

(Printed in full)

December 3, 1980

Editor  
The Washington Post  
Washington DC

Dear Sir,

The coming of the Reagan administration may provide a chance to recognize and re-examine the increasingly absurd premises underlying U.S. refugee policy. At present, assorted oppressors from Hanoi to Havana in fact dictate and control the flow of refugees to the United States, while we obligingly pick up the tab. No doubt it was our humanitarian duty to do so after our self-inflicted debacle of 1975, but we should note that the world has not rushed in to praise our virtue, and for a good reason: The world can recognize a cop-out when it sees one.

Our policy, however humanitarian in the short run, has been a cop-out because it has studiously refused to name or deal with the real problem. The conventional wisdom of those who took control of our policy after 1975 was that, after the U.S. withdrew its presence from Southeast Asia, then there would no longer be any reason for the Communist victors to treat their subjects with hostility or oppression. In fact, of course, the mountains of Laos are littered with the corpses of the Hmong, Cambodia has been one long blood-letting, and the world has been flooded with refugees. And their numbers are open-ended. Hanoi can, at any time and at its sole convenience, impose on the West a greater refugee flow than we can handle or absorb.

What new options do we have? As regards Laos and Cambodia we should study the lesson of Afghanistan. There, at long last, oppressed peoples have been able to obtain at least some access to equipment and arms with which to defend themselves, thanks to the courage and loyalty of their Islamic neighbors. And what has happened as a result? First, the Afghans have been able to retain a large measure of freedom and security in many parts of the country. Second, the cost of oppression has been raised to the oppressor. Third, no wider war has resulted - and all this on the very borders of the Soviet Union. Note that there has been no "forward" policy on the part of the West. No one has affirmatively armed and trained Afghan refugees to re-enter the country and throw out the oppressors. All that has been done is to refrain from the sort of embargo that we have so piously imposed in Laos and Cambodia against those who would resist oppression or, as in the case of the Hmong, simply try to save themselves from genocide.

A second option is to start letting the word to the victimized peoples of former South Vietnam that flight and exile in the West is no longer an available solution for the great mass of those who would like to leave, and that they must remain at home and work out their own salvation, however long it may take.

Our present refugee policy subsidizes oppression. Oppression should be made to pay its own costs. Only then will the refugee problem be on the road to solution.

4621 Q St. NW  
Washington DC 20007  
(202) 965 - 2139

Sincerely

*Ogden Williams*  
Ogden Williams