

W
FILE SUBJ.
DATE SUB-CAT.
4/75

VII. 7 Apr 75

UNITED KINGDOM

W 1

TIMES EDITORIAL ANALYZES U.S. ROLE IN VIETNAM

London TIMES in English 6 Apr 75 p 17 LD

[Editorial: "Where Washington Will Not Fight"]

[Text] Comfort comes easy to some people out of the ghastly events in Vietnam. To the left they are simple proof of American perfidy. To the right they only confirm that worldwide communism is a menace to freedom everywhere. To some they are the natural epitaph on 20 years of American foreign policy in Indochina; marked, as they believe, by duplicity or confusion at every stage and ending now in ruin for Vietnam and a catastrophe for the U.S. To others they prove that the whole of East-West detente is an evil delusion of the great powers. Both views are marked by a fierce certitude. Mingled with the horror, there is an unmistakable note of triumph at this vindication of a deep conviction.

To the Vietnamese, most of this is academic. They are suffering a terminal personal tragedy. What can it matter to them who is to blame? Few peasants or refugees have chosen to die for a political system. To them, survival for themselves and their children is the only business which concerns them. They are engulfed by thirst, famine, panic, suicide and death. Sitting in the security of London, one must hesitate before deploying these wretched victims once more as pawns in the global political argument.

For neither side, in this of all wars, has right on its side. The North Vietnamese have used the time since the Paris agreements to build massive forces for the attack. Their posture in the agreements was the purest cynicism, not diminished by the role of the U.S. in sharing and cultivating it. Dr Kissinger spoke of a "decent interval" being needed before Saigon could be left on its own. But he surely knew that the decency of the interval was to be judged by its effect on the image of Washington. It was not determined by an honest judgment of Saigon's viability. Both the Americans and the communists knew in Paris that the present assault would come some time, and that it might be irresistible.

The Americans, for their part, are playing out the last act with a pitiful lack of dignity. The President rails at Congress, as if a few million dollars could change the course of history. His personal responses to the rout have revealed a politician and a man of depressing inadequacy. No one would ask Washington to go to war again. But there is every sign, as we report from Saigon today, that thousands of the most vulnerable South Vietnamese who worked for the U.S. may simply be left to be butchered. To the outside world it seems that along with the rout of Saigon's army may go the rout of Washington's capacity to make its moral obligation effective.

Now is not the time to trace yet again how all this came about. It is legitimate, however, to pose the questions it raises for the future. Indeed it is vitally necessary to do so. They are questions not just for secretaries of state and foreign relations committees, Kremlians and Politburos. They concern the foreign offices of Europe. Even more, they concern and must be answered by the ordinary people of Europe and America.

Vietnam and Cambodia do not constitute the collapse of American power in the world. They are local events. But, with so much staked there, they have a world impact. They have begun a debate about where American power is directed and where it can be credibly sustained.