

## Speeding Evacuation

Whatever the reason, the city of Saigon has not yet been attacked by the North Vietnamese force to which it is so tragically exposed. The United States has been a beneficiary of this fortunate delay, succeeding in the safe evacuation of many thousands of American citizens whose presence has constituted one of the most explosive elements in a tense situation.

But what has so far been accomplished is not nearly enough. The excuses for the United States Embassy's failure to implement a gradual evacuation plan many weeks ago have no relevance in the present period of eleventh-hour waiting. About 1,000 Americans are said to remain in Saigon even now—inexplicably, in disregard for their personal well-being and the provocation they still could unwillingly present in South Vietnam's fluid politics. Considering the collapse of the American-backed war effort and the disintegration of the Vietnamese leadership which the United States sponsored, it is difficult to understand why such a large complement is still required for "essential" official tasks. Even five hundred officials—the overly generous figure suggested by impatient Congressmen—seems no longer justified.

Particularly unnecessary in Saigon now is the presence of Ambassador Graham Martin, symbol of this country's loyalty to the fallen President Thieu. It is doubtful whether American diplomats on the spot have any proper role at all in the political contacts now being arranged among Vietnamese factions, including those prospective contacts between Saigon and Hanoi. But if American participation is indicated, it certainly should not be in the person of a senior diplomat who appears through all shades of Vietnamese opinion as the embodiment of the policy that has failed.

When it comes to evacuating South Vietnamese who consider their lives in danger, some confusion is inevitable at this late hour but it has been compounded unnecessarily. Those families who had been closely affiliated with the United States military establishment over the years may indeed have reason to fear for their personal safety under a Communist-dominated regime. To those persons, the United States has a clear responsibility.

With each passing day of successful evacuation, however, the danger recedes that a military operation will be necessary to bring out the most threatened Vietnamese. This is the one note of relief in an otherwise somber situation, in which the Administration may soon have to be negotiating with the new Saigon authorities to permit an orderly emigration of those Vietnamese who have reason to leave.