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1 MAY 16, 1975

*Mary Queen*<sup>1</sup>

2 INTERVIEW OF PRESIDENT FORD

3 by

4 HUGH SIDEY

5  
6 MR. SIDEY: This is just kind of a personal look at  
7 your thinking in the crisis, Mr. President. Did this come  
8 as a surprise to you, Mr. President, had you expected this  
9 sort of incident?

10 THE PRESIDENT: I never expected this kind of an  
11 incident. We thought and I certainly thought that Cambodia  
12 was out of the picture now and so I was greatly surprised that  
13 Monday morning at 7:40 or 7:45 when I got my CIA briefing and  
14 they announced that an American merchant ship had been seized.  
15 It was just something that didn't occur to me.

16 MR. SIDEY: Was your initial response, your first  
17 feeling that something had to be done?

18 THE PRESIDENT: My first response was that I knew  
19 I would be seeing Henry, I think, at 9:15 that morning and  
20 that is where we usually talk over any operational problems  
21 and so when he came in that morning, we discussed the  
22 situation.

23 I asked for a full report and then we had an NSC  
24 meeting at noon that day, as I recollect. As a result of that  
25 conversation with Henry, I ordered an NSC meeting at noon that

1 day.

2 MR. SIDEY: When did you begin to get the sense?

3 THE PRESIDENT: The real sense of some potential  
4 development that might require a major decision came at the  
5 NSC meeting at noontime.

6 MR. SIDEY: What in general has been your feeling  
7 about that sort of thing over the years, about a show of U.S.  
8 force and the necessity to assert yourself in a time like  
9 that?

10 THE PRESIDENT: I have always been on the side of  
11 stronger action rather than weaker action and I think my com-  
12 ments, for example, during the early stages of the Vietnam  
13 war reflect that. That is not a comparable situation, but it  
14 is a reflection of my general attitude.

15 In this case, I made no decision because we had  
16 to get the availability of military equipment, hardware,  
17 ships; where they were, what they could do. Of course, at  
18 that NSC meeting we made the decision to send a note to the  
19 Cambodian government through the PRC Office here and through  
20 the liaison office in Peking with George Bush having it  
21 delivered to the Cambodian embassy in Peking.

22 But at that NSC meeting, things started to go  
23 through my mind. It could be serious. It might require some  
24 very direct action in a variety of ways.

25 MR. SIDEY: What worried you most?

1 THE PRESIDENT: Yes, to attack the boats.

2 VOICE: There was an NSC meeting at 10:30 that  
3 morning, which is where the decision to attack the boats was  
4 made.

5 THE PRESIDENT: That is right.

6 VOICE: But the actual attack didn't start until  
7 6:30 in the evening.

8 THE PRESIDENT: You see, we had that NSC meeting at  
9 10:30 that morning which is darkness there. We had informa-  
10 tion from our observation aircraft that there were boats  
11 around the island. I guess they might have even been observed  
12 during the daytime. But we still had them under observation  
13 at night.

14 We didn't know at that time whether the people were  
15 on the ship or on the island or whether they would be moved  
16 from either the ship or the island to the mainland. So I  
17 issued an order that we should prevent enemy boats or launches  
18 to either leave the island, the ship to go to the mainland or  
19 to come from the mainland to the ship or the island.

20 The aircraft that were over the area were able to  
21 keep pretty darned good track of the ships, the boats. I  
22 think we sank three, damaged four, and one got away.

23 VOICE: That pilot thought he saw some people on the  
24 deck that he wasn't entirely sure about, so rather than risk  
25 hitting any Americans.

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21 keep pretty darned good track of the ships, the boats. I  
22 think we sank three, damaged four, and one got away.

23 VOICE: That pilot thought he saw some people on the  
24 deck that he wasn't entirely sure about, so rather than risk  
25 hitting any Americans.

1 MR. SIDEY: That may have been the one.

2 THE PRESIDENT: It may have been the one that got  
3 our people. He called back for instructions and we discussed  
4 it.

5 MR. SIDEY: You must have had incredible communi-  
6 cations.

7 THE PRESIDENT: Pretty good.

8 MR. SIDEY: I mean it could come from the Pentagon  
9 right over here.

10 THE PRESIDENT: Right, and we made the decision.  
11 In fact, General Jones -- or was it Brant -- one of them went  
12 out and actually told them to tell the pilot to not attack the  
13 boat if he questioned the possibility that those he saw on the  
14 deck were Americans. He had reported to us that he thought  
15 he saw eight or nine individuals that looked like Caucasians

16 MR. SIDEY: This was your feeling not to jeopardize  
17 any lives.

18 THE PRESIDENT: Right.

19 So he did let them go and that may be those Americans,  
20 some on the deck, some down below and when that ship gets in  
21 we will know. That will be an interesting question.

22 MR. SIDEY: What was the toughest one of these  
23 orders and decisions you had to make?

24 THE PRESIDENT: I think the toughest one was whether  
25 in the course of the operation we should have air attacks on

1 the land-based areas at Kompong Som and at Ream. But that  
2 decision became easy the more information we got as to the  
3 military equipment that was there.

4 The question was, they had options and a recommenda-  
5 tion to land on the D.E. with 63 personnel and then have them  
6 come alongside the ship and they would board. We had 40-some  
7 Marines plus an interpreter plus personnel who were capable  
8 of manning the ship in case nobody was there. That was rather  
9 easy; there was no problem there.

10 The next question was how many Marines, at what  
11 time would go on the island and how many. That wasn't any  
12 serious problem.

13 The third question was whether to attack the land  
14 installations, the two naval bases and one or two airports.  
15 That became easier, but that was the hard one at first. When  
16 we got more intelligence information, we knew they were both  
17 naval bases. We knew they had airports, but we didn't know  
18 the extent of the hardware.

19 As we got more information, we were told there were  
20 were 2400 Cambodian troops. We were told there were a number.  
21 They weren't precise about the T-38's which of course had a  
22 capability. We had information about several other aircraft.  
23 We got pictures of the harbor and we saw in the one picture  
24 that I remember there were four of these launches on one side  
25 of the breakwater and four on the other side, which appeared

1 to be fast-moving or had the capability of fast movement.

2 MR. SIDEY: These are ships or boats?

3 THE PRESIDENT: Boats. I am guessing, but I would  
4 think they would be 50 to 75 feet long.

5 MR. SIDEY: Kind of like P.T. boats.

6 THE PRESIDENT: Something like that.

7 So at first I was a bit apprehensive about using  
8 U.S. aircraft attacking the land installations. But when we  
9 saw this equipment that was potential with the personnel that  
10 was available, I decided that it was to insure the accomplish-  
11 ment of the task on the island and the ship, we could not  
12 tolerate interference from the mainland and this was the way  
13 to avoid it.

14 MR. SIDEY: What was your worst moment in the three  
15 days. At any time doubts or any problems?

16 THE PRESIDENT: What was the night, was it Tuesday  
17 night we had the NSC meeting?

18 VOICE: It was a late one that started about 10:45.

19 THE PRESIDENT: Ten-thirty, ten-forty five. I went  
20 home for dinner. I had dinner with Betty. I told her in  
21 general what the situation was. I knew by that time that I  
22 had to make some hard decisions, and that was the time when,  
23 after looking at the situation, I ordered the Navy, the Air  
24 Force and the Marines all to be prepared. We figured we had  
25 to make the execute order the next day; although there was



1 some feeling, not strong at all, that we might have delayed  
2 another 24 hours.

3 But I would say before coming over here at that :  
4 10:30 meeting, I realized we obviously had to do something.  
5 I came over here for ten minutes or so and then went into the  
6 NSC meeting.

7 VOICE: I think it would be fair to say, too, that  
8 the Pueblo was in the back of everybody's mind throughout the  
9 whole week.

10 MR. SIDEY: Did you, when you got the reports on  
11 the boats that were sunk, know anything about whether our own  
12 men had been killed or not at that point?

13 THE PRESIDENT: No, nobody knew, and we didn't  
14 know whether people were on the ship, on the island, whether  
15 they had gotten to the mainland. I must say that I assumed --  
16 not happily, but I assumed that we would be most fortunate  
17 if we got everybody back without loss of life.

18 In fact, as we saw this thing developing, and my  
19 impression of the Cambodian attitude and the possibility that  
20 our people were in the hands of the Cambodians, that we would  
21 lose some. How many, I couldn't tell.

22 MR. SIDEY: Mr. President, were you dead set against  
23 the notion of having them taken in as hostages and then  
24 negotiated over for months?

25 THE PRESIDENT: Yes. That was one thing I was

1 absolutely going to avoid.

2 MR. SIDEY: The whole idea. Why are you so strong  
3 on it?

4 THE PRESIDENT: Because I didn't think it worked  
5 in the case of the Pueblo and we were dealing with a govern-  
6 ment that, by its recent actions, had shown a very abnormal  
7 attitude toward its own people and I could imagine how they  
8 might treat Americans.

9 For example, we knew, of course, after the American  
10 ship was seized that they had fired or or sought to intercept  
11 a Korean merchant ship in more or less the same trade lanes.  
12 They had seized but let go the Panamanian merchant ship and  
13 they had seized an American ship but didn't let it go, which  
14 convinced me that they were going to treat us differently than  
15 the Koreans and Panamanians which of course made me very  
16 concerned that the longer they were in the hands of the  
17 Cambodians, the more likely they would be mistreated, killed,  
18 or used as hostages.

19 MR. SIDEY: Is this sort of thing piracy or related  
20 to things like that? Does this mean something very special  
21 to you, Mr. President -- the notion of what is inviolate in  
22 this world? You acted so swiftly and so clearly on this. I  
23 gather this sort of thing to you is something that is inviolate,  
24 the right to the freedom of the seas.

25 THE PRESIDENT: Yes, but it is also a broader thing.

1 You cannot condone misdeeds; international law, and the best  
2 way to prevent them in the future is to meet head on with one  
3 that comes up first.

4 MR. SIDEY: Do you think this will have some of that  
5 effect?

6 THE PRESIDENT: It better. It ought to be a very  
7 clear signal, Hugh, that we are going to act with responsible  
8 caution but firm action.

9 MR. SIDEY: What about the mild criticism about you  
10 didn't consult with Congress; you told them rather than asked  
11 them.

12 THE PRESIDENT: Well, it is all dependent on how  
13 you interpret the word "consult". Our interpretation was  
14 that it required full notification, which we did.

15 MR. SIDEY: You have no real criticism or anything  
16 by any responsible leaders?

17 THE PRESIDENT: There were some questions asked at  
18 that meeting by the leadership, but in the right tone, Hugh,  
19 and my answer was to a very direct question -- I don't want  
20 to identify to you which -- I said under our Constitution, we  
21 have an Executive, a Legislative and a Judicial Branch and  
22 the head of the Executive Branch is Commander-in-Chief and  
23 I had to act in that capacity.

24 We did carry out the law as we understand it in our  
25 relationship with the Legislative Branch. But the

1 Constitution is very clear as to who is Commander-in-Chief,  
2 and I had to take the risk and make the decision and I don't  
3 want to destroy that co-equal branch relationship.

4 MR. SIDEY: There is one other question about why  
5 you didn't call off that air strike. That is debated in the  
6 papers.

7 THE PRESIDENT: Do you mean the air strike on the  
8 mainland?

9 MR. SIDEY: Yes.

10 THE PRESIDENT: After we had gotten the men?

11 MR. SIDEY: Yes.

12 THE PRESIDENT: The answer is very simple. Our  
13 Marines on the island were still under attack and the Marines  
14 deserve, as long as they were carrying out their mission and  
15 were being attacked by the enemy that we do anything and  
16 everything to protect their lives.

17 VOICE: The statement that was sent out that night  
18 said that we would cease offensive operations as soon as the  
19 men were released, and it was confirmed at 11:15 that they  
20 were released. At 11:16, the order went to stop offensive  
21 operations and from then on, the rest of it was trying to get  
22 them off and there were no further offensive operations. We  
23 were just trying to get the Marines off.

24 MR. SIDEY: What is the best moment?

25 THE PRESIDENT: There were two of them. I was

1 sitting here and people were sitting around, and Jim Schlesinger  
2 called and said a launch or some kind of a boat had just come  
3 toward, I guess, our ship. It must have been; it wasn't the  
4 island, with a white flag or a white piece of something and  
5 it turned out there were, according to him, 30 unharmed  
6 American crewmen.

7 We certainly didn't anticipate that kind of a con-  
8 clusion. Well, there were still nine or ten left, and he  
9 called back roughly 15 minutes later and said we got them all  
10 back. That was, of course, was the highlight.

11 MR. SIDEY: What precautions will there be in the  
12 future, Mr. President, anything more that will be done in that  
13 part of the world?

14 THE PRESIDENT: Well, one thing, we have got to  
15 accelerate notification to us, now that we know this kind of  
16 thing does happen, when other ships are stopped on the high  
17 seas.

18 It was known and notification did go out in com-  
19 mercial channels, but at least I didn't know that it was being  
20 done. I think we have got to include that in some of our  
21 background information and action. But I don't know of any-  
22 thing else. I think the military people all handled their  
23 jobs in a very able and very courageous way.

24 I have asked for, however, a full review of the  
25 total sequence, the chronology, just to review to see whether

1 we did everything the best way. After looking at that, I  
2 will be in a better --

3 MR. SIDEY: Might it require some change in the  
4 presence of our ships in those waters?

5 THE PRESIDENT: It could.

6 MR. SIDEY: You don't know, you are going to wait?

7 THE PRESIDENT: Very much off the record. We found  
8 that -- and again, I want to get to the inside, the full  
9 story -- that some of our equipment on the ships was not as  
10 hundred percent as it ought to be, and I think that it is a  
11 true reflection of not enough money to maintain our operations  
12 and maintenance capabilities.

13 We had one ship, one of its four boilers broke, and  
14 some other little things. But they are all indicative of  
15 inadequate funding, inadequate attention to maintenance and  
16 operation. In this case, it didn't interfere, but it slowed  
17 down one ship getting there.

18 MR. SIDEY: Did you yourself issue the command,  
19 Mr. President?

20 THE PRESIDENT: I issued the order to prevent boats  
21 going in and out from the island. That was the first order.  
22 The second order I issued was to have the Marines, the ships  
23 and the Air Force ready to go. This was an order issued at  
24 that night meeting on Tuesday. In other words, everybody was  
25 to be put on one hour's notice. Then I issued the order

1 Wednesday afternoon when we were in here with charts and  
2 everything.

3 MR. SIDEY: To go ahead with the final operation.  
4 So you are really in pretty direct command here.

5 THE PRESIDENT: I issued the orders in all three  
6 cases.

7 MR. SIDEY: Were you worried about the military size  
8 the force, the matter, how much power it had, did you get  
9 down into details like that?

10 THE PRESIDENT: Well, I sure asked the question  
11 whether we had enough.

12 MR. SIDEY: That was your concern. Were there other  
13 plans, Mr. President, in case the men were killed or it hadn't  
14 been successful like this?

15 THE PRESIDENT: Well, we had some one or more other  
16 options, but we thought those were so remote that they really  
17 weren't anything we thought we would have to do.

18 MR. SIDEY: Is this the toughest one you have had  
19 of this nature?

20 THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

21 MR. SIDEY: I mean the most open and shut, I guess.

22 THE PRESIDENT: Well, you could talk about  
23 Vladivostok, but that is negotiature. This one, you had to  
24 either fish or cut bait.

25 MR. SIDEY: The range of options is so great, you

1 had to decide in your mind which way to go.

2 I am under the impression the NSC structure worked  
3 beautifully. I feel that your Generals -- you brought the  
4 leaders in, you had the CIA there -- am I missing something?

5 THE PRESIDENT: Well, I would say it got very good.  
6 When we first started out, maybe that is indicative that the  
7 problem didn't seem too big. But the first meeting was sort  
8 of exploratory, Hugh. From that first exploratory meeting,  
9 yes, it did work very well. The first meeting was where is  
10 the ship, what are the circumstances, what broad alternatives  
11 do you have.

12 So I wouldn't be critical of that, but when we got  
13 down to the execution, it worked well.

14 MR. SIDEY: Were there any special personal messages  
15 sent that we are unaware of to the Soviet Union?

16 THE PRESIDENT: No.

17 MR. SIDEY: China?

18 THE PRESIDENT: No.

19 MR. SIDEY: No hot lines. It was pretty much  
20 worked out on a ---

21 THE PRESIDENT: Straightforward diplomatic.

22 MR. SIDEY: Any general observations about your  
23 feeling? Did you get overtired, or did you pace yourself?

24 THE PRESIDENT: I didn't get overly tired because  
25 the excitement sort of generated the necessary energy.



1 Wednesday night after the dinner, and we came back here, that  
2 is the night it all culminated, of course. We left here  
3 around one o'clock. Well, I went by the doctor's office and  
4 he gave me a little pill. I didn't ask him what it was and  
5 I set my alarm to get up at 5:30 the next morning and at  
6 7:00 Betty is waking me up and saying "I just looked at your  
7 schedule. You are supposed to be over at the Oval Office at  
8 7:40" and I said "What time is it" and she said "It is 7:00".  
9 So I think the doc sort of gave me a pill to relax me.

10 MR. SIDEY: Mr. President, this matter of command  
11 which is pretty direct and I think a new experience to you.--  
12 were you able to do it without Brown and Kissinger in town?

13 THE PRESIDENT: Well, yes. We laid out the prepara-  
14 tory meetings and decisions, although I did talk to Henry  
15 when he was in Kansas City and St. Louis. And then of course,  
16 we delayed the meeting on Tuesday night for two reasons. We  
17 wanted to get as far down the road before we had to make some  
18 decisions and then Henry got back at that time.

19 We originally set it for 9:00 as I recall, and then  
20 it was moved to 10:30 because Henry was getting back and it  
21 gave us more time and more daylight to make it.

22 MR. SIDEY: For your information and intelligence  
23 pictures, was that (unintelligible) you saw?

24 THE PRESIDENT: I thought the intelligence community  
25 did as well as they could under most difficult circumstances.

1 It is hard to see, certainly at night, if they move people  
2 from a ship to an island or from an island to the land.

3 MR. SIDEY: That was the big uncertainty, wasn't it?

4 THE PRESIDENT: That was a very substantial  
5 uncertainty.

6 VOICE: One of the first big breaks was, I guess,  
7 Monday night when it was first discovered that the ship had not  
8 gone into Kompong Som. Monday night our time would have been  
9 just the beginning of daylight their time. It was discovered  
10 not in port. It kind of opened up a whole range of things.

11 THE PRESIDENT: At first we knew they had begun to  
12 move it and there was a question that first, whether they  
13 were going to take it into Kompong Som, totally, but they  
14 stopped by this island roughly halfway in, which was surprising  
15 to us. One of the first decisions we made was, and this was  
16 aborted by the fact they stopped at the island, that we were  
17 going to try to head it off by aircraft, but they stopped  
18 at the island so that order was aborted.

19 MR. SIDEY: Mr. President, it was good going, I  
20 must say.

21  
22  
23 END  
24  
25

*Mayaguez file*

PLEASE CREDIT ANY QUOTES OR EXCERPTS FROM THIS ABC NEWS RADIO AND TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "ABC NEWS' ISSUES AND ANSWERS."

I S S U E S   A N D   A N S W E R S

SUNDAY, MAY 18, 1975

GUEST:

JAMES SCHLESINGER - The Secretary of Defense

INTERVIEWED BY:

Bob Clark - Issues and Answers Chief Correspondent

Frank Tomlinson - ABC News Pentagon Correspondent

- - -

HIGHLIGHTS

New casualty figures on the Mayaguez incident released by Secretary of Defense Schlesinger are higher than previously announced.

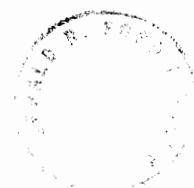
Five dead - three Marines, 2 airmen.

Sixteen unaccounted for.

Seventy to eighty wounded.

\* \* \*

This is a rush transcript for the press. Any questions regarding accuracy should be referred to ISSUES AND ANSWERS



- - -

1 THE ANNOUNCER: Our guest today on ISSUES AND ANSWERS is  
2 James Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense. Secretary Schlesinger,  
3 here are the issues:

4 Did the rescue of the Mayaguez hurt or help the United  
5 States in Asia?

6 Should we recognize the Communist Governments of Cambodia  
7 and Vietnam to lessen the danger of future incidents?

8 Will Thailand be the next domino to fall to the Communists?

9 MR. CLARK: Our guest today is the Secretary of Defense,  
10 James Schlesinger, and with me to interview the Secretary is  
11 ABC News Pentagon Correspondent, Frank Tomlinson.

12 Mr. Secretary, one of the problems is that we tried to  
13 find some diplomatic solution to the Mayaguez incident,  
14 was our total inability to communicate with the Cambodians.

15 As we look ahead now, and try to figure out ways to avoid  
16 such incidents in the future, would you favor recognizing the  
17 Communist Governments of Cambodia and Vietnam?

18 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that I would have  
19 to withhold judgment on that. That is an issue that will have  
20 to be reviewed very carefully by the Department of State.

21 I think that one should stress that with regard to  
22 communications that the Cambodian Government expelled two  
23 million people from its capital city. It is difficult at  
24 best even for those prepared to recognize the Cambodian  
25 Government, to communicate with it. So there are difficulties

1 that are inherent, as well as the difficulties that you cite.

2 MR. CLARK: And our efforts to work through the Chinese  
3 just failed totally; as the story was told by the White House,  
4 we tried to deliver a letter to the Cambodians through the  
5 Chinese Embassy and they simply and rather inscrutably  
6 gather returned the unopened letter the next day.

7 Do you know any more about that or any more about other  
8 attempts that were made to work through the Chinese?

9 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: No, I think that was the principal  
10 attempt. What may have been conveyed by the Chinese in other  
11 directions is a matter of speculation, but they did return  
12 the letter that had been delivered.

13 MR. TOMLINSON: Mr. Secretary, there has been some  
14 concern about the bombing of the Rean Airfield and the  
15 petroleum and the oil and lubricants storage area near  
16 Kompong Som after the crew had already boarded the  
17 destroyer Wilson, there had been some complaints that we  
18 were trying to teach the Cambodians a lesson that this wasn't  
19 really necessary. Could you expand on why we carried out  
20 these bombings?

21 Secretary Schlesinger: The bombings were associated with  
22 the effort to recover the vessel and the Marine landings on  
23 the island. If my recollection is correct, that the attack  
24 on Rean Airfield came before the recovery of the crew,  
25 the subsequent wave occurred after the attack. When we

1 started we had planned for the possibility of cyclic aircraft  
2 operations, as long as they were necessary. We did terminate  
3 the fourth wave and in all some 15 TAC air sorties were direct-  
4 ed against the mainland, 15, and expended ordnance. Now, this  
5 I might compare with the period before the summer of 1973  
6 when were running a thousand approximately B-52 sorties a month  
7 and several <sup>thousand</sup> TAC air sorties. This was a very prudent,  
8 limited use of force. The motivation was clearly to protect  
9 the Marines on the Island. The Marines were still engaged  
10 on the island; whether or not there is criticism in the United  
11 States, it is plain that the 200 Marines who were engaged on the  
12 island were not at all critical of the United States continuing  
13 to provide the support that was deemed necessary.

14 MR. TOMLINSON: Mr. Secretary, there is also I believe  
15 now some discrepancies on the number of casualties that we had.  
16 The Pentagon, I believe, is sticking with one Marine killed,  
17 13 men missing, I think ten Marines and three Air Force men,  
18 and 22 wounded.

19 The Captain of the Mayaguez now says that when they  
20 boarded the Wilson that there were seven Marines who had been  
21 killed on board the Wilson already when they got on there.  
22 Do you have anything to add to what our casualties were?

23 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that the Captain  
24 may have been in error, was in error, that those probably  
25 referred to wounded Marines rather than Marines who had been

1 killed. The numbers are a little bit higher than was initially  
2 released. As a result of the reassessment of the MIAs, the  
3 wounded and the KIAs, I think the current indication is  
4 something like three Marines and two airmen were killed.

5 MR. TOMLINSON: In other words, a total of five men?

6 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: But once again, we have to be very  
7 careful. This is a complex operation, but that is the  
8 general indication.

9 MR. CLARK: Is there any change in the number of those  
10 unaccounted for?

11 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: The number wounded is between 70  
12 and 80. I do not recall. This includes all sorts of minor  
13 wounds. I think that that number is essentially intact.

14 MR. CLARK: Mr. Secretary, those figures are substantially  
15 higher than the ones announced originally. Why the delay in  
16 getting the correct tally?

17 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Well, we indicated at the time  
18 that we were withdrawing from the island that initially  
19 there had been a number of choppers that had been downed, that  
20 we were running a muster on board the ships in order to  
21 assess what had been the damage.

22 We attempted to get out the results as they became clear,  
23 after notification of next of kin.

24 MR. CLARK: As it turned out, of course, the crew of  
the Mayagues, the members of the crew were not on the island of

1 Khotang where the Marines landed. Does the degree of the  
2 faulty intelligence in that operation bother you? Wasn't that  
3 a rather large error for somebody to make?

4 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: No, I don't believe that any  
5 error in fact was made. What we knew was that the crew had  
6 been moved to Khotang and we did not know whether or not the  
7 crew in its entirety or even in part had been removed from the  
8 island. We therefore felt it essential to seize the island  
9 before any further movement might -- opportunity for move-  
10 ment occurred for the crew.

11 Now, we had had a report on late Tuesday evening, I  
12 believe, that the time of the movement of one ship, one small  
13 boat, from the island towards the mainland and the pilot  
14 indicated he believed there were Caucasians aboard. We made every  
15 effort to stop that ship by firing ahead and to the rear of  
16 the ship. We used riot control agents, but, because of the  
17 observation that there might be Caucasians aboard, that vessel  
18 was not attacked directly. That was a very fortunate decision.

19 We did not at that time know whether there were any Ameri-  
20 cans on board that ship or what the number was, but apparently  
21 that was the ship that did escape from the island. We wanted  
22 to take whatever actions we could in a situation of considerable  
23 uncertainty, to give as high a chance as we could for the  
24 survival of the crew members and their return.



1           MR. TOMLINSON: Mr. Secretary, I understand that the  
2 first word coming from the United States on the Mayaguez  
3 capture was picked up in Jakarta by an American employee of  
4 a company there. Is that what happened, was it picked up  
5 in Jakarta and then relayed to an embassy in some way, and  
6 how long did it take the Administration to start making a  
7 move on this?

8           SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: The first word was picked up on  
9 Monday morning and it was in the way that you indicated,  
10 through Jakarta and through the commercial firm.  
11 The actions began to take shape Monday, later in the day,  
12 as we began to assess the availability of force, if that  
13 should be needed. The first thing that was done, of  
14 course was for the President to demand the immediate  
15 release of the vessel and an indication that the responsibility  
16 would rest with the Cambodian authorities if they failed to  
17 make immediate release. The actual movement against the  
18 vessel and against the island came more than 48 hours  
19 later, which is I believe the traditional diplomatic  
20 time that elapses under those circumstances.

21           MR. TOMLINSON: Why did it take so long to get  
22 out a warning to mariners? We had had a Panamanian ship  
23 stopped and I understand a Korean ship had been fired on  
24 by the Cambodians, and still there was no warning to  
25 mariners until after the Mayaguez was captured. Then they

1 sent out a message saying "Stay 20 miles away from Vietnam,  
2 35 miles away from Cambodia."

3 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: I think the kind of warnings  
4 you refer to are primarily warnings of insurance companies.  
5 The kind of major warning of emergency has been issued about  
6 45 times since the days of John Paul Jones, and that does  
7 not occur very frequently.

8 MR. CLARK: Mr. Secretary, the protests from the  
9 Thai government about the Marines that we first  
10 landed there for use in the operations have been considerably  
11 stronger than was first anticipated in Washington. They  
12 are still demanding a formal apology. There was a demon-  
13 stration by several thousand Thai students in Bangkok  
14 yesterday outside the American embassy where they  
15 ripped the seal off the embassy. How seriously do you  
16 regard these protests?

17 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Well, I hope that the protests  
18 will die down. I think that Dr. Kissinger indicated the  
19 other day at his press conference that in the past  
20 there has been assumed to be a wider latitude in the use  
21 of those bases. If this has caused any embarrassment to  
22 the Thai government, then we would regret that embarrassment.  
23 It was I think necessary for us to take the actions that  
24 we did take and we awaited the arrival of the Coral Sea  
25 to provide much of the force, as well as the Holt and the



1 Wilson.

2 MR. CLARK: If you had it to do all over again, would  
3 you still send those Marines first into Thailand or if  
4 you knew it was going to stir usuch a ruckus there, would  
5 you have done it in some other way?

6 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Well, that is a leading  
7 question, but I repeat we took the response under  
8 the circumstances that was firm and judicial.  
9 It accomplished the objective. This has been -- including  
10 an element of good fortune -- a very successful operation  
11 and I would not change it.

12 MR. CLARK: But has it been successful diplomatically,  
13 and that would seem to be the danger now and again the  
14 Thais protest being louder than they expected. They  
15 seemed to have been much more upset than we expected. Could  
16 that have been a spinoff in putting greater strain on our  
17 relations with Thailand, our only remaining ally in Southeast  
18 Asia? And relations with other Asian countries.

19  
20 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER. I would hope ultimately it  
21 would not have a spinoff. I think the main thing is the  
22 United States must take action to defend the right of  
23 innocent passage, to defend the right of freedom of the  
24 seas, and that the actions that were taken were judicial. I  
25 do not think, given the direct circumstances, that the

1 United States could have reacted otherwise. We took an  
2 action that was firm and it was also right, so I have no  
3 regrets about it.

4 (Announcements)

5 \* \* \* \* \*

6 MR. CLARK: Mr. Secretary, just one more question about  
7 Thailand. We have had some 25,000 American troops in  
8 Thailand, mainly airmen. We have already agreed with the  
9 Thais to begin pulling them out on a timetable that would  
10 have them all out by next March. If now, because of the  
11 strong feelings of the Thais over this incident, they ask us  
12 to pull our troops out more quickly than that, would we do it?

13 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Well, of course we will fulfill  
14 any agreements that we make with the Thai government. We  
15 had close to 40,000 men in Thailand. We had withdrawn  
16 about 13,000. We are going to reduce substantially, had  
17 planned to reduce substantially by the end of this fiscal  
18 year. There may be some adjustment of the pace of withdrawal,  
19 but ultimately I think that we have to talk very carefully  
20 with the Thai government to see indeed just what the pace  
21 should be.

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1 MR. TOMLINSON: Mr. Secretary, I remember at 3:30 in  
2 the morning everyone bleary-eyed, that you had held a news  
3 conference and you said, I believe, that the lessons learned from  
4 the Mayaguez incident were salutary.

5 Has this message gotten through and specifically in the  
6 northern part of Asia, to Korea, what happens if the Koreans  
7 should start something? How will the United States react  
8 to that?

9 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Well, once again I should  
10 emphasize, and I cannot recall what I said at 3:30 a.m.,  
11 that morning, that the action that we took was the right  
12 action. Firmness in the right, as Lincoln would say, and  
13 we had to do it that way, and I think that under those cir-  
14 cumstances the consequences are likely to be salutary, but the  
15 motivation for the action was to assure that this vessel and the  
16 crew was indeed returned to the United States.

17 To the extent the United States is seen as acting  
18 firmly and it dispels any illusions about America in the  
19 post-Vietnam period, it is healthy, and I think that they  
20 will consequently bring others to recognize that our commit-  
21 ments elsewhere will be observed.

22 I doubt whether the North Koreans are in a position to  
23 challenge what is a mutual defense treaty between the Republic  
24 of Korea and the United States. I would think they would be  
25 very hesitant to do so.

1 MR. TOMLINSON: If they did though, in a hypothetical  
2 situation, would we look at Korea as another Vietnam and  
3 go in and stand in one area for ten years or would we  
4 strike back with some force and quite frankly hit them hard?

5 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: I think one of the lessons of  
6 the Vietnamese War is that ancillary military operations,  
7 not directed against any fixed military objective, such as  
8 destroying the heart of enemy power, his military forces,  
9 is likely to be ineffective, if the opponent has will  
10 and determination to persist, and that may be a lesson that  
11 we will draw, and I would hesitate if I were some other power  
12 to test whether that is the lesson that we have drawn.

13 MR. CLARK: Mr. Secretary, there seems to me to be an  
14 implication in that, if there were aggression by the North  
15 Koreans against South Korea, we would react with overwhelming  
16 power and that would have to be air power, would it not?

17 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: I did not say that we would react  
18 with overwhelming power. What I said was a lesson that could  
19 be learned from Vietnam --

20 MR. CLARK: Ineffective not to react --

21 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: That we go against the military  
22 power of the opponent and that we not simply spend our time  
23 parrying their offensive operations. Now, whether this is  
24 overwhelming power immediately, what the precise reaction  
25 of the United States would be, I do not -- I cannot at this

3  
1 time state, but I would emphasize that it is necessary for  
2 us to recognize and the North Koreans to recognize that the  
3 United States is bound by a mutual defense treaty to South  
4 Korea.

5 MR. CLARK: Well, Mr. Secretary, we have something like  
6 38,000 troops in South Korea. I think the American people,  
7 after the experience of Vietnam, would really be appalled at the  
8 idea of getting involved in another land war in Asia. As a  
9 practical matter, if you are going to respond with full force  
10 against an attack from North Korea, aren't you talking about  
11 very heavy bombing even beyond the extent of the bombing we  
12 engaged in in Vietnam?

13 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: I think that that is an option  
14 to be considered. I would hesitate to say now what we would  
15 do under the circumstances. The heart of deterrence is to  
16 maintain uncertainty about the specific actions or maintaining  
17 certainty about our commitments.

18 MR. CLARK: Well, one or the other options obviously  
19 would be to beef up those 38,000 American troops but there  
20 you would run head-on into opposition from both the Congress  
21 and the American people. Would you not --

22 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Oh, I think so and I think one  
23 must recognize that we have been reducing our forces in  
24 Korea. In 1969 we had 60,000 troops. We have removed one  
25 division. The number of men is the lowest that it has been  
since the time of the war and represents an American presence,

4  
an American commitment but as far as a smaller number of men  
than previously.

MR. CLARK: But we are then also reducing our options,  
are we not, to the point where the option would be heavy use  
of air power?

SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: One must remember that the South  
Koreans maintain a very formidable military establishment, and  
what would be required under the circumstances remains to be  
seen, but what would be done by the United States would be  
what would be required under the circumstances.

MR. TOMLINSON: Mr. Secretary, what has been the reaction  
that you have received from the American people? The White  
House seems to have gotten a lot of letters and telegrams  
praising the action of the Americans. What about you? Have  
you received any particular communique from the people of  
America on what the military did?

SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: I think that the reaction is one  
of universal acclaim. I was in South Carolina yesterday  
and there was unstinted praise for the performance of the  
American forces as well as for the decisions and American policy.

There have been some questions that were raised, particular-  
ly initially, about the measure of force, the type of response,  
but these kinds of issues will always come up.

I think these days that if manna were to fall from heaven  
there would be criticism if we were to accept it. Some



1 criticism; not very much.

2 MR. TOMLINSON: Well, let us, if we may here, as the  
3 time is drawing close, jump to another part of the world.  
4 You, I believe, look at NATO as a real cornerstone and you  
5 mentioned detente. We have got some NATO meetings coming up.  
6 Tomorrow the Senate votes on aid to Turkey.

7 In the time we have not given aid to Turkey, how has that  
8 affected NATO?

9 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: It has caused concern within  
10 NATO generally, and appropriate concern. It has, of course,  
11 adversely affected the Turkish forces because of the lack of  
12 availability of spare parts.

13 There has been some decline in the readiness of those  
14 forces and therefore the military posture of NATO overall has  
15 been reduced slightly.

16 We would hope that we will be able to straighten out this  
17 situation. Turkey is perhaps the best example of the effect-  
18 iveness of mutual security, and it is tragic that we have  
19 gotten into the situation that we have gotten into.

20 MR. CLARK: The word from the head counters in the  
21 Senate is that you are going to win tomorrow, that the ban  
22 on American arms aid to Turkey will be lifted. But if you  
23 don't, if you should lose that vote, would it weaken your hand  
24 as you and Secretary Kissinger and the President go off to  
25 next week's NATO meeting?

6  
1 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: It would not strengthen it.

2 MR. CLARK: And what do you -- and you and Secretary  
3 Kissinger will be heading this week for Europe; the President  
4 will join you there next week where all of the Prime  
5 Ministers of NATO countries will assemble, what do you see  
6 as the chief goal of that big NATO meeting?

7 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: There are two goals. In the  
8 Defense Ministers' meeting, in which I shall participate, our  
9 objective is to see that the force structure and the strategy  
10 of the alliance is the correct one. To continue to deter, as  
11 we have deterred for 30 years, any hostile action against  
12 Western Europe. We have made some progress in recent years  
13 with regard to force structure and strategy but we must  
14 recognize that the Warsaw Pact forces have been beefed up.

15 I think that the objective in the North Atlantic Council  
16 will be to achieve a reaffirmation amongst the principal  
17 members of the Alliance, all of the members of the Alliance,  
18 of the continuing need for this alliance in this period of  
19 diplomatic uncertainty.

20 MR. TOMLINSON: Are the European members of NATO pulling  
21 their full weight now?

22 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Some are, some aren't. I think  
23 that we must do more and they must do more to assure that  
24 they do put up the forces that are necessary, that they are  
25 ready forces and well equipped.

1           There has been talk, as you know, of what is the American  
2 commitment to Europe, but there is less question of America  
3 abandoning Europe than whether the Europeans might abandon  
4 themselves through lack of effort. I think that a number of  
5 the states in Europe have increased their efforts in the  
6 past years and we are satisfied with that trend.

7           MR. TOMLINSON: When you say we should do more, does that  
8 mean we should send more troops to NATO?

9           SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: No, we should do more to urge them  
10 to take the actions necessary from the standpoint of the  
11 Alliance as a whole.

12          MR. CLARK: Mr. Secretary, while we are sending out  
13 signals to the rest of the world these days how tough we are  
14 going to stand and our credibility still exists, what would  
15 happen in the event of a new outbreak in the Middle East that  
16 has imposed an oil embargo on the United States; would we  
17 peacefully go along with the embargo as we did last time?

18          SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Well, as I have indicated before,  
19 we might be less tolerant of such an embargo than we have been.  
20 Just precisely what measures we might take would remain  
21 for the circumstances, but I do not expect those circumstances  
22 to arise.

23          MR. CLARK: But in your view military action against the  
24 Arab world could still be a viable option if there were an oil  
25 embargo?

1 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: I think that it could be  
2 achieved but we regard that as a very improbable event in the  
3 first place and it certainly is not an option that is attractive  
4 on its face, save in desperate circumstances.

5 MR. CLARK: One more very quick question: There is  
6 confusion in this country as to what precisely our commitment  
7 is to Israel.

8 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: I think there is no precise commit-  
9 ment to Israel. We have been concerned about its survival  
10 for many years. The United States played a substantial role  
11 in its establishment and we continue to be interested in its  
12 well-being.

13 MR. CLARK: I am sorry we are going to have to cut you  
14 off on such a very complicated question and answer. Thank you,  
15 Mr. Secretary, for being with us on ISSUES AND ANSWERS.

16 SECRETARY SCHLESINGER: Delighted to be with you.  
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