

The American Presidency Project

(<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>)



GERALD R. FORD **(/PEOPLE/PRESIDENT/GERALD-R-FORD)**

Special Message to the Congress Requesting Supplemental Assistance for the Republic of Vietnam

and Cambodia

January 28, 1975

To the Congress of the United States:

Two years ago the Paris Agreement was signed, and several weeks later was endorsed by major nations including the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and the People's Republic of China. We had succeeded in negotiating an Agreement that provided the framework for lasting peace in Southeast Asia. This Agreement would have worked had Hanoi matched our side's efforts to implement it. Unfortunately, the other side has chosen to violate most of the major provisions of this Accord.

The South Vietnamese and Cambodians are fighting hard in their own defense, as recent casualty figures clearly demonstrate. With adequate U.S. material assistance, they can hold their own. We cannot turn our backs on these embattled countries. U.S. unwillingness to provide adequate assistance to allies fighting for their lives would seriously affect our credibility throughout the world as an ally. And this credibility is essential to our national security.

VIETNAM

When the Paris Agreement was signed, all Americans hoped that it would provide a framework under which the Vietnamese people could make their own political choices and resolve their own problems in an atmosphere of peace.

In compliance with that Agreement, the United States withdrew its forces and its military advisors from Vietnam. In further compliance with the Agreement, the Republic of Vietnam offered a comprehensive political program designed to reconcile the differences between the South Vietnamese parties and to lead to free and supervised elections throughout all of South Vietnam. The Republic of Vietnam has repeatedly reiterated this offer and has several times proposed a specific date for a free election open to all South Vietnamese political groups.

Unfortunately, our hopes for peace and for reconciliation have been frustrated by the persistent refusal of the other side to abide by even the most fundamental provisions of the Agreement. North Vietnam has sent its forces into the South in such large numbers that its army in South Vietnam is now greater than ever, close to 289,000 troops. Hanoi has sent tanks, heavy artillery, and anti-aircraft weapons to South Vietnam by the hundreds. These troops and equipment are in South Vietnam for only one reason--to forceably impose the will of Hanoi on the South Vietnamese people. Moreover, Hanoi has refused to give a full accounting for our men missing in action in Vietnam.

The Communists have also violated the political provisions of the Paris Agreement. They have refused all South Vietnamese offers to set a specific date for free elections, and have now broken off negotiations with the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. In fact, they say that they will not negotiate with that Government as it is presently constituted, although they had committed themselves to do so.

Recent events have made it clear that North Vietnam is again trying to impose a solution by force. Earlier this month, North Vietnamese forces captured an entire province, the population centers of which were clearly under the control of the South Vietnamese Government when the Paris Agreement was signed. Our intelligence indicates, moreover, that their campaign will intensify further in coming months.

At a time when the North Vietnamese have been building up their forces and pressing their attacks, U.S. military aid to the South Vietnamese Government has not been sufficient to permit one-to-one replacement of equipment and supplies used up or destroyed, as permitted by the

Paris Agreement. In fact, with the \$700 million appropriation available in the current fiscal year, we have been able to provide no new tanks, airplanes, trucks, artillery pieces, or other major equipment, but only essential consumable items such as ammunition, gasoline, spare parts, and medical supplies. And in the face of the increased North Vietnamese pressure of recent months, these supplies have not kept pace with minimally essential expenditure. Stockpiles have been drawn down and will soon reach dangerously low levels.

Last year, some believed that Cutting back our military assistance to the South Vietnamese Government would induce negotiations for a political settlement. Instead, the opposite has happened. North Vietnam is refusing negotiations and is increasing its military pressure.

I am gravely concerned about this situation. I am concerned because it poses a serious threat to the chances for political stability in Southeast Asia and to the progress that has been made in removing Vietnam as a major issue of contention between the great powers.

I am also concerned because what happens in Vietnam can affect the rest of the world. It cannot be in the interests of the United States to let other nations believe that we are prepared to look the other way when agreements that have been painstakingly negotiated are contemptuously violated. It cannot be in our interest to cause our friends all over the world to wonder whether we will support them if they comply with agreements that others violate.

When the United States signed the Paris Agreement, as when we pursued the policy of Vietnamization, we told the South Vietnamese, in effect, that we would not defend them with our military forces, but that we would provide them the means to defend themselves, as permitted by the Agreement. The South Vietnamese have performed effectively in accepting this challenge. They have demonstrated their determination and ability to defend themselves if they are provided the necessary military materiel with which to do so. We, however, may be judged remiss in keeping our end of the bargain.

We--the Executive and Legislative Branches together--must meet our responsibilities. As I have said earlier, the amount of assistance appropriated by the previous Congress is inadequate to the requirements of the situation. I am, therefore, proposing:

--A supplemental appropriation of \$300 million for military assistance to South Vietnam.

The \$300 million in supplemental military assistance that I am requesting for South Vietnam represents the difference between the \$1 billion which was authorized to be appropriated for fiscal year 1975 and the \$700 million which has been appropriated. This amount does not meet all the needs of the South Vietnamese army in its defense against North Vietnam. It does not, for example; allow for replacement of equipment lost in combat. It is the minimum needed to prevent serious reversals by providing the South Vietnamese with the urgent supplies required for their self-defense against the current level of North Vietnamese attacks.

I believe that this additional aid will help to deter the North Vietnamese from further escalating their military pressure and provide them additional incentive to resume the political discussions envisaged under the Paris Agreement.

All Americans want to end the U.S. role in Vietnam. So do I. I believe, however, that we must end it in a way that will enhance the chances of world peace and sustain the purposes for which we have sacrificed so much.

CAMBODIA

Our objective in Cambodia is to restore peace and to allow the Khmer people an opportunity to decide freely who will govern them. To this end, our immediate goal in Cambodia is to facilitate an early negotiated settlement. The Cambodian Government has repeatedly called for talks without preconditions with the other Khmer parties. We have fully supported these proposals as well as the resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly calling for early negotiations among Khmer parties.

Regrettably, there has been no progress. In fact, the Communists have intensified hostilities by attacking on the outskirts of Phnom Penh and attempting to cut the land and water routes to the capital. We must continue to aid the Cambodian Government in the face of externally supported military attacks. To refuse to provide the assistance needed would threaten the survival of the Khmer Republic and undermine the chances for peace and stability in the area.

The Cambodian Government forces, given adequate assistance, can hold their own. Once the insurgents realize that they cannot win by force of arms, I believe they will look to negotiations rather than war.

I am, therefore, proposing:

--Legislation to eliminate the current ceilings on military and economic assistance to Cambodia, and to authorize the appropriation of an additional \$222 million for military aid for Cambodia, and

--An amendment to the fiscal year 1975 budget for the additional \$222 million.

To provide the assistance necessary, the present restrictions on our military and economic aid to Cambodia must be removed and additional money provided. The \$200 million in military assistance currently authorized was largely expended during the past six months in response to the significantly intensified enemy offensive action. In addition, I have utilized the \$75 million drawdown of Department of Defense stocks authorized by Congress for this emergency situation. Since the beginning of the Communist offensive on January 1, ammunition expenditures have risen and will exhaust all available funds well before the end of this fiscal year. To meet minimum requirements for the survival of the Khmer Republic, I am requesting an additional \$222 million in military assistance and the elimination of the present \$200 million ceiling on military assistance to Cambodia. I am also requesting elimination of the \$377 million ceiling on overall assistance to Cambodia. This is necessary to enable us to provide vital commodities, mostly food, under the Food for Peace program, to assure adequate food for the victims of war and to prevent the economic collapse of the country.

I know we all seek the same goals for Cambodia--a situation wherein the suffering and destruction has stopped and the Khmer people have the necessary security to rebuild their society and their country. These goals are attainable. With the minimal resources and flexibility I am requesting from you, the Congress, we can help the people of Cambodia to have a choice in determining their future. The consequences of refusing them this assistance will reach far beyond Cambodia's borders and impact severely on prospects for peace and stability in that region and the world. There is no question but that this assistance would serve the interests of the United States.

GERALD R. FORD

The White House,

January 28, 1975.

Gerald R. Ford, Special Message to the Congress Requesting
Supplemental Assistance for the Republic of Vietnam and Cambodia
Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency
Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/257175>