

Ford Waited 11 Hours to Tell American Public of His Action

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WASHINGTON, May 14 (UPI) —President Ford waited at least 11 hours before informing the American people today that United States warplanes had attacked Cambodian boats.

A short time later, Mr. Ford called the National Security Council into session at the White House for the third time in 24 hours to continue efforts to gain release of the United States cargo ship commanded by Cambodian forces in the Gulf of Siam.

The President conferred periodically with Secretary of State Kissinger, and White House officials sought to portray a sense of calm.

During the President's only public appearances, at the start and end of a meeting with Premier Joop M. den Uyl of the Netherlands, Mr. Ford gave no indication that he was under great pressure. At one point, he and Mr. Kissinger exchanged jokes about soccer with the Dutch leader.

Administration sources said that the first United States air strikes against Cambodian patrol boats began by 1 A.M., Eastern Daylight Time today and that at least five of the craft had been hit within an hour. The first public acknowledgment of the operations came about noon from the Defense Department. There was no official explanation for the delay in announcing the action taken by the American planes.

At that point the White House press secretary, Ron Nessen, said he was unable

to provide further details about either the military action or the status of the 39-men crew that was aboard the merchant ship Mayaguez when it was seized Monday.

Asked whether the United States was now at war with Cambodia, Mr. Nessen replied, "Not that I am aware of."

Administration sources said that President Ford decided to order the air strikes late yesterday afternoon after the first of the National Security Council meetings.

Mr. Nessen said that Congressional leaders were advised of the decision at about 5:30 P.M. by White House aides, who reported that "there was a strong consensus of support and no objections."

Mr. Ford's next meeting with the Security Council started at about 10:20 P.M., soon after Mr. Kissinger returned from a speaking engagement in Kansas City. The session lasted a little over two hours. Officials said that Mr. Ford then spent a few minutes in the Oval Office and headed for the Presidential quarters, getting to bed at about 1 A.M. for about four hours of sleep. They said that he got no phone calls during the night.

Mr. Ford reached his desk at about 7:40 A.M. and after receiving his regular early-morning intelligence briefing, he met with Mr. Kissinger for about 45 minutes. He saw the Secretary of State three more times during the morning before meeting with the Security Council.