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Behind Ford's Extra

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Washington

President Ford's extraordinary requests last night are intended to enable the United States to negotiate or fight its way out of South Vietnam again, this time finally.



The evacuation authority the President asked Congress to provide "should the worst come to pass" is the administration's central objective, official sources acknowledged in private.

It is the administration's expectation that Congress will recognize that this "worst case" is the underlying

U.S. assessment, although it is too stark to state publicly.

The "far deeper disaster" that come in South Vietnam, to which President Ford guardedly alluded, is the danger that remaining Americans might have to fight against South Vietnamese, as well as Vietnamese Communists, to reach an escape exit.

Each of the President's proposals on Vietnam, diplomatic, military and strategic, was designed to create a series of options that might avert the damaging sight of Americans fighting to get out of South Vietnam, with Vietnamese employees of the United States abandoned behind them.

There is little or no real prospect, in the judgment of administration strategists, that the requested \$722 million in new military aid for South

Vietnam could redress the military balance. Indeed, it is unlikely that this aid could reach South Vietnam in time to avert disaster for the government of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu.

What the Ford administration seeks to obtain through this request is at least a symbol of potential support for the South Vietnamese government, to give the United States a bargaining card in Saigon, to negotiate something. Exactly what will be negotiated, U.S. officials will not say, but presumably it would be evacuation of remaining Americans, and Vietnamese employees.

Simultaneously, the administration seeks to lay a foundation for bargaining with North Vietnam, at least on cease-fire terms for evacuation.

ordinary Requests

This is understood to be the reason behind the President's call for Hanoi "to cease military operations and to honor the terms of the Paris agreement."

There is not the remotest chance that North Vietnam or the Soviet Union and China who were among the "guarantors" of the 1973 Paris cease-fire accord which took U.S. troops out of the war, would concur in the American objective for the 1973 accord.

North Vietnam and its allies are interested only in those portions of the 1973 agreement which projected a three-segment council in South Vietnam to organize elections to replace the Thieu government.

Any foreseeable negotiations,

therefore, would be on what amounts to surrender terms for the Saigon government.

This is not a reality that the United States can concede publicly.

What President Ford said, therefore, was that "all members of the Paris ("guarantor") conference, including the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China," are being asked "to use their influence to halt the fighting and enforce the 1973 accords."

As an alternative to a diplomatic course, President Ford asked Congress for authority to send American military forces into South Vietnam to facilitate an evacuation.

It is the administration's judgment that the President's constitu-

tional authority as commander-in-chief, provides him with sufficient legal authority to send U.S. troops back into South Vietnam to extricate Americans.

Some U.S. legal experts, however, believe that this normal presidential authority is cast in doubt by the special legislation passed by Congress in 1973 to cut off any use of American troops in combat throughout Indochina.

The administration, however, concedes that this legislation clearly bars use of American troops to engage in combat to extricate other country's citizens from Indochina.

Therefore the administration requires a change in the restricting legislation.