



# Congress' Duty In Southeast Asia

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**L**ET CAMBODIA go with a bang not a whimper. Blame the "catastrophe" on the Congress. Then get a blank check for aid to South Vietnam, and a more defensive congressional posture on all other foreign policy issues.

That, in a nutshell, is the administration strategy for the current crisis in Southeast Asia. It is a strategy that should not survive even casual analysis of the military situation in Cambodia and the diplomatic and political conditions in South Vietnam.

In Cambodia the picture is clear. The regime of President Lon Nol is in trouble because the capital, Phnom Penh, has been cut off from supplies by land and sea. It cannot be saved unless the Mekong river supply route is reopened.

Defense Secretary James Schlesinger and other senior Defense Department officials agree that it is up to the Cambodians, not the Congress, to reopen the supply route.

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**G**IVEN THE clear responsibility of the Cambodians, why would anybody even venture to pin the blame on the Congress? The answer emerges in the question Henry Kissinger asked himself at his last Tuesday's news conference. "What," he mused, "will be the consequences if Vietnam and Cambodia did fall?"

"I believe," he answered, "that if Vietnam falls as a result of an American decision to cut off its aid, this will have over a period of time the most serious consequences." In other words, the problem is not saving Cambodia, it is keeping

up aid to Vietnam.

President Ford <sup>26 Feb</sup> in his press conference Wednesday, and in other statements, has repeatedly cited "the obligation" incurred under the Paris Treaty of 1973. But the Paris terms stipulate the United States has an option to resupply Saigon — not a commitment.

Perhaps former President Nixon and Kissinger did make some kind of commitment in order to get Saigon to the Paris bargaining table in 1972. But if so, we should all know about it. Indeed, Congress should make it a first order of business to find out if there are any secret commitments.

In any case, if there is an aid commitment to South Vietnam, it is a commitment made without adequate reference to the Congress.

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**T**HE REQUIREMENT now is that the Congress square its present existence with whatever commitment has been made to Vietnam. That is not an open-and-shut case.

What all this means is that there is no reason for the Congress to go on the defensive now. Until the country is told how Cambodia is going to be saved, what commitments have been made in Saigon, and to whom, there is no need for the Congress to yield to the President and his ministers.

On the contrary, the overwhelming evidence is that the Ford Administration is trying to con the country with the Cambodian gambit. The requirement is that the Congress, more than ever, be on guard against a foreign policy snow job.