

Koh Tang Rescue Ends Grim Crisis

THE MERCHANT SHIP *Mayaguez*, its crew and cargo intact, has resumed its voyage to Hong Kong, peace and quiet have returned to the minuscule island of Koh Tang, and a dangerous avenue toward a resumption of U.S. warfare in Indochina has been firmly closed.

This welcome denouement of a difficult crisis came at the cost of at least two American lives and considerable bloodshed, and may have further unraveled the already frayed relationship between the U.S. and Thailand, but is a cause for thanksgiving for all that.

President Ford's decision to send elements of the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps to the rescue of the seized vessel has been generally applauded, but has also been criticized as a "precipitous" use of military force. In our estimation, it was inevitable and well-timed, inasmuch as the President had waited for three days in hopes of satisfactory results from an appeal to China and the United Nations for diplomatic action. The lack of direct communication with the newly installed Khmer Rouge government balked any such intervention and a further delay might well have complicated the situation beyond redemption.

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ADMINISTRATION SPOKESMEN have denounced the seizure of the *Mayaguez* as "an act of piracy" and "an unwarranted and illegal hijacking episode," and defended the use of troops as "a firm and measured response to a high-handed and crude use of force," against "international order and civilized communication."

Defense Secretary Schlesinger, obviously relieved at what was a relatively smooth extrication from a grave predicament, defined the outcome as "a much-needed and timely reaffirmation of the freedom of the seas and peaceful transit."

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THERE IS considerable comment to the effect that the rescue of the *Mayaguez* was neatly designed to prove that the United States is still a great power, not to be trampled on by lesser powers. We doubt that such proof is needed, or that the events at Koh Tang provided it. We hope, however, that they have convinced the Khmer rulers that whatever control they may have gained over their war-torn little country does not extend to the high seas.