

# The Forgotten Charter

By James Reston

UNITED NATIONS, N. Y., April 22 —It has been widely ignored during the last gasp of the Indochina war that the United Nations, which now seems to be forgotten and even reviled by almost everybody, was almost the only organization in touch with all parties in the tragedy while it was getting food, medicine and clothing to the suffering people on both sides of the contending armies.

The United Nations has very limited resources, but when the North Vietnamese broke the Saigon Army, U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim marshaled a few planes and supplies and got one of his aides, a Frenchman named Raymond Aubrac, into Hanoi. Mr. Aubrac is now arguing there that a cease-fire in the next few days is not only the best way to avoid a bloody battle for Saigon but probably the only way to assure Hanoi of substantial international economic aid for the relief and reconstruction of the country.

Washington is concentrating now on getting the Americans and their vulnerable South Vietnamese comrades out of Saigon, and is willing to send economic but not military aid to the battlefield. Here the United Nations could be helpful, if given a chance.

The closer the North Vietnamese army comes to the center of Saigon, the more it will have to deal with the refugee problem; but if it insists on a street-by-street military victory, it will be left with the wreckage. This is what the U.N. is trying to avoid. It is imploring Hanoi to hold back, to agree to a cease-fire, and to let the U.N. try to appeal to all the nations of the world to relieve the suffering of the Vietnamese people, North and South.

Washington has a direct line of communication, not only to Saigon but to Hanoi. Secretary Kissinger can get in touch with Le Duc Tho in Hanoi within an hour, but he cannot offer economic aid for a cease-fire. Hanoi won't take it directly from Washington, but it might agree to a cease-fire for aid through the United Nations.

President Ford and Mr. Kissinger have another problem. They have been saying that they want to deal with the humanitarian problem. Congress has been saying it will vote money for the

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Vietnamese people in trouble, but not for arms. There is no way, however, to get Congress to vote hundreds of millions to Hanoi to deal with the refugees, who are now in their hands. It can be done only through the United Nations or some other international agency.

The United Nations may not be used to get out of this mess, but it cannot be ignored. Whatever happens, it will insist on debating the issue of Vietnam when the U.N. General Assembly meets in September. It will want a record of the diplomatic correspondence that led up to the Paris accords on Vietnam, and all the charges of American "promises" and "commitments."

Accordingly, Washington is now going to have to produce a White Paper on the diplomatic record of the Paris accords, what was said to President Thieu by President Nixon, what Mr. Kissinger said privately and what he said publicly. There is no way to avoid it. Mr. Kissinger may not like the United Nations, but he is going to have to answer its questions.

The Charter of the United Nations is precise. It insists that its members cooperate to reduce tensions, negotiate to avoid war, and work together to deal with the social and economic problems that may lead to war.

It also provides a forum where nations can discuss ways to relieve human suffering and political contention, and this is what Secretary General Waldheim has been doing in these last few weeks. He has been staying in touch with all parties in Cambodia and North and South Vietnam, and pleading for time and compromise.

At some point, Messrs. Ford and Kissinger are going to have to deal with the whole international community at the United Nations. They have been concentrating on the political problems of aid in the Congress, and the politics of Saigon, but are in deep trouble here at the U.N., not only on Indochina but on the Middle East.

The majority here on the East River is against Washington, both on its policy toward Saigon and on Israel. In September, Mr. Kissinger faces the possibility of a motion to expel Israel from the U.N. and a savage debate on the whole Vietnam disaster.

Against this background, it is odd that the Secretary of State is paying so little attention to the efforts of the United Nations to help arrange a compromise and a cease-fire in Vietnam. He cannot do it by himself, and he is getting very little help from either the Russians or the Chinese, but the United Nations is still a possible refuge. It is trying to help but nobody is paying much attention.