

WXPost
Cambodia
MAY 16 1975
Calls Acts
Barbarous

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The Cambodian government's version of events leading up to the forcible recapture of the U.S. merchant ship Mayaguez differs drastically from official American accounts.

Cambodia charged that for days before the Mayaguez entered the area in the Gulf of Thailand, "U.S. imperialist spy ships" disguised as fishing vessels, with Thai and Cambodian "espionage agents" aboard, repeatedly sailed Cambodia's territorial waters.

"These people have admitted that they are CIA agents sent out to conduct sabotage activities," Cambodia claimed. As a consequence, Cambodia said, it was stopping other larger foreign vessels, such as the Mayaguez, which "had come to provoke us inside our territorial waters."

Cambodia claimed, therefore, that the "savage barbarous acts" launched by the United States against Cambodian shipping, port areas and islands were without justification.

"Not true," replied a State Department spokesman, Robert L. Funseth, denying the whole range of Cambodian charges involving U.S. spying, the landing of agents of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the violation of territorial waters.

"I think that in all of these charges they are making," Funseth said, "they are just trying to cover up their own illegal seizure of our ship."

The Cambodian accusations first were aired early

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Thursday morning (Wednesday night, Washington time) over Cambodian Radio by Information and Propaganda Minister Hu Nim. The charges continued to be repeated yesterday by Phnom Penh Radio.

In Communist nations generally the accusations virtually were automatically treated as valid. They also appeared to be gaining a sympathetic audience in some neutral nations, in part because they resembled the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin charges of espionage on the ocean by North Vietnam against the United States, which rebounded for years in controversy here and abroad.

U.S. officials insisted yesterday that there is no valid relationship between the two sequences, even though there may be some superficial similarities.

The first combat encounter between the United States and North Vietnam in 1964 in the Tonkin Gulf involved U.S. destroyers and North Vietnamese torpedo boats, after South Vietnamese vessels raided Communist-held islands, arousing suspicions about U.S. intentions.

Cambodia is charging that something similar happened in the Gulf of Thailand. "That is ridiculous in this case," said one American official yesterday, expressing the Ford administration's view. "This [the Mayaguez] was a merchant ship operating in a standard international shipping lane," he said.

U.S. officials acknowledged yesterday that perhaps eight small South Vietnamese vessels carrying refugees fleeing from that nation, and perhaps a half-dozen small Thai vessels, have been halted by Cambodian patrol boats during the last two weeks.

This traffic is in addition to the previously disclosed stopping of much larger merchant ships of other na-

tions by Cambodian patrol boats during this period, including the halting of a South Korean and a Panamanian vessel before the Mayaguez appeared.

U.S. sources said yesterday that the Cambodian patrol gave "harsh treatment" to the small Thai and South Vietnamese vessels. They were seized in a region where there have been conflicting claims for years over the ownership of islands in the gulf.

Until the Mayaguez was seized, however, U.S. officials said, no large foreign vessel was detained so long, nor treated so severely.

As Ford administration officials assess the events leading up to the President's decision to use force to recapture the Mayaguez, the Cambodian government was given more than sufficient time to respond to the American demand to release the vessel and its crew. By the Cambodian government's broadcast account, however, the United States began attacking Cambodian patrol boats very early in the encounter.