

WHITE HOUSE SAYS CAMBODIA SEIZED A U.S. CARGO SHIP

Ford Charges Act of Piracy
and Demands Immediate
Release of Freighter

SCENE IS GULF OF SIAM
— MAY 13 1975

Vessel Said to Have Been
Fired On and Forced to
Dock in Nearby Port

NYTimes

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WASHINGTON, May 12—The White House announced today that a Cambodian naval vessel fired on a United States merchant ship in international waters in the Gulf of Siam early this morning and forced it into the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville.

A statement issued by the press secretary, Ron Nessen, said President Ford "considers this seizure an act of piracy" by the new Cambodian Government, which took control when Communist-led forces captured Phnom Penh last month.

The President "has instructed the State Department to demand the immediate release of the ship," the statement said, adding that "failure to do so would have the most serious consequences."

Appeal to China

The State Department quickly asked China through Peking's liaison office in Washington for help in obtaining release of the ship. Follow-up messages will be sent to Peking.

Mr. Nessen, answering questions at a news briefing, refused to comment on any possible response by President Ford to the seizure. "I have nothing to add to the statement," he said.

Pentagon sources said later

that the aircraft carrier *Coral Sea* and other ships from the Seventh Fleet had been ordered to sail for the Gulf of Siam.

The White House press secretary identified the seized vessel as the *Mayaguez*, an unarmed container ship sailing under American registry and owned by Sea-Land Service, Inc. The company, which is based in Menlo Park, N. J., is a wholly owned subsidiary of R. J. Reynolds Industries, Inc.

On Voyage to Thailand

Mr. Nessen said the ship, which was on a voyage from Hong Kong to Sattahip, Thailand, was 60 miles off the coast of Cambodia and about eight miles from a rocky island claimed by both Cambodia and South Vietnam when it was fired on.

Immediately afterward, he said, the American ship was boarded by Cambodian naval forces, who forced it to steam to Sihanoukville, known as Kompong Som under the previous government.

A spokesman for the company said the vessel was carrying a crew of 40 and a general cargo in 35-foot and 40-foot containers. The 14,500-ton, 430-foot-long vessel ordinarily operates between Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore, he said.

The White House statement said:

"We have been informed that a Cambodian naval vessel has seized an American merchant

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ship on the high seas and forced it to the port of Kompong Som.

"The President has met with the National Security Council.

"He considers this seizure an act of piracy. He has instructed the State Department to demand the immediate release of the ship. Failure to do so would have the most serious consequences."

The White House also reported that the Cambodians apparently stopped a Panamanian ship a few days ago. Mr. Nessen and other White House spokesmen said that the fate of the Panamanian ship is still unclear and that he had no details about where it was seized.

He said that although there were conflicting reports about the Panamanian ship, there is

some evidence that it was released by the Cambodians and is now moving toward Bangkok.

Shortly after the White House briefing, the State Department said in a statement:

"We are taking immediate steps to obtain prompt release of the ship. We do not believe it would be helpful at this time to discuss what we are doing."

Secretary of State Kissinger was known to have ordered discreet appeals to be made to the Chinese liaison office here and to the Government in Peking.

China Has Contacts

China, which is believed to be the only major nation with influence in Phnom Penh, was approached without publicity in keeping with Peking's desire to avoid any sign that it might bring pressure to bear on an ally. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the nominal leader of the new Cambodian Government, lives in Peking but is said to have little influence on the actual authorities in Cambodia.

There was no information available on the type of gunboat used by the Cambodians. The *Mayaguez* sent out at least two messages—one a "Mayday" signal of distress.

There were no reports of injuries before radio contact from the American ship was lost, according to the White House. Mr. Nessen was not able to say who sent or received the radio messages. But he reported that regular commercial radio channels were used and that messages were picked up in Indonesia, among other places.

Mr. Nessen said the United States position was that the *Mayaguez* had been seized on the high seas.

The State Department was not ready to discuss the international legal aspects of the seizure. Some department lawyers acknowledged that the seizure might be open to controversy because of the proximity of the ship to the small island in the Gulf of Siam, claimed by both Cambodia and South Vietnam.

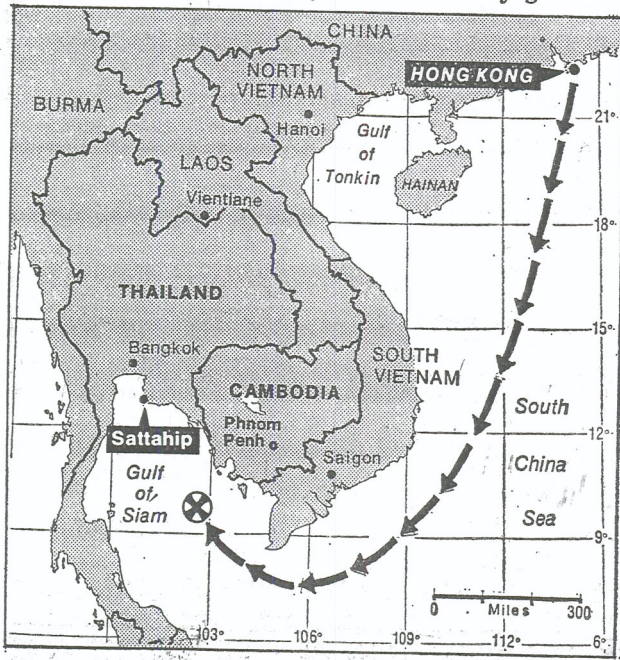
12-Mile Limit Claimed

As of 1969, when Prince Sihanouk was the ruler, Cambodia claimed a 12-mile limit. The Lon Nol government, which came to power in 1970, did not change that policy and it is assumed that the new Government follows previous practice.

Thus, the Cambodians could say they were within their rights in seizing the merchant ship within eight miles of the island. Just last week, a South Korean freighter, the *Masama* ho was attacked in the same area, a State Department official said, but escaped after having been fired upon.



to dock in Cambodia yesterday, on an earlier voyage



Cross marks where Thailand-bound U.S. ship was seized

The President's charge that the Cambodians had committed an "act of piracy" drew support on Capitol Hill even though State Department lawyers said the term was not legally correct. The lawyers said that, under international law, the term "piracy" was reserved for private vessels not flying a national flag. Governments can be accused in such cases of vio-

lating international law, the lawyers said.

Senator Clifford P. Case, Republican of New Jersey, who was co-author of the 1973 amendment barring American combat activity in Indochina, said the President would be justified in using force as a "police action" to retrieve the vessel.

Buckley for Retaliation

Senator James L. Buckley, Republican - Conservative of New York, said:

"A failure by the United States to react swiftly and clinically will only invite further outrages against the persons and property of American citizens. I therefore urge the President to order immediate punitive air and naval attacks on appropriate targets in Cambodia."

Senator Jacob V. Javits, Republican of New York, counseled patience.

"Let's keep our shirts on and see if they return the ship," Mr. Javits said. "I believe a little patience is deserved rather than cause an attack on the new Cambodian Government."

He said the new Government "may not realize what is involved."

Today's announcement by the White House recalled the Gulf of Tonkin incident of August, 1964, when North Vietnamese patrol boats allegedly fired on two United States destroyers. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, adopted by Congress in response to this incident, gave President Lyndon B. Johnson broad authority to order American military operations in Indochina.

Basis for Intervention

Armed with this resolution, President Johnson built up a presence in South Vietnam. His successor, Richard M. Nixon, later authorized the use of American troops in Cambodia.

In 1968, North Korean forces seized a United States intelligence ship, the Pueblo, whose crew was held prisoner for a year. The crew was released after protracted negotiations and a formal apology by the United States for alleged intrusion in North Korean waters.

United States naval vessels were involved in both those incidents. More recently, Ecuadorian navy ships seized privately owned American fishing vessels that Ecuador said were fishing in her territorial waters. The crews and ships were released after negotiations and reported indemnity payments.

The language used in today's White House statement suggested that President Ford regarded the seizure of the Maya-

quez as a more serious incident than the Ecuadorian episodes and that a stronger response could be forthcoming.

Move by Seamen's Union

The National Maritime Union appealed to an international seamen's federation yesterday to work for the release of the American ship and its crew. The union asked the International Transport Workers Federation in London to enlist the help of all nations to free the ship.