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## Lessons From the Pueblo

Despite mistreatment described by the Pueblo's commander as "the most concentrated form of terror that I've ever seen or dreamed is possible," 82 survivors of the 83-man Pueblo crew are safe and apparently in reasonably good health. That is the best the nation could hope would come out of an affair that began with the uncontested seizure of the American intelligence vessel off the North Korean coast and ended in the weird spectacle of a false "confession" of national guilt—one that was repudiated even before it was signed.

Neither the United States nor North Korea emerges with untarnished honor. The Communist regime in Pyongyang blatantly demonstrated its disregard for international standards of conduct by seizing the Pueblo on the high seas—clearly an illegal act, although it is far less clear that the vessel did not at any time penetrate Korean waters—and by abusing the prisoners.

The limits of American power were agonizingly exposed by the circumstances surrounding the original seizure; America's already strained credibility was put deeper in doubt by the bizarre circumstances surrounding the crew's release. The one area in which the United States did distinguish itself, however, was in the Administration's unflagging concern with its humanitarian obligation to put the safety of the men ahead of all considerations of face or political prestige.

At least two lessons can be learned from the whole sorry affair. The first is that intelligence gathering is a cynical and sordid business, posing grave risks to the men involved and to the national honor. Failure is inevitably costly. In this case disaster was averted only by a wise decision in Washington to accept some sacrifice of American pride as preferable to a resolution by military force.

The second lesson is bound up with the first. Precisely because the hazards are so great, intelligence missions should be conducted with maximum precaution and only where the potential gains justify the peril. It is not at all clear that these criteria were scrupulously followed in the Pueblo's mission.

Although the Administration did review and revise its spyship procedures after last January's seizure, it is essential that Congress investigate the Pueblo incident and related activities to insure the greatest possible protection against a repeat performance anywhere.