

Kissinger Statement On Final Evacuation

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger yesterday opened his press conference at the Old Executive Office Building with a statement on the final evacuation of Americans from South Vietnam. This is a text of the statement:

Ladies and gentlemen, when the President spoke before the Congress, he stated, as our objective, the stabilization of the situation in Vietnam.

He made clear at that time as well as before many congressional hearings, that our purpose was to bring about the most controlled and the most humane solution that was possible and that our objectives required, that these objectives required the course which the President had set. Our priorities were as follows:

We sought to save the American lives still in Vietnam. We tried to rescue as many South Vietnamese that had worked with the United States for 15 years in reliance on our commitments as we possibly could. And we sought to bring about as humane an outcome as was achievable under the conditions that existed. Over the past two weeks the American personnel in Vietnam has been progressively reduced.

Our objective was to reduce at a rate that was significant enough so that we would finally be able to evacuate rapidly but which would not produce a panic which might prevent anybody from getting out.

Our objective was also to fulfill the human obligation which we felt to the tens of thousands of South Vietnamese who had worked with us over a decade. And finally we sought through various intermediaries to bring about as humane a political evolution as we could.

By Sunday evening the personnel in our mission had been reduced to 950. And there were 8,000 South Vietnamese that we considered in a particularly high risk category, between 5,000 and 8,000, we don't know the exact number.

On Monday evening, Washington time, around 5 o'clock, which was Tuesday morning in Saigon, the airport in Tansonnhut was rocketed and received artillery fire. The President called an NSC (National Security Council) meeting. He declared that if the shelling stopped by dawn Saigon time, we would attempt to operate for one more day to remove the high-risk South Vietnamese together with all the [U.S.] Defense Attache's Office which was located near the Tansonnhut airport.

He also ordered a substantial reduction of the remaining American personnel in South Vietnam.

I must point out, I may point out that the American personnel in Saigon was divided into two groups. One with the Defense Attache's Office, which was located near the Tansonnhut airport, the second one which was related to the embassy and was with the United States mission in downtown Saigon.

The shelling did stop early in the morning on Tuesday, Saigon time, or about 9 p.m. last night, Washington time. We then attempted to land C-130s but found that the population at the airport had gotten out of control and had flooded the runways and it proved impossible to land any more fixed-wing aircraft.

The President thereupon ordered that the DAO personnel together with those civilians that had been made

to be evacuated be moved to the DOA compound, which is near Tansonnhut airport.

And about 11 o'clock last night he ordered the evacuation of all Americans from Tansonnhut and from the embassy as well. This has, this operation has been going on all day, which of course is night in Saigon, under difficult circumstances, and the total number of those evacuated numbers about 6,500—we will have the exact figures for you tomorrow—of which about 1,000 are Americans. Our ambassador left, has left, and the evacuation can be said to be completed.

In the period since the President spoke to Congress, we have therefore succeeded in evacuating all Americans who were in South Vietnam, losing the two Marines last night to rocket fire, and two pilots today from a helicopter.

We succeeded in evacuating something on the order of 55,000 South Vietnamese and we hope that we have contributed to a political evolution that may spare South Vietnam some of the more drastic consequences of a political change. But this remains to be seen. This last point remains to be seen.

As far as the administration is concerned, I can only underline the point made by the President: we do not believe that this is a time for recrimination.

It is a time to heal wounds, to look at our international obligations and to remember that peace and progress in the world has depended importantly on American commitments and American convictions and that the peace and progress of our own people is closely tied to that of the rest of the world.