



CM File

CM-3163-68
29 March 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: USS PUEBLO Incident
Paul Nitze
Reference: DepSecDef memo for CJCS dated 7 Mar 1968

1. This memorandum responds to the questions raised in your memorandum of 7 March 1968.
2. Answers to the specific questions in your memorandum follow:

a. Question. Regarding DIRNSA's message ADP 541, dated December 29, 1967, outlining DIRNSA's evaluation of the risk involved in the deployment of the PUEBLO, what specific action was taken by the JCS and by CINCPAC to weigh DIRNSA's evaluation against the "minimal risk" evaluation in CINCPAC's request for permission to deploy the PUEBLO? What were the factors that led to CINCPAC's "minimal risk" evaluation? What ship protective measures, if any, were developed as a result of the DIRNSA evaluation? Was the DIRNSA message passed to CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, Commander 5th AF, COMUSFK, COMNAVFOR Korea, or COMNAVFOR Japan? If so, to whom and what action was taken?

Answer. There was long precedent for the type of operation scheduled for the PUEBLO. The USSR pioneered this type of operation using unescorted trawlers to collect intelligence in locations thousands of miles from any Soviet supporting forces. The operation is in accord with international law as long as the ship remains in international waters. The ships are non-combatants and therefore less provocative. In 1967 the BANNER, a sister ship of the PUEBLO, performed a similar mission involving passage through the same waters off North Korea without a serious incident. Hijacking of a US naval vessel last occurred during the Civil War. The capability of the US to retaliate would tend to deter anyone from deliberately attacking a U.S. ship.

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Considering these factors a "minimal risk" evaluation was made. The DIRNSA message was reviewed in the JRC and passed to CINCPAC where, at staff level, it was determined that all the information in the message had already been considered and therefore no further action was taken.

b. Question. I note that the Fifth Air Force OPLAN 307-67 was developed to provide protective air support for CLICK BEETLE operations, but it cited only the USS BANNER by name. Did CINCPAC, CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, COMUSFK, COMNAVFOR Japan and the Commander, Fifth Air Force, believe that 307-67 was only applicable to USS BANNER deployments, or did they consider the plan applicable for the protection of other CLICK BEETLE surface intelligence collection ships?

Answer. The Fifth Air Force OORDER 307-67 was prepared for BANNER's deployments and others which were similar in nature. The order was to be implemented only when specifically directed in response to a request for pre-planned support of a particular mission. No such request was made in the case of the PUEBLO's deployment.

c. Question. Since the Commander, Fifth Air Force was an information addressee on PUEBLO deployment and mission messages, did he personally have knowledge of the PUEBLO's operation? What did he or his staff feel was required in support of the PUEBLO? Did he or his staff have enough information to plan for air support of the PUEBLO? Did the Commander, Fifth Air Force, or his staff inquire as to whether Air Force support was required? Did the Commander, Fifth Air Force, or his staff believe that such support should be requested by the Navy? What were CINCPAC's specific orders or instructions to his component commanders, and other subordinate commanders, on providing protective arrangements for operations like the PUEBLO's?

Answer. CINCPAC had not issued specific instructions to his subordinate commanders concerning protective arrangements for operations like the PUEBLO's. The practice had been that these ships operated independently, with preplanned protection being provided on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the estimated risk. Since a "minimal risk" determination was made for this mission, it was not brought to the personal attention of the Commander, Fifth Air Force, and his staff did not address the question of whether air support should be provided. If air support had been requested, the information available to Fifth Air Force would have been adequate for air support plans.

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d. Question. Since COMNAVFOR Japan was an action addressee on PUEBLO deployment and mission messages, why did he or his superiors in the chain of command, such as CINCPACFLT and CINCPAC, not provide for ship protective measures as a contingency? Why did he or his superiors not check with Fifth Air Force or PACAF to see if the Air Force could provide protective air support?

Answer. Ship protective measures and air support normally were not provided for operations like the PUEBLO's and were considered unnecessary in this instance.

e. Question. I am also concerned about a different aspect of the signal intercept missions conducted by the Navy. Under the current mode of operations the naval vessels conducting these missions are without integral self-protection to any significant degree. Further, they do not have an automatic or semi-automatic destruct capability of sensitive intelligence equipment, since apparently the view has been that the principle of freedom of the seas would provide sufficient security. On the other hand, the mission of the ships is such as to invite certain foreign powers to take some action against them because active intercept operations are being conducted. I would like your views as to whether such ships should be permitted to operate in the future, as they have in the past, as U.S. Naval vessels? If so, should they be provided a full measure of internal self-protection or external support? Alternatively, should their modus operandi be changed to provide non-military cover for their operations?

Answer. I believe that such ships should be permitted to operate in the future as US Naval vessels as part of our intelligence collection effort. In the final analysis, intelligence gathering activities of this type cannot be masked sufficiently to preclude discovery of the true purpose regardless of whether the ship is a fishing trawler or a naval vessel and regardless of whether there is non-military cover for the operations. As to internal protection for these ships, I believe that extensive arming would increase the likelihood of hostile action by an enemy. On the other hand, appropriate external support will have to be provided for future operations in high risk areas. However, I agree with the Secretary of Defense's testimony to the Congress that we cannot provide a "full measure" of support which will preclude all possibility of recurrence of an incident like the seizure of the PUEBLO.

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f. Question. I would also appreciate your comments and recommendations as to what further specific improvements could be made to lessen the possibility of incidents similar to the PUEBLO occurring in the future.

Answer. These missions should be continued and appropriate protection should be provided for operations in high risk areas. I agree with the words of the Secretary of Defense in his testimony to the Congress emphasizing the need for these missions as follows:

"Now, the last category [electronic collection platforms and equipment] I would say on the whole is the most important of the three, and from it we obtain an immense amount of information as to the military capabilities of our opponents, their possible strategy, their tactics, their operational tactics, and also their intentions. I cannot over-emphasize therefore, the importance of this third category, communications intelligence collection."

I believe a full examination should be made to lessen the dangers of a recurrence of the seizure of a vessel or the compromise of our intelligence collection effort. Action is underway in the following specific areas:

- (1) Analysis of the need for intelligence versus the risk involved.
- (2) Improvements in the instructions to commanding officers of intelligence collection ships.
- (3) Improvements in the capability for destruction of classified material to include the scuttling of the ship.
- (4) Reduction in the volume of classified material carried aboard intelligence collection ships.

Earle G. Wheeler

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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

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7 March 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

SUBJECT: USS PUEBLO Incident

Reference: (a) DepSecDef Multi-Addressee memo, Subj:
"Reconnaissance Operations (U)," dtd 3 Feb 68

In reviewing the events leading to the seizure of the USS PUEBLO I am concerned that in addition to the actions directed by reference (a), there may be further organizational or management improvements that should be made in the command and control arrangements for conducting such operations. I would, therefore, appreciate your providing me with answers to the following questions plus any other comments and recommendations you may care to make as soon as practicable:

1. Regarding DIRNSA's message ADP 541, dated December 29, 1967, outlining DIRNSA's evaluation of the risk involved in the deployment of the PUEBLO, what specific action was taken by the JCS and by CINCPAC to weigh DIRNSA's evaluation against the "minimal risk" evaluation in CINCPAC's request for permission to deploy the PUEBLO? What were the factors that led to CINCPAC's "minimal risk" evaluation? What ship protective measures, if any, were developed as a result of the DIRNSA evaluation? Was the DIRNSA message passed to CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, Commander 5th AF, COMUSFK, COMNAVFOR Korea, or COMNAVFOR Japan? If so, to whom and what action was taken?

2. I note that the Fifth Air Force OPLAN 307-67 was developed to provide protective air support for CLICK BEETLE operations, but it cited only the USS BANNER by name. Did CINCPAC, CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, COMUSFK, COMNAVFOR Japan, and the Commander, Fifth Air Force, believe that 307-67 was only applicable to USS BANNER deployments, or did they consider the plan applicable for the protection of other CLICK BEETLE surface intelligence collection ships?

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3. Since the Commander, Fifth Air Force was an information addressee on PUEBLO deployment and mission messages, did he personally have knowledge of the PUEBLO's operation? What did he or his staff feel was required in support of the PUEBLO? Did he or his staff have enough information to plan for air support of the PUEBLO? Did the Commander, Fifth Air Force, or his staff inquire as to whether Air Force support was required? Did the Commander, Fifth Air Force, or his staff believe that such support should be requested by the Navy? What were CINCPAC's specific orders or instructions to his component commanders, and other subordinate commanders, on providing protective arrangements for operations like the PUEBLO's?

4. Since COMNAVFOR Japan was an action addressee on PUEBLO deployment and mission messages, why did he or his superiors in the chain of command, such as CINCPACFLT and CINCPAC, not provide for ship protective measures as a contingency? Why did he or his superiors not check with Fifth Air Force or PACAF to see if the Air Force could provide protective air support?

I am also concerned about a different aspect of the signal intercept missions conducted by the Navy. Under the current mode of operations the naval vessels conducting these missions are without integral self-protection to any significant degree. Further, they do not have an automatic or semi-automatic destruct capability of sensitive intelligence equipment, since apparently the view has been that the principle of freedom of the seas would provide sufficient security. On the other hand, the mission of the ships is such as to invite certain foreign powers to take some action against them because active intercept operations are being conducted. I would like your views as to whether such ships should be permitted to operate in the future, as they have in the past, as U.S. Naval vessels? If so, should they be provided a full measure of internal self-protection or external support? Alternatively, should their modus operandi be changed to provide non-military cover for their operations?

I would also appreciate your comments and recommendations as to what further specific improvements could be made to lessen the possibility of incidents similar to the PUEBLO occurring in the future.

Paul H. Tipton

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