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Schlesinger Sees Ebb Of Confidence in U.S.

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The collapse of this country's allies in Southeast Asia has "shaken the confidence of many countries in American power and particularly in American steadfastness," Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger said yesterday.

As a result, Schlesinger said at a Pentagon news conference, this is a "particularly inopportune" time to think about major changes in the deployment of U.S. military forces overseas, especially in South Korea and Western Europe.

"I think the forward defense areas must continue to be Western Europe and Korea, and, indirectly, Japan," the Defense Secretary said, while also underscoring continued U.S. commitments to stability in the Middle East and defense treaty obligations to Australia, New Zealand,

the Philippines and Taiwan.

Schlesinger said it was too soon to assess the impact of Hanoi's victory on the rest of Indochina.

He voiced "hope" that the 1973 settlement in neighboring Laos and the proclaimed "neutrality" of the new Communist government in Cambodia would be respected by Hanoi.

Whether North Vietnam eventually moves militarily against more distant Thailand, he said, probably depends most on how Hanoi's leaders weigh their internal and external objectives.

Schlesinger said he thought that all of the U.S. Navy ships that had been standing by off the Vietnam coast to carry the 7,000 evacuees flown from Saigon by helicopter, plus some 18,000 others picked up from the sea, were now outside the 12-mile territorial waters claimed by North Vietnam, and that many of the vessels were steaming eastward.

PENTAGON, From A1

The secretary denied this apparent end to the sea rescue mission was a result of Hanoi's warning to stop.

Schlesinger acknowledged that Hanoi did not go all-out to interfere with the U.S. helicopter evacuation. He declined to describe this as a "tacit understanding" reached with Hanoi, but rather "a mixture of self-restraint, diplomacy and prudence in handling military units."

Schlesinger praised the skill of American helicopter pilots who flew in darkness and bad weather conditions into two tiny landing zones inside the U.S. embassy compound.

Under questioning, Schlesinger acknowledged that the helicopter evacuation at the embassy took longer than planned for several reasons and many more Vietnamese were evacuated by helicopter that had originally been expected.

Asked about reports that U.S. Ambassador Graham A. Martin had been prodded by a cable from Washington to speed up the final pullout of Americans, Schlesinger said, "Naturally, we did not want the operation to continue without limits . . . and attempts were indeed made to expedite the evacuation from the embassy."

The Defense Secretary confirmed estimates that Hanoi would inherit in excess of \$5 billion in captured war material from the South, but he said much of this would probably be unusable because of a lack of spare parts that had made much of it useless even for Saigon.

He made clear, however, that the United States "retains title" to the scores of U.S.-built planes flown by South Vietnamese pilots to Thailand and that the United States expects to get these planes back.

Asked if he thought the fall of South Vietnam was due primarily to loss of support from the United States and cuts in military aid, or internal factors in Saigon, Schlesinger said it was a bit of both and it will be hard for historians to separate the various factors.

Undoubtedly, he said, the cuts in aid were a big contributor to the immediacy of the collapse and, indirectly, also eroded morale and caused higher casualties over the past year.

"On the other hand," he added, "there has been a massive collapse here that might have occurred at some time irrespective of a

greater generosity in the aid appropriations."

Schlesinger said he believed that "if the North Vietnamese had perceived that the U.S. was once again prepared to take military action, I think the Paris accords would have stood up."

He said he thought "it was the intention of former President Nixon in the summer of 1973 and at the time of the accords [earlier that year] to be prepared to take military action."

Schlesinger acknowledged, however, that he (Schlesinger) had misjudged American public opinion when it came to supporting any renewed U.S. military action against Hanoi even if the Paris accords were clearly violated.

"Public opinion was not that volatile," he conceded, and by August, 1973, Congress had ruled out any further military involvement.

Rockefeller Defends

U.S. International Role

Vice President Rockefeller said yesterday the defeat in Vietnam should not prevent the United States from becoming involved in the Middle East and other international disputes.

It was the first time Rockefeller has commented on American foreign policy since the surrender of South Vietnam to the Communists.

His remarks came in response to a question by a young man at a meeting of the National Urban Coalition, who asked the Vice President if the administration had "learned its lesson" in Vietnam about getting involved in the affairs of other countries.

"I think you've got to face the problems before you make these beautiful, broad idealistic statements which are to me somewhat unre-

lated to the realities of the world in which we live," Rockefeller replied.

"As to what this country has learned, well I don't know where you stand on the Middle East," he said. "I don't know what your position is on the support of Israel.

"I don't know what you'd do in the way of a vote of aid to Israel in the current session of Congress, but it's something we have to face," Rockefeller said. "I think you've got to take the broad realities in addition to the idealism."