

Kissinger, Ford, and Congress: The Very Bitter End in Vietnam

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The collapse of South Vietnam in the spring of 1975 came about more suddenly than almost anyone anticipated, including the military planners in Hanoi. Putting together their strategic blueprints for unification in 1974, the North Vietnamese thought that victory would ultimately be theirs but probably not until 1979 and certainly not before 1976.¹ When South Vietnamese forces crumbled after the initial offensive in January 1975, however, the rout commenced. The North Vietnamese Politburo reconsidered its initial strategy and rushed to take advantage of the situation, resulting in national unification on April 30, 1975.

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1. Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam* (New York, 1977), 93. Van Tien Dung mentions a two-year plan beginning in early 1975, with the general offensive beginning sometime in 1976. Van Tien Dung, *Our Great Spring Victory: An Account of the Liberation of South Vietnam*, trans. by John Spragens, Jr. (New York, 1977), 25, and Hoang Van Thai, *How South Vietnam Was Liberated* (Hanoi, 1996), 140. General Thai was a longstanding senior officer. After serving as commander of the northern third of South Vietnam and then as the head of the Central Office South Viet Nam (COSVN) Military Committee, he returned to Hanoi in 1973 as a senior colonel general. For more on his career, see Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (New York, 1986), 351–352.

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The rapid demise of South Vietnam boded ill for the United States, which had spent two and a half decades trying to prop up an independent southern state. The loss brought even greater suffering and sorrow to those Vietnamese who had worked for Americans. A question asked at the time and since is who ultimately was responsible for what happened. One obvious answer is North Vietnam, which, after all, pursued the military policies that resulted in South Vietnam's collapse. But a quarter-century later, some commentators have argued that South Vietnam was still a viable entity in January 1973, at the time of the Paris Peace Accord, and that Nguyen Van Thieu's regime collapsed in April 1975 because Congress refused to appropriate the military assistance sought by the Nixon and Ford administrations.²

Were that only true, it would make a dramatic story, "a Greek tragedy where the principals are driven by their very natures to fulfill their destiny sometimes in full foreknowledge of the anguish that awaits them." Henry Kissinger, the author of those words, served as National Security Adviser and Secretary of State during the Nixon and Ford administrations. He is the only person to occupy both positions, let alone hold them at the same time. And he has been one of the most active—if not *the* most persistent—in asserting that it was Congress that severed the lifeline to the Saigon government. Most recently, Kissinger has written,

when the precarious peace wrought by the Paris Agreement was challenged, the United States, in the throes of physical and psychological abdication, cut off military and economic assistance to people whom we had given every encouragement to count on our protection. This con-

2. Most recently, Michael Lind has argued, "The South Vietnamese regime did not fall in 1975 because it was uniquely corrupt and illegitimate. It fell to Soviet-equipped North Vietnamese tanks only because the United States . . . had abandoned its allies in South Vietnam." Michael Lind, *Vietnam, the Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York, 1999), xvii. Former CIA director William Colby wrote that "President Ford and his Administration were powerless to influence the result of the contest" because of the cuts in aid to Thieu made by Congress. See William Colby, *Lost Victory: A First Hand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (Chicago, 1989), 351, 4–5. For an even more explicit accusation of Congress's role, see Anthony James Joes, *The War for South Viet Nam, 1954–1975* (New York, 1989). After describing how the "lawmakers in Washington . . . set out to cripple South Viet Nam's ability to protect itself," he concluded, "the Americans defeated the South Vietnamese, and themselves." *Ibid.*, 124–125, 145.

signed those we had made our wards to an implacable—and, in Cambodia, genocidal—Communist conqueror.³

Richard Nixon put the matter more bluntly. Having proven his government legitimate after the signing of the Paris Agreement in January 1973, Thieu demonstrated that Vietnamization, the policy whereby South Vietnamese armed forces assumed responsibility for fighting the war against the communists, was a success by holding on for over two years. According to Nixon, when Congress reduced Thieu's military assistance, it precipitated North Vietnamese aggression and led to the collapse of South Vietnam. "Congress's tragic and irresponsible action, which fatally undermined the peace we had won in Indochina," he concluded, was the principal reason for the tragedy that beset the region after 1975.⁴

The problems with these contentions are two: first, the insistence that peace had been won in 1973 does not stand up to scrutiny; second, the notion that Congress deserves blame for what happened subsequently is sophistic. The wish among Nixon and Ford administration officials, however, to fault Congress is understandable. Nixon's ire is not surprising, given his tendency to imagine threats and enemies, his difficult relationship with Capitol Hill generally, as well as with individual senators and representatives, and the congressional investigations into Watergate that forced his resignation.⁵

3. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York, 1999), 464; Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), 697. "The communist victory rapidly settled one of the perennial debates in the wake of the Vietnam War—whether the specter of the expected bloodbath in the wake of a communist takeover was a figment of the policymakers' search for pretexts to continue the war." Kissinger focused on Cambodia as a place where such genocide did occur and implied that Congress, which had pursued "a euphemism for abandonment" when it refused to appropriate additional funds to the Lon Nol government in the spring of 1975, was to blame for what happened under the Khmer Rouge from April 1975 to December 1978, when Vietnam invaded and sent Pol Pot and his followers into hiding along the Thai border. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 463.

4. Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York, 1990), 889. See also Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York, 1978), 205–210, for a discussion of the aid debate. Lewy concluded, "U.S. willingness to continue to supply [critical] commodities came into question as a war-weary Congress, in the face of a badly weakened executive, became increasingly anxious to liquidate any further American involvement in Southeast Asia." *Ibid.*, 206.

5. For an extensive treatment of Nixon, Kissinger, and the war, see Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kans., 1998). For more on Nixon's personality, see Stanley I. Kutler, ed., *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (New York, 1997) and H. R. Halde-

Nevertheless, because members of the Nixon and Ford administrations acted principally out of a desire to avoid blame for losing the war, Congress had to accept the responsibilities that went along with the ineluctable end to the nation's involvement in Southeast Asia in 1974 and 1975.⁶ The number of Vietnamese and Cambodians who suffered at the hands of the victors should have been considerably lower, but the White House avoided making critical decisions at necessary times. More specifically, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Henry Kissinger, as the key foreign policy adviser who served both Presidents, refused to draw up a strategy for extricating those Vietnamese and Cambodians who had worked for and with Americans. Instead, in an effort to absolve themselves of responsibility, key members of both administrations refused to acknowledge the rapidly deteriorating conditions in the months leading up to April 1975, delayed action repeatedly by pursuing unfeasible policies, and then attempted to saddle Congress with the ultimate burden of having lost Southeast Asia.

* * *

The story of the very bitter end begins with the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement on January 27, 1973, and includes the maneuvers that started immediately thereafter by the United States, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam to win what each had failed to gain at the negotiating table. What Kissinger and Nixon wanted was for stability to return to the region, so that they could attend to other pressing diplomatic matters, including détente with the Soviet Union, tensions in the Middle East, and the new relationship with China. Until Congress voted in June 1973 to stop funds for further U.S. military actions in Southeast Asia (with a cutoff date of August), one way the Nixon administration sought to maintain stability was through bombing Cambodia. The North Vietnamese insisted on pressing for unification, but their military forces were depleted from

man, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York, 1994). For Kissinger, see Robert D. Schulzinger, *Henry Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy* (New York, 1989), especially chapter 9 for the collapse of Southeast Asia, and Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York, 1992), 635–652, for the same.

6. Joes has asserted that the “conquest of South Viet Nam was not ‘inevitable.’” Joes, *The War for South Vietnam*, ix. I disagree, on the simple grounds that achieving Vietnam’s unification was always going to be more important to the Vietnamese than maintaining its division would be to the United States.

so many years of fighting, especially after the 1972 offensive.⁷ As plans began to take shape on how to achieve Hanoi's final victory, two factions developed: One favored a cautious policy of working to boost the domestic economy, while the other pushed for an aggressive military campaign. For their part, the South Vietnamese vacillated, alternately bolstered by their relative military superiority against North Vietnamese forces located in the South and worried about the Americans' departure, all the while remaining hopeful that President Nixon would honor his promises to come to their aid with military force if the North violated the agreement.⁸

The South Vietnamese position looked good on paper initially. Toward the end of 1972 and continuing after the Paris Agreement, the United States supplied massive military and economic assistance. The total aid package for 1973 came to \$2.3 billion. In 1974 the United States provided another \$1 billion, and for 1975 the White House proposed \$1.5 billion; Congress cut that amount to \$1 billion and later reduced it to \$700 million during the appropriations phase. All in all, for the three fiscal years 1973 through 1975, the Thieu government received, or was scheduled to get, about \$4 billion. In addition, South Vietnam received roughly \$1 billion of military equipment through the Enhance and Enhance Plus programs at the end of 1972 and into 1973. The result was that South Vietnam, a country about the size of New Mexico, had the world's fourth largest army, the fourth largest air force, and the fifth largest navy.⁹

7. William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York, 1987), 280–299; Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder, Colo., 1987), 98–99.

8. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (New York, 1986), 257–269; Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York, 1991), 281–299; James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: American and Vietnam, 1945–1994* (St. James, N.Y., 1999), 251–261; and Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War* (New York, 1997) are all good places to start for overviews of the final years. See also William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York, 1989), 396–402, for another succinct analysis of the situation from 1973 to 1975 in Southeast Asia. The most detailed accounts are supplied by Snepp, *Decent Interval*, Arnold R. Isaacs, *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore, 1983), and Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L. Schecter, *The Palace File* (New York, 1986).

9. Herring, *America's Longest War*, 253. Arnold Isaacs has estimated it at \$750 million, but he did not include the equipment left behind from two divisions of South Korean troops (38,000 men). Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 48. Jeffrey J. Clarke has concluded that in

According to one critic, however, the dollar figures exaggerated the value of the equipment provided. Nguyen Tien Hung, former special assistant to President Thieu, asserted that the “vast influx of supplies sent to Saigon under the Enhance and Enhance Plus scheme was for Thieu a demonstration for political purposes that had no real military effect because most of the equipment was old and needed to be replaced.” The equipment was basically there “so it could be replaced after the cease-fire. Unless the United States came up with spare parts and the funds to keep the vast flood of supplies in operation, Enhance Plus would be little more than an empty gesture.”¹⁰

Indeed, some of the equipment was not the latest used by U.S. armed forces, but most of it was current, effective, and appropriate for the South Vietnamese. And, with respect to aircraft, the South Vietnamese air force got F-5Gs as replacements for the F-5As, in violation of the Paris Agreement. Either way, South Vietnam received more from the United States than North Vietnam did from the Soviet Union and China. In comparing overall aid packages to the two countries, CIA analyst Frank Snepp has written that the total amounts differed only a little, but much more of the aid to South Vietnam (\$700 million, as opposed to \$300 million for North Vietnam) came in the form of military supplies. He has concluded that the South Vietnamese army enjoyed a sizable boost in its stockpiles compared with the North during 1973 and 1974. In addition, the Nixon administration’s initial requests had been inflated, under the assumption that Congress would cut the amount. Moreover, no one was entirely sure exactly what was available to the South Vietnamese armed forces, given the secret hoarding and rampant black-marketeering practiced by ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) officers.¹¹

early 1973 “The South Vietnamese were still better equipped than their opponents and, for the moment, had the upper hand, given the exhaustion of enemy forces following Hanoi’s latest offensive.” Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973* (Washington, D.C., 1988), 500. Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 247.

10. Hung and Schecter, *The Palace File*, 156, 157. For another discussion that is critical of the congressional reduction in aid, see General Cao Van Vien, *The Final Collapse* (Washington, D.C., 1985), 7, 46–57.

11. Snepp, *Decent Interval*, 161. Isaacs has written, “American intelligence found that Russian and Chinese military aid to Hanoi dropped sharply after the Paris agreement, although economic aid increased.” Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 334. Stanley Karnow has pointed out that the North Vietnamese “were rebuffed in both Moscow and Beijing in Octo-

More troubling than the amount of assistance was the way aid requests were tied to American political and diplomatic considerations, often without respect to the particular circumstances in Southeast Asia. Principal among those were Henry Kissinger's initiatives in other regions. As Snepp has put it, "Since the proposals were keyed to Kissinger's geopolitical priorities, the actual needs and deserts of the recipients were almost beside the point. Yet the Ford administration could not admit this to Congress without weakening its hand. So in the end, it chose to distort and equivocate, arguing that the supplementals were necessary to save South Vietnam and Cambodia from fiscal and psychological collapse, pending the next annual appropriation in June."¹²

Regardless of how much the United States provided, it could not overcome the substantial weaknesses that plagued South Vietnam. Thieu suffered from the same deficiencies as his numerous—and usually short-lived—predecessors, and the ARVN saw heavy losses in 1974 of men and weapons because of desertion. In the end, the government never overcame its lack of legitimacy, which, coupled with the inflation that hit in 1974, damaged general morale in South Vietnam. Unemployment rose dramatically after January 1973; inflation shot up later that year when the Arab oil embargo raised petroleum prices worldwide. The government exacerbated a bad situation by printing money, and Thieu did not endear himself to the population by jailing domestic critics.¹³

In short, despite the Paris Peace Agreement, South Vietnam remained entirely dependent on the United States. It imported rice, and "Thieu counted on the United States to be the final supervisor and enforcer of the peace"—a reliance quite clearly problematic in

ber 1973 when they asked for additional Soviet and Chinese military aid." Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, 1984), 660. For a more detailed discussion of Soviet assistance to North Vietnam, see Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996). For the Chinese side, see Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000), especially p. 136, for the table that lists the types and amounts of Chinese assistance from 1964 to 1975. Gaiduk and Zhai confirm that Soviet and Chinese aid to North Vietnam decreased after 1973. Snepp, *Decent Interval*, 108, 103.

12. *Ibid.*, 146.

13. Isaacs indicates that more than 200,000 soldiers deserted in 1974, and the army lost over 19,000 weapons. Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 328–329. Since Congress did not make its decision on the 1975 aid bill until the end of September, it is not possible that the reduction in assistance played a factor in most of the losses. Karnow, *Vietnam*, 660–661; Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 255; Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 290–291.

the face of concerted domestic opposition to the war itself. Yet, as Jeffrey Kimball has concluded in his detailed study of Nixon's handling of the Vietnam War, the President's aggressive efforts to promote the Paris Peace Accord "left many Americans unprepared for Thieu's defeat in April 1975."¹⁴

One of those caught off guard was Gerald R. Ford. Except perhaps for Harry Truman and Andrew Johnson, Ford arguably inherited the most difficult situation of any Vice President in the nation's history. Although the country was not at war when Ford assumed the presidency on August 9, 1974 (after having become Vice President only the previous December), it was riven by deep, emotional divisions largely caused by Watergate and Vietnam. Ford began his presidency with unfortunate decisions on both topics. Wanting to end the national trauma over Watergate, he pardoned Nixon for any and all crimes he might have committed. As a result, Ford's popularity plummeted from 72 to 49 percent less than a month after coming into office. Politically he never fully recovered. On Vietnam, he followed his predecessors, rather than taking advantage of his position as a new President, not tied to past failures. But this was not surprising, since Kissinger remained both his Secretary of State and National Security Adviser.¹⁵ For Ford to have acted differently, moreover, would have run counter to his conservative and moderate personality.

What could he have done? Facing the reality of a national commitment that began decades earlier to defend South Vietnam, what options did Ford really have available? Arnold Isaacs has asked the question a bit differently: "But what did the U.S. leadership really want?" From before the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement, what the White House wanted was a "disengagement of American troops from the shooting war, of course, and the return of American prisoners; and beyond that, only some form of honorable compromise that would not represent a visible, humiliating defeat of American objectives." Others have called it the "decent interval," referring

14. Hung and Schecter, *The Palace File*, 158; Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 369.

15. Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York, 1982), 162. Kissinger began in 1969 as Nixon's first and only National Security Adviser. He became Secretary of State in September 1973 and only reluctantly gave up his post as National Security Adviser in November 1975 when Ford decided to reshuffle certain cabinet positions. Brent Scowcroft became the new National Security Adviser.

to the period between the U.S. withdrawal and South Vietnam's collapse.¹⁶

When Ford took over as President, he faced a dire situation in Southeast Asia. All sides had flagrantly violated the Paris Agreement. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge had made significant gains in the countryside, isolating the government and causing a stream of refugees to flee to the capital of Phnom Penh. Within a few months of Ford's taking office, the CIA wrote off Cambodia as hopeless.¹⁷ Attention thus focused on South Vietnam. The administration decided to seek a supplemental appropriation from Congress in January 1975 as part of its effort to demonstrate that, no matter what the conditions in Southeast Asia, it was not giving up in the face of communist aggression.

The U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, Graham Martin, who had been on the job since June 1973, was asked to come up with a figure for the supplemental military assistance. He requested \$700 million. The administration decided to ask for only \$300 million, because, as Deputy National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft explained to Martin, "this amount represents the maximum the President felt could be obtained relatively quickly (and the maximum that the Department of Defense said it could now substantiate)." That this amount was not immediately needed by Saigon was not something the Ford administration admitted publicly; yet, it was realized nonetheless. Indeed, \$300 million was less than what South Vietnam still had available from the unspent balance (over \$540 million) of the original \$700 million appropriated by Congress for the fiscal year, but no one from the administration mentioned that either.¹⁸

Events in Southeast Asia precipitated the aid request. In late December 1974, Thieu launched an offensive at Phan Luc, where he hoped to demonstrate his army's prowess and impress the United

16. Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 69; Snapp, *Decent Interval*.

17. Snapp, *Decent Interval*, 145.

18. The \$700 million was broken down into \$510.7 million for the army, \$175.5 million for the air force, and \$13.8 million for the navy. The largest line item for the supplemental appropriation was \$261 million for ammunition for the army, with another \$42 million in ammunition for the air force. Graham Martin to Brent Scowcroft, Jan. 16, 1975, Jan. 5–April 1, 1975, NSC Convenience Files, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan; hereafter cited as GRF Library. Scowcroft to Martin, Jan. 16, 1975, Jan. 5, 1975–April 1, 1975, box 5, Brent Scowcroft Files, in *ibid.* Snapp, *Decent Interval*, 145–146.

States into providing more assistance. The idea backfired when the ARVN lost the battle. The North Vietnamese then initiated a series of attacks in late December in Phuoc Long province, in Military Region 3, north of Saigon. By New Year's Day, the provincial capital, Phuoc Binh, was surrounded; on January 7 the communists took control.¹⁹

Thieu hoped the loss would stimulate greater assistance from Congress. Martin immediately reported to Washington: "[W]e are in a new situation which calls for stronger, better organized diplomatic and public relations response than in the past." He emphasized the need for a strong show of support from the United States to calm fears of an American pullout, and he complained about a broadcast by CBS correspondent Marvin Kalb, specifically his statement that State Department officials were actually relieved that "Congress had imposed restraints" on the administration's efforts to aid the South Vietnamese government. Martin simply wanted the aid to allow the South Vietnamese "to freely choose their own form of government" and stressed the moral responsibility the nation had to assist South Vietnam.²⁰

Writing to CIA director William Colby, Martin outlined his thinking: "It is clear to me that the Congress and the American people can be brought to support action necessary for the support of Viet-Nam, if some way can be found to lay before them the whole truth about the current realities in Viet-Nam." He took solace in recent polls indicating that younger Americans supported aid to South Vietnam, a sentiment that he saw as rising from ethical concerns for an "obligation to the South Vietnamese, who would not have fought for so long if it hadn't been for the hope we gave them by coming into the war." Younger people, he asserted, were becoming suspicious of information being publicly disseminated about the South Vietnamese government and the ARVN, which "couldn't possibly be fighting on if the critics of the war were right and it were just serving a 'corrupt dictatorship.'" ²¹

19. Sney, *Decent Interval*, 135–136; Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 331–332; Vien, *The Final Collapse*, 58–68.

20. Martin to Kissinger, Jan. 8, 1975, p. 1, Camp David (Vietnam) (1)–(2), box P1, Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft Parallel File of Documents from Unprocessed Collections (NSC), GRF Library; *ibid.*, p. 2; Martin to Scowcroft, Jan. 16, 1975, pp. 5–6, Jan. 5, 1975–April 1, 1975, box 5, Scowcroft Files, GRF Library.

21. Martin to Colby, Jan. 16, 1975, pp. 4–5, Jan. 5, 1975–April 1, 1975, in *ibid.*

The Ford administration confidently predicted approval for the supplemental appropriation. Scowcroft cabled Martin that Kissinger "said that he did not believe Congress would want to assume responsibility for 50,000 Americans having died in vain." Ford was prepared to make the request for everything needed to ensure Vietnam's survival and also discussed various military options with Kissinger, including putting a carrier into the Gulf of Tonkin and deploying B-52s to Thailand.²²

All aid proposals (as well as any plans to recommit American forces to battle in Southeast Asia) depended upon approval and funding from Congress. Bob Wolthuis, an assistant to the President in the Congressional Relations Office, tried to rally support in January, arguing that members of Congress should visit South Vietnam to observe the situation personally: "The American people somehow have to be convinced that this expenditure is worthwhile." Advocating a commission "or task force or whatever you call it" comprised of members across the political spectrum, Wolthuis wanted to send them to South Vietnam. If their report turned out favorable, he believed a supplemental appropriation was very likely, with a full appropriation for the next year.²³

At the State Department, Linwood Holton offered similar advice to Kissinger. Opposition to a supplemental assistance bill for South Vietnam and Cambodia was tremendous, and the only way to get representatives to reconsider their positions was to have them see the situation in South Vietnam. "Our pitch should be that if, after personally seeing the current situation, they want to let these countries sink, so be it." Taking such action, moreover, would place "the burden of decision" on congressional shoulders, exonerating the White House in the process.²⁴

In a cabinet meeting at the end of January, Ford outlined the plan for the supplemental assistance for South Vietnam (and Cambodia as well, despite its precarious state) and asked for total support from everyone. He spoke of a "guilt complex" that afflicted the nation for withdrawing from Southeast Asia. Kissinger went further.

22. Scowcroft to Martin, Jan. 7, 1975, p. 1, box P1, Kissinger-Scowcroft Parallel File, GRF Library.

23. Memorandum, Robert Wolthuis to John Marsh and Max Friedersdorf, Jan. 14, 1975, Memo File: Jan.-Feb. 1975, box 3, Robert K. Wolthuis Papers, GRF Library.

24. Linwood Holton to Kissinger, Jan. 21, 1975, Vietnam: Visit by Members of Congress, Feb. 1975, box 5, Wolthuis Papers in *ibid.*

Although the United States had “brought 550,000 troops home with honor,” he worried about the impact that leaving South Vietnam to the communists would have upon the nation’s “international negotiating power” and “international negotiating ability,” in addition to its general credibility around the world. Ford told his cabinet that, two years after the signing of the Paris Peace Accord, South Vietnam faced imminent destruction, “and we apparently stand helpless, our fidelity in question, our word at stake.” Ford wondered whether other allies would not suddenly doubt the advisability of working closely with the United States. “In this world of ours, it is not without hazard to be a friend of the U.S.” The President foresaw grave consequences if Congress voted against the supplemental assistance. “The results would be an alien world in which the costs for our survival would dwarf anything we have ever known.”²⁵ Frank Snepp observed that when Kissinger traveled to the Middle East for another round of shuttle diplomacy, he “left instructions with his aides and subordinates: Do everything possible to ensure that Congress lived up to our aid commitments to Cambodia and Vietnam — not because the two countries were necessarily salvageable, but precisely because they might not be.”²⁶

The administration recognized the difficulty of getting Congress to approve the supplemental bill. In addition to encouraging a bipartisan group of representatives to visit South Vietnam, the White House investigated other funding sources for South Vietnam. Kissinger and Martin hoped that the recent normalization of relations between South Vietnam and Saudi Arabia would provide an opportunity for the Saudis to bolster Thieu, with Kissinger working on King Faisal to start the flow of assistance. This avenue became more important after the congressional visit was canceled, although it was later rescheduled. Once it became clear that something was in the works in Saudi Arabia through Kissinger’s efforts, Martin moved quickly, requesting \$1.5 billion over three years. Scowcroft replied, “an absolute maximum . . . is \$200–250 million a year. Your ball park will therefore have to be scaled down substantially.”²⁷

25. Notes of the Cabinet Meeting, Jan. 29, 1975, pp. 1–2, 1975/01/29 Cabinet Meeting, box 4, James E. Connor Papers, GRF Library. Talking points for same in *ibid.*

26. Snepp, *Decent Interval*, 176; this is Snepp’s interpretation of Kissinger’s instructions, not a verbatim quotation from Kissinger himself.

27. Martin to Scowcroft, Feb. 21, 1975, and Scowcroft to Martin, Feb. 21, 1975, both in Jan. 5, 1975–April 1, 1975, box 5, Scowcroft Files, GRF Library.

Undeterred, Martin wanted to explore the idea of Saudi oil credits to South Vietnam through the efforts of the American ambassador in Riyadh, James Akins. Kissinger gave Martin the green light but added,

We are not . . . very sanguine about the chances for success. The Saudis might think the GVN [government of Vietnam] is pushing things a bit too fast should it ask for credits so soon after the announcement of diplomatic relations; moreover, Saudi Arabia will probably want first to establish an oil price policy towards developing countries in general, and it seems unlikely that the GVN would be singled out for early preferential treatment.²⁸

While Martin worked on the Saudi connection, Kissinger and others tried to secure military assistance for Cambodia, where the situation was unraveling even faster than in South Vietnam. During a meeting in early March, after the return of a congressional delegation from Southeast Asia, three problems were identified. First, Kissinger was annoyed with U.S. ambassador to Cambodia, John Gunther Dean, for memoranda he was sending back to the State Department about the deteriorating conditions there. Second, responsibility for the situation in Cambodia would have to be laid publicly at the doorstep of Congress because of its decision to end the bombing in August 1973. Third, the administration held out hopes for a two-year-old Chinese initiative to bring Prince Norodom Sihanouk back to power in Cambodia. On the first matter, Kissinger asked, after sarcastically calling Dean “that genius in Phnom Penh” and someone “in his last post,” whether the ambassador understood “that he should not go running around Phnom Penh causing the collapse of the regime.” Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Philip Habib reassured Kissinger that Dean understood his responsibilities; besides, he was not the cause of problems there.²⁹

The Ford administration hoped Sihanouk would miraculously reappear and stabilize the situation. Kissinger wanted to determine

28. Kissinger to Martin, March 5, 1975, Jan. 7, 1974–Dec. 3, 1974, box 5, in *ibid.*

29. John Gunther Dean (not to be confused with John Dean, the White House counsel who provided crucial information on Watergate) frequently had difficulty getting Kissinger’s attention. When he was in Washington shortly after Gerald Ford became President in late August 1974, it was only after hinting to influential senators and representatives of his troubles that he was able to schedule a short meeting with Kissinger. For more, see Shawcross, *Sideshow*, 333–334.

whether this remained a possibility. In July 1973 the Chinese had informed the Americans that they were going to send a message to Sihanouk. They rescinded the statement twelve days later. There would be no message to Sihanouk after all. As Kissinger summed up the matter, "We told the Chinese then that we were prepared for Sihanouk to come back, for Lon Nol to go for medical treatment. Then the Chinese closed the whole thing off brutally. . . . There is no question that when the Chinese tell you they will pass a message that they support the message. I believe it really hurt Zhou [Enlai], who looked like a fool."³⁰

The discussion then turned to strategies for securing assistance. When Winston Lord, who at this time was head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, raised concerns about blaming Congress as a tactic, Kissinger cut him off: "If you don't . . . you'll not get the money. I've come to the conclusion that Nixon was right not to yield. You wouldn't have to do it in Nixon's obnoxious way, but every time they scream it means that you're hurting them." Later, he spoke again of saddling Congress with culpability for Cambodia, especially in light of the Nixon administration's predictions at the time of the bombing halt.³¹

The congressional delegation that had once been postponed in its trip to Southeast Asia returned from South Vietnam and met with President Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, John Marsh, and Max Friedersdorf two days later to issue its report. The eight member group, headed by Senator Dewey Bartlett (Republican, Oklahoma), included five Democrats and two other Republicans, all from the House. After a few observations, including one very negative assessment of Ambassador Martin from Donald Fraser (Democratic, Minnesota), the group addressed the administration's request for military assistance to Cambodia and South Vietnam. Kissinger responded with the Munich analogy: "98% of the people praised Chamberlain — two years later he was a pariah. I don't know how the people will treat those who led them to disasters, even if it was done in response to popular feelings." He then asked his pivotal question: "Can the United States have on its conscience pulling the plug on Vietnam?"³²

30. Memcon, March 3, 1975, pp. 4–5, Camp David (Vietnam) (1)–(2), box P1, Kissinger and Scowcroft Parallel File, GRF Library.

31. *Ibid.*, 5.

32. Memcon, March 5, 1975, Scowcroft MemCons, 3/5/75, box A5, Scowcroft Parallel File. Members of the delegation included Senator Dewey Bartlett (Republican, Okla-

From a congressional standpoint, the problem was the administration's insistence on a three-year, \$6 billion aid package to South Vietnam. Senators Frank Church (Democrat, Idaho) and James Pearson (Democrat, Kansas) had already responded that such a figure was simply impossible to bring to the floor. The amount would have to be reduced by a quarter in order to make it remotely viable, but even then it might encounter too much resistance. Still, as one Ford staffer put it, a decision on this issue had to be made quickly: "Time is running out!"³³

Meanwhile, Martin tried to bolster Thieu. Congress was not going to vote until after the Easter recess, on April 7 at the earliest. During the intervening weeks, it would be helpful for the cause if South Vietnamese troops could inflict a few defeats upon the enemy. Positive reverberations from such military actions would be felt in Washington. "I can assure you that the munitions will be forthcoming, but we can get [them] there quicker and in larger amounts if we have a few well-publicized victories to present as evidence of how well the RVNAF can really do."³⁴

Rather than improving, however, the military situation worsened when Thieu ordered the evacuation of Kontum and Pleiku provinces after the fall of Ban Me Thout in Military Region II in mid-March. It was not so much the order itself that caused a problem; it was the precipitate way in which the decision was made that fostered widespread panic and, in turn, led to a disastrous retreat. When CIA Director William Colby analyzed the situation, he reported that Thieu had been so concerned about "leaks to the Communists that he told no one in advance, not even his own commanders who were caught by surprise."³⁵

Ford and his advisers did not publicly give up hope. Ambassador Martin had flown to Washington in March to discuss the situation with the President. On his return to South Vietnam, he was ac-

homa), and House members John Flynt, Jr. (Democrat, Georgia), Paul McCloskey, Jr. (Democrat, California), Millicent Fenwick (Republican, New Jersey), Bella Abzug (Democrat, New York), Donald Fraser (Democrat, Minnesota), William Chappell (Democrat, Florida), and John Murtha (Democrat, Pennsylvania).

33. William Kendall to Max Friedersdorf, March 12, 1975, Indochina-U.S. Involvement, Jan.-March 1975, box 13, Max L. Friedersdorf Papers, GRF Library.

34. Martin to Nguyen Van Thieu, March 14, 1975, pp. 2-3, Jan. 5, 1975-April 1, 1975, box 5, Scowcroft Files, GRF Library.

35. The battle is analyzed in considerable detail in Vien, *The Final Collapse*, 68-82; Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 340-356; and Snapp, *Decent Interval*, 177-184. Minutes of NSC Meeting, March 28, 1975, p. 16, NSC Minutes Series, Kissinger/Scowcroft Files.

accompanied by U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Fred Weyand, who was to review the current situation and report back to Washington about the needs of the ARVN. In his letter to Thieu explaining Weyand's mission, Ford reassured him of the American pledge to South Vietnam.³⁶

Thieu wanted something along the lines of what Nixon had done in 1972. In responding to Ford's letter, he laid out two specific requests: "a brief but intensive B-52 air strike" against North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam "with an intensity comparable to what was done in the most critical hour of 1972," and the military equipment needed to "contain and repel the offensive." He appealed to "the credibility of American foreign policy, and especially to the Conscience of America."³⁷

The only funding Congress would approve was for humanitarian purposes, especially refugee assistance. Thieu's decision to evacuate the north-central highlands and the ensuing chaos caused by the disintegration of the ARVN led many former supporters of the administration's original request for \$300 million to reconsider. In early April Kempton Jenkins, the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, summed up the situation succinctly: "[W]e could ask for the moon in terms of emergency humanitarian assistance and get it. Any request for supplemental military assistance, however, is likely to be turned down cold."³⁸

The administration decided to go ahead with the request for military, not humanitarian, assistance anyway. Bob Wolthuis articulated two reasons. First, the Thieu government's prospects were hopeless without some tangible show of American support. Second, and far more important, was the President's political and historical standing. Wolthuis remarked, President Ford "must be on record strongly in support of an ally about to go under. I don't see that it would hurt him politically that much if he made the request and then were turned down by the Congress. If he does not make the re-

36. For more on the mission, see Hung and Schechter, *The Palace File*, 290–301. See also Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 405–406, for a brief but insightful discussion of Weyand's bias and its impact on his conclusions.

37. Thieu to Gerald Ford, March 25, 1975, through Wolfgang Lehmann to Scowcroft, March 26, 1975, Jan. 5, 1975–April 1, 1975, box 5, Scowcroft Files, GRF Library.

38. Memo, Kempton Jenkins to Marsh, April 2, 1975, Vietnam-General, 3/25/75–4/8/75, box 13, Richard Cheney Papers, GRF Library.

quest, the Presidency and the Ford Administration would be subject to the inevitable recriminations that will come in the months and years ahead.”³⁹ Wolthuis advocated a major presidential speech, circumventing Congress and going directly to the American people, to make the case for greater assistance to South Vietnam.

The administration had to walk a very fine line in its efforts to set the record straight and find Congress at fault for the situation in Southeast Asia without actually condemning particular members on Capitol Hill. Jack Marsh, a key White House adviser on congressional relations, proposed some language in a draft of a question-and-answer segment for the President on who was to blame for the deteriorating conditions in Southeast Asia: “Like many others, I am disappointed that over a period of years there has been both a diminution and limitation on our assistance to South Vietnam but it is not up to me to become involved in a national debate as to who in America is at fault.” Marsh reported to White House Chief of Staff Donald Rumsfeld that Kissinger wanted “a firm response . . . that does not permit the Congress to escape responsibility.” The existing language failed to take into account “a number of legislative actions in recent years that lead [*sic*] to the straw that broke the camel’s back.” In short, Kissinger believed “that the Congress failed to make the hard choices and accept the responsibilities required of the situation.”⁴⁰ Except just the opposite was true. While the administration worried about its place in history, Congress was prepared to authorize funds for humanitarian assistance; it would not, however, continue pretending that South Vietnam could be saved with military aid.

The administration was especially frustrated by the seventy-four members of the freshman class elected in 1974 and their truculent stance on assistance to South Vietnam, but to focus on that group missed the point. The overwhelming sentiment in Congress opposed providing additional military aid. George Mahon (Democrat, Texas) characterized the situation as one where the South Vietnamese army simply refused to fight: “The patience of the American people has been worn down on this issue.” Bob Michel (Republican, Illinois) told the administration, “The way the [South Vietnamese]

39. Memo, Wolthuis to Marsh, April 2, 1975, Vietnam-Supplemental Military Assistance (2), box 43, John Marsh Papers, GRF Library.

40. Memo, Marsh to Donald Rumsfeld, April 3, 1975, Vietnam-General, 4/3-7/75, in *ibid.*

army folded up makes military aid unconscionable.” Carroll Hubbard (Democrat, Kentucky), president of the Freshmen Democrats, concurred, citing constituents’ dismay over the South Vietnamese army’s poor performance, and Al Quie (Republican, Minnesota) offered the same. All indicated that aid should be limited to humanitarian assistance, with many members of Congress specifically mentioning aid for Vietnamese children.⁴¹

With Congress due back after the Easter recess, early April quickly became the critical time in the administration’s effort to secure passage of a military assistance bill, or any assistance bill for that matter. In addition, Ambassador Martin tried to move forward on his effort to obtain aid from Saudi Arabia. Cabling Ambassador Akins in Jidda, Martin now proposed \$300 million a year for three years. He assured Akins that, journalistic reports to the contrary, “what has happened here was [a] planned withdrawal of military force from Military Regions I and II to [a] more defensible line.” The doubt about Congress’s ultimate decision made Saudi assistance that much more important.⁴²

Between the Martin-initiated discussions in February and April came the assassination of Saudi Arabian leader King Saud al Faisal in late March. When South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Vuong Van Bac arrived in Riyadh in April, he met first with the U.S. Ambassador Akins in preparation for his meeting with the new ruler, King Khalid. Despite Bac’s later report to Thieu that “his mission had been successfully completed,” Akins cabled Martin that Bac had arrived “almost totally unprepared.” He had no knowledge about where South Vietnam got its oil, meaning that he did not know how much came from Saudi Arabia. This situation led Akins to comment that, had Bac met with the Saudis without such basic information, “he would have been told to go home and do his homework.” Akins

41. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 479, makes specific mention of the group. Memo, Charles Leppert to Marsh, April 2, 1975, Vietnam and Cambodia (2), box 26, Vernon C. Loen and Charles Leppert Papers, GRF Library. Memo, Vernon Loen, Charles Leppert, and Douglas Bennett to Friedersdorf, April 7, 1975, Vietnam and Cambodia (2), box 26, Loen and Leppert Papers. Weldon A. Brown cites a Gallup poll from mid-April 1975 that indicated “78 percent of the people opposed any additional military aid to South Vietnam and Cambodia.” Weldon A. Brown, *The Last Chopper: The Denouement of the American Role in Vietnam, 1963–1975* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1976), 327.

42. Martin to James Akins, April 9, 1975, April 9, 1975–April 28, 1975, box 5, Scowcroft Files (NSC Convenience Files: U.S. Embassy Saigon).

helped Bac put together some figures and offered advice about how to approach the Saudis.⁴³

Consistent with his claims of success, Bac informed Thieu of King Khalid's "willingness to help Saigon with either a direct loan or a guarantee of a U.S. loan to provide military aid." Although promising news, it was not enough. Thieu worried that the Ford administration's request for the \$722 million in military aid was going to be turned down. Fearful that such a decision would precipitate a complete collapse of the South Vietnamese army, GVN leaders suddenly decided to push for a postponement of the aid vote in Congress, seeking to replace the original proposal with a loan entreaty and using the promised Saudi funds as collateral if necessary. Special Assistant to President Thieu, Nguyen Tien Hung, left immediately for the United States with the mission of trying to convince key members of Congress to delay the aid vote.⁴⁴

While President Ford reviewed arguments for why the aid request had to be made, Press Secretary Ron Nessen offered another approach. He argued that, since Congress was going to turn down the offer anyway, why not acknowledge as much and prepare accordingly? Otherwise, "the President will be dragged out of the war against his will, while Congress will be seen as leading America out of the war, as the vast majority of Americans wish. It will be difficult for the President to regain the leadership role in foreign policy." Nessen proposed what every President since Dwight Eisenhower had had the opportunity to do with respect to the nation's foreign policy toward Vietnam: "break with the policies of the past." He knew that the compulsion to continue the war, to fight to the bitter end, was strong. "The previous four Presidents have not been able to either withdraw from the war or win the war. Their reputations

43. First quote is from Hung and Schecter, *The Palace File*, 319. Akins to Martin, April 9, 1975, p. 1, April 9, 1975–April 28, 1975, box 5, Scowcroft Files. Akins also complained about Bac's English and the fact that his aides spoke virtually no English. Interestingly, the issue of American aid to Israel came up, with the Saudi Arabian Deputy Foreign Minister, Mohammad Mas'ud, commenting on how strange the South Vietnamese situation appeared: "Congress withholds aid from an old ally to which it has the greatest obligations but it has no trouble in voting billions for Israel." In responding to Akins, Graham Martin hoped that South Vietnam's refusal to appoint an ambassador to Israel or move any offices to Jerusalem would stand well with the Saudis. Akins to Martin, April 9, 1975, pp. 2–3, and Martin to Akins, April 14, 1975, p. 3, box 5, Scowcroft Files.

44. Hung and Schecter, *The Palace File*, 319–328.



Figure 1. U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Fred Weyand, President Gerald R. Ford, and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in Palm Springs, California, April 5, 1975. Courtesy Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

have suffered because of this.” In the specific case of Gerald Ford, moreover, Nessen insisted he would “be seen as blindly and weakly following the policies of past Presidents, unable to formulate a dramatic new initiative of his own. Until now it is not ‘Ford’s war.’ But it will be if he requests more aid to keep the war going.”⁴⁵

Nessen’s recommendation went unheeded in large part because of Kissinger’s bureaucratic infighting. Indeed, according to Arnold Isaacs, Kissinger was “desperately anxious that if blame was to be put anywhere for the defeat, it should be on Congress.” In his address, which came shortly after 9:00 pm on April 10, Ford argued that South Vietnam still warranted assistance from the United States. The reasons varied, but all had been articulated repeatedly in the past. “I have concluded,” he said, “that the national interests of the United States and the cause of world stability require that we continue to give both military and humanitarian assistance to the

45. Memo, Ron Nessen to Rumsfeld, April 8, 1975, Vietnam-General, 3/25/75–4/8/75, box 13, Cheney Papers. See also Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 407.

South Vietnamese.” Rather than the \$300 million that had been denied earlier in the year or the \$722 million discussed for much of the year, Ford requested almost \$1 billion, “\$722 million for emergency military assistance, and an initial sum of \$250 million for economic and humanitarian aid for South Vietnam.”⁴⁶ What Ford did not mention was the plan to ask for another \$1.3 billion in military assistance for 1976, which had been recommended by Gen. Fred Weyand the day before. The figure for economic development, incidentally, was pulled out of a hat and had no correlation to any actual needs in South Vietnam, at least none that could be identified and addressed by the amount requested. As Kissinger admitted during the April 9 meeting, “I am inclined to think that anything between \$170 million and \$450 million might make sense. We can say that anything around \$250 million or in that area would make sense, *but there is no hard basis for any of these figures.*”⁴⁷ In short, Ford was asking Congress for almost a billion dollars within ten days (he had suggested a May 1 deadline less than thirty-six hours earlier, but in his speech he said April 19), with the intent of requesting over \$1 billion more in military assistance alone for 1976.

The request was not surprising. General Weyand had remarked a day earlier, “One thing I had in the back of my mind as I wrote my recommendations was that we owe it to them to help them or at least we should not deny them the help if they need it. If I did not believe it, I would not be here. Neither, I guess, would the rest of you.” Weyand’s proposal was even more interesting, counting as it did on the basic assumption that the American people would get behind it for two reasons: first, their long history of support to that point, and second, their apparent desire to help the South Vietnamese people, as evidenced during the orphan program and the refugee movement. But even he admitted, “Whether this sentiment translates into military assistance it is hard to say, but I believe it exists.”⁴⁸

Kissinger contended that the allied reaction would be critical,

46. Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 407. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 525, indicated that it was Ford who rejected Nessen’s proposal. Address by the President to Joint Session of Congress, April 10, 1975, p. 7, SP-2-3-36 4/10/75 (2), box 11, White House Central Files (WHCF), GRF Library. Isaacs points out that Kissinger was instrumental in pushing for the larger amount.

47. Minutes, NSC Meeting, April 9, 1975, p. 18, National Security Adviser, NSC Meeting File, 1974–77, box 1, GRF Library.

48. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

adding that in Asia “this rapid collapse and our impotent reaction will not go unnoticed. I believe that we will see the consequences although they may not come quickly or in any predictable manner.” The next evening Ford used much of the same reasoning before Congress. “I am also mindful of our position toward the rest of the world, and particularly of our future relations with the free nations of Asia. These nations must not think for a minute that the United States is pulling out on them or intends to abandon them to aggression.”⁴⁹

Another reason for the assistance was the need to protect the 6,000 Americans still in South Vietnam, as well as the tens of thousands of Vietnamese who had worked with the United States. Not securing the funds, Kissinger had argued on April 9, “would imperil [the] Americans, and it would make it impossible to evacuate any Vietnamese.” Ford reminded Congress, “I must, of course, as I think each of you would, consider the safety of nearly 6000 Americans who remain in South Vietnam and tens of thousands of South Vietnamese employees of the United States government, of news agencies, of contractors and businesses for many years whose lives, with their dependents, are in very grave peril.” But the figure on potential evacuees was considerably higher than the “tens of thousands” mentioned by the President. At one point, Kissinger spoke of 1.7 million, divided into eight categories—everything from American citizens and their relatives, U.S. employees and their dependents, to South Vietnamese officials and their dependents. Compounding the situation was Ambassador Martin’s refusal to begin evacuation procedures. When Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements asked why Martin was not fired for refusing to carry out the order, Kissinger responded that Martin was concerned about inciting “panic by beginning any evacuation process.” Moreover, since “no clear-cut decision” had yet been made by the President, Kissinger defended Martin: “Once we get a Presidential decision, I shall see to it that Graham Martin carries it out.”⁵⁰

In a background briefing at the White House prior to the President’s address, Kissinger reinforced the themes Ford wanted to establish. He raised the specter of tens of thousands of individuals

49. *Ibid.*, 15; Address by the President to Joint Session of Congress, April 10, 1975, p. 7.

50. Minutes, NSC Meeting, April 9, 1975, p. 16; Address by the President to Joint Session of Congress, April 10, 1975, p. 6; minutes, NSC Meeting, April 9, 1975, p. 22.



Figure 2. U.S. Army General Fred Weyand and U.S. ambassador to Vietnam Graham Martin, in South Vietnam, late March or early April 1975. Photograph by David Hume Kennerly. Courtesy Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

whose lives depended on U.S. assistance, “whatever the judgment may be of the original decision.” Of course, to stop all military assistance, “as many Congressmen have recommended,” would precipitate “an immediate collapse of the situation under the most chaotic conditions imaginable.” Kissinger also offered reassurances that the administration was not inclined to “look for scapegoats, that once the decision is made, it will not be used to start a national debate on who lost or who was responsible . . . because we owe it to the rest of the world to continue our international responsibilities as a united people.” One reporter pointed to the obvious problem with the secretary’s assertion—namely, in returning to Congress and asking for \$722 million in military aid three months after Congress had rejected \$300 million, wasn’t the administration “putting the monkey on the Congress’ back despite all of your disclaimers about not looking for scapegoats or not engaging in recriminations?” After conceding that placing blame for what was unfolding would depend on which decision was made regarding the aid, Kissinger asserted that

the two requests—for \$300 million in January and for \$722 million in April—were made under “totally different circumstances,” the major difference being the likelihood of having to evacuate “maybe tens of thousands of people.”⁵¹

One important segment of the general congressional attitude toward the Ford aid proposal became clear before the April 19 deadline. On April 14, Ford, Kissinger, Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, and Deputy National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft met with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at the committee’s request, to discuss the current situation and the preliminary report made to the committee by Richard Moose and Charles Meissner. Moose had been a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff since the early 1970s, when he, along with John Lowenstein, wrote a number of reports on Southeast Asia. Traveling with Meissner, Moose visited South Vietnam from April 2 to 13 as part of an effort to follow up on General Weyand’s mission and as part of congressional determination to obtain its own information on conditions there.

The two authors quickly got to the point: The military situation had deteriorated so much that the initiative rested completely with the North Vietnamese forces. Although the defensive perimeter around Saigon had initially offered some hope that ARVN forces could hold on for a while (at least a week, but beyond that, it was difficult to say), North Vietnamese Army “climatic moves could come sooner than expected and before the ARVN can reconstitute its shattered forces and consolidate a defensive strategy.” According to military and civilian experts, “only decisive military action by the United States could reverse the current situation.”⁵²

Given the military condition, the authors reported there was almost a “universal feeling that most of the approximately 5,000 U.S. personnel remaining in South Vietnam should be removed as rapidly as possible. Indeed, most observers felt that such reductions are dangerously overdue.” Other factors underscoring this position included the high, and ever-rising, level of anxiety, especially among

51. Background Briefing with Henry Kissinger, April 10, 1975, pp. 3, 4, 6, Foreign Policy Address 4/10/75, Vietnam & Cambodia (1), box 11, Ron Nessen Papers, GRF Library. For Kissinger’s discussion of this, see Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 525–526.

52. Preliminary Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations of Richard M. Moose and Charles F. Meissner, April 14, 1975, p. 3, Vietnam (2), box 5, William Kendall Papers, GRF Library.

the South Vietnamese middle class and wealthy; the utter disintegration of confidence in Thieu's leadership, causing a "near paralysis in the government"; and growing enmity toward Americans—especially the "publicity attendant to the 'baby lift' and some aspects of the public debate within the United States."⁵³ They concluded that now was the best time for decisive action.

Alarmed by these findings, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee wanted to speak with the President. The committee advocated "urgent action to reduce American personnel to the point where they could be lifted out in one lift." The Moose mission listed nearly 5,000 Americans remaining in South Vietnam, as of April 12, and indicated that there had been little progress over the previous week in reducing that number; it specifically cited Ambassador Martin as personally thwarting most efforts to increase the rate of reduction. This observation led Senator Jacob Javits (Republican, New York) to advise the administration to issue its orders on evacuating personnel "through someone other than Martin."⁵⁴

Ford asserted that chaos would erupt should an announcement be made through words or actions of an impending American evacuation. "If this is a meeting to plan an evacuation, this will panic the GVN totally." But when the President yet again raised the issue of military aid, Javits responded, "I will give you large sums for evacuation, but not one nickel for military aid to Thieu." And when Senator Stuart Symington (Democrat, Missouri) wondered whether the administration was not "holding Americans hostage for more aid," he was only articulating what had already been privately expressed by others, although there was not evidence to support this claim.⁵⁵

Discussion moved to extracting Americans and Vietnamese over a period of ten days to two weeks. A few senators expressed surprise at this duration, having concluded earlier that the administration was only talking about a one-time airlift of American personnel. Any proposal that might require the commitment of U.S. troops,

53. *Ibid.*, 3–5.

54. Memorandum of Conversation, April 14, 1975, p. 3, Scowcroft Memcons, 4/14/75, box 1, Scowcroft Papers. It was Senator Clifford Case who made the statement, but none of the other senators contradicted him with respect to the issue of speaking as a consensus.

55. *Ibid.*, 7, 4–5. Frank Snepp also mentions the thought, held by some, "that the Administration was deliberately holding the American community in place in Saigon to force a positive vote on the aid bill and to justify introduction of American forces." Snepp, *Decent Interval*, 359. I found no evidence to support this assertion.

Senator Church commented, would have to be considered carefully. Although the senators agreed that unlimited funds were available for the evacuation of Americans, reinserting U.S. troops to thwart North Vietnamese forces from interfering with the evacuation raised the specter of renewed casualties and perhaps a protracted conflict, especially considering the number of Vietnamese evacuees (175,000) mentioned by Kissinger. When asked by Senator Joseph Biden (Democrat, Delaware) why nothing had been done over the previous week, despite assurances from Philip Habib that something was in the works, Kissinger responded, "The plan for American evacuation is in pretty good shape. But we had a report that if we pulled out and left them in the lurch, we may have to fight the South Vietnamese."⁵⁶

South Vietnam's continuing deterioration, along with the pressure applied by the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had its effect. Kissinger cabled Martin on April 16 to increase substantially the rate of reducing U.S. personnel. "While I have great sympathy for your concerns about the impact on the political and military situation of a too rapid withdrawal, I must regretfully tell you that the U.S. political situation will not permit withdrawals at the rates you propose."⁵⁷ Some members of Congress were beginning to make the rate of withdrawal the focus of their attention, sidetracking the administration's military and economic aid request in the process. Other members simply expressed their concern for the remaining Americans. In a letter to the President, for example, Jack Brooks (Democrat, Texas) cited the "indecisiveness of the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam and the State Department in the face of this mounting threat to American lives."⁵⁸ This was exactly the kind of attention Kissinger wanted to avoid. However much the new schedule accelerating the rate of Americans leaving South Vietnam complicated Martin's task, Kissinger insisted on reducing the number of American citizens to 2,000 by the end of the following week.

On April 17 Khmer Rouge forces entered Phnom Penh, signaling the collapse of Cambodia. The day saw a flurry of communi-

56. Memorandum of Conversation, April 14, 1975, p. 5, Scowcroft Memcons, 4/14/75, box 1, Scowcroft Papers.

57. Kissinger to Martin, April 16, 1975, Martin Testimony-Support Materials, May 1974-Jan. 1976 (3), box 7, Scowcroft Files.

58. Jack Brooks to Ford, April 17, 1975, CO 165-2, 3/1/75-5/30/75, Sub. CO 165-CO 169, box 59, WHCF.

cations between Washington and Saigon, starting with Kissinger to Martin. While continuing to coax the ambassador with flattery (“You are doing a fantastic job”), Kissinger made it absolutely clear that the time had arrived for drastic action:

I want you to know that in the unanimous view of the agencies represented, the situation in Vietnam is rapidly and irretrievably approaching the worst case. It is clear to me—and the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) confirmed it—that as a result, interagency pressure for immediate evacuation of U.S. personnel has now become irresistible [*sic*]. Without exception the view of those at the meeting is that we must evacuate our people—and do so as soon as possible.

There was no more discussion about trying to hold on, waiting for a miracle in the form of aid to appear from Congress or Saudi Arabia and save the South Vietnamese government. Kissinger expressed his concern about “providing for those Vietnamese who have relied on us.” In another message sent the same day, Kissinger indicated that he saw his role in Washington as similar to Martin’s in Saigon: “to prevent panic.” Unfortunately, both were faced with increasingly difficult tasks. For Kissinger, “the Congressional situation is fast getting out of hand.”⁵⁹

For whatever reason, Martin either did not, or chose not to, understand what was being asked of him. First, he blocked efforts to evacuate Vietnamese.⁶⁰ Second, insisting that he had concluded after returning from his last visit to Washington that the situation was lost, Martin interpreted his actions over the preceding few weeks as constituting his push to “play for time until we can get the Americans out, and arrange our leaving so that the manner of it would not add a further disgrace to the sad history of our involvement.” And yet, Martin still spoke of the North waiting until May 19—Ho Chi Minh’s birthday—to take Saigon, with the real objective behind North Vietnamese actions being the “installation of a weak neutralist government which they can take over at their leisure.” Exactly why they would take this additional step was never made clear.

Citing inconsistencies in recent messages from Washington, Martin assumed that he should “keep the Mission open as long as there is a chance that there can be a negotiated settlement.” He

59. Kissinger to Martin, April 17, 1975, Martin Testimony-Support Materials, May 1974–Jan. 1976 (3), box 7, Scowcroft Files.

60. Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 411.

impugned the intelligence community for jumping to fantastic conclusions about the impending collapse, arguing that few were willing to give him a specific time-frame during which this would happen, although he did concede that the worst case mentioned was ten days before all hell broke loose. "The average," he immediately assured himself, "is a month to six weeks. . . . So I am prepared for the worst case, but wonder if we want to precipitate it by actions of our own until it is really necessary." Martin then tried to invoke what history would say about those who made the decisions regarding the United States withdrawal—whether they panicked "or coolly [*sic*] played the hand out."⁶¹ He ended his message by asking about parliamentary maneuvers to forestall a congressional vote on aid, lamenting that the \$300 million originally requested was not available and wondering what kind of progress Ambassador Akins was making with the Saudis.

Martin's remarks, steeped in denial, also contained a good deal of self-pity. In a subsequent cable to Kissinger, he railed against the apprehensive mentality pervading Washington. After citing what the intelligence and military communities had done to insulate themselves from criticism, Martin complained, "You have given me a directive which is almost impossible to fulfill without destroying the fragile fabric which still exists. The only one whose ass isn't covered is me. That has been true all along." Kissinger responded with a little one-upmanship: "My ass isn't covered. I can assure you I will be hanging several yards higher than you when this is all over."⁶²

As the light at the end of the tunnel grew ever dimmer, re-creations began to appear, despite earlier assurances from administration members that such efforts to assign blame would not happen. At one cabinet meeting, Kissinger resurrected a favorite Nixon line about how the North Vietnamese were emboldened by domestic dissent within the United States. "This is the first time that American domestic reactions, principally in the Congress, have impacted seriously on the action of a foreign government. It is the age old problem of internal domestic argument and competition effect-

61. Martin to Kissinger, April 17, 1975, pp. 1–3, Martin Testimony-Support Materials, May 1974–January 1976 (3), box 7, Scowcroft Files.

62. Martin to Kissinger, April 19, 1975, p. 3, Backchannel/Martin Channel (Saigon), box 1, Scowcroft Files; Kissinger to Martin, April 18, 1975, Martin Testimony—Support Materials, May 1974–January 1976 (2), box 7, NSC Files.

ing [*sic*] the conduct of foreign policy.”⁶³ Ford made similar accusations before a group of newspaper editors on April 17. He was accompanied by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, who mused that the fall of South Vietnam would have political ramifications during the 1976 campaign.

Jack Brooks immediately took exception. Questioning whether “additional military funds” would have made a difference, he also reminded Ford of his pledge to “not engage in recriminations or attempt to assess blame.” Indeed, what Ford and Rockefeller were attempting, Brooks insisted, was to sow divisiveness when what was really needed was a show of unity in order to protect the Americans remaining in South Vietnam and assure their safe departure.⁶⁴

Two important developments occurred in rapid succession. On April 21 Nguyen Van Thieu officially resigned; he left Saigon four days later. On April 23 President Ford spoke at Tulane University in New Orleans. Encouraged by two of his assistants, speechwriter Milton Friedman and special adviser Robert Hartmann, both of whom opposed Kissinger’s recommendations on handling Southeast Asia, Ford gave a speech that had not been shown to Kissinger beforehand. The President spoke of the end of the American involvement in Vietnam and then said, “America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned.” The audience of mostly university students broke into “a jubilant roar” when Ford uttered “finished,” drowning out the rest of the sentence.⁶⁵

63. Notes, Cabinet Meeting, April 16, 1975, p. 1, 1975/04/16 Cabinet Meeting, box 4, Connor Papers. One of the major claims made by proponents of aid to South Vietnam in 1975 is that the failure to provide it brought about the North Vietnamese victory. Although the evidence is there to indicate that the Vietnamese were encouraged when U.S. forces did not intervene, there is nothing to suggest that North Vietnam would have given up the fight even if Ford had unleashed the B-52s, sent in the Marines, or Congress had authorized the aid. Moreover, according to Arnold Isaacs, in 1974 “U.S. officials and the Vietnamese general staff collaborated in a study concluding that even with the full \$1.45 billion proposed by the administration, it was questionable whether Saigon could hold against a major Communist offensive.” Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 320.

64. Brooks to Ford, April 17, 1975, CO 165-2, 3/1/75-5/30/75, Sub. CO 165-CO 169, box 59, WHCF.

65. Isaacs, *Without Honor*, 435; Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 643-644. For a discussion of the Tulane speech, see also Robert T. Hartmann, *Palace Politics: An Inside Account of the Ford Years* (New York, 1980), 321-323. The sniping by former members of the Ford White House staff did not end in 1977. Writing long after Hartmann, Kissinger could not resist the temptation to strike back. Discussing the Tulane speech, he argued, “What the

These developments notwithstanding, Graham Martin continued rehashing the last twelve months, insisting that additional military assistance could have made a difference. In a message to Kissinger, he recounted the history of South Vietnam for the previous year, concluding that the situation had largely stabilized with the North Vietnamese having “[p]ut the war in the South on the back burner for an indefinite period [to] concentrate on the needed reconstruction in the North.” In the summer of 1974, however, everything fell apart. Particularly important was the congressional vote on military appropriations for South Vietnam, which allocated only one-half of what the administration had requested. “Hanoi took another look and decided to increase the military pressures,” according to Martin. Moreover, “[t]he Soviets, seeing an opportunity, increased their military aid . . . and, accurately, advised Hanoi that the propaganda campaign being mounted would further erode American will and determination to the point that they might score some startling success. When we did not react after Phuoc Long, the die was cast.” In Martin’s version of events, everything revolved around what the United States had or had not done. The North Vietnamese had no agency or initiative of their own, and the same held true for the South Vietnamese. “The election of the new Congress, Tran Van Lau’s interpretation to Thieu that there would be no further aid let alone any supplemental, pushed Thieu into the disastrously executed evacuation of M[ilitary] r[egion]s I and 2.”⁶⁶

This background was Martin’s way of addressing questions put to him by Kissinger. His response, coming on April 26, included the

gloaters over the paragraph in question failed to understand was that the war *was* over, with or without the paragraph; the only remaining issue was how many Vietnamese we could save and how much longer we would be permitted to carry on this essentially humanitarian activity.” Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 535–536. He also claimed, “The communist incentive to grant us that crucial time diminished when White House staffers masterminded a typical inside-the-Beltway bureaucratic victory.” The interesting point here is how Kissinger was considered a master at manipulating those very same bureaucracies.

66. Martin to Kissinger, April 26, 1975, p. 1, Backchannel Martin Channel (Saigon), box 1, Scowcroft Files. For a good discussion supporting Martin’s analysis in how the North Vietnamese read the American domestic political situation in 1974, see Van, *Our Great Spring Victory*, 18–19. Martin erred in his insistence that Soviet aid increased to North Vietnam in 1974. Martin to Kissinger, April 26, 1975, p. 2. See also Cao Van Vien for Thieu’s realization that Congress would not authorize any supplemental aid in the spring of 1975 and its effect on his decision to redeploy ARVN troops to the most populous areas, mostly in regions III and IV. Vien, *The Final Collapse*, 75–77.

assertion that even considering an American departure at this point was “a bit premature.” Martin was counting on an interim government, headed by Duong Van Minh, to permit an American embassy-level presence, although with largely “humanitarian aid responsibilities” rather than any military aid functions. That same day, Martin also complained about being told to reduce American personnel further. “Do you want us to abandon any interest in orphans?” he asked rhetorically, adding that he could evacuate the five persons with the International Red Cross if orphans were no longer a priority.⁶⁷

Back in Washington, a series of meetings of the Washington Special Action Group, the National Security Council, and the Cabinet were held over the next three days to assess options. The chaos in South Vietnam was reflected in the fragmentary and often contradictory information being discussed by the participants. When told that the Vietnamese communists were pursuing a two-track policy of military pressure coupled with negotiations, Kissinger responded that Martin had informed him of the latter but had not even mentioned the former.

The group encountered an embarrassing moment when Kissinger discovered that C-141 evacuation flights to South Vietnam had been stopped the previous day. After confirming with Scowcroft that he had not been informed of this development, he asked General George Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Why weren’t we told[?] It used to be that we were asked about these things before the order went out. Who gave the order?” Brown did not know but added that the smaller C-130s were still flying. Irritated, Kissinger asked whether there could not be better communication. And that was not all. When told that one South Vietnamese general had left the country because he did not get along with Duong Van Minh, presaging further deterioration in ARVN cohesion, Kissinger announced that he had to speak with the President about this since it was “in complete contradiction” to what Martin was telling him.⁶⁸

The WSAG met the next morning, April 29, to assess the situation. The helicopter evacuation, which had begun when the C-130s

67. Martin to Kissinger, April 26, 1975, pp. 1–3, p. 1, April 9, 1975–April 28, 1975, box 5, Scowcroft Files (NSC Convenience Files: U.S. Embassy Saigon).

68. WSAG Meeting, April 28, 1975, pp. 3–4, NSC Convenience Files-Far East, box A4, Scowcroft Parallel File. *Ibid.*, 4.



Figure 3. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Deputy National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft on April 29, 1975, the eve of the fall of South Vietnam. Courtesy Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

were unable to land, was nearing its completion. General Brown estimated it would be finished within three hours. Bad weather, in the form of the rainy season beginning, and an enormous increase in the number of Vietnamese clamoring to leave had delayed things. When Kissinger asked where the extra people were coming from, Brown responded, “Over the wall and through the gates. I don’t know where they are all coming from[.]” That was enough for Kissinger. “Can someone explain to me what the hell is going on! The orders are that only Americans are to be evacuated. Now, what the hell is going on?”⁶⁹

William Clements at the Defense Department responded that there were still between 350 and 400 Americans in South Vietnam. General Brown said the number was closer to 600. Morning rain and fog had delayed the start of the operation, which had also been delayed two hours because of a time miscalculation. Brown promised an investigation. After receiving word that the President wanted to see him, Kissinger wrapped up the meeting. Before his departure,

69. WSAG Meeting, April 29, 1975, p. 2, NSC Convenience Files-Far East, box A4, Scowcroft Parallel File.

however, Brown made one request: "There are still some 400-odd Americans still in the compound at the Embassy. The Ambassador has got to get those people out of there. Can't you tell him to get them out of there?" Kissinger snapped, "Those are his bloody orders, goddamn it!" Brown responded, "I know, but he's not complying." An exasperated Kissinger finally replied:

There is no reason for Americans to still be there. He has been ordered by the President of the United States to get them the hell out of there. My impression was that you said that it would take one and one-half hours for the evacuation and that it would be only Americans. At four o'clock this morning I find out that nobody is off the ground yet. Now what the hell is going on? Yes, I'll instruct the Ambassador to get those people out, but he's been ordered to get those people out a hundred times. Look, call Martin [addressed to Scowcroft] and tell him of the concern here. We can't tell him how to load his helicopters. I'll call him.⁷⁰

He then left to brief the President.

Thirty minutes later Ford opened the cabinet meeting with a recapitulation of the last two weeks. Kissinger provided details and added figures for the number of evacuees over the previous forty-eight hours: 4,650 from Saigon, of whom between 500 and 600 were Americans, and another 45,000 Vietnamese from other sites. The decision to include Vietnamese was made "on the ground" by Martin and Gen. Homer Smith, "presumably in order to prevent panic." The rest of the meeting was spent discussing the number of refugees, where they would be located, and what actions needed to be implemented to take care of them. Ford indicated that Kissinger would hold a press conference later that day; in the meantime, no one was to speak publicly about the situation; the President emphasized the need to speak "with a single voice."⁷¹

In the afternoon, Press Secretary Ron Nessen opened with a short statement from the President: "This action closes a chapter in the American experience. The President asks all Americans to close ranks to avoid recriminations about the past, to look ahead to the many goals we share, and to work together on the great tasks that remain to be accomplished." He then introduced Secretary of State

70. *Ibid.*, 5.

71. Notes of the Cabinet Meeting, April 29, 1975, pp. 1-3, 1975/04/29 Cabinet Meeting, box 4, Connor Papers.

Kissinger to provide details and answer questions. Kissinger spoke briefly. He emphasized the administration's efforts to achieve "the most humane solution that was possible," how officials had "sought to bring about as humane an outcome as was achievable under the conditions that existed," that the principal objective had been "to fulfill the human obligation" toward the South Vietnamese who had worked with and for the United States—in short, "to bring about as humane a political evolution" as possible. He reiterated the President's call for unity: "We do not believe that this is a time for re-creation. It is a time to heal wounds, to look at our international obligations, and to remember that peace and progress in the world has depended importantly on American commitment and American conviction." He took some solace in the evacuation of 55,000 Vietnamese, which he hoped would contribute "to a political evolution that may spare the South Vietnamese some of the more drastic consequences of a political change, but this remains to be seen."⁷²

* * *

On April 30, 1975, North Vietnamese troops entered Saigon, ending the struggle and placing all of Vietnam under one government. As Van Tien Dung described the moment, "From now on, our land was unified in one span, our network of mountains and rivers one again, peace truly unambiguous, independence truly complete."⁷³

On the other side, the rush to assign blame for what happened began well before the last helicopter left Saigon and has continued since. From the efforts in 1975 to secure additional military assistance for South Vietnam to Kissinger's third volume of memoirs

72. Press Conference of Henry A. Kissinger, April 29, 1975, pp. 1–3, Vietnam-Evacuation: Saigon (1), box 64, Philip Buchen Papers, GRF Library. Nearly two decades later, Kissinger concluded that the effort to promote a moderate political evolution ultimately failed and asserts, "In Cambodia, of course, the genocide did occur." But in Vietnam, it did not, although many Vietnamese associated with the Thieu regime were placed into reeducation camps. Here Kissinger plays a sleight-of-hand trick, jumping from the communist victory in Vietnam to Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge did embark upon a genocidal effort, motivated by rigid observance of communist ideology. He does concede that "the suffering was less drastic" in Vietnam but then equates the reeducation camps with concentration camps, immediately evoking Nazi Germany and the final solution. Whatever excesses Vietnamese government officials committed after 1975, they did not include the systematic extermination of a segment of the population. Indeed, when compared with other revolutions, the Vietnamese takeover was relatively peaceful and certainly less disruptive as a result of government policies than, say, even the American Revolution. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 697.

73. Van, *Our Great Spring Victory*, 246–247.

published in 1999, members of the Ford administration have sought to exonerate their own conduct and to fault Congress for what happened to South Vietnam and Cambodia. Far more troubling than the congressional decision to decrease the funding to two governments in Southeast Asia destined to collapse, however, was the refusal of the Ford administration to provide adequate transportation for the thousands of South Vietnamese and Cambodians who had worked so closely with Americans and were very likely to be persecuted after the communist victory. Rather than trying to lay blame for what was happening at the feet of senators and representatives who correctly understood both the hopelessness of the situation in Southeast Asia and accurately reflected domestic fatigue with the war, the Ford administration should have prepared and implemented a systematic operation to save those in the greatest danger much sooner. Congress said it was willing to provide the necessary funds and should have been held to that promise.

South Vietnam collapsed because its government, from its inception in 1954 until April 1975, was an artificial, corrupt, and unresponsive entity that never garnered sufficient popular support from the Vietnamese. As such, it could not compete with the organizational effectiveness of the communists and the promise they offered of an independent and unified Vietnam, one free from foreign intervention either directly or through puppet governments. Soviet and Chinese assistance to North Vietnam was critical to military operations throughout the war, and no less so in late 1974, but that aid was more than matched by the United States.

The South Vietnamese and Cambodians who could not leave in the spring of 1975 were indeed betrayed, but not by the U.S. Congress. The argument for military assistance to Southeast Asia in 1975 rested upon preserving the credibility of the nation's foreign policy decision makers—one of the major reasons for entering into the war in the first place. The principal actors in this situation—Nixon, then Ford, but always Kissinger—could not imagine any other way of handling the matter, although options existed. Instead, concerned over political ramifications and their places in history, the participants played the roles, to use Kissinger's analogy, of actors in a Greek tragedy, their fates known to all, including themselves, yet compelled to carry out those actions that would ultimately lead to their downfall. Except that here the real tragedy lay in how many other people were harmed as a result of their decisions. They were the ones who suffered the most at the very bitter end.