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To Rebuild Indochina

To the Editor:

With few exceptions Americans are relieved that President Ford has now made it official that the war in Vietnam is over and that all our nationals and their close Vietnamese associates are out of Saigon. But who can relieve our conscience of responsibility for two decades of ravaging of the land and innocent people who happened to be on the site of a geopolitical struggle between us and certain great powers?

Representative Ottinger is among those Congressmen quoted as thinking some restitution is due, but others, like Representative Clarence Brown of Ohio, say that he and the Congress are against any aid to places now controlled by the North Vietnamese and the Khmer Rouge. The Japanese after World War II made reparations to those Southeast Asian countries they had overrun; the West Germans did the same for the Jews who had survived their death camps; for many years German youths went summers to France to join French peers in restoration of the land and structures.

Congress and the Administration will undoubtedly take care of those Vietnamese who were evacuated, but should we forget the millions of peasants driven by our bombing and napalm into the camps and big cities, the transformation of the "rice basket of Asia" into a moonscape where food has to be imported? What of the hordes of half-blood orphans spawned by American men? What of the wrecked economy and community life there?

Probably the new Vietnamese Government, like that in Cambodia, will be chary about aid directly from the United States Government but would be glad to admit it from such respected and trusted organizations as the International Red Cross, the American Friends Service Committee, UNICEF and similar groups. If the Congress declines such an arrangement, at least Americans as individuals can support such organizations in the gigantic task of restoring the people of Cambodia and Vietnam. That might also help to assuage the troubled American conscience.

GEORGE M. HASLERUD

Durham, N. H., May 2, 1975