

NYTimes
Mystery at Sea

MAY 13 1975

All the maritime nations of the world—not just the United States—have an urgent stake in discovering exactly what happened yesterday in the Gulf of Siam, and insuring that the normal rules of international law be observed.

The incident as first reported from Washington is almost inexplicable: an unarmed American merchant vessel boarded at gunpoint by Cambodian naval personnel many miles off the Cambodian coast, and hauled into port with its forty American crewmen. President Ford's reaction, that this was nothing short of piracy, is understandable; but the fact is that too little is clear about the incident as yet to know what to make of it.

The new Cambodian regime is evidently distrustful of every foreign influence—particularly, but not exclusively, that of the United States; but this is certainly no justification for what appears on its face to be the act of piracy on the high seas that Mr. Ford says it is, contravening the oldest principles of the laws of nations.

China and North Vietnam are the best-placed outside powers to seek urgent clarification of the Cambodian action, and it is in their own interest to do so. The United States is not at war with Cambodia, and this country has not the slightest intention of committing warlike acts against the new Cambodian Government, repulsive as some of that regime's internal policies already appear to be—notably the forced exodus of the population of Phnom Penh to the countryside. The last thing the people of Indochina—or the United States—need now is a rekindling of tensions and animosities in a new *casus belli*.