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Schlesinger Says Nixon Can't Be Coerced on Arms

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WASHINGTON, March 28—Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger said today that if the Soviet Union believed that it could take advantage of President Nixon's difficulties over Watergate to obtain concessions on a strategic arms agreement it "would soon be disabused of this notion."

Speaking in response to questions at a news conference, Mr. Schlesinger said that the President would not rush into such an agreement to improve his domestic political position.

"Anybody who knows Mr. Nixon knows full well he would do nothing to compromise national security in the long run, irrespective of any political dis-

putes that exist within the United States," the Defense Secretary declared.

While Mr. Schlesinger did not voluntarily raise the issue, he spoke at length and with unusual emphasis in seeking to deny suggestions that the President's bargaining position in the negotiations with the Soviet Union on limited strategic arms had been critically weakened by the Watergate affair.

"The Administration," he said, "continues to be in a position in which it can demand what is essential for the long-run security of the United States."

The news conference was held at the Pentagon shortly after a communiqué was issued in Moscow making clear that Secretary of State Kissinger, in discussions with the Soviet party leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, had failed to achieve the "conceptual breakthrough" he had been seeking for a permanent agreement limiting offensive strategic weapons. In 1972, the United States and the Soviet Union concluded an interim accord covering some offensive arms for five years.

As interpreted by Mr. Schlesinger, the discussions between Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Brezhnev resulted in "clarification of certain questions," a better understanding of basic issues to be resolved, but "not resolution of possible areas of differences."

To Mr. Schlesinger, this meant that "progress was made" in the Moscow discussions, which were to lay the groundwork for President Nixon's trip to Moscow early this summer. At the same time, the

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Defense Secretary emphasized that no strategic-arms agreement would be reached at the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting unless the basic details had been worked out in advance.

"If it is impossible to reach the bases of agreement prior to the summit meeting with regard to strategic weapons, such agreement will not take place at that time," he said. "We must have a properly prepared agreement prior to agreements at the summit."

One of the common complaints within the Pentagon is that the present interim agreement on offensive weapons was hastily reached during Mr. Nixon's visit to Moscow in May, 1972. According to this complaint, the United States concedes that gave a potential Soviet Union.

At the news conference today, Mr. Schlesinger suggested that there was a certain flexibility in the United States' negotiating position.

For example, he said it was "inevitable" that the Soviet Union would have to be allowed to deploy some missiles with multiple warheads known as MIRV's, if only because the Soviet Union would want to demonstrate the same "high technology capability" as the United States had in such warheads. The United States is ahead of the Soviet Union in the development of MIRV's.

The question to be resolved in the strategic arms negotiations, he said, is the "extent and sizing" of multiple warheads on both sides. The point that United States is seeking

to emphasize, he said, is that a Soviet build-up in multiple warheads, which would be matched by the United States, would lead only to "instabilities" in the strategic balance and, therefore, it was in the Soviet interest to place constraints on multiple warheads.

Mr. Schlesinger declined to discuss how constraints could be placed on multiple warheads, which at this point are believed to be the major controversy blocking an agreement on strategic weapons. One approach known to be under consideration, however, is to place limitations on the numbers and size of missiles on both sides.

Alluding to that approach, Mr. Schlesinger said the United States was not insisting upon a "mirror image" of forces possessed by each side but would accept "latitude for adjusting forces" within certain over-all limitations.

On another issue, Mr. Schlesinger said that a newly concluded financial agreement with West Germany should avert the necessity of withdrawing some American troops from Europe.

Under the agreement, West Germany will provide over a two-year period \$2.24-billion in financial assistance to help offset the balance-of-payments deficit to the United States resulting from the stationing of troops in Western Europe.

A House Armed Services Committee, meanwhile, sent a report to the House recommending against making any cuts in American forces in Europe at this time, on the ground that such action would undercut current negotiations with the Warsaw Pact nations on mutual force reductions in Central Europe.