



NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.—Kans.)

New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 225-6521

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CONTACT: JANET ANDERSON

DOLE STATEMENT ON MAYAGUEZ

WASHINGTON, D.C.--Following is a statement made by Senator Bob Dole following release of the Mayaguez and evacuation of the Marines from Koh Tang:

Mr. President, all of us in this body are, of course, relieved at the news that the merchant ship Mayaguez is, at this moment, underway on its own power, manned by its own crew.

The fact that America will act with measured force and in timely fashion to ensure the safety of her citizens has been asserted once again by the bravery, and the sacrifice, of U.S. military. We are all saddened by the news of casualties among the Marines who went on to the small island of Koh Tang to rescue the crew. Our sympathies extend to their families and friends and to their comrades in arms and no words of gratitude any of us can summon would measure up to the debt each of us owes to these brave men.

TOO EARLY FOR GENERALIZATION

Mr. President, close as we are to the disappointing conclusion of our long involvement in Southeast Asia, it is too soon to attempt any major generalizations about the impact of this incident on the way in which other nations view the United States. I am hopeful that it will help erase any doubts that may have arisen about American resolve to use force when force is required and justified to protect American interests.

I believe it has done much to allay any misgivings that may have been entertained in this country or elsewhere about any of the recent Congressional actions to limit Presidential ability to respond in an emergency. The President did respond. He did so and at the same time consulted with Congress and made such reports as require under the legislation passed in 1973, the War Powers Act.

CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT

I will admit, too, Mr. President, that it is a good and unaccustomed feeling to find near unanimity among my colleagues for the first time since the early days of my experience in the Congress, over an American use of military force, however limited it may have been.

Though there seems to be an irreducible minimum of my colleagues who are prepared to criticize any assertive action this country may take in defense of its own interests, and who do so now in regard to this action, the overwhelming majority of my colleagues, and apparently a similar majority of American citizens from all walks of life, have shown enthusiasm in their support for these actions.

I believe President Ford did what he had to do. He moved deliberately after trying diplomacy first. But the first military engagements, which most of us learned about early yesterday, were motivated by the need to prevent the transfer of the American crew members to the Cambodian mainland. Any delay or overcautiousness in that decision would have led to far greater complications. With Americans on the mainland, the analogy to the Pueblo situation would have been complete and our ability to take effective action to secure their release would have been severely restricted.

Only timely, prudent and firm action by the President in consultation with the National Security Council and the Congress prevented the repetition of that situation, which would have been a tragedy for the crewmen and an embarrassment for the nation.

AMERICA'S RESPONSE TO THREAT

Mr. President, this was one, rather isolated and in some people's minds perhaps a minor incident. But in my view it is an example of how America must respond to any threat to her own interest. We cannot allow ourselves to be at the mercy of the whims and vagaries of small nations that may entertain illusions about our will or about their own abilities to confront us.

For, if we yield to small nations, or show indecision when they confront us, or accept the counsel of those who would have us be overcautious in dealing with them, then the message of our unwillingness to act in our own best interest will not be lost on larger nations, friendly or hostile.

We are strong. We are a guarantor still of world peace. We are what we are and we cannot be defensive or apologetic about acting to protect ourselves, our citizens or our interests.

The President, I believe, did what he had to do. And the vast majority of Congress, in giving him their enthusiastic support, did what they ought to do.

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