

## A Matter of 'Lawlessness'

In the wake of the Mayaguez crisis, the administration seems to be favoring the explanation that it had to use armed force against Cambodia to prove that the United States would not stand for "international lawlessness." And that is offered without blushing.

Considering what the United States has been doing to Cambodia for the last five years, including unprovoked invasion, secret bombing and destruction of the country, it might be thought that "lawlessness" is the last thing the administration (as well as some Democrats) would bring up.

It is clear that the administration had more in mind than just rescuing the crew of the ship. The punitive bombing attacks on Sihanoukville, Cambodia's chief port, were intended to teach a lesson, which seems to be this: It is perfectly all right for the United States to wreck most of Cambodia and ruin the lives of millions of its citizens, but an isolated act of "piracy" against the United States is intolerable and must be instantly and forcibly stamped out.

The administration's overnight passion against international lawlessness, however, did not stop it from violating the territorial integrity of Thailand by using Thai air bases (without permission) to launch the first attacks on Cambodia.

It is quite plain that the administration has no regrets, either, over violating the War Powers Act of 1973, which requires the President to "consult" with Congress "whenever possible" before starting military action against another country. Senate leaders say they were merely "informed" by the President of actions he had already set in motion. Mr. Ford also brushed aside another law that specifically forbade the bombing of Cambodia.

Despite its obligations to the United Nations, the administration did not turn to the United Nations for assistance until it had already sunk several Cambodian gunboats. When the Cambodians announced they were ready to release the Mayaguez, Mr. Ford sent a message saying the attacks on Cam-

bodia would stop as soon as the crew was released. It has since been learned, though, that the United States staged still another bombing attack an hour after the sailors were recovered.

Noting the absence of reliable intelligence on the whereabouts of the crew, as well as on the actual intentions of the new Khmer Rouge government, some senators wonder why the administration was not willing to give diplomacy another day or two.

Others, noting that the negotiating process was never given a real chance, suggest the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 might have ended in nuclear war if former President John F. Kennedy had acted as hastily and belligerently as Mr. Ford did.

For many days, while he was being pressed to bomb or invade Cuba, Kennedy kept his cool, opting finally for a "quarantine" of Russian ships which made it possible for a peaceful, face-saving resolution of the emergency. Moscow removed the missiles, and the United States pledged no further aggression against Cuba. It is also worth recalling that Kennedy went to both the United Nations and the Organization of American States before implementing the quarantine.

Moreover, during the Cuban crisis Washington was not flying blind. Its intelligence was on the mark. In the present crisis, scores of U.S. Marines were killed or wounded because they were needlessly ordered to attack an island where it was mistakenly believed the crew was being held. If the crew had been there, they, too, would probably have suffered heavy losses.

The motive for invading the island was to prevent the crew from being moved to the Cambodian mainland, but in fact they already had been transferred to the mainland in a boat that was repeatedly attacked by U.S. war planes. "We were bombed a hundred times," the captain of the Mayaguez now reports. Finally, had they not later been removed from the mainland, they could well have been killed by the U.S. bombing attacks that ensued. After all the mistakes that were made, they are lucky to be alive today.