

Schlesinger explains firing

By Fred S. Hoffman
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WASHINGTON — James Schlesinger considered President Ford's planned defense budget inadequate and indicated Ford fired him as secretary of defense after he objected.

In his first interview since being fired three weeks ago, Schlesinger said the defense budget for the next fiscal year "was an important issue" in events leading to his ouster.

At the same time, Schlesinger jabbed at Ford's pledge to maintain a defense second to none.

"The military establishment cannot live on rhetoric and sentiment," Schlesinger said Friday.

"And the real question we will face is not whether we will have tributes to the concept of America's strength and defense purchasing power further by additional budget cuts."

Schlesinger said Ford asked him to prepare a fiscal 1977 budget about \$10 billion less than Ford originally projected for next year.

Although Ford's new proposal of \$107 billion would represent a small increase over the administration request for this year, Schlesinger contended it would be



James Schlesinger
Rhetoric not for him

a reduction of 5 or 6 per cent in buying power because of inflation.

Schlesinger denied reports that he had reached the point of deciding whether to quit in protest. But he added, "There was a question in my mind whether I would be prepared to carry a defense budget to the Hill which I regarded as inadequate."

Apart from strong indications that he and Ford differed on the

budget, Schlesinger declined to discuss what motivated Ford to fire him.

He sidestepped taking a position on whether he would support Ford for election next year, saying, "It's premature for me to get into any political issues."

Schlesinger also "would not care to speculate" on reports that he was a victim of intrigue by Secretary of State Kissinger or a power play by Donald Rumsfeld, whom Ford named to replace Schlesinger.

However, he acknowledged major differences between himself and Kissinger on "negotiating strategy in dealing with the Soviet Union" on such matters as strategic nuclear arms limitations, mutual force reductions in Europe and "what kind of leverage we should get out of grain sales and the like."

There was no immediate comment from the White House on Schlesinger's remarks.

In announcing that he was replacing Schlesinger, Ford said he was making the change to have his own team in the cabinet. Later, however, the President acknowledged that tensions and disagreements among administration members had played a part in his decision.