

Nessen Says Ford Plans No Bombing

SFChronicle
Palm Springs

President Ford does not plan to use U.S. air power to help beleaguered South Vietnam, Press Secretary Ron Nessen said yesterday.

"The law forbids it, the President's inclination is against it, and he has no plans to do it," Nessen told a news briefing in Palm Springs. "Bombing is not a live issue."

The statement was in reply to a question about a remark made in Washington earlier yesterday by Defense Secretary James Schlesinger. Schlesinger said he could not rule out the possibility there might be a recommendation to use American air power in South Vietnam, but that the likelihood is quite low.

Both Schlesinger and Nessen noted that Congress has specifically forbidden U.S. combat activity in Vietnam.

Mr. Ford was on the golf course for the fourth consecutive day as he continued his Easter vacation. And for the fourth consecutive day Nessen declined to provide

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FORD ON BOMBINGS

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the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam.

"You'll have a chance to ask him at a press conference tomorrow," the press secretary replied when asked why he was ducking hard questions about Vietnam.

The President flies to San Diego today for the noon news conference, which will be nationally broadcast and televised.

Newsmen noted that Nessen had said earlier that the President did not plan to speak out in detail on Vietnam until after he had talked with Army Chief of Staff Frederick C. Weyand, whom he dispatched on a fact-finding mission to Saigon last week.

Weyand is due back tomorrow or Saturday.

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger will fly to Palm Springs today, where Mr. Ford has summoned him for a late-night briefing after the President returns from San Diego.

Asked if the President plans to request additional aid for South Vietnam besides the \$300 million already requested, Nessen said, "The course of future American aid for humanitarian or other purposes will depend on what General Weyand tells the President."

Schlesinger told reporters that the mushrooming Communist victory amounts to "a defeat of historic and tragic proportions" for Saigon.

Sharply modifying his estimate of only two days earlier Schlesinger told an impromptu news conference that he expects the crucial test of South Vietnam's ability to survive could come before the end of April.



AP Wirephoto

JAMES SCHLESINGER
April is crucial

Whether Saigon and the Mekong Delta can be defended "remains to be seen," he said.

"We are all distressed, I think, at the partial collapse of the forces available to the government," Schlesinger added, unambiguously describing President Nguyen Van Thieu's strategic withdrawal from the Central Highlands as an operation so badly botched in execution "that it has led to at least a partial debacle."

"That, I think, elicits sympathy on the part of myself and on the part of most Americans."

Vice President Nelson Rockefeller told reporters that, in his view, "It's really too late to do anything about it."

As for refugees fleeing the Communist advance, Rockefeller said: "They're trapped . . . they couldn't get out . . . I guess a lot of them are going to die. For us, we go on living."

Associated Press