

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Cables Warn of Viet Exit Nightmare

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

Secret cable traffic warns that the great evacuation of Saigon could turn into another nightmare.

Saigon's Tansonnhut airport, the military reports warn, is extremely vulnerable and could be put out of action at any time. If Communist mortars, artillery and rockets don't close the airport, the cables predict, the refugee mobs will.

The man who is most to blame for this impending catastrophe, judging from the cables, is American Ambassador Graham Martin. He is a diehard supporter of the South Vietnamese cause, and he has refused to accept the possibility of a Communist victory.

Martin has made it clear to all who ask and many who don't, meanwhile, that he is the President's representative in Saigon, that he is making the decisions and that he understands the Vietnamese far better than anyone else does.

Until recently, he has had the support of Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. But in the past few days, according to our State Department sources, Kissinger has begun to question the judgment of his man in Saigon.

Martin has stubbornly resisted a wholesale evacuation of Americans and their Vietnamese supporters. He keeps insisting that the situation will turn around, that the South Vietnamese will dig in their heels and throw the Communists back.

A massive airlift, Martin contends, would only panic the Vietnamese and bring their defeat. Therefore, he has limited the airlift to about 3,000 persons a day, substantially less than the 5,000 claimed by the State Department. Military experts say they could have been bringing out 10,000 a day.

Martin also has resisted a quiet Pentagon move to recover some of the costly, sophisticated military equipment which the Communists will inherit when Saigon falls. An estimated \$5 billion worth of weapons and supplies, according to one Pentagon estimate, will wind up in Communist hands.

This would give Hanoi an awesome arsenal, which some military strategists fear will be turned eventually against Thailand. Already, the North Vietnamese are reported to be in touch with Thai insurgents.

Ironically, the Pentagon brass wanted to remove military equipment from South Vietnam at the same time that President Ford was urging the Congress to pump in \$722 million more in military aid.

Martin used his authority, however, to block the Pentagon from salvaging any military equipment. If weapons were removed, he argued, the South Vietnamese would be left without the means to defend themselves.

The Pentagon succeeded in hauling out only a few loads of equipment from the northern provinces before the massive retreat. The South Vietnamese, meanwhile, abandoned an esti-

mated \$1 billion worth of military hardware along the retreat routes.

The Communists also have moved into some of the finest U.S. facilities that money can buy. They have taken over hospitals, barracks and warehouses. They are using 10,000-foot-long American-constructed runways that would make many American cities envious.

At Camranh Bay, they have inherited a giant, permanent base capable of accommodating an entire fleet. The piers, docks, oil tanks, warehouses, repair facilities and airfield probably make this the finest air base and seaport in all Asia.

The most anguished debate going on behind the scenes, meanwhile, is over who should be rescued and who should be left behind among our South Vietnamese friends. Martin contends that all South Vietnamese who had any dealings with Americans should be evacuated.

But the military experts insist they don't have the capability to remove them all. Only close collaborators and Vietnamese with vital security information should be removed, the military strategists argue. Otherwise, the United States may get bog-

ged down in an evacuation effort that could turn into a military action.

The United States has searched in vain, meanwhile, for new homes for the Vietnamese refugees. Only Taiwan has offered to take some of them. Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and other Asian nations sounded out informally have refused to accept any refugees.

Even in the United States, several governors and members of Congress have put through quiet calls to the Pentagon saying they don't want refugees because they might swell the unemployment and welfare rolls in their states.

Footnote: The intelligence reports from Saigon disclose that Nguyen Van Thieu, during the last days of his presidency, kept looking for an American miracle to save him. He was quoted in the intelligence reports as assuring his ministers that "the Americans can work miracles."

When no miracle was forthcoming, he went into seclusion and brooded over the U.S. failure to rescue him at the last minute. He turned increasingly sour and resigned with a bitter blast at the United States.

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