

Top U.S. Postwar Priority: The Rebuilding of Indochina

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# America's Share

## --\$7.5 Billion

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WASHINGTON — The 17 million people of South Vietnam whose grieving faces, shattered bodies and burning homes have become commonplace on American television news reports are becoming the No. 1 priority in U.S. postwar planning.

"These people will be the key to a long-range settlement of Vietnam," said one member of a six-man State Department task force studying rebuilding plans for Indochina. "When the fighting is over, it will be in their hands."

Details of the postwar aid program are being kept quiet until after the United States and Hanoi sign a peace agreement that provides for a rehabilitation program.

### Other Places

The agreement says that "the United States will contribute to the healing of wounds of war and to postwar construction" in North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia as well as South Vietnam.

Such a program has already been approved by Congress.

Sponsored by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), the program was adopted as part of the Foreign Assistance Act. It directed President Nixon to channel U.S. aid money for all of Indochina through a special fund to be created

by the United Nations.

At the time, the Nixon Administration supported the Kennedy provision, indicating it favored such aid going through a third party rather than directly from Washington.

### U.S. Share

Earlier in his Administration, Nixon suggested the U.S. share of such a fund would be \$7.5 billion over a five-year period.

Diplomatic sources indicate the Soviet Union and other nations would join in such a multilateral aid program.

It is nothing new to many Americans to pay for the reconstruction of countries that cost billions in U.S. taxpayer dollars to destroy. For

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example, a major rebuilding effort in North Vietnam will be powerhouses U.S. warplanes have destroyed not once but twice during the Vietnam conflict.

Reconstruction of hundreds of bridges, roadways and buildings will be an important part of the plan to permit the economies of North and South Vietnam to return to normal.

### Personal Problems

More important, however, will be efforts to deal with the personal problems of the Vietnamese. At the invitation of the Hanoi government, Kennedy has organized a team of physicians to survey health needs in North Vietnam.

In South Vietnam, Kennedy's Senate Subcommittee on Refugees estimates that more than 8 million persons have been displaced from their homes. More than 1 million were forced to flee because of renewed fighting this spring.

In addition, the subcommittee figures, the fighting has killed more than 350,000 South Vietnamese civilians while injuring 1.1 million since 1965. According to Kennedy, 600,000 have been made orphans.

"Resettlement of these people can become a very touchy political issue," said one Kennedy aide. "For ex-

ample, will the Saigon government let these people return to their homes in areas controlled by the North Vietnamese?"

### Rural Workers

Agriculture is the occupation of 80 percent of the South Vietnamese population. Efforts to win "the hearts and minds" of these rural Vietnamese has been the major cause of the Vietnam war.

Before heavy fighting started in 1965, U.S. aid programs were aimed at helping Vietnamese farmers. But the war has disrupted these programs in most of South Vietnam.

The Viet Cong, the South Vietnamese supporters of the Hanoi government, had strong support in most rural areas because of Communist efforts to restore the land ownership to the persons who did the actual farming.

After the French withdrew from Vietnam in 1954, the Communists, during a brief period of control, gave land deeds to South Vietnamese farmers.

In recent years, the Saigon government has been making an effort to redistribute the land to working farmers. But the land reform program has had its ups and downs because of opposition by a handful of South Vietnamese who own most of the better farmlands.