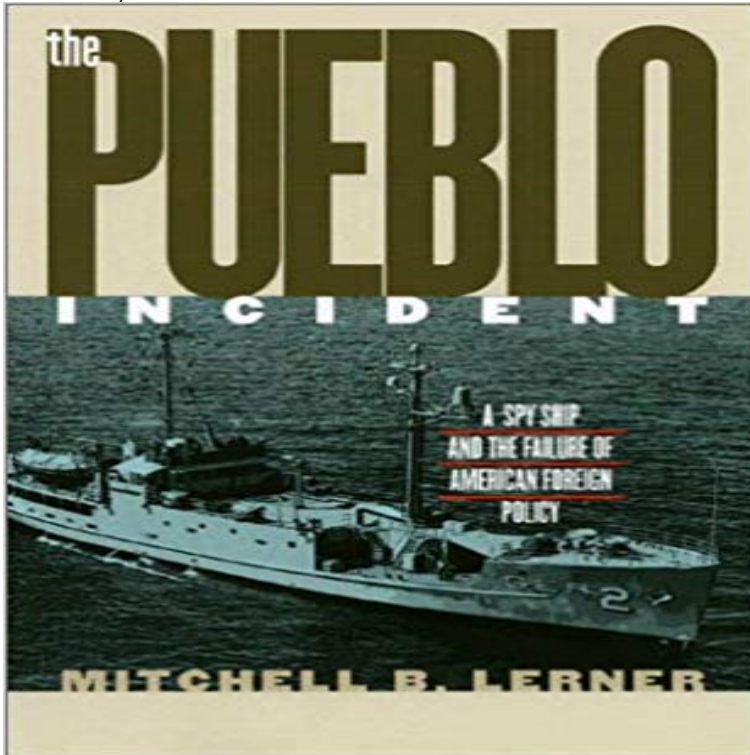


The Pueblo Incident: A Spy Ship and the Failure of American Foreign Policy



Remember, you are not going out there to start a war, Rear Admiral Frank Johnson reminded Commander Pete Bucher just prior to the maiden voyage of the U.S.S. Pueblo. And yet a warone that might have gone nuclearwas what nearly happened when the Pueblo was attacked and captured by North Korean gunships in January 1968. Diplomacy prevailed in the end, but not without great cost to the lives of the imprisoned crew and to a nation already mired in an unwinnable war in Vietnam.The Pueblo was an aging cargo ship poorly refurbished as a signals intelligence collector for the top-secret Operation Clickbeetle. It was sent off with a first-time captain, an inexperienced crew, and no back-up, and was captured well before the completion of its first mission. Ignored for a quarter of a century, the Pueblo incident has been the subject of much polemic but no scholarly scrutiny. Mitchell Lerner now examines for the first time the details of this crisis and uses the incident as a window through which to better understand the limitations of American foreign policy during the Cold War. Drawing on thousands of pages of recently declassified documents from President Lyndon Johnsons administration, along with dozens of interviews with those involved, Lerner provides the most complete and accurate account of the Pueblo incident. He weaves on a grand scale a dramatic story of international relations, presidential politics, covert intelligence, capture on the high seas, and secret negotiations. At the same time, he highlights the very intimate struggles of the Pueblos crew-through capture, imprisonment, indoctrination, torture, and release-and the still smoldering controversy over Commander Buchers actions. In fact, Bucher emerges here for the first time as the truly steadfast hero his men have always considered him.More than an account of misadventure, The Pueblo

Incident is an indictment of Cold War mentality that shows how the premises underlying the Pueblos risky mission and the ensuing efforts to win the release of her crew were seriously flawed. Lerner argues that had U.S. policymakers regarded the North Koreans as people with a national agenda rather than one serving a global Communist conspiracy, they might have avoided the crisis or resolved it more effectively. He also addresses such unanswered questions as what the Pueblos mission exactly was, why the ship had no military support, and how damaging the intelligence loss was to national security. With North Korea still seen as a rogue state by some policymakers, The Pueblo Incident provides key insights into the domestic imperatives behind that countrys foreign relations. It astutely assesses the place of gunboat diplomacy in the modern world and is vital for understanding American foreign policy failures in the Cold War.

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