

Schlesinger Terms Cambodia Situation Grim, Not Hopeless

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By JOHN W. FINNEY

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 27—Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger said today that the situation in Cambodia was grim, but not irretrievable if the United States were to provide additional military aid.

Testifying before a House Appropriations subcommittee, he said he did not hold the view, as reported in The New York Times today, that the Cambodian Government of President Lon Nol would fall, whether or not the United States provided the additional aid.

He said he regarded "the prospects in Cambodia as grim but not hopeless."

The issue was reopened before the subcommittee because of the article in The Times, which said that Mr. Schlesinger was taking a more pessimistic view of the Cambodian Government's prospects in private discussions than in public statements.

His testimony today underscored the pessimistic theme that he has been sounding re-

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cently that the Cambodian Government would fall to the Communist-led insurgents without immediate additional military aid from the United States.

But he went a step further in assessing the long-term chances of the Lon Nol Government as not completely hopeless, provided it survived in the short term.

For the near future, he expressed confidence that the Government would survive the present campaign of the insurgents if additional ammunition arrived within the next four weeks. The Ford Administration has asked Congress for \$222-million in supplemental military aid, largely for ammunition.

2 Sides Held 'Incompetent'

The critical question, he said, is whether the Cambodian Government can survive over the long term.

He said the Lon Nol Government thus far displayed "incompetency," adding that "the probability of survival is not particularly impressive."

To a reporter after the hearing, he quoted odds of "less than 50-50" for Phnom Penh's long-term chances.

At the same time, he cautioned that the Cambodian situation always had been full of "uncertainties and surprises." Repeatedly since 1970, he observed, the fall of the Lon Nol government has been predicted. Yet "somehow or other this regime has survived," he said, "in large measure because the Khmer Rouge display the same incompetence."

Judging from his testimony, the Administration hopes that Lon Nol Government will endure through the current rebel campaign, which will end with the dry season by July, and come out of the fighting strong enough to induce the insurgents to enter into negotiations.

"I think there is a distinct possibility, if not a probability, that unless negotiations take place, over the long haul, the regime is in trouble," he said.

He added that all possibilities of the Government's surviving and of an eventual negotiated settlement would be eliminated if Cambodian Government will "inevitably fall within a month."

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Yesterday, before the same House Appropriations subcommittee, when asked whether the Cambodian government could survive until July with the aid, he replied that "the probability is extremely high but there is no such thing as a guarantee in this world."

Mr. Schlesinger, who was before the subcommittee today to defend the Pentagon's \$92.8-billion budget for the coming fiscal year, was questioned about his assessment of the Cambodian situation in view of The New York Times' article. The article reported that privately Mr. Schlesinger was taking the view that even with additional aid, the Cambodian Government would eventually fall.

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Questioned on Views

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Representative John J. McFall of California, the Democratic Whip, said the article gave the impression that Mr. Schlesinger was saying one thing privately and another publicly, an im-

pression Mr. Schlesinger said was unfounded.

Mr. McFall also commented — with Mr. Schlesinger's concurrence — that if the Secretary's views as presented in the Times were allowed to stand, they could be used "very destructively" on the House floor against the request for additional aid.

Representative Joseph P. Adabbo, Democrat of Queens, said the article made it appear that Mr. Schlesinger had "no real feeling" that the Cambodian Government could survive and that the Administration, therefore, was asking for the money "not really to save a country but to save American prestige while American cities go down."

Mr. Schlesinger insisted that the Administration was not requesting the aid either to cushion the foreign-policy impact of the expected fall of the Cambodian Government or to shift the blame to Congress if it refused to approve the request.

The Times article said that both Mr. Schlesinger and Secretary of State Kissinger believe that "Cambodia's collapse by itself would be a setback but not a disaster for American foreign policy as long as aid had not been terminated, leaving the United States open to blame."

While insisting that this was not the motivation behind the aid request, Mr. Schlesinger said:

"If we are unable to get negotiations and Cambodia goes under, it should clearly be marked as the result of the ineptitude of the Government rather than due to a cutoff of American aid."

Mr. Schlesinger said the chances for survival of the Government now depended on whether it could weather the current campaign with American aid and then demonstrate "a revival of Government competency" that could lead the insurgent forces into negotiations.

With the coming of the rainy season, he predicted, it should be possible to resupply the Government by July along the Mekong River, which is now blockaded by the insurgents.