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2 August 1964

~~SECRET KIMBO~~

MEMORANDUM

To : The Secretary
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes
Subject: Incident Involving Desoto Patrol

The destroyer USS MADDOX on a Desoto Patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin was attacked by DRV naval units at 02/0807Z (4:07 a.m. August 2, D. C. time). The JRC has plotted the MADDOX's position at the time of attack as 19-41 N, 106-35 E, about 20 miles from the nearest North Vietnamese territory. Prior to the attack the MADDOX had been in to approximately 11 miles of the North Vietnamese coast. The attack was mounted by three patrol craft, similar to our PT boats, which launched torpedos and also fired 37 mm shells. The MADDOX responded with 5-inch gun fire and called for assistance from the planes of the TICONDEROGA. The last report available indicates that one patrol craft was dead in the water and burning and the other two appeared to be damaged and heading for the beach.

The first evidence of the possibility of hostile action came through COMINT sources. DIRNSA reported at 02/0302Z that DRV naval units might be planning an attack on the Desoto Patrol. This message went to the security group on board the MADDOX, At 02/0500Z, approximately three hours before the attack, the MADDOX reported no further evidence of

hostile

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hostile action. According to the chart available from the JRC, the MADDOX did, however, cease orbiting and moved somewhat out to sea prior to resuming a course which took her to point D on the attached chart, at which point it turned to the east and moved out to the point where the attack occurred.

The proposal for the Desoto Patrol conducted by the MADDOX was cleared with the Department in mid-July. The INR memorandum on this is attached. The MADDOX was authorized closest approaches as follows: Communist China, 15 NM; North Vietnam, 8 NM; North Vietnamese islands, 4 NM. We have not been able to determine what limit the DRV claims. This matter was checked with L at the time of the previous patrol, in February and March of this year. Communist China claims 12 miles. The USS CRAIG, which conducted the February-March patrol, was authorized the following approaches: Communist China, 15 NM; Chinese Communist islands, 12 NM; North Vietnamese coast, 4 NM.

Present orders from the Navy call for the MADDOX to be joined by an additional destroyer and to continue her patrol on its planned course. The JRC estimated that the patrol would be resumed on or about 10:00 o'clock EDT, August 2, along a course approximately 12 NM from the North Vietnamese coast.

The attack on the MADDOX appears to have been related to DRV heightened sensitivity over coastal defenses resulting from recent raids including a previous probe in mid-July against the Hon-Me Island complex

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complex (approximately 19-22 N, 105-56 E) which would have been about 4 NM off the planned course of the MADDOX. The prior indication mentioned above of a possible attack being planned on the Desoto Patrol came from DRV naval communications of July 30th and 31st which reported an attack by "enemy vessels" on Hon-Me Island. These messages indicated DRV intentions and preparations to repulse further attacks.

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INR/CS:MMcAfee:lgc
INR/RFE:REwing

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