

NYTimes MAY 16 1975

# After the Mayaguez

Only a profound sense of relief can follow the successful recovery of the American merchant vessel Mayagüez and its crew from their brief and bizarre Cambodian captivity. By all accounts so far, the swift military operation which President Ford ordered was conducted with admirable efficiency, against nerve-wracking difficulties.

It was a narrow escape. This fact alone, quite aside from the inevitable political questions arising from the incident, requires that the Mayagüez affair now be scrutinized in minute detail, from start to finish, by responsible committees of Congress. A quiet and careful study of all details pertaining to this fortunately short-lived crisis might draw significant lessons about foreign policy decision-making and execution, data that could be useful in avoiding any repetition of the nervous hours through which both Government and public have passed.

The list of unanswered questions is long: why was the Mayaguez passing through disputed waters, particularly after at least two incidents of unfriendly interference with other vessels had been reported in the immediately preceding days? Did the White House, after first news of the ship's seizure, exhaust all orderly diplomatic alternatives before moving in to recover the Mayagüez and crew by force? At some early date, the Administration should make available to Congress all the relevant diplomatic messages of the past days.

The support which President Ford is now receiving from much of the public, including this newspaper, for having acted as decisively as he did is premised on acceptance of official statements that the Mayagüez was on a genuinely innocent voyage, and not fulfilling any intelligence mission as the Cambodian Government belatedly claimed. This aspect should be fully explored now, lest subsequent suspicions and accusations arise to cast doubt on the whole incident.

Was the dispatch of the Marines to Thailand absolutely essential to the rescue operation? This raised the affair's most troublesome political side-effect, and may yet undermine United States attempts to retain working relationships with the Government of Thailand.