

# The Way to Leave Vietnam

APR 24 1975

By Daniel I. Davidson

WASHINGTON—All that remains in the Vietnamese war is the final killing. Our goal must be to minimize it. The critical immediate problem with which we must be concerned is the safe evacuation of the thousand-odd American citizens in South Vietnam.

There has some fear that their precipitate withdrawal would hasten the collapse of the Saigon regime, thereby making it appear that American actions rather than South Vietnamese decay had caused its fall.

Since the military outcome is no longer in doubt and every day of continued combat will result in more useless deaths and devastation, this apprehension is merely a continuation of the policy that Vietnamese lives must be sacrificed to protect perceived American world interests.

Another reason for the slowness of American evacuation is that it might make possible avoidance of the final horror of members of an enraged South Vietnamese Army, feeling betrayed and abandoned, turning on the fleeing Americans and engaging in

firefights with their military protectors.

There is also a dilemma of how to protect those Vietnamese who because of their service to Americans or our Vietnamese ally-fear for their lives or livelihoods. This number has been estimated at from 200,000 to millions. Without North Vietnamese cooperation, the alternatives are a token effort or full-scale American military operations.

A practical alternative is to negotiate directly with the North Vietnamese. They are aware of the impact that the executions of tens of thousands, or more, would have on the world.

They showed concern for foreign opinion previously when they backed away from threats to try captured American pilots as war criminals after global sentiment was mobilized against them in 1966. They might welcome, as Premier Fidel Castro did, a way to rid themselves of any continuing need to deal with their enemies. And the spectacle of Americans leaving and taking their Vietnamese "jackkeys" with them might also have some appeal to Hanoi.

Furthermore, in negotiating the Paris accords the North Vietnamese showed a strong desire for—and received a promise of—reconstruction aid from the United States. Whether or not we call it humanitarian aid or ransom—which we paid for the release of the survivors of the Bay of

Pigs invasion—there is some prospect of an arrangement whereby "our" South Vietnamese will be allowed to depart in return for significant amounts of money.

We have contributed so greatly to the devastation that in any event we do owe the Vietnamese people humanitarian aid regardless of the regime under which they live. And such aid has been appealed for both by North Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government, although not specifically from the United States.

The North Vietnamese, who regard us, just as we regard them, as having violated the Paris accords, would undoubtedly wish to retain and gradually release many South Vietnamese on our list of "friends" in some proportion to our making available humanitarian funds.

We should be under no illusion that at the end of a long and particularly brutal civil war there will not be summary torture and executions both in the heat of passion and as a conscious instrument of terror.

But negotiations offering generous long-term American humanitarian aid in return for humanitarian conduct on the part of the conqueror could serve to minimize the carnage.

It is surely better to make an effort in this direction than to make appeals to Congress for millions of dollars of military aid that could only increase the butcher's bill.

Reassuring those who are most likely to fear a Communist take-over would also lessen the likelihood of any last-ditch defense of Saigon and increase the possibilities of a politically negotiated surrender. It would at least be a step away from fraudulent concepts of "honor" and toward traditional American generosity and concern for the endangered.

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