

SAIGON ARMS AID HELD FORD'S GOAL

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Officials Say the Rejection of Cambodian Bid Would Bolster Vietnam Case NYTimes

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WASHINGTON, March 18—High Administration officials said today that the White House was pursuing a strategy that it hoped would force Congress to expend its anti-Indochina war sentiments in the fight over emergency aid to Cambodia and thus salvage aid to South Vietnam in the coming fiscal year.

The strategy runs counter to efforts by a Congressional majority to deny military aid to both countries by lumping them together in debate.

One Administration official explained that he believed that in effect if Congress cut off all military aid to the Cambodian Government, it would be much harder politically for Congress to do the same to South Vietnam.

Officials hinted further that in order to increase Congressional support for military aid to Saigon in the fiscal year beginning in July, the White House might not even press Congress to vote on its request for a \$300-million supplemental request for Saigon in the current fiscal year.

This tactic, the officials reasoned, could avoid Saigon's being dragged into the current debate on the \$222-million supplemental request for Cambodia.

Ford's 3-Year Plan

In a related development, officials disclosed that the Ford Administration had framed a \$6.4-billion three-year plan to phase out military and economic grant aid to South Vietnam and had been discussing this plan with two key Senators.

Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, and Senator James B. Pearson, Republican of Kansas, who took the initiative in these talks after President Ford first raised the possibility of the phase-out several weeks ago, proposed their own total of about \$1.6-billion for three years.

Congressional and Administration sources said that because the two figures were so far apart, the discussions had reached a virtual standstill.

Senior Administration officials have made clear in recent weeks that they considered the supplemental aid request for Phnom Penh much more urgent, but far less important than the emergency aid request for Saigon.

Two Points Noted

These and other officials, while insisting that they still wanted Congress to vote the extra military aid for Cambodia, indicated that as the Cambodian debate wore on, they had become aware of two tactical points.

One was that Congressional opposition to further aid to Phnom Penh was endangering future aid for Saigon. The other was that if Congress failed to vote more military aid for Phnom Penh and that Government fell to the Communists, Congress would be less inclined to risk the same consequence in South Vietnam.

One official said: "We were not making Cambodia the sacrificial lamb; we want that aid, but it is a political fact of life that Congress would be more wary to try the cutoff act twice."

Representative George H. Mahon, Democrat of Texas and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, which is reviewing the supplemental aid request for Saigon, said in a telephone interview that "I have not felt a major push in recent days from the Administration on the Vietnam supplemental, but no one in the White House or Pentagon has told me that they would not like to have it."

"My own judgment is that a major fight in Congress on the Vietnam supplemental would not be wise," Mr. Mahon added. "It would tend to cloud the issue of aid to Vietnam in the fiscal year 1976 budget."

For the new fiscal year, the Administration is asking Congress for \$1.3-billion in military aid and about \$700-million in economic aid for Saigon. But if Congress were to agree to the President's three-year plan to phase out aid, this plan would supersede the formal requests in this year's budget, officials explained.

Congressional sources said that Mr. Church and Mr. Pearson believed that President Ford's phase-out idea was a good one and drafted legislation to implement it. They showed this draft bill to the State Department, which, after staff work with the Pentagon, presented the Senators with the \$6.4-billion program.

Administration officials emphasized that the new plan would phase out all grant aid programs, but would not preclude future aid through military and economic credits. Thus, after fiscal year 1978, when the plan would end, Saigon could continue to receive aid, for example, through military credit sales and the Export-Import Bank.