

North Korea Uses Pueblo Apology as

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TOKYO, Jan. 31 — More than a month after the release of the Pueblo crew, North Korean propagandists are still reaping a harvest from the pre-Christmas Panmunjom agreement, proudly reminding the world that the mighty United States was forced to "bend the knee" and consistently ignoring Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward's repudiation of his apology.

North Korean broadcasts and news dispatches on the Pueblo issue monitored here have intensified since the Jan. 23 anniversary of the crew's capture and the start of the U.S. Navy court of inquiry. Propaganda broadsides designed to show world support for Pyon-

gyang have focused on Middle Eastern and African reaction, largely bypassing the ambivalent response of public opinion in Japan, where the U.S. has won applause for agreeing to a release formula.

The standard North Korean version of the Panmunjom signing ceremony depicts Gen. Woodward "leaning over the documents of apology in a fit of surprise, his face reddened and his fingers trembling as if in convulsions."

Only twice in more than 30 differing descriptions of the ceremony has Pyongyang even obliquely alluded to the repudiation statement. Once, a Foreign Ministry manifesto observed that "until the very last moment when they signed the docu-

ments of apology, the U.S. imperialists persisted in their attempt to escape their responsibility, reading preposterous allegations" that the Pueblo had not intruded into North Korean territorial waters. "Even at the very last moment," said a commentary issued by the Korean Central News Agency, "when they were signing the documents of apology, the U.S. imperialist aggressors frantically tried to evade this disgrace. But the documents of apology signed by them will remain forever in history as evidence of their brigandish crimes and their disgraceful defeat."

The fact that Pyongyang does not directly acknowledge the U.S. repudiation statement helps explain why

it was willing to accept an apology. At home, the Kim Il Sung regime has an iron communications monopoly and has predictably told its people only of the Woodward apology.

Abroad, if Japan is any example, many news accounts played up the apology as the natural focus of interest, taking the repudiation as a confusing secondary element in the story.

An examination of Japanese press coverage of the release gave marginal attention to the repudiation.

The general tenor of Japanese reaction was reflected in the Asahi Shinbun comment that "the affair actually ended in success for North Korean assertions."

Yet at the same time, Japanese newspapers have

stressed that the U.S. had "no other choice" and have praised the U.S. move as a contribution to peace in Northeast Asia.

"Basically," said a high Japanese Foreign Ministry official recently, "the Japanese people were glad to see the Pueblo issue out of the way. We were glad the U.S. did what it did even if this did disgrace you to some extent. The U.S. Embassy has been very worried about the psychologic effects here but we have told them to forget about it."

Japanese officials stress two factors in explaining why the repudiation formula was acceptable to Pyongyang.

One is that in North Korean eyes, the onus is clearly on Washington for the

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anomaly of the formula, and it seemed only natural to Pyongyang that other countries would share this view.

In the past, officials here observe, Washington has said that the Communist countries are the international outlaws who refuse to conform to commonly accepted norms of morality and orderly interchange. But in this case the U.S. was placed in the position of unilaterally setting its own private ground rules in confrontation with another country. In its efforts to persuade the world that a signature dishonored was really not dishonored, the U.S., this time was the one departing from commonly accepted norms.

A second explanation

strongly emphasized by government analysts here is that Kim Il Sung has been even more concerned with advancing claims to the legitimacy of his regime through his handling of the Pueblo affair than he has been with anti-U.S. political warfare.

Thus, it is pointed out, here are six references in one sentence of the Woodward apology to the "government of" or the "territory of the Democratic Republic of Korea." Capt. Bucher's references to the "Democratic Republic of Korea" following his release were regarded as a significant propaganda victory for Pyongyang.

An important psychological factor consistently un-

derlined by Korean observers here with close Pyongyang links is that the successful vindication of North Korea's stand, by its own lights, required the resolution of the Pueblo issue.

"Victory" would have been inherently more difficult to achieve with a new man in the White House free, conceivably, to disown responsibility for the deeds of his predecessor.

Just as Lyndon Johnson may have had his own varied compulsions for wanting to see the men freed before his departure from office, this also holds for Koreans, who think it right and proper that Lyndon Johnson should have been the one to give Gen. Woodward his historic order.