

# Ford Vows Viet 'Tragedy' Won't Weaken U.S. Policy

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**'We Will  
Stand By  
Our Allies'**

San Diego

President Ford yesterday warned American adversaries yesterday that the United States will not back down on its world commitments because of "the great tragedy" in South Vietnam.

"We will stand by our allies and I specifically warn any adversaries 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 any place in the world." Mr. Ford told a nationally televised news conference.

The President used even stronger language in public and private speeches here. He indicated that the United States would use force if necessary to protect the lives of Americans now in South Vietnam, and he also implied that Congress will be held accountable by the American people if South Vietnam fails to survive or if the U.S. defense budget is reduced.

"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," the President said at a White House conference originally scheduled to discuss domestic affairs. "We stand ready to defend ourselves and support our allies as surely as we always have."

Mr. Ford pledged that he would "resist stripping America's defense capability in every legal way available to me," and said that now is "not the time to dismantle our defense capabilities, including our intelligence capabilities."

"If the men and women you send to the Congress fail to face up to these inescapable realities . . . then by

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simple arithmetic it will only be a few short decades before our defenses will be down to a single soldier with a single rifle with a single round of ammunition," the President said.

In his press conference, Mr. Ford repeatedly asserted that he was not trying to blame congressional rejection of aid requests for the continuation of his continued military effort. But he appeared to be assessing this blame indirectly by saying that "the American people will make that judgment."

The President said that the American commitment to South Vietnam under four presidents, including himself, was "a sound policy." He said the South Vietnamese government would not be in its present situation if the United States had replaced its military equipment, "as we promised to do at the time of the Paris peace accords."

Answering a question about whether lives of the 55,000 Americans who died in Vietnam had been "wasted," the President said:

"I do not think they were wasted, providing the United States had carried out the solemn commitments that were made in Paris."

He left the impression that these deaths would indeed be a waste if South Vietnam falls, a prospect that the President refused to concede.

Mr. Ford said he thought there remains "an opportunity to salvage the situation in Vietnam" and that this result would mean the loss of American lives there would not "be a sacrifice that was inappropriate or unwarranted."

About 7000 Americans remain in South Vietnam and Mr. Ford said that unspecified "contingency plans" have been developed to rescue them if necessary. He ruled out military intervention in South Vietnam, as he has in the past, and he again pointed out that such action has been specifically forbidden by Congress.

However, the President said that he has authority under the War Powers Act to take emergency action to evacuate Americans.



UPI Telephoto

**PRESIDENT FORD  
At his news conference**

A White House spokesman said after the press conference that Mr. Ford has this authority as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He described the War Powers Act as legislation limiting this authority and said that the law does not prohibit specific action necessary to save the lives of Americans.

The President opened his news conference with a brief statement saying, "I have spent many hours" on the problem of the flow of refugees in South Vietnam.

"It is a great human tragedy as untold numbers of people flee the onslaught in South Vietnam," Mr. Ford said, pledging a strong effort to help the refugees.

These included the dispatch of "all available naval ships to stand off Indochina," an appeal to the United Nations and North Vietnam and an order to the embassy in Saigon to cut red tape slowing down the evacuation of orphans to the United States.

On a larger scale, Mr. Ford said he was examining the question of allowing Vietnamese refugees to enter the United States under a waiver of immigration restrictions.

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