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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

26 APR 1969

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IPS by CJ Date 2/17/06

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. HENRY KISSINGER

SUBJECT: Critique of EC121 Planning Exercise

1. I offer these comments in response to your request to members of the EC121 Group for personal critiques of the EC121 planning exercise.
2. Staff work developed chronologically in two distinct stages: (1) preliminary analysis of alternative courses of action, and (2) preparation of detailed contingency plans for those courses under serious consideration. It seems appropriate to comment on each stage separately.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

3. Initial response to the shoot-down was managed through emergency procedures of the National Military Command Center (NMCC) and counterpart centers elsewhere. One result of this initial period of management was a paper by the JCS, available early in the morning of April 15, outlining alternative military actions that might be taken in response to the incident.

4. Early in the morning of April 15, the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operations of the Services were convened for consultation. Among other things, they decided, lacking any information on pending meetings of the NSC Review Group and the NSC, that the emerging crisis should be referred to a Korean Task Force similar to the one assembled for the Pueblo incident. In response to a request from Rear Admiral Shepard of ISA, Ambassador Brown of State convened a Korean Task Force at 1330, and presented a working draft outlining the problem and alternative courses of action. Richard Snyder of the NSC staff attended and notified the Task Force that it should prepare a paper to be considered by the NSC Review Group at 1830. After several hours of relatively unproductive discussion, the Task Force decided (1) to adjourn for sufficient time to permit the Joint Staff and State Department to develop military and diplomatic options, respectively, and (2) to reconvene in the Situation Room at the White House at 1730 to draft a paper for the Review Group meeting at 1830.

5. Since a satisfactory draft had not emerged by 1830, the Review Group issued guidance on further drafting procedures and adjourned around 2000 with instructions that a draft paper be prepared by 2230.

6. The most pertinent observation about these procedures is that virtually no progress was made on preliminary analysis of alternative

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military responses to the EC121 incident over the twelve-hour period from 0800 to 2000 of April 15. After long hours of discussion and drafting, the options already outlined early in the morning remained virtually the same, and little progress had been made in sorting out the basic alternative courses of action open to the USG. It remained for the Review Group, sitting essentially in drafting session until around 0200 of April 16, to develop a paper suitable for consideration by the NSC at 1000 the same day. Twenty-six hours elapsed between the shoot-down and a systematic presentation of possible responses.

7. The question naturally arises whether the existing machinery for management of crises is adequate, and I shall address this question in more detail below. For the moment, it is interesting to note that it was not until some time during April 16, a full day after the shoot-down, that a Korean Task Force was formally constituted by a memorandum to members of the NSC in accord with provisions of NSDM 8. By that time, contingency planning had been delegated to the special EC121 Group, and the mechanism provided in NSDM 8 had been superseded.

#### PREPARATION OF DETAILED CONTINGENCY PLANS

8. The day of April 16 was devoted to a meeting of the NSC, additional consultations of the President with the principals most directly involved in the crisis, and formulation of tentative decisions by the President. As one result, the special EC121 Group was formed to prepare detailed contingency plans for two tentative courses of action, one of which was subsequently discarded. The first meeting from 1400 to 1630 on April 17 consisted primarily in deciding on procedure and assigning tasks. During almost eight hours of meetings on April 18, the Group prepared a detailed scenario and contingency plan for the one remaining course of action under consideration, gaming the action in the process. In my opinion, this exercise was highly productive both in developing a careful and systematic plan and in revealing serious problems that could not have been anticipated until a precise scenario was developed. The Group reconvened for an hour and a quarter on April 19 in what turned out to be a brief post mortem, since the President had decided by then not to undertake the course of action being programmed.

#### CRITIQUE

9. The following are the major lessons that I derive from the EC121 planning exercise:

a. The machinery for crisis management provided in NSDM 8 is not appropriate for military crises such as the EC121 incident. In particular, Interdepartmental Groups do not seem to be suited to contingency planning and crisis management when our national security is seriously in danger. A group like the special EC121 Group seems far more appropriate from the outset.

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b. Procedures for activating crisis management are inadequate. While the NMCC structure responded very satisfactorily as far as emergency measures were concerned, there seems to be no tripwire to set in motion the more extended management of crises.

c. The time lost in this episode before systematic plans were generated could have been crucial, and every effort should be made to avoid the same experience in similar episodes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The following recommendations seem to emerge:

a. The procedures provided in NSDM 8 should be carefully re-examined and reformulated, at least as far as crises directly involving our national security are concerned. I hope to prepare some concrete suggestions for consideration in proper channels.

b. Tripwires should be established to activate crisis management machinery promptly.

c. The two-stage process of staff work followed in the EC121 exercise proved sound, but consideration should be given to modifying normal NSC procedures in such crises. For example, if a special crisis management group like the EC121 Group handled affairs from the beginning, its preliminary analysis could proceed directly to the NSC without being processed through the Review Group.

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BRIEF CHRONOLOGY  
(April 1969, Washington Time)

Shootdown	142347 (?)
JCS preliminary paper on alternative military actions	150800 approximately
Meeting of Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operations	150900 approximately
Rear Admiral Shepard (ISA) contacts Ambassador Brown re conven- ing of Korean Task Force	151000 approximately
Meeting of Korean Task Force at State	151330 - 151600 approximately
Meeting of Korean Task Force at White House	151730 - 152000 approximately
Meeting of NSC Review Group	151830 - 152000 152230 - 160200
Meeting of NSC	161000
Meeting of EC121 Group	171400 - 171630 180930 - 181320 181630 - 182000 190800 - 190915

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