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Right of Rescue

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Once established diplomatic procedures had failed to achieve prompt recovery of the seized American merchant ship *Mayagüez* and its crew from Cambodian naval forces, President Ford had no alternative but to employ direct military means to protect American lives and property. There will be time and occasion later to examine the many unanswered questions about the whole incident; the immediate point is that no responsible government can tolerate capricious interference with its shipping in international waters. We are assuming, of course, that the *Mayagüez* is exactly what it appears to be—a merchant vessel on a normal commercial run.

The Ford Administration showed proper restraint in the early aftermath of the ship's seizure, in attempting diplomatic interventions rather than rushing into the immediate reprisal urged by some unthinking United States Senators. Even now, the sole United States purpose should be to retrieve the vessel and crew, not to "punish" or retaliate by a massive show of force against Cambodia.

A quite different set of issues, however, is raised by the Administration's dispatch of Marines to a base in Thailand over the protests of the Thai Government. Here it may be that the United States has infringed upon another nation's sovereign rights; however that legal point is resolved, the Administration's action threatens to shatter whatever was left of American-Thai cooperation in Southeast Asia.