

MAYAGUEZ OPERATION CRITICIZED IN REPORT

G.A.O. Study Finds U.S. Failed to
Exhaust Diplomatic Channels

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 5—A Congressionally sponsored study of the Mayaguez incident of last year has concluded that the Ford Administration did not exhaust all diplomatic possibilities before launching an attack against Cambodia to rescue the cargo ship and her crew.

The report, made public today by the General Accounting Office, a Congressional agency that conducts audits and investigations of the executive branch, said that while the Administration undertook a number of diplomatic initiatives, "little weight appears to have been given to indications that the Cambodians might be working out a political solution."

The report was ordered by the Political and Military Affairs Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee.

White House Voices Disagreement

The unstated conclusion of the report was that it had not been necessary for President Ford to order bombing of targets in Cambodia or to send marines to the rescue because the Cambodians had already decided to release the crew and the ship. Such a view was expressed in various quarters shortly after the rescue mission.

The White House press secretary, Ron Nessen, said today in California, "Well, we disagree with that conclusion, if that is the conclusion."

Lawrence S. Eagleburger, an executive assistant to Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, in a letter printed in the report, accused the General Accounting Office of "attempts to second-guess the actions of officials acting under the constraints of time." Such attempts, he said, "bring the entire purpose of the report into question."

Mr. Eagleburger's implication was that the report had been released to embarrass Mr. Ford just before his foreign policy debate with Jimmy Carter tomorrow night. Similar accusations about playing politics with foreign policy were made against Mr. Ford shortly after he ordered the military operation.

The G.A.O.'s report did not give the names of countries involved in the diplo-

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matic efforts to obtain the release of the Mayaguez and its crew, but it was learned from Congressional officials that a senior Chinese diplomat in the Middle East had made contact with a foreign ministry official of a neutral country and had asked him to convey a message to the United States.

The message, as stated in the report—with the names omitted—was that the Chinese Government was using its influence with the new revolutionary Communist Government in Cambodia to seek an early release of the ship and "expected it to be released soon."

Although this message was received more than 14 hours before the rescue assault by American marines, the report concluded that "he found no evidence that the State Department attempted to verify" it.

41 U.S. Servicemen Lost

The Mayaguez, bound from Hong Kong to Sattahip, Thailand, was fired upon by Cambodians 60 miles off the Cambodian coast and eight miles from a group of small islands claimed by both Cambodia and Vietnam, in the early morning hours of May 12, 1975, and was then taken into the port of Kompong Som. The rescue operation was launched late in the afternoon of May 14.

Forty-one American servicemen were killed, presumed dead or listed as missing in rescuing a ship and 40-man crew that—it was later acknowledged—had already been released.

The fact that the crew had been released before the rescue operation has been known. The G.A.O. report added details on how American military pilots had spotted the crew on a fishing boat and not on Tang Island, the target of the marines' attack, and on how the local military command had chosen instead to rely on another assessment that the men were still held on the island.

The report listed what it said had been several other failures to evaluate intelligence and utilize it in military operations and Presidential decisions.

The only information previously made public about Administration diplomatic efforts was that the Government had tried to deliver messages to the new Cambodian Government through the Chinese Liaison Office in Washington, through the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Peking, and directly to the Cambodian Embassy in Peking. Those messages were all returned but were presumed to have been read, Administration officials said at the time.