s 2:25 a.m. phone call to brief President Johnson, the Department of Defense issued the first press release at 8:37 a.m. At 11:58 a.m., White House Press Secretary George Christian held a news conference, followed at 12:26 p.m. by a “press and radio news briefing” at the State Department.\textsuperscript{199} Secretary of State Rusk stated that every effort to get the ship and crew released would be made “through the channels that are available


\textsuperscript{199} Chronology. 7.
to us.” The world and the U.S. Congress now knew that North Korea had attacked and forcibly taken a military ship belonging to the United States. Keeping the U.S. public and Congress informed and placated now added to the many multi-faceted problems on the president’s desk.

Print media and radio and television news swarmed around the *Pueblo* story. Monitoring the written and broadcast news regarding the *Pueblo* incident, as well as the remarks of members of Congress, mattered greatly to the Johnson administration. On January 24, Bob Fleming, Deputy Presidential Press Secretary, submitted a memorandum to the president that summarized that day’s major television network broadcasts. He wrote that NBC’s John Chancellor used remarks from the State Department briefings to address the question of why no U.S. military assistance had come to the spy ship. ABC’s Frank Reynolds advised the public that, “the president not only had to be concerned about losing face in Korea, but even more in avoiding a new war in Asia.” Dan Rather of CBS described the mood at the White House as “grim,” and advised that “diplomatic efforts continue with no military retaliation expected now.” Fleming continued by citing syndicated columnist and self-proclaimed liberal, Carl Rowan, who may have been waxing hawkish when he was quoted as asking, “why the ‘ponderously slow’ reaction,” and wondered “why the captain did not report activity sooner, and why no supporting help arrived quickly.”

Initially the press seemed to take a wait-and-see attitude, almost assuming a pedantic tone to inform the American public. David Lawrence, for example, founder and

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200 Brandt. 111.
writer for the *United States News*, informed readers of the subject of “sea coast surveillance” by describing the *Pueblo* and explaining that the United States was being watched by the Soviets from “fishing vessels...in waters off the ports of Charleston, S.C., and Boston, Mass.” The media were not immune to the idea of a global Communism plot. Lawrence continued, opining that the plot may have been initiated “by the Red China regime....” He went on to write that North Korea claimed that the *Pueblo* was “carrying out hostile activities.” Lawrence then wrote, “This is the kind of propaganda that would naturally be expected from Communist sources,” and he concluded by writing, “The whole incident illustrates how readily small conflicts can be generated that could lead to international complications.”

An editorial in the *New York Times* of January 24, 1968, urged caution by reminding readers of the circumstances that led to America’s involvement in Vietnam. It stated, “Remembering the Gulf of Tonkin, Americans would be wise to keep cool and not leap to conclusions...about the North Korean capture of the American naval intelligence ship.” The Washington, D.C. *Evening Star*, knowledgeable of normal Legislative theatrics, suggested, “the *Pueblo*, has touched off a mighty roll of rhetorical thunder in Congress.” Its editorial warned against unnecessary military puffery, stating, “The ultimatum and the application of military power are--quite literally--the last actions the United States should take....” and “the instinctive reaction of outrage must be tempered by a realization of the awesome power that this nation possesses and of the

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202 Lawrence, David. “*Pueblo Seizure Threatens Crisis.*” This document was not dated, although it is annotated ‘24th’ assumed to be January 24, 1968. The publication name was also not noted, but it is assumed that Lawrence was writing for U.S. News. Accessed at Tom Johnson’s meeting notes, LBJL. Box 2, Pueblo 3. Print.

203 Armbruster. 87.
consequences of a major war to all mankind. Military force should be applied only as a last resort.” The editorial continued: “So North Korea continues to tweak Uncle Sam’s beard. And in recognition of the size and strength of the diminutive aggressor, we have - so far - managed quite properly to hold our temper in check.”

So, initially, the press, mirroring the president’s stance, remained receptive to learning more about the entire incident and refrained from throwing barbs of blame.

President Johnson, still waiting for further information, was interviewed on January 26 by Hugh Sidey of Time magazine. Instead of sticking with the known facts, Johnson threw out an object of distraction he had been pondering. When asked by Sidey if the military had done all it could, Johnson stated, “Three or four things could be true. Bucher could be a traitor. I do not think that is true. He could be doped up.” The president went on to say that he could find no fault with “superior officers in the field.”

If the president did not think it was true that Bucher was a traitor, it seems odd that he would express the possibility. Whatever the reason, this statement demonstrated a not-so-subtle leadership flaw. He seriously besmirched the character of Bucher, laying a possibility of Bucher’s culpability at the feet of the American public. The president’s purpose was unknown, especially in light of the fact that there is no factual basis for making that statement. By that libelous remark, it seems that Johnson was ready to point the blame finger at anyone to deflect the investigative spotlight from his administration and his closest military advisors.

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205 Tom Johnson’s meeting notes, LBJL. January 27, 1968. Box 2, Pueblo 7. Print
Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara informed the American public of the status of the *Pueblo* when they appeared on *Meet the Press* on February 4, 1968. Elie Abel of NBC reminded Rusk that in the previous week he had stated that the *Pueblo* and crew needed to be released and “spoke of the seizure as an act of war.” Rusk responded that there had been no moderation, but “President Johnson has made it clear that we would prefer to get these men back through diplomatic process,” and the “administration was [first] using diplomatic contacts through capitals; secondly, the Military Armistice Commission machinery at Panmunjom, Korea; and third, the United Nations Security Council.” Abel then asked Rusk if he hoped “to continue on the diplomatic route for some time?” Rusk responded that he did “not want to put a time factor on it.”

Hence, Secretary Rusk’s statement conveyed President Johnson’s wish for a diplomatic solution and let the American people know that such a solution could take quite some time.

The apparent embarrassment and anger of the American public subsequent to the hijacking of the *Pueblo* sparked people to take pen in hand. As a result, the volume of mail received by the White House increased accordingly. For example, by the week of February 9, 1968, the White House received over a thousand (1002) letters with reference to the *Pueblo*. 73 percent of the letters that week were in favor of military action against North Korea.

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letters dropped to eight hundred seventy-six, yet 81 percent of those writers advocated military action.\textsuperscript{208}

In a Gallup poll conducted on February 6, 1968, 45 percent of the American public believed that the present situation in North Korea was likely to lead to war, and 40 percent of those responding thought that the United States needed to get the ship and crew back, by force if necessary. Even though 40 percent were hawkish, a full 46 percent approved of the manner in which President Johnson was handling the situation. Quite obviously, there was not a full consensus among Americans on the method and means of handling the \textit{Pueblo} situation.\textsuperscript{209}

The Navy and the Department of Defense found themselves in a public affairs nightmare concerning the \textit{Pueblo} incident and were forced into a defensive position. Stoked by a grinding war in Vietnam that continued to foster a large number of anti-war demonstrations, the public assumed that the military and the administration were not divulging all of the facts surrounding the seizure of the \textit{Pueblo}. The “\textit{Pueblo} occurred during [a] period of dwindling confidence in the American Government” and “antimilitarism.”\textsuperscript{210} The public letters to the Pentagon “portrayed a marked belligerent, anti-Navy tone.” Respect for the Navy had diminished to the point that the public opinion could be described as “hostile.”\textsuperscript{211} It was understandable because of the military’s lack of transparency regarding efforts in Vietnam and the Navy’s obfuscation


\textsuperscript{209} Armbruster. 89.

\textsuperscript{210} Armbruster. 109.

\textsuperscript{211} Armbruster. 85.
regarding the role of Navy spy ships, the capture of the *Pueblo*, and the general astonishment that a U.S. Navy warship could be seized by a minor military nation. This pattern of withholding facts from the press and the public may have begun some years prior when government officials and the Navy distorted “facts and deceive[d] the American public about events that led to full U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War,” that is, the allegation of events of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.\(^{212}\) The Navy’s lack of forthrightness resulted in a skeptical American public. Tired of the Navy’s obfuscation, “Most [letters from the public] condemned the lack of support and protection for the *Pueblo.*” The Navy was forced to tread carefully “to avoid further inflaming of public sentiment.”\(^{213}\) Apparently, their efforts to be low-key did not influence the public, because when the Navy’s Court of Inquiry commenced on January 20, 1969, a full year after the seizure of the *Pueblo*, an unforgiving public and the press leaped on the opportunity to opine that the inquiry would be “a cover-up, and whitewash, and the Navy would not tolerate...the truth.”\(^{214}\) At a news conference held at Naval Air Station Miramar after the crew’s return, LT Edward Murphy, who had served as the Executive Officer on the *Pueblo*, “gave his impression of life in custody.” After that interview, *The New York Times* gave its impression of the suppression of Murphy’s interview: “Murphy seemed ‘willing to discuss the entire *Pueblo* story with newsmen but indicated he was under some sort of wraps from higher authority.’” Sensing a lack of candor on the part of the Navy, newsmen then confronted the Navy’s Admiral Rosenberg, who had


\(^{213}\) Armbruster. 92.

\(^{214}\) Armbruster. 97.
accompanied Murphy to the news conference, charging the Navy with keeping a “lid” on information. The news media was “stymied in their quest for individual eyewitness accounts of what actually happened.”

On January 23, 1969, during the Navy’s court of inquiry, and prior to his testimony, CDR Bucher was given a mandatory warning that he was suspected of violation of Navy regulations. The warning was standard procedure in a court of inquiry. But the result was a deeply aroused public sentiment. Letters to the Pentagon “turned into a torrent.” Anti-Navy sentiment rose higher yet when it was rumored that selected members of the Pueblo crew, including Commander Bucher, would be punished. The media portrayed Bucher as “wan and thin,” speaking in “a choked voice,” and “powerless before the admirals who sit behind an elevated table and watch him.” The result was an outpouring of sympathy from the public and “contempt for those who would persecute him further.” For example, an editorial in The New York Times of January 25, 1969, titled “The Pueblo Inquiry,” stated, “Certainly now there is neither need nor excuse for subjecting Commander Bucher to the emotional trial he is being forced to endure.” Adding more fire to the national public furor, the Navy denied copies of the transcript of the court of inquiry proceedings to The New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and Reader’s Digest. Public sentiment had now placed the Navy, not CDR Bucher on trial, and “public indignation [had] shifted from the North Koreans to the Government at home.”

215 Armbruster. 95.
216 Armbruster. 98.
217 Armbruster. 102.
218 Armbruster. 105.
Congress, of course, was aware of the proceedings. Representative Edwin D. Eshleman (R-PA) expressed his anti-Navy sentiment by urging “newly appointed Secretary of the Navy, John Chafee, to halt [the court of inquiry].” Congressman L. Mendel Rivers (D-SC) began procedures to establish a subcommittee to “conduct a full and thorough inquiry into all matters arising from the capture and internment of the USS Pueblo and its crew by the North Korean Government.”

The court of inquiry, which had begun in January, was completed on March 13, 1969. Prior to the announcement of the Navy’s findings, this post-inquiry editorial appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* of March 17, 1969:

> If the court of inquiry’s findings are as fair as its hearings have been, they will show that whatever questions there may be about the commander’s conduct, the big mistakes were made at far higher levels. For the Navy, the lesson of the *Pueblo* is an old one: If you send men on a difficult mission ill-equipped, ill-prepared, and ill-instructed, you cannot expect exemplary performance.\(^{219}\)

The Navy took a hard line in its recommendations for discipline of the *Pueblo* crew. CDR Bucher, LT Stephen Harris, who was in charge of the ship’s intelligence personnel, and RADM Frank Johnson were recommended for disciplinary letters of reprimand, and it was recommended that *Pueblo’s* XO, Edward Murphy, receive a letter of admonition.

It seems possible that public reaction and sentiment may have played a significant role in forming Secretary of the Navy John Chafee’s post-hearing decision to drop all charges against the Pueblo’s crew and those in the Navy chain of command above the spy ship. Writing his decision, Chaffee stated:

[In relation to the accusation of] failure to anticipate the emergency that subsequently developed, this accusation could be leveled in various degrees at responsible superior authorities in the chain of command and control. ...the common confidence in the historic inviolability of a sovereign ship on the high seas in peacetime was shown to be misplaced. The consequences must in fairness be borne by all, rather than one or two individuals whom circumstances had placed closer to the crucial event. In light of the consideration set out above, I have determined that the charges against all of the officers concerned will be dismissed.... “The Navy’s leaders are determined that the lessons learned from this tragedy shall be translated into effective action.”

Congress had reacted predictably upon learning of the Pueblo’s seizure. Members aligned themselves with either of two courses of action regarding the capture of the Pueblo. “The Pueblo seizure risked strengthening the position of [congressional] ‘hawks’ such as Senators Strom Thurmond (R-SC) and John Stennis (D-MS), Representative Mendell Rivers (D-SC), and Governor Ronald Reagen (R-CA), who had

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long demanded more forceful military actions in Vietnam.” Some advocated immediate military action against North Korea, while others urged restraint and diplomacy. “But, with few exceptions, even the hawks in Congress were moderate in their reaction.” Apart from the hawks and doves were a small number, such as Arkansas’s Democratic Senator and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, J. William Fulbright, who seemed to be one of President Johnson’s harshest critics on Vietnam, wishing to gain the spotlight by being nettlesome and accusing the president of not being forthright with the Committee. All of these actions were played out on the floor of Congress, in snippets to the media, and in letters to the president.

In the Senate, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, a strong advocate of the military and a Vietnam War hawk, rose to the occasion on January 24th when he said, “Seizure of the USS Pueblo on the high seas is a calculated test of the will of the American People.” Apparently Senator Thurmond also believed there may have been an underlying Communist plot as he stated, “In effect, the North Koreans and the Soviet Union are trying to give the United States a ‘Yankee go home’ suggestion.” He continued, “There should be no doubt that the United States will fight if necessary to obtain the immediate release of this ship and all of its personnel.” He informed his colleagues that he had sent President Johnson a telegram advising him to send North

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222 Brandt. 111.
223 Letter to William Fulbright from President Lyndon B. Johnson, February 8, 1968. Folder 08, Box 10, Larry Berman Collection, (Presidential Archives Research). The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Web. October 29, 2015. <http://vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0241008005>. Interestingly this letter has a typed memo from LBJ attached as a cover, advising Fulbright to tear up the letter and flush it away, and that LBJ did not want a record of it. Fulbright was an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War, even publishing a book in 1966, *The Arrogance of Power*, which was highly critical of the United States intervention in Vietnam.
Korea an “ultimatum that the Pueblo will be taken by force if it is not delivered within a specified period of time.” He did not elaborate on the time allowed or the method for carrying out the consequences of his ultimatum. Thurmond went on to say, “There is no question in my mind that the seizing of the Pueblo and its crew by the North Koreans was not an isolated incident but was closely tied in with the war in South Vietnam.”

Countering cautionary remarks were voiced by strong Vietnam War critic and Democratic Senator, Mike Mansfield of Montana. On January 29, 1968, he stated, “[we must use] caution, coolness, and restraint,” and “any rash action would not only...seal the doom of the 83 Americans of the U.S.S. Pueblo, it could also bring about another bloody and prolonged involvement in Korea.” He went on to say, “We ought to keep our shirts on and not go off half-cocked until we know more about the details of this incident.”

Like the Senate, members of the House of Representatives made their feelings known in peaceful or blustery orations. Republican Representative Durward Hall of Missouri seemed to equivocate as he referred to himself as a “peacemaker in perilous times,” and stated that “it is time for level heads.” He then stated, “These provocations require—indeed demand—an immediate response. The president should make clear...that the American ship should not be ransacked and should be released at once, or North Korea be prepared to suffer needed and dire consequences. We are acting too little as a proud nation to the loss of too many fine citizens.”

Hall was echoed by California’s Republican Representative Bob Wilson, who stated, “the seizure of the U.S. patrol boat

*Pueblo* ...is an obvious violation of the Korean truce and is an act of war. If this means sending in military and naval forces, including air cover, it must be done-and done at once. It calls for immediate and adequate response.**227** Democratic Representative Paul Rogers of Florida stated, "Not in 100 years has the U.S. flag been forcibly lowered from a Navy ship. The seriousness of the situation requires an immediate response by the United States."**228**

Alabama Republican Representative Jack Edwards was more direct in his remarks pointed at President Johnson and voiced his displeasure at the inaction of the administration:

> Failure of the Johnson administration to face up to foreign problems around the world encourages the Communists to become even bolder in their aggressive adventures as they sense that any reaction from us is unlikely. We should now give the Korean Communists just 3 minutes to release the USS *Pueblo* and its men. And if that fails, then we should go into North Korea and get that ship and our men - - now.**229**

Voicing a less hawkish view than Edwards was Hawaii’s Democratic Representative Spark Matsunaga, who opposed the Vietnam War, but as a military veteran did not wish to undercut the efforts of the soldiers fighting in Vietnam. Matsunaga stated, “let us not respond too hastily and do what we may later regret. Let us turn to that international machinery set up to settle disputes such as this - the United

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**227** Ibid. 727. Wilson was a strong advocate for the release of the *Pueblo*. A native of the San Diego, California area, his voice was heard many times over the course of the eleven month imprisonment of the *Pueblo* crew. Another reference is Armbruster, 86.


Matsunaga’s reasoning seemed logical, but the administration would soon learn that North Korea was averse to interaction by the U.N.

Members of Congress were not immune to belief in communist collusion, nor from conspiracy by the Johnson administration. On February 8, 1968, Indiana Republican Representative William Bray stated, “The Soviet Union and North Korea are certainly working together now to make the whole incident as humiliating and difficult for the United States as they possibly can.” He then suggested that the administration was hiding facts about the Pueblo from the American people, stating, “release [of facts] might tell the American people more about our lack of military preparedness and foresight than the administration cares for them to learn.” The lack of proper leadership, preparedness, and planning for the Pueblo mission seemed apparent to Representative Bray.

So prevalent was the theory of a communist conspiracy that many congressional members concluded that rather than blaming Pyongyang, Moscow should be chastised. For example, Tennessee Republican Representative Daniel Kuykendall demanded that the administration “bring the Soviets to immediate responsibility for the provocative excesses not only of North Korea but of all Communists nations.” The conspiracy theorists in Congress wished to have the Soviet Union placed on notice that further communist aggression would not be tolerated.

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An influential faction of the American public met with President Johnson on January 27, 1968. It was probable that the magnates of America’s leading businesses had a vested interest in how the Korean and Vietnam issues would effect their global interests. The group was comprised of presidents or chairmen of Coca-Cola, Burlington Industries, Levi Strauss, McDonnell Douglas, ALCOA, Ford, and LTV, as well as publishers and bankers. They met with the president, who tried to assuage their concerns, telling them, “I know what is on your mind is the crisis in Korea. I know you are also concerned about prices and the state of the economy and the state of our nation.” Johnson then proceeded to have Clark Clifford brief the businessmen on the need for electronic surveillance and the necessity of having spy ships at sea. Oddly enough, the subject of business and the effect on the U.S. dollar were scarcely discussed.233

While the posturing and puffery continued in both the house and senate, on January 30 the leadership of those chambers met privately with the president. House Majority Leader Carl Albert, Democrat from Oklahoma, attended and summarized the Pueblo incident by stating, “This has many aspects of a kidnapping case. You want to get the victim back, but you do not want to do anything that would get the victim killed.” The president answered, “We will keep our hands out and our guard up. We are going to protect ourselves. We are going to pursue the various diplomatic alternatives.”234 President Johnson was clearly putting the congressional leadership on notice of his intention to continue a diplomatic course of action. Later that day, the president met

again with his Foreign Affairs Committee. And once again, Johnson asked General Wheeler, “What about the possibility of this officer having turned [voluntarily assisted the North Koreans]?” Wheeler tried to discourage that line of thinking, telling the president that the possibility was “very small.” But the president could not drop it, stating, “This officer doesn’t look like the normal, prudent, alert officer I would have handle Air Force One if it were on alert. We must always bear in mind the possibility that we are in the wrong.”

It seems that Johnson had a nagging proclivity to focus the blame for the international incident on Commander Bucher. Yet his action seems greatly unfounded, especially because he had been briefed by NSA, CIA, and other advisors that the evidence did not bear out his position. There is a leadership flaw in his continuing to pursue his speculative theory in hopes of directing culpability from himself.

Another interesting item occurred at that afternoon meeting on the 30th. Secretary of State Rusk reported that he had been told by his sources at the United Nations that the North Koreans did not favor U.N. involvement. Rusk stated, “The North Koreans said it was not the United Nation’s business.” That statement is significant because it confirmed that a major avenue in Johnson’s wish for a diplomatic resolution had been closed by the North Koreans.

The president was not finished with business on the 30th. At six p.m. he met with Senate Minority Leader, Illinois Republican Everett Dirksen, and House Minority Leader, Michigan Republican Gerald Ford to discuss the Pueblo. Also attending were Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Chairman of the JCS

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236 Ibid.
General Wheeler, and Ambassador to South Vietnam, General Maxwell Taylor. The two congressional leaders gave little quarter to the president and his advisors with their questions. Ford started out by asking the president if he would have done things differently with “the benefit of hindsight.” The president responded that he would not have waited “52 minutes to file the first message.” It is unclear whether the president was referring to his own administration or to the *Pueblo*. The very next statement Johnson made was telling. He said, “I have looked into the background of this commander. It was his first command.” Johnson once again revealed his misguided, flawed leadership by implying that Commander Bucher should be targeted for placement of blame for the loss of the spy ship. Ford did not respond to Johnson’s insinuation and turned the conversation by stating, “I would have gotten rid of all that [classified] equipment, even if it required sinking our own vessel.” Johnson deflected Ford’s comment by stating that he was just lucky not to “have another Bay of Pigs.” Ford would not drop the line of questioning, however, asking, “First, why was there no more certain way of destroying the ship?” Johnson answered obliquely, using a football analogy of holding “the ball a second too long and [getting] tackled.”

Ford knew very well that culpability did not rest entirely with Bucher and counseled the president, saying, “I think you should take a good look at where we made mistakes on this.” Rather than admitting any responsibility, however, Johnson again demonstrated his arrogant leadership by countering Ford’s statement, saying, “I think the mistake was made by the North Koreans. History may prove it wrong. I do not think the mistake was made by us.” Ford, a former college football player, naval officer, and
veteran of the Second World War understood ship-board protocol and did not acquiesce to the president, instead stating, “If I had known what was on that vessel I might have blown it out of the water myself.” Ford finally had heard enough and addressed all those in the room, including the president, stating, “All of you seem to have a good reason for not doing something. We need a thorough going over of this matter to see what were the facts. It seems to me your attitude is one of excuse rather than how to prevent it from happening again. I do not like the attitude that this was a helpless ship. It appears that we should have been better prepared with a contingency plan. We ought to raise some very serious questions.” For some unknown reason, Senator Dirksen then asked, “What information do we have about the Captain?” The president answered that he believed that Bucher was loyal to the United States, but he could not refrain from adding, “Bucher did have certain emotional traits which might have been exploited.”

It is interesting to note that well past the January meeting with President Johnson, Ford, who would later become president, remained focused on the plight of the Pueblo and its crew. In a July 18, 1968, press release, Ford showed his displeasure in President Johnson’s handling of national defense, stating that the Johnson/Humphrey administration had “weakened our ability to respond to emergency situations such as the seizure of the USS Pueblo by concentrating attention on Vietnam.” Still later, after the Pueblo crew had been released, Ford issued a news release to constituents

237 Tom Johnson’s meeting notes. January 31, 1968. LBJL. Box 2, Pueblo 12. Print. This meeting in the evening of January 30 lasted nearly two hours. Not once during the meeting did the president acknowledge U.S. government leadership responsibility for the capture of the Pueblo.
informing them that the House Committee on Armed Services had opened hearings on the capture of the USS Pueblo. He wrote that the committee would look at “the concept of single, unprotected, intelligence-gathering ships...who generated the particular mission of the Pueblo, who characterized it as low risk, and who determined the ships to be used, their configuration, their armament....”

The purpose in exploring so much of the national dialogue is twofold: First, it demonstrates the depth and range of feelings of the American public, U.S. government officials, and foreign interests that resulted from the seizure of an American Naval vessel. From those emotions, the resulting recommendations ranged from response by immediate and decisive military action to the more tedious, methodical diplomatic means of resolution. The president certainly could not appease all interests. Thus, President Johnson was presented with a seemingly insurmountable problem, especially in light of the unmoving and frustrating negotiations with the North Koreans and the administration’s preoccupation with the Vietnam War. Second, the recorded dialogue of the media, congress, and the administration confirms a fault in leadership, which encompassed even the highest office in the United States. It is obvious from the meeting notes that the president and his advisors demonstrated poor leadership by giving no thought to the possibility that the administration, NSA, and Navy shared responsibility for seizure of the Pueblo. The near-desperate search for a scapegoat seemed to blind the president and his advisors to the fact that culpability started at the top with gross failure to properly plan, analyze risk, and execute the spy ship missions.

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The avoidance by American military and political leaders to accept responsibility for the capture of the *Pueblo* reflected poorly on them and demonstrated arrogant and flawed leadership in time of crisis.
Chapter Four

*Juche*

Why North Korea Seized the *Pueblo*
The Washington Viewpoint

Time would prove President Johnson and nearly all of his closest advisors inaccurate in their assessments of North Korea’s motive for seizing the USS *Pueblo*. But at the moment of *Pueblo’s* capture, the administration’s overwhelming belief was that the seizure of the spy ship was part of a larger communist plot. After all, the United States and the Soviet Union had been locked in a struggle for world dominance since the end of the Second World War. By 1968, the opposing giants had faced each other for two decades in a continuing war of words and arms escalation. During that time, four U.S. presidents (Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson) watched over American interests to protect freedom and democracy, while Moscow-driven Communism expanded into Eastern Europe and Asia. President Johnson and his inner circle had witnessed the aftermath of the war and the polarization between the United States and the Soviet bloc.

During the Cold War, Americans were fed a steady diet of the evils of communism and were exposed to red scare tactics from the likes of Wisconsin Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. Between the print media, nightly televised Vietnam war updates, and Congressional hearings, the average citizen might well have believed that the Soviets or the Chinese were behind the *Pueblo* incident. While a portion of the anti-communist liturgy from the media and Washington may have espoused the truth, some was certainly speculative. President Johnson believed that anti-communist fears were plainly based on evidence. The Vietnam war became Johnson’s measure of the facts. To him, there was no better example of communist tentacles reaching around the globe
than the encroachment of communism into Vietnam. Historian Mitchell Lerner explained this, writing:

The decision by North Korean president Kim Il-sung to capture the *Pueblo* made sense only when considered within a global Cold War framework. Lyndon Johnson viewed the seizure as part of a world-wide challenge to the United States, a coordinated communist plan to divert U.S. military resources from Vietnam and to pressure the South Koreans into recalling their two divisions from that area.\(^{240}\)

As early as January 24, 1968, however, some officials such as Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach held a different opinion. He stated in a State Department meeting that the spy ship’s seizure was “simply a North Korean action.”\(^{241}\) While the reasons for Kim Il-sung’s action are complex, one explanation resides in Kim’s allegiance to the ideology of *Juche*.

**The North Korean Viewpoint**

To grasp Kim’s reasoning and adoption of *Juche*, we must first understand that through history, Korea has been subjugated by the Mongols, the Chinese, Japan, and Russia.\(^{242}\) In addition to living under foreign authority, the country was party to detrimental trade agreements with both Eastern and Western nations, thereby crippling


Korea’s economy. Hence, the Korean people have maintained a great distrust of foreigners because multiple foreign nations attempted to dominate the Korean peninsula over centuries. In spite of the various attempts to subjugate Korea, the nation maintained a “streak of autonomy [in the midst of foreign domination] and a deep desire for independence...”\(^\text{243}\)

One trading partner, Japan, forced its influence to the point that it annexed Korea in 1910, a situation that was politically acceptable to the United States.\(^\text{244}\) Under Japanese rule, every aspect of Korea was controlled. A later example of the Japanese oppression was the forced shipping of millions of Korean men and women to Japan to be used as slave labor for the Japanese war effort in the Second World War. Yet, in the midst of Japanese rule, mass protests took place in Korea and splinter resistance groups formed, some of which embraced communism. The Japanese could not eliminate all guerrilla resistance fighters in Korea, and from these fragmented groups of soldiers, a leader emerged, Kim Il-sung, an adherent of communism, who would later rule North Korea for nearly a half century. The Japanese considered Kim Il-sung to be the most dangerous of the guerrillas because of his military prowess and made numerous attempts to locate and eliminate him. In 1939, Kim’s guerrilla tactics were achieving results against the Japanese military. His bands of soldiers were destroying entire “convoys and companies,” while they received aid from the general Korean

\(^{243}\) Ibid. 135-137
\(^{244}\) Cumings, Bruce. Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2005. Print. 86-87. Also see the Taft/Katsura agreement of 1905, a telegram sent from Tokyo to President Theodore Roosevelt describes a verbal understanding between Japan and the United States in relation to American interests in the Philippines and Japanese interests in Korea. A copy and an explanation can be seen at <www.dokdo-research.com/temp25.html>
population. But the Japanese were too powerful for Kim’s guerrillas. When the guerrillas were in danger of elimination, Kim Il-sung fled north and was afforded sanctuary in Russia. While in Russia, with the sponsorship of Joseph Stalin, Kim and two divisions of guerrilla fighters were trained in Siberia to retake Korea.²⁴⁵ The history of the subjugation of Korea by foreign states and the draconian Japanese measures to enslave all of Korea, became the stimulus for Kim Il-sung’s adoption of the Juche ideology.

By the end of the Second World War, the Soviets had crossed into the northern part of Korea, and the U.S. Army had moved onto the peninsula from the south. With Hirohito’s surrender, the Americans and the Soviets each moved to fill the void of the departing Japanese. Once again, Korea was occupied by foreigners. Under the subsequent Armistice Agreement, the Soviets would retain the northern part of Korea while the Americans held the south, with each side restricted to their side of a hastily designated line. Consulting no Koreans, it was Colonel Dean Rusk (future Secretary of State) and Colonel Charles Bonesteel (future general in charge of all U.N. forces in South Korea) who had been assigned to find a suitable dividing line. Their rather unsophisticated approach used a National Geographic map, from which they chose the 38th parallel, a dividing line that remains today.²⁴⁶ Within a few weeks, the United


States had moved nearly 25,000 military troops into South Korea.\textsuperscript{247} Shortly thereafter, two leaders were installed by the opposing sides. The Americans designated Syngman Rhee to head South Korea. The returning guerrilla fighters considered Kim Il-sung to be their “general commander, great leader, sagacious teacher, and intimate friend...and their trust, self-sacrifice, and devotion are such that they will gladly die for him.” Thus, the guerrillas “pushed Kim Il-sung forward” as their choice for leader of North Korea, and the Soviets concurred.\textsuperscript{248} By 1948, with his cadre of guerrilla fighters at its core, Kim formed the Korean People’s Army (KPA) and subsequently would be “referred to as ‘suryong,’ a term meaning supreme or maximum leader.”\textsuperscript{249} North Korea would, from then on, be called the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) and South Korea would be referred to as the Republic of Korea (ROK).

Whether due to centuries of internal conflict or domination by outsiders, Korea’s history reveals that a great many forces have influenced the country. “That Korea had been frequently under foreign rule is acutely felt by all Korean People.”\textsuperscript{250} Driven by more than a decade of personal resistance to Japanese colonialists, and later fighting as a communist in the Korean War, Kim Il-sung would have been well aware of that history. Besides adhering to communist ideology, Kim was a Korean nationalist, and he surrounded himself with many of his old guerrilla fighters and other nationalists. To Kim, one Korea meant “the nation as an indivisible and deified sacred entity. The notion that individuals are not worthy of living if they are deprived of their nation has been

\textsuperscript{247} Cumings, 189.
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid. 125.
\textsuperscript{250} Byung-joon, Ahn. 15-38.
promoted [by Kim] so persuasively that complete loyalty to the nation is considered natural."\textsuperscript{251} The ultimate nationalistic goal for Kim and his Central Committee was the reunification of the Korean peninsula into one nation, a goal that was blocked by South Korea and the United States. The result was Kim's intense hatred for those two nations.\textsuperscript{252} “Kim’s hatred of the United States is apparently matched only by his frustration over the unattainability of his ambition to rule all of Korea, and he has endeavored, with marked success, to instill the same hatred in the minds of all the North Korean people as well.”\textsuperscript{253} More than anything else, the North Korean leader sought self-determination and governance over a unified Korea, without influence by the Soviets and Chinese.\textsuperscript{254}

**Juche**

The exact origin of *Juche* is subject to debate. Various scholars attribute the philosophy to Karl Marx, Freidrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, or Mao Tsetung. More likely, it was an evolutionary “Asian view of Marxism-Leninism with significant overtones for the future development of Communist doctrine in Asia.”\textsuperscript{255} In North Korea there is no doubt about *Juche*’s origin; it is attributed to Kim Il-sung and is said to be Kim’s “original, brilliant, and revolutionary contribution to national and

\textsuperscript{251} Cumings. *North Korea, Another Country*. 159.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid. However, Kim did not isolate North Korea from the Soviets or the Chinese. He traded with both, and in fact, played off of each of them in order to gain favor from both governments, even during periods when there were disagreements between the two major powers.
international thought. Kim first promulgated Juche in a speech to party propaganda and agitation workers in 1955. He contended that while Marxism-Leninism was valid revolutionary thought, it needed his interpretation "to define a new set of practical ideological guidelines appropriate to the revolutionary environment in North Korea." In other words, Kim molded Marxism-Leninism to fit the communist politics of North Korea. Thus, North Koreans see Juche as “uniquely Korean.” In addition, Juche “is claimed to be an ‘eternal truth’...meant for all the oppressed peoples in the world.” And while self-sustainability is the base of Juche, coincidentally this ideology placed Kim Il-sung, “the guerrilla fighters of the liberation struggle,” the Korean Workers Party (KWP), and the North Korean military at the apex in North Korean society. Kim “saw himself as an absolutely essential figure in the struggle of the working masses against the oppressive middle class.” He became “the one-man distillation of the North Korean regime itself, to whom all of his people must pay unlimited and unending homage.” As a result, Kim became the North Korean “absolute communist dictator” for life.

For Kim, the ideology of Juche became a blueprint for achieving the unification of Korea. Kim was “determined to forge a Korea that could resist foreign domination-

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256 Lerner. The Pueblo Incident. 103.
261 Koh, B.C. 274.
262 Many sources also write “Chuche” vice Juche. I have used the Juche spelling throughout this document.
while at the same time opportunistically allying with communist forces.” The foundation of Juche is national self-determination instead of foreign intervention, exactly what Kim advocated for Korea. It is an ideology that demands that North Korea “take charge, subvert external interests, and strengthen its grip on its own population.” North Korea’s policies and behavior are governed by the “state ideology of Juche. An understanding of the origins, components, and philosophical underpinnings of the Juche ideology is essential to an understanding of the North Korean state and its people.” Understanding Juche reveals the philosophy of Kim Il-sung, and the reason for the North Korean seizure of the USS Pueblo.

Kim saw Juche as the vehicle to move Korea to chaju, self-independence, with a heavy overlay of nationalism. He held that in chaju, all nation states must be viewed as equals, a fact that comes into play when outsiders try negotiating with the North Koreans. This was in evidence as the United States, thinking itself dominant, toiled to negotiate freedom for the Pueblo and crew. Chuck Downs, former deputy director for Regional Affairs and Congressional Relations in the Pentagon’s East Asia policy office wrote, “Dealing with North Korea is a tough proposition.” The North Koreans are “especially adept at brinkmanship. They make a show that convinces us they mean business. Then they extract their price and celebrate. They take from the negotiating table what they are unable to win in any direct conflict [and] survive not just to fight another day, but to create a new crisis when they are better equipped and stronger. At

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263 Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun, 196.
264 Some scholars also define Juche as “take charge-ism.” Economist author Nicholas Eberstadt uses that term in his book, Korea Approaches Reunification.
266 Lee, Grace. 111.
many occasions [of negotiating] North Korea demanded everything but actually took whatever it could get.” 267 Such was the case in the negotiations for the release of the Pueblo and crew. Rear Admiral John Smith was the initial U.S. negotiator in talks with North Korea for the release of the spy ship and crew. Early in negotiations, and attempting to show dominance, Smith demanded the release of the ship. He was literally laughed at by his North Korean counterpart, Major General Pak Chung Kuk, who, by his actions, considered North Korea to be the equal of the “imperial aggressors” and took charge of the meeting(s). 268 Pak’s instructions came directly from Kim, whose hatred for the United States was voiced by him while negotiations were underway. 269 Kim wrote the following in the Nodong Sinmun, the Workers’ Party newspaper of November 21, 1968:

If more countries, even if small, pool their strength and fight resolutely against imperialism, the people can knock down U.S. imperialism with decisively overwhelming power at each and every front. The peoples of all countries making revolution should tear the limbs off of the U.S. beast and behead it all over the world. When the peoples of many countries attack them from all sides and join in mutilating them in that way, they will soon become impotent and bite the dust in the wind. 270

Under the leadership of Kim Il-sung, the North Korean strategy at the negotiating table “require[d] iron-fisted control by one side of the negotiating table and clever

267 Downs. ix-x.
268 Lerner. The Pueblo Incident. 123-125.
269 Ibid.
270 Kiyosaki. 83.
manipulation of the other.”

“Secretary of State Dean Rusk referred to the ten months of negotiations with North Korea after the seizure of the USS Pueblo as the most frustrating episode in his career.”

“The holding of hostages as a means of coercing an enemy or an ally into complying with your will is at least as old as the recorded history of human conflict.”

Kim Il-sung would surely have known the value of his Pueblo hostages and use the American propensity for recovering captured Americans to his advantage. By negotiating with the United States for the release of the Pueblo crew, Kim Il-sung showed the world audience that his country was on equal footing with the more powerful imperialist aggressor, the United States. It was not in Kim Il-sung's interest to complete the negotiations quickly. He would ensure that the talks spanned many months.

The North Koreans were demonstrating their mastery of Juche ideology. In demonstrating their ability to take charge of a situation, the North Koreans, in the final days of negotiations, demanded that the U.S. negotiators sign a letter of apology and admit to criminal acts. A precedent for this manner of resolution had been set when two U.S. Army helicopter pilots had been forced down in North Korea on May 17, 1963. In that incident, Kim Il-sung, in a letter to General Hamilton H. Howze, the United Nations Command (UNC) commander in chief at the time, outlined the demands to be met prior to the release of the American pilots. The UNC would be required to admit to “criminal acts,” guarantee that such acts would not occur in the future, and strictly abide by the

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271 Downs. 13.
272 Downs. 3.
Armistice Agreement. After U.S. officials signed a letter admitting their intrusion into North Korea, the army crew was released on May 16, 1964, nearly a year after their helicopter had crossed into North Korea.\textsuperscript{274}

The \textit{Pueblo} crew was released under similar circumstances. Major General Pak Chung Kuk remained the North Korean negotiator for the duration of the negotiations, but in May 1968 Admiral Smith, who had reached the end of his term in Korea, was replaced by Major General Gilbert Woodward. Throughout the negotiations, Pak had insisted that the U.S. negotiator sign a document containing what the UNC and American officials referred to as the “three A’s,” admission of guilt, apology to North Korea, and assurance that it would never happen again.\textsuperscript{275} Perhaps because it would imply an admission of wrongdoing, the United States did not wish to sign such a document. As a result, the negotiations dragged on for months. Finally, in an odd set of circumstances, agreement was reached when Pak permitted Woodward to read a complete refutation of the signed agreement into the record of the negotiations. In other words, the United States had agreed to North Korea’s demands of the three A’s, and North Korea had allowed the U.S. negotiator to verbally reject the three A’s agreement. Nations outside of North Korea knew of the dichotomous nature of the agreement, but with Kim Il-sung controlling all media within North Korea, the North Korean citizens would never know about it.\textsuperscript{276} Woodward signed the agreement on December 23, 1968, and within hours, the \textit{Pueblo} crew and the remains of Fireman Duane Hodges, who had died from gunfire injuries during the attack on the \textit{Pueblo}, were taken to the DMZ at

\textsuperscript{274} Downs. 112-113.  
\textsuperscript{275} Downs. 137.  
\textsuperscript{276} Downs. 142-146. The document can be seen on page 143-144.
Kaesong and released to walk across the Hangul bridge, more commonly called “The Bridge of No Return.” While members of the press on both sides of the bridge observed, Bucher was made to walk across the bridge first. He was followed by North Koreans carrying the plain wooden coffin containing the remains of Hodges. One by one, the crew then followed Bucher to freedom and were quickly moved away in U.S. buses to undergo physical examinations and debriefing. In accordance with Juche philosophy, forcing the United States to acquiesce during negotiations brought prestige to Kim Il-sung in the eyes of the North Koreans and the world while demonstrating to North Koreans the global prominence of their country and the esteemed guidance of their leader.

**Elements of Juche**

According to Kim, Juche must have two key factors to achieve chaju (independence). The nation must first have an independent economy, termed “charip, or self-sustainability.” Second, the nation must have a formidable military to defend itself from domestic conflict and outside aggression, a condition called chawi. To ensure that chawi is achieved, the military is positioned just below the country’s leader and “above the working class and the peasantry.” In addition, the “DPRK Constitution calls for ‘arming all the populace [and] turning the entire country into a fortress.’” In Juche ideology, “chawi is critical” and will remain a tenet “as long as imperialist

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279 French. 30-32.
280 Cumings. 1.
countries continue to exist....” Understandably, having been a guerrilla fighter for many years while opposing the invading Japanese, Kim did not want North Korea ever to be a colony again. It was also his view that imperialist countries should not be allowed to exist anywhere in the world. Because of this belief, Kim declared the imperialist United States to be an enemy of North Korea soon after the Korean War armistice was signed in 1953.

Kim Il-sung faced several challenges to implementing the Juche ideology: First, *Juche* requires the elimination of political rivals in order to achieve complete subservience, cooperation, and participation of the North Korean people. Workers became part of the state, instruments to achieve national independence and self-reliance. All workers toiled for the state, all in harmony for the greater good of North Korea. Under Kim, the state now owned most of the land and all production. In true communist fashion, all commercial and agrarian production was forcibly taken from the largely rural people, centralized, and managed by the government. To instill a sense of worth in workers, Kim formed the Korean Workers Party (KWP), which he said, empowered the North Korean worker by including all workers in one organization for the good of the state. Membership in the KWP was meant to demonstrate a condition of equality among the populace.

Under Kim’s rule, dissenters either simply disappeared or were publicly executed. Killing off dissenters, of course, was one facet of Kim’s techniques for maintaining power. The late political scientist and professor, R.J. Rummel wrote in

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281 French. 30-32.
282 French. 33-35.
Statistics of Democide: Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1900, that Kim Il-sung’s regime was estimated to have executed, or killed in work camps, from 710,000 to slightly over 3,500,000 dissenters.\textsuperscript{283} Elimination of dissenters would ensure that the North Korean populace remained loyal “supporters” of the dictatorial regime.

Second, \textit{Juche} requires the populace to be isolated from outside influences. In North Korea, interaction with foreign communities was, and continues to be, forbidden, and the government controls all media and the access to foreign cultures. Professor Han S. Park pointedly wrote, “North Korea’s achievement of ideological consensus on \textit{Juche} would never have been possible without the deliberate and methodical manipulation of the mass media by shielding off the entire society from the external world.”\textsuperscript{284} Kim could never achieve self-reliance for North Korea since failed crops, “massive scale” starvation deaths, and an inability to obtain credit on the world market for trade and commerce forced North Korea to solicit hand-outs from China and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{285} Yet, “the North Korean elite has elevated \textit{Juche} to a sacred doctrine, an end in itself. The \textit{Juche} ideology was to be Kim’s guide [for raising his nation to world equality. But in order to keep himself in power], \textit{Juche} ultimately became a straitjacket [for Kim], spawning such deleterious effects as a propensity toward chauvinism, bragging, [mass murder], and even deception,” most of which were clearly

<https://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/SOD.CHAP10.HTM>

\textsuperscript{284} Park, Han S. 77.

\textsuperscript{285} French. Chap. 10.

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evident as the United States struggled to work with the North Koreans for the release of the *Pueblo* and crew.286

**The Propaganda of North Korea**

Kim Il-sung’s propaganda machine served several purposes. Because of failures in self-sufficiency, a keystone of *Juche*, Kim resorted to propaganda aimed first at the North Korean people to elicit their loyalty; second, to keep himself in power; and third to ensure that the world knew the alleged formidability of North Korea, in essence, to project the idea that North Korea was equal to all other world powers. Propaganda initiated following the seizure of the *Pueblo* served all three of these purposes.

Another example of Kim’s propaganda techniques was his claim that only North Korean citizens enjoy “free will.” Kim claimed that it was “free will” that “motivated people’s actions independent of [any capitalist] economic imperative.” Author Paul French wrote his opinion on Kim’s thinking.

> The notion of free will in Party-dominated North Korea is almost as absurd as the notion of self-reliance. However, it is politically useful in establishing that philosophically North Koreans, through *Juche*, are capable of independence as contrasted to the servility of the South Koreans dominated by American imperialism. Within this theoretical

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paradigm the DPRK appears the free country and the ROK the enslaved chattel of the [United States].  

Another of Kim’s dictums held that the disproportionate military expenditures for a strong military were necessary to achieve sufficient chawi, the ability to protect the country and bring the North Korean military up to an even basis with all world nation states, even if it was at the expense of a starving population. As further justification, Kim Il-sung continued to insist that chawi was necessary because of a constant threat from imperialist nations, specifically the United States. His proof was the continued occupation of South Korea by U.S. forces.  

Kim’s propaganda also included a boast that North Korea was militarily the equal of any other nation, reinforcing this contention with blustery threats against incursion by capitalist countries, especially the United States. In 1968, perhaps in an effort to reinforce his image as a strong leader, Kim’s blustery threats continued, but were summarily dismissed by U.S. officials involved in the risk analysis for the USS Pueblo mission. A major purpose of those threats was to propagandize and reinforce Kim’s role as the North Korean people’s protector. By broadcasting the warnings on Radio Pyongyang to the North Korean people, Kim assured the citizenry that he was protecting the country, at the same time proving to the people that North Korea was the equal of any world power.  

In other words, Kim constantly marketed himself first to

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287 French. 34.
288 Koh. 270-271.
289 See note 96. Pyongyang was referring specifically to U.S. spy ships off their coast.
290 Interestingly, those North Korean threats continue today, probably with the same intent as that of Kim Il-sung nearly fifty years ago.
291 Armbrister. 27.
the North Korean people, and then to the rest of the world in order to glorify *Juche* ideology and reinforce his power. In doing so, he established what Korean historian Wayne S. Kiyosaki terms “The Cult of Kim Il-sung.” Kiyosaki described Kim’s speeches as vehicles intended to glorify himself to the populace and keep him in power:

As the spokesman for a country that generates higher expectations than guarantees of self-realization, Kim Il-sung apparently believes that it is necessary for the masses to believe that his leadership will hold at bay or even subdue the forces that threaten to thwart the national goals of Korea.292

Kiyosaki insisted that there was a great deal of theatrics included in Kim’s manipulation of the masses.

[Kim’s] theatrics of leadership are part of the national act that must be played out to pry the country loose from old moorings and outmoded beliefs. It is [Kim’s] conviction that fears must be dispelled by the undaunted, timidity by heroics, conservatism by progressivism, and egotism by patriotism. Only total mobilization under a strong leader will bring about the cohesiveness that North Korea needs to unify the country and assert itself internationally.293

However, even Kim Il-sung’s blustery speeches could only carry popular support so far. Kim needed to demonstrate the infallibility and continuance of *Juche* as the nation’s ideology and to prove to the North Korean people and to the world that because

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292 Kiyosaki. 19-21.
293 Kiyosaki. 19-21.
of *Juche*, he and North Korea were formidable. Actions were necessary because Kim needed to assure the North Korean people that *Juche* ideology was necessary for North Korea’s survival against imperialist aggression, that the huge North Korean military expenditures were necessary, and that he was the leader to ensure the welfare and safety of the people and nation.

It was under his *Juche* ideology and through *Juche* propaganda that Kim’s “North Korean regime hardened more than ever before its ‘anti-imperial’...attitude toward the United States and South Korea; from mid-1965 North Korea accelerated its campaigns for ‘unification by means of revolution,’ that is, revolutionary guerrilla warfare against the South [and the United States.]” Kim carried out several bold actions in 1968 meant to reinforce *Juche*, to educate the world, and to assure the continuance of his autocratic leadership. The seizure of the USS *Pueblo* on January 23, 1968, was one of those actions. Two others were the attempted assassination of the South Korean president in an attack on the Blue House on January 17, 1968, and the later shoot-down, on April 15, 1969, of a U.S. EC-121 spy plane killing 31 U.S. airmen, “the deadliest such incident during the entire Cold War.” Kim obviously capitalized on the seizure of the USS *Pueblo*. While the *Pueblo* contained an immense amount of classified material and communication coding machines, the DPRK military “largely ignored this trove of information and instead sought to use the incident only for domestic propaganda.”

294 Baek, Jong-Chun. 91.
296 Lerner. “A Dangerous Miscalculation.” 8. It is believed that the classified material and code machinery was given to the Soviet Union.

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The propaganda value of the capture of a U.S. warship was immense to Kim, as the government-controlled media lauded the bravery of Kim and the North Korean military as they faced down and then defeated the U.S. imperialists who had been allegedly invading North Korean waters.297 “What mattered [most] was the fact that Kim perceived the seizure as a tremendous boost to his prestige.”298 During the eleven months that the Pueblo crew was held captive, Kim issued “ninety-one Pueblo-related propaganda statements of over three hundred words [each].”299 After eleven months of the Pueblo crew’s captivity in two different prisons in Pyongyang, and after Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection, Kim was faced with “accepting [Johnson’s] offer to release the Pueblo crew or face continued confrontation with “an unpredictable U.S. administration at some future point in time.”300 For Kim and North Korea, the propaganda value of the Pueblo and its crew had served its purpose, and the issue of the ship and crew could be resolved under conditions agreeable to North Korea. After reaching an agreement with the United States, Kim released the Pueblo crew on December 23, 1968, exactly eleven months after their capture.301

Kim’s propaganda machine made full use of the release of the Pueblo crew. “The North Koreans believed they had won a clear victory.” The North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman continued: “This means the ignominious defeat of the U.S. imperialist aggressors and constitutes another great victory for the Korean people.

297 All referenced sources in my reading reveal that the Pueblo was well outside the North Korean territorial waters. North Korea claims 12 miles from their coast as their territorial waters. The Pueblo’s radar revealed that the ship was 15.8 miles from the nearest North Korean land. (For example, see Bucher, page 174.)
300 Kiyosaki. 83.
301 Lerner. The Pueblo Incident. 123-125.
Today in Panmunjom, ...once again the U.S. imperialists knelt to the Korean people and apologized for the incident of the armed spy ship Pueblo."³⁰²

State propaganda ensured that the North Korean people knew their leader was working to achieve chawi, a basic tenet of Juche. Kim’s propaganda affirmed that he was fully capable of placing North Korea on an equal military footing with the United States. By using the seizure of the U.S. spy ship, Kim Il-sung had achieved Chawi. In addition, Kim had his “war trophy,” a lasting legacy of his facing and defeating the imperialists in the form of the United States spy ship permanently on display as a piece of a military museum in North Korea. On January 20, 2003, the thirty-fifth anniversary of the ship’s capture, the DPRK’s Central News Agency issued a news release commemorating the capture of the Pueblo: “The spy ship Pueblo, a trophy captured by Korean seamen from the U.S. imperialists, is on display on the river [T]aedong in [P]yongyang [and] since the spy ship was brought to the river, it has been visited [seen but not boarded] by 360,000 Korean people including servicemen and schoolchildren, and more than 7,000 foreigners.”³⁰³ Then, in late 2013, the ship was refurbished and opened to the North Korean public. The Pueblo serves as a permanent marketing tool aimed at the North Korean people, reinforcing Kim Il-sung’s belief that through Juche, he and the nation had achieved chawi, defending against their imperialist enemy, the

³⁰² Downs. 145.
United States. The “North Korean press today continues to trumpet both [the Pueblo incident and the EC-121 shoot-down] as badges of national honor.”

In reality, Kim’s grand design of uniting Korea by military force failed. His military actions, including the capture of the USS Pueblo, had long-lasting repercussions, all of which were actually counter to Kim’s goals. “In the final analysis, North Korea’s militant policy toward the South [and the United States in 1967-68] became counterproductive by hardening the South Koreans’ fear and distrust of the Pyongyang regime and providing a rationale for the continued presence of U.S. troops until the ROK would develop a sufficient deterrent force against the North.”

Even as early as May 1968, the CIA learned that there was a “growing nervousness on the part of North Korea” as a result of the $100 million in military aid given to South Korea to quell President Park’s wish to invade North Korea, and because there had been a “lack of real progress in the Panmunjon talks concerning the Pueblo.” The North Korean government also learned that the South Koreans were “receiving a squadron of F-4 Phantoms and three destroyers.”

Kim’s hope for easily negotiated concessions from the U.S. negotiators for the release of the Pueblo and its crew did not go according to his plan.

The reaction in Washington to the capture of the Pueblo generally attributed the incident to a world communist plot orchestrated by the Soviet Union or China. Historian Mitchell Lerner wrote: “Almost unanimously, the Johnson administration embraced the

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idea that North Korean actions were rooted in a larger Communist conspiracy.”\textsuperscript{307} However, Soviet intelligence officers denied their participation. “‘This was simply not something we would do’, explained former KGB Major General Oleg Kalugin.”\textsuperscript{308} Perhaps understandably, Washington continued to believe that North Korea had acted while the major communist powers had pulled the puppet strings, regardless of the fact that the Soviets denied involvement. The Soviet Union had its own fleet of spy ships lurking off the U.S. coast and shadowing the U.S. Navy fleet. “It is highly unlikely that the Soviets would risk a quid pro quo capture of one of their spy ships by the United States and risk strengthening the position of American hawks who had long demanded more forceful actions against communist influence, especially in Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{309} In addition, the U.S. and Soviet governments had been making progress in negotiations of non-proliferation of arms talks in 1967-68, the results of which were beneficial to the economies and safety of both nations. Soviet complicity in the spy ship seizure would have jeopardized further negotiations.\textsuperscript{310} Yet, President Johnson and many of his closest advisors were convinced of the communist conspiracy, even venturing to speculate that Berlin would be the next communist objective.\textsuperscript{311}

We now know from Soviet and CIA sources that Kim was not taking direction from either the Soviet Union or the Chinese. He knew exactly what he was doing and, in all likelihood, gave the orders to fire on the \textit{Pueblo} while the North Korean warships

\textsuperscript{307} Lerner. “A Dangerous Miscalculation.” 16.
\textsuperscript{309} Ibid. 7.
\textsuperscript{310} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{311} See note 254.
idled near the spy ship, awaiting his direction. “To Kim, such acts as piracy on the high seas and in the air over Korea seemed justifiable to dramatize the depths of Pyonyang’s resentments to a world that seemed oblivious to his beliefs,” even if it meant drawing criticism from both Moscow and Peking.312

It would only be speculation to guess the nature of Kim’s risk analysis before seizing the Pueblo. As an autocrat, Kim answered to no one, heeding only his own counsel. The CIA, in a report dated November 26, 1968, but written just before the Pueblo crew was released, concluded:

In deciding to risk possible U.S. military retaliation by seizing the Pueblo on 23 January 1968, Kim and his aides probably calculated that Washington would not use nuclear weapons to attack the North. They were willing to risk provoking a conventional air attack (as the most probable form of retaliation, if it came) because they were confident they had a good chance of resisting and surviving it. Another important consideration probably was the North Korean’s calculation that Washington was deterred from launching an air attack because of the regime’s defense treaties with Moscow and Peking. [A subjective factor in Kim’s reasoning was that] Kim probably believed that by seizing the Pueblo he would be upstaging Moscow and Peking and scoring a point regarding the importance of small countries in the world Communist movement. Kim...extracted...personal political benefits from seizure of the

312 Kiyosaki. 87-88.
ship. From his viewpoint, he has defied the major enemy and he has upstaged his big Communist allies in the process.\textsuperscript{313}

Kim had acted on his own in his quest to capture the \textit{Pueblo}. He was guided by his \textit{Juche} ideology and a fortuitous opportunity. Four years after the \textit{Pueblo} incident Kim wrote an article for the \textit{Pyongyang Times} that explained how \textit{Juche} guided Kim’s actions. “The government of [North Korea] formulates its foreign policy on the basis of the [\textit{Juche}] idea and is guided by this idea in carrying out its external activities. In a word, our republic maintains its independence in its foreign activities.”\textsuperscript{314} With \textit{Juche} as his guide, Kim may have gambled that the United States had its plate full with Vietnam and would, therefore, not risk starting another war in Korea. He won the gamble, thereby humiliating the United States and raising his esteem, all in accordance with \textit{Juche} ideology. The idea that North Korea acted alone is supported by former U.S. Ambassador to Taiwan, Ralph N. Clough, who wrote:

\begin{quote}
North Korea has never wavered in its determination to bring about the withdrawal of U.S. forces [from South Korea], but its tactics have varied over the years, from acts of force, like the seizure of the \textit{Pueblo}, to proposals for direct negotiations. Hostility toward the United States has been a permanent feature of the political landscape in North Korea, serving to rally the populace under the leadership of Kim Il-sung to meet...
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{314} Kiyosaki. 25.
the U.S. threat, often portrayed in North Korean propaganda as a scheme to back South Korea in a military invasion of the North.\textsuperscript{315}

Historian B.C. Koh concurred: “It is improbable that the decision [to seize the \textit{Pueblo}] was either instigated by or cleared in advance with the Soviet Union [or] Peking.... In all likelihood, North Korea acted alone, unaided and without consulting any of its allies, for the main purpose of harassing and humiliating its archenemy, the United States.”\textsuperscript{316} Without the help of any other communist nation, Kim had focused world attention on his small country and caused a great deal of consternation within the administration of President Lyndon Johnson and great concern within the American public.

Enabled by flawed leadership within the U.S. Navy and the Johnson administration, the seizure of the U.S. spy ship \textit{Pueblo} was a unilateral decision on the part of Kim Il-sung. Capturing the spy ship allowed him to perpetuate the \textit{Juche} ideology and maintain his power by demonstrating to the North Korean people that he had achieved \textit{chawi} for the nation. Flawed leadership and lack of due diligence on the part of the Navy and Washington officials allowed a dramatic act by Kim Il-sung that was played out on the world stage, allegedly to give his government legitimacy and achieve equality with the world’s greatest and most powerful political communities.


\textsuperscript{316} Koh, B.C. “The \textit{Pueblo} Incident in Perspective.” 275.
Epilogue

While public interest in the plight of the Pueblo ebbed with the change of U.S. presidents in January 1969, the United States had not abandoned its monitoring of North Korea, nor had North Korea ceased its muscle flexing. In April 1969, President Richard M. Nixon and the American public learned that a U.S. EC-121 spy plane had been shot down over North Korea by North Korean MiGs, resulting in the deaths of thirty-one American airmen. Once again, an unarmed military unit that reported to CNFJ, was sent into a hostile zone with faulty communication gear and without cover by escort forces.\footnote{Lerner. The Pueblo Incident. 233.} Apparently, lessons from the Pueblo incident had been forgotten or ignored.

President Nixon’s reaction to the shoot down proved interesting. With his staff members, he discussed the idea of hijacking a large, newly refurbished North Korean fishing ship as it was transiting from a shipyard in The Netherlands to North Korea. Nixon sought revenge for the Pueblo and the spy plane shoot-down. In other words, the president wanted to capture a North Korean vessel in the same manner that the North Koreans had taken the Pueblo. After an examination of the international and legal aspects and a great deal of discussion with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State William Rogers, and Attorney General John Mitchell, the plan was abandoned.\footnote{United States Assistant to the President for National, Security Affairs. 1969. “Retaliatory measures for downed reconnaissance plane and pueblo incident.” UTA Library. Web. Jan. 17, 2016. <https://login.ezproxy.uta.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.exproxy.uta.edu/docview/1679096562?account=131}
Several lessons are apparent from the seizure of the Pueblo. At the outset of the spy ship program, no mission-specific ship had been designed and built for intelligence-gathering. Starting with the USS Liberty and carrying over to the Banner and Pueblo, mothballed, past-prime hulls were reconfigured for use as spy ships. None of the intelligence ships were specifically designed from keel up to be used for the missions on which they were sent. This resulted in “work around” solutions, making do with available resources. For example, in the case of the Banner and Pueblo, mission-essential electronic eavesdropping equipment was placed on top decks where space was available, causing the ships to become less stable and top heavy.

Using retired, balky coastal freighters as the platforms for Banner and Pueblo meant that they were prone to equipment break-downs. Pueblo experienced several episodes of steering equipment failures. Another concern that Navy leadership discounted was that the top speed of the old freighters was a paltry 13 knots at best, not nearly fast enough to quickly depart a hostile situation. It could be argued that if Pueblo had been capable of higher speed, it might have safely avoided seizure.

Pueblo and Banner were designated as auxiliary ships, not ships of the line. Having served on auxiliary ships, I know that they are not well armed, as their mission does not normally take them into harm’s way. But unlike the usual auxiliary ships, the spy ships were routinely sent into dangerous waters without proper defense. Two .50 caliber machine guns are meager arms against torpedo boats, sub chasers, and MIGs. Armament and protection for the sailors who might need to use that armament (proper
gun tubs, for instance) was given scant attention. CDR Bucher was even told to stow his .50 caliber guns below deck and out of sight.

Another lesson not addressed was the failure to ensure essential communication capabilities aboard the Pueblo, leaving the ship in several instances unable to properly communicate with its operational chain of command, including the moments prior to imminent danger. This communication problem was apparently a lesson not learned by the Navy, as the Liberty had been sent into a dangerous area with poor communication capability that may have been the leading factor in the attack on that ship. In the case of the Pueblo, this communication flaw was especially apparent off the coast of Korea. The identical problem had previously been experienced and reported by the Banner. Hence, the Navy had knowledge of this sporadic communication problem in the Sea of Japan, and yet it was not corrected.

Command and control of the Pueblo was lacking, as it was in the Liberty attack. Command of the ship and its mission rested at the highest levels in Washington, the NSA, and the JCS. Local administrative control of the ship was in Japan and rested with an admiral who had little previous exposure to Naval intelligence operations. Between Japan and Washington were multi-levels of operational and administrative leadership. The vast operational and communication distance between Washington, the Navy chain of command, and the Pueblo left far too many gaps in communication and control of the ship, the same shortcoming experienced six months earlier by the Liberty and reported in the Liberty court of inquiry. The deficiencies in command and control experienced in the Liberty incident had not been corrected when Pueblo sailed.
A second command and control issue was the fact that Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) officials barred CDR Bucher from having complete control over the intelligence personnel and spaces on board the Pueblo, even going so far as initially denying him access to the ship's intelligence spaces. This restriction was contrary to normal Navy shipboard protocol and created a divisive atmosphere between the regular ship's crew and the intelligence personnel, and distracted from the smooth operation of the ship.

There was a distinct lack of leadership attention to details regarding the construction, operation, and mission of the Pueblo. At many steps in the ship's conversion from mothballed coastal freighter to spy ship, construction plans on paper did not translate easily to the actual ship itself. Bucher's account of numerous meetings with construction officials clearly points out the difficulty in ensuring that the ship would be habitable and operationally sound. In his book, he relates several of his recommendations that fell on deaf ears, especially with Navy and shipyard officials, who were more concerned with repair and/or reconfiguration projects involving ships destined to return to the Naval front line in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{319} According to Bucher, it was apparent that NSA and the Navy did not devote proper attention to detail regarding the spy ship program.

Another example of lack of leadership attention to details was apparent in the misallocation of classified publications sent to the Pueblo prior to sailing. The disbursement of this classified material is the responsibility of the Office of Naval Intelligence Publications (ONIP). Through obvious mismanagement, the Pueblo

\textsuperscript{319} Bucher. 65, and Chap. IV.
received an allotment of classified material for the *Pueblo*, classified publications for the intelligence operators on the ship, and all classified publications that would have been required for a coastal freighter, which was superfluous. As many as ten copies of some publications were received. And on the morning of departure for its mission, the ship received yet another classified publication shipment. Even though CDR Bucher had voiced concern regarding the sheer volume of intelligence materials before leaving port, through inattention to detail by Navy leadership, at the time of its capture by the North Koreans, the *Pueblo* was carrying an inordinate amount of classified material, all of which fell into the hands of the North Koreans and, according to CIA sources, was turned over to the Soviets.

A corollary to this leadership failure regarding intelligence publications was the fact that the *Pueblo* was provided with woefully inadequate intelligence material destruction capability. The ship had a small capacity burn apparatus and a limited number of weighted bags, not nearly sufficient for destruction of all of the classified material on board in an emergency. In addition, the ability to scuttle the ship quickly in a crisis situation was also impossible. Poor Navy attention to detail provided the North Koreans with one of the largest windfalls of U.S. intelligence material ever collected.

Another lesson that should have been learned was that it was foolhardy to send a nearly defenseless ship into a known hostile area without providing for protection of the ship and crew. The Navy was well aware that the North Koreans were not receptive to the U.S. Navy parking a spy ship off their coast. Yet, Navy leadership made no provision for emergency response to reach the *Pueblo* in a critical situation. All U.S.
military assets were either too far away, or tactically misconfigured to come to prompt assistance of the hapless spy ship.

Another lesson that was completely ignored by Pueblo’s chain of leadership command, including the Johnson administration, was the repetitive overt and clear warnings from North Korea. Blatant military attacks against DMZ peace keepers and a daring attack on the South Korean president’s residence demonstrated the brazen volatility of the North Koreans. The government of Kim Il-sung had issued multiple warnings directed toward the United States, placing the United States on notice that spy ships off the Korean coast would not be tolerated. One such clear warning from North Korea came only three days prior to the capture of the Pueblo, but apparently NSA and the CIA did not give credence or due concern to the DPRK warning and therefore gave no serious thought for protection of the spy ship. Proper analysis should have been given to the North Korean warnings.

Above all, it was flawed leadership that failed to conduct a proper risk analysis of the ship’s mission. All other facets of poor leadership are secondary to the Navy’s lack of proper risk analysis. Disregarding previous lessons learned, conducting no serious detailed examination of all factors germane to the spy ship mission, and failing to properly weigh the risk to the Pueblo, the Navy and administration officials relied upon the belief that no harm had occurred in previous Banner missions and therefore no harm could come to a U.S. Navy ship that maintained a thirteen mile distance from other nations’ shores. As a result, the Navy assigned a routinely-endorsed rating of minimal risk to the Pueblo mission, a rating that proved to be foolish, indeed.
Kim’s legacy, the ideology of *Juche*, which is still in practice, has remained central to North Korea for decades. The same ideological propaganda disseminated to the North Korean people was continued by his successor and son, Kim Jong-il, and now Jong-il’s son, the present ruler of North Korea, Kim Jung-un. While 30 percent of the government budget and 15-20 percent of the GNP is spent on the military, and starvation is decimating the population, the Kims bolster their regimes by reminding the North Korean public that all efforts of the KWP and all government action is for the good of the whole, North Korea.320

Propaganda continues to flourish in North Korea. An interesting example occurred on August 8, 2015, when North Korea announced that it had created its own time zone, called “Pyongyang Time.” The new Pyongyang time was explained to the populace as throwing off a vestige of prior Japanese “colonial domination,” because North Korea’s previous time zone had been set during the Japanese occupation. In addition, the act of creating its own time zone served to demonstrate North Korean independence to the world community.321

Hatred for America continues to be a prominent theme in North Korean propaganda. Today, just as in 1968, North Korea is threatening military action against both South Korea and the United States. But at this time, Kim Jong-un, the grandson of Kim Il-sung, is threatening to carry out an attack on Washington, D.C. using nuclear weapons. His propaganda machine has produced a video depicting intercontinental

missiles "slamming into Washington, near what appears to be the Lincoln Memorial." As for the crew of the Pueblo, they arrived in the United States to a heroes' welcome in San Diego, where nearly a thousand well-wishers gathered at Miramar Naval Air Station to greet the arriving men, who then received medical treatment and debriefing. The body of Duane Hodges was escorted to his hometown, Creswell, Oregon, (population nearly 1,000), where he was buried with full military honors on December 28, 1968.

The jubilant arrival of the Pueblo crew was soon replaced by the intense scrutiny of a Naval board of inquiry in an attempt to assign blame for the Navy's own failure in leadership. Following the inquiry proceedings, the majority of the men left the Navy after completing their enlistments. Commander Bucher remained in the Navy and requested and received orders to the Naval Post-Graduate School in Monterrey, California. Following completion of an advanced degree, he held two more shore-based Naval assignments before retiring from the Navy in 1973.

Ironically, as this passage is written, the United States has once again been involved in another vessel seizure on the high seas, as two U.S. Navy gunboats were captured and detained by a foreign military force without a shot being fired. This is

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325 The news of the capture of the two U.S. gunboats by Iran on Tuesday, January 12, 2016, was widely disseminated. Two articles concerning the incident are:
yet another embarrassing incident caused, at least partially, by arrogance and lack of leadership within the U.S. Navy and the leadership in Washington. The Navy “has fired the commander” of this group of sailors for “failing to provide effective leadership, leading to complacency [and] a lack of oversight,” the same flaws in leadership so evident at the time of the *Pueblo*.326

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Biographical Information

James Duermeyer holds a B.A. degree in sociology/business from William Penn University in Oskaloosa, Iowa (1968). Following college he entered the U.S. Navy as an officer and rose to the rank of commander with twenty years of service, including duty in Vietnam. James worked in private industry human resources for fifteen years, and worked for the U.S. government for twenty years in the Department of the Navy, U.S. Customs Service, and the Department of Labor. During his working career(s), he wished to acquire an advanced degree and finally found time to pursue further education following retirement. He earned an M.A. in U.S. history at the University of Texas Arlington in 2016.