

Kissinger View of Why Hanoi Won

Washington

If Watergate had not sapped presidential power and Congress had not passed the War Powers Act, Hanoi probably would not have staged its successful military campaign in South Vietnam, says Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

"In January '73, we did not foresee that Watergate would sap the executive authority of the United States to such a degree that flexibility of executive action inherently would be circumscribed," Kissinger said in an interview with Barbara Walters to be telecast today on the NBC "Today" show.

"We did not foresee that the Congress would pass a law which prohibited us from enforcing the Paris agreement and while we probably might have done nothing anyway, it makes a lot of difference for Hanoi whether it thinks the United States probably will not or whether it thinks that we certainly cannot," Kissinger said.

"I do not believe that Hanoi would have sent 19 of its 20 divisions south if these two things hadn't happened," he said.

Kissinger also said that after it became clear that a gradual erosion of morale was occurring in South Vietnam, "we tried very hard to get negotiations started."

He said that former South

Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu on a number of occasions made proposals to get such talks started unconditionally.

"But once the North Vietnamese realized what the trends were, they blocked all negotiations and went for a military solution," he added.

Kissinger was asked why he hadn't revealed to Congress the contents of a letter written to Thieu in January of 1973 by former President Nixon promising that the United States would move full force to punish any violations of the Paris peace agreement.

Senator Henry Jackson (Dem-Wash.), had demanded that the administration reveal the contents of any

Back Page Col. 6

From Page 1

secret commitments made with Thieu by Mr. Nixon.

"If we begin revealing the contents of letters, simply because of a senator, on top of it a presidential candidate, but quite apart from this a senator alleges that there is something in these letters, then presidential correspondence will lose its private character," Kissinger said.

"The reason President Ford decided to not release these letters was to maintain the principle of confidentiality of presidential correspondence," he added. "We do have an obligation to tell the Congress about

obligations which the country has undertaken. That was done in many public statements in 1973 and they were made moot by congressional actions and after that, it was not an issue."

Asked if the United States would recognize the North Vietnamese government, Kissinger said: "We want to observe the conduct of the Vietnamese for a while before we make this decision."

Associated Press