

Vietnam Airlift Goes On; U.S. Confident

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 25—The United States Government continued its huge airlift today, aiming at the evacuation of more than 130,000 Americans and South Vietnamese from Saigon and confident of its technical abilities despite funding and logistical problems.

In testimony before a Senate subcommittee, Philip C. Habib, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said of the big airlift that began last Tuesday morning, "there is nothing like American organization."

As of 3 A.M., Eastern standard time, he said, there were 1,357 Americans remaining in South Vietnam and registered with United States officials there.

Reporting to Panel

This followed evacuation of about 14,000 persons since Tuesday—all by air. Today, planes brought out 501 Americans and 5,587 South Vietnamese, he said. The overwhelming majority of the South Vietnamese are relatives of American citizens.

Mr. Habib was reporting to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees, headed by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, mainly about the evacuation of South Vietnamese and their admission this country as authorized by the Attorney General.

He said it was the intention of the Ford Administration to go on removing Americans from Saigon "down to 1,000 or below very shortly."

Pressed by Senator Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, to say "when the last American" would leave Saigon, Mr. Habib replied, "I can't tell you when we will get all out because we have interests and responsibilities to fulfill."

Later, a high Administration official said the United States would "not pull the plug" on its Saigon operations until the last minute and then, if necessary, would make a lightning swoop with helicopters much like the evacuation of the remaining United States Embassy staff from Cambodia earlier this month.

No Complete Withdrawal

Mr. Habib said: "Policy does not provide for complete withdrawal." The Administration is still hoping for "a negotiated solution, a controlled situation in South Vietnam."

Of the remaining Americans, 164 are civilian employes of the Defense; 162 are military personnel, including Marine security guards; 300 are Defense Department contract employees; 534 are United States officials and Government contract employees; and 197 are newsmen, businessmen and other private American citizens.

The problem of reducing the number of Americans in Saigon has been complicated every day by the large numbers coming out of

the woodwork," an official said. Yesterday, for example, nearly two-fifths of the Americans evacuated were unlisted in Embassy records. Some are believed to be United States Army deserters.

As for the South Vietnamese to be evacuated, Mr. Habib testified that there may be "10,000 to 75,000" who are relatives of Americans or of South Vietnamese already in the United States. These would provide virtually no resettlement problem, he asserted.

'High Risk Factors'

In addition, he said there were about 50,000 South Vietnamese who have worked for the United States Government or were associated with it and who have a "high risk factor" in the event of a Communist takeover.

Priority is being given to evacuation of employes of the United States Embassy, he said.

Present plans call for wide dispersal of most of these Vietnamese throughout the United States, he said, so that no one region would incur difficulties in resettlement.

Objections were raised earlier by several representatives from California that the West Coast would be subjected to a massive resettlement problem with a sudden influx of South Vietnamese.

Far Too Little

The funding problem confronting the Administration was described as severe by Arthur Gardiner, assistant administrator for east Asia of the Agency for International Development.

"We need every dime for refugee relief," he told the subcommittee.

At present, the relief effort is being paid for out of \$56.2-million foreign assistance appropriation for "postwar reconstruction" in Vietnam. It is almost gone.

Today, President Ford notified Congress that he would

issue a waiver that would permit use of the remaining funds from that appropriation for evacuation costs. But that is far too little. "We're spending money we don't have," an AID official said.

The Administration is counting on \$327-million refugee relief and evacuation appropriation, which still needs approval by the House.

Logistical complications have arisen from the sudden transfer of huge numbers of evacuees to Guam, where processing facilities and personnel are lacking.

Leonard Chapman, director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, alluded to this in testimony when he said he had dispatched 51 inspectors to Guam in the last couple of days and was prepared to send "another 50 or so."

Mr. Habib remarked that it cost the Government \$15 a day for each refugee at Guam and that the flight from Guam to the United States was \$400 each.

He testified that the airlift was in such an early stage that the Administration was unable to provide figures on refugees either to international agencies or to domestic refugee aid organizations.

There have been some preliminary soundings by the United States with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan.

Prince Sadruddin told American officials that the United Nations expected to assist in aiding Vietnam refugees in terms of two-way traffic—that is, assisting those who want to leave the region and those who wish to return to areas controlled by North Vietnam.

The refugee question was also briefly discussed here today by Secretary of State Kissinger and Kurt Waldheim, the United Nations Secretary General.

In reply to questions by Senator Kennedy, Mr. Habib said the United States had not attempted to draw the United Nations more heavily into the evacuation effort until now because "unfortunately they don't seem to move as fast as we do."

But he said the United States was now exploring the possibility of resettling some South Vietnamese in other countries although "we are operating on the assumption that the great majority will come to the United States."

There was a flurry at the outset of the session when Senator Kennedy and Senator Philip A. Hart, Democrat of Michigan, complained angrily that the White House had refused to send Ambassador Lewis Dean Brown, director of President Ford's refugee program, to testify. "To me that is just nutty," Senator Hart declared.

Later, the White House explained that it did not want to break with tradition by allowing a Presidential assistant to testify before Congress.