

# Worksheet: Project AZORIAN



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Use the link : <https://www.cia.gov/legacy/museum/exhibit/project-azorian/>

Access the exhibit using the link above and answer the questions.

***\*Please note: the responses below are examples. Write the answers in your own words, ensuring you capture the key points.***

## *Exhibit Overview*

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Visit the exhibit "Project Azorian" from the CIA Museum. Summarize the main aspects of the project and its historical significance in your own words.

"Project Azorian," also known as the Glomar Explorer, was a covert CIA operation in the 1970s to recover a sunken Soviet submarine, K-129. The operation involved the construction of the Glomar Explorer, a specially designed salvage ship. It was historically significant because the mission highlighted the U.S. intelligence community's determination to obtain valuable intelligence during the Cold War. The operation provided substantial insights into Soviet military technology and operations.

## *Operation Details*

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Describe the purpose and objectives of "Project Azorian." What was the CIA attempting to achieve through this operation? Explain how it was unique and technologically advanced for its time.

"Project Azorian," also known as the Glomar Explorer, was to recover a sunken Soviet submarine, K-129, from the Pacific Ocean. The CIA aimed to obtain valuable intelligence on Soviet military technology and operations through the salvage of the submarine.

-Or-

The operation's objectives were to develop advanced deep-sea recovery capabilities, retrieve the wreckage of the Soviet submarine, and extract critical information from it.

What made "Project Azorian" unique and technologically advanced for its time was the construction of the Glomar Explorer, a large salvage ship equipped with a specially designed claw mechanism called the "Capture Vehicle." The Capture Vehicle lowered to the ocean floor, attached to the submarine wreckage, and lifted to the surface. The mission's technological advancements in deep-sea recovery capabilities set a precedent for future underwater salvage and intelligence-gathering endeavors.

### *Challenges Faced*

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Identify and discuss at least three significant challenges encountered during the execution of "Project Azorian." How were the challenges overcome, and what innovative solutions were implemented?

During the execution of "Project Azorian," several major challenges were encountered. Here are three significant challenges, along with the innovative solutions implemented to overcome them:

- **Retrieval of the Sunken Submarine:** One of the primary challenges was retrieving the sunken Soviet submarine, K-129, from the depths of the Pacific Ocean. The innovative solution was the development of the "Capture Vehicle," a specially designed claw mechanism capable of attaching to the submarine wreckage. The claw allowed for the partial raising of the submarine to the surface. Although the submarine ultimately broke apart during the retrieval, the Capture Vehicle brought up a section of the submarine, providing valuable intelligence.
- **Secrecy and Cover Story:** Maintaining the utmost secrecy surrounding "Project Azorian" posed a significant challenge. The operation required a cover story to explain the purpose of the Glomar Explorer, which was presented as a deep-sea mining vessel. To address this challenge, the CIA created a fictional company called the "Hughes Glomar Explorer," with the assistance of Howard Hughes' company, to provide a plausible cover for the operation. This cover story helped deflect suspicion and maintain secrecy surrounding the project's true nature.
- **Engineering and Technical Complexities:** The execution of "Project Azorian" involved unprecedented engineering and technical complexities. One major

obstacle was the depth of the ocean floor, which presented difficulties in reaching and manipulating the submarine wreckage. The Glomar Explorer was equipped with advanced deep-sea recovery systems, including positioning and lifting mechanisms, to address this challenge. Additionally, extensive planning, research, and testing were conducted to develop innovative solutions for the unique challenges encountered during the operation, highlighting the ingenuity and problem-solving abilities of the engineering teams involved.

### *Historical Impact*

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Analyze the impact of "Project Azorian" on intelligence gathering and maritime operations. How did this operation contribute to the advancement of U.S. capabilities and the understanding of foreign technology?

"Project Azorian" had a significant impact on intelligence gathering and maritime operations, contributing to the advancement of U.S. capabilities and the understanding of foreign technology. The operation provided valuable insights into Soviet military technology and operations represented a significant leap forward in deep-sea recovery capabilities; and demonstrated the effectiveness of covert operations in acquiring critical intelligence.

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"Project Azorian" advanced U.S. capabilities in intelligence gathering and maritime operations. By providing unprecedented access to foreign technology, it contributed to a deeper understanding of Soviet naval capabilities and influenced subsequent advancements in U.S. intelligence gathering and underwater salvage operations. The operation's impact on intelligence assessments, technological advancements, and covert operation strategies made it a pivotal moment in the history of intelligence gathering and maritime operations.

## Engineering Marvel

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Explore the engineering aspect of "Project Azorian." What were some remarkable engineering feats in designing and constructing the specialized vessel used in the operation? Discuss the challenges and innovations in maritime engineering.

Some remarkable engineering feats are:

- The construction of the specialized vessel, the Glomar Explorer.
- Designing and implementing advanced deep-sea recovery systems was a significant engineering challenge.
- Raising and securing the submarine from the ocean floor and securely holding it during retrieval.
- The project pushed the boundaries of maritime engineering, requiring innovations in deep-sea recovery systems, vessel stability, and concealment strategies.

## Lessons Learned

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Identify at least two key lessons learned from "Project Azorian." How can these lessons be applied to future intelligence operations or engineering endeavors?

Two key lessons that have implications for future intelligence operations and engineering endeavors:

**Importance of Innovation and Problem-Solving:** "Project Azorian" demonstrated the power of innovation and problem solving in overcoming complex challenges. This lesson can be applied to future intelligence operations and engineering endeavors by encouraging a culture of innovation, fostering multidisciplinary collaboration, and providing resources for research and development.

**Balancing Secrecy and Transparency:** The operation highlighted the balance between secrecy and transparency in intelligence operations. Future intelligence operations can learn from this by prioritizing clear guidelines for oversight, ensuring appropriate checks and balances, and engaging in a transparent dialogue with the public and oversight bodies.

### *Personal Reflection*

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Share your thoughts on the exhibit. What aspects of "Project Azorian" fascinated you the most? Did anything surprise you or change your perspective on intelligence operations or engineering achievements?

Share your thoughts.

### *Further Research*

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Based on your interest in the topic, suggest two related areas or projects you would like to explore further. Briefly explain why these topics intrigue you and how they relate to the subject of intelligence or engineering.

Share your thoughts.

*Remember to use the exhibit as your primary source of information to answer the questions. Enjoy your exploration of "Project Azorian" and its significance in intelligence and engineering history!*