

Letters to the Editor

The U.S. and South Vietnam: After President Ford's Address

To the Editor:

As our domestic economic crisis moves to the forefront of national concern, America seems to have abandoned many of its most crucial moral obligations. The recent collapse of South Vietnamese military forces points up forcefully the results of such an abandonment.

The United States stood beside the Republic of South Vietnam for fifteen years at a great cost in lives, money and prestige. The fact that some Americans from all walks of life, including many professional military men, regarded this endeavor as ill-fated from the start is not, however, the question facing the leadership of the United States today.

We have created a situation which no longer allows the honorable hand-washing which Congress is scrambling for. The United States, through Mr. Kissinger and ex-President Nixon, explicitly guaranteed the security of the Republic of South Vietnam at the Paris peace talks and through private correspondence with South Vietnamese leaders. In view of this we must, as the most powerful defender of democracy and freedom in the world, respond to this moral, if not legal, obligation.

I do not speak for the United States Military Academy, but as an American I am appalled by the apparent ability of our Congressional representatives to turn their backs on the tragedy of South Vietnam's present situation.

If, as our President says, "... the spirit of our country is good," then let us show that spirit. We must counter the spread of Communism in Vietnam by military intervention if necessary, and we must realize now, for the hour is late, that we cannot wash our hands of a people and a nation which we have forced to rely on us. Most certainly not now, when the lives and in fact the very existence of an ally are in the balance. We have created a situation which we cannot morally abandon at this late date.



Claude Bellare

With all of this in mind, Congress must heed the cries of a suffering and endangered people in South Vietnam and must not allow our American nation to lose the worldwide respect all of us have worked so hard to retain. We cannot morally place a price on the freedom of any nation. Let us act now so that every American, now and in the future, can be proud to be a part of this nation regardless of the cost.

KERRY E. MURPHY
Company F-2, U.S.C.C.
U.S. Military Academy
West Point, N.Y., April 11, 1975

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To the Editor:

Publicized as presenting a new approach to world affairs, President Ford's foreign policy speech was nothing more than a rehash of clichés and warmed-over Nixon/Kissinger rhetoric.

Most ludicrous was the President's perspective on Vietnam, in which he has now joined in a long history of faulty American assessments: In 1954

Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said: "The French are going to win." In 1962 Robert McNamara said: "Every quantitative measure we have shows we're winning the war." In 1965 Presidential adviser Walter Rostow said: "The Vietcong are going to collapse within weeks. Not months, but weeks." In 1967 Richard Nixon said: "It can now be said that the defeat of the Communist forces in South Vietnam is inevitable. The only question is, how soon?" In 1968 General Westmoreland said: "The enemy has been defeated at every turn."

And now, after 500,000 American soldiers, seven million tons of bombs and \$150 billion, Gerald Ford says only another \$722 million may "stabilize" the situation.

The President indicated that by not continuing to underwrite the Thieu regime in South Vietnam the U.S. would look bad in the view of other nations. In point of fact, the American involvement in Vietnam has been consistently deplored by most of the world, with such outstanding individuals as U Thant and Arnold Toynbee calling the war one of the most barbarous and unfair in history.

For more than three decades the Vietnamese nationalists have fought against the Japanese, the French and the Americans to achieve one independent country, and now they are about to succeed. Only then will peace come to Vietnam. DOUGLAS MATTERN
Palo Alto, Calif., April 10, 1975

To the Editor:

In response to the State of the World speech and the life-and-death emergency in South Vietnam which it highlighted, let us remember that Congress has the power to deny our country the right to meet its foreign-policy commitments and to aid, succor

and protect its citizens and friends. It cannot evade its responsibility, so it should convene, vote and take the praise or blame—now. If Congress fiddles while babies die by the thousands it should be known and remembered as the Nero Congress.

MARGARET W. PATTERSON
New York, April 10, 1975

To the Editor:

When I hear solemn discussions by eminent public figures on whether America's "word" will ever be good again if we do not give limitless support to South Vietnam, I seem to be transported into the beautiful, clear world of Victorian melodrama. There a girl who committed a single "fault" was tarnished for life; the shadow of a smirch on a gentleman's reputation meant a lifetime of atonement.

Is the community of nations composed of rigid moralists, none of whom would hesitate to spend \$150 billion to help a distant minor ally? Have the Governments of England and France, Germany and Japan, Russia and India, and so forth and so on, never fudged a little bit on their word when circumstances required it? Before what moral tribunal is the United States going to be dragged if, in this particular instance, it ceases to follow rigid principles with insane consistency and listens instead to the quiet, practical promptings of common sense?

ROBERT M. ADAMS
Los Angeles, April 11, 1975

To the Editor:

When Kitty Genovese was murdered in New York's Kew Gardens eleven years ago, twenty or thirty of her neighbors heard her screams for help in the evening but did not stir themselves to find out what was occurring or to provide help. Since that date, newspaper columnists and the public have been appalled at the unfeeling and insensitive character of the neighbors, and these neighbors themselves have been scarred in their self-respect and self-image—even though they had made no commitment to Kitty Genovese to help her if she was attacked.

The American people are now individually and collectively in the same position as Kitty Genovese's neighbors—except that our elected representatives have made promises that they will come to the assistance of the victims. If we stand by heedlessly while 500,000, or a million, or two million, South Vietnamese are systematically massacred in cold blood, the world will recognize our flint-hearted indifference. Even worse, we will individually and collectively wear in our minds a self-image and a self-respect blighted by the knowledge that we honor our word only if convenient, only if it does not demand too much of us. This will be a cost too enormous for us as civilized people and for our future status among nations.

We must provide President Ford's program of military and humanitarian aid to South Vietnam. We do not dare do less.

WILLIAM R. HANAWALT
Springfield, N. J., April 14, 1975