The photo was taken from an altitude of about 10,000 feet. The unenlarged 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 antiaircraft 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.
FISHING BOAT
FISHING BOAT
60X ENLARGEMENT

Approximately 29 possible persons on deck.

cargo boom

drums or barrels

probable boxes or crates

14 May 1975
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 deter-
dined 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 board 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 stabi-
lizer 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 hos-
tile 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 be-
cause (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-programed 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 35 minutes before the fishing boat suspected of carrying caucasians docked at Kompeng 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.]
Despite the shorter distances involved, the local U.S. command was not able to communicate directly with U.S. Forces in the vicinity of Koh Tang; nor were communications always as speedy or clear as those with Washington. The use of on-scene C-130 communications relay aircraft provided some relief from the otherwise formidable task facing the local U.S. command in tying together Marines at Utapao, Thailand, and on the island of Koh Tang with supporting air and sea forces—a task further complicated by the fact that Marines on the island were not able to direct supporting air strikes because they had lost necessary communications equipment when an assault helicopter was downed during the landing.

**MILITARY ASSETS**

Defense did not allow us access to the military options and recommendations prepared for the President. Documents made available did identify some plans and indicated what forces were readied, and it seems reasonable to conclude that these plans and the forces assembled, as outlined below, provided the basis for military options and recommendations.
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 8 a.m. on May 15. At the same time, the guided missile destroyer U.S.S. Wilson was also en 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 Halt 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 5:35 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.

9:32 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 recoiless 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.263) 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 8:28 p.m. No one was found on the Mayaguez and the vessel was declared secure at 9:22 p.m.

On June 28 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 Ma-
rine be withdrawn? At 12:10 a.m. on May 15, the Secretary of De-
fense 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 pre-
pared. 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 ap-
proved. 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 cordonning 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. Hanoock—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 operations from the U.S.S. Coral Sea. The first time over target—8:46 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, 10 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 9:46 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.

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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
   - hangars
   - 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
Isla~d 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 mili­
tary 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 en­
tire 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 pro­
tracted and somewhat humiliating negotiations to recover crew mem­
bers, was avoided. The United States also showed its resolve to other
countries in the context of the recent fall of the governments of Cam­
bodia 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 informa­
tion actually made available to or generated within that body.
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 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 presoftering 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 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 28, 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 accurate to convey the views of the Executive Branch, we have refrained from additional substantive comment.

I would also like to note that Philip W. Buchen, the President's Counsel, wrote Congressman Fasce U, on March 2 offering to lend 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. FASCEU,
Director, International Division, General Accounting Office,
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. FASCEU: 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 too 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 practically 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 Fasick'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

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 Fasick.

Sincerely,

LAWRENCE S. EAGLEBURGER.
Hon. Elmer B. Staats,
Comptroller General of the United States.

November 28, 1975.

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 to 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 16, 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 Cambodian 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 18 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 5200.1, 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.

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 con-
cclusions into better perspective and to make the report more accurate and help-
ful. 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 con-
text 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 decision-
makers. 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 86 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.
- 8 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 State 1
Secretary of Defense
Director, Central Intelligence Agency
Deputy Secretary of State
Deputy Secretary of Defense
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs 2
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 to be 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 Poulo Wel, 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 adjacent 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 Wal 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 Wal 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 18, 10:40 P.M. to about 12:40 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, Philip 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.

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 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.
—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, 3:00 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
Location of ship
No change.

Location of crew
No new information.

Status of diplomatic, military and other activities
- 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.
- Regim Airfield and refinery in Kompong Som area bombed with tactical aircraft from U.S.S. Coral Sea.
- 16,000 pound bomb dropped on Koh Tang Island.

APPENDIX 7
CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT

Meaning of typefaces:
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.

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### APPENDIX 7—Continued

**CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGÜEZ INCIDENT—Continued**

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<th>U.S. military</th>
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<td>May 4</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td>8 vessels fleeing from South Vietnam and a South Vietnam Government craft were seized by Panamanian ship seized; released about 36 hours later on authority of Cambodian hierarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New Cambodian regime was focusing attention on which islands they should control because of possible petroleum reserves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There was some evidence to suggest the new Cambodian Government was claiming a 90-mile territorial limit and planned to seize foreign ships violating such limits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30 to 3:38 a.m.</td>
<td>2:31 to 2:38 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SS Mayaguez—a U.S. merchant ship—challenged by armed Cambodian firing shot over bow about 6-7 miles south of Cambodian island of Paulo Wei which lies about 80 miles south/southeast of Cambodian mainland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:38 a.m. to 3:38 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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 35 minutes north/102 degrees 58 minutes east. Ship is being towed to unknown Cambodian port.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 5 a.m.</td>
<td>3 to 4 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Neal lost communication with the Mayaguez, gave up trying to reach the ship and informed the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta of the Cambodian threat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. Defense Attaché Office, Singapore, informed Commander Seventh Fleet that local shipping agency has received message released by sublieut. “Being boarded by Cambodian army and commandeered at position 6 degrees 35 minutes north/102 degrees 55 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:54 to 5:55 a.m. to 5:55 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. Embassy Jakarta sends Washington (NSA, White House, CIA, DIA, NMCC) and commands a series of six messages informing them of the incident. Embassy indicates that vessel is under own power slowly following one gunman to Honolulu; Son; no casualties; crew does not feel to be in immediate danger; troops on board do not speak English, crew standing guard at gun positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:12 a.m. to 4:12 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>National Military Command Center at the Pentagon and other agencies receive notification of the incident from U.S. Embassy, Jakarta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:24 a.m. to 4:24 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NMCC officials discussed seizure with Pacific Command officials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:38 a.m. to 4:36 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mayaguez anchors near Paulo Wei Island close to enemy positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:38 a.m. to 4:36 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up message from U.S. DAO, Manila reporting local radio operator receipt of mayday message redistributed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:20 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NMCC officials discuss possible aircraft reconnaissance with Pacific Command.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:40 a.m. to 5:40 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acting Chairman, JCS notified of situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

See footnotes at end of table.
APPENDIX 7—Continued

CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:32 a.m. to 6:05 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:19 a.m. to 6:19 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 7:40 a.m. to 6:40 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:37 a.m. to 6:37 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:37 a.m. to 6:37 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:05 a.m. to 9:05 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:24 a.m. to 9:24 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 10, 10:24 p.m. to 9:24 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:18 p.m. to 1:18 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:44 p.m. to 8:44 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 p.m. to 3:30 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 p.m. to 3:30 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:25 a.m. to 4:25 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:24 p.m. to 5:24 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13, exact time uncertain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See footnotes at end of table.
CHAIRONOLY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

Meaning of type faces:

Rroman 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Washington</th>
<th>Cambodian</th>
<th>U.S. diplomatic</th>
<th>U.S. military</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:16 p.m.</td>
<td>8:36 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>P-3 aircraft reports (1) positive identification of Mayaguez, anchored off Poulo Wea Island, (2) took one minor hit on low identification pass, and (3) two gunboats in vicinity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:43 p.m.</td>
<td>8:43 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>U.S. Seventh Fleet directs the amphibious ready group alpha to return troops to have them ready to move.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:44 p.m.</td>
<td>8:44 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P-3 aircraft tasked to locate and trace all Cambodian naval units in area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20 p.m.</td>
<td>9:20 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P-3 aircraft reported that Mayaguez was underway heading north.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:37 p.m.</td>
<td>10:37 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:10 a.m.</td>
<td>11:30 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A mariner 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 10th. This was the first communication of the U.S. warning to Peking.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 a.m.</td>
<td>11:30 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>P-3 aircraft reported Mayaguez dead in water apparently preparing to anchor 1 mile north of Ko Thang Island. Mayaguez log indicates that ship anchored off Ko Thang at about this time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:23 a.m.</td>
<td>1:23 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs briefs President on situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 a.m.</td>
<td>3 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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'Affaires advised that the United States would inform the Thai Government before undertaking any action involving Thai base planes. A-7 aircraft placed ordnance in the water in vicinity of Mayaguez as a signal not to get underway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45 a.m.</td>
<td>3:45 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mayaguez captain and crew ordered into two small fishing boats by Cambodian guards. Hosts leave the Mayaguez and anchor about 75 yards off the beach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>F-11 aircraft report smaller vessels tied up to Mayaguez and a ladder over side of Mayaguez.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>JCS directs CINPAC to (1) maintain constant surveillance of Mayaguez, (2) prevent its movement into port on the Cambodian mainland, Authority granted to (1) fire in exigency of life not at small boats to prevent movement and (3) proceed within 12 mile territorial limit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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 Cambodian personal on board, while the other was carrying a lot of people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two gunboats tie up to anchored fishing boats containing the Mayaguez crew.

Approximately

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Washington</th>
<th>Cambodian</th>
<th>U.S. diplomatic</th>
<th>U.S. military</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:40 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.</td>
<td>5:40 to 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mayaguez officers aboard give orders to tie up smaller vessels and leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:36 a.m.</td>
<td>6:36 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P-3 aircraft report smaller vessels tied up to Mayaguez and a ladder over side of Mayaguez.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:17 a.m.</td>
<td>5:17 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>JCS directs CINPAC to (1) maintain constant surveillance of Mayaguez, (2) prevent its movement into port on the Cambodian mainland, Authority granted to (1) fire in exigency of life not at small boats to prevent movement and (3) proceed within 12 mile territorial limit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Washington</th>
<th>Cambodian</th>
<th>U.S. diplomatic</th>
<th>U.S. military</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:18 to 6:24 a.m.</td>
<td>5:18 to 6:24 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mayaguez officers aboard give orders to tie up smaller vessels and leave.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Washington</th>
<th>Cambodian</th>
<th>U.S. diplomatic</th>
<th>U.S. military</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:30 a.m.</td>
<td>5:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Two gunboats tie up to anchored fishing boats containing the Mayaguez crew.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 7—Continued

#### CHRONOLOGY OF MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT—Continued

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 or modifications to original executive branch chronology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Type of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Cambodian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:33 a.m.</td>
<td>6:33 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:54 a.m.</td>
<td>5:54 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:15 a.m.</td>
<td>3:15 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:31 a.m.</td>
<td>6:31 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:35 a.m.</td>
<td>6:35 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:27 a.m.</td>
<td>7:27 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>8:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approximately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to 10 a.m.</td>
<td>8 to 9 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:41 a.m.</td>
<td>8:41 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:50 to 10:00</td>
<td>8:00 to 9:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:55 a.m.</td>
<td>8:55 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 a.m.</td>
<td>9 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday morning</td>
<td>Tuesday night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10-10 a.m.</td>
<td>9:00 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20 a.m.</td>
<td>9:20 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 a.m.</td>
<td>11:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13, 140</td>
<td>May 14,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:40 p.m.</td>
<td>12:40 a.m.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

See footnotes at end of table.
### Chronology of Mayaguez Incident—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>U.S. Diplomatic</th>
<th>U.S. Military</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
<td>1:30 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:36 p.m.</td>
<td>2:36 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CINCPAC reports first ship on scene will be destroyer Hall, 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:12 p.m.</td>
<td>2:12 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:20 p.m.</td>
<td>2:20 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:35 &amp; 2:37 p.m.</td>
<td>9:35 &amp; 8:35 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 p.m.</td>
<td>4 a.m.</td>
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<td>6:05 p.m.</td>
<td>5:05 a.m.</td>
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<td>5:05 p.m.</td>
<td>4:05 a.m.</td>
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<td>6:01 p.m.</td>
<td>5:01 a.m.</td>
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<td>6:20 p.m.</td>
<td>5:20 a.m.</td>
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<td>8:46 p.m.</td>
<td>7:46 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:50 to 11 p.m.</td>
<td>7:50 to 10 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 p.m.</td>
<td>5 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>5:30 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 p.m.</td>
<td>7:30 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:04 p.m.</td>
<td>6:04 a.m.</td>
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<td>Approximately</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>6 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:05 p.m.</td>
<td>6:05 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>6:30 a.m.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Bold type—Items in executive branch chronology confirmed by GAO.*

*Italic type—Additional items in executive branch chronology.*

**Footnotes:**
- [Footnote 1](#)
- [Footnote 2](#)
- [Footnote 3](#)

See footnotes at end of table.