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DOC ID: 749054

ACTION PRECEDENCE
IMMEDIATE

INFO PRECEDENCE
IMMEDIATE

SPECIAL HANDLING
NONE

FROM: JCS
TO: USCINCEUR
INFO: CNO
CINCLANT
CINCLANTFLT
CINCUSNAVEUR
COMSIXTHFLT
CTF 64
USS LIBERTY
HQ NSAEUR
NSAEUR OFF GER
DIRNSA
DIRNAVSECGRU
ASSTDIRNAVSECGRU
DIRNAVSECGRULANT
DIRNAVSECGRUEUR

DATE: 09 JUNE 67 INFO:

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JCS 7347 J3 SENDS.

SUBJ: USS LIBERTY (U)

REFS: A. JCS 7337/072230Z JUN 67

B. COMSIXTHFLT 071503Z JUN 67 (NOTAL)

1. (U) CANCEL REF A.

2. ~~(TS)~~ REQ LIBERTY COMPLY NEW OP AREAS DEFINED PAST SENTENCE PARA 2 REF B, UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, I.E., NOT CLOSER THAN 100NM TO ISRAEL, SYRIA EGYPT AND 25NM TO CYPRUS.

~~GP-3~~

L23 NOTE: DTG 072230Z - AGI 42486
DTG 071503Z - AGI 42373

DRAFTER B/JBH		RELEASING OFFICER	RELEASED AT (ZULU)
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REFERENCES TO MESSAGE	SECURITY CLASSIFICATION TOP SECRET		AGI NR. 42787
AGO	<input type="checkbox"/>	AGO NR.	DTG 080110Z
AGI			
DTG			
SUSPENSE			

3

The Liberty Exhibit



On June 8, 1967, the *Liberty*, a ship of the Naval Security Group, found itself in the middle of the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War. Cruising 25 miles off the Gaza coast, it was attacked by Israeli fighters and torpedo boats at 2 o'clock on a clear and sunny afternoon. There was no apparent provocation, and the reason for the attack has never been fully resolved, although Israel described it as an identification error and sent restitution for the damage and loss of life. The U.S. government accepted the explanation of the Israeli government concerning the identification error. The loss of thirty-four men was the largest loss of life in a single event in American cryptologic history. It occurred, ironically, during a war in which the United States was not a participant.

Declassified and approved for release by NSA on 06-27-2006 pursuant to E.O. 12958, as amended

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REPORT TO THE
DIRECTOR
NSA

USS LIBERTY
(AGTR-5)

23 MAY - 8 JUNE 1967

~~THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS SENSITIVE MATERIAL~~

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INTRODUCTION

On 13 May 1967, NSA requested that the JCS authorize diversion of the USS LIBERTY from ABIDJAN to an operational area off PORT SAID to provide vital SIGINT coverage in the Middle East crisis area.

NSA requested JCS approval of specified operational areas in the southeast Mediterranean and proposed that the actual operating areas and the closest point of approach (CPA) should be adjusted as necessary for operational and safety reasons. NSA and US Navy linguists and technical support materials were provided to the USS LIBERTY at ROTA.

The LIBERTY departed ROTA at 1230Z on 2 June. In her last reported position prior to the incident (33°06'N by 28°54'E at 070800Z), she was underway and destined to arrive at 2300Z and remain stationary at a position within 30 nautical miles of 31°45N by 33°30E. This position would be within the previously defined NSA OP area 3 (32°00'N - 33°00'N to 34°00'E).

Several JCS actions were taken to restrict progressively the closest point of approach (CPA) of the USS LIBERTY away from the UAR-Israeli coastal area; the last delimiting operations to positions no closer than 100 nautical miles from the UAR and Israel and

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25 nautical miles from Cyprus.

Personnel losses are known. Losses of classified cryptologic materials and equipments will not be known until an inventory is made of materials remaining aboard the LIBERTY.

The following report will demonstrate on the basis of evidence now available that the USS LIBERTY was an essential augmentation to the Middle East SIGINT posture; that SIGINT command, operational and technical control responsibilities were fulfilled according to existing instructions; and that the position of the USS LIBERTY was operationally and technically proper from a SIGINT standpoint except in the hindsight of the rash Israeli act.

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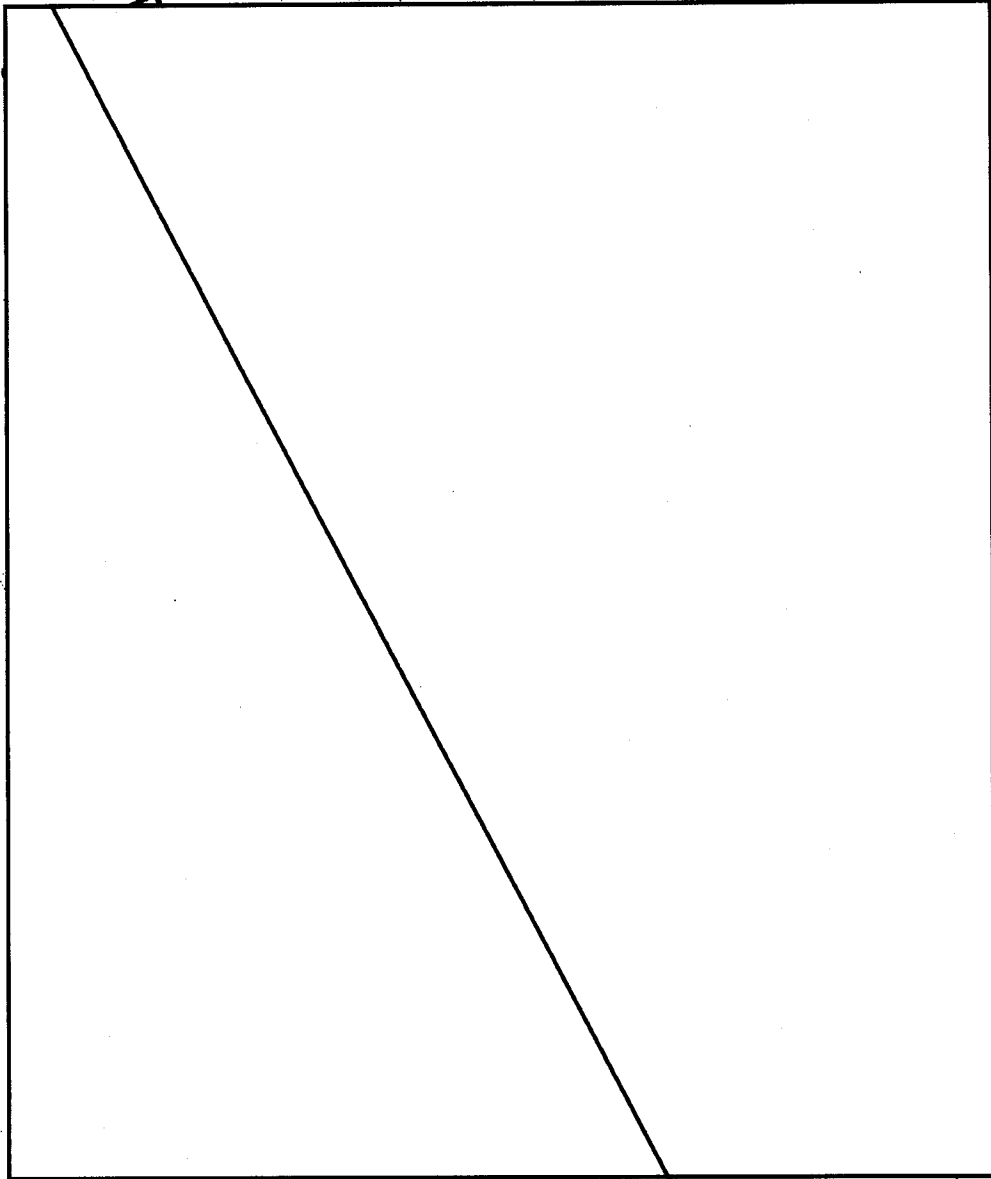
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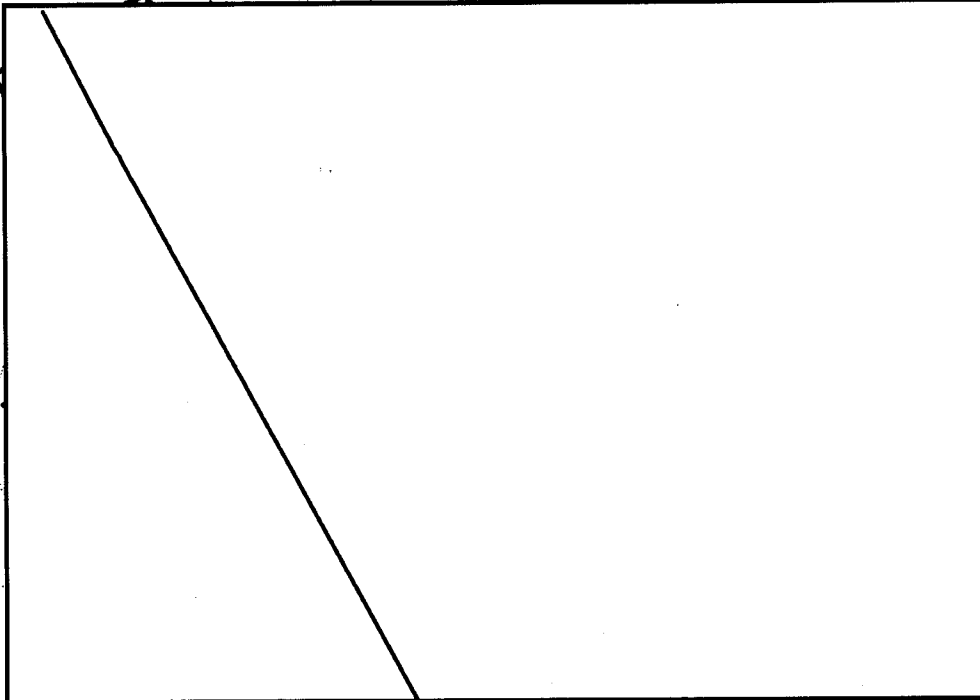
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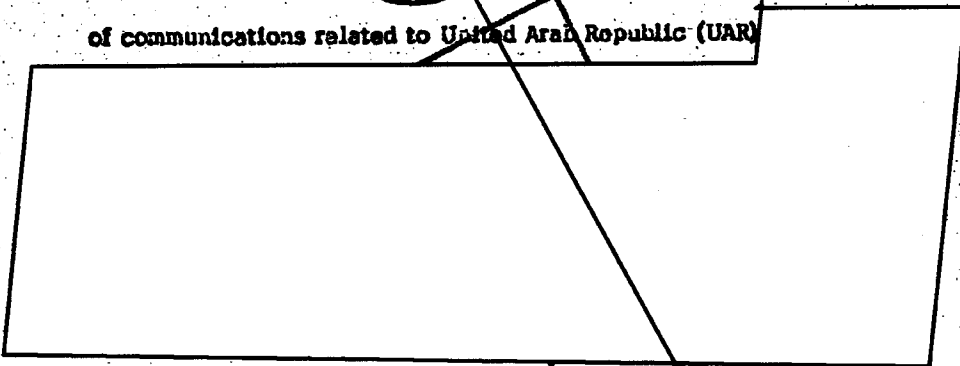
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The SIGINT tasking of the USS LIBERTY was directed at coverage of communications related to United Arab Republic (UAR)



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DEPLOYMENT OF THE TECHNICAL RESEARCH SHIP, USS LIBERTY (USN-855)

The USS LIBERTY (AGTR-5) is a converted Victory Ship previously known as the SIMMONS VICTORY. (TAB D)

The conversion to an AGTR (Technical Research Ship) was made by the Willamette Iron and Steel Works, Portland, Oregon. The USS LIBERTY was commissioned on 30 December 1964.

The principal characteristics of the ship are as follows:

Length, overall 455' - 0"

Beam 62' - 0"

Full Load Draft (estimated) 24' - 0"

Displacement, light 7,190 tons

Displacement, full load 10,680 tons

Maximum Speed 18 knots

Personnel

General Service Allowed

9 Officers
151 Enlisted Men

Navy Security Group Allowed

6 Officers
128 Enlisted Men

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The collection and reporting effort assigned to the
 USS LIBERTY was directed primarily against UAR [redacted]
 targets in the high frequency, very high frequency and ultra
 high frequency ranges. The normal personnel complement
 of the USS LIBERTY was augmented by six Arabic Linguists
 for this specialized effort.

[redacted]

The proposal to deploy the USS LIBERTY to the
 Eastern Mediterranean was the result of consumer
 requirements, the anticipated loss of fixed intercept
 capability, and technical requirements to develop
 optimum data for SIGINT units providing direct support
 to U.S. forces which might have become involved in the
 Middle East Crisis.

[redacted]

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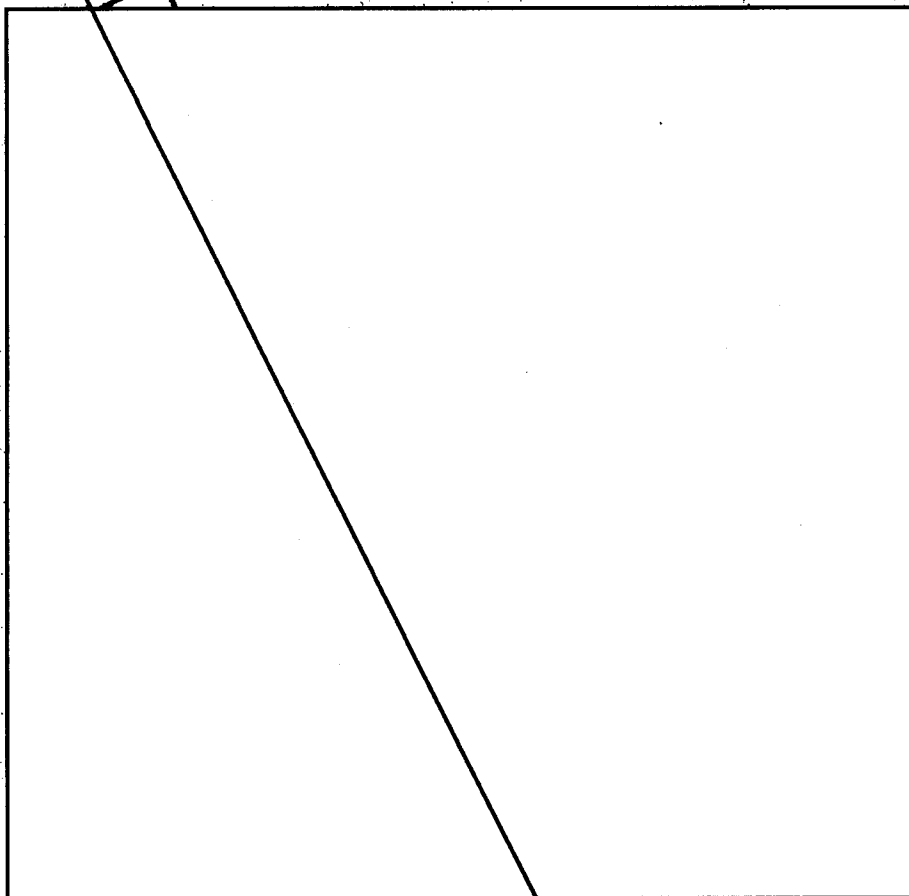
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The rationale for requesting the positioning of the USS LIBERTY in operation area 3 for initial operations was based upon the following factors:

- The major requirement was for coverage of UAR targets in the VHF/UHF ranges; therefore, the platform was

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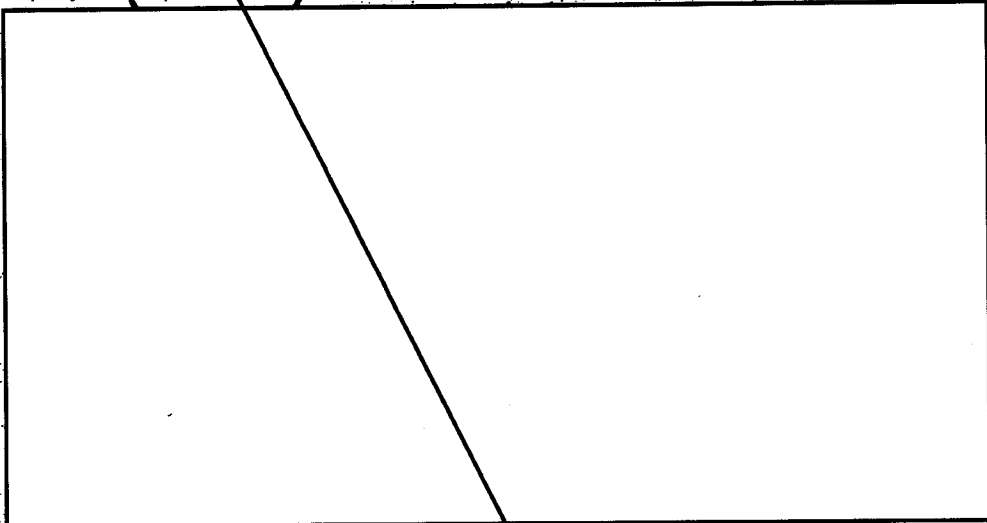
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requested to operate in an area affording the maximum possibility of collection success.

- Wave propagation analysis indicated that operational area 3 would allow for the collection of the greatest number of signals as contrasted with the other specific, approved operating areas.



Communications known to be used by the USS LIBERTY are as follows:

2 High Frequency Morse circuits

2 High Frequency Radio Telephone/Radio Printer circuits

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1 secure Moon Relay system, one channel capability,
100 words per minute

4 secure High Frequency circuits plus two spares
(total of 3 full duplex and 3 half duplex)

2 off-line encryption/decryption devices.

The ship had the capability of using any combinations of
the above but not all simultaneously.

The SIGINT collection was to be processed and reported
within on board capabilities.

The LIBERTY was tasked to provide daily electrical technical
summaries to other collectors and NSA. These summaries would
provide the latest technical information for use by other
collectors and would provide to NSA a means of staying abreast
of the LIBERTY's SIGINT activities.

All plaintext international shipping activity was to be
forwarded electrically to NSA for exploitation.

Upon completion of the deployment, the ship was requested
to provide all on board collection, including unprocessed
tapes, to NSA

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OPERATIONAL AND TECHNICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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Command and control of a seaborne SIGINT collection platform is exercised in military command channels. Control is delegated from the JCS to the Unified or Specified Commander and thence to the Naval component Fleet or Force Commander. Command control of a technical research ship includes the final determination by military operational commanders that the operation required by NSA is compatible with the safety of the ship.

Operational and technical control of the SIGINT activities on board the platform is exercised by the Director, NSA.

Documentation outlining the responsibilities of NSA, JCS and others is contained in Tabs E., through N., and is summarized as follows:

The Introduction to the Manual of U. S. SIGINT Operations (MUSSO), dated 1 March 1966, outlines the means by which the Director, NSA, exercises operational and technical control of the National SIGINT effort in accordance with the authority and provisions of National Security Council Intelligence Directive (NSCID 6) and

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Implementing DOD Directives (S3115.2 and S3115.4). This document describes operating instructions (OPINS) as "Orders and directives assigning missions, tasks or functions to SIGINT organizations." (TAB E)

OPINS 2855 provides the specific operating instructions for the SIGINT component aboard the Technical Research Ship USS LIBERTY (AGTR-5). It outlines the command relationships, mission, functions, liaison, communications and special instructions for this component. (TAB F)

A JCS Memorandum of 4 May 1966 outlined the responsibilities of NSA and command elements with regard to the specific procedures for the planning and approval of Technical Research Ship schedules. NSA employs this document as the basis for scheduling actions for TRS platforms. (TAB G)

A JCS Message of 6 June 1967, provides the NSA and command responsibilities for the USS LIBERTY while operating in the USCINCEUR area of responsibility. (TAB H)

On 5 November 1965, the JCS outlined contingency planning for TRS operations to be used in general planning.

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for SIGINT support of contingency operations. This message was a result of correspondence relevant to command/control of SIGINT platforms. Although the message is not specifically related to procedures employed by NSA, it is a JCS statement of command and control responsibilities. (TAB I) Amplification of this statement is provided below.

As a result of experience

[Redacted]

[Redacted] involving the Technical

Research Ship (TRS) USS BELMONT, DIRNSA determined the need for guidance to operational commanders regarding the employment of the TRS. On 27 May and 4 June 1965 NSA requested JCS To issue general guidance to inform appropriate commanders of the purpose, nature and concept of TRS operations since the USS OXFORD was being deployed to Southeast Asian waters. The message recommended that such guidance include the following statement:

"Operational and technical control of the SIGINT activities on board the OXFORD is exercised by the Director, NSA."

(TABS J and K)

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In accordance with the NSA request of 26 May 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued guidance on TRS operations in Southeast Asia on 7 June (JCS 2085-65 071404Z June 1965.)

(TAB L) This message substituted the statement, "Technical control and signal tasking of SIGINT collection activities aboard the OXFORD will be as directed by DIRNSA through DIRNAVSECGRU for the desired wording in the DIRNSA suggested guidance: i.e., "Operational and technical control of the SIGINT activities on board the OXFORD is exercised by the Director, NSA."

Subsequently, on 17 June 1965, DIRNSA in commenting on JCS 2085-65, advised the JCS that "these activities include processing and reporting as well as collection." (TAB M)

On 1 September 1965, NSA requested that JCS consider issuing general guidance similar to JCS 2085-65 071404Z June 1965 to inform the other unified commanders of the purpose, nature and concept of TRS operations. (TAB N)

In accordance with the NSA request of 1 September 1965, the JCS issued the guidance on TRS operations on 5 November 1965. This message was sent to all unified commanders and the CNO. The message outlined the purpose, nature and concept of TRS

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operations and was made applicable to all TRSs. The message provides for exercise of "operational and technical control of all SIGINT activities (collection, processing, reporting) on board the ship, by the Director, NSA (via direct communications to ship or through the Director, NSG)." The message further states: "operational control of ship. Military operational control of these ships will be effected by the cognizant unified or specified commander through the Naval component commander to a specific fleet or force commander ... Basis for collection area assignments ... Determination by military operational commanders that the operation required by NSA is compatible with the safety of the ship." (TAB I)

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USS LIBERTY (AGTR-5)

(USN-855)

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

23 MAY - 8 JUNE

1967

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23 May

The situation in the Middle East resulted in NSA declaring a SIGINT Readiness BRAVO. In order to augment coverage in the area, NSA requested JCS/JRC to authorize diversion of the USS LIBERTY from Abidjan, Ivory Coast to Rota, Spain, in preparation for deployment to the Eastern Mediterranean (TAB O) (DIRNSA ADP/224-57 231729Z). Since the LIBERTY possessed an excellent capability for collection, processing and reporting of SIGINT, she was considered a superior platform to the USNS VALDEZ which was scheduled to return to New York.

25 May

The following action was initiated:

- provision to the LIBERTY of additional linguist capability in Arabic including three NSA civilians:

Mr. Allen M. Blue, GG-7

Mr. Donald L. Bialock, GG-7

Mr. Robert L. Wilson, GG-7

(No Hebrew linguists were available) ←

- Tasking for both the transit to the operating area and the period while on-station was developed, coordinated and supplied to USN-855 (TAB P) (DIRNSA K12/585 292201Z, DIRNSA K12/606 022333Z, K12/611 022335Z)

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29 May

JCS approved the NSA request for diversion of the LIBERTY and requested that CINCLANT change OPCON of the LIBERTY from CINCLANT to CINCEUR upon the ship's arrival at Rota, Spain, on or about 31 May.

Additionally, JCS informed CINCEUR to make the necessary preparations for extended employment of the LIBERTY to the Eastern Mediterranean (TAB Q) (JCS 6499 291502Z).

DIRNSA requested JCS approval of the operational areas for the LIBERTY and proposed Area 3 (TAB A) as the initial area subject to "adjustment as necessary for operational or safety reasons." (TAB R) (DIRNSA ADP/242-67 292013Z)

1 June

JCS requested CINCEUR to deploy the LIBERTY on 2 June from Rota, Spain, to Area 3 and stipulated a closest point of approach (CPA) to Algeria, Libya, and the UAR of 13 nautical miles during the transit. Upon arrival in Area 3 on or about 9 June, the CPA stipulated by JCS was to be 12.5 nautical miles to the UAR and 6.5 nautical miles to Israel (TAB S) (JCS 6724 01845Z)

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4 June The LIBERTY deployed from Rota, Spain, at #2123#Z through the Straits of Gibraltar following a coastal route to Area 3.

5 June In view of the outbreak of hostilities, representatives of the tasking elements of NSA telephoned JCS/JRC and asked whether or not a change in the employment of the LIBERTY was contemplated. Recollection of the repositioning of the OXFORD during the Cuban crisis in 1962 prompted the telephone call. JRC advised that no action was contemplated at that time.

6 June CINCUSNAVBUR directed Commander, Sixth Fleet (C)MSIXTHFLT to take OPCON of the LIBERTY in order to "facilitate command and control and possible requirement for protection during Mid-East hostilities" and additionally directed LIBERTY to change operational control to COMSIXTHFLT at #7#01Z. The message also authorized modification of the initial JCS plan of operations (TAB 6) should safety reasons so dictate. (TAB T) CINCUSNAVBUR #1357Z). Subsequently COMSIXTHFLT issued his OPCON change message to the LIBERTY (TAB 6) COMSIXTHFLT #62349Z).

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7 June

Since the UAR target entities were moving westerly, DIRNSA requested JCS for immediate action to change the operating area of the LIBERTY from Area 3 to Area 2 in order to satisfy tasking requirements (TAB V) (DIRNSA K12/631 072104Z).

The LIBERTY reported her position at 070800Z and stated she would remain stationary within 30 nautical miles of a point (31-49N, 33-30E) approximately 68 nautical miles northeast of Port Said upon arrival in Area 3 (TAB W) (USS LIBERTY 070900Z).

On the afternoon of 7 June, the NSA representative at JRC telephoned the NSA tasking representatives to advise of discussions underway between Navy and JCS/JRC concerning the possibility of changing the LIBERTY's CPA. There was concern within JRC since the LIBERTY was 350-400 miles from the closest Sixth Fleet ships. The NSA representative at JRC relayed the concern expressed by a member of JRC that a change in the CPA might have an adverse effect on the ship's SIGINT mission. The NSA tasking representatives pointed out that the effect of any

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however, they

declined to make any statement regarding any specific repositioning of the LIBERTY since changes in the CPA for operational or safety reasons were considered a military command decision, and they felt that any specific statement on their part could be interpreted as a defense for retaining the 12.5 mile CPA.

Prior to close of business 7 June, the NSA representative at JRC saw a message originated by JCS/JRC ordering a change in the LIBERTY's CPA to 20 nautical miles to the UAR and 5 nautical miles to Israel and ^{CHANGING} in the LIBERTY's OP area to Area 2, as requested by DIRNSA on 5 June.

However, the message as transmitted by JRC (TAB X) (JCS 6724 072230Z) did not contain the latter change.

The JRC member concerned stated that he had decided to do one thing at a time. It later turned out that JRC was overtaken by events in changing the OP area.

Later in the evening the NSA representative at JRC received a call from JRC requesting his concurrence in a

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JCS message changing the CPA to 100 nautical miles.

The reasons for the change were expressed as being, at the outset, primarily political in origin: Since the United States Ambassador to the United Nations had stated to that body that there were no U. S. Navy ships within 350-400 nautical miles of the UAR/Israel area, JCS and Navy felt that they must lend support to that position. During the night a message was received by JCS from the Commander, Sixth Fleet (FAB Y) (COMSDXTHFLT 071503Z) stating that "no operations, either surface or air, were permitted within 100 miles of Israel, Syria, or Egypt or within 25 miles of Cyprus." The message provided a status report on Sixth Fleet operations as of 5 June - at which time the LIBERTY was under the operational control of CINCEUR; transfer of operational control to COMSDXTHFLT was effected at 070001Z. The status report was apparently prompted by the allegation by the Arabs, at the UN, that the U. S. and the British had participated in the Israeli air strikes against the UAR. JCS reacted by sending a message to CINCEUR, Info LIBERTY, cancelling the 20 nautical mile

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message (TAB X) and defining the new CPA as "no closer than 100 nautical miles from Israel, Syria, Egypt and 25 nautical miles to Cyprus." (TAB Z) (JCS 7347 080110Z). Since the attack on the LIBERTY occurred at 081205Z, it is extremely unlikely that the LIBERTY could have received and taken action on the message in time. Additionally, CINCEUR would be required to send a message implementing the JCS decision.

8 June

COMSIXTHFLT reported that at 1252Z the LIBERTY reported she was under attack at 31-23N, 33-25E - hit by torpedo and listing badly. (TAB AA) (COMSIXTHFLT 081320Z).

A message originated by the LIBERTY was intercepted by USM-4 [redacted] reporting the incident and informing CNO that she was clearing the area. (TAB BB) (USM-4 081812Z).

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