

We should, I suggest, beware of subjective spill-over, into Canadian perceptions, of concepts or responsibilities that are specifically American. To say that we have humanitarian reasons to take into Canada some of the Vietnamese refugees, including those evacuated by the USA, is one thing; to suggest that in the last days of American presence in South Viet-Nam we had the need, the ability or the responsibility to do what the USA did is, I suggest, quite another matter; and it seems to me quite obviously wrong. I wonder whether much of the criticism we have seen and heard recently does not come from the failure of some to draw a clear distinction between the American and Canadian positions.

4. DECISION TO LEAVE

As it was, when the decision was made to withdraw Canadian Embassy personnel from Saigon on April 24, the Canadian Government faced a choice. We could have simply stayed. The experience of those who did so suggests that we would have served no practical or useful purpose by doing so. Alternatively, we could have, as some did, stayed until the American evacuation a few days later. We would then have risked being caught up in a hazardous and unsatisfactory evacuation from a Canadian standpoint, under the direct protection of the armed forces of the USA, with all that would imply, or we could have been left behind by default rather than by choice (as some foreign missions were) in circumstances which could have left our Mission hostage to the unknown policies of the new authorities. What I mean by that is that we considered that the continued presence of our Embassy could have serious consequences, since our decision to accept refugees in Canada corresponded to the humanitarian instincts of Canadians but appeared to conflict with the desires of the new authorities in South Viet-Nam. Our final choice was to withdraw our Mission in an orderly way, using Canadian means, taking with us those Canadians and their Vietnamese dependents who wished to leave, and those Vietnamese citizens who could be gotten out under the constraints of the situation, of our resources and of our responsibilities. That is what we did. Other countries, including Australia, Britain, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Netherlands and West Germany, took the same decision earlier or on the same day. Even with the benefit of hindsight, we would not have done otherwise, and I suggest that events have proved that we did the right thing.