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Why did U.S. come on so strong

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WASHINGTON — Under procedures established more than 30 years ago, the State Department was supposed to notify American ships to steer clear of the troubled waters off Cambodia at least a week before the S.S. Mayaguez was captured.

But no warning was issued until 7:15 p.m. Monday, May 12, (Washington Time), more than 12 hours after the Mayaguez had been seized.

That delay in issuing a "special warning" under international "notices to mariners" has prompted suggestions from at least two members of Congress that the capture of the Mayaguez might have been prevented.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), after listening to closed door testimony from CIA Director William Colby,

Cambodia had attacked Thai, Korean ships, too

said Friday that page 2% an administration investigation "is now being made."

And Rep. Eob Carr (D-Mich.) has called on colleagues on the House Armed Services Committee "to examine the chronology of the event and determine its cause and the correctness of our response."

Neither Church nor Carr criticized President Ford's use of force to recover the ship and its crew. But both raised questions which suggested the initial capture of the ship might have been prevented and that therefore the subsequent American actions and casualties would have been unnecessary.

Their primary question was expressed by Church: "We did have information in advance that these were troubled waters. But we never communicated this to the ships in the area."

Beginning around May 1, several Thai ships were attacked, harassed and stopped by Cambodian forces in fiberglass gunboats, originally supplied by the U.S. to the anti-communist Cambodian government. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger conceded that these attacks may have been carried out by isolated, local commanders without

over Mayaguez?

coordination from the new Cambodian government.

On May 3, Cambodians attacked and attempted to board a South Korean vessel on its way from Bangkok to Borneo. On May 6, South Korea issued a shipping warning and passed it on to the U.S. State Department.

On May 7, a Panamanian freighter was captured by Cambodians in the same wa-

ters of the Gulf of Thailand, between the Cambodian mainland and the Cambodian-claimed island of Poulo Wai, and released after 36 hours.

Spokesmen earlier said that knowledge of these incidents did not reach high State Department levels until after the seizure of the Mayaguez, on May 12. Kissinger told a press conference Friday that insurance companies had been in-

formed of the incidents and assumed they had the responsibility for telling their vessels.

On the contrary, according to CIA Director Colby, the intelligence agencies has kept track of the incidents in the Gulf of Thailand and had informed the proper authorities in time to warn the Mayaguez away. Colby added, in testimony before Church's committee on intelligence activities, that it was the responsibility of the 'Army Map Service' to disseminate the information to ships in the danger area.

A spokesman for the Defense Mapping Agency, which has replaced the old Army Map Service, said all information on "political incidents involving ships, like seizures," must go to the Department. And the State Department is supposed to write the "special warning" to American ships and other mariners. Insurance companies are not involved in this procedure, he said.

Carl McDowell, president of the American Institute of Marine Underwriters said, in response to Kissinger's press conference remark, "As far as I could verify from my sources. . . (the insurance companies) did not

receive any forewarning from the U.S. government concerning trouble in Cambodian waters."

The procedures for funneling information on "political" incidents, like seizures, through the State Department were first set up in 1939 by then Secretary of State Cordell Hull. In 1942, according to a mapping agency spokesman, the procedures were changed to include "special warnings" to mariners on waters and 2% routes which could hold political dangers to ships.

The spokesman added that "we received no messages on any seizures until the seizure of the Mayaguez. And at that time we were asked to issue a special warning."

"Special Warning Number 45," issued Monday night and broadcast by eight Navy transmitters from Guam to Iceland, said:

Shipping is advised until further notice to remain more than 200 nautical miles off the coast of Cambodia and more than 200 practical miles off the coast of Vietnam, including offlying islands. Recent incidents have been reported of firing on, stopping and detention of ships within waters claimed by Cambodia, particularly in the vicinity of Poulo Wai Isa Island. . . ."

The warning's mention of "recent incidents" indicates that the State Department, which drafted the warning, knew of the earlier attacks. But "special warning 45" came too late for the Mayaguez.

Said Church: "If we had a lean and highly efficient intelligence service which had been focused on the problem and working rapidly, all this could have been prevented. But the information was not communicated to our ships at sea because the machine

just bogged down."

Church added that "an investigation is now being made" into the failure to issue a shipping warning in time to keep the Mayaguez out of Cambodian hands. He indicated the investigation is being made by the adminis-

tration.

Carr in a letter to Rep. F. Edward Hebert, chairman of a House Armed Services subcommittee, asked for a congressional investigation on whether "the seizure of the Mayaguez could have been avoided."