



Why Mayaguez Case Called for Force

— Andrew Tully

CRITICISM of President Ford's use of force to rescue the merchant ship Mayaguez and its crew is reminiscent of the lecture delivered by a Washington judge to a householder who had slugged a creep he caught burglarizing his home. The judge said sternly that the householder should have called the cops.

In the Mayaguez case, Mr. Ford is lambasted because he took unilateral action instead of seeking to resolve the grievance through patient diplomacy or adjudication by the United Nations. The United States is held up as a bully, picking on a small and allegedly defenseless Communist Cambodia.

Perhaps the best answer to this argument was offered by a French diplomat in Washington. "But what would you do?" he asked. "In such cases, diplomacy is nonexistent. The Khmer Rouge was simply flaunting its right to violate international law. Had America hesitated, it would have taken months, perhaps years, to get the ship and crew back. You'd have had another Pueblo case."

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IT IS a cogent brief. Every line in the record tells us that Communist regimes will always press every advantage, hoping to get away with their banditry through long and drawn-out diplomatic negotiations.

Yes, the critics are correct in charging that the United States violated its

pledge to the U.N. Charter. Unfortunately, however, the U.N. Charter is a piece of paper violated almost daily by U.N. members. In any event, the United States has learned that when swift action is imperative, the U.N. is a helpless bureaucracy.

Ford tried diplomacy. Both China and the Soviet Union were asked to intercede with the Khmer Rouge. Both refused to do so, meanwhile dispatching encouraging messages to Phnom Penh. From Phnom Penh, from its embassy in Peking, and from Prince Sihanouk, Cambodia's "heir apparent" exile in Peking, came only silence.

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WE SHOULD have been more patient, cry the critics. Well, patience is a relative term. The danger of too much patience in the Mayaguez case was that history had warned us against dawdling. Had we waited, the vessel almost surely would have been moved to the mainland and the crew deposited in prison, their eventual release at the very least uncertain. Moreover, you can bet the Khmer Rouge would have pushed ahead with more harassing "incidents."

Those who championed patience say that there was no evidence that the Mayaguez crew had been harmed or that the vessel would not be returned. But the record also reminds us there was no assurance the crew would not be harmed or that we'd get the Mayaguez back.