

Response Differs From

By George C. Wilson
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President Johnson found himself confronted with the capture of the *Pueblo* spy-ship and a Navy patrol boat; President Nixon with the shooting down of the unarmed EC-121 spy plane, and President Ford with the seizure of the merchant ship *Mayaguez*. Grim similarities exist in all the incidents.

But, in what is probably the most significant difference from a national policy standpoint, only Mr. Ford opted for an immediate and fierce military response.

The *Mayaguez* incident, like the others before it, already has raised compelling questions.

Why did not U.S. authorities knowledgeable about hostile actions in the area warn the skipper of the *Mayaguez*?

Why was American power so far away from the area?

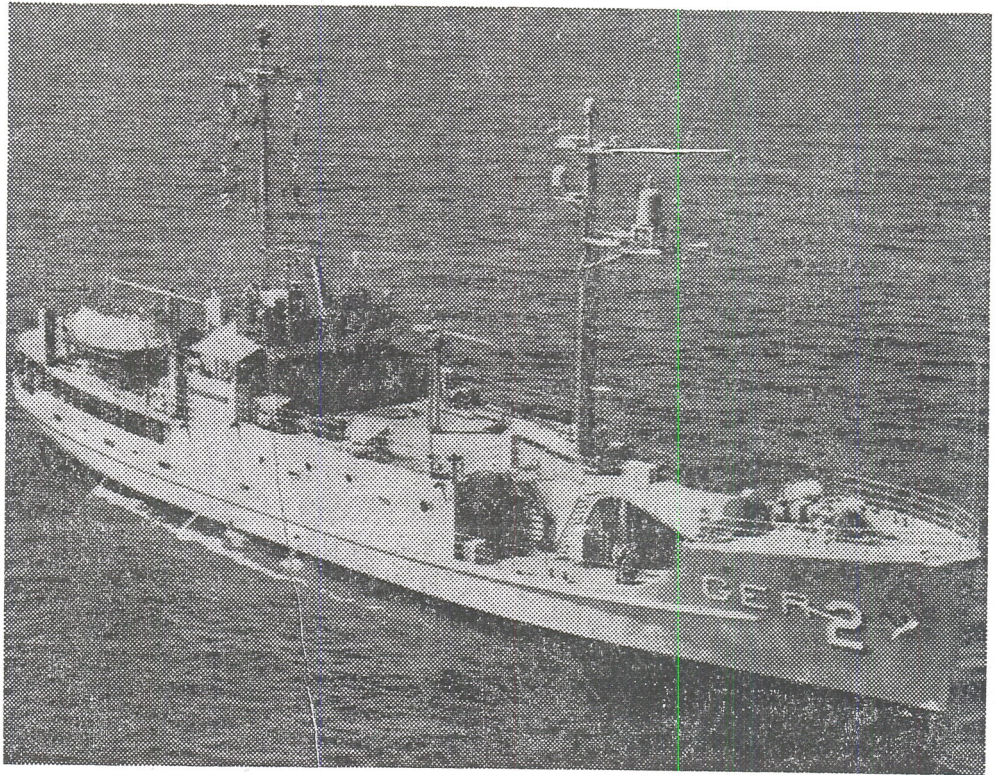
Was there another intelligence gap that precluded the drafting of military contingency plans for capture on the high seas?

Did the President underreact or overreact?

In all four incidents, there were warning signs of hostile action that apparently were ignored or not taken seriously by U.S. policymakers. Charges of "intelligence gap" were sounded after both the *Pueblo* and EC-121 incidents and are already being heard in reference to the *Mayaguez* capture.

The Navy failed to call off the *Pueblo's* eavesdropping mission off North Korea despite the warnings broadcast from North Korea that spy ships would not be tolerated. Also, as another sign of its hostile mood, North Korean guerrillas attacked the presidential Blue House in South Korea in a vain assassination attempt while the *Pueblo* was out on its mission in January, 1968. But *Pueblo* skipper Lloyd M. Bucher was not told of that or other bellicose actions.

"Would not such an attack



U.S. Navy photo

The USS *Pueblo*, captured by North Korean warships on Jan. 23, 1968.

on the Blue House," asked Chairman Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.) of a House Armed Services subcommittee investigating the *Pueblo* capture, "show a definite escalation in the risk of a mission like the *Pueblo*?"

"From a point of view of hindsight," replied Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, then chief of naval operations, "it certainly does." Moorer added that U.S. military leaders at the time did not see the Blue House raid as a break in the overall pattern of North Korean infiltration.

The *Pueblo* was captured by North Korean torpedo boats and a subchaser off the port of Wonsan on Jan. 23, 1968. One of her 83-man crew was killed during the capture. But the remaining 82 were released by North Korea after 11 months of captivity.

The North Korean government claimed that the *Pueblo* had intruded into

territorial waters, a claim disputed to this day by Bucher. He said the ship never got within the 12-mile limit asserted by North Korea as territorial waters.

The U.S. patrol boat—called an LCU for Landing Craft Utility—sailed into Cambodian waters July 17, 1968, after Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk had warned American ships to stay out of his part of the Mekong River.

The State Department said then that the patrol boat had indeed "inadvertently intruded" into Cambodian waters. The Cambodian government said it would release the 11 American soldiers and one South Vietnamese aboard in exchange for 14 bulldozers. Sihanouk released the 12 men on Dec. 19, 1968, with no mention of receiving bulldozers or any other consideration from the American government.

Nixon, after referring dis-

paragingly in his political campaign to the lack of executive action after the *Pueblo* was captured, risked further North Korean retaliatory action in 1969 by letting a Navy EC-121 plane fly off that country on an electronic eavesdropping mission. The plane was shot down by North Korean Migs on April 14, 1969. All 31 men aboard died when the plane plunged into the Sea of Japan.

The danger signals flying before the *Mayaguez* was boarded by armed Cambodians on Monday some 60 miles off the Cambodian coast included the harassment and capture of other ships in the same area last week.

A Cambodian gunboat stopped a Panamanian ship last Thursday and a South Korean freighter was fired upon May 4 in the general area where the *Mayaguez* was seized. The South Korean Ministry of Transportation, apparently as a result

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of that attack, issued a warning to ships in that area.

But there was no indication that American officials issued any warnings before the Mayaguez was seized.

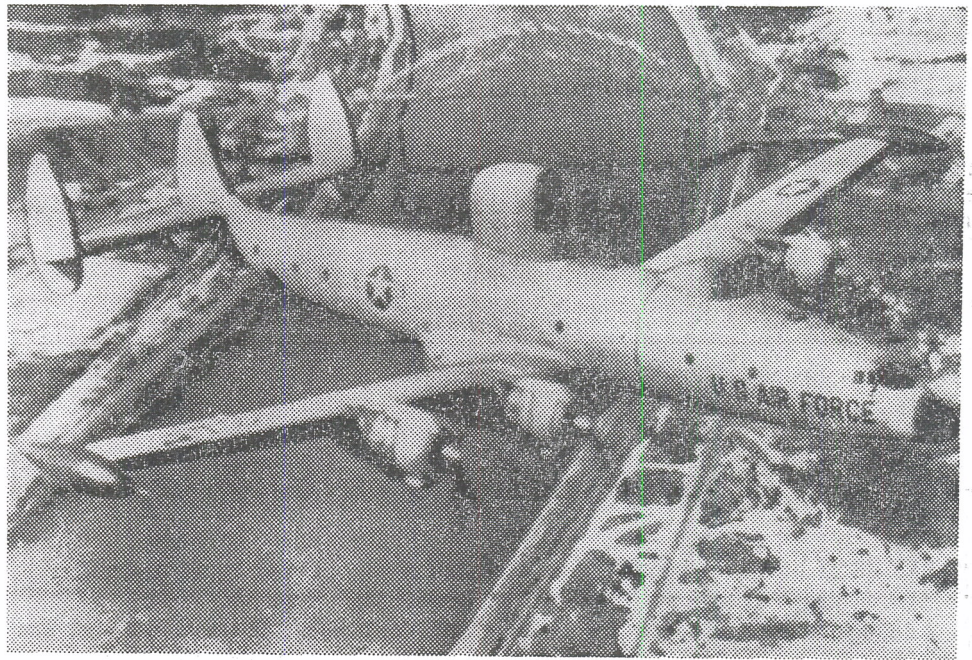
Another similarity between the Pueblo, EC-121 and Mayaguez incidents was the decision to rely on international law—not armament—for protection. The U.S. government is insisting now, as it did in the Pueblo and EC-121 incidents, that the merchantman had the international right of passage.

Bucher, before he set forth was ordered to rely on the right of international passage on the high seas rather than his only armament—two old .50 caliber machine guns. The EC-121 and Mayaguez were not armed at all.

Johnson said after the Pueblo capture that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had advised against retaliatory action because it might provoke another Korean war while the United States was tied down in Vietnam.

Johnson's aides said that their primary aim was to get the 82 men from the Pueblo crew back home alive.

Nixon, according to those who were with him at the time, fumed when his military advisers failed to come up with what he considered



United Press International

An EC-121 spy plane of the type downed by North Korean Migs in April, 1969.

for the downing of the EC-121. Now the big question hanging over the Mayaguez incident is whether Mr. Ford's retaliation will result in harm to any of the ship's 39 American seamen.

practical ways to retaliate 121.