

## The Pueblo Deal <sup>Post</sup> 12 24-68

Diplomatic necessity may never have mothered an odder invention than the arrangement by which the United States first repudiated and then signed North Korea's prepared "confession" that the Pueblo had been spying in Korean water. Only a country contemptuous of normal, rational considerations of international law and practice could have evoked such an arrangement. In accepting it, the United States inevitably called its own diplomatic sense and credibility into question. The deal's obvious uniqueness, however, may be its saving grace. Moreover, that the repudiation preceded the "confession" puts the main onus on the Koreans—for being willing to trade valuable property for devalued coin. Propaganda usage of the "confession" should make the North Koreans' cynicism evident. The United States can easily be mocked, but it has the prisoners back. Those men and nations with a proper regard for their own integrity will understand how distasteful it was to the United States to play this sort of game.

A reading of the public record makes plain there are at least three versions of the Pueblo capture. One is the North Koreans'; the United States said, in General Woodward's disclaimer, that the Korean

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version is "at variance" with the American position. The second version is what is carefully described as the American "position": it holds that the Pueblo "was not engaged in *illegal* activity, that there is no *convincing* evidence that the ship at any time intruded into the territorial waters *claimed* by North Korea, and that we could not apologize for actions which we did not *believe* took place (italics added). The third version of the capture is yet to be told; it is the version which Mr. Rusk suggested last February can emerge only when the crewmen are questioned in an atmosphere free from North Korean intimidation—and also free, we might add, from an American coverup. This is the version owed to the public.

The press conference held by Cmdr. Bucher in Seoul provided welcome flesh-and-blood evidence of the men's return, and sobering insights into their prison ordeal. But remarks made at a quick emotion-charged news conference are no substitute for a full, cool accounting. In this regard, it was disappointing to be told by the skipper that shipboard evidence of Pueblo movements is no longer available. That will make more difficult the investigation that this and the next administration, and most likely Congress too, ought to conduct into the whole affair. Candor offers the best way for the United States to limit the damage done to its credibility by the confusion over the Pueblo seizure last January and by the strange diplomatic contortion which brought the crewmen home.