



BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE: After Saigon's Fall

August 24, 2023

The impacts of the war in Vietnam did not end when Saigon fell. Our contributors review Amanda C. Demmer's "After Saigon's Fall: Refugees and US-Vietnamese Relations, 1975-2000" and consider remembrance, policymaking, and humanitarianism in U.S.-Vietnamese relations after the U.S. withdrawal.

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1. The Rhythm of Winning the Peace: Rotor Blades

Robert J. Thompson III

Since the Vietnam War, modern American foreign policy beats to the rhythm of helicopter rotors. U.S. aviation brought American troops to battle in both the Vietnam War and the war in Afghanistan, and helicopters evacuated them when U.S. intervention was over in both places. In near-mirror-image fashion, the startling end to both wars emerged live on television for the world to see as American aircraft evacuated people in Saigon in 1975 and again in Kabul in 2021. Reverberations from the fall of Saigon and its U.S.-backed government caused ripple effects that shaped international relations for years after. We can similarly expect to see the local, regional, and international consequences of the fall of Kabul for years to come.

Wars are messy affairs, but so is the peace that follows. Two years after the Taliban's recapture of Kabul on Aug. 15, 2021, the United States is still reconciling with the two-decade long war in Afghanistan that produced few, if any, tangible benefits. Even before the American military began its airlifting efforts in Kabul, the discourse drew parallels to what happened decades earlier in Saigon. Articles in the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* gave readers images and arguments similar to those that the same newspapers made in 1975.¹ As the United States deals with the fallout from its

¹ For examples, see Rex Huppke, "A 'herculean' Afghanistan evacuation: Why We Should Pause to Appreciate What Our Military Accomplished," *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 31, 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/columns/rex-huppke/ct-afghanistan-withdrawal-evacuation-biden-military-kabul-flights-huppke-20210831-ghgvong5fjhvtns2kmxlofzlfq-story.html>; Clay Risen, "Afghanistan, Vietnam and the Limits of American Power," *New York Times*, Aug. 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/17/us/politics/vietnam-war-afghanistan.html>; and Gillian Brockell, "The

newest, longest war, mechanics similar to those that operated during and after the Vietnam War are again in motion. In the years following the end of the Vietnam War, Americans argued about resettling Vietnamese refugees — especially those who had worked with the United States — in America. U.S. policymakers debated what, if any, relationship Washington should have with Hanoi. Since the fall of Kabul, Americans have grappled with their nation’s responsibility to Afghan refugees and whether the United States should have diplomatic relations with the Taliban.

Given the parallels between the post-Vietnam and post-Afghanistan eras, readers could not have received a timelier book in 2021 than Amanda C. Demmer’s *After Saigon’s Fall: Refugees and US-Vietnamese Relations, 1975-2000*. Demmer’s work begins where the war ends and illustrates the challenges of winning the peace after the war. At the start of her book, Demmer reminds us that wars do not end abruptly.² After the guns fall silent, adversaries continue to fight via memory and political wrangling. Although America did not diplomatically recognize the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for two decades after the war, Demmer shows how the two nations engaged with each other during the period of non-recognition. The activism of Congress, non-governmental organizations, and private citizens ensured that the United States and Vietnam remained tethered to each other, even when they had no formal relations.³

Fall of Saigon: As Taliban Seizes Kabul, the Vietnam War’s Final Days Remembered,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 16, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/08/15/saigon-fall-kabul-taliban/>.

² Amanda C. Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall: Refugees and U.S.-Vietnamese Relations, 1975-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 6.

³ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*.

Humanitarianism and U.S.-Vietnamese Relations

After Saigon's Fall centers on Demmer's masterful explanation of policymaking during a period when the American and Vietnamese militaries were no longer fighting, but relations between the two countries were by no means at peace. Coupled with a convincing argument, Demmer's well-researched book incorporates elements of cultural, diplomatic, and memory history to offer both a holistic retelling of events and a robust, multilayered analysis. Demmer skillfully illustrates how humanitarian issues drove U.S. postwar engagement with Vietnam. Americans understood the debate surrounding the massive influx of thousands of South Vietnamese refugees in humanitarian terms, and migration formed "the basis of normalization between Washington and Hanoi."⁴ In 1975, President Gerald R. Ford established refugee resettlement as central to postwar U.S.-Vietnamese relations by framing American ties to South Vietnam as a "profound moral obligation." Ford had "fashioned the American obligation in a way that did not have obvious limits — temporal or demographic."⁵ Casting refugee resettlement this way changed America's image from aggressor to savior. Operation Babylift offered a way to "rescue" orphaned South Vietnamese babies while signaling to the world that the United States cared about people despite having caused so much death and destruction in Vietnam.

Yet, while Ford set the tone for U.S. refugee resettlement, lawmakers hashed out the terms of U.S. policy toward Vietnam in Congress. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had given U.S. presidents, beginning with Lyndon B. Johnson, a "blank check" to deal with Vietnam as they saw fit, but the War Powers Act of 1973 gave control back to Congress.

⁴ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 2.

⁵ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 38.

The legislative branch used public hearings during the Carter administration to exert pressure on the White House regarding refugees and America's relationship with Vietnam.⁶ During the Reagan administration, members of Congress hammered out policies regarding POW/MIA accounting and the release of South Vietnamese from reeducation camps. Demmer attributes Reagan's recasting of the Vietnam War as a "noble cause" to the policymaking focus on humanitarian issues.⁷

What unfolds in *After Saigon's Fall* is essentially another conflict over people. As Martin Clemis shows in his recent work on pacification in South Vietnam, the Vietnam War was very much a war of control over South Vietnamese people in order to reach a desired political outcome.⁸ In the war's aftermath, the Indochinese refugees crisis bred conflicts among U.S. citizens and between nations over responsibility, resettlement, and repatriation. Unofficial and informal relations between Americans and Vietnamese on these issues paved the way for President Bill Clinton to facilitate normalization between the United States and Vietnam in 1995. As part of the diplomatic agreement, Hanoi agreed to pay Washington hundreds of millions of dollars in postwar concessions. Despite having lost the war, the United States had managed to secure a monetary prize from the victor and present itself as having won the peace.⁹

⁶ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 91.

⁷ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 128.

⁸ Martin Clemis, *The Control War: The Struggle for South Vietnam, 1968-1975* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2018).

⁹ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 214.

Reviews

As a whole, the roundtable commends Demmer for her well-argued book. All reviewers appreciated that the author broke the arbitrary limitations often associated with war. From that common starting point, each reviewer emphasized different themes found in the book, including remembrance, policymaking, and humanitarianism.

For David Kieran, *After Saigon's Fall* is first and foremost a work on memory. Kieran addresses the periodization of the Vietnam War, which is often far too neat, praising Demmer for using remembrance to show that wars have untidy endings. He places Demmer's contribution alongside that of Marilyn Young, Mary Dudziak, and Patrick Hagiopan, all well-respected historians on Vietnam War remembrance. Kieran highlights a second major strength in the book: Demmer's treatment of refugee and resettlement policy in America. That Demmer includes the Cold War context, not just the Vietnam War context, is something Kieran praises. Kieran sees Demmer launching an evolution in Vietnam War historiography and recommends that graduate programs add her book to their reading lists.

Y Thien Nguyen highlights the superb job that Demmer does of navigating the space between war and peace, enriching readers throughout the process. In doing so, Nguyen finds that Demmer succeeds in demonstrating how to overcome the periodization boundaries of the Vietnam War. Nguyen contends that another strength of *After Saigon's Fall* is the author's use of non-executive actors to explain policymaking from 1975 into the 1990s. Nguyen also praises Demmer for the inclusion of South Vietnamese voices as part of her cohort of non-executives. By discussing the role of Khuc Minh Tho and the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association in the policymaking process, Demmer gives much deserved agency to an overlooked yet significant source of

Vietnamese-American activism. Nguyen hopes Demmer's book will inspire subsequent work on Vietnamese agency, noting that the scholarship as a whole will benefit from more Vietnamese sources.

Amber Batura's review echoes the others in its praise of Demmer's efforts to blur the lines between war and peace. It's in this space, Bature argues, that Demmer provides a useful lesson on how policymaking permits a power to achieve its ends without resorting to the use of military force. The postwar collaboration that took place in Washington among politicians and non-governmental actors proved far more effective than the actions that the United States took during the war. Despite their differences, interested parties worked together to achieve common goals in the postwar era, producing something the war could not — policy victories for Americans. Like Nguyen, Batura sees room for the inclusion of more Vietnamese voices in *After Saigon's Fall*. In general, Batura is curious about how policymaking in Washington affected South Vietnamese refugees in the United States. More specifically, Batura wants to know more about the role of South Vietnamese refugees as non-executive actors and the role, if any, they played in the normalization of American relations with the very people who killed their family members. Their perspectives, contends Batura, are too briefly present in Demmer's work.

Conclusion

All of the reviewers here express hope that historians of this war will work harder to incorporate South Vietnamese perspectives and voices into their discussions of the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Demmer provides such an informative narrative, which includes great coverage of the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association, that the reviewers were left wanting to know more about other Vietnamese-Americans and their roles in shaping U.S. policy. Scholars who use Demmer's book as a model for

studying other postwar relationships, such as that between the United States and Afghanistan, would do well to amplify Afghan views. What happens to Afghan refugees awaiting resettlement in America could very well emulate the history laid out in *After Saigon's Fall*. Time will tell if Americans use Congress to enact new policies, building off those made possible by those highlighted in Demmer's work, to win another war for peace.

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2. Memories of Vietnam: Refugees, Remembrance, and Resettlement

David Kieran

In the summer of 2021, as Afghanistan rapidly fell to the Taliban, comparisons to the end of the Vietnam War were legion. Secretary of State Tony Blinken dismissed the metaphor, arguing that “This is manifestly not Saigon,” but many Americans weren’t having it. As the *Washington Post* pointed out, “the scenes of chaos and desperation . . . made those comparisons inevitable.”¹⁰ Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) inveighed that “President [Joe] Biden’s decisions have us hurtling toward an even worse sequel to the humiliating fall of Saigon in 1975.”¹¹ That comparison was made visually as well. Hubert van Es’ famous photograph of a CIA helicopter on a Saigon rooftop with a line of people waiting, most in vain, to be evacuated — an image that *The Guardian* noted had “immortalised America’s defeat in Vietnam” — was suddenly everywhere.¹²

To be sure, linking Afghanistan and Vietnam visually was not an innovation. Van Es’ well-known image had had a renaissance more than a decade earlier, when President Barack

¹⁰ Gillian Brockell, “The Fall of Saigon: As Taliban Seizes Kabul, the Vietnam War’s Final Days Remembered,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 16, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/08/15/saigon-fall-kabul-taliban/>.

¹¹ “Afghanistan Likened to Fall of Saigon as Officials Confirm Taliban Take Kandahar,” *The Guardian*, Aug. 13, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/13/afghanistan-likened-to-fall-of-saigon-as-us-and-uk-send-troops-to-aid-evacuation>.

¹² *The Guardian*, “Afghanistan Likened to Fall of Saigon.”

Obama announced a troop surge that would precede a U.S. withdrawal.¹³ In the summer of 2021, though, it returned with a vengeance. It circulated on social media, appeared in editorial cartoons, and in articles in the *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *Foreign Policy*, and the *Military Times*.¹⁴ Other outlets, like National Public Radio and ABC News, published an image that seemingly updated the van Es photograph: another helicopter, this time a UH-61 Chinook, “fl[y]ing over the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.”¹⁵ If what the picture signified was somehow too subtle for some viewers, CNN made the comparison explicit by broadcasting the two images on a split screen.¹⁶

The prominence of the van Es image in public discourse about the fall of Kabul reveals the extent to which it signified the ignominious end of a misbegotten war. It was not,

¹³ David Kieran, *Forever Vietnam: How a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 217.

¹⁴ Marie Morelli, “Editorial Cartoons for July 11, 2021: Afghanistan Pullout, Olympics Runup, Delta Variant,” *Syracuse.com*, July 11, 2021, <https://www.syracuse.com/opinion/2021/07/editorial-cartoons-for-july-11-2021-afghanistan-pullout-olympics-runup-delta-variant.html>; Brockell, “The Fall of Saigon,” *The Guardian*, “Afghanistan Likened to Fall of Saigon;” Michael Hirsh, “Is Biden Haunted By Vietnam? Should He Be?” *Foreign Policy*, July 9, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/09/is-biden-haunted-by-vietnam-should-he-be/>; and Howard Altman, “‘What’s Happening Now Is Worse’: Midway Skipper Who Pushed Choppers Off Deck in Fall of Saigon,” *Military Times*, Aug. 15, 2021, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2021/08/15/whats-happening-now-is-worse-midway-skipper-who-pushed-choppers-off-deck-in-fall-of-saigon/>.

¹⁵ “Taliban Fighters Enter Kabul as Helicopters Land at U.S. Embassy,” *National Public Radio*, Aug. 15, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/15/1027806863/the-taliban-seize-jalalabad-cutting-off-kabul-to-the-east>; and Luis Martinez and Conor Finnegan, “Chaos at Kabul Airport Amid Struggle to Flee,” *ABC News*, Aug. 16, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/afghanistan-updates-chaos-kabul-airport-worlds-response/story?id=79474962>.

¹⁶ “‘This Is Not Saigon:’ Blinken Says Afghanistan Is Different than Vietnam,” *CNN*, Aug. 15, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2021/08/15/antony-blinken-afghanistan-is-not-saigon-sot-sotu-vpx.cnn>.

however, the only narrative of Vietnam that emerged in the summer of 2021. *USA Today* published an article by Thuan Le Elston, in which the author argued, “Former Vietnam War refugees have been watching Kabul in horror.”¹⁷ The chaos in Kabul reminded another Vietnamese American of “her own family, decades earlier and thousands of miles away.” She told a reporter for *AP News* that “it took years for her family to finally get out of the country.”¹⁸ Newspapers documented the assistance that Vietnamese Americans were offering to Afghan refugees.¹⁹ The headline of a *Vox* interview with Phuong Tran Nguyen did not mince words: “The U.S. Needs to Meet its Moral Obligation to Afghan Refugees.” The article began by asserting, “After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the US took in more than 100,000 Vietnamese refugees in less than a year, a policy the government desperately needs to learn from as it deals with the impact of withdrawing from Afghanistan.”²⁰ Clearly, the cultural memory of post-Vietnam refugee resettlement was emerging as a critical terrain on which Americans would make sense of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The emergence of this discourse highlights one reason that Amanda Demmer’s deeply researched and elegantly written book, *After Saigon’s Fall: Refugees and U.S.-Vietnamese*

¹⁷ Thuan Le Elston, “Fall of Kabul, Fall of Saigon: Their Horror Was Our Horror. Anguished, We Pray for a Miracle,” *USA Today*, Aug. 16, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2021/08/16/afghanistan-fall-kabul-fall-saigon-vietnam-horror/8146925002/>.

¹⁸ Amy Taxin, “‘We Were Them:’ Vietnamese Americans Help Afghan Refugees,” *AP News*, Sept. 20, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/united-states-immigration-philanthropy-seattle-washington-e3bc392f34f30c433a5a75ba8c11f58d>.

¹⁹ Madeline Ngo, “Vietnamese Americans, Once Displaced Themselves, Mobilize to Help Afghans,” *New York Times*, Oct. 3, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/03/us/politics/vietnamese-americans-afghan-refugees.html>.

²⁰ Li Zhou, “The US Needs to Meet Its Moral Obligation to Afghan Refugees,” *Vox*, Aug. 19, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22627834/afghanistan-refugee-policy-vietnam>.

Relations, 1975-2000, is a timely and necessary contribution to the literature on war and society in contemporary U.S. culture. Although Demmer's book may hold policy lessons for the current moment — indeed, she has written and been interviewed about the connection between Vietnam and Afghanistan — *After Saigon's Fall* also emphasizes the intersection of memory and policy by showing how the evolving remembrance of the Vietnam War shaped debates over refugee policy and how refugee policy became the grounds on which the war's meaning was worked out.²¹ As a result, Demmer provides critical insights that may prove instructive as scholars confront the next stage in America's culture of perpetual warfare.

Policy and Remembrance

After Saigon Fell is indebted to, and adds to, a body of scholarship by historians like Marilyn Young and Mary Dudziak that questions the notion that wars have tidy and discrete temporal boundaries.²² As Demmer explains, “the scope and complexity of the normalization process demand that historians interrogate the war's protracted ending with the same suspicion and curiosity that they have afforded the conflict's beginnings.”²³

²¹ Amanda C. Demmer, “With Afghanistan's Fall, the U.S. Confronts a Moral Necessity It Faced Before,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 16, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/08/16/afghanistan-falls-us-confronts-moral-necessity-it-faced-before/>; and Stuart Anderson, “Learn the Lessons of Vietnam to Help Afghan Refugees,” *Forbes*, Sept. 2, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2021/09/02/learn-the-lessons-of-vietnam-to-help-afghan-refugees/?sh=248ab8bf7505>.

²² Mary L. Dudziak, *Wartime: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Mark Philip Bradley and Mary L. Dudziak, eds., *Making the Forever War: Marilyn B. Young on the Culture and Politics of American Militarism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021).

²³ Amanda C. Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall: Refugees and U.S.-Vietnamese Relations, 1975-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 6.

In making this compelling claim, Demmer also calls upon scholars not to leap as quickly as they might — and, indeed, have — to studying the remembrance and memorialization of a given conflict. A sentence earlier, she argues, “Although the iconic photograph of the U.S. evacuation is a tempting place to . . . pivot to exploring the war’s memory, legacy, and lessons, it is imperative to continue examining U.S.-Vietnamese relations after 1975.”²⁴ Demmer is correct that, with a few notable exceptions, scholarship on the Vietnam War after 1975 has focused primarily on issues of memory of the war and less on U.S. policy toward Vietnam.²⁵ By insisting that scholars pay close attention to refugee and resettlement policy as a critical element of the normalization process, Demmer adds considerably to the scholarship on this period.

Refugee policy, Demmer maintains, was “the basis for ongoing US-Vietnamese ties during the crucial twenty years after the fall of Saigon.”²⁶ However, she also shows how at almost every stage the policies that the United States pursued worked to elide the more troubling aspects of America’s involvement in the war and retroactively justify American violence. As an example, she points to Ronald Reagan’s infamous declaration that the war had been “a noble cause.”²⁷ As one of the foremost historians of the war’s remembrance, Patrick Hagopian explains that rhetoric and the memorial practices that it facilitated “promoted ‘healing’ by evading some of the crucial moral and political questions that . . .

²⁴ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 6.

²⁵ Notable exceptions include Edwin A. Martini, *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975-2000* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); and Michael J. Allen, *Until The Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

²⁶ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 227.

²⁷ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 4.

troubled Americans in the postwar period.”²⁸ *After Saigon’s Fall* illustrates that refugee policy similarly often worked to gloss over difficult questions about the war’s wisdom and morality and, often, to support revisionist narratives of the war. Demmer explains, for example, that the Ford administration’s evacuation policy, Operation Babylift, cast Americans as moral actors saving suffering Vietnamese orphans: “Framing the children as orphans enabled American officials to craft a compelling rescue narrative while, at the same time, obscuring the role the violence unleashed by the American military played in creating conditions that required rescue in the first place.”²⁹

A similar logic, she argues, attended the Carter administration’s unwillingness to create policies that would enable Amerasian children — evidence of “the intimate ties between the US and South Vietnamese, which were almost always asymmetrical and violent” — to migrate to the United States.³⁰ Vice President Walter Mondale’s condemnation of the Vietnamese regime for the plight of the so-called Boat People “required a large dose of historical amnesia about the systemic violence the US government unleashed in Vietnam prior to 1975.”³¹ She goes on to write that “the myth of orphaned Amerasians allowed US officials to sidestep uncomfortable realities about US policy causing humanitarian crises rather than simply responding to them.”³² Demmer argues that casting these children as orphans was in many cases an overstatement that ignored, or was ignorant of,

²⁸ Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 16.

²⁹ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 32.

³⁰ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 101–02.

³¹ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 90.

³² Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 102.

Vietnamese culture and family structure. Moreover, by not asking how those children came to need assistance, the United States could once again cast itself as a noble actor.³³

Demmer similarly adds considerable insight to the study of post-1975 U.S.-Vietnamese relations by exploring how refugee policy unfolded alongside POW/MIA policy. Much has been written about the politics and mythology of the latter, and particularly about how debates over normalizing relations with Vietnam were shaped by calls for “the fullest possible accounting” of missing servicemen.³⁴ Demmer expertly engages with this history but asserts that it was part of a wider discourse in which POWs and MIAs were linked to Vietnamese refugees and reeducation camp detainees to cast family separation as one of the war’s most persisting tragedies and family reunification as a precursor to normalization.³⁵ As she explains, “the [Reagan] administration put full accounting and migration programs on equal footing insofar as it framed each as a ‘humanitarian’ issue that the former adversaries had to resolve before they could address ‘political’ questions.”³⁶ According to Demmer, doing so served a domestic political purpose as well. As I have pointed out elsewhere, relying on the work of scholars like H. Bruce Franklin and Michael J. Allen, “The notion that the Vietnamese government has impeded efforts at recuperation or even kept American prisoners after the end of the war has shaped a memory of the conflict that underscores Vietnamese leaders’ inhumanity, American leaders’ indifference, and American soldiers’ victimization.”³⁷

³³ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 43.

³⁴ Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*; and H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A., or Mythmaking in America: How and Why Belief in Live POWs Has Possessed a Nation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

³⁵ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 97.

³⁶ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 120.

³⁷ Kieran, *Forever Vietnam*, 38.

The Reagan administration's emphasis on the treatment of Amerasians and reeducation camp prisoners, Demmer shows, was of a piece with using the POW/MIA myths to recast the United States as benevolent, the Vietnamese as insidious, and the conflict as justified. Noting that "Reagan's rebranding of the conflict as a 'noble cause' should have been a tough sell," she explains that "charges that Hanoi continued to detain American prisoners of war and used their remains for diplomatic bargaining chips, oppressed innocent children for no other reason than their mixed parentage, and incarcerated former South Vietnamese soldiers in camps that violated their human rights, however, all supported Reagan's charges of American beneficence and Vietnamese perfidy."³⁸ Perhaps more importantly, she shows how activists pressing the United States to address family members who were still being held in reeducation camps capitalized on a cultural obsession with POWs by pointing out that they "had irrefutable proof that their loved ones, who were former American allies, were being held against their will in Vietnam."³⁹

These arguments, and the intersections that Demmer finds between refugee and resettlement policy and other, often more prominent, political and memorial discourses highlight the critical contribution that *After Saigon's Fall* makes to the study of the war and its legacies. Refugee and resettlement policy, she convincingly shows, was a critical component of normalization. But it was never just about people or diplomatic relations. It was also a critical means through which narratives about the war's meaning, and the global impact of American militarism, could be crafted, circulated, and sustained.

³⁸ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 128.

³⁹ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 139.

The Contingency of History

Another strength of *After Saigon's Fall* is that it shows how refugee and resettlement policy evolved in response to the actions of a diverse group of stakeholders and a range of domestic and international political factors. Demmer details how changes in presidential administrations shaped attitudes toward refugee and resettlement policy. The Ford administration, she illustrates in a beautifully written first chapter, explicitly sought to facilitate migration out of South Vietnam when “it would have [cost] very little to stay silent and simply evacuate Americans” and made a morally admirable, if politically difficult, decision to do so.⁴⁰ Despite the Carter administration’s professed commitment to human rights, “the South Vietnamese were not among [President Jimmy Carter’s] top priorities when he entered office or, arguably, at any point during his presidency.” Carter “feared political fallout” over the economic impact that admitting refugees might generate.⁴¹ Reagan, as we have seen, embraced these issues as part of his larger strategy of revisionism and remilitarization.⁴² President George H.W. Bush was less tolerant of POW/MIA activists than his predecessor but was more open to repatriating some refugees to Vietnam.⁴³ It was under President Bill Clinton, the first president to have come of age during the Vietnam War, that normalization was achieved.

The varying inclinations of these five presidents are significant and meticulously documented, but the real strength of Demmer’s work is her call for historians to look beyond the executive branch and focus on what she terms “nonexecutive actors” as well

⁴⁰ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 56, 48.

⁴¹ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 62, 67.

⁴² Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 98.

⁴³ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 179, 182.

as on the domestic and international political factors that shaped U.S. approaches to these issues.⁴⁴ Throughout, Demmer shows in rich detail that it was human rights activists, including members of the Vietnamese diaspora, and members of the House and Senate, often Vietnam veterans themselves, who were the primary drivers of refugee and resettlement policy.

She details, for example, the role that Amnesty International and, later, activist Ginetta Sagan played in focusing attention on reeducation camp detainees, and how the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association advocated for family reunification. I did find myself wishing to know how these issues played out beyond these groups and in the wider Vietnamese diaspora in the United States and whether other forms of grassroots activism shaped the debate. However, Demmer expertly shows the extent to which relatively small organizations played an outsized role in influencing U.S. policy, to the point that “Hanoi recognized the [Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners] Association’s importance to the American stance” on reeducation camp detainees and “wished to meet with the FVPAA’s leadership.”⁴⁵ At the same time, she highlights how a small group of Vietnam veteran senators that included future presidential nominees John Kerry and John McCain became increasingly vocal in the debates over refugee policies and normalization. Demmer maintains that their prominence in these debates was made possible by the Reagan-era celebration of Vietnam veterans and the 1991 Persian Gulf War.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 10–11.

⁴⁵ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 150–51, 170.

⁴⁶ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 152, 187, 191.

The emphasis on these actors is critical because it reveals the degree to which the issue of refugee resettlement crossed political lines in this era, as well as the impact that the increasing attachment of political power and public influence to veteran status has had in the post-Vietnam era.⁴⁷ As Demmer shows, “As Americans regained pride in their military and veneration for their troops throughout the 1980s, veterans in Congress cashed in on this new political capital to exercise a leadership role in the normalization process” that included making it nearly impossible for Reagan to avoid signing the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act.⁴⁸ Her attention to this issue highlights the continuing need to study the social construction of the veteran in American culture and the very real political power that military veneration generates.

At the same time, *After Saigon’s Fall* places U.S. policymaking in a global context, illustrating that refugee resettlement policy was at once a factor in and shaped by the global politics of the Cold War. Unlike many histories of the Vietnam War, Demmer explicitly places the debate over refugee policy, and normalization more generally, in the larger context of the Cold War. She meaningfully juxtaposes the Carter administration’s embrace of global human rights with its approach to Vietnamese refugees and skillfully documents how other nations in the region contended with an influx of Vietnamese asylum seekers and responded to U.S. policymaking in ways that often frustrated American officials.⁴⁹

More broadly, she shows how “larger Cold War considerations colored the American assessment of what was occurring in Southeast Asia and imbued the United States

⁴⁷ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 148.

⁴⁸ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 152.

⁴⁹ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 60–61, 65, 86.

Vietnam policy with heightened significance.”⁵⁰ She thus illustrates how the Carter administration placed the Cambodian genocide and the Third Indochina War in a larger Cold War context, as well as how the U.S.-Soviet rapprochement of the 1980s “had profound ramifications for internal SRV [Socialist Republic of Vietnam] politics and US-SRV dynamics.”⁵¹ Perhaps more importantly, Demmer attends to the motivations and agency of Vietnamese leaders throughout this period, showing both how Vietnamese officials were often able to resist U.S. demands but also that, as the Cold War waned and Vietnam’s internal politics shifted, they were forced to become more accommodating.⁵² This section would have benefited from mining Vietnamese archives for sources related to this history, though it bears noting that a global pandemic made this task nearly impossible for a U.S.-based scholar. Still, this perspective is critical.

Through this analysis, Demmer thus identifies the range of actors and factors that shaped America’s refugee policy. Her analysis encourages readers to consider how executive and non-executive politicians, officials in global non-government organizations, and grassroots activists all worked to shape policy, and how they did so in response to an array of global events. As well, she insists that we take a nuanced perspective on Vietnamese attitudes toward refugee resettlement. In doing so, *After Saigon’s Fall* focuses attention on the contingent nature of this history by showing how refugee policy unfolded as it did because of the ways in which diverse actors with particular interests responded to each other and a range of local and global events and concerns.

⁵⁰ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 76.

⁵¹ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 76–77, 145.

⁵² Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 160, 145.

Conclusion

The cultural and political responses to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021 reveal once again that — George H.W. Bush’s famous proclamations notwithstanding — the U.S. war in Vietnam remains a powerful touchstone in American culture. What that war meant and continues to mean for the United States and how it shapes U.S. foreign policy continues to be open to debate and discussion and will likely remain so. With *After Saigon’s Fall*, Amanda Demmer has added significantly to our understanding of that war and its legacy, illustrating how U.S. policy toward Vietnam and the politics of refugee resettlement constitute a central chapter in the war’s history. This book belongs on any graduate reading list about the Vietnam War, as well as in courses about human rights, migration, and political history.

It also offers insights for those studying the present moment. The media coverage during the summer and fall of 2021 reveals that refugee politics will again be a significant cultural and political issue and a terrain on which Americans will endeavor to make sense of America’s longest war. The questions that Demmer asks and answers in *After Saigon’s Fall* — How do debates about refugee resettlement draw on and intersect with other political questions and memorial discourses? What non-executive actors and grassroots organizations are key players in shaping these debates? What other transnational discourses are shaping and being shaped by this debate? — model the questions that historians of the contemporary moment should consider.

We should ask, for example, how the turn toward great-power competition with Russia and China will shape U.S. policies toward Afghan refugees. We should also pay attention to the role that the growing number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans — who served in an era during which their service was uncritically celebrated and who are now being elected

to Congress — might play in that debate. We might consider what other memories of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are shaping and being shaped by discussions of refugees, and particularly whether the “rescue” of refugees enables a reframing of the U.S. military intervention as benevolent. We should take seriously the Taliban as political actors who might thwart, embrace, or seek to use to their own advantage U.S. policy in this arena. And we should also identify the grassroots organizations whose small size may belie the outsized influence they will have in these debates.

As Demmer’s history reveals, the debate over the obligation to and status of refugees is likely to continue for some time. Her book models the kind of thoughtful consideration of these issues that is required in the present moment and, beyond that, in a culture in which wars do not end but rather evolve and persist in new forms.

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3. Vietnamese Refugees, Political Agency, and U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Vietnam

Y Thien Nguyen

On May 4, 2021, H.R. 3001 was introduced into the 117th Congress by Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.). Known as the “Vietnam Human Rights Act,” H.R. 3001 is the latest manifestation of two decades of political advocacy by Vietnamese American human rights groups who have lobbied incessantly for human rights provisions to be embedded “across the full spectrum of official interactions between the Government of the United States and the Government of Vietnam ... [including] trade, security, humanitarian cooperation, and economic development.” Although not brought onto the House floor for discussion, by the end of the congressional term, H.R. 3001 had amassed a total of 30 cosponsors, 22 of whom were Democratic representatives, highlighting the bipartisan support for the proposed bill in question. Since the 108th Congress (2003–2004), Vietnamese American lobbying groups have mobilized the support of their allies in the House of Representatives to push for the passage of the Vietnam Human Rights Act. Four previous renditions of the bill — in 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2013 — passed the House but were never heard on the Senate floor.⁵³

Emphasizing contemporary political and religious persecution and violations of civil liberties in Vietnam, the 2021 bill pushes for stronger mechanisms for promoting and monitoring internet freedom, religious freedom, and political freedom, as well as for

⁵³ H.R. 1587, Vietnam Human Rights Act, 108th Congress, introduced April 3, 2003; H.R. 3096, Vietnam Human Rights Act, 110th Congress, introduced July 19, 2007; H.R. 1410, Vietnam Human Rights Act, 112th Congress, introduced April 7, 2011; and H.R. 1897, Vietnam Human Rights Act, 113th Congress, introduced May 8, 2013.

establishing safeguards to restrict nonhumanitarian assistance and greater sanction powers against Vietnamese government personnel who are directly tied to alleged abuses.⁵⁴ Spearheaded by the Vietnamese American nonprofit Boat People SOS, Inc., support for the bill within the Vietnamese American communities ranges from religious organizations to veteran organizations for former servicemen in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, to coalitions against human trafficking, to community-based and mutual assistance organizations. Despite the apparent low likelihood of a Vietnam Human Rights Act ever becoming actual law, H.R. 3001 and its precursors highlight the persistence of Vietnamese Americans' efforts to influence American foreign policy toward the Socialist Republic of Vietnam through the language of human rights, sustained engagement with congressional representatives, and strategic utilization of the American political system.

Vietnamese American political activism is an understudied and poorly understood phenomenon within both political science and Vietnamese American studies. In large part, the scholarship on Vietnamese American politics has focused on high-visibility protests, the conservatism of the Vietnamese American electorate, and the embeddedness of anticommunism in the community's politics.⁵⁵ Few scholars have

⁵⁴ H.R. 3001, Vietnam Human Rights Act, 117th Congress, introduced May 4, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3001?s=1&r=57>; Christian Collet, "Vietnamese Americans and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam: The Grassroots Lobby Takes on the Corporatized State," in *Congress and Diaspora Politics: The Influence of Ethnic and Foreign Lobbying*, ed. James A. Thurber, Colton C. Campbell, and David A. Dulio (Albany: State University of New York, 2018), 185–221.

⁵⁵ E.g., Như Ngọc Ông and David S. Meyer, "Protest and Political Incorporation: Vietnamese American Protest in Orange County, California, 1975–2001," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 78–107, <https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2008.3.1.78>; Kim Nguyen, "'Without the Luxury of Historical Amnesia': The Model Postwar Immigrant Remembering the Vietnam War through Anticommunist Protest," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (2010): 134–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859909351574>; Kieu-Linh Caroline Valverde, *Transnationalizing Viet Nam: Community, Culture, and Politics in the Diaspora* (Philadelphia:

sought to examine the impact of Vietnamese American political lobbying on both domestic and international politics.⁵⁶ As a community of displaced refugees formed as the result of the end of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese Americans are rarely viewed as important political actors in American national politics, let alone ascribed the agency to significantly shape the American foreign policy-making process. It is in this light that Amanda Demmer's *After Saigon's Fall* contributes one of the most significant and valuable historiographical advances in not only the scholarship on the Vietnam War, but also scholarly understanding of Vietnamese American politics.

Temple University Press, 2015); Zoltan Hajnal and Taeku Lee, *Why Americans Don't Join the Party* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); James Ciment, "Vietnamese American Politics and Political Empowerment," in *Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Austin and Huping Ling (New York: Routledge: 2015); and C.N. Le, "Better Dead Than Red: Anti-Communist Politics Among Vietnamese Americans," in *Anti-Communist Minorities in the U.S.: Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*, ed. Ieva Zake (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁵⁶ Christian Collet is perhaps the most authoritative voice on the topic. Collet is the first to take seriously the political significance of Vietnamese Americans as both an electorate and a political lobbying force. See Christian Collet, "Bloc Voting, Polarization, and Panethnic Hypothesis: The Case of Little Saigon," *Journal of Politics* 67, no. 3 (August 2005): 907–33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2005.00345.x>; Christian Collet, "The Viability of 'Going It Alone': Vietnamese in America and the Coalition of a Transnational Community," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 1, no. 2 (2008): 279–311, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25594989>; "Vietnamese Americans and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," in Thurber, Campbell, and Dulio, eds., *Congress and Diaspora Politics*, 185–221; and "Vietnamese American Politics: Evolution at the Grassroots, 1981–2020," in *Toward a Framework for Vietnamese American Studies: History, Community, and Memory*, ed. Linda Ho Peche, Alex-Thai Vo, and Tuong Vu (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2023). Additionally, Jana Lipman's recent publication *In Camps: Vietnamese Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Repatriates* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020) provides excellent analysis of Vietnamese American lobbying efforts surrounding the passage of the 1989 Comprehensive Plan of Action.

After Saigon's Fall is an eloquent and well-researched analysis of American foreign policy toward Vietnam after 1975. Demmer's work traces the transformations and continuities in discourse, policy, and public opinion regarding four interrelated issues that dominated U.S. foreign relations during the years after the war: American POW/MIAs supposedly still in Vietnam, the resettlement of Amerasians to the United States, the release and resettlement of political prisoners held for "reeducation," and international management of the "boat people" crisis.

Analyses of these issues are framed around four main arguments that are, in large part, robustly supported by Demmer's broad use of archival evidence, ranging from congressional records and State Department memos to internal documents of key nongovernmental organizations doing advocacy work during the period. Two of these arguments in particular make significant contributions to the study of the Vietnam War and its aftermath and have important implications for future scholarship in this area: the need to revise how we envision the timeline of that war, and the need to look at the roles of nongovernmental actors and the Vietnamese diaspora in U.S. foreign policy-making.

Reconceptualizing the "End" of the Vietnam War

Demmer calls for a sharp reconsideration of what has historically been considered the "end" of the Vietnam War in order to re-periodize the war to include what transpired after the fall of Saigon. By problematizing periodization, politics, and the memory of America's second-most protracted war, Demmer aptly demonstrates that, despite formal cessation of the conflict in 1975, hostilities between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (formerly the Democratic Republic of Vietnam until 1976) did not disappear, nor did "the alliance between the United States and the South Vietnamese

people.”⁵⁷ Using policy documents, congressional hearings, and statements from presidents and government officials, Demmer authoritatively argues that the United States continued to view and treat the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the South Vietnamese, who were once citizens of the Republic of Vietnam (1955–1975), as distinct groups. For Demmer, the relationship between those who once constituted the Republic of Vietnam and the United States continued despite the collapse of South Vietnam and the ostensible “end” of the conflict in 1975.

America continued its hostile posture toward the Socialist Republic of Vietnam after the end of the war not only by imposing economic sanctions but also by demanding that the communist government address humanitarian issues (e.g., resettlement of South Vietnamese, POW/MIA accounting, and family reunification) that were pertinent to U.S. interests prior to opening any formal diplomatic dialogues. Meanwhile, U.S. policies and officials continued to treat the South Vietnamese people as exceptional, reflecting President Gerald Ford’s assertion that America had a “profound moral obligation” to its wartime ally.⁵⁸ Efforts by both state and nonstate actors designed to support and assist those who had wartime connections with the United States — particularly through resettlement and migration — were sustained throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s. Legislation like the McCain Amendment and the Resettlement Opportunities for Vietnamese Refugees program are quintessential examples of this sustained prioritization of the South Vietnamese people some 20 years after the cessation of the conflict.

⁵⁷ Amanda C. Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall: Refugees and U.S.-Vietnamese Relations, 1975–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 2.

⁵⁸ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 8.

While challenging the temporal divisions between periods of “war” and “peace” is not particularly novel,⁵⁹ *After Saigon’s Fall* elucidates how arbitrary that 1975 division was in terms of the perspectives of American officials as well as the policies that the United States implemented. Although the Vietnam War had deep cultural and emotional ramifications for American society, Demmer goes beyond previous scholarly emphases on cultural memory and trauma and refreshingly grounds the discussion of continuity in tangible policies that were implemented and the advocacy work of nongovernmental organizations.⁶⁰ Indeed, it was precisely because the war “continued” for South Vietnamese refugees who had left family behind that the advocacy efforts of Khuc Minh Tho and the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association (FVPPA) emerged. Linking their own cause to the more visible movement surrounding POW/MIAs, the FVPPA mobilized the language of POW/MIAs to argue that “our husbands and fathers are POWs too.”⁶¹ This not only helped the FVPPA to acquire official backing “by speaking to American officials in a language they understood,” but it also helped to sustain the attention of American policymakers regarding the plight of reeducation camp prisoners.⁶² A serious breakthrough on the issue of reeducation camp prisoners did not come until 11 years after the formation of the FVPPA. With the establishment of the Humanitarian Operations Program in 1988, the objectives of the FVPPA were finally achieved: the

⁵⁹ See Ian Roxborough, “Clausewitz and the Sociology of War,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 4 (1994), 619–36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/591886>.

⁶⁰ For memory-focused studies of the Vietnam War’s legacy, see Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1997); Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); and Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁶¹ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 139.

⁶² Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 143–44.

closure of reeducation camps in Vietnam and the mass resettlement of reeducation detainees and their families to the United States.

Demmer's attempt to destabilize the temporal boundaries of the Vietnam War lays the groundwork for a deeper examination not only of continuities in U.S. policy and American public opinion, but also of the how political, cultural, and ideological aspects of what once constituted South Vietnam would come to influence the politics and advocacy work of Vietnamese refugees who made their homes in the United States. As Demmer demonstrates, this community had a role in the shaping of U.S. foreign policy toward the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.⁶³ The porous divide between "war" and "peace" that Demmer so eloquently highlights pushes scholars to go beyond the arbitrary lines separating historical periods and forces historians to be attentive to the unexpected contingencies of any historical process. One of the major lessons that can be drawn from Demmer's work is that war does not simply end when the gunfire ceases. Rather, the social, political, and ideological components of that war can persist, shaping the human actions that follow.

Voices Less Often Heard

Demmer also makes a robust case for the importance of examining "non-executive" agency and its influence on U.S. foreign policy. In Demmer's analysis, nongovernmental

⁶³ My own work has emphasized this notion of continuity within the emerging Vietnamese community of refugees in the postwar period. Here, I emphasize how interpretive frameworks, institutions, and norms that were developed in South Vietnam became readapted to inform the creation of Vietnamese refugee communities overseas. See Y Thien Nguyen, "Legacies and Diasporic Connectivity: Dialogues and Future Direction of Vietnamese and Vietnamese American Studies," in Peche, Dinh Vo, and Tuong Vu, eds., *Toward a Framework for Vietnamese American Studies*.

organizations such as the Aurora Foundation, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia (known as “the League”), the Citizens Commission on Indochinese Refugees, and the FVPPA “contributed decisively to the formation of U.S. policies.”⁶⁴ Through their extensive advocacy work, information collecting and reporting methods, and the alliances that they formed with members of Congress and non-executive officials, these nongovernmental organizations — some literally emerging from the kitchen tables and homes of activists — became influential voices that helped shape the direction of U.S. foreign policy toward Vietnam.⁶⁵

The political influence of the League drew on a surge in American public imagination regarding not only the existence of American POWs in Vietnam, but also the possibility of rescuing those held captive (cinematographically portrayed in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*). Building on a “national obsession” with POWs, the League established itself within policymaking circles and saw its heyday under President Ronald Reagan, who publicly endorsed the myth that American POWs were being held in post-1975 Vietnam. Reagan legitimized both the POW myth and the cause of POW accounting pushed for by the League — such that it became the single most visible issue in U.S.-Vietnamese relations.⁶⁶

Normalization came within view in 1987. However, the prevalence of the POW myth torpedoed efforts to move negotiations forward, highlighting the significant influence of the League over the trajectory of normalization. Following Hanoi’s withdrawal of troops from Cambodia, the White House authorized Gen. John Vessey Jr., a personal envoy of Reagan, to sign an agreement with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach to

⁶⁴ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 14.

⁶⁵ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 118.

⁶⁶ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 120.

resume U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation in the search for American MIAs. However, the POW myth, sustained by the “Rambo faction” in Congress and an increasingly radical POW/MIA movement, quickly put the brakes on further diplomatic prospects. Appealing to the League’s opposition to expanded relations with Vietnam without full accounting of POWs, Gaston Sigur, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, delivered a confrontational testimony in opposition of an “interest section” to regularize communications between Vietnam and America on bilateral issues. Simultaneously, Sigur’s testimony reaffirmed the American efforts “to completely isolate Hanoi.”⁶⁷ Consequently, Hanoi suspended cooperation with the United States on POW/MIA accounting and resettlement of former reeducation camp detainees, directly citing Sigur’s remarks.⁶⁸ It was not until the George H.W. Bush administration that further progress was made on these issues, and, by then, the influence of the POW/MIA lobby had significantly waned.

Highlighting the need to integrate nongovernmental or “non-executive” agency in the examination of the policymaking process in the United States is perhaps one of Demmer’s most crucial and robustly defended contributions. Here, Demmer incorporates not only the influence of “kitchen-table activists” and members of Congress into her analysis, but also the voices and perspectives of Vietnamese Americans. This is remarkable given the profound lack of Vietnamese voices within the literature on normalization of relations between the United States and Vietnam and the legacy of the Vietnam War.⁶⁹ Even when Vietnamese Americans are discussed, the story is less about what Vietnamese Americans

⁶⁷ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 158.

⁶⁸ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 153–59.

⁶⁹ E.g., Edwin Martini, *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975–2000* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); and Edwin Martini and Scott Laderman, eds., *Four Decades On: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

believed, advocated for, or did and more so about what happened to them, as passive and seemingly pathetic refugees.⁷⁰

Here, Demmer stands apart. She is one of but a handful of recent authors who has sought to weave the agency of the South Vietnamese people (both prior to and after migration) into the analysis of the politics around postwar refugees.⁷¹ Indeed, if non-executive actors are underdiscussed when examining American foreign policy and decision-making, Demmer's work magnifies the scope of this omission by focusing on the FVPPA. As a grassroots organization built in the homes of newly arrived Vietnamese refugees, the prospects of the FVPPA to make any impact on U.S.-Vietnamese relations would seem abysmal. However, the contribution (and innovation) of Demmer's work is in powerfully highlighting how this woman-led Vietnamese American organization played a decisive and politically significant role in shaping the U.S.-Vietnamese normalization process.

Demmer emphasizes the effects and influences of the FVPPA's advocacy work on U.S. policy, a task that not only acknowledges the importance of Vietnamese Americans in U.S.

⁷⁰ For a critique of refugee literature, see Yen Le Espiritu, "Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in U.S. Scholarship," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, no. 1-2 (2006): 410-33, <https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2006.1.1-2.410>.

⁷¹ For scholarly emphases on Vietnamese refugee agency, see Sam Vong, "'Compassion Gave Us a Special Superpower': Vietnamese Women Leaders, Reeducation Camps, and the Politics of Family Reunification, 1977-1991," *Journal of Women's History* 30, no. 3 (October 2018): 107-31, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2018.0032>; Long Bui, *Returns of War: South Vietnam and the Price of Refugee Memory* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); and Phuong Tran Nguyen, *Becoming Refugee American: The Politics of Rescue in Little Saigon* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017). For agency of the South Vietnamese government and people during the war, see footnote 6. See also Edward Miller and Tuong Vu, "The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2009.4.3.1>.

politics but also shows the impact of their participation. Most starkly, the FVPPA served as *the* information conduit between the Vietnamese American community and policymakers, filling in an information gap regarding the names and profiles of reeducation detainees in Vietnam. Mobilizing a transnational “Vietnamese grapevine” — one that the FVPPA was uniquely positioned to access — Khuc Minh Tho and her organization helped to sustain the attention of policymakers and State Department officials on the plight of their brothers, husbands, and fathers. They also ensured the successful implementation of resettlement policies. Indeed, even the Socialist Republic of Vietnam would eventually come to acknowledge the role of the FVPPA in shaping the American stance on reeducation camp prisoners, requesting a direct meeting with Khuc Minh Tho in 1989.

Eloquent, authoritative, and well researched, *After Saigon’s Fall* lays the foundation for future scholarship on both the Vietnam War and Vietnamese refugees. The FVPPA is but one organization in what Demmer aptly calls a “Vietnamese grapevine” or a “transnational network” of Vietnamese American activism with regard to the issues of reeducation, detainees, and assistance to the “boat people.”⁷² Future scholarship should take seriously Demmer’s argument that the “South Vietnamese people ... actively influenc[ed] international relations both as migrants and as advocates” and fully explore that influence.⁷³

⁷² Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 177. For an indication of how vast this “Vietnamese grapevine” may be, see statement issued by the Indochina Refugee Action Center on the behalf of 145 “Indochinese organizations” across the United States and Europe in opposition to the Comprehensive Plan of Action (Indochina Resource Action Center, “Towards Humane and Durable Solutions to the Indochinese Refugee Problem,” Indochina Resource Action Center, June 13–14, 1989, https://oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb6n39po8d&brand=oac4&doc.view=entire_text).

⁷³ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 19.

Building on Demmer’s work, future scholarship also ought to incorporate other Vietnamese-led organizations not mentioned or only cursorily referred to in *After Saigon’s Fall*, such as the Boat People SOS Committee, the Indochinese Resource Action Center, and the National Congress of Vietnamese Americans.⁷⁴ These organizations were not only deeply involved in advocating for the Humanitarian Operations program, but some also carried out independent fact-finding missions within refugee camps in Southeast Asia.⁷⁵ Notable Vietnamese Americans emerged as community leaders from such efforts, becoming prominent voices pushing for the advancement of human rights, religious freedom, and democracy in Vietnam. Indeed, certain Vietnamese-led advocacy organizations developed sustained alliances with congressional representatives and state officials — so much so that their leaders regularly appeared before Congress to deliver testimonies.⁷⁶ Disagreements over certain organizations’ historical involvement in the formation and implementation of key policy measures, particularly the Comprehensive Plan of Action and the Resettlement Opportunities for Vietnamese Refugees, have emerged as a political controversy within Vietnamese America in recent years, highlighting the contested legacy of the “boat people” era.⁷⁷ Greater incorporation of Vietnamese-language sources (including the plethora of Vietnamese American newspapers, journals, and publications) will benefit a greater exploration of the scope of

⁷⁴ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 185, 169.

⁷⁵ May Lee, “U.S. Immigration Rules: Keep Refugees Out, Group Charges,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1987.

⁷⁶ Lipman, *In Camps: Vietnamese Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Repatriates*, 189, 288.

⁷⁷ Lê Xuân Khoa, “Trả lại sự thật cho lịch sử [Return the truth to history],” *Tiếng Dân* [Voice of the People], Nov. 11, 2021.

the advocacy work of Vietnamese Americans and their role in shaping U.S. foreign policy toward Vietnam.⁷⁸

Scholars may also find it fruitful to further examine how the alliances that formed between members of Congress and nongovernmental organizations persisted and were sustained, particularly as they related to contemporary Vietnamese American advocacy work. A prime example would be the previously mentioned Vietnam Human Rights Act, which was first introduced in 2003 and subsequently appears in the House's agenda every congressional term. With the end of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, Rep. Smith had argued in support of a program to give Vietnamese boat people who were rejected for asylum the chance to appeal their case, helping the enactment of the 1996 Resettlement Opportunities for Vietnamese Refugees.⁷⁹ The fact that Smith has been the primary sponsor of the Vietnam Human Rights Act over the last two decades indicates that relationships formed between Vietnamese American advocacy groups and lawmakers during the "refugee crisis" continue to play a role in contemporary U.S.-Vietnamese relations. Support for the Vietnam Human Rights Act historically included members of Congress representing areas with high Vietnamese populations, including the various districts in Orange County, California. A similar Senate bill, the Vietnam Human Rights Sanction Act, began being introduced by Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) in the Senate during

⁷⁸ Most notably, the Vietnamese-language periodical *Người Việt Daily News* (est. 1978), which is still in circulation today, can serve as a strong starting point for such analysis. Additionally, academics may find Huy Phương and Võ Hương An's *Chân Dung H.O. [Portraits of the H.O. Program]* (Stanton, CA: Nam Viet Publisher, 2015) fruitful. The work is a community publication that portrays the advocacy work of Vietnamese Americans around the Humanitarian Operation program, as well as the stories of the program's recipients. Demmer's work aligns with efforts by the Vietnamese American community to ensure that their own agency in the formation of the Humanitarian Operation program is acknowledged and documented.

⁷⁹ Lipman, *In Camps*, 193–94; and Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 216.

the 112th Congress (2011--2012).⁸⁰ Although never passed, Cornyn continued to put the act before the Senate every legislative session until 2019. How support for such legislation was cultivated at the local level and the alliances that formed between Vietnamese American constituents and their congressional representatives are areas still in need of scholarly exploration.

After Saigon's Fall contributes to a much-needed revisionism of Vietnam War historiography, problematizing not only the arbitrary temporal boundaries between "war" and "peace," but also whose voices matter in the examination of international relations, U.S. foreign policy, and historical processes. Demmer's work paves the way for future scholarship, providing a broad framework that emphasizes the agency of nongovernmental actors and the contingencies and continuities that should be integral to any historical analysis.

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⁸⁰ The most recent manifestation of the Vietnam Human Rights Sanction Act is S.1369 of the 116th Congress, introduced on May 8, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1369>. The bill requires the president to impose financial sanctions on Vietnamese nationals who are complicit in human rights abuses and prohibit their entry into the country. The Vietnam Human Rights Sanction Act was originally introduced by then-Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) (S.3974, Vietnam Human Rights Sanction Act, 111th Congress, introduced Nov. 18, 2010, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/senate-bill/3974?s=1&r=2>. Brownback later served as the governor of Kansas and the ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom under President Donald Trump. On Brownback, Boat People SOS, and refugee advocacy, see Lipman, *In Camps*, 226-28.

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4. The Continuum of War: Policy and Normalization as a Phase of War

Amber B. Batura

Amanda Demmer's book *After Saigon's Fall* opens with an iconic image from the U.S. evacuation of Saigon on April 30, 1975. The picture of both Vietnamese and Americans queued to board a lone helicopter, desperate to flee the encroaching communist forces, reflects the chaos and confusion that dominated the evacuation. America's disorganized and hasty withdrawal seemed to echo the failed military effort in Vietnam. And it raised questions about America's obligations following the end to what was once the country's longest war.

Demmer's analysis begins at this moment: She contends that while most historians see the evacuation as the closing scene of a decade-long war, it was just a transition into a different phase of that war. She traces the normalization process between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, arguing that the policy, debates, and programs that ultimately led to normalization were a continuation of the Vietnam War. The questions of how the United States would deal with the tens of thousands of refugees and evacuees and what obligations it had to the people who were left behind, especially the South Vietnamese, became a pressing issue for the Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations. Demmer posits that negotiating and implementing the programs surrounding this migration "became the basis of normalization between Washington and Hanoi."⁸¹

⁸¹ Amanda Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall: Refugees and US-Vietnamese Relations, 1975-2000* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 2.

The book convincingly details how humanitarian issues like refugee policy, reeducation camp detainee release, and POW/MIA accounting became focal points of policy that both hindered and helped achieve official relations with Vietnam. Refugee, humanitarian, and human rights policies were achieved through the work of various entities, including White House officials; nonexecutive actors; and nongovernmental, nonprofit, and international organizations. Sometimes collaborative, and other times contentious, these actors' efforts helped to steer policy regarding U.S.-Vietnamese relations. Demmer's work is a vital addition to the historiography on the Vietnam War, highlighting the intersections of war and peace, demonstrating how wars continue past combat operations, and emphasizing the collaborative nature of policy and international relations.

Policy as War by Other Means

Demmer's argument contends that policy regarding Vietnamese refugees and normalization of relations with Vietnam were continuations of the Vietnam War. By doing so, she forces readers to rethink what differentiates wartime from peacetime and provides an important contribution to the growing body of literature on war and peace studies. While North Vietnam advanced south in 1975, Demmer argues, the Ford administration adopted an outward narrative of optimism regarding the fate of South Vietnam. By asking for military, economic, and humanitarian aid, and by choosing to leave Americans in-country, the White House tried to buy time before the inevitable collapse to plan an evacuation of as many people as possible.⁸² In a televised speech on April 10, President Gerald Ford declared that the United States had a "profound moral obligation" to aid the South Vietnamese who had assisted America during the conflict. This rhetoric prioritized refugee and migrant issues and "fashioned the American obligation in a way

⁸² Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 37.

that did not have obvious limits — temporal or demographic.”⁸³ It also allowed the United States to fight the war from a different angle — one focused on legacy, image, and postwar narrative.

The choice to include South Vietnamese in the evacuation plans provided an opportunity for American officials to bolster the country’s international reputation after a decade of war, moving from the role of aggressor to “generous patron.”⁸⁴ During the evacuation, Operation Babylift, which focused on rescuing “orphans” and finding families for them in the United States, “enabled American officials to craft a compelling rescue narrative while ... obscuring the role the violence unleashed by the American military played in creating conditions that required rescue in the first place.”⁸⁵ Policymakers and U.S. officials also used the increasing number of Vietnamese fleeing Vietnam, along with the growing concern over humanitarian and human rights violations in the 1980s and 1990s, to rewrite the narrative of the war.⁸⁶ Internationally, communist Vietnam lost the favor it enjoyed during the conflict and became seen as a human rights violator instead of an anticolonial underdog.⁸⁷ The United States, by emphasizing the plight of refugees, Amerasians, reeducation camp detainees, and POW/MIAs could then claim moral superiority. Ultimately, President Ronald Reagan would rebrand the war as a “noble cause” due to the

⁸³ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 38.

⁸⁴ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 47.

⁸⁵ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 32. Demmer, using an extensive historiography, argues that casting these children as orphans was often a mischaracterization due to misunderstanding of the function of orphanages in Vietnam, as well as purposeful misrepresentation. Many children were not true orphans, and some were “rescued” without parental consent.

⁸⁶ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 4.

⁸⁷ Demmer, *After Saigon’s Fall*, 90.

actions of the Vietnamese regime against these groups.⁸⁸ American officials, policymakers, nongovernmental groups and other organizations used policy and refugee issues to control the postwar narrative, placing themselves in the role of benevolent rescuer, champion, and protector of human rights, and ultimately, the military victor of the war.

Demmer also demonstrates how policy became a nonmilitary means to continue hostilities against Vietnam.⁸⁹ With official diplomatic relations ended, the United States placed economic sanctions on Vietnam and used its influence on the global stage to block international financial assistance to Vietnam from other countries. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank would not lend money to Vietnam without American approval.⁹⁰ In 1975, the United States utilized its veto power in the United Nations to prevent North and South Vietnam's admittance. It would go on to block Vietnam from admission three separate times, preventing the country from gaining access to aid programs and perpetuating hostilities.⁹¹ As the two governments worked together to establish official diplomatic relations in the 1990s, America received financial concessions from Vietnam related to the war. Demmer argues "that U.S. officials demanded and won, from the position of military defeat, \$208 million in postwar concessions without paying anything to the military victor is unheard of in the history of modern warfare."⁹² The United States even claimed victory financially.

⁸⁸ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 128.

⁸⁹ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 50, 189.

⁹⁰ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 4, 145

⁹¹ "Vietnam Is Admitted to the U.N. as 32nd General Assembly Opens," *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1977, <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/09/21/archives/vietnam-is-admitted-to-the-un-as-32d-general-assembly-opens.html>.

⁹² Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 214.

Foreign policy allowed the United States to continue the conflict with Vietnam without the use of military force, but Demmer's focus on refugees illuminates another way that war and peace are difficult to separate. While hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees escaped the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, many did not do so as a family unit. The trauma of displacement and living in a diaspora community extended the experience of the war for many. Family separation for both Vietnamese and some Americans meant that the war continued for them as well. Demmer notes that two powerful organizations would develop from this shared trauma, the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association, led by Khuc Minh Tho, and the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War.⁹³ Demmer's focus on refugees and American policy responses toward Vietnam in the postwar years highlights the ways these issues provided the basis for later normalization of relations between the United States and Vietnam despite the lack of formal diplomatic channels. This approach also clearly demonstrates that war and conflict do not always have a clear end. The separation and loss of the family unit made the war never-ending for many Vietnamese and Americans.

Policy as Collaboration

By focusing on nonexecutive actors, *After Saigon's Fall* reveals the myriad agents that participated in or influenced the creation of policy and the formation of programs. Family reunification, POW/MIA accounting, and reeducation camp detainee release became the focal point for many grassroots nongovernmental organizations. Those groups worked

⁹³ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 51. The League of Wives was created in the 1960s by military wives throughout the United States whose husbands were prisoners of war or missing in action. In 1970, the organization became the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Action, or the League.

closely with congressional leaders and White House administrations to enact their programs and policies, demonstrating the oft-times collaborative nature of policy formation and program passage. Collaboration meant that there were times when the diverse groups found themselves at odds regarding how best to achieve desired ends. Yet, Demmer shows that policy that emerged in the years after the end of the conflict ultimately was the result of many multiple contributions.

Vital to the formation and passage of many of the refugee policies were individual members of Congress. Following the Vietnam War, Congress made a deliberate attempt to remove some of the executive overreach in foreign policy. Many scholars identify the passage of the War Powers Act of 1973 as representative of this desire to diminish executive power and provide checks and balances over military actions overseas.⁹⁴ Demmer's work reveals that Congress also reasserted its influence on foreign affairs as it shaped U.S.-Vietnamese relations in the postwar period. During Carter's administration, Congress used the pressure of public hearings and its role in appropriations to influence foreign policy against the president's desires.⁹⁵ Though U.S.-Vietnamese relations often caused partisan splits in Congress, Demmer notes the efforts during the Reagan administration to differentiate between the "humanitarian" issues that the former adversaries needed to resolve and the "political" issues that could wait which helped to create consensus on issues like reeducation camp detainees and POW/MIA accounting.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ "War Powers Resolution of 1973," Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, July 27, 2021, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/news/war-powers-resolution-1973#:~:text=The%20War%20Powers%20Resolution%20of,the%20executive%20branch's%20power%20when.>

⁹⁵ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 91.

⁹⁶ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 127.

Congress and the White House also worked closely with nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, whose grassroots efforts were vital to policy creation and implementation in the United States. During the Carter administration, the Citizens' Commission on Indochinese Refugees, a subcommittee within the International Rescue Committee, utilized the "politics of information" to pressure Congress and the White House into action regarding Indochinese refugee resettlement. The organization successfully utilized Carter's humanitarian agenda to force him to provide more parole slots for refugees.⁹⁷ Ginetta Sagan, who worked with Amnesty International and eventually started the Aurora Foundation in 1981, provided comprehensive reports on human rights violations and the conditions of reeducation camps and their detainees in Vietnam. These reports informed government officials' decisions regarding U.S.-Vietnamese relations and helped with the passage of programs and policy regarding the release of detainees.⁹⁸ The Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association and the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War both formed out of a desire for family reunification, and both of the organizations took drastically different approaches to achieving their goals.

Khuc Minh Tho, who was separated from her own children when Saigon fell, founded and led the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association. She became one of the most "important players in solidifying and maintaining the U.S. commitment to reeducation camp prisoners" through advocacy; creating close, persistent relations with officials; by providing quality information to individuals and organizations; and through her transnational network of connections.⁹⁹ The League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War eventually adopted a stance that there were POW/MIAs still being held

⁹⁷ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 7.

⁹⁸ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 115.

⁹⁹ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 131, 150.

in Vietnam, a position that several presidents, most notably Reagan, reinforced. However, there was no evidence to back up such bold claims. Eventually, the league lost its influence when it refused to accept the overwhelming evidence that Vietnam was not, in fact, holding POWs.¹⁰⁰ As Demmer shows, through advocacy, information campaigns, and networks of close relations, nonexecutive actors were able to steer U.S. foreign policy to address the humanitarian and human rights needs that affected their lives. Despite differences in politics and opinions, Congress, NGOs, and the White House often found themselves collaborating on the humanitarian issues, leading to policy shaped by sometimes unlikely allies.

Policy, Vietnam, and Future Scholarship

After Saigon's Fall is an important contribution to war and peace studies, international relations and foreign policy, and studies of the Vietnam War. The scholarship borrows methodologies from other fields, including a brief gender analysis of women leaders of NGOs, nonprofits, and other grassroots organizations. Demmer briefly discusses the history of women in the United States who claimed the moral authority that had been socially assigned to them by their gender and status as mothers, and connects this with the power and authority leaders like Ginetta Sagan and Khuc Minh Tho exercised in their organizations.¹⁰¹ In doing so, she provides a useful template for how to incorporate social and cultural analysis into more traditional histories on war and policy that are not focused on these elements. As with any exceptional research, Demmer's work has prompted many questions. For example, where are the voices of the South Vietnamese refugees in the formation of policy and the normalization of relations with the Socialist

¹⁰⁰ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 179.

¹⁰¹ Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 109.

Republic of Vietnam? Demmer mentions refugee identity and the desire to prevent the erasure of ARVN forces,¹⁰² but there is little discussion of how Vietnamese in America engaged with nongovernmental organizations, American officials, or the international community. How did the diverse groups of refugees feel about normalizing relations with communist Vietnam? Other scholars should build from Demmer's work to look at the South Vietnamese people's voices in the narrative.

Demmer's book also raises the question regarding the tenor of opposition to normalization of relations with Vietnam. She discusses moments of opposition between the White House and Congress, as well as between NGOs, but the discussions are brief compared to her focus on the collaborative efforts of the diverse groups to enact policy. Demmer also mentions American veterans like John McCain and John Kerry, but what did other veterans, who did not hold office, think about normalization? How did they react to refugee policy and the influx of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese into their towns and cities? Did they influence policy? Ultimately, Demmer's research provides a platform for more inquiry into foreign policy, conflict, and the various groups who shape policy.

Conclusion

In August 2021, an image from America's new longest war dominated media outlets, and the parallels to the 1975 evacuation of Saigon were too blatant for many to resist.¹⁰³ News stories of Americans quickly departing in helicopters as the Taliban overtook Kabul, hectic images and stories of desperate Afghans fleeing for safety, hanging from aircraft,

¹⁰² Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 4, 140.

¹⁰³ "Editorial: President Biden's Saigon Moment," *Boston Herald*, Aug. 15, 2021,

<https://www.bostonherald.com/2021/08/15/editorial-president-bidens-saigon-moment/>.

and the chaos of a rushed evacuation resurrected the specter of the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.¹⁰⁴ *After Saigon's Fall* is a timely, relevant lens into a similar history, sharing valuable lessons as the United States now deals with the Afghan refugees who made it to the country and the many still struggling to escape Taliban rule.¹⁰⁵ Many of the refugees worked as allies for the United States during the 20 years of armed conflict. As early as May 2021, Department of Defense officials argued that the United States had a “moral obligation to help those that have helped us” in Afghanistan, repeating President Ford’s sentiments about Vietnam.¹⁰⁶ Nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, congressional leaders, and the White House are working to address the humanitarian and economic crisis left behind.¹⁰⁷ Demmer illustrates how America both successfully, and sometimes unsuccessfully, forged policy to overcome these same issues in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. As Demmer proved with Vietnam, the war in Afghanistan did not end with America’s withdrawal. It will be negotiated through diplomatic, humanitarian, and economic policies for years to come.

¹⁰⁴ David Zucchino, “Kabul’s Sudden Fall to Taliban Ends U.S. Era in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/15/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-surrender.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Michelle Hackman, “Afghan Refugees in the U.S.: How They’re Vetted, Where They’re Going and How to Help,” *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 21, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghan-refugees-in-the-u-s-how-theyre-vetted-where-theyre-going-and-how-to-help-11630677004>.

¹⁰⁶ C. Todd Lopez, “DOD Official Discusses ‘Moral Obligation’ to Help Those in Afghanistan Who Helped U.S.,” Department of Defense News, May 20, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2626344/dod-official-discusses-moral-obligation-to-help-those-in-afghanistan-who-helped/>.

¹⁰⁷ Christina Goldbaum and Yaqoob Akbary, “Over a Million Flee as Afghanistan’s Economy Collapses,” *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/world/asia/afghanistan-migration-refugees.html>.

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