

U.S. Faces Viet Refugee Problem

By Lawrence Meyer

Washington Post Staff Writer

With time running out in Saigon, the Ford administration has taken the first steps toward planning for the arrival of Vietnamese refugees, but officials are increasingly pessimistic about being able to rescue large numbers of people from Saigon.

The first problem facing the Inter-agency Task Force on Vietnam, established by the White House Friday, is that it has no idea how many refugees may be coming to this country. 18 APR

However, as the military collapse of the Saigon forces has accelerated, officials have shelved last week's estimates that as many as 200,000 Vietnamese refugees might come to the United States.

"The facts of the situation, how it turns out, that's what's going to decide it—how many people get out," one government official working on the task force said yesterday.

Another official said the question of how many Vietnamese would arrive has become academic in the last two days because of the rapid disintegration of Saigon's defenses.

Before this disintegration, the task force had run into a restlessness within Congress over the prospect of large numbers of Vietnamese coming into the United States under the Attorney General's authority to "parole" persons into the country in emergency situations.

Last week, after public

and private hearings with Philip C. Habib, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, the Senate Judiciary Committee wrote Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and Attorney General Edward H. Levi to endorse the "limited use" of Levi's authority to permit orphans and alien dependents of American citizens into the United States.

The committee said it also would welcome consideration of use of the parole authority to facilitate the immigration of certain Vietnamese nationals to join their families already in this country.

"However," the letter continued, "prior to the use of the parole authority . . . for the purpose of large-scale evacuation and resettlement of Vietnamese nationals, the committee will require such recommendations in writing and daily consultations on this important matter of public policy until further notice."

Habib's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee was only one of a series of appearances by him and Kissinger during which they were questioned about possible immigration of large numbers of Vietnamese refugees to the United States.

During his Judiciary appearance last Tuesday, Habib told the committee in closed session that the administration was thinking in terms of 200,000 Vietnamese refugees, a staff source said.

Habib mentioned several countries—Australia, France,

Brazil, Venezuela — that might take refugees. "He sort of talked about conversations, he never mentioned commitments. He talked about spreading these people around the world," this source said.

"The committee to a man was skeptical of the whole process," the source said. "I think they're skeptical about the numbers. I think they're skeptical about who is coming out (from Vietnam). I think they're skeptical about how these people will be taken care of. We can go down the list of two dozen questions."

This source said the committee felt that 5,000 or 10,000 persons can be absorbed in this country. "But if you're talking about 200,000 peo-

ple, that's a hell of a lot of people."

When a reporter mentioned the lack of relocation camp sites and other facilities to a member of the task force yesterday, he replied, "That's an academic point. We don't have that kind of numbers yet." According to this official, "sites have been suggested," but not selected.

Besides the relatively serious problems in refugee planning, other less severe issues also must be handled.

According to one Immigration and Naturalization Service official, "We don't even have the proper forms. That's a minor problem, but at the same time, the bureaucracy has to have its paperwork."