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# Mayaguez Reaction Held Slow

Reuter

A top Defense Department official acknowledged yesterday that the United States was too slow in sending military planes to search for the American freighter Mayaguez when it was seized by Cambodian forces last May.

Deputy Defense Secretary William P. Clements Jr. made the concession during testimony before a House International Relations subcommittee reviewing the administration's handling of the crisis.

The Mayaguez incident touched off U.S. bombing attacks against Cambodia in what the administration portrayed as a test of America's determination to stand firm in protecting its foreign interests.

Clements said that although he believed the overall operation to free the ship and its 39-man crew was well done, he agreed with Rep. John H. Buchanan Jr. (R-Ala.) that military reconnaissance to locate the ship could have been begun earlier than it was.

Buchanan said that although the Mayaguez issued a Mayday distress signal, which was relayed to Washington by the embassy in Jakarta at 5:12 a.m. EDT, it was four hours before a search plane was dispatched from Thailand.

Clements suggested that American commanders near such trouble spots as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam have become sensitive to congressional restrictions on military operations there, which may have restrained them somewhat.

"I would like to think that our response would have been different in another part of the world or under a different set of circumstances," Clements said.

Clements said the Defense Department is working to shorten the time it would take reconnaissance planes to react to any similar situation in the future.