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23 January 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: See Distribution List

SUBJECT: North Korean Intentions

1. Per McNamara's request, the Director of Central Intelligence herewith submits a preliminary assessment of the Pueblo incident.

2. Since the fall of 1966, North Korea has been pursuing a tougher, more aggressive policy toward South Korea and the US. Pyongyang has deliberately heightened tensions along the DMZ, launched infiltration teams inside South Korea, and has been more aggressive in shooting incidents involving South Korean fishing vessels and patrol boats. This policy is probably intended by the North Korean leadership primarily as a demonstration against US and UK action in Vietnam.*

3. The attempt of an armed North Korean infiltration team to attack the presidential mansion in Seoul was the most conspicuous example of this North Korean policy thus far. Now the seizure of the USS Pueblo adds a direct involvement with the US in an unusually dramatic way.

4. In our view the two incidents were not planned jointly. The attack in Seoul almost certainly involved considerable advance planning. It is unlikely that the attack was timed to coincide with the seizure of the Pueblo, which did not begin unloading until 10 January.

* See SNTI 14.2-67, "North Korean Intentions and Capabilities with Respect to South Korea," dated 21 September 1967.

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5. Nevertheless, the circumstances of the Pueblo's capture indicate that the North Koreans acted deliberately. If the local North Korean commander was exceeding his instructions, there was ample time for Pyongyang to countermand his actions.

6. What is known thus far does not suggest that the North Koreans are deliberately creating a pretext for hostilities. At this stage, however, regardless of whether they planned for it or not, they are probably now prepared to face a period of sharply heightened tensions. They claim, and they may believe, that the Pueblo was within their territorial waters. They will undertake a heavy propaganda exploitation of the affair for some days at least. They will probably not release the crew or the ship promptly unless they judge that the US will resort to retaliatory action, such as an air attack against the patrol craft involved in seizing the Pueblo.

7. Pyongyang will be aware that the ROK on its own motion will probably undertake some violent retaliation for the episode in Seoul, presumably in the DMZ. The prospect of this will probably cause the North Koreans to exercise some caution in handling the further course of the affair.

8. If tensions rise sharply, the Soviets seem bound to take a hand at least privately. They will almost certainly advise the North Koreans to terminate the episode at an early date.

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