

05/11/76

THE SEIZURE OF THE *MAYAGUEZ*—A CASE STUDY OF CRISIS
MANAGEMENT

(Departments of State and Defense, National Security Council)

COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, D.C.

[B-133001]

HON. DANTE B. FASCELL,
*Chairman, Subcommittee on International Political and Military
Affairs, Committee on International Relations, House of
Representatives.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Your letter of June 23, 1975, asked us to review all aspects of the seizure of the U.S. vessel *Mayaguez* and the subsequent diplomatic and military efforts to secure its release. You also asked that we focus on the crisis management operations of our Government. We were restricted by the executive branch from analyzing the decisionmaking process involved in the management of this crisis and, consequently, our review was basically limited to an analysis of the implementation of the decisions which were made. As you know, however, we are now assisting your subcommittee in collecting and analyzing congressional responses to a questionnaire on executive-legislative communications and the role of Congress in international crises. We will submit a separate report on this questionnaire in the near future.

The Departments of State and Defense and the National Security Council were provided the opportunity to comment on a draft of this report. All comments were considered in preparing the final report. In addition to these official comments, we received the personal views of State's Deputy Under Secretary for Management which are reprinted in appendix III.

The report has been classified Secret by the President's Adviser for National Security Affairs even though the Departments of State and Defense, who provided the information on which the report is based, have no objection to releasing the report as an unclassified document. We believe that all information contained in the report is unclassified but since GAO neither classifies nor declassifies documents, we have abided by the National Security Council's request.

As arranged with your subcommittee staff, we will distribute the report to the Departments of State and Defense, the National Security Council, and other congressional committees. Unless the report becomes unclassified, we will restrict other congressional distribution to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

Sincerely yours,

ELMER B. STAATS,
Comptroller General of the United States.

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S REPORT TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS, COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DIGEST

On May 12, 1975, the U.S. merchant vessel *Mayaguez* was seized by Cambodian naval forces. During the next 3 days, the United States undertook a variety of diplomatic and military actions in an effort to secure the release of the ship and its 40-crew members. Some 65 hours after the seizure of the ship, the crew was released by the Cambodians (the United States did not learn that the crew had been released until several hours after military actions were underway); and a few hours thereafter, U.S. Forces recaptured the *Mayaguez*.

GAO, pursuant to the subcommittee request under a House Resolution of Inquiry, attempted to examine all aspects of the *Mayaguez* incident. Our purpose was to determine how this crisis was handled and to identify lessons which would be of value in the handling of future crises, recognizing that every crisis has its unique characteristics. GAO was restricted by the executive branch from analyzing the decisionmaking process at the highest levels and, consequently, was basically limited to an analysis of the implementation of those decisions. Specifically, we were denied records of National Security Council meetings and information prepared for the Council or for the participants in Council meetings.

GAO noted several points worthy of praise.

- The publicly stated aim of U.S. actions—release of the ship and crew—was achieved.
- U.S. Naval, Marine, and Air Force assets were generally assembled effectively and efficiently.
- Command and control of our communications between the multiservice assets applied, was established expeditiously.
- The willingness of members of the Armed Forces to perform assigned missions despite the personal risks involved was inspiring as was the valor and prowess with which the missions were performed. (See p. 100.)

Several facts became evident.

- The United States did not warn its merchant ships after the *Mayaguez* was seized, despite increasing evidence that Cambodian forces were asserting historical claims to offshore islands and that Cambodia had greatly extended its territorial limit and was seizing ships entering these waters¹ (See p. 111.)
- A significant time elapsed before reconnaissance aircraft were launched to locate the *Mayaguez*. Defense acknowledged the need for improving the process of initiating reconnaissance but did not identify any specific steps being implemented. Defense emphasized that, because of the sensitive political situation in Southeast Asia, action in that part of the world would be initiated with extreme caution. (See pp. 71-73.)

¹The adequacy of the U.S. mariner warning system is addressed in a separate GAO report, "System to Warn U.S. Mariners of Potential Political/Military Hazards: SS *Mayaguez*, A Case Study," ID-76-33. The report analyzes why 19 hours elapsed before mariners were warned to avoid the seizure area. This delay was partially due to a failure within the State Department to notify the responsible office. Our report contains recommendations for improving the mariner warning system.

- Some available assets were not used to obtain better evidence of the location of the crew. Defense indicated that with the limited resources available, their inherent limitations, and the rapid tactical situation, it is difficult to see what more could have been done. GAO acknowledges the difficulties and uncertainties existing at the time, but believes that several available opportunities for attempting to reduce the major uncertainty during the incident—the location of the *Mayaguez* crew—were not pursued. The crew's location was central to developing a U.S. response. (See pp. 76-84.)
- Some important details on the possible location of the crew did not reach decisionmakers. Reports prepared in Washington and Hawaii on the number of caucasians taken away from Koh Tang Island to the mainland were inaccurate; GAO saw no evidence that the military command centers knew of several details which would have lent credence to an interpretation that most or all of the crew had left Koh Tang. Defense stated that information passed to decisionmakers was not inaccurate or intentionally changed. Defense indicated, however, that some details were undoubtedly omitted or inadvertently altered. (See pp. 74-75.)
- While the United States undertook a number of diplomatic initiatives to secure the release of the *Mayaguez* and its crew, little weight appears to have been given to indications that the Cambodians might be working out a political solution. Among these indications was a report received more than 14 hours before the Marine assault was initiated which indicated that a foreign Government was using its influence with Cambodia to seek an early release of the *Mayaguez* and expected it to be released soon. Also, several possibilities for communication with the new Cambodian Government were not attempted; contrary to Administration statements, GAO found no evidence that the United States broadcast directly into Cambodia. The Department of State maintained that all effective diplomatic initiatives were taken within the severe time constraints. (See pp. 66-69.)
- Marine assault forces planned and carried out the assault on Koh Tang with inaccurate estimates of Cambodian strength on that island. GAO was unable to determine why the available more accurate intelligence estimates did not reach the task group and assault force commanders. The Commander in Chief, Pacific, has subsequently established a feedback system designed to ensure acknowledgement of critical intelligence by all concerned commands. (See pp. 91-92.)
- The degree to which relative military risks were assessed is not clear. The risks involved in the Marine assault on Koh Tang—even without the traditional presoftening of the Island by bombardment and with a relatively slow Marine buildup rate—were deemed acceptable. On the other hand, the risk of having an aircraft carrying the Marine assault commander fly below a 6,000 foot altitude restriction to obtain first-hand information on Koh Tang, was deemed unacceptable. Defense officials said that all risks were appropriately evaluated but

GAO was unable to ascertain whether the President or other National Security Council participants requested or received information concerning relative risks involved. (See p. 100.)

- In retrospect, the final Marine assault and the bombing of the Cambodian mainland did not influence the Cambodian decision to release the crew. However, certain U.S. actions probably did influence that decision; for example, the sinking of gunboats and U.S. air activity in the area. Defense stated that the decision to assault Koh Tang was reasonable in lieu of information at the time and that the mainland was bombed since Cambodia had the capability to interfere with the operation. GAO does not question the purpose of either the assault or the mainland bombing. (See p. 101.)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE CONGRESS

GAO believes that the U.S. response to the *Mayaguez* seizure points to the desirability of having the Congress:

- Support and/or sponsor, perhaps under U.N. auspices, some form of "satellite hotline" linking all world capitals. (See p. 101.)
- Require that, after certain crises, a crisis review group assess Government performance and procedures in order to identify possible changes which would improve the U.S. responses to future crises. Such a review would require access to National Security Council material if the review is to be of maximum value in the handling of future crises. (See p. 102.)

AGENCY COMMENTS

The Department of State did not challenge the facts in our report. However, in transmitting the Department's comments, the Deputy Under Secretary for Management expressed his personal view that the report was inadequate and misleading and that it attempted to second-guess the actions of officials acting under the constraints of time. GAO disagrees. We believe that our report is a fair and objective analysis of the factual information which we received. (See p. 102.)

State took the position on the proposal of a "satellite hotline" that even if an internationally sponsored communications link had existed, it would not necessarily have contributed to a solution because the Cambodians might not have chosen to use it. GAO does not view this obvious fact as a valid objection to our suggestion that the Congress might wish to explore the concept. (See p. 101.)

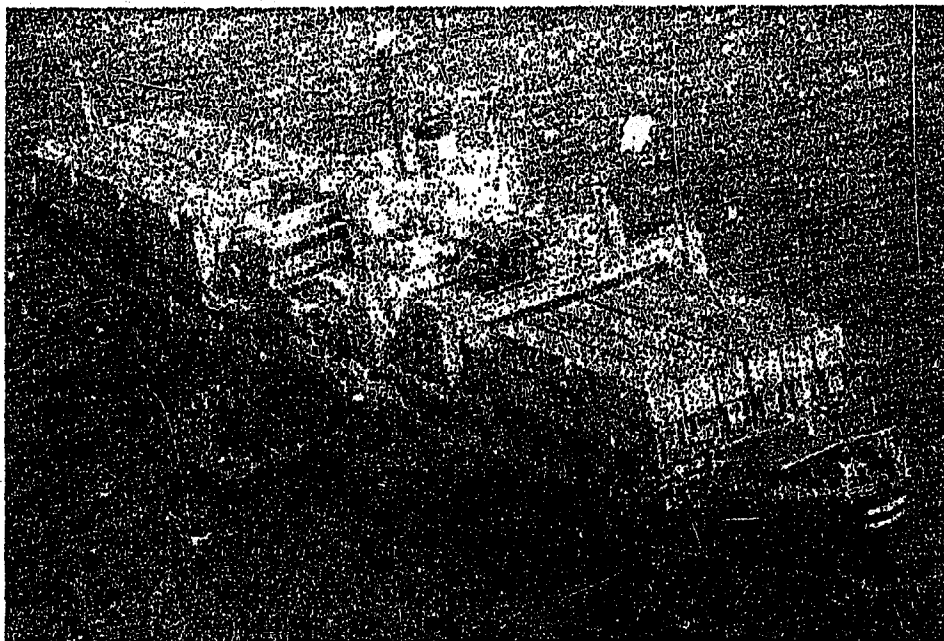
The Department of Defense did not comment on our suggestions that Congress might consider the desirability of a "satellite hotline" and a crisis review group. Defense, also, did not question the accuracy of our report but rather, in a few instances, our interpretation of the facts. (See pp. 102-104.)

CHAPTER 1.—INTRODUCTION

The U.S. merchant ship *Mayaguez* and its 40-man crew were seized by a Cambodian gunboat shortly after 3 a.m. (2 p.m., Cambodian time) on May 12, 1975, about 6 or 7 miles south of the Cambodian claimed Island of Poulo Wai, which lies about 60 miles south/south-

west of the Cambodian mainland. Cambodia had earlier seized, or attempted to seize, and then released other ships operating within its claimed territorial limit. The *Mayaguez* is a container ship owned by U.S. Sea-Land Service, Inc., a subsidiary of the R. J. Reynolds Industries, and operated a regularly scheduled shuttle service between Hong Kong; Sattahip, Thailand; and Singapore; feeding container ships in Sea-Land's West Coast—Far East service.

After a variety of U.S. diplomatic and military initiatives, Cambodia released the *Mayaguez* crew on May 14 at about 7:30 p.m. (6:30 a.m., May 15, Cambodian time).



On June 23, the Chairman of the House Committee on International Relations, in a floor discussion of House Resolutions of Inquiry directing the Secretary of State to provide information concerning the seizure of the *Mayaguez* and its crew, pointed out that the Committee had referred the Resolutions to its Subcommittee on International Political and Military Affairs and that GAO was being requested to conduct a study of the incident. Shortly thereafter, the Subcommittee Chairman asked GAO to (a) independently establish or confirm the chronology of events of the *Mayaguez* incident, (b) compile a list of key decisionmakers, and (c) conduct a thorough investigation of all aspects of the seizure and of subsequent diplomatic efforts and military operations to secure its release.

Similar Resolutions of Inquiry were referred to the House Armed Services Committee.

Our review was hampered by an inability to gain access to certain executive branch records and by extensive delays in gaining access to other records and to personnel. However, Defense cooperation and responsiveness was generally good.

During the *Mayaguez* incident, the President called the National Security Council (NSC) into session on four different occasions. The U.S. reaction to the seizure, by all available accounts, was debated and designed during these sessions.

We were unable to obtain access to the information necessary to analyze the (1) NSC decision process, (2) degree to which known information was made available to NSC decisionmakers, or to which highly sensitive intelligence information available to NSC was disseminated downward, or (3) the adequacy, timeliness, and accuracy with which NSC policy decisions or requests for information were communicated downward. Similarly, the Departments of State and Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency would not give us any information prepared for the NSC or for their participation in the NSC sessions. Hence, our review was limited for the most part to analyzing the Department of Defense implementation of NSC decisions.

Within these restrictions, the information we were able to develop on the chronology of the *Mayaguez* incident is summarized in chapter 2 and presented as appendix VII, and the information as to the key decisionmakers appears in appendix VI.

CHAPTER 2.—UNFOLDING OF THE *MAYAGUEZ* INCIDENT

The *Mayaguez* incident encompassed some 78 hours from the seizure on Monday, May 12, 1975, until the withdrawal of U.S. Marines from Koh Tang on Thursday, May 15.

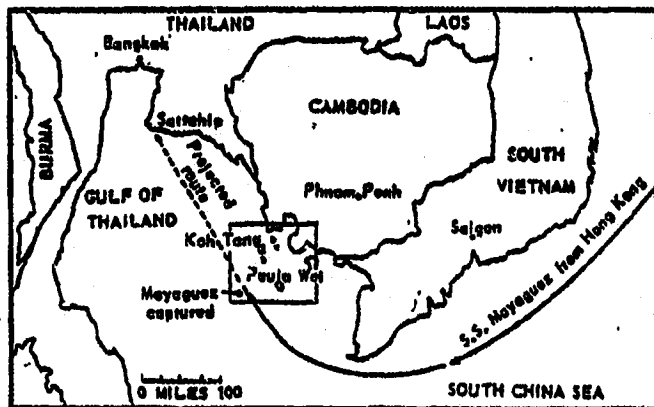
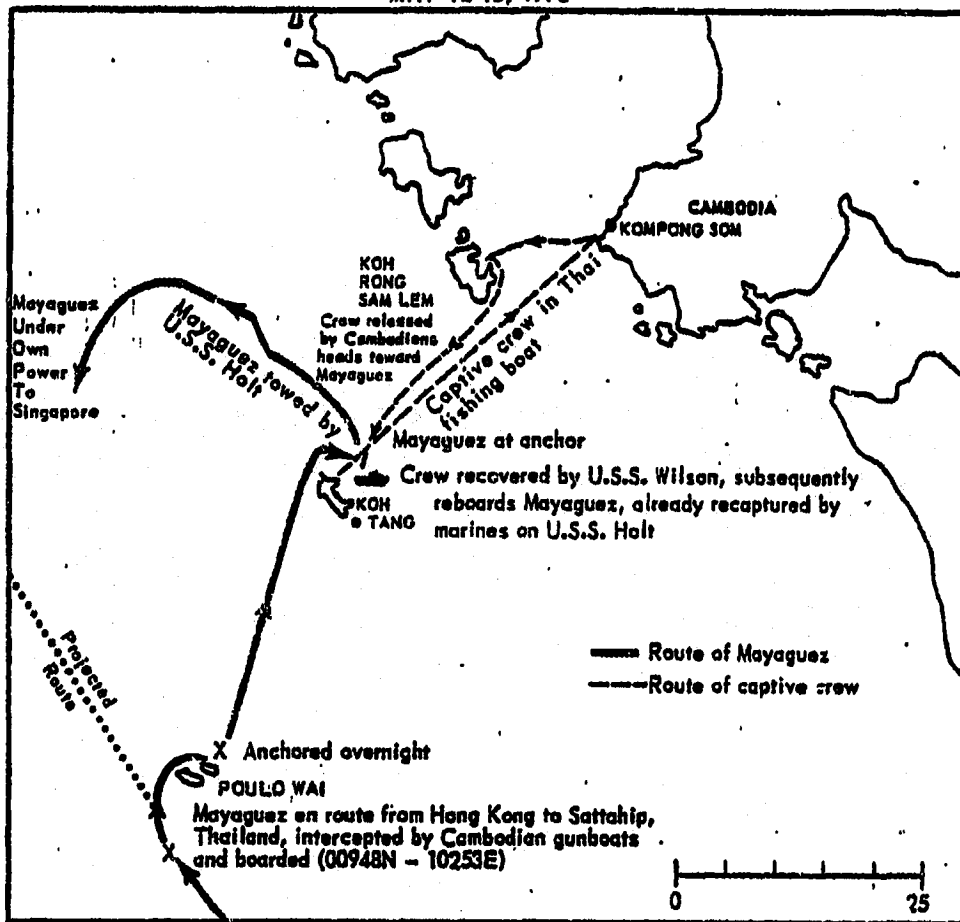
During the remainder of this report, all times are given in eastern standard time. It should be noted that, because of daylight saving time, it was 11 hours earlier in Washington than in Cambodia during the *Mayaguez* incident.

The SS *Mayaguez*, a U.S. merchant vessel enroute from Hong Kong to Sattahip, Thailand, was fired upon, seized, and boarded near the Island of Poulo Wai by Cambodian naval forces at 3:18 a.m., on May 12, 1975. President Ford, after meeting with the National Security Council at about noon that day, issued a statement that he considered the seizure an act of piracy and that failure by the Cambodians to release the ship would have the most serious consequences.

During the next 3 days, a number of diplomatic efforts were initiated including appeals through the People's Republic of China, and through the United Nations, all of which appeared to be futile to decisionmakers. In the meantime, reconnaissance aircraft had been tasked to survey the situation and, accordingly, attempted to follow the whereabouts of the *Mayaguez* and its crew.

It was determined that the *Mayaguez* was moved from the Island of Poulo Wai, where it stayed most of May 12, and was taken to the Island of Koh Tang, about midway between Poulo Wai and the Cambodian mainland where it stayed during the remainder of the incident. Several hours later on May 13 (early evening in Cambodia), the entire crew was transferred to two small fishing boats which anchored just off the coast of Koh Tang. Later on May 13 (daylight May 14 in Cambodia), the crew was taken to Kompong Som aboard one of the fishing boats, but was not taken ashore. Shortly thereafter the boat proceeded, on May 14, to the offshore Island of Koh Rong Som Lem and the crew went ashore. Later on May 14 (daylight May 15 in Cambodia), the crew was put aboard the same fishing boat and released. The boat then made the approximately 3-hour trip toward the *Mayaguez* during which the crew was recovered by the U.S.S. *Wilson*.

WHEREABOUTS OF MAYAGUEZ AND CREW
MAY 12-15, 1975



During this period, reconnaissance aircraft noted that possible caucasians were taken off the *Mayaguez*; they also observed possible caucasians aboard the vessel that docked at the mainland port of Kompong Som. Reconnaissance did not follow the vessel after it reached Kompong Som, and it was not until the boat carrying the crew returned toward the *Mayaguez* that their whereabouts became certain.

While reconnaissance aircraft were attempting to follow the *Mayaguez* and crew, the President held three more meetings with the National Security Council, at which decisions were made concerning the military response appropriate in the light of the apparently futile diplomatic efforts.

Military assets readily available were directed to proceed toward the area of the seizure; these included the destroyers U.S.S. *Wilson* and U.S.S. *Holt*, the carrier U.S.S. *Coral Sea*, and Marines from Okinawa and the Philippines. In an effort to prevent the crew from being taken to the mainland, where their extraction by force would be most difficult, and where their extraction through negotiation could be most humiliating, a decision was made to isolate the Island of Koh Tang, where the crew was thought to be. Several Cambodian patrol boats were sunk or immobilized in doing this. After repeated attempts to force one boat containing "possible caucasians," back to Koh Tang (the fishing boat described above), this boat was allowed to proceed to the mainland.

With diplomatic efforts apparently proving futile and with Naval forces coming within operating range of Koh Tang, a decision was made to undertake a Marine assault on the Island of Koh Tang on May 14 ("first light" on May 15 in Cambodia) with an almost simultaneous reboarding of the *Mayaguez*. At about 7 p.m. on May 14 Marines from Thailand began landing by helicopter on the Island of Koh Tang, where they met much heavier resistance than had been anticipated, and at 8:30 p.m., additional Marines boarded the *Mayaguez* and found it empty. At about 8 p.m. a translation of a Cambodian broadcast indicated to Washington decisionmakers that the Cambodians were about to release the *Mayaguez*. Since there was no mention of the crew in that broadcast, military operations proceeded as planned. In fact the crew had been released by the Cambodians at about the time the Marine assault began.

A fishing vessel carrying caucasians waving white flags was spotted by reconnaissance aircraft at about 10:30 p.m. (daylight in Cambodia), and the crew taken aboard the U.S.S. *Wilson* at about 11 p.m. At about that time, aircraft from the *Coral Sea* were undertaking bombing raids on the Cambodian mainland—raids deemed necessary to protect U.S. Marines engaged in hostilities on Koh Tang. After the crew was determined to be in U.S. hands, the President issued orders to suspend all offensive military actions. Nonetheless, to protect the Marines on Koh Tang, it was deemed necessary to send in a second wave of Marines. Fighting continued for several hours, and the last Marines were not extracted from Koh Tang until about 9 a.m. on May 15.

During the Marine assault, 18 U.S. military personnel were killed or missing and presumed dead and 50 were wounded. In addition, 23 U.S. Air Force personnel were killed when a helicopter moving them into position for possible *Mayaguez* recovery action, crashed. Defense has indicated that 47 Cambodians were killed, including 10 boat pilots, 55 were wounded and an unknown number were missing.

CHAPTER 3.—U.S. ATTEMPTS AT A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION

U.S. diplomatic initiatives and communications seeking the release of the *Mayaguez* and her crew began approximately 10 hours after the seizure, following the first National Security Council meeting which ended at about 12:45 p.m., May 12, 1975. Between the time of the seizure and the release of the crew, the United States

- issued a public statement demanding the immediate release of the ship (1:50 p.m., May 12),
- attempted to deliver a message to the Cambodians through the People's Republic of China Liaison Office in Washington, D.C. (4:30 p.m., May 12),
- delivered messages to the Cambodian Embassy and the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China in Peking (12:10 a.m., May 13),
- requested U.N. Secretary General Waldheim's assistance in securing the release of the ship and crew (1-2 p.m., May 14), and
- responded to a local Cambodian broadcast that the *Mayaguez* would be released with a public offer to cease military operations if the Cambodians stated they would release the crew (9:15 p.m., May 14).

Administration officials stated that they are confident the Cambodians received U.S. demands for the release of the *Mayaguez* and its crew. According to the Secretary of State, the absence of any communications from the Cambodians precluded a diplomatic solution.

U.S. ACTIONS

At 1:50 p.m. on May 12, 1975, following a noon meeting of the National Security Council (NSC), the White House received the following statement on the seizure.

We have been informed that a Cambodian naval vessel has seized an American merchant ship on the high seas and forced it to the port of Kompong Som. The President has met with the NSC. He considers this seizure an act of piracy. He has instructed the State Department to demand the immediate release of the ship. Failure to do so would have the most serious consequences.

Shortly thereafter, the Department of State requested Huang Chen, Head of the Chinese Liaison Office in Washington, to call at the Department. At 4:30 p.m., Huang Chen met with Deputy Secretary Ingersoll but refused to accept a message for the Cambodian authorities.

The State Department then requested the U.S. liaison office in Peking to deliver messages to the Cambodian Embassy there and to the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China. These messages were delivered at approximately 12:10 a.m. on Tuesday, May 13. The following day, the Chinese returned their message undelivered to the Cambodians and the Cambodians sent theirs back through the mails.

Sometime between 1 and 2 p.m. on May 14 (about 3 to 4 hours before the orders were issued to begin military assault operations) Ambassador Scali delivered a letter to U.N. Secretary Waldheim requesting his assistance in securing the release of the *Mayaguez* and its crew. The letter cited the absence of response to U.S. appeals through diplo-

matic channels and stated that the United States reserved "the right to take such measures as may be necessary to protect the lives of American citizens and property, including appropriate measures of self-defense under article 51 of the United Nations Charter." Secretary General Waldheim, in response, directed messages to the Cambodians in Phnom Penh and Peking and to the United States. At approximately 7 p.m. on May 14, he released a statement that he had communicated with the Cambodians and the United States and appealed to both governments "to refrain from further acts of force in order to facilitate the process of peaceful settlement." According to U.N. records, the Secretary General did not receive a reply from the Cambodians until May 19.

At 7:07 p.m. on May 14, at almost the same time the Marines began landing on Koh Tang, the Phnom Penh domestic radio broadcast a message in Cambodian. The following extract is from a summary of the broadcast, which was available in Washington shortly after 8 p.m.

* * * [the royal government] will order the *Mayaguez* to withdraw from Cambodian territorial waters and will warn it against further espionage or provocative activities. This applies to the *Mayaguez* or any other ships like the ship flying the Panama flag which we released on May 9, 1975.

Administration officials stated that, since the Cambodian message made no specific mention of the crew, there was no firm basis upon which to halt U.S. military actions. (The original White House statement of May 12 (see p. 66) similarly referred only to the ship and did not mention the crew.) In response, the White House issued a press release at 9:15 p.m. which acknowledged receipt of the broadcast and stated:

As you know, we have seized the ship. As soon as you issue a statement that you are prepared to release the crew members you hold unconditionally and immediately, we will promptly cease military operations.

Unbeknown to the United States, the crew had been released at approximately the same time as the Cambodian broadcast and were aboard a Thai fishing boat enroute toward the *Mayaguez*, when the White House released this statement. Later on May 14, Ambassador Scali sent a letter to the President of the U.N. Security Council stating that the United States had "taken certain appropriate measures under Article 51 * * * to achieve the release of the vessel and its crew."

Administration officials have stated that the diplomatic messages intended for the Cambodians did not include a time deadline but did denote an immediate time frame for the release of the ship and its crew. We were unable to confirm that the diplomatic messages to the Cambodians did not include a deadline because the Department of State refused to release these documents. Regardless of whether the United States communicated a specific time deadline, U.S. decision-makers judged that the Cambodians had received the U.S. messages and had had sufficient time to respond before the orders were issued to begin the Marine assault and mainland bombing.

DIPLOMATIC OPTIONS NOT USED

Administration officials stated that the United States took the most effective means of communicating—through the People's Republic of China and directly with the Cambodians in Peking. According to the Secretary of State, the absence of any communications from the Cambodians or any other source precluded a diplomatic solution. No government except the Chinese appeared to have diplomatic influence with the new Cambodian Government. Administration officials told us that the Chinese link for communicating with the Cambodians had been successfully used before.

During our review we explored several other options which were available at the time.

- Contacting Cambodians in Phnom Penh directly.
- Contacting Cambodian representatives in Paris and Moscow.
- Enlisting the diplomatic assistance of governments other than the Chinese.

With respect to the first option, the Secretary of State and the White House stated that the United States broadcast its response to the Cambodian message of May 14 directly into Cambodia. The White House Press Secretary stated that the United States broadcast its response on a radio frequency "we knew would be monitored" in Cambodia. When releasing the text of the U.S. response to the press, he stated that the United States did not know if this route was sufficiently fast and that the news channels might be the fastest way for the message to get through. On May 16, the Secretary of State said that the United States took "drastic communications measures" and broadcast the U.S. statement directly into Cambodia. However, we found no evidence that the United States did directly broadcast its response to Cambodia. There were, during the incident, a number of Voice of America broadcasts in Khmer (the Cambodian language), and in September 1975 a ranking Cambodian official claimed that Phnom Penh's first knowledge of the seizure was through "the American broadcasts." There were, however, no Voice of America Khmer language broadcasts from the time the Phnom Penh radio broadcast was available in Washington (8:00 p.m., May 14) and the time the *Mayaguez* and its crew were recovered.

With respect to the options of contacting Cambodian representatives in Paris and Moscow or seeking the diplomatic assistance of governments other than the Chinese, the Department of State said that the People's Republic of China was the only country which might have had official representatives in Phnom Penh at the time and that there was no reason to believe that the new government's personnel in Paris or Moscow were accredited diplomatic representatives or had rapid means of communication with Phnom Penh. The Department's view was that, given the severe time constraints, it had taken all effective diplomatic action.

We agree that the Department of State took the most reasonable and direct route to reach the Cambodian authorities (other than attempting direct contact with Phnom Penh). However, given the situation that Cambodia was almost totally cut off from communications with the outside world, extra efforts to communicate with the Cambodian authorities might have been warranted. Such efforts might

not have produced positive results, but if they had been made simultaneously with the diplomatic initiatives which were attempted, there should not have been any lost time.

Little weight appears to have been given to a report almost 14 hours before the Marine assault, from a U.S. Embassy in a Middle Eastern country that a third-country official had learned from a senior [security deletion] diplomat that his government was using its influence with Cambodia and expected the *Mayaguez* to be released soon. The report indicated that this [security deletion] source knew that an officer from the [security deletion] had called on the [security deletion] Ministry of Foreign Affairs the preceding day. The Department of State commented that this was an unevaluated report of questionable validity and that it contradicted the [security deletion] refusal in Washington to relay a message from the U.S. Government to the Cambodians. We found no evidence that the Department attempted to verify this report.

GAO was unable to determine the content of the U.S. messages delivered in Peking because the Department of State refused to release these documents.

DIPLOMATIC IMPACT

During the incident, the United States did not consult with other governments but did, concurrent with the Marine assault, inform governments throughout the world of its position. On the evening of May 14, the State Department phoned various embassies in Washington with a message stating in part that the United States was "taking appropriate military action to secure the release of the ship and its crew and to assure the success of the operation." After the ship and crew had been recovered, the State Department instructed all U.S. diplomatic posts to "inform local officials at the highest appropriate level" of the circumstances surrounding the seizure, military action against Cambodia, and recovery of the ship and its crew. Reports from a few Missions, however, indicated uncertainty as to whether the *Mayaguez* was seized in international or Cambodian territorial waters. Therefore, on May 19 the State Department instructed all U.S. diplomatic posts that if there was any reason to believe a host government was unclear on this issue the post should provide clarification of the U.S. position that the ship was in international waters.

In general, U.S. diplomatic posts reported that most host governments reacted favorably to U.S. actions. The most serious adverse reaction was in Thailand, whose government formally protested the use of Thai territory for U.S. military actions. The United States, in response, expressed regrets over the misunderstandings that had arisen between Thailand and the United States "in regard to the temporary placement of marines at Utapao to assist in the recovery of the SS *Mayaguez*." The U.S. diplomatic note satisfied the Thai Government.

CHAPTER 4.—CONSULTATION WITH THE CONGRESS

Section 3 of the War Powers Resolution requires that "The President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing U.S. Armed Forces into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by

the circumstances * * *” The term “consult” indicates clear congressional intent that the President is to do more than inform the Congress of decisions he has already made and excuses him from prior consultation only when instances of such extreme emergency make it impossible to consult in advance. The report accompanying the original House bill, made it clear that consultation was not:

synonymous with merely being informed. Rather, consultation in this provision means that a decision is pending on a problem and that Members of Congress are being asked by the President for their advice and opinions and, in appropriate circumstances their approval of action contemplated.

Furthermore, for consultation to be meaningful, the President himself must participate and all information relevant to the situation must be made available.

The following contacts were made by the President, his staff, and executive branch officials with the Congress during the unfolding of the *Mayaguez* incident. There may have been other contacts of an informal nature for which there is no record.

May 13 (5:50 p.m.-11 p.m.).—At the direction of the President, White House staff officers contacted 10 House and 11 Senate Members regarding military measures the President had directed to prevent the *Mayaguez* and its crew from being transferred to the Cambodian mainland and to prevent Cambodian reinforcement of Koh Tang.

May 14 (11:15 a.m.-12 n.).—11 House and 11 Senate Members were contacted and informed that 3 Cambodian patrol craft had been sunk and 4 others immobilized in an effort to prevent removal of the *Mayaguez* crew to the mainland.

May 14 (2 p.m.-5 p.m.).—Briefing of House International Relations Committee by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. Briefing of Senate Foreign Relations Committee by Legal Advisor, Office of Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Briefing of House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Department of Defense by National Intelligence Officer for South and Southeast Asia, Central Intelligence Agency. Briefing of House Committee on Armed Services by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

May 14 (6:30 p.m.).—The President, at a meeting in the White House Cabinet Room, personally briefed the congressional leadership on his specific orders for the recapture of the ship and crew. Administration sources indicated that, after White House staff officers had contacted Members of Congress on May 13 and the morning of May 14, each individual view of those Members was communicated to the President. Also, according to the State Department Legal Advisor, at the meeting between the President and the congressional leadership on May 14, an active exchange of views occurred concerning the operations that had already taken place and, with one exception, no objection was expressed by the congressional leadership about the military operations that were to take place later on the evening of May 14.

Certain of those Members of Congress who were "consulted" on both May 13 and May 14 have stated that the President merely informed them of decisions already made. However, there was sufficient time to consult in a more meaningful manner. It is clear, moreover, that the "active exchange of views" between the President and congressional leadership on May 14 began about 1½ hours after the "execute" orders had been given for the Marine assault on Koh Tang, to retake the *Mayaguez*, and to make the air strikes on the Cambodian mainland. An additional concern that may be raised is that, at the briefings of the various committees on May 14, there were no administration officials who had been in on the decisionmaking process.

The available evidence suggests less than full compliance with section 3. Due to the ambiguity of this section, and without more definitive guidelines than are present in the legislative history of that section, we cannot say that in the situation surrounding the rescue of the *Mayaguez* crew, the President failed to comply with section 3 of the War Powers Resolution.

Section 4 of the War Powers Resolution requires the President to report to the Congress within 48 hours the basis for, facts surrounding, and estimated duration of the introduction of U.S. Armed Forces in three types of situations. In compliance with section 4, deliveries of the President's written report were made to the offices of the Speaker of the House and the President Pro tempore of the Senate at approximately 2:30 a.m. on May 15, about 4 hours before the expiration of the 48-hour period.

We are presently undertaking an inquiry into the flow of information from the executive branch to the Congress during the unfolding of international crises. It appears that the flow of such information could certainly be improved; it is also possible that the War Powers Resolution should be amended so that, for crises involving actual or potential use of U.S. Forces in hostilities, the consultation provision might be made more specific as to precisely who in the Congress is to be informed, under what circumstances, and through what means.

CHAPTER 5.—IMPLEMENTATION OF MILITARY ACTIONS

U.S. military involvement in the *Mayaguez* incident progressed from collecting information through military reconnaissance and other means to assembling sufficient military assets in the Gulf of Thailand which would permit recovery of the ship and crew to identifying military options and recommendations for the President to implementation of the selected options.

U.S. military strategy was to:

1. locate the *Mayaguez*,
2. prevent further movement of the ship,
3. isolate Koh Tang to prevent movement of the crew or reinforcement of the island, and
4. retake the *Mayaguez* and rescue the crew believed to be on Koh Tang (targets on the mainland were bombed to protect U.S. Forces).

The military actions discussed in this chapter were implemented under a perceived need for quick action. One Defense official told us that Cambodia was believed to be acting to embarrass the United States and its prime motive was to gain control of American prisoners

of war to use for various purposes. The United States had to respond quickly to recover the crew because it was believed that once they were moved to the Cambodian mainland their recovery by force would be extremely difficult. Another Defense official told us that if the crew had reached the Cambodian mainland, a diplomatic solution—similar to the negotiations to secure the release of the *Pueblo* crew—would have been about the only alternative. The *Pueblo* negotiations are widely considered a humiliating experience for the United States.

RECONNAISSANCE

At 5:12 a.m. on May 12, the Defense Department's National Military Command Center received notification of the seizure and discussed the report with the Pacific Command in Hawaii at 5:34 a.m. Almost 2 hours later, at 7:30 a.m., the Center directed the Pacific Command to launch a reconnaissance aircraft from Utapao, Thailand, to obtain a photographic, visual, or radar fix on the ship and its armed escort. It was not until 9:57 a.m. (nighttime in Cambodia), however, that the first reconnaissance plane, a P-3 at Utapao, was launched. The question arises as to why almost 5 hours elapsed before this elementary action was undertaken.

Although the *Mayaguez* was only moved a short distance from the point of seizure during this 5 hours, the delay in launching aircraft could have considerably increased the potential search area for reconnaissance and the vessel could have been moved to the Cambodian mainland.

Defense has stated that, as soon as the report of the seizure was received, the requirement to locate the vessel was immediately recognized and the process started. The Thailand-based P-3 was not kept on alert, so it had to be readied, the crew briefed, the mission planned, and all other pretakeoff activities completed. Given the situation, Defense said that the aircraft was launched in remarkable time.¹

According to Defense, the P-3 was the proper craft to assign to this mission because of its unique capabilities. A P-3 is a large, propeller-driven aircraft specially equipped for long-range surveillance. Jet fighters were initially considered for reconnaissance but were rejected due to their lack of staying power and the fact that their use might have been interpreted as a military signal. Unlike the P-3, however, jet aircraft were on alert in Thailand and could have been quickly launched. Other aircraft in Thailand were also available for and suited to such a reconnaissance mission. For example, the AC-130, which provided coverage after the *Mayaguez* was located, is specifically equipped to operate at night.

Although other aircraft in Thailand probably could have been launched sooner, the local U.S. command had no operational authority to launch aircraft for reconnaissance purposes closer than 12 miles to Cambodian territory. [Security deletion.] Approval for the launch of reconnaissance aircraft into Cambodian airspace originated in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

¹ A P-3 aircraft in the Philippines was on ready alert but the flying time to the vicinity of the seizure was about 4 hours. The flying time from Utapao, however, was only 40 minutes.

Defense acknowledged the need to improve the process of initiating reconnaissance but did not identify any specific steps being implemented. It did emphasize that because of the sensitive political situation in Southeast Asia action in that part of the world was initiated with extreme caution.

LOCATING THE CREW

Both during and after the *Mayaguez* crisis, executive branch officials stressed the uncertainty that existed over the crew's location. It was believed possible that some crew members might be on the *Mayaguez*, on Koh Tang, and on the Cambodian mainland:

There was evidence that American prisoners were to be moved to Koh Tang Island by the Cambodians. There were visual reports that possible caucasians had been taken off the *Mayaguez* and that personnel were being transferred to Koh Tang. About 12 hours later, there were additional visual reports that "30-40 people on decision thought possible to be caucasian" had been taken to the Cambodian mainland. We saw no evidence which indicated that any crew members were still aboard the *Mayaguez*.

Available information

The first U.S. reconnaissance aircraft arrived on the scene at about 10:30 a.m. (nighttime in Cambodia). It identified a ship of the same class but could not positively identify the *Mayaguez*. At 9:16 p.m. (daylight in Cambodia) the third U.S. reconnaissance aircraft on the scene positively identified the *Mayaguez*. It was "dead" in the water at Poulo Wai Island, 60 miles from the Cambodian mainland and only several miles from where it was boarded. From this time forward, the *Mayaguez* was under continuous aerial surveillance.

Several hours later, at about 2:30 a.m. on May 13, reconnaissance aircraft reported that the *Mayaguez* was dead in the water at Koh Tang, approximately 30 miles from Poulo Wai. The *Mayaguez* remained dead in the water, 1 mile off Koh Tang Island, until recaptured on May 14.

Between 5:54 a.m. and 8:27 a.m. on May 13 (dusk in Cambodia), the local U.S. command filed six situation reports on the location of the *Mayaguez* crew based on oral reports of visual sightings by U.S. aircraft. At 5:54 a.m., the command reported "smaller vessels now tied up to *Mayaguez* and a ladder over starboard side of *Mayaguez*." Approximately 30 minutes later, two reports stated that two boats which had been tied up to the *Mayaguez* were moving toward Koh Tang Island—one had "a lot of people on board," and the other, a small fishing-type vessel, "appears to have caucasian personnel on board." Two subsequent reports indicated that "personnel are disembarking on island" and "two small boats offloading personnel on island and they are moving toward interior of island." An 8:27 a.m., report concluded that "all personnel appear to have been transferred to island. Both small boats are at island."

We were not able to determine why the local command reached this conclusion. Defense was not able to locate the written debriefings of pilots who observed caucasians being transferred. After his release, the *Mayaguez* captain indicated that the crew had never set foot on Koh

Tang Island but, until being transferred to the mainland, had been held captive aboard two fishing vessels docked several hundred yards off the beach.

For about the next 12 hours, there were several reports of small boats moving between the *Mayaguez* and the island and vessels anchored several hundred yards off the beach. Reconnaissance aircraft observed the movement of only a handful of people during this time period.

From approximately 6:30 p.m. to 11:15 p.m. on May 13 (daylight in Cambodia), U.S. jet fighters observed and attempted to turn around five boats headed from Koh Tang toward the Cambodian mainland. Three boats were successfully forced back to Koh Tang; one boat sank when ordnance directed at its rudder caused a fire; the fifth boat—described as a 40-foot fishing vessel—eventually docked in Kompong Som harbor at 11:15 p.m. Despite repeated warning shots and use of riot control agents, this fishing boat refused to return to Koh Tang.

In an attempt to determine who was on the boat, U.S. jets made repeated visual reconnaissance passes at low altitudes (between 100 and 300 feet) and at minimum safe air speeds (about 450 mph), which permitted only brief looks at the boat. The information obtained by pilots was passed to the on-scene commander—a C-130 aircraft acting as an airborne battlefield command and control center—which in turn relayed the information to the [security deletion]. As far as we were able to determine, only one aircrew included information from their visual reconnaissance passes in a written report.² This report indicated that the boat was carrying "30-40 people on decision thought, possible to be caucasian."

Because many of the pilot's verbal reports were not put in writing, Defense cooperated by identifying and setting up interviews with its personnel involved in visual reconnaissance of this particular fishing boat. The pilots we interviewed indicated that there was no way of determining for certain that any of the people on this boat were members of the *Mayaguez* crew but that its passengers appeared to be caucasian.

Details about why caucasians were suspected of being aboard the fishing boat apparently never reached Thailand, Hawaii, or Washington. A Defense official told us that even at low altitudes and slow air speeds, a jet pilot could not distinguish a caucasian from an oriental. Such an assignment was both unprecedented and difficult. Nevertheless, the pilots observed that the majority of passengers visible on the boat's deck appeared too large to be orientals, no weapons were visible, passengers' clothing was brightly colored or white, and appeared unusual—a black turtleneck, yellow slickers, and they were not fired at from the fishing boat. However, they were not able to say with 100 percent certainty that the 30 to 40 passengers were caucasian or members of the *Mayaguez* crew. We have seen no indications that these details reached higher level decisionmakers. Defense officials we interviewed knew only that jet pilots were not able to say for certain whether there were or were not caucasians aboard the boat.

Some Defense officials in Hawaii and Washington told us that only a few possible caucasians were believed to have been taken to the main-

² Air Force intelligence officers debrief an aircrew after a mission and file an operational report, known as an oprep.

land. The Secretary of State said that a substantial number of crewmen were believed to be on Koh Tang. Both the Pacific Command and the Department of State published documents indicating that a small number of possible caucasians had been taken to the mainland; the Command reported 8 to 9, State reported 6 to 8.

Neither the pilots nor airborne battlefield command and control center personnel we interviewed recall hearing of or making an estimate of 6 to 9 caucasians aboard the boat. The consensus—from various pilots involved in low passes over the fishing boat—was that there were 30 to 40 people on the deck; several interviewees stated that there was no specific estimate as to how many of these were possible caucasians. Two individuals, however, said they reported that all the people on the deck were possible caucasians. Command and control center personnel stated that the estimate of 10 survivors from a sunken Cambodian patrol boat may have been confused with the report made at about the same time that there were possible caucasians aboard the fishing vessel.

In retrospect, the information collected by pilots under difficult circumstances appears to have been accurate but to have been incompletely or inaccurately passed to decisionmakers.

Defense stated that their information was not inaccurate or intentionally changed, although some details were undoubtedly omitted or inadvertently altered. More specifically, Defense states that the detailed observations of pilots concerning the suspected caucasians were passed via secure phone to Washington. Our review indicates that reports prepared in Washington and Hawaii on the number of caucasians believed to have been taken to the mainland were inaccurate. We saw no evidence that several details, which lend credence to an interpretation that a large portion of the crew was taken to the mainland ever reached military command centers. Our observations are based on extensive interviews with officials at all levels of the chain of command. Contrary to the Defense assertion, we believe there is no way to determine the impact that accurate or more complete information would have had on the decisionmakers' assessment of the situation or on their final decisions.

Defense stated that, once the fishing boat docked at Kompong Som harbor, it was believed any further action would be unproductive in the light of more pressing requirements at Koh Tang where the majority of crewmen were thought to be. Although continued reconnaissance in the area was directed, the fishing boat was not designated as a target of significant interest. The airborne battlefield command and control center, which ordered U.S. jets to maintain contact with the fishing vessel as it approached the mainland, had no authority to direct aircraft to fly over the mainland. U.S. jets lost visual contact with the boat as it docked in Kompong Som harbor. When the command and control center asked if U.S. jets should follow the boat into the harbor, the local U.S. command replied that U.S. aircraft should "keep their feet wet,"—not fly over Cambodia.

Defense indicated that turning back the boat that had possible caucasians aboard was the paramount task, not identifying the passengers. It believed the crew would be lost once they entered the harbor. However, isolating Koh Tang would have little meaning if the crew had been transferred to the mainland.

We have seen no evidence indicating that any of the crewmen were still aboard the *Mayaguez*. The available information—both visual and other—seemed to indicate that the crew had probably been moved elsewhere. In addition, the stack temperature of the *Mayaguez* had been steadily decreasing since the ship was first reported dead in the water at Koh Tang. An increasing stack temperature might indicate preparation to move the ship and such movement would probably require the presence of crew members. From the time the fishing vessel carrying possible caucasians reached Kompong Som until the commencement of U.S. military operations to recover the crew, there were no reports of people boarding or leaving the *Mayaguez*.

Numerous Defense officials told us that the weight of the evidence suggested that a large portion of the crew was on Koh Tang Island. GAO believes that there is no logical reason for attaching more reliability to a visual report of possible caucasians being transferred to Koh Tang than to a similar report of 30 to 40 people thought to be possible caucasians being taken to the mainland.

Some defense officials also noted that considerable emphasis was placed on the evidence that the American prisoners were to be moved to Koh Tang Island by the Cambodians. There were visual reports that possible caucasians had been taken off the *Mayaguez* and that personnel were being transferred to Koh Tang. However, a subsequent report of possible caucasians on a fishing vessel might suggest that after initially being taken to Koh Tang, members of the crew were being moved again—this time to the mainland. One of the first reports on the seizure indicated that the *Mayaguez* was being taken to the Cambodian mainland. Cambodian patrol boats were attacked to prevent the possible movement of crew members to the mainland. The *Mayaguez* crew consisted of 40 people, and 30 to 40 were visible on the deck of the fishing vessel that reached the mainland, more people than the normal complement of one of these boats. Thus, one might just as easily conclude that the weight of the evidence suggested that most or all of the crew was no longer on Koh Tang.

Sources of information not fully used

Despite the availability of various assets and the apparent uncertainty concerning the location of the *Mayaguez* crew, little attempt appears to have been made to use photography or other means to verify reports or to obtain additional information.

Once located, the *Mayaguez* and the area around Koh Tang were photographed frequently. Primary coverage was provided by RF-4 photo reconnaissance aircraft, which flew a total of 16 missions—4 on May 13, 6 on May 14, 4 on May 15, and 2 on May 16—and took an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 pictures.³ In addition, a high altitude aircraft flew one photo mission on May 13, and P-3 aircraft took a small number of hand-held photographs at the outset and toward the end of the operation. Unmanned photo drones available in Thailand were not used during the incident. Although only a small number of photographs reached Washington during the incident, they were analyzed in the field.

³ Defense keeps track of aircraft missions in Greenwich Mean Time, indicated by the use of the letter Z. If a mission began on the 13th Z, but terminated on the 14th Z, it is recorded as having taken place on the 14th Z.

RF-4 coverage

On the evening of May 12, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested that RF-4 photo coverage of Poulo Wai Island be made at the first available light in Cambodia. The local U.S. command received these instructions via a non-secure phone. Command personnel told us that because of the use of this phone, they were not told why the photo reconnaissance was being requested or what the pilot should look for. However, Defense made available to us messages containing specific instructions which we were told should have arrived prior to the first photo reconnaissance flight. The mission was carried out while the *Mayaguez* was still dead in the water at Poulo Wai, but no photos of the ship were obtained.

Although the Commander in Chief, Pacific Command, initially imposed minimum altitudes—6,000 feet over the mainland, 4,500 feet over the islands—missions were subsequently flown as low as 1,000 feet. Some missions were general in nature and aircraft were directed to take photos along a pre-plotted course which included Kompong Som, Ream, Koh Tang, and Poulo Wai. Other missions were more specific and included two nighttime missions to obtain information on the distance between the cargo containers aboard the *Mayaguez* and the relationship of the *Mayaguez* to Koh Tang Island.

RF-4 coverage was not continuous. For example, no RF-4s were in the area when the *Mayaguez* crew was believed to have been transferred to Koh Tang. However, RF-4s were in the area at the time the fishing vessel suspected of carrying caucasians left Koh Tang until several hours after it reached Kompong Som.

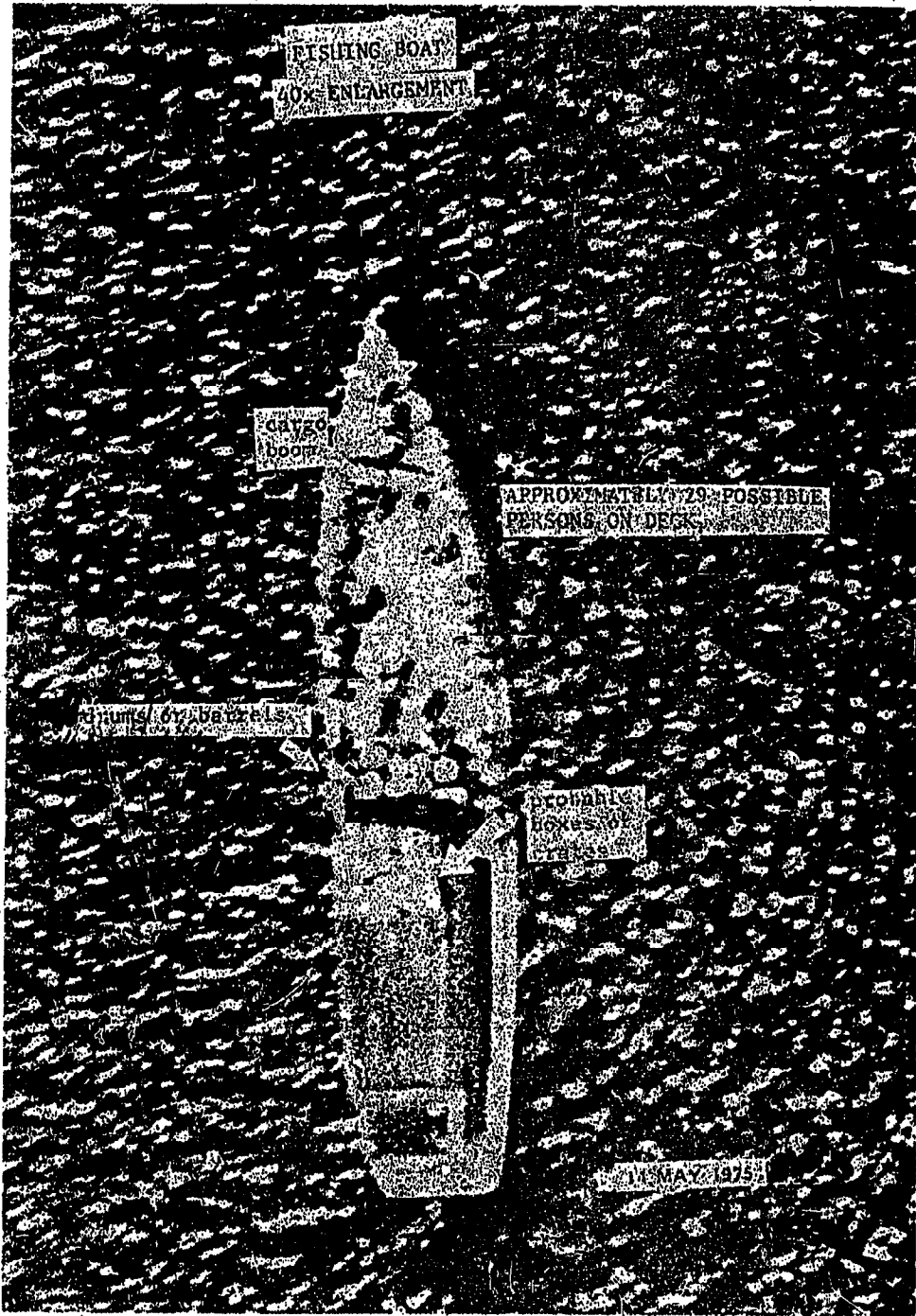
Defense permitted us to examine film that had been analyzed in Thailand during the incident to verify that no photos were obtained which might shed light on the whereabouts of the *Mayaguez* crew. Photo interpreters were neither informed of nor asked to look for a fishing boat suspected of carrying caucasians. After the *Mayaguez* incident, the film was forwarded to Washington where it was examined again, but not primarily to determine whether the fishing boat had been photographed. We selected approximately 1,000 photos taken on a single RF-4 mission at about the time the fishing boat reached Kompong Som. Using similar photo interpretation equipment to examine the film, we did discover a picture showing a lot of people on the deck of a fishing boat lying dead in the water near Kompong Som harbor. Defense photo interpreters analyzed the picture and confirmed that it was a "fishing boat with approximately 29 possible persons on deck." The boat in the photo had "probable boxes" and drums or barrels in front of the pilot house, as did the fishing boat from which the *Mayaguez* crew was eventually recovered. The crewmen, after their recovery, indicated that shortly after reaching Kompong Som harbor, their boat was moved about 1½ miles down the coast where it anchored 50 yards offshore.

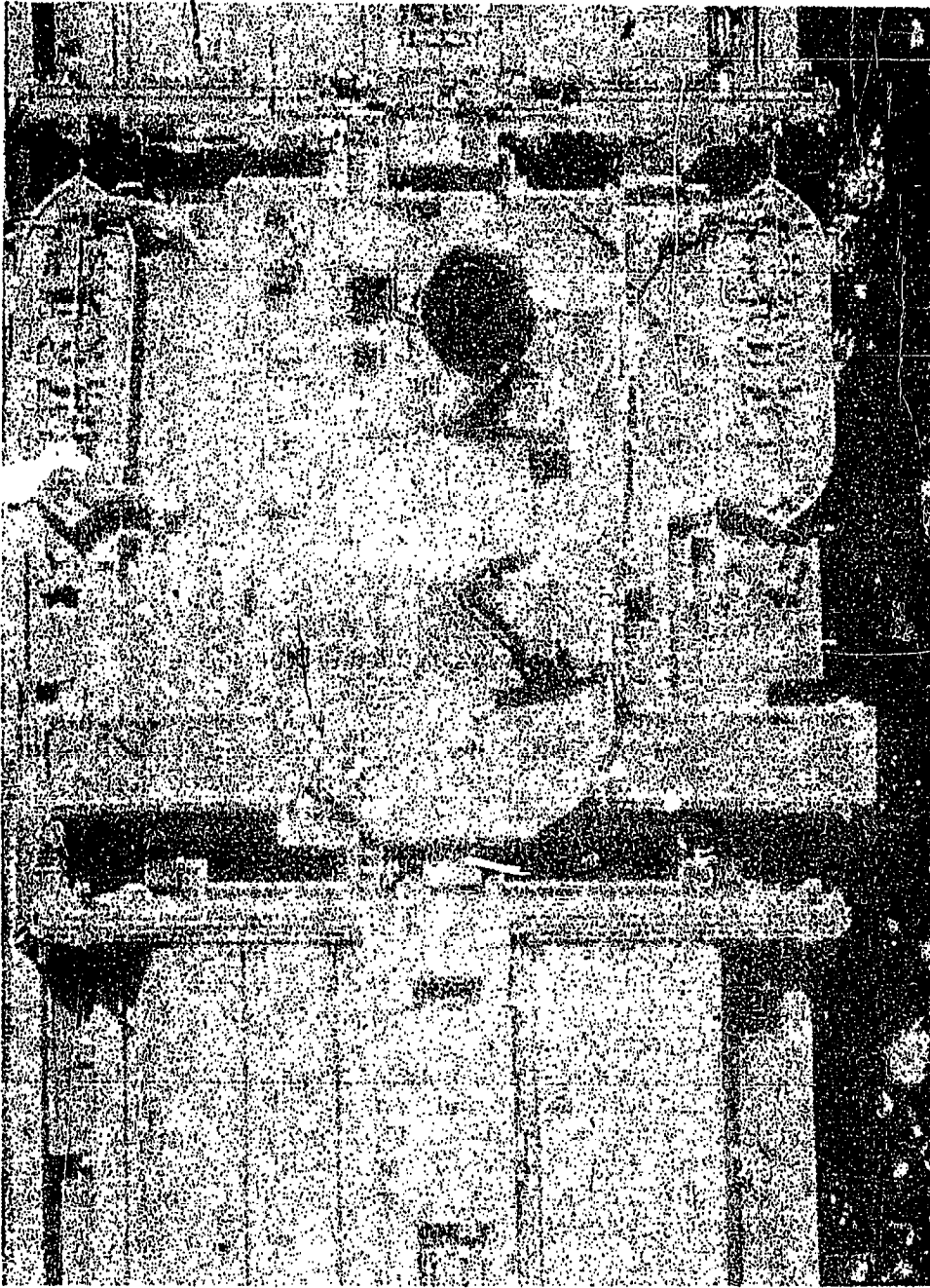
None of the RF-4s in the area at the time were directed to take photographs of a fishing vessel at this location. The mission of the aircraft which obtained this picture was to take photographs along a pre-plotted course over Kompong Som, Ream, Poulo Wai, and Koh Tang. The pilot was probably not aware that a fishing vessel with possible caucasians aboard was in the area.

The photo was taken from an altitude of about 10,000 feet. The un-enlarged photo is on p. 26. The altitude and the camera used, among other factors, influence the detail seen in a photo when it is enlarged. Page 27 shows the photo enlarged 40 times. The RF-4 that took this photo was also carrying a camera that can be used at an altitude as low as 500 feet, which would result in a picture with better detail and which would not need as much enlargement since the scale of the object being photographed is larger. Page 28 is an RF-4 photo of the *Mayaguez* taken at an altitude of between 1,500 to 2,000 feet and enlarged 10 times. Defense has indicated that the existence of known anti-aircraft sites on the mainland posed a risk for low level photo reconnaissance.

We were told that photo interpreters are not—nor should they be—kept abreast of operational developments. Later, Defense indicated that this is not the official policy of the Department. Photo interpreters confirmed that they were not informed that a fishing vessel with 30 to 40 people thought to be possible caucasians had reached Kompong Som.

Defense stated that every reasonable effort was made to secure additional information on all aspects of the incident, through photography or other means. We believe that the facts presented in our report indicate that several reasonable opportunities to try to gain additional information on the crew were not pursued. Concerning the photograph we discovered, Defense states that we were not under the time constraints imposed by the incident and had the benefit of additional photos not available when the film was first reviewed. Our discovery of the photo of the fishing boat carrying the crew was made prior to our access to this additional Defense photography. The additional photography was used to persuade Defense that the photo was probably the vessel carrying suspected caucasians. Unlike the photo interpreters who first examined the film, we were aware that a fishing boat carrying possible caucasians had reached the Cambodian mainland. Some Defense officials told us that photo interpreters should not be kept abreast of such operational developments. Our examination of approximately 1,000 photos and discovery of the particular photograph took approximately 1 hour.





P-3 photography

The P-3 is a large four-engine aircraft specially equipped for long range surveillance missions. Its equipment includes stabilized binoculars, observation portholes, and fixed and hand-held cameras. It carries approximately 12 crewmen. Because of its size, manner of carrying fuel, and slow air speed, the P-3 is vulnerable to ground fire. We were told, however, that a hand-held photograph taken at a low altitude from a P-3 probably would have been the best way to obtain photographic evidence of the location of the *Mayaguez* crew.

The original mission of the P-3 was to maintain visual contact with the *Mayaguez*, but upon arrival of Air Force jets, this mission was changed without specific directive to one of monitoring and providing information for Navy use.

Defense officials said that because of the risk to crew and aircraft, P-3s would not have been directed to fly close in to the fishing boat suspected of carrying caucasians and heading toward the Cambodian mainland. Pilots of Air Force jets, however, indicated that the boat was not firing at the U.S. jets flying overhead. Given the inability of jet aircraft pilots to positively identify the occupants on the deck of the fishing vessel, a slower aircraft flying at a reasonably low altitude might have been able to obtain better visual and photographic intelligence. The P-3 was used in this manner approximately 24 hours later. Shortly after 10:00 p.m. on May 14, a P-3 was tasked by the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center to investigate a boat approaching Koh Tang from the mainland. The aircraft made repeated passes at the vessel—each at lower altitudes—and the aircrew determined that they were not being fired upon. They were then able to observe at an altitude below 1,000 feet that the boat was carrying about 30 caucasians waving white flags. The aircrew took a hand-held photo of the boat which confirmed their visual reconnaissance. (See next page.) This boat was the same one that had brought the *Mayaguez* crew to the mainland.

Defense stated that there could be no assurance that the fishing boat would not fire at the slower, lower flying P-3 and that the stabilizer of a P-3 had been damaged earlier in the incident. Our report points out that a P-3 was used later in the incident to fly low and slow over the same fishing boat, when also there was no assurance it would not draw hostile fire.

Air Force drones

A drone is an unmanned aircraft equipped with high resolution cameras and is designed to take photographs at low altitudes in a hostile environment. It is launched by a specially equipped C-130 and flies along a pre-programmed route.

During the *Mayaguez* crisis, a drone unit was stationed in the area. Defense indicated that the use of drones was considered but rejected because (1) at least 24 hours were required to make it operational, (2) the air space was already densely saturated with other aircraft, and (3) the drone's flight route must be pre-programmed so its success against moving targets cannot be assured.



We recognize these difficulties, but drones, by their nature, obviously would have provided a less risky way of attempting to obtain photographic evidence on the crew's location—information which was not obtained with any certainty by other means. They might also have provided more detailed information about Koh Tang Island.

Air Force helicopters

Defense stated that a helicopter would have been the best aircraft with which to try to identify the *Mayaguez* crew. At 8:20 p.m. on May 13, the first Cambodian patrol craft was sunk. U.S. aircraft reported that there were 10 survivors in a life raft. A U.S. search and rescue helicopter was in the area about 2 hours later—at 10:21 p.m. This was approximately 55 minutes before the fishing boat suspected of carrying caucasians docked at Kompong Som. Use of the helicopter to obtain more positive identification of the possible caucasians was not considered, partly because the helicopter was not believed to have been in the vicinity at that time. Defense has stressed the risks involved in using a helicopter in this manner.

According to Defense, the search and rescue helicopter was involved in another mission and would have involved too great a risk. The other mission was to look for survivors from a sunken Cambodian patrol boat. The survivors were not located. The risk to the helicopter crew could have been weighed against the information that the fishing boat was not firing upon any aircraft.

MILITARY CHAIN OF COMMAND

The President, as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, made the ultimate decisions on military actions to secure the release of the *Mayaguez* and its crew, presumably after options had been presented and discussed by the various members of the National Security Council. Members of the Council included the President and Vice President and Secretaries of State and Defense. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency are statutory advisers. There were, however, additional participants and/or substitutes for certain statutory members at the four Council meetings on May 12, 13, and 14, 1975.

The chain of command (see p. 85) went from the National Command Authority (the President and the Secretary of Defense), through the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), who had planning and operational responsibility for the entire operation.

CINCPAC control operated somewhat differently over each of the three military services involved in the *Mayaguez* operation. Basically, however, orders went from CINCPAC to the local U.S. command which directed the operations and reported to CINCPAC. It was the local command that was asked to develop the plan for the rescue operation to be undertaken at first light on May 15, Cambodian time.

CINCPAC exercised control over Naval operations through the CINCPAC Fleet and the 7th Fleet. CINCPAC Fleet, however, exercised no operational command over the Naval units involved in the *Mayaguez* operation—the U.S.S. *Holt*, the U.S.S. *Wilson*, and the Coral Sea Group. Its responsibility was to train, equip, provide, ad-

minister, and discipline the forces involved. In short, it acted in support of specific tasks given by the local U.S. command. Military personnel noted that no requests made by the local command were denied by the CINCPAC Fleet during the *Mayaguez* operation.

Although Marines are normally under Navy control, once the Marine Task Group arrived in Utapao, it was under the operational control of the local U.S. command. The local command's orders went down to the Commander of Marine Task Group and, once Marine operations began, to the Marine Assault Commander and the head of the *Mayaguez* boarding party.

For the air forces involved, the chain of command went from CINCPAC to the local U.S. command which was headed by the same individual who headed the 7th Air Force [security deletion] then to the four operating wings.

The airborne battlefield command and control center received orders from the local U.S. command and had no authority of its own. Rather, it served as a coordinating function and was used especially as a communications link between the local U.S. command and the various military units with which it could communicate directly.

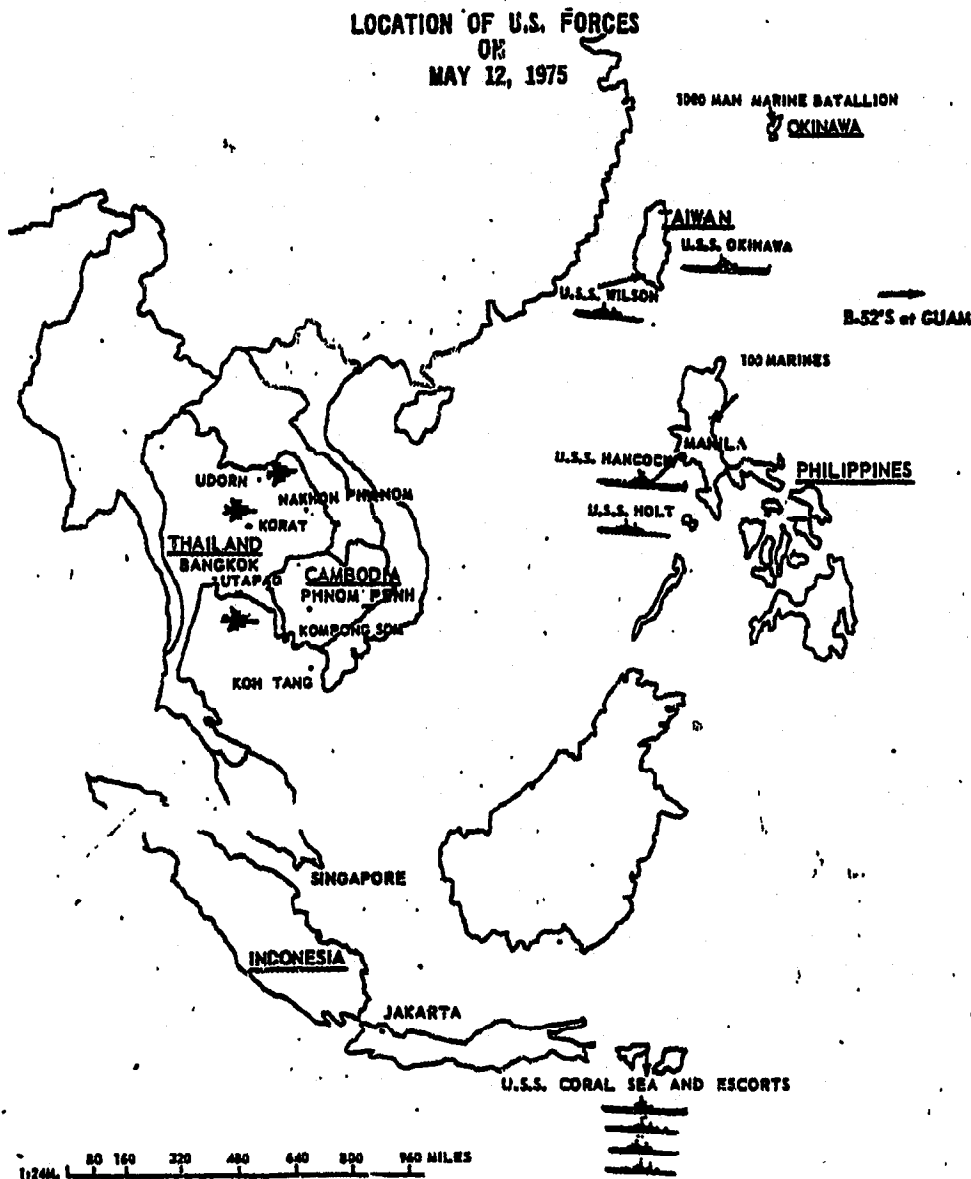
COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

The communications network used during the *Mayaguez* incident demonstrates Washington decisionmakers' control over events halfway around the world. The rapidity of communications tends to encourage central direction, and during the incident, the communications network was used to exercise close control over the use of force. For example, rapid communications permitted the President to decide whether to attack a vessel heading toward the mainland which was suspected of carrying *Mayaguez* crew members, and at a later point in the incident, to cancel and then reinstate the initial air strikes against Kompong Som.

[Security deletion.]

10:19 a.m., May 12—the destroyer escort U.S.S. *Holt*, located about 100 miles from the Philippines, set sail for the seizure area. The U.S.S. *Vega*, a refrigerator cargo ship, followed 75 miles behind the *Holt*. Estimated time of arrival of the *Holt* was 12 noon on May 14.

2:12 p.m., May 12—CINCPAC Fleet directed an Amphibious Ready Group, a configuration of Naval vessels designed to support a Marine amphibious assault, to prepare to proceed to the scene. At the time, the helicopter carrier U.S.S. *Okinawa* was on its way to Okinawa; it was ordered to sail to the Philippines to reconstitute an Amphibious Ready Group. The U.S.S. *Okinawa* was scheduled to set sail for the seizure area at 6 a.m. on May 15 and to arrive at 11 p.m. on May 15.



3:14 p.m., May 12—the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Coral Sea* and escorts (including three destroyers) changed course and proceeded at best speed for the seizure area—about 950 miles away. The estimated time of arrival of the *Coral Sea* was 3 a.m. on May 15. At the same time, the guided missile destroyer U.S.S. *Wilson* was also on route. The *Wilson*, which had been on its way to the Philippines, was expected to arrive off Koh Tang at 11 p.m. on May 14.

5:22 p.m., May 12—preparations were underway for the possible use of mines to prevent reinforcement from the mainland. Personnel aboard the carrier U.S.S. *Coral Sea* were involved in planning for the mining of Kompong Som.

9:59 a.m., May 13—CINCPAC directed the *Holt* to be prepared to seize or disable the *Mayaguez* upon arrive on the scene.

12:10 p.m., May 13—the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered all available helicopters, 125 Thailand based U.S. Air Force security police, and two Marine platoons of about 100 men in the Philippines to Utapao. The Air Force security police were prepared for insertion aboard the *Mayaguez* as early as 6:45 p.m. on May 13. However, the local U.S. command recommended that seizure of the *Mayaguez* be delayed until the arrival of two platoons of Marines from the Philippines. If ordered, they could be inserted at 8:50 p.m. on May 13.

3:12 p.m., May 13—the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed about 1,000 Marines to move from Okinawa, to Utapao. In a message to CINCPAC sent at 3:55 p.m. on May 13, the local U.S. command reported that the soonest these Marines could be inserted on Koh Tang was 8:15 a.m. on May 14, (evening in Cambodia). However, the message continued that:

a night insertion into strange terrain and unknown conditions at the slow buildup rate of approximately 200 troops every 4 hours which is dictated by the number of available choppers and long enroute time is tactically questionable.

Instead, the local command recommended that if a landing on Koh Tang continued to be necessary, it should be planned for dawn on May 15, Cambodian time.

7:10 p.m., May 13—the U.S.S. *Hancock* and escorts were ordered to sail from the Philippines to Koh Tang. The *Hancock*, which had been involved in the Phnom Penh evacuation, had about 14 Marine helicopters and 400 Marines aboard. It set sail at 2:00 a.m. on May 14 but was not scheduled to arrive off Kompong Som until 6:00 a.m. on May 16.

9:30 a.m., May 14—B-52 bombers in Guam were tasked to prepare for possible strikes against the Cambodian mainland. At 5:55 p.m. on May 14, they were placed on 1-hour alert.

About 11 a.m., May 14—the local U.S. command was asked whether Thai-based rather than *Coral Sea*-based jets could be used over Koh Tang. The local command believed that the risks of such a plan were too great. Shortly thereafter, the Group was told to use aircraft from [security deletion] over Koh Tang.

PLANNING THE RESCUE OPERATION

At 12:48 a.m. on May 14, following the third National Security Council meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave subordinate commanders the following planning guidance.

At first light 15 May [late afternoon of the 14th in Washington] U.S. Forces will be prepared to secure Koh Tang Island and simultaneously board the *Mayaguez*. Also plan for strikes against Kompong Som complex using B-52's from Guam and Tacair from the U.S.S. *Coral Sea*.

With this guidance, the local U.S. command was requested to draft a plan setting out the details for the military operations—number of helicopters, Marine landing rate, provisions for combat support, and command and control procedures.

Planning for the assault of Koh Tang began early morning May 14—about 15 hours before Marines boarded helicopters in anticipation of the President's order to begin the operation. The commander of the Marine Task Group arrived at Utapao, on the initial flight from Okinawa, at about 10:30 p.m. on May 13. For the next several hours, the available Marine forces were on alert for possible orders to seize the *Mayaguez*. By about 3 a.m. on May 14, the entire 1,000-man battalion had arrived. Several hours later, the local command informed the commander of the Marine Task Group of the decision to retake the *Mayaguez* and assault Koh Tang and instructed the commander to prepare plans for the assault. The mission was to capture the *Mayaguez* and seize Koh Tang and hold it for up to 48 hours if required. Implicit in the mission was to locate any members of the *Mayaguez* crew on the island. The only restriction placed on the operation was that there would be no preparatory fire to soften up the island. It was felt that such fire could result in the death of *Mayaguez* crew members. However, jet aircraft suppressive fire was authorized to begin as soon as the Marines arrived. The next 12 hours saw a frenzy of activity.

The only map of Koh Tang available at Utapao was an enlargement of an April 17 photograph of the island, and it was not detailed enough for planning purposes. Consequently, Marine Corps personnel were given permission to overfly Koh Tang Island. Although permission was requested to fly at a low altitude, the observation aircraft used was instructed to stay above 6,000 feet. Visual reconnaissance from this altitude was difficult because of the heavy foliage on the island. There was no visible activity. The overflight revealed only two possible areas on the island large enough to accommodate several helicopters at a time without initial preparation of the landing zone.

Photos of Koh Tang from missions flown after the seizure of the *Mayaguez* were not available at Utapao until several hours before the assault force boarded the helicopters. These photos revealed the existence of a possible antiaircraft site near the eastern landing zone (point C on map on p. 93). The commander of the Marine Task Group requested that this site be destroyed prior to the arrival of the assault force. However, this was not done. Defense was unable to verify such a request but does not indicate that no such request was made. Defense states that the destruction of the site would have had to be weighed against the potential risk to the crew believed to be on Koh Tang. Our report points out that firing on enemy positions, which began as soon as helicopters arrived over Koh Tang, posed a similar risk to the crew.

In addition to collecting information about Koh Tang and selecting landing zones, the best use of the 11 available helicopters had to be determined. Each helicopter could carry about 25 fully equipped Marines. The round trip flight from Utapao to Koh Tang took

4 hours. Thus, after the arrival of the first wave of Marines it would be 4 hours before reinforcements could be brought in. The information available at Utapao indicated that the *Mayaguez* crew was probably not aboard the *Mayaguez*. Three helicopters with about 60 personnel aboard were allocated for boarding and retaking the *Mayaguez*. The initial assault on Koh Tang was assigned to 175 Marines aboard the remaining 8 helicopters. The plans provided that 4 hours later about 10 helicopters would return with an additional 250 Marines, bringing the total number of Marines on Koh Tang to 425. Additional waves were available if necessary. Bringing only 175 personnel in the first wave was felt to be a reasonable risk, given the Marines understanding of 18 to 20 Cambodian irregulars on Koh Tang.

The only element in the Marine Task Group plan that was changed by higher authorities was the timing of the seizure of the ship and the island. The Marines recommended a simultaneous landing on the *Mayaguez* and Koh Tang. CINCPAC directed that Marines be put aboard the *Holt* and that the *Holt* be brought alongside the *Mayaguez*. As a result the landings on the ship and the island were not simultaneous. CINCPAC explained that the change was made because it was not known whether any Cambodians were on the *Mayaguez*. It was simpler, and less risky to board the *Mayaguez* from the *Holt* than from the helicopters.

Many other decisions were made by the Marine planners in the brief period of time before the assault, including:

- The BLU-82—the largest U.S. conventional bomb—would not be used unless requested by the assault commander.
- Riot control agents would be employed against the *Mayaguez* before putting Marines aboard, but not against the Koh Tang landing area.
- Cambodian linguists, a doctor, and an explosive ordnance specialist would accompany the assault force.

At 12 noon on May 14, the Marine assault plan was relayed verbally to the local U.S. command and approved. Due to insufficient time and the physical separation between the local U.S. command and the Marines at Utapao, no written detailed operational plan of the Marine landing was prepared. One of the items in a written operational plan would have been the expected enemy threat.

The local U.S. command view was that the Marines knew the task, their own capabilities and limitations, had the advantage of first-hand observation of the objective area from an observation aircraft and were the best qualified and proper unit to plan the landing and ground maneuvers they would have to execute. The Marine assault plan was considered "gutsy." The local U.S. command, which had a coordinating role during the incident, incorporated the Marine assault plan into an overall concept plan for the operation. This plan was received in Washington at 1:30 p.m. on May 14, and approved, as modified by CINCPAC.

On May 12, the day of the seizure, the Defense Intelligence Agency assembled the following information on Khmer Communist forces, which were believed to have previously reinforced Koh Tang. Possibly 150 to 200 Khmer Communists were on the island, armed with 82 mm mortars; 75 mm recoilless rifles; 30-caliber, 7.62-mm, and 12.7-mm

machineguns; and B40/41 rocket propelled grenade launchers. Also, the Defense Intelligence Agency estimated that:

1. An additional 1,500 to 2,000 Khmer Communist were in the Kompong Som/Ream area.
2. There were 24 to 28 Khmer Communist naval craft armed with 3-inch guns, 20/40-mm antiaircraft weapons, and 50-caliber, 7.62-mm, 12.7-mm machine guns.
3. An unknown number of 23/37-mm AAA weapons were at known sites at Ream Airfield.
4. There were a small number of T-28, AU-24, AC-47, and helo gunships with unknown operational status and locations.

Late in the afternoon of May 13, Intelligence Pacific in Hawaii issued its estimate of Khmer Communist strength on Koh Tang—a maximum force of 90 to 100, reinforced by a heavy weapons squad of 10 to 15.

We were told that the Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington and Intelligence Pacific in Hawaii coordinated their respective intelligence estimates. They were in frequent contact during the crisis. However, apparently their estimates were not reconciled. It appears that the Intelligence Pacific assessment reached the local U.S. command about 5 to 6 hours before the assault; we saw no evidence that the Defense Intelligence Agency estimate of 150 to 200 Khmer Communists was also transmitted to the local command.

We found that the preceding estimates of Cambodian military forces, one of which was formulated as early as May 12, the day of the seizure, did not reach the Marine assault forces. Defense officials told us that the Intelligence Pacific estimate was communicated verbally and in written form. Nevertheless, key Marine Corps personnel involved in planning and carrying out the assault told us that the estimates available to them indicated there were only 18 to 20 Cambodian irregulars and their families on Koh Tang. From reports of numerous Cambodian patrol craft in the vicinity of Koh Tang and evidence of anti-aircraft sites Marine assault personnel concluded that the intelligence estimates available to them were probably inaccurate. Therefore for planning purposes they assumed that there were possibly 100 people on Koh Tang, including women and children. On May 17, 2 days after they were recovered from Koh Tang, officers in charge of the Marine assault force saw accurate pre-assault estimates of Khmer Communist strength for the first time. Assault personnel have estimated that there were actually about 150 Khmer Communists on Koh Tang. We were not able to determine why the pre-assault estimates did not reach Marine assault personnel. We were told by Marine assault personnel that, had the more accurate information been available, the assault would have been conducted more covertly.

Defense maintained that the Defense Intelligence Agency and Intelligence Pacific did agree on the nature of the probable opposition, and in retrospect their force estimates appear to be quite accurate. However, Defense did not address our statement that these estimates—which differed widely—were not reconciled. Defense acknowledged that these more accurate estimates did not reach the assault force commander. CINCPAC has subsequently established a feedback system designed to ensure acknowledgment of critical intelligence by all concerned commands.

" Military risks are assessed at each level of the military chain of command. Each command level presents its assessments to the next highest level.

Pacific Command and local U.S. command officials told us that they believed the risks involved in the Marine assault on Koh Tang were reasonable risks. Their assessments were apparently based on Intelligence Pacific estimates of Khmer Communist strength on Koh Tang.

Similarly, Marine Corps officers who actually participated in the assault stated that, from the intelligence available to them at the time, the assault plan involved a reasonable risk. However, their assessment of the risk was based on a substantially different estimate of Cambodian strength on Koh Tang. We recognize that prudent men may differ in their assessment of a reasonable risk. However, we believe that these differences should be based on differences of judgment, not differences of fact. Given the availability of differing intelligence estimates at various levels of the chain of command and the apparent lack of a coordinated intelligence appraisal, it is difficult to understand how an accurate assessment of risks could be made.

Defense assured us that "the military risks involved, a wide range of options, appropriateness of forces and all other aspects of the operation were considered by higher authority before arriving at the selected course of action and decision." Defense was unable to provide us with any documents prepared before the start of operations to seize the *Mayaguez* and Koh Tang that assessed the military risks of such actions.

CARRYING OUT THE RESCUE OPERATION

The execute order to seize the *Mayaguez* and assault Koh Tang was given at 4:45 p.m. on May 14 (just before first light on May 15 in Cambodia). About 20 minutes later, the President authorized bombing of the Cambodian mainland.

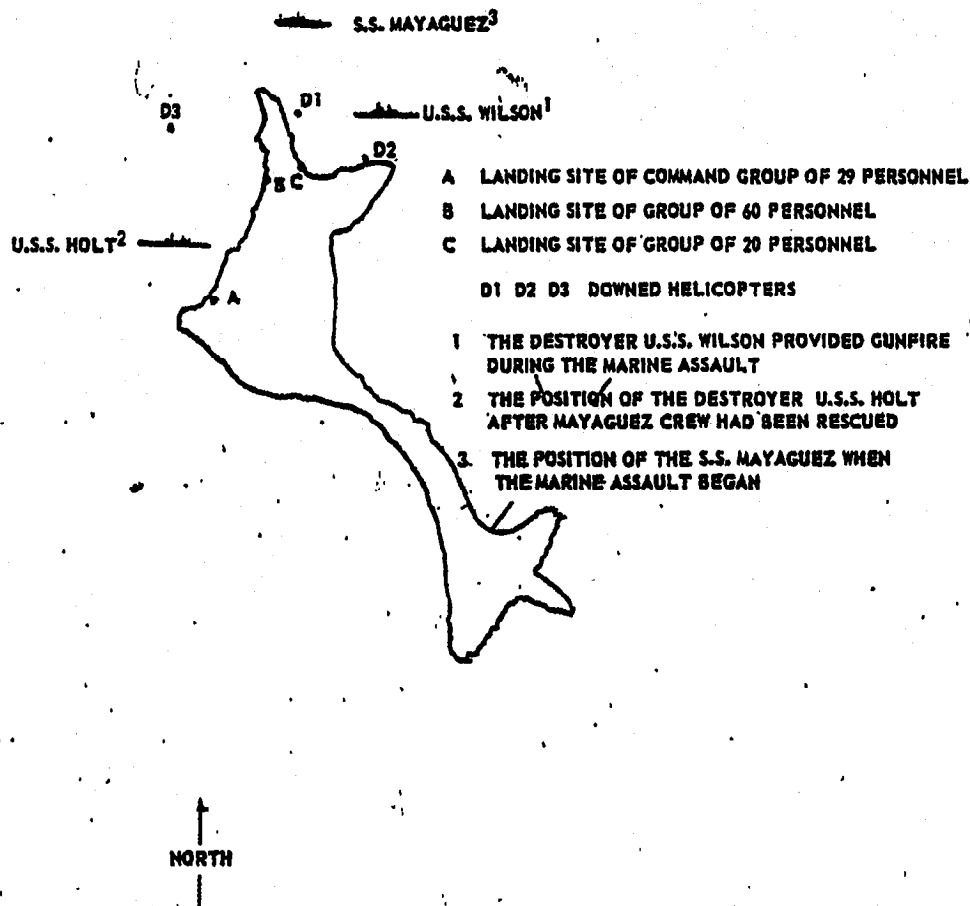
Helicopters carrying the Marine assault force began to arrive over Koh Tang at about 7:10 p.m. on May 14. Of the eight helicopters in the first wave, three crashed, two were disabled, and three were undamaged. The plan was to land six helicopters in the eastern landing zone and two in the western landing zone. Under intense ground fire only about 109 of the 175 Marines were actually landed. The majority of the force was split into a group of 60 (point A on map on p. 93) and a group of 29 (point B on map) on the west side of the island. A third group of 20 Marines was isolated in the eastern landing zone (point C on map). The assault force realized that reinforcements could not be landed for at least 4 hours, so it attempted to link up.

At about the same time that the Marines began landing on Koh Tang, a force of about 48 Marines and 12 other personnel were transferred from helicopters to the U.S.S. *Holt*. Shortly before the *Holt* pulled alongside the *Mayaguez*, U.S. aircraft dropped riot control agents on the merchant vessel. Marines boarded the vessel at about 8:25 p.m. No one was found on the *Mayaguez* and the vessel was declared secure at 9:22 p.m.

On June 20, Defense gave the House Armed Services Committee a narrative description of the *Mayaguez* related military operations. It indicated that at about midnight on May 14 the order was given to cease all offensive operations and to begin to withdraw. At that time,

the ground force commander requested additional forces in order to provide sufficient firepower for a successful withdrawal under fire. At 12:08 a.m. on May 15, after augmentation by a portion of the second wave, the Marines were reported in good position with the opposition forced back. At 1:21 a.m. a second helicopter from the second assault wave was hit at the island and, along with two of the helicopters, returned to Utapao without disembarking the Marines.

KOH TANG RESCUE OPERATION



We found that the sequence of events concerning the arrival of the second wave of Marines is out of order in the above description.

The second wave of Marines had been scheduled to land on Koh Tang at 11:00 p.m. At that time, the Marine assault commander on the island learned that the reinforcements had not yet left Utapao. He informed the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center that additional forces were definitely required. At this time he was

not aware that the crew had been recovered, and he was working under the assumption that the mission was still to capture the island and locate possible crew members. Shortly thereafter, the second wave of Marines departed for Koh Tang.

At about 11 p.m., the entire *Mayaguez* crew was reported aboard the U.S.S. *Wilson*. The local U.S. command asked for instructions—should the assault against Koh Tang be continued or should the Marines be withdrawn? At 12:10 a.m. on May 15, the Secretary of Defense directed that efforts be made to extract the Marines without further casualties. Several minutes earlier, the assault force was reported to be in a good position with the opposition forced back. CINCPAC was advised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff at 12:20 a.m. on May 15 that there was no commitment to keep the Marines on the island or to capture it and that an extraction plan should be prepared. The local U.S. command was ordered not to land additional Marines on Koh Tang. The commander of the Marine Task Group at Utapao heard the local U.S. command order the second wave of Marines to return to Thailand. He argued that reinforcements were necessary to ensure a safe extraction of the assault force. The local U.S. command placed the helicopters in orbit over Koh Tang and requested permission to land the second wave; the request was approved. At 12:50 a.m., the Secretary of Defense ordered the cessation of all offensive operations and the disengagement of all forces as soon as possible consistent with safety and or self-defense. By 1:21 a.m.—when the Marine reinforcements had successfully landed—two of the three Marine groups on Koh Tang had linked up. The reinforcements told the Marine assault commander that the *Mayaguez* crew had been recovered. Although the commander had not been told officially, he assumed that the continued buildup ashore and complete seizure of the island was no longer the mission.

During the last part of the Marine extraction from Koh Tang, the local U.S. command was directed to drop a BLU-82 bomb. The BLU-82, a 15,000-pound bomb, is the largest non-nuclear weapon, in the U.S. arsenal.

Three of the bombs were airborne during the Marine assault for use during any contingency. The Marine Task Group commander was informed that the BLU-82 was available, but he asked that it be used only when requested by the Koh Tang assault commander.

The assault commander had not requested the use of the BLU-82 and stated that he was not informed that a decision had been made to drop the weapon. We were told that the decision to use the weapon was probably made in Washington.

The BLU-82 was expended in the southern end of Koh Tang. The enemy was observed shifting troops from one area to another, and it was surmised that the purpose might be to bring overwhelming force to bear on the small group of Marines isolated from the main body. After the weapon was expended, no additional enemy troops were observed moving their positions. The weapon was expended under the control of the forward air controller, who was aware of the actual situation on Koh Tang.

The question arises as to the urgency for conducting the Marine assault on the evening of May 14. The arrival of U.S. Naval forces—

including at least 5 destroyers and an aircraft carrier—beginning several hours before the assault should have permitted the successful cordoning off of the island and thus prevented the further movement of any crew members believed to be held on Koh Tang. Defense officials have not cited any indications that Cambodia was preparing to attack U.S. forces assembling in the area. It was believed that Cambodia possessed only about two dozen patrol craft in the area, a number of which had already been sunk. The few Cambodian aircraft at Ream were outnumbered by U.S. jets on the scene.

Were there any military advantages in postponing the assault? A postponement might have reduced the risks involved. Marine Corps doctrine calls for an initial three to one superiority over enemy forces. The number of helicopters available in Thailand did not permit the quick landing of a large Marine force. We were told that additional helicopters could not be moved more quickly from other locations in the Far East to Thailand. For example, one Defense official told us that helicopters were not quickly transportable via C-5A. However, the U.S.S. *Coral Sea*, which was near Koh Tang, might have served as a platform from which to land the Marines more quickly. In addition, helicopters aboard the U.S. *Hancock*—which was about 35 hours away at the time of the assault—would have doubled the number of helicopters available.

Postponement of the operations would have permitted additional time to plan the assault. Because of the lack of time, no detailed operational plan for the Marine assault was prepared. A formal assault plan would have listed estimated enemy forces, and thus might have alerted the local U.S. command to the fact that Marine assault planners did not have the accurate estimates of Cambodian strength.

A delay in the conduct of the rescue operation would have permitted it to be made in an entirely different manner. An Amphibious Ready Group was scheduled to set sail for the seizure area at 6 a.m. on May 15 and would have reached the Koh Tang area at 11 p.m. on May 17.

The further question arises as to the ability of any assault on Koh Tang to achieve the release of Americans believed held captive there. Defense personnel told us that the rescue operation was a difficult assignment. The goal of safely landing the assault force on the island was in direct conflict with the goal of ensuring the safety of possible American prisoners. For example, bombardment of the island before the arrival of the Marines might have reduced the risk to the assault force but probably would have increased the risk to any crew members there. The only suitable landing zones on Koh Tang were in the area where Cambodian forces were believed to be concentrated, and where it seemed likely to assume *Mayaguez* crew members might be held. Yet, landing in this area probably posed the greatest risk both to the assault force and to any crew members who might be caught in the midst of the fighting. At the same time, it could be argued that recovery of crew members might be facilitated if the Cambodians could be quickly overwhelmed. Further danger to the crew was posed by suppressive fire from U.S. jets which began as soon as the first Marines were landed.

BOMBING THE CAMBODIAN MAINLAND

At 5:10 p.m. on May 14, the President ordered cyclic strike operations⁴ from the U.S.S. *Coral Sea*. The first time over target—8:45 p.m.—coincided with the estimated recovery of the *Mayaguez*, but not with the assault on Koh Tang which started about 1½ hours earlier. The first flight was to be armed reconnaissance, having as principal targets aircraft, military watercraft, and merchant ships positively identified as Cambodian. Subsequent flights were ordered to use maximum precision guided ordnance to attack military targets in the Kompong Som area.

A White House press statement released at 9:15 p.m. on May 14 indicated that the *Coral Sea* operations were directed to protect and support operations to regain the *Mayaguez* and members of the crew. Responding to a question about the use of air power, the President is quoted by news sources as saying "I am not going to risk the life of one Marine. I'd never forgive myself if we didn't do this and 2,400 Cambodians attacked the Marines." Secretary Schlesinger has termed the bombings as a very prudent, limited use of force, clearly motivated by a desire to protect the Marines on the island.

At 8:28 p.m. on May 14, [security deletion] the President directed that *Coral Sea* aircraft were not to release ordnance on Kompong Som harbor. This was shortly after Secretary Kissinger received the text of the Cambodian statement that the *Mayaguez* would be released. However, 19 minutes later, the President instructed the first wave to continue the mainland strike mission; bomb damage assessment reports were to be submitted before any additional strikes. Orders to carry out the subsequent mainland strikes followed shortly thereafter. [Security deletion.] At 11:02 p.m. on May 14, the *Coral Sea* asked the Commander of the 7th Fleet for advice on striking targets in the Kompong Som complex. A "garbled" Joint Chiefs of Staff message sent at 8:44 p.m. said to cease strike operations; a CINCPAC Fleet message transmitted at 8:57 p.m. said to resume strikes. At 11:44 p.m. the Secretary of Defense informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the third wave from the *Coral Sea* should strike as planned.

The first wave of aircraft from the *Coral Sea* took off at 8:05 p.m. and was recovered at 9:30 p.m. It did not expend ordnance but did identify the Kompong Som refinery as a potential target.

The second wave was launched at 9:45 p.m. Defense indicates that these aircraft hit Ream Airfield at 10:57 p.m.

At 11:20 p.m. the *Coral Sea* launched the third strike group, which hit targets in the Kompong Som area and the naval station at Ream. Defense states that the attack against the Kompong Som refinery was underway at 11:50 p.m.

We were told that, before each launch, the *Coral Sea* informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff by flash message what particular targets would be hit.

Jet aircraft from the second and third wave struck the following targets on the Cambodian mainland.

⁴ The launch of a small number of aircraft at approximately 1½ hour intervals. The next cycle is launched before the recovery of the previous cycle.

1. Ream Airfield:
 - aircraft
 - hangers
 - fuel storage facilities
 - runway
 - anti-aircraft site
2. Ream Naval Base:
 - barracks
 - fuel storage facilities
3. Kompong Som port complex:
 - two warehouses
 - oil refinery
 - railroad marshalling yard building

Although Defense originally reported that the *Coral Sea* airstrike against Ream Airfield destroyed 17 aircraft, subsequent photo analysis revealed that there was only 12 Cambodian aircraft at Ream and that 6 were undamaged, 3 were destroyed, 2 were damaged, and 1 was derelict. The estimate of 17 destroyed aircraft was a preliminary figure based on pilot reports. We were told that strikes at Ream Airfield were to be carried out at 6,000 feet and that this prevented more accurate bombing and reporting of damage.

Defense officials were unable to provide any evidence that Cambodia was preparing to retaliate against U.S. military forces involved in the assault on Koh Tang or in the capture of the *Mayaguez*.

The initial mainland target was air and watercraft that might interfere with U.S. military operations. Apparently no craft were observed. Defense officials told GAO that Cambodian air power was known to be limited and that the aircraft themselves were not formidable. Moreover, they pointed out that the numerous U.S. aircraft on the scene should have been able to provide protection against any Cambodian aircraft that might be launched.

While all of the targets struck could have contributed to the overall capability of the Cambodians to retaliate, a substantial number of them did so indirectly. The targets in the Kompong Som harbor area and Cambodian merchant shipping fall into this category.

We find that the bombing was not closely coordinated with other military action. The first attacks against mainland targets were not scheduled to begin until 1½ hours after the assault, at the same time the *Mayaguez* was boarded.

The bombing did not commence until about 4 hours after the assault on Koh Tang began and about 2½ hours after the boarding of the *Mayaguez*.

At least one of the targets—the Kompong Som refinery—was not on the target list prepared by Intelligence Pacific because the refinery was known to have been non-operational for several years.

CHAPTER 6.—GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE CONGRESS

The President made the following statement at 12:27 a.m. on May 15, 1975.

At my direction, United States forces tonight boarded the American merchant ship SS *Mayaguez* and landed at the

Island of Koh Tang for the purpose of rescuing the crew and the ship, which has been illegally seized by Cambodian forces. They also conducted supporting strikes against nearby military installations.

I have now received information that the vessel has been recovered intact and the entire crew has been rescued. The forces that have successfully accomplished this mission are still under hostile fire, but are preparing to disengage.

I wish to express my deep appreciation and that of the entire Nation to the units and the men who participated in these operations for their valor and for their sacrifice.

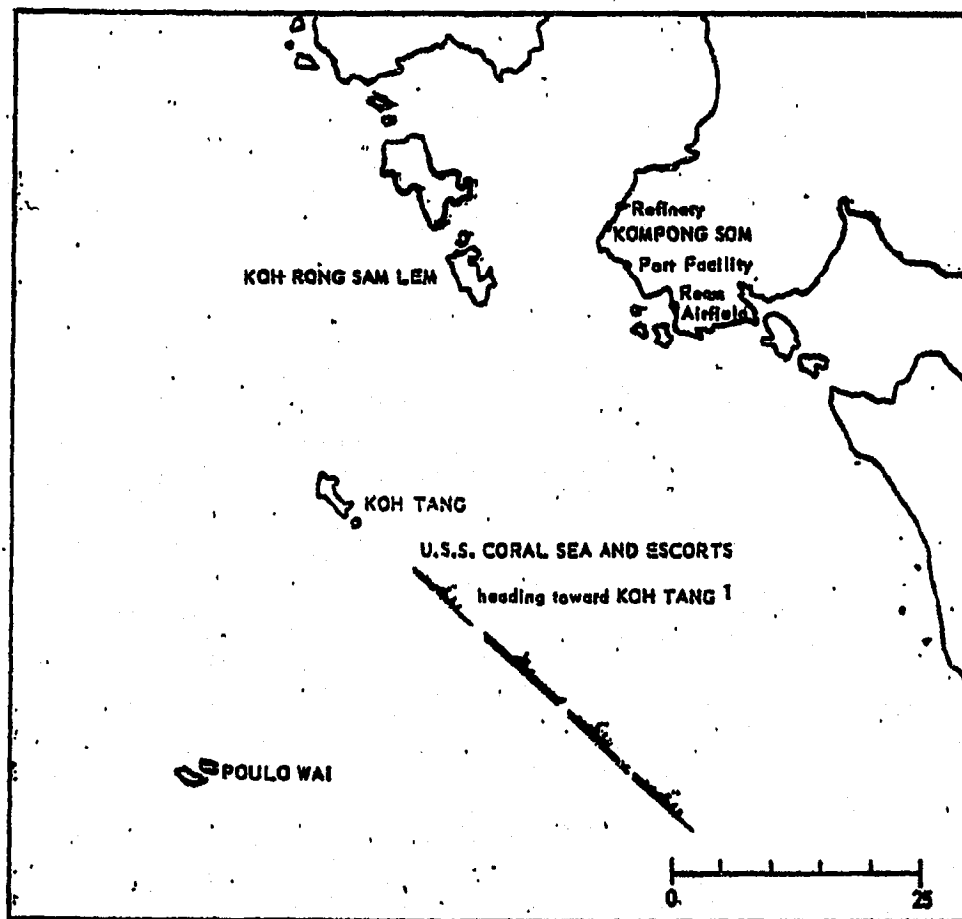
Thus the S.S. *Mayaguez* and all crew members were recovered in just over 3 days. U.S. officials have pointed out that through prompt military response they not only achieved these specific objectives but also accomplished two other goals. Another *Pueblo* incident, with protracted and somewhat humiliating negotiations to recover crew members, was avoided. The United States also showed its resolve to other countries in the context of the recent fall of the governments of Cambodia and South Vietnam and decreased U.S. influence in Southeast Asia.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Our investigation of the *Mayaguez* incident concerned primarily the processes and procedures for handling the crisis. We attempted to find out whether decisionmakers had all available information on which to base their actions and whether implementing diplomatic and military operations were in accord with the decisions taken at the highest level.

As discussed in chapter 1, decisions were made within the National Security Council, and we were unable to secure access to the information actually made available to or generated within that body.

BOMBING OF CAMBODIAN MAINLAND



† Targets attacked by tactical aircraft from carrier U.S.S. Coral Sea

† Notes Position of U.S.S. Coral Sea not drawn to scale.
 At time of first air strike, U.S.S. Coral Sea was
 actually about 185 miles from Kampong Som.
 At time of fourth final launch, it was about
 100 miles from Kampong Som.

Within this limitation, our findings are presented in earlier chapters, primarily in chapter 5 which deals with the implementing of military actions. Several more general matters should be mentioned, however, to place these findings in perspective.

First, the handling of the *Mayaguez* incident must be considered in the context of events and perceptions at the time. Cambodia and South Vietnam had just fallen, with a loss of influence anticipated in that part of the world. The seizure of the *Pueblo* and its crew in 1968, and the difficulties in securing their release had not helped the U.S. standing in Asia. Viewed in this light, the seizure of the *Mayaguez* could be perceived as a deliberate testing of U.S. will, requiring prompt and decisive action. On the other hand, it was not clear at the time to what extent central Cambodian authorities controlled Cambodian navy craft. Communications between Cambodia and the outside world had all but disappeared by the time of the seizure. Administration officials

do not know why the Cambodians seized the *Mayaguez*. In general, they told us that Cambodian intentions were not relevant. Once the *Mayaguez* was seized, the potential for political demands or embarrassment was great.

Second, the role of the Department of State during the *Mayaguez* incident appears to have been limited essentially to the delivery of U.S. messages in Washington, Peking, and New York. The information made available to us indicates that prior to the seizure State had made little effort to analyze political and military situations within Cambodia. During the incident, State had little information about ongoing events which was not originated by or available to other departments. An informal *Mayaguez* working group was established in State, but its function was limited to internally monitoring and reporting on communications received by State's Operations Center. We were unable to determine State's input to National Security Council meetings, but its principal representative at these meetings, said he was essentially an observer and contributed little to the discussions. He was possibly overshadowed in these deliberations by the Secretary of State, who was acting in his capacity as the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs during these meetings.

State agreed that it had little information about ongoing events which were not originated by or available to other departments, but maintained that it had a greater role during the *Mayaguez* incident than our report indicated. In support of this position, State noted that the Secretary of State, in both that capacity and in his former capacity as the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, directly participated in the major decisions. It pointed out that the Deputy Secretary and, on one occasion, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs also participated in National Security Council meetings. Finally, State cited a number of its actions, which are also discussed in parts of the report, as evidence of a greater role. In our opinion, the report's discussion of Department of State activities before and during the incident is factual and is not intended to diminish the importance of State's role. Rather, it brings into focus the uncertainty of conditions in Cambodia at the time, the difficulties of the diplomatic initiatives attempted, and the rapid movement of the U.S. response from a diplomatic to a military phase.

Finally, assembling under severe time constraints the various military assets scattered throughout the Pacific area was generally accomplished in an efficient and effective manner. Command and control of, and communications between, multiservice assets was established expeditiously. The performance of U.S. Forces was inspiring. At the same time, all available means were not used to obtain better evidence on the location of the crew while plans were being developed to assault Koh Tang Island. Also, although Defense officials told us that assessments of the risks involved in using the various military assets were made by higher authority before arriving at the selected course of action, it is unclear to us why certain risks were deemed acceptable and others unacceptable. For example, the risks involved in the Marine assault on Koh Tang—even without the traditional presoftening of the island by bombardment and with a relatively slow Marine buildup rate—were deemed acceptable. On the other hand, at a lower command level, the risk of having an aircraft carrying the Marine assault

commander fly below a 6,000-foot altitude restriction to obtain first hand information on Koh Tang, was deemed unacceptable.

Defense indicated that, considering the limited resources available, their inherent limitations, and the rapid tactical situation, it is difficult to see what more could have been done. We acknowledge the difficulties and uncertainties existing at the time, but we believe that several available opportunities to try to reduce the major uncertainty during the incident—the location of the *Mayaguez crew*—were not pursued. The crew's location was central to developing a U.S. response.

In retrospect, the final Marine assault and the bombing of the Cambodian mainland did not influence the Cambodian decision to release the crew. This was not known and probably could not have been known at the time. However, certain U.S. actions, for example, the sinking of gunboats and U.S. air activity in the area, probably did influence that decision.

Defense agreed with our assessment that the Marine assault and bombing of the mainland did not influence the Cambodian decision to release the crew. However, it stated that the decision to assault Koh Tang was reasonable given the information at the time, and that the mainland was bombed since Cambodia had the capability to interfere with the operation. Our report points out that information reaching decisionmakers was incomplete and in one important instance was inaccurate. With respect to the bombing, although we agree that Cambodian intentions could not be definitively known, no Cambodian military movement was noted. We do not question the purpose of either the assault or the mainland bombing.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE CONGRESS

U.S. decisionmakers have stated they were uncertain whether the *Mayaguez* seizure was a carefully planned operation or an isolated act of a local commander. It was also uncertain whether U.S. diplomatic messages, sent through indirect but the only available channels, reached the Cambodians. Moreover, due to a lack of U.S. understanding of Cambodian intentions to release both the *Mayaguez* and its crew or only the ship, the United States continued its invasion of the Cambodian Island of Koh Tang. The United Nations lack of a rapid and/or instant communications capability with the Cambodian leadership undoubtedly contributed to the several of these uncertainties. A better communications link between world capitals might provide a means of control against the use of force by miscalculation.

The technology to produce some form of satellite communications system to link all world capitals is available. Recognizing that international issues are increasingly momentous, the Congress may wish to consider the desirability of supporting and/or sponsoring some form of "satellite hotline" linking all world capitals, perhaps under U.N. auspices.

The Department of State took the position that even if an internationally sponsored communications link had existed at the time, it would not necessarily have contributed to a solution because the Cambodians might have chosen not to use it. The existence of such a system would not guarantee its use, but GAO does not view this obvious fact as a valid objection to our suggestion that the Congress may wish to explore the concept.

The Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy recently proposed that after an international crisis a review group under National Security Council auspices should assess the Government's performance and procedures. We endorse the need for such assessments. However, we believe there would be merit to having an independent review group make such an assessment, with the results of its assessment available for congressional consideration. Such a review would require access to National Security Council material if the review is to be of maximum value in the handling of future crises. Accordingly, the Congress may wish to consider the desirability of establishing a legislative requirement for such assessments.

CHAPTER 7.—AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR ANALYSIS

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

State did not challenge the facts in our report. However, in transmitting the Department's comments, the Deputy Under Secretary for Management expressed his personal view (see app. III) that the report was inadequate and misleading and that it attempted to second-guess the actions of officials acting under the constraints of time. He cited as an example of "weakness" in our reporting, that we ignored public statements of the Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs.¹

In drafting our report we very carefully reconstructed what factual information existed during the various stages of the incident. Care was taken not to introduce data which was out of the sequence of events and to weigh closely information which became available after the incident. For this reason, we purposely did not give much credence to the statements of the Deputy Premier of Cambodia which were made in September 1975, almost 4 months after the incident. Actually, the full September statements indicate that the seizure of the *Mayaguez* was initiated by a local commander, that authorities in Phnom Penh learned of it many hours later, and that poor communications between Phnom Penh and local authorities delayed the Cambodian response. Thus, these statements hardly support a view that expeditious military action was necessary to secure the release of the *Mayaguez* and its crew.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Defense did not question the accuracy of our report but rather, in a few instances, our interpretation of the facts.

Defense maintained that "the report insists that the whereabouts of the crew could and should have been more accurately ascertained." This statement does not accurately reflect our position. Our report points out that additional assets were available to attempt to obtain better information but that these assets were not used. Defense agreed the use of these assets might have provided additional data during the incident. We pointed out that details as to the basis for suspecting caucasians had been moved to the mainland never reached the military command centers. These details lend credence to an interpretation that

¹ Actually the statements referred to were made by the Deputy Premier of Cambodia.

a substantial portion of the crew had been moved to the mainland. Also, the number of possible caucasians moved was incorrectly reported. Although pilots indicated that the vessel carried 30 to 40 possible caucasians, both Hawaii and Washington reported that only 6 to 9 caucasians had reached the mainland. We agree with the Defense statement that definitive knowledge did not exist on the whereabouts of the crew. However, the information collected by pilots under difficult circumstances was accurate but was incompletely or incorrectly passed to decisionmakers.

Defense noted that our review was not made under the same time constraints imposed on decisionmakers by the incident. However, there was ample time during the incident to query air crews for additional information about the possible caucasians. Standard crew debriefings were conducted during the incident, but they simply did not elicit some important details. Similarly, the photo interpreters in Thailand examined photographs from the scene only a few hours after they were taken and quickly passed the information obtained up the chain of command. However, no one informed the photo interpreters about or asked them to look for the fishing boat. More importantly, no one told the pilot who was taking photographs to try to get a picture of the boat. The pilot who photographed the boat carrying the crew was unaware that a vessel suspected of carrying caucasians was in the area. In conclusion, time did not prevent these actions from being initiated.

Defense maintained that "the report charges that the timing of the operation was unnecessarily hurried, requiring commanders to act with inadequate force and intelligence." Our report points out that the Marine assault was not the only possible military response. Sufficient Naval and Air forces were near Koh Tang to cordon off the island and prevent the movement of any crew members to the mainland or reinforcement by the Cambodians. The delay in the assault could have permitted the collection of more adequate forces and thus have reduced the military risks involved. Finally, we pointed out the difficulty of the mission assigned to the assault force and the risk of an assault to crew members believed to be held on Koh Tang. Defense did not address these points but stressed that, from a military standpoint, there was tactical value in a preemptive strike.

Defense stated that "the report challenges the underlying purposes for attacking mainland targets." We did not question the purpose of the strikes but noted that (1) the initial armed reconnaissance flight revealed no military movement, (2) no targets were struck until 4 hours after the Koh Tang landing, (3) less than half of the 12 Cambodian aircraft attacked on the ground were destroyed, (4) other targets struck were not directly related to Cambodian ability to interfere or retaliate, and (5) the small number of old propeller-driven Cambodian aircraft were outclassed by the numerous U.S. jets on the scene. These facts cast doubt on the Defense statement that lack of Cambodian interference or reinforcement can be attributed to successful mainland strikes.

Defense maintained that the Defense Intelligence Agency and Intelligence Pacific did agree on the nature of the probable opposition, and that, in retrospect, their force estimates appear to be quite accurate. However, Defense did not address our statement that the intelligence estimates, which differed widely, were not reconciled.

Defense acknowledged that these more accurate estimates did not reach the assault force commander. CINCPAC has since established a feedback system designed to ensure acknowledgement of critical intelligence by all concerned commands.

In conclusion, our report emphasized that the Department of Defense implementation of decisions and the performance of military personnel during the incident were worthy of praise.

APPENDIX 1

LETTER DATED JUNE 23, 1975, FROM CHAIRMAN, HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

JUNE 23, 1975.

HON. ELMER B. STAATS,
*Comptroller General, General Accounting Office,
Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. STAATS: Pursuant to our June 9 telephone conversation, I am writing on behalf of the Subcommittee to officially request that the General Accounting Office conduct a thorough investigation of all aspects of the seizure of the US vessel *Mayaguez* and subsequent diplomatic efforts and military operations to secure its release.

In particular, the Subcommittee would appreciate your report focusing on improvement of the crisis prevention and crisis management operations of our government. It seems imperative, however, that other major issues relating to the effectiveness of the planning and execution of military operations, the speed and quality of our military and diplomatic communications and the adequacy of arrangements both for briefing and consulting Congress also be reviewed. It is the hope of the Subcommittee that a report on the *Mayaguez* can be provided as soon as possible with a further report on the crisis management system at a later date. If at some future point you feel that these reports should be combined, I would be happy to review their status with you.

Corollary to your review of the *Mayaguez* incident, and the US crisis management, we would like GAO to independently establish or confirm the chronology of events of the *Mayaguez* incident and to compile a list of key decision makers on various aspects of the incident. A response to these requests is desired as soon as possible.

The Subcommittee is appreciative of your willingness to provide substantial resources for conduct of this investigation as well as for completion of a report in response to our earlier request we made regarding the adequacy of our maritime warning system. We realize that the nature of the subject will require GAO to take its investigation to the highest levels of government. The Subcommittee will be glad to assist GAO in securing the cooperation of the Executive branch.

Sincerely,

DANTE B. FASCELL,
*Chairman, Subcommittee on International Political
and Military Affairs.*

APPENDIX 2

LETTERS DATED AUGUST 20, 1975, MARCH 15, MARCH 30, AND APRIL 15, 1976, FROM
STAFF SECRETARY, NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

AUGUST 20, 1975.

MR. ELMER B. STAATS,
*Comptroller General of the United States,
Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. STAATS: Secretary Kissinger has asked me to respond to your letter of July 8 informing him of the request made by the Subcommittee on International Political and Military Affairs for review of the *Mayaguez* incident and of crisis management operations within the Executive Branch.

He has, in addition, reviewed the July 18 letter from Mr. Oppenheimer of the General Accounting Office outlining in more detail the material sought.

As you know, we have already provided a great deal of information on these subjects to the Congress in the form of testimony by senior officials of the Executive Branch and responses to inquiries by Congressional committees and

to letters from individual Congressmen. Mr. Kissinger has asked that we supply the GAO investigators with copies of all such material, and my office is now collecting copies of this information for this purpose. We will transmit the material to the GAO team as soon as it is ready.

Should the investigators have further specific questions after they have reviewed this material, we will be glad to consider ways in which we might appropriately be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

JEANNE W. DAVIS,
Staff Secretary.

MARCH 15, 1976.

HON. ELMER B. STAATS,
*Comptroller General of the United States, General Accounting Office,
Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. STAATS: In response to your letter of February 2, 1976 the NSC Staff has now completed its review of the GAO report on the *Mayaguez* incident.

In the course of the review we have been in touch with the Departments of State and Defense. Their comments, which are being submitted to you separately, include a substantive critique and point out some severe deficiencies in the report. Since they seem accurately to convey the views of the Executive Branch, we have refrained from additional substantive comment.

I would also like to note that Phillip W. Buchen, the President's Counsel, wrote Congressman Fascell on March 2 offering to lend to him or a member of his staff a copy of the CIA post mortem on the *Mayaguez*. So far neither he nor his staff has contacted me to request the report.

I also note that you have not asked the Central Intelligence Agency to review the report. Since that Agency furnished some classified source material to the GAO investigators, we believe it essential that it also be given the opportunity to review the draft report.

The report in its present form should remain classified. We believe it would be preferable for you to submit a classified report to the Congressional subcommittee. However, if the subcommittee insists on an unclassified version of the report appropriate for publication, we would be pleased to work with the GAO and the various departments and agencies involved in preparing such an unclassified version.

Sincerely,

JEANNE W. DAVIS,
Staff Secretary.

MARCH 30, 1976.

MR. J. K. FASICK,
*Director, International Division, General Accounting Office,
Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. FASICK: In response to telephone inquiries from Mr. Watson of your staff we accept your assurances that the GAO did not use any CIA material in its report on the *Mayaguez* incident. We still believe, however, that the report contains information generated by several components of the Intelligence Community and included in various situation reports which were made available to the GAO investigators. It certainly includes "sources and methods", which, of course, are the responsibility of the Director of Central Intelligence. Therefore, we suggest that it would be useful and helpful for you to send it to the Director of Central Intelligence for review. We do not think this would be very time consuming and it would ensure that your report is as comprehensive as possible.

With regard to the classification, we still believe the report should remain classified. We see great disadvantage to the United States in advising the world, including our potential adversaries, of the manner in which the U.S. Government operates in time of crisis, particularly with the degree of specificity contained in this report. We would find a similar detailed account of another government's operations, for example, during the last Middle Eastern crisis, to be of inestimable value in terms of predicting how they might react in future crises. We believe you would be doing this country a grave disservice by declassifying and releasing your report.

Having said this, let me assure you that we have no wish to avoid your criticisms of the Executive Branch or block the public release of your recommendations. We believe a separate, unclassified paper containing both your criticisms and recommendations would be relatively easy to prepare. The main narrative and detailed account of Executive Branch actions, however, should remain classified.

Sincerely,

JEANNE W. DAVIS,
Staff Secretary.

APRIL 15, 1976.

Mr. J. K. FASICK,
Director, International Division, General Accounting Office,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. FASICK: General Scowcroft has asked me to respond to your letter of April 7, signed for you by Charles D. Hylander, regarding the classification of the GAO study on the *Mayaguez*.

There is an apparent misinterpretation of my March 30 letter. Nowhere in that letter is there any statement or implication that "certain undesignated portions (of the report) could be treated as unclassified." The NSC position is that the Report in its present form cannot be practicably segregated into classified and unclassified sections and that the entire report should remain classified.

Let me assure you once again that we have no wish to avoid your criticisms of the Executive Branch or block the public release of your recommendations. There is nothing to prevent you from providing the members of Chairman Fascell's subcommittee and its staff with copies of the classified report. In addition, as suggested in my previous letters, we believe the GAO could easily prepare an unclassified paper containing both your criticisms and recommendations without revealing the detailed information which, for the reasons set forth in my March 30 letter, would be damaging to the national security of the United States.

Sincerely,

JEANNE W. DAVIS,
Staff Secretary.

APPENDIX 3

LETTERS DATED SEPTEMBER 16, NOVEMBER 28, AND DECEMBER 10, 1975 AND
MARCH 15, 1976, FROM DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

SEPTEMBER 16, 1975.

HON. ELMER B. STAATS,
Comptroller General,
General Accounting Office

DEAR MR. STAATS: I refer to your letter of July 8 addressed to the Secretary of State and to subsequent letters of July 23 and August 6 from Mr. John E. Watson of your staff in regard to the seizure of the U.S. vessel *Mayaguez*, and to crisis management operations of the Government.

Mr. Watson's letter of August 6 requested that the Department furnish the General Accounting Office certain information which falls in the category of extremely sensitive diplomatic communications between the Secretary of State and U.S. Missions abroad. He also requested copies of intelligence summaries which, of necessity, contain highly sensitive information of worldwide scope.

After careful consideration, we must conclude that access to the requested records, which are of the highest sensitivity, cannot be granted. Accordingly, I must inform you that we are unable to allow your staff access to those materials which are categorized by the Department as "NODIS," and to the intelligence summaries prepared for the Secretary by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

I feel confident that with the information and records previously furnished, and with such additional documents as we can yet provide, you will be able successfully to complete the assignment requested of you by Congressman Fascell.

Sincerely,

LAWRENCE S. EAGLEBURGER.

NOVEMBER 28, 1975.

HON. ELMER B. STAATS,
Comptroller General of the United States.

DEAR MR. STAATS: This is in response to your letter of September 30 in which you state that certain NODIS and Bureau of Intelligence and Research documents which had previously not been made available to the GAO are essential to the GAO review of the *Mayaguez* incident.

Since the receipt of your letter, we have been reviewing the documents in question to determine whether due to the passage of time or other factors these documents may now be made available to the GAO. Our review of some of these documents is still in progress and I expect that it will be completed in the very near future.

I will, of course, inform you promptly as to the results of our review. I hope that when you have seen the documents we are able to make available, there will be no further disagreement concerning the requirements for your investigation.

Sincerely,

LAWRENCE S. EAGLEBURGER.

DECEMBER 10, 1975.

HON. ELMER B. STAATS,
Comptroller General of the United States.

DEAR MR. STAATS: In my letter to you of November 28, I stated that the Department was in the process of reviewing certain NODIS and Bureau of Intelligence and Research documents requested by the GAO in connection with its investigation of the *Mayaguez* incident. That review has now been completed.

I am pleased to inform you that we are now able to make available either for your retention or, in some cases, for reading and taking notes almost all of the documents which you have requested. We find that we are able to make available to representatives of the GAO all of the material in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research Summaries with the exception of material derived from Department of Defense sources, which would have to be sought directly from the Department of Defense. In addition, with respect to the NODIS cables, we similarly are able to make available 12 of the 14 NODIS cables with the exception of one paragraph of one cable. The exceptions relate to sensitive positions and statements of other governments which were made in confidence, the disclosure of which could result in substantial damage of our relations with those governments.

I hope that members of your staff will find these documents helpful in the completion of their investigation.

Sincerely,

LAWRENCE S. EAGLEBURGER.

UNCLASSIFIED WITH SECRET ATTACHMENT

MARCH 15, 1976.

HON. ELMER B. STAATS,
Comptroller General of the United States.

DEAR MR. STAATS: I enclose herewith the Department of State's reply to the GAO report on the *Mayaguez* incident. I should note, however, that our reply, limited as it is to specific comments on specific statements from the report, cannot adequately express my personal view of how totally inadequate and misleading the report is. It is, by the most generous interpretation I can muster, an exercise in *ex post facto* diplomacy by amateurs. Its conclusions demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of the issues involved, and a total disregard of the atmosphere in which the decisions surrounding the *Mayaguez* incident were made.

The report's essential—in fact, fatal—weakness is its total failure to recognize first principles. The fact is that the United States Government was attempting to secure the release of an American ship and an American crew seized by Cambodia in blatant violation of international law. The report's conclusions largely ignore the fact that we were reacting to a Cambodian provocation, and that we had a responsibility to protect the lives of American citizens. It ignores the public statements of the Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign

Affairs, which indicate that the central authorities were aware of the United States' extreme concern for the welfare of the crew of the *Mayaguez*. Those statements, and the testimony of the captain of the *Mayaguez*, further indicate that the Cambodian authorities waited some 13 hours after having made the fundamental decision to release the crew to broadcast that message on their *domestic* radio, by which time our landing on Koh Tang was beginning. This crucial broadcast, which in fact referred only to the ship and not to the crew, was delayed until the last possible minute, and was designed to camouflage the actions of Cambodian local commanders behind a cloak of anti-American vitriol. When speed was essential, the Cambodians bumbled and delayed.

The report's attempts to second-guess the actions of officials acting under the constraints of time—and without the advantage of the hindsight the GAO so happily enjoyed—bring the entire purpose of the report into question. The report acknowledges but does not take into account in its conclusion the fact that we faced, at the time, the likelihood that the Cambodian authorities, whose hostility toward the U.S. had been so clearly demonstrated, might remove the members of the crew to the mainland where their recovery would have been virtually impossible until and unless the Cambodians decided to release them—after who knows how many months and how much agony and humiliation.

The drafters of this report had a special responsibility to attempt to understand the realities of the diplomatic environment at the time of the *Mayaguez* seizure. They did not meet this responsibility. Instead, they went out of their way to develop wholly fictional diplomatic scenarios which bore no resemblance to fact or reality, and then criticized the Administration for its "failure" to pursue their fantasies.

I regret the need to react so strongly, but it is time we—all of us—put a stop to this wholly senseless and highly destructive tendency constantly to find fault with everything our Government does. We often make mistakes, but in my opinion the GAO has failed—despite its best efforts—to find any substantial failures in the handling of the *Mayaguez* incident.

Sincerely,

LAWRENCE S. EAGLEBURGER.

GAO Note: Detailed agency comments contained in a Secret attachment to this letter are addressed in the text of this report and therefore were not printed.

APPENDIX 4

LETTER DATED OCTOBER 24, 1975, FROM DIRECTOR, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OCTOBER 24, 1975.

Hon. ELMER B. STAATS,
Comptroller General of the United States,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. STAATS: This is in response to your letter of 9 September 1975 in which you requested access to all information held by this Agency related to the *Mayaguez* incident. A review of your request has indicated that most of the information requested is quite sensitive and highly classified.

In the past, the policy in sensitive areas such as this has been to brief the concerned committees of Congress directly on the details of such matters. While this procedure may change in the future as a result of the current congressional inquiries, it is felt that any decision to modify prior practice in this area should await the termination of the current investigations and suggested changes in procedures emanating therefrom.

Absent any change in the existing arrangement, we would propose to brief the Subcommittee on International Political and Military Affairs, House International Relations Committee, directly on such information as the Subcommittee may desire from CIA.

Sincerely,

W. E. COLBY,
Director.

APPENDIX 5

LETTER DATED MARCH 16, 1976, FROM ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY,
INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MARCH 16, 1976.

Mr. J. KENNETH FASICK,
Director, International Division, U.S. General Accounting Office,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. FASICK: The GAO draft report of 2 February 1976, "The Seizure of the Mayaguez—A Case Study of Crisis Management" (OSD Case #4218-A), has been reviewed by the Department of Defense.

Comments on the major findings and recommendations of the report affecting the Department of Defense are contained in the attachment. The Department of Defense has worked with the Department of State on the comments and general agreement has been reached.

The Department of Defense interposes no objection to the declassification of this document. However, the Department defers to the judgment of other agencies concerning the classification of material under their purview.

In accordance with DoD Directive 5200.I, you are authorized to distribute the final report to appropriate Congressional Committees, individual members of Congress, and executive agencies.

It is requested that this reply be published in the Appendix to the final report.

Sincerely,

HARRY E. BERGOLD,
Acting Assistant Secretary.

Attachment.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE GAO DRAFT REPORT, "THE
SEIZURE OF THE MAYAGUEZ—A CASE STUDY OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT

There are a few areas in the report which contain speculative conclusions on the part of the GAO which are based upon a too-rigid interpretation of the facts. For example, throughout, the GAO report appears to blithely assume that the Cambodians' failure to attempt certain actions proves that preemptive measures by U.S. Forces were unnecessary. Similarly, a number of conclusions were based on an extensive after-the-fact analysis which was not available to decisionmakers during the short period of the crisis. The Department of Defense believes that some general comments are appropriate, in order to put these events and conclusions into better perspective and to make the report more accurate and helpful. There are four substantive areas which deserve attention and general comments.

First, the report insists that the whereabouts of the crew could and should have been more accurately ascertained. This criticism must be viewed in the context of the crisis. The implication that the U.S. intelligence community can or should be able to reach into every remote corner of the world on a moment's notice, ignores the physical and fiscal facts of life. The information desired here was not general but very detailed and concerned specific people who were being moved almost constantly. Air observation and photographs may be helpful in such a case but certainly offer no guarantee to provide this type of data. The time to conduct extensive examination of photography and detailed debriefings of aircrews, as was conducted by the GAO, was simply not available to decisionmakers. It must be recalled that approximately 16 hours elapsed from planning to execution of the Koh Tang operation. Actually the U.S. was aware that some of the crew had probably reached the mainland. To ask for more, stretches credibility. Moreover, even the GAO post-action analysis does not indicate that definitive knowledge regarding the location of the crew was among the available data. Also, there is no evidence that an additional wait would have further clarified the situation. It remains for us to insist that the assessments made were as good as could be expected in the light of information then available and the other considerations which constrained planners and decision-makers.

Second, the report charges that the timing of the operation was unnecessarily hurried, requiring commanders to act with inadequate force and intelligence. Again this criticism must be viewed in the context of the time and the events. The United States was attempting to secure the release of the Mayaguez crew before anything happened to them or they were transferred to the less accessible interior of the mainland.

From a military standpoint, it is a well known and proven principle that to move first and earliest yields a commander great advantage over an opponent by denying him the time or the opportunity to improve his position. In this case moving rapidly to cordon off the island and to attack the local garrison was not unreasonable. In fact, the crew was not on Koh Tang. This does not discredit the timing or the tactics used as much as it illustrates again the uncertainties which plague military operations and intelligence gathering (discussed above). Certainly, delay would have made it possible to bring more force to bear but this decision would have given the Cambodians more time to act. As with all military operations, it was necessary to balance competing and incompatible demands and in the context of the crisis surprise was gauged to be more important than overwhelming force. Therefore, we believe that the tactical judgments that were made, based on information available at the time, were both reasonable and justified from a military point of view.

Third, the report challenges the underlying purposes for attacking mainland targets. The intent of the mainland airstrikes was to deny Cambodia the capability to interfere either by sea or by air. The fact that in retrospect the specific bombing strikes had little influence on the Cambodians' decision to release the Mayaguez crew is not disputed. However, the presence of U.S. combat aircraft on the scene prior to the airstrikes and before the release of the Mayaguez crew as indicated in Captain Miller's testimony, did weigh heavily in the Cambodian decision. Additionally, the fact that the Cambodians did not reinforce or interfere with our operation on Koh Tang from the mainland cannot be disputed. This lack of reinforcement or interference can be attributed, in part at least, to the successful mainland airstrikes. The facilities were approved military targets and, in light of the information at the time, were appropriate, based on the limited objectives for which the airstrikes were designed.

Fourth, the report states that available intelligence on Cambodian opposition on Koh Tang was not fully coordinated and was not made available to the assault force commander. This criticism is only partially true. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and Intelligence Center Pacific (IPAC) did agree on the nature of the probable opposition, and in retrospect their force estimates appear to be quite accurate. Although these estimates were given wide distribution, by an unusual set of circumstances they did not reach the ground assault commander. The Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) has subsequently established a feedback system which is designed to ensure acknowledgement of critical intelligence by all commands directly concerned in an operation of this sort. It should be recognized that time and geographical distances were both critical factors in the operation which inhibited extensive cross-checking and feedback.

GAO Note: Additional specific observations made by Defense are addressed in the text of the report and therefore were not printed.

APPENDIX VI

STATUS OF INCIDENT AT TIME OF EACH NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

The first National Security Council meeting was convened about 7 hours after Washington received notice of the seizure. Information concerning Cambodian motivations prior to the first meeting included the knowledge that:

- 10 days before the seizure a group of Thai fishing boats had been seized and later released by Cambodia.
- 8 days before the seizure Cambodian patrol boats had fired upon and unsuccessfully attempted to seize a South Korean ship.
- 6 days before the seizure six vessels fleeing from South Vietnam and a Vietnam Government craft were seized by Cambodia.
- 5 days before the seizure Cambodia had stopped, seized, and searched a Panamanian vessel, which it released about 36 hours later.
- 5 days before the seizure Cambodian authorities were focusing attention on the need to control certain outlying islands because of possible petroleum reserves.
- 3 days before the seizure evidence suggested that the new Cambodian Government was claiming a 90 mile territorial limit and planned to seize all foreign ships violating such limits.

FIRST MEETING, MONDAY, MAY 12, 12 TO 12:45 P.M.

Attendees

President
 Vice President
 Secretary of State¹
 Secretary of Defense
 Director, Central Intelligence Agency
 Deputy Secretary of State
 Deputy Secretary of Defense
 Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs¹
 Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General David Jones
 Assistant to the President, Donald Rumsfeld
 Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs
 Senior NSC Staff Officer for East Asia, Richard Smyser

Location of ship

Believed being taken to Cambodian mainland.

Location of crew

Believed to be on ship.

Status of military and other activities

Prior to this first meeting:

- The National Military Command Center had directed and the U.S. Pacific Command had launched reconnaissance aircraft from Utapao, Thailand.
- Commander 7th Fleet had tasked the destroyer U.S.S. Holt and supply ship U.S.S. Vega to proceed to seizure area at best speed.
- Intelligence community was taking actions necessary to maximize information availability.

Subsequent actions

- Contact made with the People's Republic of China Liaison Office in Washington and the Foreign Ministry in Peking and with Cambodian representatives in Peking to demand ship's release.
- Constant reconnaissance of area ordered, including tracking of all naval craft (initially outside of but later within 12-mile territorial limit). Photo reconnaissance made of Phnom Penh, Kompong Som, and Poul Wai, with priority on identifying merchant ships, naval craft, and para-troop landing zones.
- Aircraft carrier U.S.S. Coral Sea directed to proceed to seizure area at best speed.
- An Amphibious Ready Group/Marine assault unit of four vessels were to prepare to proceed to seizure area.
- Guidance issued to U.S. merchant ships to stay clear of area.
- Munitions placed in water in vicinity of Mayaguez as a signal against movement.
- Mines readied for specific areas adjunct to the seizure area.
- Jet aircraft ordered to make low passes over and to fire near, but not at, small craft in the general area.
- President authorized use of riot control agents in effort to recover ship and crew.
- U.S.S. Holt ordered to be prepared to move or to disable Mayaguez upon arrival at scene.
- U.S. 7th Fleet directed the Marine Amphibious Ready Group to reassign troops to have them ready to move.

SECOND MEETING, TUESDAY, MAY 13, 10:30 TO 11:30 A.M.

Attendees

President
 Vice President
 Secretary of Defense
 Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

¹ At the time of the Mayaguez crisis, both posts were held by Henry Kissinger. The Deputy Secretary of State presented the views of the Department of State at each NSC session while Mr. Kissinger acted in his capacity as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General David Jones
 Director, Central Intelligence Agency
 Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
 Deputy Secretary of Defense
 Assistant to the President, Donald Rumsfeld
 Counsellor to the President, John Marsh
 Counsellor to the President, Robert Hartmann
 Senior NSC Staff Officer for East Asia, Richard Smyser

Location of ship

Ship initially located near Poulo Wai Island. Ship then moved to about one mile off Koh Tang Island, a Cambodian-claimed island about 30 miles south/southwest of the Cambodian mainland. Ship now dead in water.

Location of crew

Visual reconnaissance had reported that a small vessel with lots of people was leaving Mayaguez and moving toward Koh Tang. Subsequent visual report indicated small vessel flying red flag moving toward Koh Tang with possible caucasians on board.

Status of diplomatic, military, and other activities

- One reconnaissance aircraft had received minor hit from Cambodian small arms fire.
- No response yet received from diplomatic notes given to People's Republic of China Foreign Ministry or Cambodian Embassy in Peking.
- Cambodian local authorities learned that an American ship had been captured south of Poulo Wai and that the prisoners were to be moved to Koh Tang Island.
- Thai Prime Minister had emphasized that Thailand would not permit use of its bases for U.S. action or retaliation against Cambodia. The U.S. Charge d'Affaires informed Thai Government that United States would inform it before undertaking any action involving Thai based U.S. planes.
- U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Thailand had advised Secretary of State that United States should "play by the rules" otherwise it stands to lose a great deal in terms of Thai cooperation.

Subsequent actions

- Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered second aircraft carrier with Amphibious Ready Group/Marine assault unit to sail from Philippines as soon as possible.
- Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC and on-scene commander to isolate Koh Tang by intercepting all vessels but to obtain Washington approval before destroying or sinking any vessels.
- Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that all available helicopters in Thailand, 125 U.S. Air Force security police from Nakhon Phanom Air Base in Thailand, 2 Marine platoons from the Philippines, and a Marine battalion from Okinawa be moved to Utapao, Thailand Air Base.
- One Cambodian gunboat sunk by U.S. A-7 aircraft.

THIRD MEETING, TUESDAY, MAY 13, 10:40 P.M. TO ABOUT 12:30 P.M.

Attendees

President
 Vice President
 Secretary of State
 Secretary of Defense
 Director, Central Intelligence Agency
 Deputy Secretary of Defense
 Deputy Secretary of State
 Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General David Jones
 Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
 Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs
 Assistant to the President, Donald Rumsfeld
 Counsellor to the President, John Marsh
 Counsellor to the President, Robert Hartmann
 Counsel to the President, Phillip Buchen
 Senior NSC Staff Officer for East Asia, Richard Smyser

Location of ship

No change.

Location of crew

Fishing boat suspected of carrying caucasians had been visually observed before this NSC meeting moving from Koh Tang toward Cambodian mainland. U.S. jets unsuccessfully tried to stop or divert its movement by firing across its bow and dropping riot control agents on it. Pilots reported that at 11:15 p.m. it docked at the mainland port of Kompong Som. One pilot report indicated 30 to 40 possible caucasians on board. Pacific Command intelligence report indicated 8 to 9 possible crew members were aboard.

Status of diplomatic, military and other activities

- U.S. message for Cambodia furnished to the People's Republic of China Foreign Ministry in Peking on previous day had been returned.
- Communist Chinese official in Paris had said Chinese would not do anything if United States used military force.
- Unsuccessful attempt made by United States to rescue 10 Cambodian survivors from gunboat sunk by U.S. aircraft.
- Helicopter transporting 18 U.S. Air Force Security Police from North Thailand to Utapao Air Base lost with 23 Americans killed.

Subsequent actions

- Plans finalized for Wednesday night (Thursday morning in Cambodia) Marine assault on Koh Tang, boarding of Mayaguez, and bombing of targets in Kompong Som area of Cambodian mainland.
- U.S.S. Hancock, carrying 14 Marine helicopters and 400 Marines (from April 1975 U.S. evacuation from Cambodia), departed for Koh Tang; estimated arrival time 6:00 a.m., Friday morning.
- The United States delivered a letter between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday to U.N. Secretary General seeking help in securing release of ship and crew.
- One additional Cambodian gunboat and two small vessels sunk by U.S. aircraft.
- Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved a Resolution stating that:
 - “Committee condemns an act of armed aggression on an unarmed U.S. merchant vessel in the course of innocent passage on an established trade route.
 - “The President has engaged in diplomatic means to secure release and we support that.
 - “Third, we support the President in the exercise of his constitutional powers within the framework of the War Powers Resolution to secure the release of the ship and its men.
 - “We urge the Cambodian Government to release the ship and the men forthwith.”
- Thailand formally protested U.S. movement of Marines to Thailand and requested their removal.
- A U.S. Embassy in the Middle East reported to the Secretary of State that a third country official had learned from a senior [security violation] diplomat that his government was using its influence with Cambodia to seek early release of the Mayaguez and that it was expected to be released soon.
- Defense press spokesman announced that there were indications that the Cambodians appeared to be attempting to move U.S. captive crewmen from the ship and from the Island of Koh Tang to the mainland. One boat succeeded in reaching Kompong Som.
- B-52 bombers in Guam tasked for use in operations to recapture Mayaguez.
- Discretionary authority given to attack and sink all small craft in vicinity of Koh Tang

FOURTH MEETING, WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 8:52 P.M. TO 5:40 P.M.

Attendees

President
 Vice President
 Secretary of State
 Secretary of Defense
 Deputy Secretary of State
 Deputy Secretary of Defense

Director, Central Intelligence Agency
 Counsel to the President, Philip Buchen
 Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
 Assistant to the President, Donald Rumsfeld
 Counsellor to the President, John Marsh
 Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of staff, General David Jones
 Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs
 Senior NSC Staff Officer for East Asia, Richard Smyser
 Counsellor to the President, Robert Hartmann
 Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral James Holloway

Location of ship

No change.

Location of crew

No new information.

Status of diplomatic, military and other activities

- U.S.S. Holt on scene near Koh Tang. Second destroyer within 3 hours of Koh Tang area. U.S.S. Coral Sea close enough to launch air strikes on Cambodian mainland.
- 22 Members of Congress informed about sinking of Cambodian vessels to prevent movement of crew to the mainland.
- First public announcement made of U.S. use of military force.

Subsequent actions

- President briefs 17 congressional leaders on military actions ordered at 4th NSC meeting.
- Letter sent to President of U.N. Security Council stating that "certain appropriate measures under Article 51 * * * to achieve release of vessel and its crew" had been taken.
- Marine assault made on Koh Tang and Mayaguez.
- Marines recapture Mayaguez; crew released by Cambodians and recovered.
- Ream Airfield and refinery in Kompong Som area bombed with tactical aircraft from U.S.S. Coral Sea.
- 15,000 pound bomb dropped on Koh Tang Island.

APPENDIX 7

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT

Meaning of type faces:
 Roman type—Items in executive branch chronology confirmed by GAO.
 Bold type—Items in executive branch chronology GAO was unable to confirm.
Italic type—Additions to or modifications of executive branch chronology.

Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
Apr. 17.....	May 12.....		X		Between fall of Phnom Penh on Apr. 17 and seizure of Mayaguez on May 12, the United States undertook periodic reconnaissance flights in the area.
Apr. 25.....	Apr. 27.....			X	A Cambodian "Special National Congress" confirmed Sihanouk as Chief of State and Penn Nouth as Prime Minister of the new Government of Cambodia.
May 1.....				X	State Department Status Report on Cambodia stated: "At present, to our knowledge, no foreign nation has an Embassy in Phnom Penh." [GAO Note: State Department later said that there may have been People's Republic of China personnel in Phnom Penh at this time but there was no indication that an Embassy had been established.]
May 2.....					A group of Thai fishing boats were seized and later released by Cambodian authorities.

See footnotes at end of table.

APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Washington	Time	Cambodian	Type of action			Action
			U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
	May 4.....				X	<i>Korean ship fired upon by Cambodian patrol boat but escaped. Korean officials requested U.S. assistance. U.S. officials in Korea discussed on several occasions with State Department officials in Washington by phone.</i>
	May 6.....				X	<i>6 vessels fleeing from South Vietnam and a South Vietnam Government craft were seized by Cambodia.</i>
	May 7.....				X	<i>New Cambodian regime was focusing attention on which islands they should control because of possible petroleum reserves.</i>
	May 7.....				X	<i>Panamanian ship seized; released about 56 hours later on authority of Cambodian hierarchy.</i>
	May 9.....				X	<i>There was some evidence to suggest the new Cambodian Government was claiming a 80-mile territorial limit and planned to seize foreign ships violating such limits.</i>
	May 12					
	3:10 to 3:18 a.m.	2:10 to 2:18 p.m.			X	<i>SS Mayaguez—a U.S. merchant ship—challenged by Cambodian gunboat firing shot over bow about 6-7 miles south of Cambodian island of Paulo Wat which lies about 60 miles south/southwest of Cambodian mainland.</i>
	3:18 a.m.....	2:18 p.m.....			X	<i>Mr. John Neal of Delta Exploration Co. in Jakarta, Indonesia received a mayday call from the Mayaguez: "Have been fired upon and boarded by Cambodian armed forces at 9 degrees 48 minutes north/102 degrees 53 minutes east. Ship being towed to unknown Cambodian port"</i>
	4 to 5 a.m.....	3 to 4 p.m.....			X	<i>Mr. Neal lost communication with the Mayaguez, gave up trying to reach the ship and informed the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta of the incident.</i>
	4:45 a.m.....	3:45 p.m.....			X	<i>U.S. Defense Attaché Office, Singapore, informed Commander Seventh Fleet that local shipping agency has received mayday relayed by tubboat: "Being boarded by Cambodian army and commandeered at position 9 degrees 48 minutes north/102 degrees 53 minutes east." Vessel identified itself as an American flag ship. DOD officials stated that message arrived at CINPAC headquarters, Honolulu, and Washington after message from Jakarta.</i>
	4:54 to 6:55 a.m.	3:54 to 5:55 p.m.	X			<i>U.S. Embassy Jakarta sends Washington (NSA, White House, CIA, DIA, NMCC), and concerned commands a series of six messages informing them of the incident. Embassy indicates that vessel is under own power slowly following one gunboat to Kompong Som; no casualties; crew does not feel to be in immediate danger; troops on board do not speak English, crew standing by for any instructions.</i>
	5:12 a.m.....	4:12 p.m.....		X		<i>National Military Command Center at the Pentagon and other addressees receive notification of the incident from U.S. Embassy Jakarta.</i>
	5:34 a.m.....	4:34 p.m.....		X		<i>NMCC officials discussed seizure with Pacific Command officials.</i>
	Approximately					
	5:55 a.m.....	4:55 p.m.....			X	<i>Mayaguez anchors near Paulo Wat Island close to the point of seizure.</i>
	6:18 a.m.....	5:18 p.m.....			X	<i>Follow-up message from U.S. DAO. Manila reporting local radio operator receipt of mayday message redistributed.</i>
	6:20 a.m.....	5:20 p.m.....		X		<i>NMCC officials discuss possible aircraft reconnaissance with Pacific Command.</i>
	6:46 a.m.....	5:46 p.m.....		X		<i>Acting Chairman, JCS notified of situation.</i>

See footnotes at end of table.

APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
7:02 a.m.	6:02 p.m.		X		NMCC notifies Pacific Command to get crew in aircraft for possible launch.
7:19 a.m.	6:19 p.m.		X		NMCC initiates inquiry to ascertain cargo of Mayaguez.
7:30 a.m.	6:30 p.m.		X		JCS orders CINCPAC to send reconnaissance aircraft to find ship.
Approximately					
7:40 a.m.	6:40 p.m.			X	During his regular morning intelligence briefing the President learned of the Mayaguez seizure. Pacific Command requested authority to use flares/ searchlights for illumination for photo coverage. NMCC authorized use. Restricted aircraft to outside of Cambodian 18-mile territorial limit and directed "get aircraft airborne."
8:10 to 8:32 a.m.	7:10 to 7:32 p.m.		X		CINCPA CFLT, Hawaii, directs nearest surface units to proceed to area at best speed to provide assistance as practicable.
9:37 a.m.	8:37 p.m.		X		P-3 aircraft launched from Thailand to locate Mayaguez.
10:05 a.m.	9:05 p.m.		X		Pacific Command notified NMCC that P-3 aircraft from Cubi Point, Philippines enroute to scene.
10:19 a.m.	9:19 p.m.		X		Destroyer, U.S.S. Holt and a supply ship, U.S.S. Vega, get underway for seizure area.
12:05 p.m.	11:05 p.m.			X	President convened meeting of National Security Council.
May 12			X		President authorized U.S. forces to use riot control agents in the event a military operation is approved to recover the Mayaguez and crew.
May 12, 1:50 p.m.	May 13, 12:50 a.m.			X	White House announces seizure of ship. President calls it an "act of piracy," demands immediate release of ship and states that failure to do so will have the most serious consequences.
2:12 p.m.	1:12 a.m.		X		Aircraft carrier, U.S.S. Coral Sea and escorts directed to proceed to vicinity of Kompong Som. An amphibious ready group of four vessels (U.S.S. Orinawa, DeLuth, Barbour County, and Mt. Vernon) were directed to prepare to proceed to seizure area.
3:44 p.m.	2:44 a.m.		X		JCS directed (1) continuous P-3 surveillance of seizure area, (2) two flights of photo reconnaissance of Phnom Penh, Kompong Som port, and Poulou Wat at first satisfactory light, and (3) high altitude coverage of Poulou Wat. Subsequent CINCPAC message implementing photo reconnaissance directs aircraft to give priority to identifying merchant ships, naval craft, and paratroop landing zones.
4:30 p.m.	3:30 a.m.	X			A representative of the Liaison Office of the People's Republic of China was summoned to the Office of the Deputy Secretary of State and given a message for the Cambodian authorities, demanding the release of the ship. The PRC representative refused to accept the message.
4:30 p.m.	3:30 a.m.			X	White House announces that Congressman Rhodes who was at White House on another matter, was briefed on Mayaguez by President Ford.
5:22 p.m.	4:22 a.m.		X		CINCPAC Fleet ordered that MK68 mines be relded for specified areas.
6 p.m.	5 a.m.			X	Voice of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story of Mayaguez incident.
6:24 p.m.	5:24 a.m.		X		Second destroyer, U.S.S. Wilson underway toward seizure area with estimated time of arrival 8:00 p.m. on the 14th.
May 13, exact time uncertain				X	Cambodian communist local authorities learned that a U.S. vessel had been captured south of Poulou Wat and that the American prisoners were to be moved to Koh Tung Island by the Cambodians.

See footnotes at end of table.

APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
9:16 p.m.	8:16 a.m.		X		P-3 aircraft reports (1) positive identification of Mayaguez, anchored off Poulo Wai Island, (2) took one minor hit on low identification pass, and (3) two gunboats in vicinity.
9:43 p.m.	8:43 a.m.			X	<i>Mayaguez leaves Poulo Wai and proceeds as per instructions of armed guard on half speed to stall for time.</i>
9:44 p.m.	8:44 a.m.		X		U.S. Seventh Fleet directs the marine amphibious ready group alpha to reassign troops to have them ready to move.
10:30 p.m.	9:30 a.m.			X	Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs updates President on Mayaguez situation.
10:54 p.m.	9:54 a.m.		X		P-3 aircraft tasked to locate and trace all Cambodian naval units in area.
11:37 p.m.	10:37 a.m.		X		P-3 aircraft reported that Mayaguez was underway heading north.
12:10 a.m.	11:10 a.m.	X			A representative of the U.S. Liaison Office in Peking delivered a message to the Cambodian Embassy there. A message was also delivered to the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China.
12:30 a.m.	11:30 a.m.			X	<i>A mariners warning to avoid the area where the Mayaguez was seized was disseminated through the Defense Mapping Agency Hydrographic Center. (The warning was finalized by the U.S. Government agencies involved in Washington in the evening of the 12th. This was the first communication of the U.S. warning to U.S. shipping.)</i>
2:25 a.m.	1:25 p.m.		X		P-3 aircraft reported Mayaguez dead in water apparently preparing to anchor 1 mile north of Koh Tang Island. <i>Mayaguez log indicates that ship anchored off Koh Tang at about this time.</i>
2:25 a.m.	1:25 p.m.			X	Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs briefs President on situation.
4 a.m.	3 p.m.			X	<i>Thai Premier informed United States that Thailand would not permit use of its bases for U.S. action or retaliation against Cambodia. U.S. Chargé d'Affairs advised that the United States would inform the Thai Government before undertaking any action involving Thai based planes.</i>
4:45 a.m.	3:45 p.m.		X		<i>A-7 aircraft placed ordnance in the water in vicinity of Mayaguez as a signal not to get underway.</i>
Approximately					
5:40 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.	4:40 to 5:00 p.m.			X	<i>Mayaguez captain and crew ordered into two small fishing boats by Cambodian guards. Boats leave the Mayaguez and anchor about 75 yards off the beach.</i>
5:54 a.m.	4:54 p.m.		X		F-111 aircraft report smaller vessels tied up to Mayaguez and a ladder over side of Mayaguez.
6:17 a.m.	5:17 p.m.		X		JCS directs CINPAC to (1) maintain constant surveillance of Mayaguez, (2) prevent its movement into port on the Cambodian mainland. <i>Authority granted to (1) fire in vicinity of but not at small boats to prevent movement and (2) proceed within 12 mile territorial limit.</i>
Approximately					
6:18 to 6:24 a.m.	5:18 to 5:24 p.m.		X		On scene aircraft report two small vessels which had been tied to Mayaguez moving toward the island. One vessel flying a red flag appeared to have caucasian personnel on board while the other was carrying a lot of people.
Approximately					
6:30 a.m.	5:30 p.m.			X	<i>Two gunboats tie up to anchored fishing boats containing the Mayaguez crew.</i>

See footnotes at end of table.

APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
Approximately					
6:33 a.m.	5:33 p.m.		X		Pilot reports that personnel are disembarking on Koh Tang Island. Also reports ground fire received on low visual reconnaissance pass with no hits.
6:54 a.m.	5:34 p.m.			X	White House briefed press on location of ship and U.S. surveillance effort.
Approximately					
7:15 a.m.	6:15 p.m.		X		Aircraft reports small boats are off-loading personnel onto Koh Tang Island, and they are moving toward interior of island.
7:31 a.m.	6:31 p.m.	X			U.S. Charge in Bangkok reports to Secretary of State that U.S. should "play this by the rules" otherwise U.S. stands to lose a great deal in terms of Thai cooperation.
7:35 a.m.	6:35 p.m.		X		Aircraft pilots observed crew on the island but it cannot be ascertained how many men have been moved.
8:27 a.m.	7:27 p.m.		X		(Local U.S. command reports that (1) Mayaguez still dead in water, (2) all personnel appear to have been transferred to island, (3) two small boats are at island, and (4) aircraft report small arms fire from island.
8:30 a.m.	8:30 p.m.			X	Voice of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story on Mayaguez incident.
Approximately					
9 to 10 a.m.	8 to 9 p.m.			X	Cambodian guards take Mayaguez captain and chief engineer back to Mayaguez to examine cargo. They are frightened by U.S. aircraft dropping illumination flares and return to fishing vessel.
9:41 a.m.	8:41 p.m.		X		JCS notified CINCPAC that key immediate objective is to prevent Mayaguez from sailing toward mainland and authorized use of riot control agents and/or gunfire necessary to disable ship with minimum risk of lives but without risking sinking the ship.
9:50 to 10:03 a.m.	8:50 to 9:03 p.m.		X		U.S. aircraft report that two 80-80-foot boats departed Mayaguez and tied up to three vessels anchored at beach and that 5-6 people then went ashore near where anti-aircraft fire had been observed.
9:59 a.m.	8:59 p.m.		X		U.S.S. Hull directed to be prepared on arrival to (1) move Mayaguez with our resources, and (2) disable Mayaguez.
10 a.m.	9 p.m.			X	Voice of American broadcast to Cambodia carried news story on Mayaguez incident.
Tuesday morning.	Tuesday night.			X	Mayaguez crew spends night aboard fishing vessels anchored just off Koh Tang Island.
Approximately					
10:30 a.m.	9:30 p.m.			X	President convenes NSC meeting.
12 noon.	11 p.m.			X	JCS directs that Koh Tang Island be isolated by intercepting all boats. Action to be reported JCS.
12:10 p.m.	11:10 p.m.		X		JCS directs that (1) 125 U.S.A.F. security police be transferred from Nakhon Phanom to Utapao, (2) all available helicopters in Thailand be transferred to Utapao, (3) two marine platoons be transferred from the Philippines to Utapao, and (4) a marine battalion at Okinawa be placed in advanced deployability posture for air movement to Utapao.
May 13, 1:40 p.m.	May 14, 12:40 a.m.		X		U.S. aircraft reports five gunships in cove near Mayaguez about 300 yards off shore of Koh Tang.

See footnotes at end of table.

APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
2:38 p.m.	1:38 a.m.		X		<i>CINCPAC reports first ship on scene will be destroyer Holt, with an estimated arrival time of 8 a.m. (Cambodian 7 p.m.) on 14th and that carrier, Coral Sea will arrive later on 14th.</i>
3:05 p.m.	2:05 a.m.		X		C-130 aircraft reports receiving small arms fire from Koh Tang Island.
3:12 p.m.	2:12 a.m.		X		JCS directs marine battalion to move from Okinawa to Utapao by airlift.
3:20 p.m.	2:20 a.m.		X		C-130 aircraft receive antiaircraft fire from Cambodian gunboats.
3:35 to 3:57 p.m.	2:35 to 2:57 a.m.		X		P-3 aircraft reports gunboat discharged four people on Koh Tang Island. Four probable jeeps sighted under camouflage. Four people board gunboat enroute to Mayaguez.
5 p.m.	4 a.m.		X		Destroyer U.S.S. Wilson is estimated to arrive on scene in about 30 hours.
5:05 p.m.	4:05 a.m.		X		Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs notified that a high-ranking Chinese official in Paris said Chinese would not do anything if United States used military force in this affair.
5:05 p.m.	4:05 a.m.		X		Marine battalion from Okinawa begins airlift to Utapao. Units ready for forward movement upon arrival. Estimated completion time is 10 hours later.
5:30 p.m.	4:30 a.m.		X		U.S. aircraft reports that earlier a 30-foot boat went into shore at Koh Tang Island, 3 people got off, about 25 minutes later, 2-3 people got back on and boat then joined other craft anchored about 280 meters offshore; that shortly thereafter a patrol boat proceeded to the Mayaguez and stopped and that people or supplies could have been moved.
5:46 p.m.	4:46 a.m.		X		Estimated arrival time for destroyer U.S.S. Holt extended 4 hours to 12 a.m. (Cambodian 11 p.m.) on 14th.
5:50 to 11 p.m.	4:50 to 10 a.m.			X	White House Staff Officers, at the direction of the President, contacted 10 House and 11 Senate Members regarding the military measures directed by the President to be taken to prevent the Mayaguez and its crew from being transferred to the Cambodian mainland, and to prevent any reinforcement from the mainland of Cambodian Forces detaining the Mayaguez vessel and crew.
3 p.m.	5 a.m.			X	Voice of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story on Mayaguez incident.
6:30 p.m.	5:30 a.m.		X		NMCC confirmed that helicopter lost in Thailand with 23 Americans aboard; 18 were Air Force security police being transported from Northern Thailand to Utapao.
9:30 p.m.	5:30 a.m.			X	A field report indicated that at this time a 30-foot craft with approximately 40 people aboard departed Koh Tang.
7:04 p.m.	6:04 a.m.		X		Three patrol boats move from Koh Tang Island. Warning fire from U.S. aircraft turn them back.
Approximately					
7 p.m.	6 a.m.			X	Fighting boat containing Mayaguez crew is anchored off Koh Tang. Under Cambodian guard, it lifts anchor and heads toward the Cambodian mainland port of Kompong Som.
7:10 p.m.	6:10 a.m.		X		JCS orders U.S.S. Hancock with amphibious ready group/marine assault unit to sail from Philippines to Koh Tang areas as soon as possible. Orders other amphibious ships to proceed without waiting should Hancock be delayed.
7:30 p.m.	6:30 a.m.			X	Voice of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story on Mayaguez incident.

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APPENDIX 7—Continued

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Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
8:12 p.m.	7:12 a.m.		X		<i>JCS relayed President's decision to sink a Cambodian patrol boat attempting to leave Koh Tang Island.</i>
8:20 p.m.	7:20 a.m.		X		<i>A Cambodian patrol boat was sunk during an attempt to divert it. F-111's initially fired in front of boat. Two A-7's expended riot control agents. Boat stopped momentarily then continued to proceed. A-7 aircraft then expended 20 mm fire at stern in an attempt to disable boat. Boat caught fire and sank.</i>
8:35 p.m.	7:35 a.m.		X		<i>Search and rescue helicopter launched from Thailand to attempt to pick up 10 survivors in raft from sunken Cambodian patrol boat. Estimated time to raft was 8 hours and 10 minutes.</i>
8:45 to 11:15 p.m.	7:45 to 10:15 a.m.		X		<i>Vessel spotted with possible caucasians huddled in bow. Repeatedly strafed across bow and dropped riot control agents on vessel in an attempt to prevent it from reaching the mainland. Repeated reconnaissance passes made. One aircraft reported that vessel carried 30 to 40 people thought possible caucasian. Vessel eventually docked at Kompong Som harbor.</i>
9:41 p.m.	8:41 a.m.		X		<i>JCS ordered daily photo coverage of Koh Tang Island with selected prints electronically forwarded to Washington.</i>
Approximately					
10:40 p.m.	9:40 a.m.			X	<i>President convenes meeting of the National Security Council.</i>
10:21 to 11 p.m.	9:21 to 10 a.m.		X		<i>Search and rescue helicopter on scene but unable to locate raft with 10 Cambodian survivors of sunken craft.</i>
12 p.m. to 2 a.m.	11 a.m. to 1 p.m.			X	<i>Boat anchors for a short time about 1½ miles out of harbor. Boat arrives at Koh Rong Som Lem Island. Crew taken ashore.</i>
12:06 a.m.	11:06 a.m.		X		<i>JCS authorizes sinking of small boats identified in vicinity of Koh Tang and the one craft which previously departed Koh Tang for Poulo Wai Island.</i>
12:29 a.m.	11:29 a.m.		X		<i>U.S. aircraft attack three patrol boats; one is sunk, other two are damaged. Two more boats subsequently damaged.</i>
12:40 a.m.	11:40 a.m.		X		<i>F-4 aircraft sunk two boats in cove at Koh Tang Island.</i>
12:48 a.m.	11:48 a.m.		X		<i>Acting Chairman, JCS, briefed CINCPAC and major subordinate commanders on the 10:40 p.m. Tuesday NSC meeting and provided planning guidance for military operations to recover the ship and crew as follows: At first light 16 May, U.S. Forces will be prepared to secure Koh Tang Island and simultaneously board the Mayaguez. Also plan for strikes against Kompong Som complex using B-52's from Guam and tactical aircraft from the U.S.S. Coral Sea.</i>
2:45 a.m.	1:45 p.m.		X		<i>U.S.S. Hancock estimates arrival at Kompong Som 6 a.m. (Cambodia 5 a.m.) on the 16th.</i>
2:49 a.m.	1:49 p.m.		X		<i>Helicopter carrier U.S.S. Okinawa—one of four vessels in a four vessel Amphibious Ready Group/Marine assault unit—estimates arrival at Kompong Som at 11 p.m. on the 17th. (Cam 10 a.m. on the 18th.)</i>
3:54 to 5:35 a.m.	2:54 to 4:35 p.m.		X		<i>F-111 aircraft during 1½ hours observation tour observed (1) two boats together off Kompong Som port area, later separating, one going into Kompong Som port and the other to Koh Rong Som Lem Island—a Cambodian Island a few miles offshore, and (2) movement of patrol boats around Koh Rong Som Lem Island.</i>

See footnotes at end of table.

APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Time		Type of action				Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other		
4:56 a.m.	3:56 p.m.	X				A U.S. Embassy in the Middle East sent following report to Secretary of State: A third-country learned from a senior (security deletion) diplomat that his government was using its influence with Cambodia to seek early release of the Mayaguez and that it was expected to be released soon.
Morning	Afternoon		X			Designated commander for assault on Koh Tang flew over Koh Tang Island at 6,000 feet to identify best landing zones.
5 a.m.	4 p.m.	X				Thai Prime Minister Whitshed U.S. Charge d'Affaires an Aide Memoir protesting the landing of marines at Utapao despite Thailand's request that Thailand facilities not be involved in U.S. action to recover Mayaguez and pointing out that unless such forces were withdrawn immediately, the relations between the United States and Thailand would be exposed to serious and damaging consequences.
5:08 a.m.	4:08 p.m.			X		Swedish refrigerator cargo ship, the M. S. Hrado, reportedly being attacked off Cambodia-claimed Island of Pan Jang, was visually identified by P-3 aircraft. Aircraft reported a small craft that did not appear to be a gunboat about 3 miles from Hrado and that no apparent signs of distress were noted.
7:15 a.m.	6:15 p.m.	X				U.S. Watson office reported that Chinese Foreign Ministry returned the message for the Cambodian authorities.
8 a.m.	1 p.m.			X		Mayaguez captain told by his Cambodian captors, on authority of supreme commander in Phnom Penh, that he and selected crew members would be released if they would return to Mayaguez and request that U.S. aircraft be withdrawn from Cambodian airspace. The captain and 9 crew members were put on a Cambodian gunboat at about dusk. The captain and crew then decided not to proceed on the gunboat due to their fear that it would be sunk by U.S. aircraft, and expressed their desire to go on a fishing boat. No fishing boats were immediately available. Captain and crew were returned to shore of Koh Kong Som Lem Island where they spent the night. Further negotiations resulted in the promise that Phnom Penh authorities would release captain and all crew members to return to the Mayaguez in a fishing boat around 6 a.m. (about daybreak) the following morning. The captain's understanding was that his ship and crew would be permitted to sail out of Cambodian waters, with the U.S. aircraft in the sky as long as the U.S. aircraft did not fire or bomb Cambodian territory.
8:30 a.m.	7:30 p.m.			X		Voice of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story on Mayaguez incident.
8:30 a.m.	7:30 p.m.		X			U.S. aircraft directed by on-scene commander to prevent any boat from approaching the Mayaguez.
9:00 a.m.	8 p.m.			X		Voice of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story on Mayaguez.
9:32 a.m.	8:32 p.m.		X			Strategic Air Command headquarters promulgates B-52 operations in support of recapture of Mayaguez.
10 a.m.	9 p.m.		X			U.S.S. Holt reports it will be standing by at a position northwest of Koh Tang Island to receive marine boarding team at first light.
11:15 a.m. to 12 noon.	10:15 to 11 p.m.			X		White House staff notified 11 House and 11 Senate Leaders by telephone that 3 Cambodian patrol craft had been sunk and 4 others immobilized in an effort to prevent removal of the Mayaguez crew to the mainland.

See footnotes at end of table.

APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
12:20 p.m.	11:20 p.m. ...			X	Defense Department press office issues statement about U.S. attacks on Cambodian boats and holds press briefing.
Wednesday afternoon.	Thursday morning.			X	<i>Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously adopted a resolution stating: "Committee condemns an act of armed aggression on an unarmed U.S. merchant vessel in the course of innocent passage on an established trade route. The President has engaged in diplomatic means to secure its release and we support that. Third, we support the President in the exercise of his constitutional powers within the framework of the War Powers Resolution to secure the release of the ship and its men. We urge the Cambodian Government to release the ship and the men forthwith."</i>
Between					
1 and 2 p.m.	12 midnight and 1 a.m.	X			U.S. Ambassador Scall delivered a letter to U.N. Secretary General Waldheim requesting his assistance in securing release of the Mayaguez and its crew.
2:08 p.m.	1:08 a.m.		X		<i>U.S. aircraft sunk patrol boat 2 miles east/northeast of Koh Tang Island.</i>
3 to 5 p.m.	2 to 4 a.m. ...			X	State and Defense officials briefed Members of House International Relations Committee, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and House Armed Services Committee.
3:15 p.m.	2:15 a.m.		X		<i>Destroyer U.S.S. Wilson expected to arrive off Koh Tang at about 8:00 p.m. (7:00 a.m., May 16, Cambodian time).</i>
3:32 p.m.	2:52 a.m.			X	President Ford convenes fourth meeting of National Security Council.
4:45 to 5:10 p.m.	3:45 to 4:10 a.m.		X		President issues orders to begin military operations to recover Mayaguez and crew, including air attacks against military facilities near Kompong Som to prevent reinforcement and support from the mainland for Cambodian forces detaining the ship and its crew.
4:52 to 5:20 p.m.	3:52 to 4:20 a.m.		X		JCS issued verbal orders to CINCPAC to (1) seize and secure Mayaguez (2) conduct a Marine helicopter assault on Koh Tang Island (3) destroy all Cambodian craft that intervene in operation. CINCPAC was also ordered to conduct strikes from the U.S.S. Coral Sea against targets in Kompong Som complex, with first time on target to be 8:45 p.m. (Cambodian time 7:45 a.m.) to coincide with estimated capture of Mayaguez. First strike was to be armed reconnaissance with principal targets as aircraft and military watercraft, avoiding merchant ships in Kompong Som harbor until clearly identified as Cambodian. Subsequent strikes were to make maximum use of precision-guided munitions to attack targets of military significance in the Kompong Som complex.
4:58 p.m.	3:58 a.m.		X		<i>Arrival of U.S.S. Coral Sea (already within range for launching aircraft) estimated at 11:15 a.m., or a little over 7 hours later.</i>
5:15 p.m.	4:15 a.m.		X		First troop-carrying helicopter took off from Utapao Airfield, Thailand, where all available USAF helicopters and the Marine Ground Security Force had been prepositioned. At about the same time, tactical aircraft began to launch to provide continuous coverage for the operation, and an airborne command post assumed on-scene control.
5:45 p.m.	4:45 a.m.		X		<i>U.S.S. Holt confirmed to be in position to receive helicopters with Marine boarding team.</i>

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APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
5:55 p.m.	4:55 a.m.		X		<i>B-58 aircraft in Guam placed on 1-hour alert.</i>
6 p.m.	6 a.m.			X	<i>Voices of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story on Mayaguez incident.</i>
6:40 p.m.	5:40 a.m.			X	<i>President Ford and other National Security Council members brief 17 congressional leaders on military plan.</i>
7 p.m.	6 a.m.	X			<i>U.N. issued a statement that the Secretary General has communicated with Cambodians in an attempt to solve the problem of the U.S. merchant vessel by peaceful means.</i>
7 to 7:22 p.m. .	6 to 6:22 a.m.		X		<i>Three helicopters carrying 48 marine ground security force combat troops, 6 Navy explosive ordnance disposal technicians, a linguist, and 6 military sealift command personnel to crew the Mayaguez transferred to U.S.S. Holt.</i>
May 14, evening.	May 15, morning.	X			<i>State Department advised various embassies in Washington that the United States is taking military action to secure the release of the ship and its crew.</i>
7:07 p.m.	6:07 a.m.	X			<i>Phnom Penh domestic radio broadcast a 19-minute message by Hu Nim, Cambodian Minister of Information and Propaganda, stating Cambodians prepared to release Mayaguez and order to withdraw from Cambodian waters. Broadcast monitored by U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service.</i>
7:09 to 8:15 p.m.	6:09 to 7:15 a.m.		X		<i>8 helicopters carrying about 175 Marines began to arrive at Koh Tang. Because of the ground-fire, only about 110 Marines were landed. Assault force was split into three groups. Of the 8 helicopters, 3 crashed, 2 were disabled and 3 returned to Thailand.</i>
Approximately					
7:20 to 8 p.m. .	6:20 to 7 a.m.			X	<i>Cambodian authorities with Mayaguez crew on Koh Rong Som Lem Island received word from Phnom Penh that crew could be released. Mayaguez crew and several Thai fishermen were loaded on a Thai fishing vessel with four Cambodian guards. Cambodians furnished crew long bamboo poles on which crew tied their undershirts to wave at U.S. planes. Crew expressed concern that Cambodian armed guards might draw fire for U.S. aircraft. About 20 minutes after leaving Koh Rong Som Lem Island another fishing boat came along side, took off the Cambodian guards and told both the Mayaguez crew and the Thai fishermen they were being released and should return to Mayaguez.</i>
7:30 p.m.	6:30 a.m.			X	<i>Voices of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story of Mayaguez incident.</i>
8:05 p.m.	7:05 a.m.		X		<i>First aircraft for mainland strikes launched from U.S.S. Coral Sea.</i>
8:10 p.m.	7:10 a.m.		X		<i>Destroyer U.S.S. Wilson arrives on scene.</i>
8:15 p.m.	7:15 a.m.	X			<i>Kissinger informed President Ford of domestic Cambodian broadcast of about 1 hour earlier.</i>
8:19 p.m.	7:19 a.m.		X		<i>Riot control agents dropped on Mayaguez by U.S. aircraft.</i>
8:25 to 9:22 p.m.	7:25 to 8:22 a.m.		X		<i>U.S.S. Holt pulled alongside Mayaguez and placed security force on board. No personnel found on board Mayaguez. Mayaguez declared secure.</i>

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APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Washington	Time	Cambodian	Type of action			Action
			U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
	Approximately					
	8:45 to 12 p.m.	7:45 to 11 a.m.		X		During this period, air strikes were carried out against Cambodian mainland. First cycle did not expend ordnance. Second cycle struck Ream Airfield about 10:57 p.m. Runway was cratered, numerous aircraft were destroyed or damaged, and hangars were damaged. About 11:50 p.m., third and final cycle struck naval base at Ream, damaging the barracks area. Naval facilities in Kompong Som, including fuel storage area, were also struck, damaging two warehouses in the port and scoring a direct hit on a large building in the marshalling yard. In all, 15 attack sorties expended munitions.
	9:15 p.m.	8:15 a.m.			X	White House announces that it has sent the following urgent message to Cambodian authorities. <i>"We have heard a radio broadcast that you are prepared to release the S. S. Mayaguez. We welcome this development, if true. As you know, we have seized the ship. As soon as you issue a statement that you are prepared to release the crew members you hold unconditionally and immediately, we will promptly cease military operations."</i>
	9:15 p.m.	8:15 a.m.			X	White House announces that President has directed (1) U.S. marines to board Mayaguez, (2) U.S. marines to land on Koh Tang Island, to rescue any crew members as may be on the island and, (3) aircraft from U.S.S. Coral Sea to undertake associated military operations in the area.
	9:24 p.m.	8:24 a.m.			X	State Department instructs Ambassador Scall to deliver letter to President of U.N. Security Council stating that the United States had "taken certain appropriate measures under Article 51 . . ." to achieve the release of the vessel.
	10:35 p.m.	9:35 a.m.			X	P-3 aircraft, which had been directed by on-scene commander to investigate small craft proceeding from Cambodian mainland area towards Koh Tang Island, noted 50 caucasians onboard waving white flags.
	10:49 to 11 p.m.	9:49 to 10 a.m.			X	U.S.S. Wilson intercepted a small craft carrying Mayaguez crew. Captain of Mayaguez reports that all of his crew and five Thais were on board. Later the Thais were given food and fuel and departed the area.
	11:35 p.m.	10:35 a.m.			X	On-scene commander reported that preparations were being made to posture Marine ground forces so that heavy suppressive artillery and air support could be initiated.
	11:45 p.m.	10:45 a.m.			X	Commander of U.S.S. Wilson reports to JCS that captain of Mayaguez convinced Cambodians that upon release U.S. airstrikes would be stopped.
	May 15					
	12 (midnight)	11 a.m.			X	U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Thailand notified Thai director of information that a story in the Thai morning paper that U.S. marines had been removed from Thailand was incorrect.
	12:27 a.m.	11:27 a.m.			X	President Ford announced recovery of the Mayaguez and its crew.
	12:55 a.m.	11:55 a.m.			X	JCS orders cessation of all offensive operations and withdrawal of all forces from operational area as soon as possible, consistent with safety and self-defense.
	1 a.m.	12 noon			X	P-3 aircraft sink large barge north of Koh Tang Island.

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APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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Time		Type of action			Action
Washington	Cambodian	U.S. diplomatic	U.S. military	Other	
1:05 a.m.....	12:05 p.m....			X	<i>Mayaguez captain and crew reboard Mayaguez, which is under tow by U.S.S. Holt.</i>
1:40 a.m.....	12:40 p.m....		X		<i>A-7 aircraft patrol craft 6 miles south of Cambodian mainland.</i>
Approximately					
1:30 a.m.....	12:30 p.m....		X		A second wave of about 100 Marines successfully landed on Koh Tang.
1:46 a.m.....	12:46 p.m....		X		<i>U.S. aircraft sink two small craft south of Koh Tang Island.</i>
2 to 2:30 a.m..	1 to 1:30 p.m.			X	President Ford's War Powers report delivered to Senate and House leadership.
3:34 a.m.....	2:34 p.m....		X		Initial efforts to withdraw forces from the island concentrated on extracting the 22 isolated personnel. The main body of the marine ground security force with a strength of approximately 213 personnel was unable to reach the 22-man marine force. It was felt there would be considerable risk to this small force if left overnight. The first helicopter making the attempt was hit by ground fire and landed on U.S.S. Coral Sea.
4:45 a.m.....	3:45 p.m....	X			<i>Thai Premier presented aide memoire to U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Thailand protesting the sending of marines to Thailand for U.S. military actions against Cambodia.</i>
5:40 a.m.....	4:40 p.m....		X		<i>U.S.S. Wilson sinks a patrol craft north of Koh Tang Island.</i>
6:15 a.m.....	5:15 p.m....		X		Small boats from U.S.S. Holt and U.S.S. Wilson began efforts to approach the beaches but aborted due in part to ground fire. Working with naval gunfire and tactical aircraft support, the extraction continued into darkness.
Morning.....	Afternoon...		X		<i>A 16,000-pound bomb—BLU 82—was dropped on Koh Tang Island. Its use was probably authorized by Washington.</i>
7:15 to 8:15 a.m.	6:15 to 8:15 p.m.		X		Marine personnel were extracted from Koh Tang by helicopters which landed on U.S.S. Coral Sea.
8:30 a.m.....	8:30 p.m....		X		<i>Voice of America broadcast to Cambodia carried news story on Mayaguez incident.</i>
10:09 a.m....	9:09 p.m....	X			<i>U.S. Embassy in Thailand reports view that if U.S. marines are withdrawn speedily, U.S. relations will eventually recover from Mayaguez crisis.</i>
12:44 a.m....	11:44 a.m....	X			<i>Department of State instructed all diplomatic posts to inform local officials at the highest level of specific circumstances surrounding Mayaguez incident.</i>

- 1 National Security Agency.
- 2 Central Intelligence Agency.
- 3 Defense Intelligence Agency.
- 4 National Military Command Center.
- 5 Defense Attache Office.
- 6 Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- 7 Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet.

APPENDIX VIII

MAYAGUEZ CARGO

The *Mayaguez*, when it was seized, was carrying 274 35-foot containers—77 were destined for Sattahip in Thailand, 96 for Singapore, and 101 were empty containers. According to manifests, the containers for Sattahip contained subsistence items, including food, beverages, and clothing; parcel post; paint; and chemicals. The manifests carried no military weapons or ammunition. The Singapore cargo consisted of various commercial goods, including food, industrial raw materials, and consumer products.

The captain of the *Mayaguez* stated that the Cambodians did not open any cargo containers while the ship was being held. After the *Mayaguez* was recovered, it was diverted from Sattahip to Singapore. According to the captain, the cargo was available for inspection at Singapore, but no one inspected it. The *Mayaguez* continued to Hong Kong, where it discharged the Sattahip cargo. In Hong Kong, newsmen selected six of these containers and inspected the cargo, which included paints, fertilizers, and automobile parts.