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Schlesinger Backs Off on Viet Blame

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Defense Secretary James Schlesinger yesterday softened administration warnings of dire consequences should South Vietnam fall and backed off blaming Congress for that nation's military near-collapse.

But he urged Congress to vote more military aid for the Saigon government.

Schlesinger appeared on the CBS television program "Face the Nation" as Congress prepared to reconvene from its Easter recess. Pending before the lawmakers is an administration request for \$300 million in more aid for South Vietnam, which has lost most of its territory to Communist forces while Congress was away.

The causes of South Vietnamese losses are too complex for "simplistic" answers, Schlesinger said.

"Congress clearly cannot in any way be blamed" for the quality of South Vietnamese forces, which have given up large parts of their country with "very little major fighting," he said. On the other hand, one factor leading to the "partial collapse undoubtedly" was a 70 per cent cut in aid voted by Congress, he said.

"I hope that we can get these issues behind us," Schlesinger said. "There is nothing that this country needs less at this time" than a "divisive" postmortem on Vietnam or a "major confrontation" between the executive and legislative branches.

Asked if he agreed with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that the loss of Vietnam would weaken respect for American commitments around the world, Schlesinger said, "It would go either way" and would depend on how the United States faces the future.

The secretary called it a "fair inference" that General Frederick C. Weyand, Army chief of staff, reported Saturday to President Ford after his trip to Saigon that without more U.S. aid South Vietnam "will go down."

Schlesinger also said "I would doubt" that if the Communist offensive in South Vietnam stopped today the Saigon regime could survive without "substantial and very long-range American military aid."

Schlesinger also repeated his statement that at the time of the 1973 Paris cease-fire agreement the administration made oral commitments to Saigon — "which I do not know in detail" — to give Saigon aid if North Vietnam violated the agreement permitting one-for-one replacement of lost equipment.

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