

DECLASSIFIED

Authority E.O. 12958

By WAN NARA Date 3-14-06

~~TOP SECRET SENSITIVE~~
UNCLASSIFIED

The attached is an urgent paper to be the subject of discussion at the National Security Council meeting 10:00 AM 16 April.

DECLASSIFIED/RELEASED ON 4/15/02
by NARA on the recommendation of the NSC
under provisions of E.O. 12958 RS

~~TOP SECRET SENSITIVE~~
UNCLASSIFIED

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVEALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION
IN RESPONSE TO KOREAN ATTACK ON US AIRCRAFT

This paper examines possible U.S. courses of military and diplomatic actions in response to the North Korean attack on the U.S. EC-121 aircraft. It first states assumptions regarding the possible survival of the crew and North Korean intentions, and then lists possible objectives of U.S. actions. Alternative military courses of action with associated diplomatic actions are discussed as follows:

1. Show of force
2. Single select military combat actions
3. Other military actions

Diplomatic alternatives are then discussed on the assumption that we are taking no military action.

I. Assumptions

- A. The aircrew has not been taken prisoner by North Korea. (Different courses of action would be required to seek the return of any crewmen captured.)
- B. The North Korean action was taken independent of any Communist tactics in Vietnam or elsewhere.

II. Possible Objectives of U.S. Actions

- A. Maintain our right to use international airspace.
- B. Deter similar hostile actions by North Korea or other countries.
- C. Exact redress by retaliation or compensation.
- D. Maximize international criticism of North Korea and minimize criticism of U.S. actions.
- E. Maintain domestic support for our overseas security commitments, including Vietnam.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

NOTE: The courses of action described below are evaluated in terms of achieving one or more of these possible objectives and in terms of the risk of military escalation and the military costs of any operation.

III. Military Options (All actions considered are non-nuclear)

A. Military actions not involving combat courses of action

Possible Military Actions

1. Show of force using air and naval forces in proximity to but outside of North Korea.
2. Repeat EC-121 reconnaissance mission with combat escort.

Pro:

- a. Actions do not violate international law and therefore maintain law abiding image.
- b. Little risk of escalation to a point of resumption of full hostilities.
- c. Demonstrates our right to free use of international airspace.
- d. Avoids demonstrations and outcry from anti-war element at home.
- e. As compared to a show of force, the reconnaissance operation is more quickly mounted, is less costly in resource requirement, and is more credible.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

Con:

- a. Little if any deterrent effect, and at considerable cost in resources.
- b. Carries no cost to North Korea and hence allows their unlawful acts to go unpunished.
- c. Erodes domestic support for overseas security commitments by failure of costly overseas complex to protect U.S. interests.
- d. Both operations involve diversion of resources from Vietnam but the air reconnaissance less so.
- e. Show of force would be viewed by North Koreans as unconvincing.

Diplomatic options to support show of force

1. Purposes of diplomatic action in support of show of force.
 - a. To underline seriousness with which we view North Korean action.
 - b. To demonstrate responsibility and restraint of U.S. reaction.
 - c. To establish legal basis for U.S. position.
 - d. To promote international acceptance of U.S. military action.
 - e. To secure domestic support for U.S. military action.
2. Illustrative package of diplomatic actions to accompany show of force.
 - a. Participate in Panmunjon talks: to keep channel to North Korea open, to underline directly

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

Authority EO 12958
By W/AN NARA Date 3-14-06TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

to North Koreans seriousness with which we view the incident; to demonstrate to world our willingness to use all peaceful avenues.

- b. Call Security Council meeting: to gain maximum publicity for our position; to establish legal basis for our position.
- c. Make strong statement to USSR: to urge them to put pressure on North Koreans to desist from further provocative acts.
- d. Approach friendly governments to appeal for support for our position, and to emphasize U.S restraints.
- e. Make public statement of facts of case: to express U.S indignation over North Korean action, and to make clear that U.S. will not tolerate further provocations.

B. Military Combat Options

The basic advantage of a military combat course of action is that it provides a greater opportunity to accomplish the possible objectives of deterrence, redress, and maintenance of our rights to use international airspace. However, any military course of combat action involving an attack on North Korea involves the risk of retaliatory action by North Korea.

Neither the Soviets nor the Chinese would be likely to take countermeasures that they believed would increase the chances of a confrontation with the U.S. The Chinese would probably make some demonstrative defense preparations in North China and Manchuria, and the Soviets, too, would begin marshalling some more naval and air power in the Far East and the Sea of Japan. They would still hope to avoid a direct clash with the U.S., but the chances of dangerous incidents, particularly involving Soviet naval forces, would increase.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

Authority EO 12958
By W/AN NARA Date 3-14-08TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

A military course of action is also likely to evoke a more adverse international and domestic reaction. All of these combat options against the territory of North Korea would in ROK eyes stand in stark contrast to U.S. restraints when ROK interests have been involved.

A single selected military combat action, particularly, has the advantages of being less likely to lead to escalation of the conflict by the North Koreans than sustained combat actions. The North Korean air and air defense capabilities are such that losses must be expected in most options. In addition, North Korean capabilities give them the option of continuing the combat after we desired to break it off. The more serious the U.S. action, the greater is the risk of North Korean counteraction and escalation.

1. Destroy a North Korean aircraft off the coast of North Korea:

Pro:

- a. This action would extract redress from the North Koreans and tend to deter them from other acts of piracy in international airspace.
- b. It demonstrates U.S. determination to react in the face of clear provocation.

Con:

- a. The probability of finding a single aircraft in a position to destroy it without a response by the North Koreans which would escalate the action is extremely remote.

2. Selected airstrike against a military target, preferably one airfield.

Pro:

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

- a. The destruction of a specific military installation or complex would tend to deter further attacks on U.S. aircraft by the North Koreans. It exacts redress by retaliation and demonstrates our intent to maintain our right to use international airspace. It is a measured response.

Con:

- a. This action would be made in the face of a sophisticated North Korean Air Defense System of fighters, Surface to Air Missiles, and other Anti-aircraft means. There could be significant loss to the attacking force.
 - b. Were a carrier or other U.S. ship to be disabled, there is the probability of the action continuing in order to cover the withdrawal of the force.
 - c. The airfield from which the North Korean aircraft were launched to make the attack on the U.S. EC-121 is not favorably located to be an effective target. Its proximity to USSR makes this a difficult target to attack without chance of confrontation with the Soviets.
 - d. The action involves sustained risk of retaliation.
3. Shore bombardment of North Korean military targets by U.S. surface craft on either east or west coast.

Pro:

- a. This course is mentioned as a possible form of redress.

Con:

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

- a. Adequate air cover would be required to protect the naval task force from North Korean air reaction.
- b. The North Korean response, within their capability, would be to launch air attacks against the U.S. Naval force. An air battle could ensue which could require U.S. aircraft from sources other than the Naval Task Force thereby escalating the conflict and widening the scope of the action.

4. Ground raid across the DMZ.

Pro:

- a. This would demonstrate to the North Koreans that excursion across the Demilitarized Zone were not their exclusive rights.
- b. It has the advantage of being a retaliation visible to the people of the ROK.

Con:

- a. This action, if of sufficient size and scope to be effective against the existing prepared North Korean defenses, could be mistaken for an attack designed to reopen the front in Korea and restart the Korean War.
- b. It invites further escalation by the ROK Government by precedent, which we have tried hard to avoid.
- c. It also is an Armistice violation with the inherent disadvantage of further eroding the effectiveness of the UN Armistice Commission.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

d. Ground actions are much harder to break off than air actions and the dangers of a ground attack escalating, compared to an air course of action, are considerably greater.

5. Attack military targets near DMZ by fire.

Attack suitable military targets closely adjacent to the DMZ. Utilizing artillery, HONEST JOHN, and/or tactical air.

Pro:

- a. This would constitute a positive act of retaliation.
- b. In the case of artillery or HONEST JOHN, forces are readily available without redeployment.
- c. This action could be conducted, particularly in the case of artillery or HONEST JOHN, with complete surprise.
- d. This action would involve a minimum expenditure of military resources and have minimum effect on Southeast Asia operations.

Con:

- a. This action could provoke retaliation in kind and lead to an expanding combat operation across the entire front.
- b. This action might be interpreted by NK as the prelude to a ground attack across the DMZ thereby involving significant danger of escalation.
- c. Attacks on such targets are not directly relatable to the right to use international airspace.

6. Attacks on NK naval vessels by U.S. submarines.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
 SENSITIVE

NK naval vessels, including submarine venturing into international waters, would be destroyed by US submarines.

Pro:

- a. This action would constitute a positive act of retaliation.
- b. This action would be directly relatable to the right to freely use the seas and air-space.
- c. This action would involve minimum expenditure of military resources.
- d. This action would probably receive a favorable degree of domestic and allied support.

Con:

- a. North Korean naval vessels rarely venture into international waters. NK submarines rarely operate submerged.
- b. NK surface naval vessels are small and of shallow draft such that they are very poor submarine targets.
- c. The possibility exists that a confrontation with Soviet surface ships or submarines might ensue.

7. Blockade of North Korean ports

Using surface ships a blockade of North Korean ports could be established to prevent the use of seas by North Korean ships and craft.

Pro:

- a. This would be an act of positive retaliation.
- b. This action would be directly relatable to the right of free use of the seas and the airspace.

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

Con:

- a. The effect of this action would be minimal on North Korea as their use of the seas has been halted since PUEBLO. A majority of their imports are by rail.
 - b. The problem of protection of the blockading force from air attack would be immense and would require extensive air resources.
 - c. Probability of continuing air battle would exist.
 - d. Probability of confrontation with USSR air, surface, or subsurface units would be high.
 - e. It would require action continuing over an extended period.
 - f. A blockade would have to extend to the Soviet border to be effective.
8. Mining or Threatening to mine North Korean waters

Warning all nations to vacate and stay clear of North Korean ports because they will be mined if North Korea does not provide adequate redress for their unprovoked, illegal action.

Pro:

- a. Would cut off seaborne commerce to North Korea, which although not extensive would be damaging to their interests (about 550 ships calls/year).
- b. Avoids the disadvantages of confrontation which go with blockade.
- c. Achieves redress.

Con:

- a. Likely to evoke widespread international reprobation.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

- b. As a hostile act, could provoke retaliatory action and hence escalation.
 - c. Would require considerable SEA air resources.
9. Seize some North Korean assets abroad

Two fish factory ships built in the Netherlands look like the only substantial items. One is rounding the Cape of Good Hope en route to Korea with a Dutch flag and crew. The North Koreans have little cash tied up in her.

Pro:

- a. A forceful act of this sort would be responsive to public indignation.
- b. The North Koreans would be intimidated into keeping the rest of their fleet in port.

Con:

- a. Important legal and other principles would be violated. The Dutch would be outraged.
- b. Public opinion would ridicule our equating of a fishing vessel and a "spy plane."

Diplomatic Actions in Support of Military Combat ActionPurpose:

- 1. To establish the legal basis for the U.S. action.
- 2. To neutralize international criticism and censure and to develop a modicum of international support for the action.
- 3. To seek public support for the U.S. action in Korea and for continued U.S. commitments elsewhere in Asia, particularly in Vietnam.

Illustrative Package of Diplomatic and Political Actions:SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

- A. Panmunjom Take initiative to call MAC meeting at Panmunjom to establish that North Korean action constituted act of war and was in violation of the spirit of the Armistice Agreement.
- B. UN Actions
1. UN Security Council action either to gain prior approval of US military action (highly unlikely), to justify the action after the fact, or set the stage for the action.
 2. Present a letter to the UN justifying the US legal and political case.
- C. Possible Approach to the USSR
- Pro:
- a. Provides opportunity to assure the Soviet Union that the action is not directed at it. That the action is limited.
- Con:
- a. Could force Soviets to react in support of North Korea if they chose to remain uninvolved.
 - b. Would give warning if done in advance.
- D. Approach to friendly power to seek international support
- E. Major Presidential speech following the action to seek domestic and international support.
- IV. Diplomatic Options Without Military Actions

If we decided to take military actions, our diplomacy will be designed to support and exploit what is achieved by our use of force, and to minimize its ill effects. If there is no military action, our diplomacy must accomplish what it can in its own terms. This section examines this latter case.

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

We could adopt a "high posture" seeking a maximum of publicity for our diplomatic moves, mobilizing public opinion to deter future hostile actions and to make their past actions costly to the North Koreans. Alternatively, we could take a "low posture," working so far as possible behind the scenes to achieve some accommodation without involving our prestige or that of our opponents.

Whatever our posture, we could focus on a serious diplomatic effort to convey a genuine determination to meet the next provocation by force, or we could limit our objectives to maintaining our own image and our support, while denigrating our antagonist.

Diplomatic steps might include one or more of such objectives as:

1. Conveying an explicit warning that the next incident would be responded to militarily.
 2. Conveying a maximum warning for deterrent purposes without being precise on military action ensuing.
 3. Demanding compensation for the lives of the men involved and for the plane.
 4. Maximizing international opprobrium against North Korea for its action.
 5. Seeking to reduce the level of international tension by treating the matter in relatively calm form (having already decided not to react militarily).
- A. Talks at Panmunjom

We would accept the North Korean call for 18 April, made after the attack, or try to call our own meeting, or call for a closed meeting, or suspend meetings completely.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

1. Accept the North Korean proposal to meet
18 April.

Pro:

- a. We would use the meeting to express indignation, by presenting a strong case and/or possibly by walking out.
- b. Our statement of our position could put on the record our right to use international airspace. It could carry as grave and explicit a warning as we might choose.
- c. Going to the table would show our respect for established procedures in settling disputes; walking out would effectively protest the abuse of these procedures.
- d. A walkout would cut off their efforts to humiliate us with long harangues and put them on notice that Panmunjom is not simply a forum for propaganda.

Con:

- a. Our attendance at North Korean invitation could be construed as an admission of provocative action.
 - b. Even if we walked out, the North Koreans would not be impressed.
 - c. Public warnings will not be believed unless reinforced in private; the public warning then becomes superfluous.
2. Ignore the North Korean proposal and try
to call our own meeting.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

Pro:

- a. We would then be presenting ourselves as the plaintiff which in fact we are. We would have the advantage of speaking first.
- b. We could obtain the other advantages of the preceding course through the content of our opening statement and, if we wished, by walking out as the North Korean began talking.

Con:

- a. The North Koreans would probably not attend a meeting convened by the US.
 - b. If there were a meeting, a procedural hassle could well ensue, producing considerable delay and diverting attention from substance.
3. Call for a closed meeting on the Pueblo model.

Pro:

- a. A closed meeting could be a forum for conveying a serious warning.

Con:

- a. We have nothing to negotiate if they have no prisoners. Warnings could be conveyed privately through other channels.
- b. ROK public opinion would again be angered by our closeting ourselves with the North Koreans as soon as we are hurt, even though President Pak could be made to understand.

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

4. Ignore the North Korean call for a meeting and announce that we will boycott Panmunjom until they behave.

Pro:

- a. Our most dramatic option in this group. It would be "stronger" than a walkout.
- b. North Korea would lose a propaganda forum they value.

Con:

- a. We could not directly confront the North Koreans with our charges.
- b. We would lose our only channel for direct contact with Pyongyang. Re-establishing it would be difficult.
- c. We would be criticized at home and abroad for subordinating the UN, which we represent in Korea, to "US interests."
- d. Our action would seem to many to be more harmful to peace than to North Korea.

B. United Nations Options

1. Call a Security Council Meeting

Pro:

- a. This would gain maximum publicity among all the choices.
- b. Our statements on our rights and on North Korean wrongs would move directly to sophisticated and interested audiences.

SENSITIVE
TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET
 SENSITIVE

Con:

- a. We probably could not obtain "action" even in the form of a resolution.
- b. The Soviets would be forced to defend the North Koreans even though they are well aware of the facts.
- c. Debate in the present Council could be hard to manage. Thorny problems (e.g. a debate on "spy ships and planes") could arise and divert attention from our objectives.

2. Present a letter to the Security Council

Pro:

- a. A letter could not get out of hand like a meeting.
- b. It could assert all our claims and positions in an orderly manner, getting wide circulation.

Con:

- a. It would attract much less attention than a meeting.
- b. Though widely circulated, it would be little read.
- c. Unless supplemented, it could appear quite perfunctory.

C. Third Country Channels

- 1. Approach the Soviets to convey a serious warning and/or to pressure the North Koreans to adopt a less belligerent attitude and to behave more consistently with international law and practice.

TOP SECRET
SENSITIVE

Pro:

- a. The Soviets may be the only power with real influence (if it is real) in Pyongyang.
- b. The Soviets have a genuine interest in avoiding military conflict in Korea.

Con:

- a. The Soviets are not likely to judge the situation serious enough to call for serious arm-twisting.
 - b. If they did put real pressure on Pyongyang, they would resent the necessity and take it out on us elsewhere.
 - c. The most probable outcome would be Soviet resentment against our importuning and no measurable effect on North Korea.
2. Approach the North Koreans through other governments.

Pro:

- a. This could provide an alternative or supplement to closed meetings at Panmunjom if we want to deal frankly yet quietly.

Con:

- a. No third party will accept a charge from us to convey an official serious threat, however privately.