

Aid to Saigon: 2 Views

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While Administration Thinks It Is Vital,
Congress, Balking, Doubts Public Support

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 23 —

There is every indication that the Ford Administration will seek to make a major political issue of its request to Congress for \$300-million in supplemental military aid to South Vietnam.

News

Analysis

And every indication from Congress is that the request will fail.

Administration leaders and the overwhelming majority of the legislators are making divergent political calculations.

Key Democrats and liberal Republicans maintain that while the American people may or may not care about the fate of Vietnam, they certainly do not want to spend more money there. President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger, according to their aides, are taking a different view because they believe that a Communist takeover in Saigon would outrage the American people.

Much is riding on these judgments.

On a philosophical plane Mr. Kissinger's belief in flexibility for the President in foreign affairs and the inviolability of executive commitments is pitted against a Congressional mandate to cut spending abroad, particularly in Vietnam, and to concentrate on domestic economic problems.

"Just think," a Senatorial aide said, "one of the first things this new revolutionary Congress will be asked to vote on is whether to give \$300-million to President Thieu."

Major Turning Point

On the plane of personal political fortunes both Secretary Kissinger and his archrival, Senator Henry M. Jackson, Democrat of Washington, are at a turning point.

With Mr. Kissinger's personal prestige tied to peace in Vietnam, his aides have said that he will try to pin the blame for failure there on Congress. In the opinion of Senator Walter F. Mondale, Democrat of Minnesota, and other legislators, "Kissinger will hurt himself on Capitol Hill" by making an issue of more aid to Saigon.

Mr. Jackson, in the view of many colleagues, is also facing a critical choice—whether to join the bulk of the Democratic party on the Vietnam issue or to risk political isolation as a Presidential campaign approaches. The Senator made his first move yesterday, saying that he was "inclined to vote against the supplemental" and adding: "Vietnam is a bottomless pit."

There is no evidence of dissent in the Administration on the issue. "Kissinger is the

moving force on this and on the \$200-million supplemental to Cambodia," a Pentagon official said, "but no one is nipping at his heels."

For the current fiscal year, ending June 30, the Administration requested \$1.45-billion in military aid for Saigon. Congress authorized \$1-billion but appropriated \$700-million. The Administration asked \$450-million for Cambodia and Congress authorized \$275-million.

Some Views Withheld

In Congress the attitude is predominantly negative, with some legislation withholding their intentions.

The assistant Democratic leader in the Senate, Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, said: "I think most Senators will take a rather dim view of it. We can't go on indefinitely appropriating more aid. What will it be next year? Where will it end?"

Senator John G. Tower, Republican of Texas, agreed with Mr. Byrd's assessment of the vote, "given the present complexion of the Congress," but said he would support the President.

Representative Richard L. Ottinger, Democrat of Westchester, who is chairman of the freshman Democrat caucus of about 75, said: "No way?" when asked about the chances that the supplemental would pass in the House of Representatives.

The House minority leader, John J. Rhodes of Arizona, commented that the Administration had not consulted with him about the supplemental and that its chances depended on "how strong a case they're prepared to make." He added: "I'll be talking with my colleagues and looking at the evidence."

Vehemence, Not Evidence

In the view of a number of legislators the evidence presented by the Administration will be less important than the vehemence with which its case is made.

According to Administration officials, they will remind Congress that the North Vietnamese have violated the Paris peace agreements, that Saigon's forces could run out of ammunition in the face of the current North Vietnamese offensive and that what is being sought is the difference between what Congress has authorized and appropriated.

Mr. Kissinger is reported by other officials to have said that the \$300-million is vital to the Saigon Government's survival "in a psychological sense." They have also said that he has argued that Congress would not cut off all aid because that would mean accepting responsibility for the fall of Saigon to Communism.

Mr. Kissinger's associates have said that the issue he intends to put to Congress is this: Are the American people prepared to stand by and watch Saigon's collapse after all the war has cost the United States and at the very time when the Thieu Government is beginning to stand on its own? The answer to this question, they said, will not be found in current public-opinion polls but in polls taken after the collapse.

Senator Mondale gave a typical response to this argument: "The Administration knows that the \$300-million won't really do anything to prevent ultimate collapse in Vietnam, and it is just trying to shift responsibility for the bankruptcy of its policy to Congress and the Democrats."

"The Administration can't ask Congress for more Vietnam aid and say not to food stamps and Social Security adjustments for senior citizens," he added. "This is not an issue where Kissinger should invest his influence."