

FORD, KISSINGER AND AID FOR SEA

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Bob Schieffer --- CBS - Radio - 1st Line Report

When Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger were running the war Gerald Ford was their 'point man' on Capitol Hill. When the Democrats came up with a plan in the summer of 1973 to make it illegal to bomb in Cambodia it was Ford who argued against it. That ban on bombing had been tacked on to a funding bill which was necessary to provide money for virtually all government agencies. President Nixon would have no part of it. He let it be known he would veto any bill that contained a similar ban-the-bomb amendment, that meant a deadlock with Congress and a looming financial crisis. Laird, who has served earlier as Secretary of Defense in the Nixon Administration, came up with a possible compromise. It boiled down to this -- the Administration would continue bombing until August 15th, if the President considered more bombing necessary after that he would seek Congressional permission, and would not bomb unless Congress gave the Okay. Again it was Majority Leader Ford who took the Administration's case to the Floor of the House, arguing the Nixon case as he had so many times in years past. Mr. Ford said he had been in communication with the White House over night and indeed he said he had been assured that the President would support such a compromise. A few minutes later Mr. Ford would leave the floor, then rush back to the microphone. Some who saw him swear he ran part of the way. Mr. Chairman, he said, I have just finished talking to the President himself for approximately ten minutes. He assured me that everything I said on the Floor of the House is a commitment, a commitment by him. With that dramatic announcement direct military involvement in Indochina had finally been set to end at a date certain. It would not be ending in the way many had hoped but it was ending and the cutoff date would be August 15th. Ford is no longer the Administration's point man in the House on Vietnam matters, he is the Administration's top man now and yesterday he called in the Congressional leaders to the White House to tell them it was time to give more help to Indochina, not direct military help but financial aid -- an extra 300 million to SVN and an extra 220 million to Cambodia. He used many of the same arguments that had been used by a succession of Presidents who wanted to help the people of Indochina, arguments that other Presidents had asked him to use to fight their battles on Capitol Hill. This time Ford was in the White House and if there were any volunteers to take his place as point man on Capitol Hill, they did not step forward. To put it bluntly said one source 'when Ford told those Senators and Congressmen he wanted more aid for Indochina they just sat there and looked at him.' According to the source even

John Stennis , the conservative Chairman of the SASC and a long time supporter of aid to Vietnam, it be known immediately he is not yet ready to vote for this new request. Democratic Whip Robert Byrd said both Democrats and Republican leaders had advised the President during the meeting that getting the extra money for Indochina from Congress would be extremely difficult , if not downright impossible. Well, will Ford then assume his old pointman role himself , will he become his own Vietnam point man on Capitol Hill ? The feeling in this corner is No; Kissinegr will continue the hard sell but several Administration sources said yesterday that Kissinger's enthusiasm for Vietnam aid is not shared by all of the President's advisors. According to those sources several of the President's top advisors felt that the President was obligated to ask for the funds as he did yesterday , but beyond that there feeling is that the President should not make a big fuss if Congress turns down the aid package. ' We have enough trouble trying to straighten out the economy, one official said privately, we do not need a fight with Congress over Vietnam.'