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FORD CALLS UPON ALLIES

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NOT TO MISTAKE VIETNAM

AS SIGN OF U.S. WEAKNESS

WARNING TO FOES

World Commitments Affirmed — Tokyo Seems Disturbed

By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times

SAN DIEGO, April 3—President Ford declared here today that neither the friends nor the adversaries of the United States should interpret the losses in South Vietnam as a sign that American commitments would not be honored anywhere in the world.

In a nationally televised news conference, Mr. Ford said

*Transcript of news conference
is printed on Page 12. OVER*

he did not expect the Saigon Government to fall.

But, in any event, he said:

"We will stand by our allies and I specifically warn any adversary they should not, under any circumstances, feel that the tragedy of Vietnam is an indication that the American people have lost their will or their desire to stand up for freedom and place in the world." [Question 4, Page 12.]

In Tokyo, officials said they were disturbed and divided by the failure of the United States to help South Vietnam and Cambodia. They said the Japanese Foreign Minister would seek an affirmation of the United States commitment to defend Japan. Page 11.]

Assurances Affirmed

Later, in a speech prepared for delivery to a group of business and civic leaders, Mr. Ford said:

"I must say with all the certainty of which I am capable: No adversaries or potential enemies of the United States should imagine that America can be safely challenged; and no allies or time-tested friends of the United States should worry or fear that our commitments to them will not be honored because of the current confusion and changing situation in Southeast Asia. We stand ready to defend ourselves and support our allies as surely as we always have."

In a series of appearances in this conservative stronghold, Mr. Ford broke his silence on the Vietnam situation and sought to show that he was doing all he could both to save the Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu and to provide assistance for the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the advancing Communist forces.

He made the following points:

¶ While saying that he would not blame Congress for the losses in South Vietnam — he

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said the American people and historians would have to be the judge of that—he asserted that the policies of Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard M. Nixon and himself were right and the loss of 55,000 American lives in Vietnam would not have been in vain if Congress had provided more military aid to Saigon.

¶ He criticized President Thieu for making a unilateral decision to withdraw troops from the northern provinces, creating a chaotic situation and setting off the exodus of citizens. But he said it would not be proper to seek Mr. Thieu's resignation because he was an elected head of state.

¶ Mr. Ford said that although he was barred by law from introducing American forces into the conflict, the United States had contingency plans for protecting the lives of 7,000 Americans in South Vietnam. He said the President had authority to protect American lives "and to that extent I will use that law." [Question 6.]

¶ He said he taken steps to fly 2,000 Vietnamese orphans to the United States for adoption and other efforts would be made to assist the refugees.

Relaxed and Tanned

The President was relaxed and tanned from four days of golfing in nearby Palm Springs, where he is spending an Easter vacation, and he sought to put an optimistic tone on the world outlook despite what he acknowledged to be a crisis situation. He was greeted by friendly crowds of several thousands who jammed the streets outside the hotels and convention halls where he spoke.

A further assessment of Vietnam policy is to be made in the next few days as President Ford meets with his advisers in Palm Springs. Secretary of State Kissinger was to arrive from Washington tonight and Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, the Army Chief of Staff, is due from Saigon tomorrow to report on his assessment.

Mr. Ford said today that he would continue to ask Congress for the \$300-million of supplementary aid for South Vietnam and that he might ask even for more.

Because the Administration will continue to press for aid, it has refrained from blaming Congress for the present situation. This was evident in the restraint of State Department and White House officials as they discussed the matter.

Critical of Congress

President Ford seemed to slip away from that restraint in his news conference, even though he said he was not pointing a finger of blame.

"I must say I am frustrated by the action of the Congress in not responding to some of the requests for both economic, humanitarian and military assistance in South Vietnam," he said. [Question 4.]

At another point, he said the Government's policy since the early nineteen sixties had been sound.

"Unfortunately," he added, "events that were beyond our control as a country have made it appear that that policy was wrong. I still believe that policy was right if the United States had carried it out as we promised to do at the time of the Paris peace accords, where we promised, with the signing of the Paris peace accords, that we would make military hardware available to the South Vietnamese Government on a replacement, one-for-one basis. Unfortunately, we did not carry out that promise."

He was alluding to a provision in the 1973 cease-fire agreement that said both sides in the conflict could replace worn-out or destroyed military equipment, but not expand their armaments.

Did this not mean he was blaming Congress?

"I am not assessing blame on anyone," he replied. "The facts are that in fiscal year 1974, there was a substantial reduction made by the Congress in the amount of military equipment requested for South Vietnam."

Mr. Ford's criticism of President Thieu came this morning in a meeting with editors, publishers and broadcasters of the San Diego region. Although his remarks were to be off the record, they were passed on by several of those attending.

In a reference to the withdrawal of Saigon Government forces from military regions north of Saigon, Mr. Ford was quoted as having said:

"President Thieu made a unilateral decision to withdraw from Military Areas I, II and III, and I am told by experts that a withdrawal is the most difficult military maneuver to undertake. The commanders were unprepared and did not take into consideration the flood of hundreds of thousands of refugees that clogged the highways."

In his news conference, he repeated the statement in less specific terms. Asked why President Thieu did not advise the United States of its plans, Mr. Ford said, "I think the only answer to that can come from President Thieu."

Backed on Evacuation

By JOHN W. FINNEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 3— President Ford, at his news conference in San Diego, contended that he had authority under the 1973 War Powers Act to use troops to rescue endangered American citizens. Congressional aides who drafted the law said the legislative history of the act supported that view.

The law, as it emerged from a Senate-House conference, does not specifically deal with the use of troops to rescue Americans, which was covered in the original Senate version. Basically, the law provides that the President cannot commit troops into hostilities or "into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated" for more than 60 days without the approval of Congress.

The legislative history of the debate and the committee reports are interpreted as giving the President an inherent power to use troops to rescue Americans. The only legal question that might arise, according to Congressional aides, is whether he might have to inform Congress of the use of the troops.

The Defense Department has drafted contingency plans, including the possible use of marines, to evacuate American citizens from Saigon.

Methods Described

The preferred method would be to evacuate the Americans through Tan Son Nhut airport outside Saigon. The contingent of 66 marines assigned to the American Embassy would provide protection.

The Defense Department would be prepared to send in additional marines by helicopter to establish a security perimeter around the airport. An alternate plan would call for the marines to establish a secure landing place elsewhere for the evacuation of the Americans by helicopter.

Should evacuation by either plane or helicopter be impossible, then the marines would be ordered to escort the Americans to the coast, where they could be picked up by four Navy ships already offshore for possible evacuation of Vietnamese refugees.

There are 700 marines aboard the four ships. In addition, the helicopter carrier Okinawa, with a Marine landing battalion of 1,800 men is stationed in the Gulf of Siam, to rescue Americans in Cambodia.