

Moorer Defends Joint Chiefs' Scrutiny of Pueblo

By WARREN WEAVER Jr.
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WASHINGTON, March 4—The Navy's highest officer maintained today under persistent Congressional questioning that the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave "proper consideration" to the risks involved in widespread intelligence activities such as the use of the U.S.S. Pueblo.

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, the Chief of Naval Operations, declined to divulge how much time the Joint Chiefs had spent in evaluating the mission of the Pueblo, the intelligence ship seized by the North Koreans off their coast in January, 1968.

Representative Otis G. Pike, chairman of the House Armed Services Special Subcommittee investigating the Pueblo capture, asked Admiral Moorer whether the Pueblo mission had been part of an intelligence "package" and now many other activities had received the chiefs' approval at the same time.

"There is a package," the officer replied, "and once a month this is given the closest scrutiny by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It may take an hour or more or it may not, depending on whether there are any crucial aspects in the package."

'Large Number' Involved

Admiral Moorer declined to say how many other intelligence projects were in the same package, but he said it was "a large number" and that all the missions had been extensively reviewed by staff before the chiefs approved them.

"Obviously, in this case [the Pueblo], they were all wrong," Mr. Pike, a Democrat of Suffolk, observed.

Informa a House Panel Such Activities Were Evaluated for 'an Hour or More'

"That's right," Admiral Moorer said.

"I do think the American people have a deep and real interest in knowing the depth to which these matters are considered," the Congressman said. "When you talk about deciding a great number of cases in an hour, I hate to have that testimony hanging there for the public to read."

"It's fair to say," the admiral replied, "that the Joint Chiefs of Staff do, when and where necessary, give this proper consideration."

Admiral Moorer testified for more than four hours in open session as the first witness of the hearings and then continued in closed session.

Assurances Declined

On a number of occasions, Admiral Moorer declined to answer questions, either on the ground that his answer might violate security or because it involved matters currently before a court of inquiry into the Pueblo seizure in Coronado, Calif., whose findings he will ultimately have to review.

Admiral Moorer refused, in response to a question, to provide any assurance that there would not be a recurrence of the Pueblo incident.

"I don't think anyone can do that," he replied, "but we are taking every possible precaution against this happening again."

Asked if the Joint Chiefs had

participated in the decision not to send aircraft to the aid of the Pueblo, Admiral Moorer said it "was actually made in Hawaii" but that military leaders in Washington "thought that was the best course of action."

Representative Samuel S. Stratton, Democrat of upstate New York, asked if that action by the chiefs had not been similar to Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher's decision "not to take on the PT boats" when the Pueblo was attacked.

"I don't think I'd say that," Admiral Moorer replied.

"I'd sustain your position," Representative Pike said to Mr. Stratton.

In defending the Pueblo mission, Admiral Moorer said that the Soviet Union had 40 unarmed intelligence ships operating around the world "well beyond the protective reach of other Soviet forces." He said they were regularly stationed off bases in Scotland, Spain, Guam and South Carolina, from which United States Polaris submarines operate.

The officer insisted that the Pueblo was an overt intelligence craft and did not operate under the "cover" of a hydrographic ship, although it carried such personnel. Mr. Pike cast some doubt on this statement with questions that the admiral refused to answer for security reasons.

Although the Pueblo did not have an automatic destruction system to prevent its intelligence material and equipment from falling into enemy hands, Admiral Moorer said, comparable Navy ships now have such devices.



Associated Press

AT INQUIRY: Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, left, Chief of Naval Operations, at Congressional subcommittee hearing yesterday on Pueblo incident. At right is Adm. Joseph McDevett, judge advocate. Admiral Moorer said Navy was taking precautions against repetitions.