

Operation Babylift: Souvenirs

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

LOS ANGELES — Over the weekend the President rushed out of Palm Springs, down here in Southern California, up north to San Francisco to perform the traditional American political act of baby kissing. Only these were dark-eyed Oriental orphans from Vietnam, those babes who are so exotically super-cute to our occidental eyes.

Just as the President was being photographed carrying infants in swaddling clothes off a rescue plane The Washington Post was publishing a story in which it was revealed that our side in the Cambodian war has been practicing cannibalism on the enemy's dead. While it

may be that in the final analysis it makes no difference whether the bodies of slain soldiers are buried, burned or eaten, cannibalism, for people of our culture at least, is the symbolic act of barbarism.

Yet here we are, congratulating ourselves on the humanitarianism of Operation Babylift while our ally is literally fricasseeing the members of the other side and consuming them as though they were missionaries. It figures. From the start to what we must hope is the end of this affair our official people have never been able to get a hint of what they look and sound like to second-party eyes and ears.

Take the C-5A that went down, killing all those children. It's the war in microcosm. First a brainstorm in the White House, then a self-serving announcement to

From the War Games

Poster

the world about this newest example of our selflessness, and next, of course, we had to send the biggest, the mightiest, the most overpowering plane in creation so that we could claim we'd set a new record for mercy missions.

When it crashed and, once again, we discovered we'd killed the people we'd set out to save, we screamed sabotage. Sabotage or not, it would not be the first time in our long Christo-judaic history that the Lord has countenanced the slaughter of holy innocents to instruct the rulers of men in virtue.

If the Angel of Death had been sent to teach the armed, angry and alarmed Americans that there is a difference between morality and the public proclama-

tion of good intentions it was lost on our Secretary of State.

"For God's sake," he cried out from the irrigated Palm Springs desert to a press conference while his superior went golfing, "we ought to stop talking as if one side had the monopoly of wisdom, morality and insight, and that serious people (meaning himself) trying to deal with this problem are trying to run a confidence game."

Only the optimists think Dr. Kissinger is trying to run a confidence game. The pessimists believe he no longer knows what game he's trying to run or even what ballpark he's playing his game in.

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If you think Dr. Kissinger is playing a con game, then you can believe he thought up Operation Babylift for some sinister, but sane, reason such as he could use it to get votes in Congress for more military aid. A con man might have thought up babylifts to distract people from considering that it's not the orphans who really need the saving.

War Games

The incoming, conquering Reds are not going to blood-bathe infants and children with no political convictions. They will feed them and grow them up to be good Communists. It's those many, small, non-powerful South Vietnamese adults who took our part in the war who are in serious danger. But no Operation Babylift for them. What do you want to bet the only South Vietnamese grownups who'll get flown out are the murderers from the political police and the numbered-Swiss-bank-account boys?

Dr. K didn't think up Babylift. No, that was either an invention of the childless couples' lobby or the vaguely

suburban guilt-ridden, or the remnants of the old fight-to-win crowd. When they run out of babies, they'll switch to airlifting puppydogs.

So it's no con game that the Doctor of Diplomacy is playing, and he's right about his critics not having a monopoly on wisdom and morality. Nonetheless, the war for freedom that he and his former boss began in 1970 ends five years later in cannibalism. Shall we blame that on insufficient congressional appropriations and then mark Kissinger down as one more confused, rampaging, misunderstood and misunderstanding American?

In which case Dr. Kissinger will have to live, like the rest of us, with the words of the South Vietnamese army lieutenant on the day the C-5A went down and the orphans were crisped: "It is nice to see you Americans taking home souvenirs of our country as you leave—China elephants and orphans. Too bad some of them broke today, but we have plenty more."

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