

Threat of Force Serves as U.S. Weapon

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 19—Secretary of State Kissinger and Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger have attracted considerable attention in recent weeks by their refusal to rule out the possibility that under certain dire circumstances the Ford Administration might use military force in the Middle East or Vietnam.

Of the two officials, Mr. Kissinger, with his comment to a Business Week interviewer about the hypothetical use of force in case the Western world was undergoing "actual strangulation," touched off the larger controversy.

In the Arab world, in particular, the radical press distorted Mr. Kissinger's remarks to make it appear as if United States Marines were about to land. And French television added to some European jumpiness by filming a marine landing exercise on Sardinia and suggesting that it was connected with Mr. Kissinger's statement.

In the Business Week interview, the questioner asked:

"One of the things we also hear from businessmen is that in the long run the only answer to the oil cartel is some sort of military action. Have you considered military action on oil?"

'A Very Dangerous Course'

Mr. Kissinger asked: "Military action on oil prices?"

"Yes," was the answer. Then followed Mr. Kissinger's controversial response:

"A very dangerous course. We should have learned from Vietnam that it is easier to get into a war than to get out of it. I am not saying that there's no circumstances where we would not use force. But it is one thing to use it in the case of a dispute over price, it's another where there is some actual strangulation of the industrialized world."

Mr. Kissinger said later, "I was astonished when this was seized upon."

"No nation can announce that it will let itself be strangled without reacting," he said on public television, "and I find it very difficult to see what it is that people are objecting to."

"We are saying the United States will not permit itself or its allies to be strangled," he said. "Somebody else would have to make the first move to attempt the strangulation. It isn't being attempted now."

Further Qualification

He said, in what he plainly hoped would be his last word on the subject:

"There would have to be an

overt move of an extremely drastic, dramatic and aggressive nature before this contingency could ever be considered."

In the weeks since the Business Week interview, despite the controversy, neither Mr. Kissinger nor any of his top aides have expressed regret about the "strangulation" remark. They have been irritated by some of the published commentaries, but Mr. Kissinger and his colleagues seem to believe that despite the outcry, the remarks may in the long run benefit the United States.

In their view, the moderate forces in the Middle East will be able to utilize the interview to caution the more radical forces to act with restraint in oil matters or run the risk of possible American intervention.

This interpretation is disputable. The radicals could point to Mr. Kissinger's remark and argue that it made no sense to show goodwill to the United States since Washington would be motivated by its own "imperialist" interests in the long run.

Mr. Kissinger believes that in the Middle East a major struggle has been going on between the moderates and the radicals and that the more weak and servile the western world appears to be to the oil producers, the more likely the radicals will prevail in driving up prices and demands.

'Signal' Evidently Not Intended

The "strangulation" remark apparently flowed from Mr. Kissinger's own philosophy and not from any high-level decision to send a "signal" to the Middle East.

Mr. Kissinger and his aides have expressed amusement at

speculation that Washington is looking for some opportune moment to drop a verbal bomb on the oil producers. They stressed that Mr. Kissinger's remarks were an "honest answer" to a question that suggested that the Administration was too soft toward the producers.

But once having left open the military option, the Administration did decide at the highest level not to close it.

President Ford endorsed Mr. Kissinger's "hypothetical" remarks in a subsequent Time magazine interview, and Mr. Schlesinger said at a new conference that Mr. Kissinger "has indicated very clearly that in the gravest emergency the United States would be prepared to have recourse to force, or would consider recourse to force under those circumstances."

Mr. Schlesinger also refused to rule out American use of force in Vietnam, even though by law the United States is barred from reintroducing military combat forces in Indochina.

Intentions Kept Unclear

Just as Mr. Kissinger believed it would damage American interests to rule out all military options in the Middle East, Mr. Schlesinger clearly viewed it important to keep Hanoi worried about a reintroduction of American force.

He said, in answer to a question about North Vietnamese motivations, that he did not believe Hanoi planned an all-out offensive in South Vietnam comparable to the countrywide attacks of 1968 and 1972. One of the reasons he gave was his belief that North Vietnam was concerned about possible American re-entry into the conflict if an offensive occurred.

"I think that the North Viet-

namese continue to have an abiding respect for American power, that they do not discount American power, and that they are reluctant to take those steps that they fear might conceivably lead to a reintroduction of American power," he said.

U. S. Opinion Called 'Volatile'

When a newsman asked whether he really believed Hanoi was still concerned about American intervention, given the Congressional ban on American combat forces in Indochina, the Defense Secretary replied:

"American opinion, indeed, is volatile. American opinion, historically, has reacted in anger to outright aggression, unprovoked massive attacks. Hanoi still recognizes that were a massive invasion of the type of 1972 to occur, that the President has the power to approach the Congress and the Congress under those circumstances might well authorize the use of American force."

At the moment, Congressional opinion seems sharply opposed to any introduction of American forces in the area and most observers believe the Administration will have great difficulty even in obtaining the additional funds it wants for South Vietnam and Cambodia.

American officials acknowledge that both hypothetical situations—the use of force in oil production areas and the use of American combat forces in Indochina—are hardly likely to come about. But by dangling the possibility before the radical oil producers and Hanoi's leaders, the Administration hopes to achieve its objectives short of actual use of force.

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