

# U.S. PACIFIC FORCE PLACED ON ALERT IN SEIZURE OF SHIP

MAY 14 1975  
But Ford Would Consult  
Congress Before Moving  
Against Cambodians

## SECURITY PANEL MEETS

100 Marines Reported Sent  
to Thailand for Possible  
Use as Rescue Party

NYTimes

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WASHINGTON, May 13—

United States marines, warships and planes have been placed on alert in the western Pacific following the seizure of an American merchant ship yesterday by Cambodian gunboats, Administration officials said today.

The officials said a 1,000-man Marine battalion on Okinawa had been alerted for possible participation in operations to rescue the vessel, the unarmed container ship Mayagüez.

One source said that about 100 marines had been sent to Thailand for possible use as a boarding party to rescue the crew of the ship.

Ron Nessen, the White House press secretary, said President Ford would consult with Congress before ordering the use of force to retrieve the vessel. Mr. Nessen briefed reporters after Mr. Ford had met with the National Security Council.

### Crew of 39 Aboard

The White House would make no public statement on either military or diplomatic efforts to obtain the release of the ship and its crew of 39 Americans. But officials said the basic strategy under consideration involved the use of air or sea power to prevent the ship from being taken into a

Cambodian harbor.

High-ranking sources familiar with military strategy and planning said privately that the seizure of the vessel might provide the test of American determination in Southeast Asia that, they asserted, the United States has been seeking since the collapse of allied governments in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The Mayagüez was fired on and seized by two Cambodian gunboats early yesterday 8 miles off the Wai Islands, a group of rocky islets 60 miles from the Cambodian coast.

### Was Not Taken to Port

Yesterday, White House spokesmen said the ship had been taken to the port of Sihanoukville, known as Kompong Som under the previous regime. But by this morning it was evident that the Mayagüez and the gunboats had halted off Tang Island, 30 miles from the port.

With the ship 30 miles from the coast, American officials said, there was hope that military power could be interposed to prevent it from being taken to the mainland. The officials conceded that there were serious military and political problems in any such operation.

The Government of Thailand has stated publicly that it would not allow the use of Thai bases by planes, ships or troops for a military operation against Cambodia.

Actually United States aircraft based in Thailand are already being used for around-the-clock surveillance of the Mayagüez, administration sources disclosed privately. Publicly, the Government will not say where the planes are coming from, for fear of exacerbating the delicate political situation.

One of the Thailand-based aircraft, a Navy P-3 Orion reconnaissance plane, was hit by

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small arms fire as it swooped low over the merchant ship today, officials reported. They said that the unarmed plane had been forced by cloud cover to fly at a low altitude. It reportedly was not seriously damaged and was able to complete its flight.

The original operations plan, the officials said, was to airlift the Marine battalion to U Thaphao air base in Thailand. But when word of the alert leaked out and Premier Kukrit Pramoj said in Bangkok that Thailand could not be used as a staging area, the use of the battalion became doubtful. American officials said privately that the Thai warning might be intended chiefly for domestic consumption.

Meanwhile, the aircraft carrier Coral Sea, which had been en route to Australia to celebrate the anniversary of the World War II battle of the Coral Sea, has been diverted and is now sailing toward the Gulf of Siam. Other ships from the Seventh Fleet, including destroyers, have also been ordered to move toward the gulf.

The Coral Sea was said to be one day's sail from the Mayagüez and none of the other ships is in the immediate vicinity.

### Comment by Kissinger

Secretary of State Kissinger, answering questions at a news conference in Kansas City, said diplomatic efforts were also in progress. He said the Government was proceeding "with deliberation and determination" and would not make any decisions under pressure.

Several members of Congress who saw Mr. Ford privately today came away with the impression that he did not intend to order the use of force in the immediate future.

Senator Jacob K. Javits, Republican of New York, told reporters after having emerged from the White House that the President had not decided at this point to take military action.

"He is keeping his shirt on," Senator Javits said.

At today's White House briefing, Mr. Nessen reported that air surveillance showed there were Cambodians aboard the Mayagüez. When asked whether Americans were still aboard, Mr. Nessen replied, "I can't go into that."

When asked whether the Mayagüez had been engaged in spying or any activity other than carrying cargo, Mr. Nessen replied, "The answer to that is a flat no."

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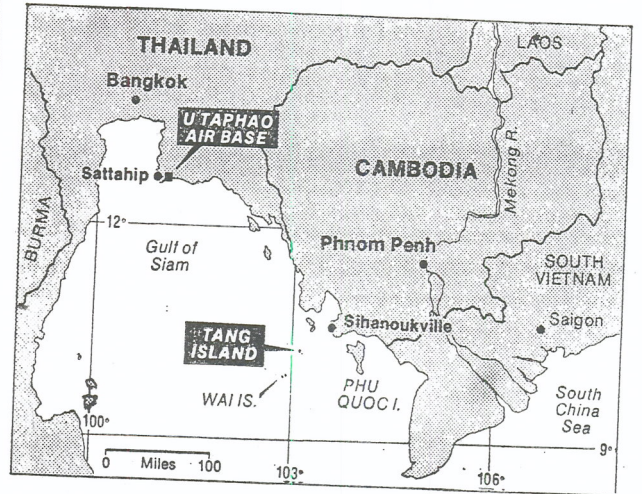
—Diplomatic efforts to obtain the release of the Mayaguez are believed to have included contacts yesterday between the United States Liaison Office here and the office of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, titular head of state of the Cambodian Government. Spokesmen for the mission and for the prince both declined to comment in response to newsmen's queries.

George Bush, chief of the liaison office, spent the morning visiting the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs north of Peking in the company of Secretary of Commerce Rogers C. B. Morton, who is here as his personal guest. Mr. Bush returned to the office shortly after noon, possibly to supervise the relaying of messages from Washington to the Cambodians.

A channel for contact with Prince Sihanouk was opened last month when the liaison office relayed a cease-fire proposal from the then Cambodian Government to the prince, who

rejected it. The Communist-led insurgents captured Phnom Penh shortly afterward.

Western diplomats thought it likely that United States efforts to retrieve the ship would also include representations to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which maintains close contact with Prince Sihanouk and the Phnom Penh Government. The diplomats said the United States would probably ask Peking to use its influence with the Cambodians.



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Some American marines were reportedly flown to the U Taphao base as seized ship lay at Tang Island.