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MEMORANDUM

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

~~SECRET~~ (XGDS) (3)

August 25, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: BRENT SCOWCROFT

FROM: Jeanne W. Davis *WJD*

SUBJECT: *JN* Minutes of WSAG Meeting,
Held August 19, 1976

Attached are the minutes of the Washington Special Actions Group meeting held August 19, 1976, to discuss Korea.

Attachment

cc: William G. Hyland
William Gleysteen

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 E.O. 12958 (as amended) SEC 3.3
 NSC Memo, 3/30/06, State Dept. Guidelines
 NARA Date 1/21/11

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
Presidential Libraries Withdrawal Sheet

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REASON FOR WITHDRAWAL ÇNational security restriction
TYPE OF MATERIAL ÇMemorandum of Conversation

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DESCRIPTION Re North Korean Tree Incident

CREATION DATE 08/19/1976

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Meeting, August 19, 1976 (Korean
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DCI Briefing

WSAG 19 Aug 76

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This morning I will address two questions. First, likely North Korean responses to measures we might take. Second, what the intelligence community is doing to keep North Korean movements under maximum surveillance.

Show of force. Demonstrative military measures of the type we have already taken will reinforce existing deterrents to major North Korean acts of force and also discourage further provocations for the immediate future.

-- The North Koreans will read our actions as evidence that we will be more alert to the possibility of violence and quicker to take effective defensive action for some time to come.

-- Pyongyang's propaganda response is entirely predictable: US military movements will be described as further efforts on our part to "light the fuse of war," in line with their intensive propaganda campaign of the past several months portraying the US as the major source of tension in Korea. We believe that their announcement of a state of alert is essentially a propaganda move.

At the same time, Pyongyang will be attentive to the reaction in the US to the loss of American lives and to the subsequent actions taken by the administration.

-- If the North Koreans perceive the promise of a significant debate over the troop presence and our commitment, they may well resort to additional small scale violence in order to point up the continuing threat to American lives.

The tree clearing exercise. Two alternate actions have been proposed by General Stillwell, who believes--out of tactical necessity and principle--that the original tree clearing exercise must be completed.

-- with no prior warning, cut down the tree using the maximum legal guard force of 35 men, and depart as rapidly as possible. The advantage would lie in completing the operation before the North Koreans could react. The disadvantage is that the North Koreans might still have time to react--and with a force larger than the rules permit.

-- alternately, to the North Koreans in advance our intent to prune the tree, and invite neutral observers and members of the press as witnesses. This course would underscore the

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non-provocative nature of our intent; the disadvantages are that the North Koreans would dispute our right to proceed and that the proposal would be submerged in inconclusive debate.

General Stillwell prefers the first course. Assuming that the tree clearing exercise must be completed soon, we would agree with the General's preferred course of action--provided that he feels he has an adequate back up force on hand. We believe the North Koreans would react if they have the time and superior forces on hand. As for the second alternative, the North Koreans are likely to object to our proposal and it is unlikely to move forward quickly.

Reprisals. We do not know how the North Koreans calculate the odds of a US reprisal. They are certainly aware of the possibility, even though previous incidents involving US loss of life in Korea (the seizure of the USS Pueblo and the shoot down of the EC-121 in the late 1960's) did not prompt one. In any event, a US reprisal would present the North Koreans with several difficult decisions.

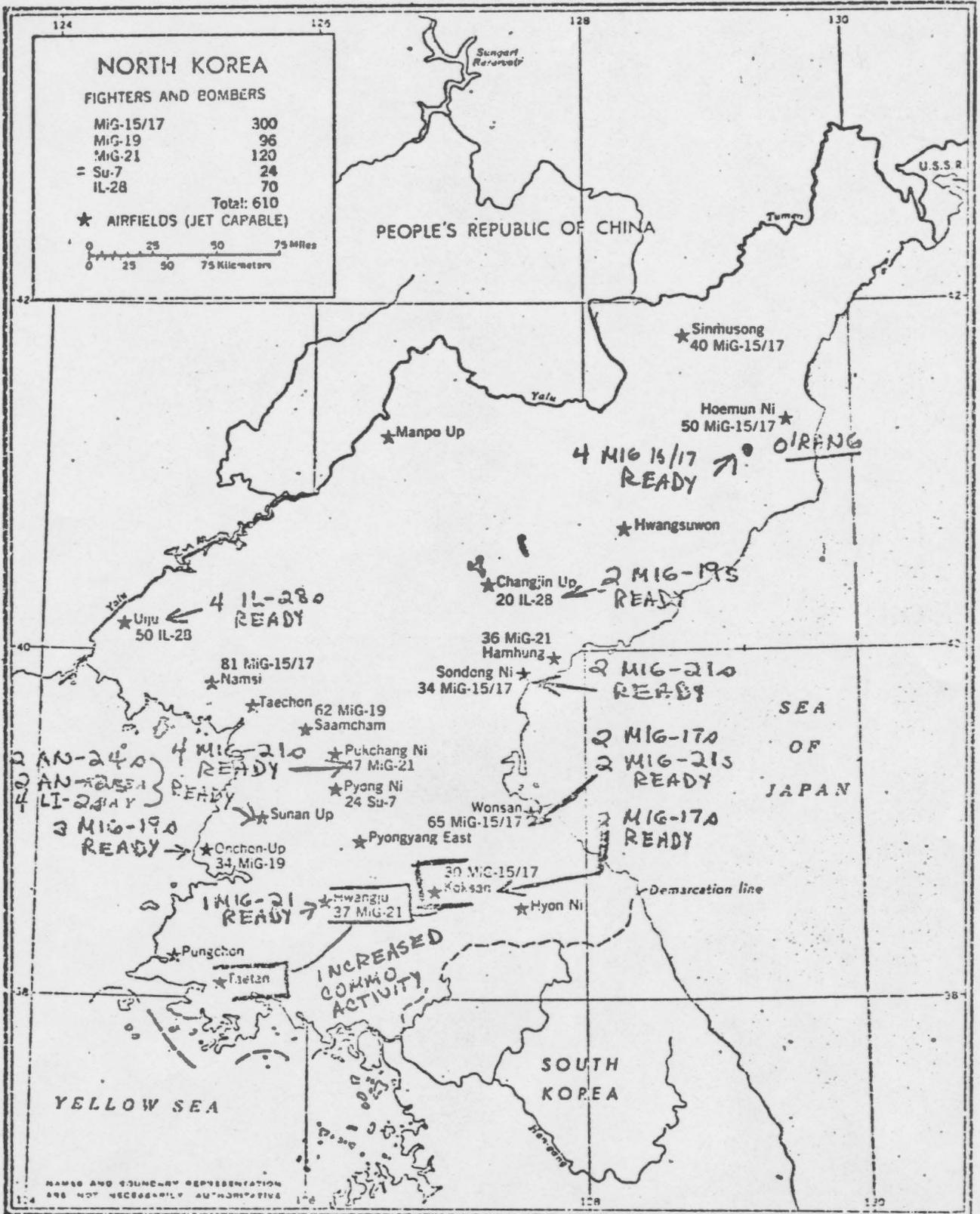
-- their response to the reprisal itself would be dictated by the balance of forces immediately at hand. The North Koreans would probably react to a reprisal--or any aspect of a reprisal operation--if superior forces could be deployed. Conversely, Pyongyang would probably not risk deploying a reaction force if its chances of success were no better than even.

-- in the wake of successful reprisal, Pyongyang would consider retaliatory action against US forces elsewhere in the general area--lightly armed ships or aircraft within range or US personnel at Panmunjom. Should Pyongyang perceive no vulnerable US target, it might consider attacking a South Korean target most anywhere along the DMZ or perhaps by attempting to duplicate the form of the US reprisal.

On balance, we do not believe that Pyongyang would decide to embark upon a series of escalatory incidents. A military response at an equal or somewhat lower level is more probable, while a response at a higher level--perhaps caused by differing US and North Korean perceptions--certainly cannot be ruled out.



NORTH KOREAN AIR FORCE



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BY NLF, DATE 5/18/05

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