

Ford Urges U.S. 'To Close Ranks'

Washington

The United States completed the month-long evacuation of more than 6000 Americans and about 56,000 South Vietnamese from Saigon yesterday as President Ford called on the nation "to close ranks, to avoid recrimination about the past."

When word was flashed to the White House that Ambassador Graham Martin and the last evacuees had been airlifted from South Vietnam, Mr. Ford declared: "This action closes a chapter in the American experience."

Some 6500 persons were rescued on the last day, about 1000 of them Americans. Mr. Ford said it was now time "to look ahead to the many goals we share and to work together on the great tasks that remain to be accomplished."

Delays blamed on bad weather, pilot fatigue and difficult helicopter landings

stretched out the day's withdrawal, which marked the end of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war — a war that Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger acknowledged did not meet U.S. objectives.

But, sharing the President's sentiments, Kissinger said, "It is a time to heal wounds, to look to our international obligations and to remember that peace and progress in the world has depended importantly on American commitment and American conviction. . . ."

White House press secretary Ron Nessen said the operation was extended several hours because "a lot more Vietnamese were taken out than had been planned."

He said other reasons were occasional bad weather and pilot weariness. In addition, only two helicopters could go in at one time

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to make pickups from the embassy roof and the parking lot, he said.

In a briefing, broadcast on radio and television, Kissinger rejected suggestions that Ambassador Martin resisted this last withdrawal. "He was in a very difficult position," Kissinger said, "he felt a moral obligation to the people with whom he was associated."

"He attempted to save as many people as possible. That's not the worst fault a man can have."

Kissinger said the United States moved deliberately over the last few weeks to avoid panic among the local population and to save many of the 5000 to 8000 South Vietnamese thought to be in a "high risk" category because of their known opposition to Hanoi and the Viet Cong.

At the same time, Kissinger credited the Soviet Union with providing "some help" in the evacuation effort. He was not specific, saying the degree would have to be assessed later.

Kissinger said that "obviously this has been a very painful experience" and that it would be a long time before Americans could write about the war dispassionately.

"It is clear the war did not achieve the objectives of those who started the original involvement," Kissinger said, "or those who sought to end it on terms compatible with the investments made."

In the future, he said, the United States "should be very careful in the commitments we make" and yet "scrupulous in carrying out the ones we do make."

Until Sunday night, Kissinger said, "there was some hope the Communists would not seize power by military means" and that a negotiated solution to the war was possible.

But the rocketing of Tan Son Nhut airport impelled Mr. Ford to order a final evacuation. "The North Vietnamese changed signals and we don't know why," he said.

At the same news briefing, Nessen read Mr. Ford's statement, in which the President said he had ordered "the reduction of American personnel in the United States mission in Saigon to levels that could be quickly evacuated during an emergency, while enabling that mission to continue to fulfill its duties . . ."

"The evacuation has been completed. I commend the personnel of the armed forces who accomplished it, as well as Ambassador Graham Martin and the staff of his mission who served so well under difficult conditions.

"This action closes a chapter in the American experience. I ask all Americans to close ranks, to avoid recrimination about the past, to look ahead to the many goals we share and to work together on the great

tasks that remain to be accomplished," the statement said.

Hours before, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger sent a message of appreciation to the members of the U.S. armed forces saying "our involvement was not purposeless."

"It was intended to assist a small nation to preserve its independence in the face of external attack and to provide at least a reasonable chance to survive," he said.

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