

No Objection To Declassification in Full
2011/04/28 : LOC-HAK-431-3-1-8

THE SECRETARY

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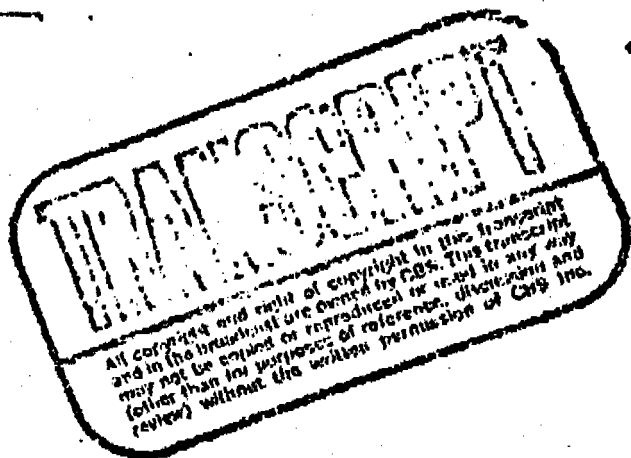
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CBS NEWS
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FACH THE NATION
as broadcast over the
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and the

No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/28 : LOC-HAK-431-3-1-8

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Origination: Washington, D. C.

GUEST: JAMES R. **SCHLESINGER**
Secretary of Defense

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Michael Getler, The Washington Post

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HERMAN: Secretary Schlesinger, we see reports in the news this morning that some South Vietnamese troops have gone back into some of the places they seem to have abandoned. We see reports that some enemy troops seem to be approaching Saigon. What is the situation? Are the South Vietnamese losing or gaining?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: It's difficult to say at the moment, because in general conditions have been very quiet in the area around Saigon, and in the delta. There has been some activity in the delta, but basically things have been roughly unchanged for the recent days.

HERMAN: Are they moving back to the north--places that they've abandoned?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: There were a number of cities along the coast, in No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/28 : LOC-HAK-431-3-1-8^{1a} Trang.

ANNOUNCER: From CBS News, Washington, a spontaneous and unrehearsed news interview on FACE THE NATION, with Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger. The Secretary will be questioned by CBS News Pentagon Correspondent Ike Pappas; Michael Getler, Pentagon Correspondent for the Washington Post; and CBS News Correspondent George Herman.

HERMAN: Mr. Secretary, this business of the South Vietnamese troops going back into Nha Trang puzzles me. Is this an indication that the South Vietnamese bugged out too fast, that they were panicky? What does it mean?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that one can use harsh terms of that sort. It is plain that the great offensive is a phrase that probably should be in quotation marks. What we have had here is a partial collapse of South Vietnamese forces, so that there has been

very little major fighting since the battle of Ban Me Thout, and that was an exception in itself. There was a little fighting in the area-- in the northern coastal regions, around Hue and Danang; but generally speaking, there's been little fighting and the South Vietnamese forces have moved out without pressure being brought to bear on them.

GETLER: Mr. Secretary, I'd like to ask you how you evaluate the impact of the potential loss of Southeast Asia on the United States. Do you believe, as Secretary Kissinger has recently lamented, that it will--if it comes to pass--that this would weaken respect for American commitments and reliability around the world, cause us a lot of difficulties? Or do you think in the long run that once Indochina is behind us, perhaps even in defeat, that it will serve to strengthen the United

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States in terms of strengthening
of interests, both in this country and abroad, which Americans can agree on more generally?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: It could go either way. This has been a very serious setback for American policy. Other nations do not listen simply to our rhetoric; they watch our actions. If indeed we do as you suggest, which is to take other areas increasingly seriously, and not proceed to reduce our forces in Europe, to reduce our capabilities by massive cuts in the budget, and that sort of thing, then I think that the respect for American commitments will continue. By contrast, if our actions are such further to weaken the belief in American stability and steadfastness, then it will have the very serious consequences that Secretary Kissinger has mentioned.

PAPPAS: Mr. Secretary, General Woyand, the Army Chief of Staff, has returned from Saigon with what reports say is a pessimistic report

on what's happening in South Vietnam--pessimistic report to the President. The question is, how pessimistic is that report, and what can the United States do now to help South Vietnam survive? What do you think his recommendations will be?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I would describe General Wayand's report as realistic, and I will not go beyond that in discussing it. Generally speaking, the situation in Vietnam is serious. If the government is able to mobilize the will to fight, then we ought to continue to provide them with support.

PAPPAS: Realistic in what terms? I wonder if I could press you on that a bit. If we don't give them the aid, is South Vietnam going down? Is that what he's saying?

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without any further reference to his report.

PAPPAS: Well, sir, the President has asked the Pentagon and also the State Department to come up with options, to come up with alternatives. From your point of view, what is needed?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I would prefer to reserve any observation on that till I have a chance to talk to the President.

GETLER: Mr. Secretary, I'd like to ask you about the administration's strategy on getting this aid. If it indeed is--the administration wants to help South Vietnam, and if this additional 300 million dollars that you've requested is indeed so important, the Congress obviously is the body that has to approve that aid, and yet the administration seems not to let an opportunity go by without blaming Congress and antagonizing it for what's happened in South Vietnam. Can you explain that in any way?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I would not agree with your observation that the administration scarcely allows an opportunity to go by. I think that there has been some tendency in interpreting what has been said to suggest that Congress is to blame. So let me state categorically the question of who is to blame is a simplistic question in a very complex set of events. The Congress clearly cannot in any way be blamed for the cohesion, the discipline, the training, the leadership, the command control, of South Vietnamese forces. In addition, there are many other factors that contributed to this partial collapse; and undoubtedly amongst those factors is a decline of aid of approximately 70 per cent. I think there's a little touchiness on that issue. I would hope that we can get these issues behind us. There is nothing that is more divisive than an extended post-mortem on Vietnam that is as divisive as the Vietnam operation. The only thing that we need less than that is a major confrontation between the executive and the legislature.

PAPPAS: Yet the administration keeps pointing to Congress and the law forbidding American involvement in Southeast Asia as the reason for the collapse. In other words, we had at least wanted to use the threat of our military power in Indochina to keep the North Vietnamese in line. When Congress removed that threat--so I got the thinking--the North Vietnamese moved, and the administration continues to refer to that series of events as an excuse.

SEC. SCHLESINGER: No, the threat--the legislation was passed in the summer of '73. It was not until January of '74 that--or January of '75--that the North Vietnamese proceeded to test what was their residual fear of further American involvement in that war. So that

was an 18-month period. I would also point out that the administration, in the summer of 1973, stated that if circumstances needed to be changed, they would come back to the Congress for further authority. As a consequence, that particular action is something that is quite complicated in terms of the relationship of the two branches, and of course, public opinion plays a very large role in this.

HERMAN: It is frequently said that at the time of the Paris agreements the United States, or the administration, gave the South Vietnamese some kind of an undertaking that we would help them in the event of a massive violation of the Paris agreements. Is that a properly phrased statement?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think that that is properly phrased. I think that that refers to what the President made public commitments the other evening.

HERMAN: But my question--

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I do not know in detail what those commitments were, but I do know that the United States was a signatory to the Paris agreements, that we were one of the high contracting parties, that we did certainly state that we intended to see that the commitments were lived up to. And repeatedly in the year after the Paris agreements, the administration stated and restated that commitment. In addition there was, of course, a firm commitment with regard to aid.

HERMAN: My question is--or the question I was building up to, I guess you'd say--that kind of a commitment sounds to me on--something on the order of a treaty agreement. Is this something that was ratified or should have been ratified by the Senate of the United States--

a commitment which seems to involve, at least by implication, the use of force?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I do not know the precise legal status of such commitments when they are verbal commitments, whether they are treated as part of the prerogatives of the executive branch, or require a treaty form. So I cannot answer that question.

HERMAN: But this was a--this was some kind of a commitment which was made unilaterally by the executive branch without any ratification or support, direct or implicit, by the Congress?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think that that is correct.

GETLER: Doesn't that, in hindsight, Mr. Secretary, tell us something about perhaps the danger of presidential commitments in a republican system? Does that warn us for the future that maybe that's not a good way to operate, that maybe these kinds of things should require much more specific commitments which then the Congress puts its name to, so that you don't get this debate every year?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think in the present climate of opinion, it is apparent that we must have greater degree of consultation between the executive and the legislature on such longer term commitments.

GETLER: One other point I did want to ask you on the aid question--that South Vietnam, even if the offensive stopped tomorrow, South Vietnam is now reduced to a relatively small enclave. It's surrounded by communist forces in the north and probably soon in Cambodia as well; it's got its back to the sea. Assuming the offensive stopped now, do you think that South Vietnam could survive in the long run without substantial and very long range and continuing doses of American mili-

tary aid for many years to come?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I would doubt it.

PAPPAS: Mr. Schlesinger, I wonder if I could ask you about our plans to evacuate refugees from South Vietnam. Can you just bring us up to date on what the Navy plans to do and when we will move our American civilians, and also the overriding question of whether that might not further bring about the collapse of the South Vietnamese government--if we pull out our skilled technicians and our experts and so forth.

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, we have no present plans to pull out such skilled technicians. We are, of course, reviewing the situation with respect to dependents, or transients, and the like. But we have no plans at this time to remove the technicians from Saigon.

HERMAN: What technicians are we talking about that are vital--

SEC. SCHLESINGER: These are contract maintenance people who hold the aircraft together, and the like.

GETLER: Mr. Secretary, you've said that the severe test for the remaining South Vietnamese forces is likely to come within possibly four--in the next four weeks. Now there is still some money left in the money Congress approved this year--I think 150 or 160 million dollars or so. Now given the relatively short period of time before Saigon may face a do or die battle, is there really anything at all the United States can do in that period of time that could militarily change the situation at all?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think that the United States' role should be to provide these special categories of equipment that are extremely important and yet short in Saigon. That will not consume many of the

dollars that are remaining. In addition, the role of the United States in its supply policy must be to maintain the morale of the forces of the republic, to show that we are still prepared to help.

GETLER: So you're saying basically that a vote for the 300 million would be more of a vote for support and morale, and that in fact, in terms of getting that kind of aid to the battlefield in time, the money that you already have probably could fill that bill.

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think that as quickly as we get additional assistance voted by the bill, we will be able to put that money out in several weeks. And when you speak of 300 million dollars, that is a much larger sum, and much more can be done with it than 150 million.

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takes to get anything voted--anything this complex voted by the Congress, the time it takes to get it there--if everything went your way, assuming the best case of all in Washington, passage of what you ask for--would it change the outcome significantly in Vietnam? How would it affect the outcome?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Nobody knows the answer to that. That is the great imponderable about American aid. If we are to refrain from giving aid in those cases in which we do not know the outcome, then we will, through a self-fulfilling prophecy, create the fall of many countries.

(MORE)

HERMAN: But do you never calculate the odds and say this is a bad case, this is a good case, this is where we might gamble, and this is where it might be unwise?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think in this case it's a question more of the national honor, the perception of American commitments. No one can say at this stage that provision of military equipment represents the equivalent of a gilt-edged investment. What one can say is it represents a continuation of the American commitment so that all parties will see that the United States was the nation that gave a reasonable chance for the South Vietnamese to survive.

PAPPAS: Mr. Schlesinger, I believe that the President suggested in his No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/28 : LOC-HAK-431-3-1-8 more aid for Vietnam. Do you know how much more and how that might work?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that that remains to be seen. I'll withhold comment on that until after the NSC meeting when the President has spoken.

PAPPAS: One other thing -- just before we went on the air, I was handed a report on the wire service -- I think it was the AP -- Reuters, rather -- which says that Cambodian insurgents have captured two towns southwest of Phnom Penh and are pressing in on the capital; apparently they are quite close. What is the current situation regarding Phnom Penh? Do you think they are now making a final push, or have we written off Phnom Penh?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: We have not as yet written off Phnom Penh. What is plain is that with the fall of Nakh Luang that the insurgents have been able to move some of those forces up around Phnom

Penh and that the pressure is intensifying. I described this as very grim some days ago -- it is even grimmer today.

HERMAN: Mr. Secretary, do we have any new evidence, any new facts about the crash of the C-54? Can sabotage now be ruled in or ruled out?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Not as yet. We have recovered the recording device, and the experts will be examining it.

HERMAN: Is sabotage a realistic thing, or is this just a sort of a wild story that got brought in? Do you think that there is any reason to suspect or believe sabotage?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I can't say at this time whether or not it can be ruled out.

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time soon will over reach the point where it would privately, I would guess, recommend to Mr. Thieu that the situation as best we can tell is lost and stop from publicly encouraging such a defense? In other words, an attack; if it was pursued all the way, an attack on Saigon, the Saigon area, would undoubtedly be an extremely bloody affair, and if the odds are really so long against the South Vietnamese surviving, it might be the better part of judgment to suggest that to them. Is there anything like that in the wind, do you think?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I don't think there is anything like that in the wind. The United States is going to be very hesitant under all circumstances suggesting to another country, and to an ally at that, that it surrender.

PAPPAS: Have the South Vietnamese officially asked us for any military aid, the use of our power, air power or anything of that sort?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I do not believe that they have done so

formally. There certainly have been hints of one sort or another from various of their military leaders and political leaders as well.

PAPPAS: What kind of hints? What were they?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think that there are longing glances at B-52 strikes.

HERMAN: Do they have a prayer to get American air power and American strikes in there?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think that the President's statement of March 6 was conclusive, at least for the time being. He indicated that those forces would not return.

GETLER: What's happened to the South Vietnamese air force? We built No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/28 : LOC-HAK-431-3-1-8 of airplanes, they were fourth or fifth largest air force in the world. Now we know that they had a lot of helicopters and transport planes that were grounded, but what happened to the very large numbers of fighter bombers and things? They don't seem to be playing any part in this at all.

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think in recent days they've been playing a role in the Delta, which you have discussed. Generally speaking, the attempt has been to keep up the fighter aircraft rather than transport or helicopters, but all of these capabilities have been under pressure because of the shortage of contract maintenance money, and to some extent the shortage of spare parts.

HERMAN: I want to ask you -- I guess it would have to qualify as a non-military, non-defense question -- the flying out of refugee children, of these orphans, from South Vietnam to the United States, their adoption by Americans. Do you, as a father of eight yourself,

have a position on this? Should we be flying out these orphans and bringing them to America, adopting them into American families? Is there no way they could stay in Vietnam and be safe and be raised as Vietnamese with their own heritage?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that this is in part a response to the desires of many American people to adopt such children, and--

HERMAN: Is it well-advised?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: --these children will, I feel, be far better off in the United States than they will be in Viet Nam in the future.

Mr. GETLER: /Secretary, maybe we could turn your attention to another area, just for a moment, before we all get riveted on Indochina again. The No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/28 : LOC-HAK-431-3-1-8 very large American arms sales to the Persian Gulf, and one concern that had been expressed was what would happen if, after building up a tremendous armed force, for example, in Iran, that something would happen to the leadership there and that armed force would fall into somebody else's hands that we never intended. Two weeks ago the Saudi Arabian king, King Faisal, was assassinated. Does that event produce any second thoughts in your mind about the wisdom of putting so much armament into these oil-rich monarchies?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that when one refers to a great deal of weaponry, one is talking really about Iran, rather than Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian development will be very slow. Now, I think the regime in Saudi Arabia has shown stability in the period of succession, that this tends to suggest that one can get through these periods of crisis, without necessarily a change in orientation. No one can guarantee the future. We cannot say what the regime will be like

in 15 years in Iran or Saudi Arabia or in Germany, or in the United States, for that matter. One must deal with the situation as one finds it today, recognizing that if there are great vulnerabilities that one may choose to hedge, but the situation in the Middle East, which is highly vulnerable and has been highly vulnerable, requires indigenous strength. Whether the United States participates or not, those nations will acquire those arms.

PAPPAS: What is the latest intelligence on the possibility of a new war in the Middle East?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think that the latest intelligence has not indicated anything new -- it's a little quieter now in the Middle East, but there is deep concern that in the summer there will be a renewal of

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HERMAN: What does it mean when we say we are reappraising our ideas about aid to -- military aid to Israel? Does it mean we are reappraising them downwards? Does it mean we are thinking of stopping? Does it mean we are trying to send a message to the world? What is the actual meaning of this phrase?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: Well, I don't know that we've used that phrase. What the President has said is he is reassessing conditions in the Middle East in the wake of the non-success of our recent diplomatic initiatives. I think that that is a wise action on the part of the President, that quite obviously when American effort has been undertaken, it has not been successful, that it's appropriate for us to reconsider just where we are going. And that is a general policy, directed towards not only Israel but all of the states of that area and towards all issues, not only the questions of arms. With one

exception, I think, and that is that the United States continues to have as an objective the security of Israel.

HERMAN: Does reassessment carry something with it in the sense that while we are reassessing, we are changing our--say, our flow of arms to the area? Is there anything that goes with it in the sense of a pause in actual operations?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I think that I wouldn't have chosen that term, but during this period of reassessment, we are not entering into new commitments. We have shipped to Israel, in the period since the President came into office, up to April 1, which was the termination point for that particular shipment, a very substantial shipment of arms which has put the Israelis in a better position than they were in October, 1973.

GETLER: They have, however, let it be known, for example, that they are going to delay some shipment of new fighter planes, F-15s, and new Lance missiles, and what I'm driving at here is precisely your point. We have just completed a very large buildup of the Israelis, and these new weapons wouldn't be available for quite some time anyway, under normal circumstances, so do you think there is going to be any substantive change in American policy of supplying arms to Israel?

SEC. SCHLESINGER: I would hesitate to comment on that now. I will wait the results of the reassessment save to reiterate that I believe that the security of the State of Israel remains an American objective.

HERMAN: Just so we can get some idea of how long we are going to wait--how long do you think the reassessment is likely to take our government?

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SEC. SCHLESINGER: I would suggest six weeks should be sufficient.

HERMAN: Thank you very much, Secretary Schlosinger, for being with us today on Face the Nation.

SEC. SCHLESINGER: My pleasure.

ANNOUNCER: Today on FACE THE NATION, Secretary of Defense James F. Schlesinger was interviewed by CBS News Pentagon Correspondent Ike Pappas, Michael Gotler, Pentagon Correspondent for The Washington Post, and CBS News Correspondent George Herman. Next week, another

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