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# The frustration of the powerful

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President Ford laid bare this week something most leaders like to hide — the frustration of the powerful.

His admitted frustration is over the congressional restraints placed upon him in two ways — not fulfilling his requests for aid for South Vietnam, and barring the commander-in-chief from again using military force in Indochina.

Against the background of the Communist victories in South Vietnam that caused him to issue a direct "warning" against misreading America's will to defend freedom, Ford told the nation:

"I must say that I am frustrated by the action of the Congress in not responding to some of the requests for economic, humanitarian and military assistance in South Vietnam. And I am frustrated by the limitations that were placed on the chief executive over the last two years."

His references compelled some observers to wonder: Was it frustration that caused him to promise in one breath not to "assess blame" or "engage in recriminations," and in the next to cite "facts" that it was Congress that failed to provide what he asked for South Vietnam.

In a prepared San Diego speech he said that "adversity is creating a new sense of national unity among Americans." But two hours later he loosed a shaft against unity.

He told a nationally televised news conference that "the American people ought to know the facts" — that Congress made a "substantial reduction" in military aid for Saigon. And in that second breath he insisted that he was "not assessing blame on anyone."

What seemed to bear out the sense of frustration was that the White House had been marching up and down the hill of "blame" all week as the President tried to get some relaxation at this desert resort.

Press Secretary Ron Nessen had taken issue with Press suggestions that Ford had "blamed" Congress for contributing to the military collapse in South Vietnam. Yet the White House continued to insist that Saigon's "uncertainty" about future aid was a factor in the Thieu government's military pullback.

Then, in his news conference, the President — in what came off as a hand-washing exercise — added this to the record on the subject of blame: :

"I think it is up to the American people to pass judgment on who was at fault or where the blame may rest. That is a current judgment."

"I think historians, in the future, will write who was to blame in this tragic situation. But the American people ought to know the facts and the facts are as I have indicated."

"I think it is a great tragedy, what we are seeing in Vietnam today. I think it could have been avoided. But I am not going to point a finger . . ."

While helping to keep the blame issue alive, the President's words also may have been projecting it into the 1976 campaign and beyond.