



The Mayaguez

Victory Celebration

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BEFORE any more champagne is uncorked, it might be well to stop and consider that we are celebrating in the rescue of the Mayaguez, a notion as false as the first casualty reports to come out of the affair.

The toasting and the boasting is over the ludicrous assumption that the U.S. is for the first time, finally and at last, resorting to force in its dealings with Cambodia.

Actually, from 1969, we have communicated with that wretched country solely through high explosives dropped from the sky. We have shown them nothing but muscle. The seizure of the Mayaguez presented what appears to have been a welcome opportunity to show it again.

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RICHARD NIXON began his vigorous search for "a generation of peace" by instituting a secret bombing campaign against Cambodia. When the falsified reports were finally translated in Congress, it turned out that B-52's had carried out 3650 bombing raids over Cambodia.

With that in mind, when the Mayaguez was captured, no one in the government had reason to believe that the Cambodians would treat the ship's crew kindly. As a matter of fact, they did, but we did not learn this until we had sent in the Marines — to the wrong island, as it

happened — and until after, for good measure, we had dropped a superbomb on the mainland — to prevent a counter attack that seemed likely only in the lurid imaginations of the crisis-managers.

The Cambodians have been dealing harshly with their own people. They have taken victory badly, but they were hardly ready to go to war with the U.S. over a ship sailing in contested waters.

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THE AFFAIR was supposed to restore American credibility in the world. It may return it to its old tarnished state in the country. Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, when confronted with the discrepancies, spoke of the "reassessment" of the casualties. Usually, they are simply counted. Inevitably the question arises whether an accurate count was withheld lest it cloud the victory celebration.

The one novel aspect of the whole situation is that unnumbered Americans were killed or wounded over an episode that is common in international life — the seizure of an American ship in foreign waters.

The most depressing aspect to the non-celebrants is the realization that what the Ford Administration learned from Vietnam can be summed up in three words: Do it again.