

U.S. Show of Force in Cambodia Ship Seizure

Marines SF Chronicle MAY 14 1975 Land in Thailand

Washington

President Ford conferred with his top national security advisers early today and 800 Marines arrived in Thailand as part of U.S. strategy to gain the release of the American merchant ship seized by the Cambodian navy.

The Marines are now less than two hours' flying time from the ship being held off Cambodia, although there was no immediate word on what the National Security Council may have decided to do.

The United States brushed aside opposition from the Thai government and flew the marines into the U.S. air force base at Utapa, 120 miles west of the Cambodian border.

Mr. Ford said yesterday that he wants the unarmed container ship Mayaguez, which was seized Monday by a Cambodian gunboat, freed immediately.

"Immediate is immediate," presidential press secretary Ron Nessen said yesterday at a news briefing.

"The President wants the ship released now."

Nessen said, however, that Mr. Ford would consult with

Congress before making any military moves against the Cambodians.

A few minutes before the announcement of the Marine landing, Thai Premier Kukrit Pramoj told newsmen his government did not want the Marines to come. He said he had no communication from Washington about them, and if they came without his permission, "we cannot be friends with the United States any more."

A foreign ministry spokesman predicted an official protest to Washington and anti-American demonstrations.

The President convened the National Security Council

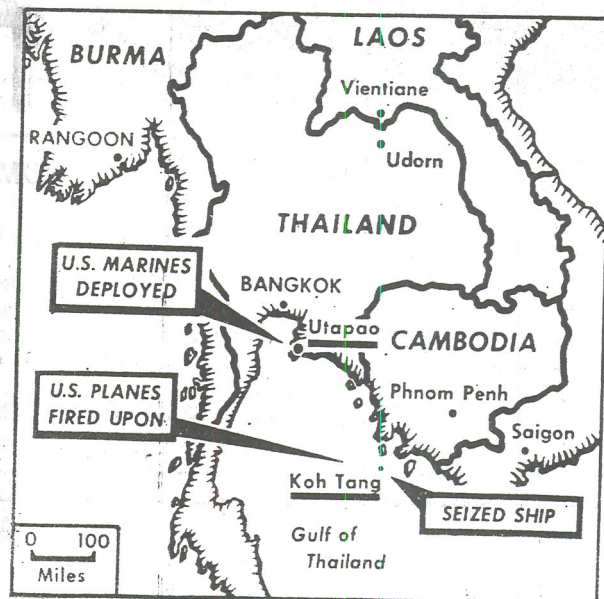
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cil for the second time in 12 hours last night, shortly after Secretary of State Henry Kissinger returned to Washington from a Midwest speaking engagement. Kissinger joined Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger, CIA Director William E. Colby and other members of the council in the late night session that lasted almost two hours.

Mr. Ford also met with the security council yesterday morning.

Reuters reported from Peking this morning that sources close to the U.S. liai-



AP Wirephoto

Map shows key sites in ship crisis

son office said U.S. representations to the Chinese government and Cambodian envoys in Peking over the seizure of the ship have been unsuccessful.

It is understood that the liaison office, which operates as an embassy in all but name, yesterday contacted the Peking embassy of the Royal Cambodian government of National Union, the Chinese Foreign Ministry and Prince Norodom Sihanouk over the incident.

American officials were still declining to comment today officially on the issue or confirm that contacts had been made.

It was understood, however, that the Cambodians failed to respond to messages from the liaison office and that the Chinese Foreign Ministry declined to intervene on the grounds that the matter was no concern of the People's Republic.

The Mayaguez was reported to be near Koh Tang Island about 30 miles off the Cambodian coast. Pentagon sources said U.S. war planes, while making no attacks, made close passes over the vessel all day yesterday.

At least six F-4 Phantom jets, two F-111 fighters and a number of A-7 fighter-bombers flew from Thailand over the ship.

The Phantoms were fired upon with small arms as they made low passes.

On Monday, a Navy patrol plane flying a reconnaissance mission shortly after

the ship's seizure was similarly fired upon and suffered minor damage from Cambodian gunboat fire. Sources said gunfire blew a hole in one wing of the P-3 Orion patrol plane.

There were no reports of injury to the crew.

Besides the show of U.S. air power, the aircraft carrier Coral Sea, bound for Australia, has turned around and is headed toward the Gulf of Thailand.

At least two Navy destroyers also reportedly have been sent toward Cambodia.

There has been little negotiating with Cambodia, either directly or indirectly,

since the Mayaguez was seized. Instead, the message, most probably relayed through the Chinese to the new leaders in Phnom Penh, has been: "We want the ship back."

U.S. officials acknowledge that the Mayaguez may have been seized within eight to ten miles of an island claimed by both Cambodia and South Vietnam and 55 miles off the Cambodian mainland.

The U.S. position has been that international waters begin three miles off each nation's shores, but the Ford administration supports a change in international law to extend it to 12 miles.

Even so, the State Department maintains that there must be free access to shipping lanes, including those where the ship was seized.

There were conflicting reports from Pentagon sources that made it unclear whether the gunboats near the Mayaguez had moved away from the ship after U.S. fighter planes appeared.

Other sources said Cambodians were seen aboard the ship while Americans were boarding a fishing boat pulled alongside.

In any case, there was no indication last night that the Cambodians were yet ready to return the vessel and its 39-man crew. Most of the crewmen are from California.

At the White House briefing, Neessen was questioned at length about possible military response to the seizure. He said, "the President would consult with Congress" before acting.

Associated Press