

Praise for the President

Domestic and Foreign Triumph Is Seen As U. S. Reasserts Its Presence Abroad

NYTimes

By JAMES M. NAUGHTON

MAY 16 1975

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 15—By nearly every measure President Ford's military venture in the Gulf of Siam was being evaluated here today as a diplomatic and domestic political triumph.

The merchant ship *Mayaguez*, steaming once more through Southeast Asian waters, serves as a visible symbol of United States resolve to remain an influence—and, if necessary, a military presence—abroad despite the recent debacle in Indochina.

Democrats in Congress who expect their party to elect the successor to Mr. Ford in 1976 termed his actions right and accorded him high marks for leadership. Republican conservatives who had begun questioning his capacity declared him, in the words of one, "a man who knows how to act."

The President's decision to use marines, warships and military aircraft to retrieve the crew and recover the *Mayaguez* from their Cambodian captor was, White House officials acknowledged, a calculated gamble with a broad purpose.

The military operation was mounted without any certainty on the whereabouts of the captive seamen and with no guarantee that the broad goal of demonstrating United States resolve for worried allies or potentially capricious op-

ponents would be buttressed by the rescue. The real test, a White House aide said when the outcome was still in doubt yesterday, would be how many of the 39 crew members were saved.

All were. That the crew was surrendered by a Cambodian gunboat flying a white pennant rather than rescued by the Marine landing forces did not diminish the belief here that pluck had been more responsible than luck.

'I'm Glad It Worked'

"It worked," said Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the Senate Democratic whip. "I'm glad it worked. It's certainly a plus for the country. It will strengthen our prestige throughout the world."

Administration officials, including Secretary of State Kissinger and Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, were said to have been eager to find some dramatic means of underscoring President Ford's stated intention to "maintain our leadership on a worldwide basis."

The occasion came with the capture of the vessel. While Administration officials emphasized that the first objective of the rescue operation was to save the American crew, they made it clear that they welcomed the opportunity to show that Mr. Ford had the will and the means to use

Continued on Page 15, Column 4

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

American power to protect American interests.

Mr. Schlesinger described the operation as a "judicious and effective use of American force for purposes that were necessary for the well-being of this society."

Public response to the president's action, judging by the telephone calls, letters and telegrams received by the White House, continued to be strongly favorable. The count today was about 5 to 1 in support of the President.

The overwhelmingly positive initial reaction from the public and the international community suggested that, barring qualms about casualties, there was broad agreement with Mr. Ford's use of force.

The boldness and speed of the rescue venture also appeared to have enhanced the President's political standing in the wake of the collapse of American efforts in Indochina and amid persistent economic difficulties.

"He's etched a sharper profile in the minds of the people as a leader," according to Representative John B. Anderson of Illinois, the third-ranking House Republican leader.

"I am proud of him today," said Senator Jesse A. Helms, Republican of North Carolina, one of several conservatives who have been considering support for a third-party challenge to Mr. Ford.

By one Administration account the rescue operation coincided with Mr. Ford's determination to build on his image as a decent, unaggrandizing President by showing that he could also be firm when the occasion required it.

Senator Byrd, agreeing that the operation was "a plus for the President, and it ought to be," said nonetheless that in government "those who cheer today a often curse tomorrow."

He and others in Congress expressed muted concern that Mr. Ford's decisiveness might have been at the expense of an obligation under the War Powers Act of 1973 to consult with Congressional leaders before committing United States forces to combat situations. The act, according to one of its architects, Senator Thomas F. Eagleton, Democrat of Missouri, obliges the President to "at least hear out their advice"

before rejecting their recommendations.

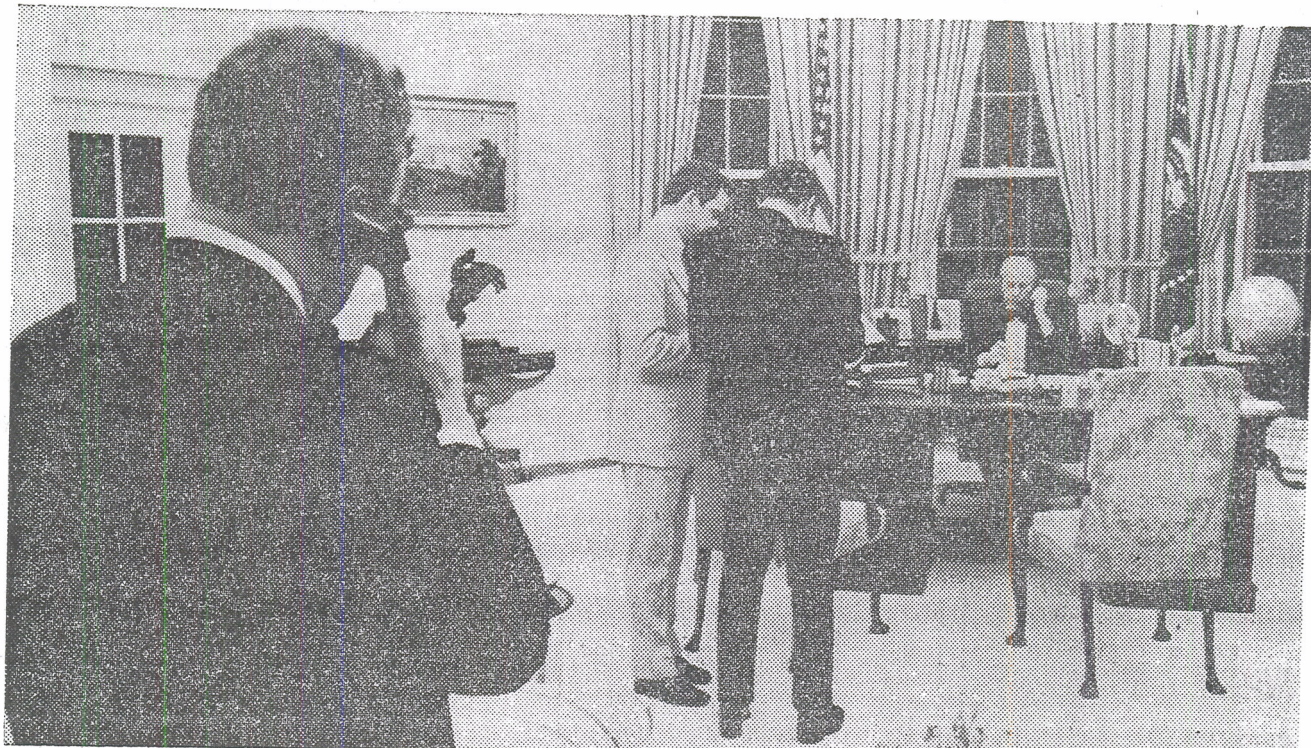
Moreover, Senator Edward W. Brooke, Republican of Massachusetts, sent to Secretary Kissinger a detailed list of questions about the seizure and recapture of the *Mayaguez*, asserting that the responses would facilitate judgments as to the wisdom of the operation.

For all that, Representative Anderson said that the complaints voiced on Capitol Hill were mild and that they did not diminish the psychological boost the nation had received because Mr. Ford "applied the balm of gilead to the wounds we suffered in our ignominious departure from Indochina."

On balance the sharp reversal of fortunes seemed to be similar to that attributed 13 years ago to President John F. Kennedy because of his decisive actions in the Cuban missile crisis.

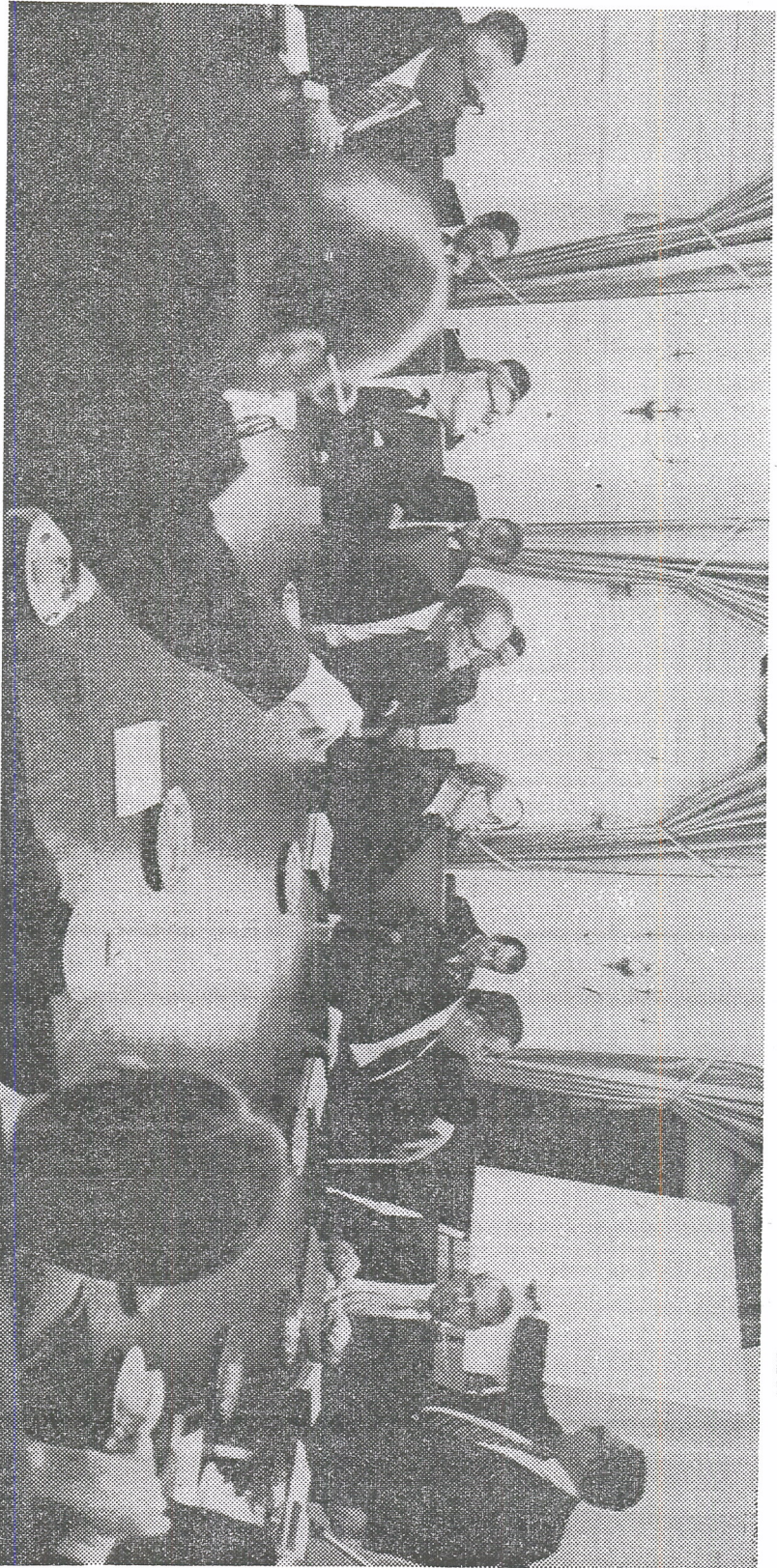
In an article written in 1962 Mr. Kissinger, then a professor at Harvard, said that Mr. Kennedy had "boldly seized an opportunity given few statesmen: to change the course of events by one dramatic move."

Mr. Kissinger reportedly counseled Mr. Ford to take bold action in the Gulf of Siam. As the Secretary wrote of the confrontation with the Russians over the missiles, "the President's stroke demonstrated that a great power leads not so much by its words as by its actions, that initiative creates its own consensus."



White House Photograph/David Hume Kennerly

President Ford, at desk, getting a telephone report from Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger on action to recapture the Mayagüez. Secretary of State Kissinger, left, listens on extension. Center, Robert McFarland, of the National Security Council staff, talks with Donald H. Rumsfeld, Presidential assistant. Scene is Oval Office.



White House Photograph

Secretary of State Kissinger, right, using a map at a briefing on the Cambodia affair. Clockwise around the table, beginning at lower left: President Ford, Representative Eford A. Cederberg, Vice President

Rockefeller, Senators John C. Stennis and John T. McClellan, Representative Thomas E. Morgan, Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger and, in right foreground, back to camera, Carl Albert, Speaker of the House.