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Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger
Interviewed by Newsmen
Following his Appearance before Morning Session
of House Appropriations Committee
Monday, March 3, 1975

*Rev. Phil
3-4-75
L-9*

Q: What phase of the appropriations procedure were you able to get into with the Committee today?

A: We discussed the force balance on a classified basis and we discussed some of the weapons systems requests in relation to that force balance; spent some time on the B-1, and in addition, the Committee members listened to the comments of Congressman Flynt who had just returned from Southeast Asia.

Q: Are you satisfied that a group of eight Congressmen traveling for something like five days can get a full picture of the defense needs of Southeast Asia?

A: I think they can get the beginnings of a picture in such a way that they have a firsthand impression of what is going on there rather than an impression that is gathered from the news media; there may be a distinction between the two.

Q: Could you say a word about Congressman Flynt's impression which he brought back?

A: I think that it would be inappropriate for me to give any comments on his impressions. I think that he had best provide them himself.

Q: Did you detect any increase in support or lack thereof for the Vietnam request?

A: I would say there is an increasingly open mind on that subject generally on the Hill and I regard that as an encouraging sign.

Q: That was with regard to South Vietnam. How about with regard to Cambodia?

A: The questions with regard to Cambodia, increasingly the interest is just what responsibility the U.S. does indeed bear toward the Government in Phnom Penh and what kind of regime might succeed the present regime in Phnom Penh. They are more generalized questions than in the case of South Vietnam.

Q: What is your reaction to Thailand's announcement that they might want American troops out in a year and a half?

A: That is just I think a comment by a particular group within Thailand. I think the U.S. would prefer, needless to say, to maintain a residual force ultimately in Thailand and that would require the acquiescence in support of the Thai public as well as the Thai government.

Q: Are you concerned at all about our Defense Posture as it's coming under more critical questioning by Congressional groups and others? They're really questioning what our military commitments are. Are you concerned that we're going to get into some kind of military problems?

A: I think that I'm much encouraged by the serious questioning that's going on at the present time. For a period of seven years, while many individuals used the phrase sacrosanct with regard to the Defense budget, we noticed that the Defense Department was the only budget that was repeatedly lopped when it came up here to the Hill. Now there is, I think, serious joining of the issues with regard to America's foreign policy, its role in the world and how that is related to our defense posture. That kind of serious questioning will be helpful, I think, in the long run.

E N D

March 13, 1975

REMARKS OF GENERAL WILLIAM WESTMORELAND
ON THE NORTH LAWN

1:35 P.M. EDT

Q Will you tell us what you talked about with the President?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: The President is an old friend of mine. When I was a young Brigadier General in Washington and he was a freshman Congressman, we became acquainted. We traveled to his home town of Grand Rapids, Michigan, on a number of occasions together, and we went to Europe on one occasion together.

So, he and Mrs. Ford are dear friends of ours. We did a lot of reminiscing, but we talked about a number of things.

Q Did you talk at all, sir, about the current situation on Capitol Hill with the aid for Indochina?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: We did. We discussed that subject -- not exhaustively, but we deplored the present trend of events.

Q You deplored it, you say?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: I did, yes.

Q Could you fill us in on what you mean by that?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: I think our most important asset in this country is our credibility, and I think if we fail to support our friends that we have been supporting over the years -- and I talked specifically about Cambodia and Vietnam -- we are going to damage our international credibility.

Q General, could you tell us what effect you think the fall of Cambodia would have on South Vietnam?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: I think you have to put this in broad context. The objective of Hanoi is to dominate Indochina. Sihanouk has nothing to do with Cambodia. He could be installed as a figurehead if the Communists took over, but he has no real clout.

Hanoi is behind this effort. Hanoi is the oppressor of the orient now, and particularly Southeast Asia, and their objective from the very beginning is to dominate Indochina. They are behind this effort, and if they take over Cambodia, it is going to be another step in fulfilling their long-range mission.

Q Do you think the President shares your views, sir?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: He does not disagree with them, but we didn't discuss them to the point, and certainly I was not presumptuous enough to try to pin the President down as to whether he agreed or disagreed with me.

Q General, you sound as if you think that there should be more than \$220 million in aid, which according to Administration experts only gives the Cambodian government a reasonable chance of survival.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: Having supported them to the extent that we have, which was in accordance with the doctrine that was promulgated at Guam, as long as they are willing to fight for their own freedom and their own independence, it would seem to me that we should give them a fair chance.

Whether or not this amount of money will do the trick, I don't know, but the point is that the enemy is not ten feet tall.

Q Would you not say that the United States, with all of the money and the lives that have been poured into Southeast Asia, has given those countries a fair chance?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: I think we have been generous with our aid and, of course, this has been in the great American tradition. The thing that worries me is that we seem to be punishing our friends and rewarding our enemies. The culprit in this whole thing is Hanoi. Hanoi is the one who has set aside and violated the provisions of the Paris cease-fire accords.

It is Hanoi that has been moving more and more troops down to the South. It is Hanoi that is supported and aiding and abetting the Khmer Rouge that have made the progress that they have made.

I might point out parenthetically that the strategic pattern in Cambodia now is that followed by the Communists in China where they have dominated the countryside and surrounded the cities, whereas their general strategy in Vietnam is to divide the country through the use of force.

Q General, do you think that they really have a chance if they get through to the rainy season or --

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: If they can hold on until May, when the rainy season starts, they might be able to regroup and they might be in a position that would give them sufficient strength, hopefully, but this is certainly not assured in order to come to some compromise.

Q General, if Cambodia falls, do you think South Vietnam also will be threatened?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: It will not help the situation in Cambodia. As a matter of fact, it will be injurious to the situation in Cambodia because the Communists will have Cambodia as a base that they can use against Vietnam.

Q You said Cambodia. My question was --

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: If the Communists dominate Cambodia, it will give them the whole country as a base.

They can open up the seaport town which used to be known as Sihanouk, and is still referred to as that from time to time, where supplies can be moved in and which will simplify the logistics for the North Vietnamese.

Q To attack South Vietnam?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: To attack South Vietnam.

Q General, have you got any impression from the President as to whether he thinks there is a chance to get this aid after this vote yesterday by the caucus?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: He did not express an opinion on this. I would say he did not express optimism, but I don't think he has given up.

Q Do you think he has any option if Congress does not provide more aid? Do you have a feeling that there is anything America can do, that the Administration, without Congress, could do to carry out its policy?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: Of course, I think it is too bad that the President does not have the power to use the resources available to us in order to stabilize the situation. The only language that Hanoi understands is the language of force, and I think it is too bad that we could not again mine Haiphong Harbor.

The President does not have the authority to use tactical air or B-52 strikes to hit the Communists supply lines, all of which have been set up in violation of the Paris cease-fire accords.

Q You would support that?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: Absolutely I would support it. It is the only language they understand.

Q American troops again on the ground?

Q The timing of your visit here to see the President seems to be a bit of a coincidence.

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: As you may or may not know, on the 3rd of January, in Palm Springs, I suffered a coronary attack. I have been on convalescent leave from the hospital. I returned yesterday to Walter Reed Hospital for checks and evaluation.

I expect to return to my home town tomorrow evening. I was given a stress test today, and I had a long conference with the doctor. He says I have made a remarkable recovery. He tells me that I can now carry on a normal routine and play golf and eventually I can play tennis, and he urges me to be prudent in the build-up of my physical activity and he feels that I can do it now.

Q Did you contact the White House, or did the President contact you about this meeting today?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: The President sent word to me that he wanted to see me. We had planned to get together in mid-January, and then I had this coronary attack. Then the appointment secretary called me several times. I then called him and told him that I would be up here for this examination and at that time this appointment was arranged.

Q Did the President want your advice on Indochina?

GENERAL WESTMORELAND: I think he was much interested in my views.

THE PRESS: Thank you very much, General.

END (AT 1:42 P.M. EDT)



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REMARKS BY
GENERAL GEORGE S. BROWN, USAF
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
BEFORE THE
NAVY LEAGUE OF THE UNITED STATES (SAN DIEGO COUNCIL)
San Diego, California
Wednesday, March 19, 1975 - 8:00 P.M. (PDT)

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to the Navy League of the United States. Knowing how deeply dedicated the Navy League has been in its support of a strong national defense, I have been looking forward to this evening to share with you my views on a critical defense question facing our nation. The question is how should we support our national security commitments around the world, and the specific cases that I will address this evening are Cambodia and South Vietnam.

Exactly one month from today, on April 19th, we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the battles of Lexington and Concord, where "once the embattled farmers stood, and fired the shot heard round the world." As a nation, we are filled with pride whenever we hear those immortal words of Emerson and reflect on the basic principles for which we stand.

Now, 200 years later, we are engaged in a national debate as to whether or not we should continue financial assistance to the besieged nations of Cambodia and South Vietnam. Will some future poet write where "once the embattled peasants stood, fired, and the click was heard round the world?" That click would be the sound made by some rifle hammer striking an empty chamber, the day that the last round of ammunition had been spent by those

fighting for their freedom in Southeast Asia. As Emerson's words fill us with pride, how do these words strike our national ear, "the click heard round the world?"

The issues involved in whether or not to continue military assistance to Cambodia and South Vietnam are clear. First, to the people who live there, we have a moral obligation which we should not shirk. Some would have us believe that we could bring an end to the killing and suffering by cutting off our support to the government forces, putting the government in the position of having to negotiate or surrender. But experience has shown in both Cambodia and Vietnam that a Communist takeover of an area does not bring an end to killing and suffering: instead it subjects helpless people to unspeakable horrors. The Communists, being a minority, will surely, as they have elsewhere, eliminate potential and actual opposition leaders. This means countless military commissioned and non-commissioned officers, civil servants, teachers, business men and religious leaders will be "neutralized." The 1968 Communist occupation of Hue is but one example. Sixteen hundred people on prepared lists were murdered as the top three levels of leadership in that provincial capital were eliminated.

I believe that if Phnom Penh were to be overrun by the Communist insurgents, there would, over a period of time, be a bloody accounting that would not stop with just a few government leaders, judging from what has already happened in Cambodian villages and military units that have been overrun by these so-called "liberators." Only through continued economic and military assistance to these beleaguered peoples is there a reasonable and honorable opportunity to end needless bloodshed. Moreover, our termination of aid to these people would be seen by the world as a cold and calculated move by the United States in disregard of our historical relationship and mutual sacrifices.

The second issue is whether the problems of Southeast Asia will be solved by Communist conquest or by negotiated settlement. The governments of Cambodia, South Vietnam, and the United States have made vigorous and continuous efforts over the past years to bring about a ceasefire and a political settlement in both these war-ravaged countries. For example, after the January 1973 Paris Accords that were to bring peace between North and South Vietnam, the Cambodian government declared a unilateral ceasefire, called for negotiations, and has since repeatedly expressed its willingness to be flexible in achieving a negotiated end to the conflict. Despite similar efforts by the South

Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese have outrageously ignored the Paris Accords from their very beginning. They have relentlessly increased their troops, supplies, and arms throughout Indochina and have now launched, with some initial success, a major effort in South Vietnam, using heavy artillery and tanks. How can we now terminate our aid and leave these people helpless in the face of this Communist offensive. To cut off aid now would be viewed by much of the world as a fundamental lack of resolve on our part -- or even worse, a suggestion that aggression pays.

Last year North Vietnam received a record increase in military and economic aid from other Communist countries. We estimate that Communist aid to Hanoi reached \$1.7 billion last year -- an increase of \$700 million over 1973.

As you know, the President has asked Congress to appropriate a \$300 million supplemental in military aid for South Vietnam this year, which is still \$400 million less than what was originally requested. The principal difficulty of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces today is due to the lack of support in this year's funding. We had estimated a requirement for \$1.4 billion which was reduced to an authorization of \$1 billion and further reduced to an appropriation of \$700 million. There have been no major end items supplied this year. None of the combat losses in aircraft, tanks or armored personnel carriers has been replaced. There has been no contract maintenance -- just fuel and ammunition with which to defend their homeland. For example, they are trying to fight with one-seventh of their C-130 transports flyable (5 to 7 out of 34) and one-sixth of their CHINOOK helicopters operating (10 to 12 out of 64). Consequently, today we see district capitals falling to the Communists, and province capitals like Pleiku, Kontum and Ban Me Thuot in dire straits.

If United States support does not continue, South Vietnam will be forced into an increasingly defensive posture in face of the current major series of attacks by the North Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese lost six district capitals in as many days last week. They are having to make the tough decision on which province capitals can still be saved. Their backs are against the wall! The argument is no longer academic.

Cambodia's situation is even more critical. Her crucial supplies are now measured in days. If additional aid is not forthcoming within the next few weeks, Cambodia will no longer have the ammunition with which to defend herself, nor the rice to feed the multitudinous refugees

who flee before the Communist onslaught and seek safety in the cities.

Additional military aid to the Cambodian government is needed to re-establish a military equilibrium -- we need to convince the Communists that a military solution would be a most difficult and costly affair. We can hope that then the Communists will come to the negotiating table and abandon the battlefield. Our failure to provide assistance will vastly diminish the possibility of a political settlement which protects the rights of both sides. There will be no political settlement if the free people of Phnom Penh are denied the means to resist. Of this I am certain.

In both Cambodia and South Vietnam, all recent efforts at a negotiated settlement have been rebuffed by the Communists, not because of any failure to offer reasonable compromises by both the Cambodian and South Vietnamese governments, but because the Communists now believe that they can win their objectives on the battlefield. We will encourage these aggressors' beliefs if we terminate aid to these embattled nations. We certainly want an end to the killing, and negotiated settlements, but we have scant hope of success unless we act quickly to provide additional aid for both countries.

President Ford has said: "If we abandon our allies, we will be saying to the world that war pays. Aggression will not stop, rather it will increase. In Cambodia the aggressors will have shown that if negotiations are resisted, the United States will weary, abandon its friends, and force will prevail."

Tonight, we stand on the eve of a momentous national decision. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the world does note and will long remember what we do for Southeast Asia. The London Daily Express has declared that "if America fails to honor her obligations in Cambodia and South Vietnam, the Russians and Chinese could draw the conclusion that America will not honor her commitments anywhere. That would be very bad news indeed for Asia, the Middle East -- and especially for Western Europe." Similar thoughts have been expressed in the press of Hamburg, of Vienna, and of Malta. East Asian editors echo the same fears, reporting in Seoul that U.S. failure to act would "generate psychological uneasiness and distrust among Asian allies."

If this country will not continue to support our moral obligation in Southeast Asia with dollars, the word of the United States will surely count for less in the world.

The ultimate cost of failing to do what should be done would be far greater than the cost of our continued support of our moral obligation. The ultimate question, therefore, is whether the United States is a responsible power that acts with due regard for its historic involvements, obligations, and commitments to other nations in helping preserve world peace.

All of us can and must do a much better job of informing the public of our compelling military responsibilities, both here at home and on the frontiers of freedom.

And one month from today, as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the battles of Lexington and Concord, where "once the embattled farmers stood, and fired the shot heard round the world," let us fervently hope and pray that this celebration will not be marred, nor the principles for which we stand sullied by "the click heard round the world."

Thank you.

- E N D -

(This is not a verbatim transcript)

DoD Morning News Briefing
Thursday, March 20, 1975, 11:15 a.m.
(Maj. Gen. Sidle)

Announcements:

1. On the Hill: We posted the schedule as usual. We have some statements. Mr. Schlesinger testifies at executive session of Senate Armed Services Committee at 10:00 a.m. -- no statement; Maj. Gen. L. E. Weber, Chief of National Guard Bureau, is before the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee on reserves; Brig. Gen. Blanton, USAF, testifies at closed session of Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee on '76 appropriations for O&M. Lt. Gen. Fish appears before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on foreign military assistance. We will have statements for the last three when they are released by Congress.

2. No speech texts today. Dr. Malcolm Currie, DDR&E, is at Hilton Head, SC, where he'll participate in a panel discussion sponsored by the Electronic Industries Association.

3. The Soviets have fired the second ICBM in their current test series in the Pacific; this one we characterize as probably a SS-18, again with a single reentry vehicle and it impacted at 10:20 p.m. last night our time.

Q: Same area -- 1700 miles south of Hawaii?

A: Same place. Launch: Central USSR; distance: about the same as last time, 8,000 nautical miles.

Q: Ships still in the area?

A: Ships are still in the area; the area is still closed.

Q: I saw an AP report that the warning to mariners had been lifted.

A: I haven't received that officially; it could be. Sometimes they only shoot a couple. If that's true, we'll probably get it shortly.

Q: Do you have reports of any Soviet naval activity around the CIA/Hughes sunken submarine area?

A: The only report we have is as of late Tuesday, or rather Wednesday morning our time, that there was a Soviet tug about 40 miles north of Oahu. It hasn't communicated with any U.S. Navy vessel or anyone else that we know about. It's not unusual for a Soviet ship to be in those waters and as far as we know there are no other Soviet ships within several hundred miles of Hawaii. Just the one tug.

Q: A seagoing tug?

A: It's a seagoing tug.

Q: No other ships within how many miles?

A: Several hundred; 6-700 miles.

Q: Is there any electronic gear on that tug?

A: I do not have any word on that. The tug isn't very big, of course.

Q: Are you going to shadow that tug?

A: I have no comment on that.

MORE

Q: What do they call this ship, does it have a name or number?

A: It probably does, but I don't have a name or number.

Q: Is there any reason to believe that it's in any way connected with the reported recovery of the submarine?

A: No reason to believe that or not to believe it. We just don't know what it's doing there.

Q: It's been in the area of Hawaii for several days, hasn't it?

A: It's been there at least a couple of days.

Q: It would have to have left port a long time ago to have gotten there.

A: That's true, it's not a high-speed vessel.

Q: Did the Pentagon ever announce the sinking of the Soviet Golf-type submarine in 1968? There's a Navy report on the Soviet navy that indicates that they're aware that one had sunk?

A: We looked into that. I don't have any comment on it. I frankly don't know. We haven't been able to find any such announcement. That doesn't mean it wasn't made though. It was a long time ago. We're still checking that.

Q: Wasn't there something said here officially at some stage where a couple of Russian seagoing salvage ships or rescue ships were in the Atlantic with a sub in distress on the surface and we were told, I think we were told -- my files don't show it -- but my recollection is the next chapter was on an oil spot on the surface?

A: My recollection definitely is we've made some kind of statement like that. Let me check that out.

Q: Last week the Secretary indicated that the thinking was that the North Vietnamese were just chipping away provisional capitals, etc., now that the South Vietnamese are abandoning whole provinces, etc. What's the current theory on what the intention is of the South Vietnamese?

A: Intention of the South Vietnamese?

Q: And the North Vietnamese, what's the current thinking of what's going on in South Vietnam?

A: You are aware that President Thieu made a speech a few hours ago in Saigon in which he did say that the cities of Pleiku and Kontum had been evacuated. He gave a rationale for that as "overpowering enemy strength in country." He did not get into a real answer to your question; therefore, I can't either.

Q: What do Pentagon analysts say about what's going on based on our latest reports? I understand that we think it's a worse situation than we ever thought it was last week. As late as last week, it's really gotten very bad.

A: There's no question, it's very obvious, I think, that everyone believes the situation is worse than it was last week. We're not in a position to make any comment on that at this point. As I said yesterday, we really have to let the South Vietnamese talk first; it's their country, their government.

MORE

Q: But they're not even admitting that there's a withdrawal underway?

A: Yes, they are. That's what I'm saying. They are admitting a withdrawal. They're admitting a heavy attack being mounted in northern MR I; shelling of Hue and a great number of things. But they're not getting into the answer to your question, and therefore, I really can't either.

Q: Pretty often over the years you've given a Pentagon analysis from this platform.

A: That's correct, but we usually do this, if you'll recall, to enlarge on something that's already been announced. I don't want to get out ahead of President Thieu, in other words.

Q: We've often sat here and talked about the chances of a North Vietnamese offensive and contradicted what President Thieu has said when he has been predicting one every week on end.

A: That's back a long way in history on that.

Q: Going back over the last five years, how much do we ?

A: It's a little different ballgame when we were in the act directly. We were perfectly qualified to talk about what was going on when our troops were there too.

Q: Do you have some new information on the NVA units that are involved in the attack in MR I? Any new stuff coming from the DMZ that we didn't know about?

A: I don't think there's anything that hasn't been discussed before. President Thieu's speech also talks about divisions. We haven't seen it long enough to really know whether we agree 100 percent or not. It sounded to me on one reading that we're reasonably in line. Everybody's using the same numbers. I'd have to check that further.

Q: Are we still meeting all the one for one on the replacements? Has there been any effort to move ahead in terms of shipments to South Vietnam, deliveries or anything like that ?

A: The Congressional fund cut absolutely prohibited us -- we don't have the money and have not had the money to meet this on a one-for-one basis for losses. As you noticed in General Brown's speech yesterday, he addressed this problem very directly and I'll give you his statement: "There have been no major end-items replaced this year. None of the combat losses and aircraft, tanks and armored personnel carriers have been replaced." So we're not doing that. With the money -- the \$700 million -- we've been spending, has been for POL, ammunition and some spare parts. That's it.

Q: When was the last one-for-one delivery that we could have met the schedule on a one-for-one basis?

A: I'll have to check that. I don't know when. The point is there's been none in this fiscal year for losses incurred this fiscal year.

Q: Rocket numbers?

A: Rocket numbers today: 16 - 107s in the Pochentong metropolitan area.

Q: Any 105s?

A: No 105s.

The flights were 44 -- 23 were C-130s and 21 were DC-8s.

E N D

WASHINGTON



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TRANSCRIPT

March 31, 1975

James R. Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense

with

Henry Trewitt, the Baltimore Sun

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ANNOUNCER: James R. Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense. Tonight, on WASHINGTON STRAIGHT TALK, Defense Secretary James Schlesinger is interviewed by Washington correspondent for the Baltimore Sun, Henry Trehitt.

HENRY TREHITT: Mr. Secretary, is what we're seeing now in South Vietnam, an all-out offensive by the North Vietnamese?

JAMES R. SCHLESINGER: It is becoming an all-out offensive. It was not an all-out offensive initially. In fact, there has been relatively little fighting. There was major engagement around Ban Xe Thot, but by and large there has been a collapse of much of the fore-structure of the Vietnamese government in the north, rather than an all-out attack.

TREHITT: In one to expect that this fall-back will continue?

SCHLESINGER: I hesitate to say. I think that it will be some time before the South Vietnamese government is able to stabilize the situation, so we must expect some further withdrawals.

TREHITT: I suppose what I'm really asking is whether South Vietnam, a truncated South Vietnam, is defensible?

SCHLESINGER: I think that the argument has been that the South Vietnamese could survive in a stronghold, consisting of the Saigon area and the Delta. Whether in fact that materializes, depends on the ability of the government to stabilize the existing military situation.

TREHITT: Didn't the South Vietnamese lose some of their best units, however, in the north?

SCHLESINGER: They have lost a goodly number of their better units. What they have salvaged, in terms of manpower, represents units that are now ill-equipped, so the force balance which was adverse to the South Vietnamese even at the start of this dry season offensive is now shifted far more adversely against them.



TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, what happens to an army to demoralize it such as happened with the South Vietnamese army in the north?

SCHLESINGER: Well, historically, if one goes back even to the battles of ancient Rome and prior to that time, the tendency of an army when it is retreating has been to disintegrate.

And, in order to prevent this requires continued maintenance of morale, discipline, excellent training. Armies in retreat, even in Korea, if you will recall, tend to disintegrate. And a retrograde operation of the sort that President Thieu called for, after the loss of Ban Me Thuot, when he decided to withdraw from the highlands, became that kind of demoralized force.

The South Vietnamese have lacked ammunition, to a considerable extent; their men have gone into combat in recent months in order to conserve supplies, with two hand grenades rather than the ten that they previously carried. And as a result, they have lost confidence in their supply situation and the ability of the leaders to provide the necessary supplies. This has had a general impact on morale.

TREWHITT: Well, was that withdrawal a mistake, then, in the light of subsequent events?

SCHLESINGER: I think that one can say that tactically it was not well carried out. It became plain, I think, to President Thieu, that with the reduced level of support, with the logistical weaknesses, and his inability to maintain his mobility forces, that he could no longer support places like Ban Me Thuot, by quick introduction of military power. And that therefore he had to shrink all over the country. Unfortunately, the tactical execution left much to be desired.

TREWHITT: You mentioned the potential viability, or lack thereof, of South Vietnam, in reduced circumstances. Could Vietnam, with a new defense line, somewhere north northwest of Saigon, I assume, be in any way economically viable? Militarily, also, for that matter.

SCHLESINGER: Oh, I think that the viability of the country, in terms of per capita income, would be higher in that reduced area, because the wealth of the country has been in Saigon and the Delta, that much of the highlands in the north of the country has represented an economic drain.

-- so from that standpoint, if the military situation can be stabilized, I think that there is no reason for despair.

TREWHITT: To go back to an earlier point, Mr. Secretary -- I gather you believe the North Vietnamese will drive very hard to continue the offensive. In other words, they will move on Saigon?

SCHLESINGER: Yes, indeed.

TREWHITT: In the near future?

SCHLESINGER:-- That depends. In the past, the North Vietnamese have been rather slow, and have been very cautious in bringing up supplies before they mounted an offensive. Whether they continue to exhibit that kind of caution in the wake of these widespread withdrawals, remains to be seen. But I would think that there would be major action directed toward Saigon in the next month or two.

TREWHITT: You would expect them, then, in effect, to be testing Saigon's defenses, and to try to comprehend how well the South Vietnamese army has been able to recover, if it has?

SCHLESINGER: I think that that is their principal objective at the present time, to move as rapidly as they can before there is an opportunity to recover.

TREWHITT: Which brings us, I suppose, to a very important questions for Americans now, Mr. Secretary, and that is, what can the United States do, what should it do, and what courses are available to the United States to attempt to retrieve as much as it can from what's happening now?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that the detailed response to that must await the return of General Weyand after his fact-finding mission for the President.

I think, as a general observation, that the United States continues to have an obligation to be helpful to the South Vietnamese whom we have supported for so many years. What particular forms that help takes, remains to be seen.

TREWHITT: Does the administration's request for, I believe it's \$300 million in emergency aid, have any meaning in this present context, or are we talking about something much larger? Do you have to put the issue before Congress in a different way?



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SCHLESINGER: I think that the precise dimensions of an aid package remain to be seen. Just what the future holds, is, for the moment at least, somewhat cloudy. But it's plain that \$300 million is not consistent with long-term survival of South Vietnam. In that respect, the sums required will probably be much larger.

TREWHITT: But in the meantime will you stay with the \$300 million?

SCHLESINGER: That is the request of the administration.

TREWHITT: I should have, I suppose, begun earlier to ask what might be done in terms of the rescue mission which seems to be faltering, to say the least, in the north. Is that done with now? Is there any possibility of getting more of those refugees out?

SCHLESINGER: No, Danang has fallen to the Communists, and there is no likelihood of any further evacuation of the people in Danang. The rescue capabilities are available should they be required for the sections lying south of Danang, particularly in M.R. II.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, there was word this morning that the Vietcong has suggested it might be willing to negotiate. I believe the phrase is "all issues related to Vietnam," with the government in Saigon now. Does that sound realistic or is this merely a matter of asking the South Vietnamese to hand over their sword?

SCHLESINGER: I think that it may fall under the latter heading, that these offers which are tantalizing in the face of trouble tend to disappear in times when they seem appropriate. And it has been exceedingly difficult to negotiate with the North or the Vietcong over recent years.

One must remember also that the Paris agreements have been totally violated by the North Vietnamese. I think that is obvious to all parties at the present time. They have treated these documents as a scrap of paper.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, is there any reason to suggest that South Vietnam would be in a better negotiating position if President Thieu stepped down, which I think is one of the conditions of the Vietcong offer, or alleged offer?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that that is a very difficult question. I think it goes back to the tantalizing nature of the offer expressed before. There is no reason, and certainly the United States government would not involve itself in such pressures on President Thieu. That is a matter for the Vietnamese to decide, and they have a Constitutional framework.

TREWHITT: Do you know of any move in Saigon other than that mentioned by former Premier Nguyen Cao Ky for the resignation of President Thieu?

SCHLESINGER: I think that there is always discussion of discontent in circumstances of this sort, but there's been no serious move.

TREWHITT: And you see in the present circumstances then, no prospect of President Thieu's resignation?

SCHLESINGER: I think that is unlikely.

TREWHITT: We'll move just a little bit west. Cambodia has fallen out of the news in the last several days, and I wonder what the prospects are now of Phnom Penh's survival.

SCHLESINGER: Well, once again the survival of Phnom Penh depends upon two questions: first, additional funding so that they have ammunition. The ammunition supplies are of course short; in several weeks there will be no further airlift, unless we get additional appropriations from the Congress.

And the fact that Cambodian forces are in a position in which they keep looking over their shoulders and wondering whether there will be an ammunition issue in a few weeks hence, is having a detrimental effect on the morale of the Cambodian forces. And they're beginning to lose some of their aggressiveness.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, are you suggesting that it is the Congress's fault that Indo-China is coming unraveled on us now?

SCHLESINGER: I have always tried to avoid that kind of question. The other day I was asked that, and I said, no, and it was reported the other way. What I try to do is to avoid these recriminations. I think that we've got to deal with the facts, and the facts in particular with regard to South Vietnam is that the drastic cuts in funding and FY '71



budget clearly pushed South Vietnam closer to the edge of the cliff. And I don't know what to do about that at this stage of the game; that's water over the dam. But I think that in historical retrospect we must understand that if we cut funding request by 60% or more, that the effect of this cannot be beneficial.

TREWHITT: Appropos of the discussion of President Thieu's resignation, which you don't seem to think is in the cards for the moment -- Lon Nol now is preparing to leave Cambodia, and we have heard, of course, a great deal of discussion from critics to the effect that his resignation might lead to negotiations between the Khmer Rouge and the government in Phnom Penh. Do you think that's likely?

SCHLESINGER: If Lon Nol does indeed leave, I would be hopeful that that would materialize. Nonetheless on the basis of all the activities of the Khmer Rouge today, it does not strike me as probable.

TREWHITT: I'm going to put that to you in strategic terms...as a matter of fact, I think if you were handling strategy for the Khmer Rouge, would you be inclined to negotiate at the present moment?

SCHLESINGER: Unless I saw that the Cambodians would be continued to be stocked with ammunition rather than a situation in which all would automatically fall into their hands, I would be dis-inclined to negotiate.

If they can see the continuation of the government for an extended period of time, then indeed they may discover that the cost to them of continuing to attack the government position in the cities are too great and that they would prefer to achieve their results by diplomatic solution.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, continuing our westward movement here. Let's leap to the Middle East for a moment. Everyone knows that the most recent peace mission of Secretary Kissinger in the Middle East failed.

He was unable to negotiate a second stage disengagement between the Egyptians and the Israelis. The consensus arising from that seem to be that everyone now is doomed or consigned or fated to go to Geneva for the larger peace conference. Now does that seem inevitable to you?



SCHLESINGER: I think it is very close to inevitable. I think that all parties are inclined to go to Geneva, and then I would expect the Geneva Conference to resume some time at the close of the spring or early summer.

TREWHITT: Have we made overtures to the Soviet Union about reconvening the Geneva Conference already?

SCHLESINGER: I have not had the latest information, but until a day or two ago, we had not.

TREWHITT: Well, we're talking about May or June, then?

SCHLESINGER: That would remain to be seen. I think that it would be a later date rather than immediately reconvening the Conference.

TREWHITT: Does the situation appear to be stable for the interim?

SCHLESINGER: The military situation does appear to be stable. Of course tension has risen as a result of the non-success of the diplomatic ventures of the United States.

TREWHITT: President Sadat of Egypt took what seemed to me to be a surprising step, perhaps even conciliatory in extending the mandate of the United Nations forces for three months, and announcing, of course, the plans to reopen the Suez Canal, barring Israeli shipping, of course. What effect will this gesture have on the political and military situation in the meantime, do you think?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that it will have something of a stabilizing effect. I think that the ending of the mandate would of course rapidly have raised the tensions, so we're quite satisfied to see the extension.

TREWHITT: The Secretary of State mentioned the other day, to my knowledge, the first time anyone has so flatly guaranteed the survival of Israel; I suppose it's been implied for a long time. Does that mean, as you understand it, that the United States is prepared to take whatever measures are necessary to guarantee the survival of Israel?

SCHLESINGER: I think that we have a re-assessment of American policy toward the Middle East, and that is an issue that would have to be dealt with.



I think that what the Secretary did say was that the survival of Israel remains an objective of American policy, a commitment of American policy. But the precise measures to achieve that objective were not specified.

TREWHITT: Do you believe, as some members of the administration do, that Israel should have been more flexible in these most recent negotiations?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I'm not in a position to say... I think that the failure of these negotiations, of course, are having a detrimental effect on Israel, as it does on the general situation in the Middle East.

But I'm not in a position to, since I did not know the details of the negotiation, to assess any responsibility.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, let me put a question to you as a strategist. If you were handling strategy for the Israelis, would you withdraw from the Golan Heights and yield military control of the West Bank territory in the Middle East, without a complete transformation of Arab political attitudes toward Israel, more specifically, a guarantee or a recognition on the part of the Arabs that Israel has a right to survive?

SCHLESINGER: That is, of course, a very difficult question, and I suspect if I were in the position that you suggest, that I would be inclined to resist withdrawal. On the other hand, I think that is necessary to recognize that some suitable adjustments must be made and what precisely those adjustments must be depends on the judgment of the Israelis as well as the others.

TREWHITT: We would be prepared, I take it from everything you have said and other members of the administration have said, to at least endure another Arab oil boycott in the interest of maintaining stability.

SCHLESINGER: We would not, I think, expect readily to tolerate such a renewed boycott.

TREWHITT: What could we do about it?

SCHLESINGER: That would remain to be seen, but I think that the reaction of the United States might be far more severe this time than last time.

TREWHITT: Are we back to the discussion that we had for such a long period of possible intervention in those circumstances?



SCHLESINGER: That is, of course, a tricky question. I think that the point that was made about that intervention is that it is a remote possibility. On the other hand, I think that we would have to react under the circumstances.

But all of these matters depend upon the outcome of the re-assessment of our whole strategy towards the Middle East, which is now underway.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, let's turn to some more general questions, if we might, about the United States' position now.

Some members of the administration have cited the developments in Southeast Asia, the difficulties in our relations with Turkey and the Greece-Turkey problem in isolation, developments in Portugal, the movement leftward there, the stalemate in the Middle East, at least a failure of American diplomacy there, as having serious strategic consequences to the United States. Is our credibility suffering generally in that context?

SCHLESINGER: I think that there has been a loss of the awe which the United States has held for so many years, and some of these difficulties would not have arisen if the American prestige were at its peak of some decades ago.

I think that there is some loss of credibility, some reduction of credibility generally. But I would stress that the credibility problems are primarily localized, as in Southeast Asia, where the United States is precluded by law from engaging in combat activities.

One cannot generalize from that specific locale all over the world in the same degree. No doubt there is a general effect, though.

TREWHITT: You're not putting all these pieces into a single mosaic then, in the sense of a general decline of American strategic capability?

SCHLESINGER: I think that we must recognize that we're going through one of the most difficult periods in our foreign policy, probably the most difficult period since the post-war period, 1947, 1948, 1949, when Eastern Europe was engulfed by the Soviet Union and Western Europe was quite shaky. This has been the most difficult period in terms of the unsettling of the framework of international politics.



TREWHITT: I suppose one looks in determining the absolutely fundamental interests of the United States to Western Europe and of course to American relations with the other great, great powers. Have you seen any indications yet in the behavior of Western Europe that they have come to doubt the credibility of the United States regarding its defense commitment to them?

SCHLESINGER: I think that they have expressed some concern about the general character of U.S. policy in the recent past. I do not believe that they are seriously concerned about the United States' commitments to NATO.

The fact of the matter is that U.S. forces continue to be deployed in Germany, the United States remains wholly committed to NATO, and I think it is recognized that in the event of any attack against Western Europe, that the United States will use the full weight of its military power as necessary.

TREWHITT: Is the greater danger, however, and wouldn't the Europeans be inclined to see that danger more in perspective of erosion rather than an attack on Western Europe, which no one seems to expect?

SCHLESINGER: I think that there is some concern about erosion of public support rather than the character of our foreign policy, I think the poll indications that the American public is less interested in supporting the other nations if they happen to be attacked, is a source of generalized concern to them.

TREWHITT: Now the Soviet Union reacts, of course, to all these developments, is terribly important...

SCHLESINGER:with delight.

TREWHITT: With delight, obviously. Are they inclined, do you think, to attempt to exploit what they might conceive to be American weakness?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I would hesitate to discuss any particular country, but as a generalization, I think that with the difficulties that we have faced in these past months, and with the lack of consensus and cohesion about our foreign policy, that we are tempting somebody to test us.

TREWHITT: Now might that test come? You say that Europeans probably are convinced of America's commitment to NATO, I would suggest to you that probably the Soviet Union would be too. Would you agree with that?



SCHLESINGER: Oh, I believe that the Soviet Union is convinced of that commitment, and that it is not in the interest of the Soviets to test it in any event. But there are other parts of the world in which probing could take place.

TREWHITT: Which is what I was leading to....how would that kind of probe be undertaken, would you think?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I would prefer on that kind of question to withhold any suggestions.

TREWHITT: Might it be in the Middle East, do you think?

SCHLESINGER: Of course the Middle East today is somewhat akin to the Balkans before World War I. It is a tinder box. And one is concerned, it is an area in which the tendency to play with the tensions and strains for marginal advantages is very great, and therefore the situation is explosive, or potentially explosive.

TREWHITT: Do you think the Soviet Union might be inclined to test the United States in that area?

SCHLESINGER: I think that one must recognize that there was a severe test of the United States in 1973 so that the Soviets by no means feel debarrred from that. I think that the Soviet inclination would be to go to Geneva and see what political capital can be made out of that diplomatic setting.

TREWHITT: How would you expect the Soviet Union to behave at Geneva?

SCHLESINGER: I would expect that the Soviet Union will be inclined to support the more radical demands directed against the state of Israel.

TREWHITT: Are we looking forward simply to a propoganda conflict there?

SCHLESINGER: That is the danger in the re-convening of the Geneva Conference, that it could turn into a shouting match. And that is one of the reasons that American diplomacy has been exercised privately and among small groups, that it has permitted a quiet discussion of the problems. When we convene a larger group, the tendency will be for the discussions to be far less productive.



TREWHITT: Which I suppose is the reason for an earlier question, and that is, is there is any possibility of coming back to bilateral negotiations, negotiations through a smaller forum simply because of the risk that might grow out of Geneva?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that it's premature to raise that question at this time. There is always that possibility, but I think that the next stage will be at Geneva. Whether circumstances then develop in which the parties might call for smaller group negotiations in which the United States plays a special role, remains to be seen.

I think more generally that the United States has made a very honest effort at negotiations in the Middle East to serve as the honest broker, and that those negotiations have not been successful. I think that many of the parties will look back nostalgically at these negotiations later on.

TREWHITT: Because of the propaganda level, the decibel level that will come out of them?

SCHLESINGER: I think that they will see that these negotiations tended to be far more productive than what will come next.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, although you're a bit withdrawn on the subject, some members of the administration seem to feel that Israel should have been more flexible in the most recent round of negotiations.

Are we going to withhold or delay action on Israeli requests for additional military supplies as perhaps a means of using our own discreet political pressure in this area?

SCHLESINGER: I think that during this period of re-assessment that the United States will be reluctant to enter into new commitments in the Middle East until we have a firmer grasp of where the United States wishes to go.

I should emphasize, however, that the United States has during the course of the fall-winter committed itself to a very substantial shipment of military equipment to Israel, that that equipment was to be delivered by April 1st, and it is virtually all there.

TREWHITT: Do you think the Israelis are satisfied with that prospect?



SCHLESINGER: I think that the Israelis of course have wanted to enter into a much longer term commitment with regard to the security of supply, and such a matter will have to wait.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, as a final question, how serious is the Soviet spread of naval power into the Mediterranean, to the general United States position there?

SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that it is serious in the Mediterranean, but far more serious potentially is the extension of that power into the Indian Ocean, where for the first time one will have military power, Naval power, astride the lifeline of oil supplies to Western Europe, to Japan, and to the United States to a lesser extent.

TREWHITT: Mr. Secretary, I'm sorry to interrupt. We're out of time. Thank you very much for being here this evening.

SCHLESINGER: It was a pleasure to be here.

ANNOUNCER: Washington Straight Talk. From Washington, NPACT has brought you Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger, with Henry Trehitt, Washington Correspondent for the Baltimore Sun.

Next week on Washington Straight Talk, F.B.I. Director, Clarence Kelly, will be interviewed by NPACT Correspondent, Jim Lehrer.

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