

Kissinger: U.S. Shows Firmness

By Murrey Marder

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Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said yesterday that American support for the forcible recovery of the merchant ship *Mayaguez* and its crew reminds the world "there are limits beyond which the United States cannot be pushed."

"I don't want to transform it into an apocalyptic event" internationally, Kissinger said in his first news conference after the combat action off the Cambodian coast. "... We are not going around looking for opportunities to prove our manhood," he said.

If the retrieval of the American freighter and its crew by U.S. combat units enhanced American credibility abroad, Kissinger said, that was "a bonus" for an operation that involved anguish and high risk. Kissinger displayed pleasure with the outcome, but he also indicated that if the hazardous operation had failed, judgments about it would be very different.

The Cambodian decision to seize the *Mayaguez*, Kissinger said, "could well have resulted from an isolated act of a local commander." He said, "I am not inclined to believe that this was a carefully planned operation on the part of the Cambodian authorities."

Nevertheless, Kissinger



By Ellsworth Davis—The Washington Post

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added, "the impact on us was the same."

He said: "We believed that we had to draw a line against illegal actions and secondly, against situations where the United States might be forced into a humiliating discussion about the ransom of innocent merchant seamen" for "a very extended period of time."

Kissinger this Sunday is scheduled to leave for Western Europe for the first

round of conferences with U.S. allies after the jarring Communist conquests of South Vietnam and Cambodia last month. President Ford will make his first trip to Europe later this month for other consultations.

This sequence of post-Indochina reassurance talks with allies was believed to be a factor in the administration decision to risk sending U.S. forces back into combat in the region to ex-

tricate the *Mayaguez* and its crew.

Kissinger indicated that many U.S. officials believed that an absence of decisive American action would have plagued the Ford administration especially if there had been prolonged bargaining with Cambodia over release of the ship and its crew.

With a successful outcome achieved, "the impact"

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abroad, Kissinger said, "ought to be to make clear that there are limits beyond which the United States cannot be pushed, and that the United States is prepared to defend those interests, and that it can get public support and congressional support for those actions."

"But we are not going around looking for opportunities to prove our manhood."

Kissinger said, "We would far have preferred it this had not happened . . . We were forced into this."

He rejected all criticisms that the United States acted precipitately in sending warships, Marines, and planes into the area. He also denied that the United States deliberately used excessive force

against the new Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, to punish it for defeating the American-supported government there. Some U.S. sources privately concede, however, that they were gratified to see the Khmer Rouge government hit hard.

Kissinger said, "There was no chance during this crisis to resolve it diplomatically. That is to say, we never received a communication, proposition, that would have enabled us to explore a diplomatic solution" during "some 60 hours of diplomatic efforts . . ."

Kissinger disclosed that in addition to sending a diplomatic demand through China to Cambodia for release of the ship and crew, the United States delivered its own message "to the Cambodian embassy in Pe-

king, in addition to everything else."

Although the message sent through China, via its liaison mission in Washington, was returned the next day here, ostensibly undelivered, Kissinger broadly indicated that the United States is convinced that this message was received by Cambodian authorities in Phnom Penh.

By formally returning the note, Kissinger said, China was indicating that "it was not responsible for the content of the note."

Kissinger added, however, "but I am assuming the Chinese Xerox machines can reproduce it within 24 hours." China's action, he said, represented "a formal disassociation" from a demand levied on the Cambodian regime it supported

and supplied during the Cambodian war.

During what Kissinger described as 60 hours of diplomacy, there was in fact considerable shooting in the waters off Cambodia, including the American sinking of Cambodia patrol boats. Later, on Wednesday, after the crew of the Mayaguez had been released and returned to the U.S. destroyer Wilson, American bombers attacked military installations on the mainland, including Ream airfield, near the port of Kompong Som.

Kissinger said the intent was not "punitive," but he said: "Obviously, any damage that is done in the process has a punitive effect, whatever the intention is. We tried to gear the action as closely to the objective as possible."