

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

1/29/68  
ACTION

WASHINGTON

Meeting with the President  
Tuesday, January 30, 1968, 8:30 a.m.  
Presentation to Congressional Leadership: the PUEBLO case

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1. The facts. (General Wheeler)

Essentially, what we know about the location of the PUEBLO before, during, and after seizure, from all sources. Also: its course; navigational gear; probability of error between January 10 and its seizure.

2. Questions raised and answers. (Sect. McNamara and General Wheeler)

-- Why was the PUEBLO on this mission?

(To get necessary intelligence concerning the activities of armed forces which have been increasingly aggressive over the past year.)

-- Why was the PUEBLO not escorted?

(It was on the high seas. If we apply the principle of escorting vessels in international waters, the scale of our naval and air forces would have to be greatly expanded; intelligence missions would become much more provocative; the chances of incidents would increase; and the minimum principles of international law and order would be undermined.)

-- Why did Capt. Bucher delay in asking for assistance?

(He thought he was being harassed, not seized. The PUEBLO sister ship, the SS BANNER, was harassed seven times over the last year. In the past four years, there were more than a hundred such harassing incidents.)

-- Why did the naval base at Yokohama not respond to the first message from the PUEBLO?

(It believed that the message transmitted at 10:52 p. m. (EST) and received at Yokohama, seemed a harassing message, as did the PUEBLO's second message.)

-- Why did the 5th Air Force not respond in the period between its notification that the PUEBLO was in danger and the arrival of the PUEBLO in Wonsan Bay port?

(The commander of the 5th Air Force made the judgment that air operations would be ineffective or imprudent. He could not re-rig the strike aircraft in Korea in time (nor could the USS ENTERPRISE get its aircraft over Wonsan Bay in time). Beyond that, the poor weather, poor late afternoon visibility, and the presence of substantial numbers of hostile aircraft made it, in the air commander's judgment, unlikely that his aircraft could do anything useful for the PUEBLO and its crew: in fact, the outcome might have been an ineffective operation against the PT boats in which U. S. aircraft and crews would have been lost, the PUEBLO and its crew additionally endangered.)

NSC has no objection to declassification and/or release. (1/17/2006)

DECLASSIFIED  
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-- Why were only four U. S. aircraft in Korea?

(We have greater flexibility for the whole Pacific area if we do not tie down our aircraft in Korea itself, but keep them in Japan and Okinawa for swift deployment. As the movements of aircraft after the PUEBLO attack indicate, they can be moved into Korea in a matter of hours.)

-- Why were the aircraft in Korea and elsewhere not on the alert for this kind of event?

(It was a unique event. No one had attempted to capture one of these ships before. It was not judged a contingency worthy of the allocation of significant resources.)

3. Diplomatic action since seizure (Secretary Rusk)

- approaches to the Russians;
- demarche in all the capitals;
- UN Security Council meeting;
- Panunjom machinery;
- future possibilities of offer of impartial arbitration.

4. Actions that might be undertaken (Secretary McNamara)

Our objective is to get back the crew and the ship; keep the South Koreans confident and willing to put an extra division into South Vietnam; and avoid the opening up of a second front.

We have examined a number of possible courses of military action, if diplomacy fails, to achieve the return of the men and the ship (tab. A). We have not decided on any such course of action yet.

But we may have to take certain actions that will permit us to maintain a situation of confidence in South Korea, and in particular keep them to their tentative commitment to place an extra division in South Vietnam.

In particular, we might be considering with the Congress:

- the grant to the President of the right to extend SMI treaties;
- the maintenance of some, but by no means all, of the reinforcements we have put into the area; and
- a substantial increase in military aid to South Korea so that it can face the possibility of increased infiltration from North Korea with confidence, while going forward with its plans to reinforce in South Vietnam.

W. A. Rostow