

January 30, 1968
**Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to
the Hungarian Foreign Ministry**

Citation:

"Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry", January 30, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1968, 58. doboz, 3, 00894/8/1968. Obtained and translated by Balázs Szalontai.
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Summary:

The Hungarian Embassy in the Soviet Union reports on Soviet discussions with North Korea over the capture of the USS Pueblo.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

On the basis of the conversation our official [András Köves] had in the MID [Soviet Foreign Ministry], I report the following:

Following the disclosure of the incident and the related American steps, the Soviet side asked the DPRK for information about the incident. They did get that information. The Korean side informed the Soviet comrades that the Pueblo had been brought to in the territorial waters of the DPRK, within the 12-mile area measured from the shore (or the coastal island in question). (By the way, our Korean comrades remark, though publicly do not emphasize, that in principle they regard the whole East Korean Bay as the inland sea of the country - this concept is known in international law, the USA and the Soviet Union regard the Hudson Bay [sic] and the bay around Vladivostok respectively as such inland seas -, and actually the territorial waters of a country should be measured from the boundary of this inland sea, rather than from the shore ...) The Pueblo did not fly any flag while being in this area, and it did not reply to the first question of the DPRK's ships, which inquired about the nationality of the ship. Instead, the ship began to flee, but it was caught up with, encircled, and - as is well-known - captured by the fast coastal ships of the DPRK. Besides this information, the Korean side also says that they do not rule out that the Pueblo, while fleeing from the Korean ships, left the territorial waters [of the DPRK].

Accepting this description of the events, the Soviets, on their part, remark that they find it completely obvious that it was proper and necessary to take some steps against that obviously provocative American step, especially as the act of catching the Americans red-handed provided [the DPRK] with an excellent opportunity for propaganda.

However, the real issue is the nature of the steps to be taken, and with regard to that question, the Soviet side remarks that the 1958 Geneva Convention on Maritime Navigation deals with the measures to be taken against warships violating the territorial waters [of a country]. The 23rd paragraph of the convention states that warships should be treated in a way that is different from the one applicable to civilian ships, and the [war]ships which violate one's territorial waters should be removed from these territorial waters. True, the Soviet Union had reservations with regard to the 23rd paragraph in the sense that it found it necessary to make a special declaration about that foreign warships could not be in the territorial waters of a given country without the consent of the state in question, but it is nevertheless obvious that, on the basis of international customs, the capture of the warship and its crew is such an excessively radical step that is out of proportion to the violation of laws committed by the Americans [i.e., by the Pueblo].

Nonetheless, the Soviets, on their part, find it necessary to give full support to the DPRK with regard to the case and to reveal the Americans.

The Soviet side asked the Korean comrades what sort of solution to the question they could imagine. The Koreans, on their part, expounded that they strove for a peaceful settlement, and if the Americans had not made such a provocative fuss about the issue, if they had not resorted to the method of utterly extreme threats against the country [the DPRK], they would have released the crew of the Pueblo long ago, in the same way as they had always done in comparable previous cases (e.g., South Korean fishing boats, American helicopters). But at present, facing the American threats, they cannot take such measures for the time being.

The Soviets, on their part, are of the opinion that by now the DPRK and the socialist countries have already achieved practically everything that could have been achieved at the expense of the USA, in the revealing of the aggressive foreign policy of the USA, etc., in the wake of the incident. The further prolongation of the crisis would be seriously dangerous, however, and therefore the Soviet side strives to induce the DPRK to find a right time for the handing over of the Pueblo and its crew

(in the view of the Koreans, primarily the crew) so as to put an end to the crisis. With regard to that, our [Soviet] comrades say the following:

It seems obvious that the Johnson administration really strove, and still strives, for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. This is indicated by the contacts established between American official personages and socialist diplomats in Moscow, New York, and elsewhere, and also by the actions of the Americans, for one can hardly accept the explanation that it was only due to technical reasons that the Americans „allowed“ the DPRK to capture the Pueblo. Evidently the Americans are seriously afraid of that if they took military steps, this would carry incalculable consequences. The Soviets, on their part, repeatedly emphasized that now a new Korean War, let alone a greater possibility of some Soviet-American military confrontation, would hardly serve American interests.

However, the question is whether a possible prolongation of the crisis will bring forth circumstances which may induce the Johnson administration to head towards a military solution against its wishes. For instance, the question is how much [36th President of the U.S.] Johnson will be able - and willing - to resist the extremely provocative attitude of the Congress that demands immediate military actions against the DPRK, in the light of, for example, the considerations of the election struggle... On the other hand, the Johnson administration already made use of the Korean crisis to draft reservists, that is, to take a step it had not dared take for long years because of the [prospective] reaction of public opinion. In this sense one can hardly preclude that the Korean crisis reinforces the [position of the] hawks with regard to the further shaping of the American policies related to the Vietnam War.

Therefore the Soviet side considers that the next task is to strive to induce the Korean comrades to seek, and find, a „moment“ that will be convenient for the solution of the crisis. As we mentioned before, the opinion they form of the Korean standpoint is that it will be possible to influence our Korean comrades in such a way. Another aspect of the question is that the Afro-Asian member states of the SC [the UN Security Council] extremely strongly press for a peaceful solution. Thus in case of the further prolongation of the affair the DPRK and - partly - the socialist countries, if they themselves do not take steps toward a settlement, will easily lose the political capital they have made.

[...]

[signature]

(Ambassador)