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Premier Says North Korea Saw A War With U.S. Near in 1968

TOKYO, Nov. 3 (UPI) —The leaders of North Korea thought they were close to war with the United States after the capture of the reconnaissance ship Pueblo, in 1968, the North Korean Premier, Marshal Kim Il Sung, said yesterday.

"The situation was really serious," Marshal Kim said in his report to the fifth congress of the Workers' (Communist) party of North Korea. It was the first public comment known to have been made by the 58-year-old North Korean strongman on the Pueblo affair. The text of his report was broadcast by the official North Korean news agency and monitored in Tokyo today.

The party congress, which opened yesterday, is the first in nine years, even though the party's constitution calls for one every four years. The party is expected to approve a new five-year plan for North Korea, to follow the seven-year economic plan that started in 1961 and later was extended for two years.

Marshal Kim declared that "the situation was extremely tense in our country at the time of the incident of the United States imperialist armed spy ship Pueblo in 1968."

"It was also serious at the time of the incident of the large-size EC-121 spy plane last year," he said. He charged that the United States "brought huge armed forces to the very threshold of our country, and overtly attempted an armed invasion of the northern half of the republic."

Premier Kim asserted that North Korea's readiness to fight rather than submit "finally forced the aggressors to bend their knees before us."

North Korea captured the Pueblo, an electronic intelligence ship, off the North Korean coast in January, 1968, and held the crew as prisoners for 11 months. The EC-121 incident concerned an electronic intelligence plane shot down off North Korea in April, 1969, by the North Koreans. Thirty-three United States Navy men lost their lives.