

MEMORANDUM

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the System

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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May 23, 1975

JCS completed review for PACOM

MEMORANDUM FOR:

SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM:

W.R. SMYSER/WILLIAM STEARMAN

WKS (MS)

WKS

We have reviewed the records of the NSC meetings, the military reports and the records of military orders that JCS and DOD have sent in response to the President's request.

On the basis of this preliminary information, pending further reports, we have the following observations on four matters of military execution during the Mayaguez incident.

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

Transmission of General Presidential Orders

Beginning with the second NSC meeting on May 13, when our available military records begin, there are two sets of instructions relevant to this inquiry:

-- At the NSC meeting on May 13, the President ordered the military to prepare for operations to seize the vessel, to land on the island, and to bomb around Kompong Som.

-- At the NSC meeting on May 14, the President ordered execution of these plans, specifying use of Coral Sea assets, rather than B-52s and Thai-based tac air, for attacks on the mainland.

The JCS record indicates that appropriate orders were issued shortly after the meetings in accordance with the President's instructions.

Use of Coral Sea Assets Against the Island Rather Than Against Kompong Som Targets

The record of the NSC meetings clearly shows a general expectation that the Coral Sea aircraft would be used against Kompong Som targets whereas Thailand-based aircraft would be used to support the Marines on the island. The President's remarks also clearly indicates that this was his expectation.

OSD and JCS
reviews
completed

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The record of military messages shows that authority was given to use Coral Sea assets against the island, though it does not show whether they were, indeed, so used. For example:

-- A JCS message sent at 1742 EDT, May 14 specified that tac air from Coral Sea as well as from Thailand was authorized against the island.

-- A message sent by CINCPAC to USSAG at 2058 EDT, May 14 gave USSAG authority to use Coral Sea tac air to support forces on the island. These tac air strikes could preempt Cambodian strikes if required.

-- At 2342 EDT CINCPAC informed the JCS that Coral Sea tac air would be used to support ground forces on the island, if needed, and JCS acknowledged that this was within CINCPAC authority.

Termination of Strikes Against Kompong Som

The record of the NSC meetings indicates that it was generally understood that the strikes against the mainland would continue while the Marines were engaged or until orders to the contrary were received. The President specifically said that the strikes against Kompong Som "should not stop until we tell them."

The military record shows that, after the third wave a discussion ensued between CINCPAC, JCS, and Secretary Schlesinger about whether to launch a fourth wave. The Secretary initially stated that we should mount a fourth wave. General Brown recommended against it; so did Admiral Holloway and Admiral Gayler. One of the arguments against launching was that the Coral Sea had to turn into the wind to launch aircraft and was then moving away from the island. Secretary Schlesinger accepted the recommendations of the JCS and CINCPAC and, according to the record, called the President at that time to report that there would not be a fourth wave (the exact time of the Secretary's call was not given but in the context it would have been around 0030 or 0035 EDT on May 15). The military record shows a verbal order from Sec Def at 0038 on May 15 that the fourth wave should not be sent.

No Ordnance Expenditure on First Wave

The record of the NSC meetings indicates that the first wave of the strikes against Kompong Som would have a mission of armed reconnaissance,

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which by definition includes authority to strike targets of opportunity. the NSC record also shows that the aircraft were to hit mobile targets initially.

The JCS orders to CINCPAC (1710 EDT on May 14) carried out the NSC intent, stating that the first flight was to be armed recce against aircraft and against military water craft.

It is not clear why no ordnance was expended. There was no discussion of it in the records that we have seen. A possible explanation arises out of some changes in instructions between about 2025 EDT and 2052 EDT on May 14, when expenditure of ordnance was temporarily suspended while we were discussing what to do about the Cambodian radio broadcast announcing their intent to expel the vessel. The more detailed records that we understand to be forthcoming may give us an answer.

As for the size of the first wave from the Coral Sea, such discussion as had been held in the NSC suggested that it would be a large wave. We have seen no orders in the military record available to us that dealt with precise numbers of aircraft or that instructed them as to whether or not to expend ordnance on the first strike.

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