Introduction

FIGURE 1 An American assists Vietnamese as part of the US evacuation of Saigon in late April 1975. [Image by Bettmann/Getty Images]

On April 29, 1975, Dutch photographer Hubert Van Es took an iconic photograph of events unfolding on the rooftop of 22 Gia Long Street in Saigon, South Vietnam (Figure 1). In the preceding two months, North Vietnamese troops had captured (or, depending on one's perspective, liberated) vast swaths of South Vietnamese territory in a stunningly successful military offensive. The next day, communist forces crashed through the gates at the presidential palace and raised their colors in a vivid display of Hanoi's victory. Van Es's snapshot captures one frame in this larger moment of systemic change: the chaotic and humiliating American evacuation of South Vietnam. That the last Americans frantically evacuated by helicopter dramatized the extent to which the United States failed to impose its will in Vietnam, despite preponderate economic, military, and geopolitical power. With the fall of Saigon, Indochina disappeared from the nightly

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news and most Americans were eager to turn their attention elsewhere. US leaders refused to establish formal economic or diplomatic relations with the government of unified Vietnam, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), until the mid-1990s. In addition to symbolizing the end of the war, the photograph has become one of the quintessential representations of the limits of American power in the late twentieth century.

Another narrative has been hiding in plain sight, however. While the man standing on the rooftop reaching his arm out to potential passengers is an American, the majority of the people in the image, those waiting on the ladder and on the rooftop below, are South Vietnamese. It is obvious that they will not all fit in the helicopter. How would the American decide whom to board? What would happen to those left behind? More than presenting agonizing dilemmas for an individual American on April 29, 1975, these questions reverberated in Washington for decades. While usually synonymous with a resounding, emotional ending point, the image, in other ways, also captures the opening frame of a new saga. More than one million South Vietnamese resettled in the United States in the two decades after 1975, signaling a new phase in US-Vietnamese relations.[1]

Although South Vietnam ceased to exist politically, the alliance between the United States and the South Vietnamese people did not abruptly disappear. Nor, for that matter, did hostilities between Washington and Hanoi. For twenty years, the relations between the former foes stood at an uneasy status somewhere between war and peace. Understanding the end of the Vietnam War, I argue, requires one to acknowledge both processes: the resumption of official ties between Washington and Hanoi, what US officials called "normalization," *and* the policies and programs that facilitated one of the largest migrations of the late twentieth century. These processes were not merely simultaneous, they were mutually constitutive. Negotiating and implementing migration programs for South Vietnamese became the basis of normalization between Washington and Hanoi.

Normalization is a term that historical actors used constantly while rarely, if ever, providing a definition. Although much more work needs to be done to uncover the concept's origins as a tool of American foreign policy, it is clear that achieving normalization involved at least three things: developing formal economic relations, establishing formal diplomatic ties (i.e., exchanging ambassadors), and securing the ability to

respond to bilateral and international issues without major incident. While we tend to think of normalization as a moment – usually President William J. Clinton's announcement of the resumption of diplomatic relations on July 11, 1995 – it is more accurate to consider normalization as a nebulous process, one that took decades to unfold. Uncovering the American approach to US-SRV normalization is the main task of this book.

Normalization, in this case, was a postwar reconciliation process, but the narrative is not a linear story from war to peace. Recent advances in the study of both war and peace have demonstrated that neither category is as clear as it first appears. While it is a truism that wars are easy to begin and difficult to end, an interdisciplinary group of scholars has documented the many ways wars are not easy to contain; the sharp geographic, human, and temporal boundaries we affix to conflicts are often, in reality, hazy at best.[2] To make the matter even more complicated, the military outcome of a war is often not as decisive as the nonmilitary combat that follows. Writing the history of a war, remembering a war, and commemorating a war are often just as crucial to lasting victory as success on the battlefield.[3] While wars continue long after the fighting stops on paper, in hearts and minds, and in stone and granite, conflicts also persist in human displacement.[4] For those uprooted by war, migration is so deeply connected to armed conflict as to be inseparable from the war itself.

For many South Vietnamese, the Vietnam War persisted past 1975.[5] First, the war continued through the ongoing traumas of displacement and family separation. Second, in the official histories and popular narratives that (re)wrote the history of the war and commemorated the conflict, the South Vietnamese suffered from erasure in both the United States and SRV.[6] This project contributes to ongoing initiatives to redress this silence. I expand on existing efforts, spearheaded by critical refugee scholars, by demonstrating the ways the South Vietnamese people influenced international relations long after the collapse of the RVN state.

In addition to migrations and debates about the war's memory, the Vietnam War also endured beyond 1975 in other ways. Despite Hanoi's unequivocal military victory, the United States still exerted disproportionate power in international relations. American officials used Washington's global stature to perpetuate hostilities through nonmilitary means.[7] US policy makers expanded an embargo, which had formerly pertained only to North Vietnam, to the entire country and also refused to honor

President Richard Nixon's promise of billions of dollars in reconstruction aid. Washington also wielded its considerable international leverage to prevent Western financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund from lending to Hanoi. These decisions enabled the United States, even from a position of defeat, to deprive the SRV of direly needed external capital required to rebuild after decades of warfare.[8] As the United States waged nonmilitary battles with Hanoi, actual fighting between Vietnam and China and Vietnam and Cambodia – conflicts known collectively as the Third Indochina War – raged in Southeast Asia.[9] As war commenced between communist countries, US relations with China thawed considerably, culminating in the resumption of diplomatic relations in 1979.[10] The Third Indochina War and US-Chinese rapprochement reoriented US policy in Asia, prompting additional warlike policies from Washington. In response to the SRV's incursion into Cambodia and occupation of power in Phnom Penh, for instance, the United States led an international effort to politically and economically isolate Hanoi.

At first glance, the United States' resettlement of South Vietnamese migrants seems to conform to this larger pattern of continuing conflict with Hanoi after 1975. Like the majority of refugees admitted to the United States during the second half of the twentieth century, the South Vietnamese were fleeing a communist state, symbolically voting with their feet in the ongoing Cold War struggle.[11] In addition to this broader propaganda victory, the flight of such a large number of South Vietnamese also served as a substitute for military victory: the fact that so many of the nation's former allies would rather flee their homeland than live under Hanoi's rule validated, for some, President Ronald Reagan's claim that the Vietnam War had been a "noble cause" all along.[12] By drawing attention to the hardships faced by the South Vietnamese and implementing policies to "rescue" or "save" them, American officials perpetuated conflict between Washington and Hanoi.[13] This rescue narrative had profound consequences for Vietnamese American diasporic communities, who became rhetorically indebted to the United States and were expected to exhibit gratitude and perform their refugee identity in specific ways.[14]

As the war lingered beyond 1975, peace was especially elusive. Although we often conceive of peace as temporal – the time when war is absent – Mary Dudziak reminds us that it is not that simple.[15] Especially for Americans in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when war has

been nearly perpetual, peace has been a "felt experience," a spatial rather than a temporal phenomenon.[16] The fact that most Americans, especially white Americans, can experience peace while their country wages war abroad is an important corrective to dismissing peace as a utopian ideal or thinking about peace as war's opposite. Understanding war and peace as entangled rather than opposed creates the space to understand the full complexity of normalization.[17] Normalization was a highly contested, paradoxical process where war and peace often coexisted.

The United States and SRV took steps toward postwar reconciliation, even as Washington implemented hostile policies. The incongruities between various aspects of American policy are decipherable only once we acknowledge that, even after the fall of Saigon, US officials treated the communist government in Hanoi and its South Vietnamese allies as distinct groups and implemented policies to address them both. Indeed, although the Republic of Vietnam ceased to exist, the tense relationships between the South Vietnamese people and the governments in Hanoi and Washington continued. As Long T. Bui and others have shown, South Vietnam persisted as a "ghost nation" whose history and people were "still unfolding . . . carried forth by the South Vietnamese diaspora and the refugees displaced by the war."[18] Although resettling South Vietnamese migrants might have, and sometimes did, inflame US-SRV hostilities, ultimately, negotiating and implementing migration programs thawed relations between Washington and Hanoi.

The United States could not secure the migration of South Vietnamese without SRV cooperation. Successful resolution of what US officials deemed "humanitarian issues" required regular contact and compromise between the former adversaries, which facilitated personal, governmental, and nongovernmental relationships established through regular meetings in Geneva, Hanoi, and New York City. These contacts were so extensive that by 1988 the US Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs asserted that "the United States has more contact with the Vietnamese on operational and policy levels than any other Western nation, including those which maintain diplomatic relations."[19] The tension between maintaining warlike policies, on the one hand, and demanding close collaboration, on the other, proved unsustainable. Negotiating and implementing policies to address humanitarian issues facilitated US-Vietnamese normalization.[20]

A fuller history of normalization invites us to reexamine the Vietnam War through new eyes. When reading the vast and constantly growing

histories of the war produced in the United States, it is impossible to overlook the pervasiveness of the question "Why Vietnam?" – that is, why did the United States devote so much blood and treasure in its failed attempt to secure the existence of a noncommunist South Vietnam?[21] This question has inspired a massive body of scholarship about the war's origins. The war's postscript, in contrast, has inspired far less scrutiny. While scholars have written extensively about the American withdrawal and the fateful events that occurred between the Peace of Paris Accords in 1973 and Hanoi's military victory in 1975, many accounts end abruptly in April 1975. Although the iconic photograph of the US evacuation is a tempting place to conclude histories of the conflict and pivot to exploring the war's memory, legacy, and lessons, it is imperative to continue examining US-Vietnamese relations after 1975.[22] The scope and complexity of the normalization process demand that historians interrogate the war's proctracted ending with the same suspicion and curiosity that they have afforded to the conflict's beginnings.

MIGRANTS AND US-VIETNAMESE NORMALIZATION

To make sense of the contradictions in the American approach to normalization, one must center the bilateral and multilateral migration programs that brought over one million South Vietnamese to the United States. Like the man standing on the Saigon rooftop on April 29, 1975, however, US officials had limited resources and had to make hard choices. Who, of South Vietnam's millions of people, did American policy makers view as most deserving of resettlement in the United States? To what extent did making these types of decisions perpetuate the paternalism and animosity that often characterized US policies toward South Vietnam during the war years? At the same time, how did implementing migration programs open a new chapter of relations between the American and South Vietnamese peoples? Ultimately, US officials prioritized three groups of South Vietnamese: those among the "boat people" with familial and/or wartime connections to the United States; those incarcerated in Hanoi's reeducation camps, especially members of the ARVN; and the 30,000–50,000 Amerasians, or children of American servicemen and Vietnamese women, who remained in Vietnam after 1975.

Approximately 130,000 South Vietnamese evacuated Saigon with American personnel in April 1975. Immediately thereafter, others continued to flee. Many departed in unseaworthy vessels and faced unpredictable waters, pirates, and starvation during their journeys, migrants the

world called "boat people."[23] Still others, known as "land people," fled communist control of Vietnam and neighboring countries through dangerous overland routes that often required traversing mountainous terrain, completing daring river crossings, and successfully navigating through minefields. These exoduses were the result of both individual decisions made by hundreds of thousands of nonstate actors and forced expulsion policies. Ultimately, 1.3 million oceanic and overland migrants successfully reached the shores of first asylum nations between 1975 and 1995. Of these, the United States resettled 822,977, or just over 63 percent, including 424,590 Vietnamese, 248,147 Laotians, and 150,240 Cambodians.[24] Although the diaspora included others, I focus primarily, though not exclusively, on Vietnamese migrants who resettled in the United States, given my primary interest in US-Vietnamese normalization.

The number of Vietnamese who resettled in the United States far exceeded the original 130,000 evacuees and the nearly 425,000 overland and oceanic migrants. An additional half million emigrated directly from Vietnam to the United States through a multilateral initiative known as the Orderly Departure Program (ODP).[25] The 500,000 persons who traveled through the ODP included those with ties to the United States who would have otherwise fled as "boat people," including Amerasians, former reeducation camp detainees, and their close family members.[26] Between 1975 and 1995, then, over one million Vietnamese resettled in the United States, and over two thousand refugees per year were still arriving annually on American shores in the early twenty-first century through the vestiges of war-related migration programs.[27]

There was nothing inevitable about American officials' decision to admit South Vietnamese migrants for more than two decades following the RVN's collapse. Both long-standing trends in US law and the immediate historical context stood as obstacles to the resettlement of such a large Asian migrant population. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the 1924 Quota Act, and racially defined naturalization laws largely prohibited Asians from legally immigrating to the United States or obtaining American citizenship until the mid-twentieth century.[28] The US-Philippine War, the ferocity of US-Japanese combat during WWII, Japanese American Internment, and wars in Korea and Vietnam all reinforced this deep-seated racial animus by dehumanizing Asians as others and enemies.[29] These precedents, and Americans' eagerness to wash their hands of Indochina after 1975, combined to pose significant barriers to entry for South Vietnamese. Although US policy makers looked favorably on refugees fleeing communism throughout the Cold War, the

Vietnam War and the Watergate Scandal discredited so many of the assumptions underpinning US foreign policy that anticommunism alone does not satisfactorily explain why American policy makers made an immediate commitment to resettle South Vietnamese in 1975 and steadily expanded that commitment for twenty years.

The vast majority of the South Vietnamese who resettled in the United States did so through special programs that operated outside normal channels. The Refugee Act of 1980, inspired in large part by the United States' inability to respond effectively to the early surge in the diaspora, was the first stand-alone refugee law of the twentieth century. Throughout the 1980s, American policy makers consistently earmarked over half of the available admissions slots for Indochinese refugees. The majority of South Vietnamese who arrived in the United States, however, resettled through programs that required additional legislation and/or bilateral or multilateral agreements. In addition to more than five separate paroles in the second half of the 1970s, South Vietnamese also emigrated via the 1979 Orderly Departure Program, the 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act, the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act, the 1989 Humanitarian Operation (a special program for former reeducation camp detainees), the 1989 Comprehensive Plan of Action, the 1996 Resettlement Opportunities for Vietnamese Returnees, and the 1996 McCain Amendment. Implementing these programs involved intensive negotiations between American officials and their SRV counterparts. These policies were also premised on assumptions about the exceptionality of the relationship between the American and South Vietnamese peoples, what President Gerald Ford described as a "profound moral obligation."[30] Even as Washington and Hanoi resumed formal economic and diplomatic relations in the mid-1990s, American officials continued to create special channels for their South Vietnamese allies to resettle in the United States.

While the more than one million Vietnamese who resettled in the United States in the twenty years after the fall of Saigon are commonly referred to as *refugees*, they actually occupied a variety of legal categories. Vietnamese *migrants* – a term I use to connote, simply, people on the move – assumed an assortment of legal statuses, including refugee, parolee, immigrant, and screened-out refugee. International law during this period, which derived from the 1951 Refugee Convention as amended by the 1967 Protocol, defined a refugee as any individual "outside the country of his nationality" and unable to return due to "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of

a particular social group or political opinion."[31] This narrow definition does not encompass the much broader, colloquial use of the term refugee to refer to individuals compelled to flee, even if they remain in their home country or flee for reasons not included in the UN definition, such as natural disasters.[32] If popular usage far outpaces the legal definition, scholars have documented the extent to which the term refugee indicates more than a legal status.[33] As Mimi Thi Nguyen explains, "the refugee" is "a historical event, a legal classification, an existential condition of suspension or surrender . . . and a focal point for rescue or rehabilitation."[34] While I am deeply indebted to the scholars who have theorized and problematized the concept of refugee, in the pages that follow I use the term in a strictly legal sense unless otherwise noted. US and SRV officials vociferously debated whether or not Vietnamese migrants formally qualified as refugees. These disagreements involved far more than semantics.[35] The ability to apply a specific label and persuade the international community that the label was correct became one of the many means through which Washington and Hanoi clashed, cooperated, and fought for credibility on the world stage after 1975.

The full extent of the Indochinese diaspora and its impact on US-Vietnamese normalization during these decades has, hitherto, largely been overshadowed. During the same years that over one million South Vietnamese resettled in the United States, the American public's attention remained fixated on a much smaller cohort: the 2,500 US servicemen listed as prisoners of war/missing in action (POW/MIA). Of all the issues that influenced US-SRV normalization, none rivaled the attention that the American people devoted to the effort to determine the fate of every American who served in the Vietnam War and bring them (or their remains) back to the United States. This campaign was known as the effort to provide a "full accounting" of missing American servicemen.[36] After US troops left Vietnam in 1973, the belief that Hanoi continued to hold live American prisoners against their will and that the US government, either out of negligence, incompetence, or subterfuge, refused to bring them home gripped the American public consciousness. Public opinion polls taken in April 1993, for example, revealed that 67 percent of respondents believed that there were Americans "still being held in Southeast Asia."[37] Yet, for all of the fanfare, public recognition, and expenditure of governmental resources the full accounting effort inspired, POW/MIAs were only one of multiple groups that occupied a prominent place on the US government's agenda vis-à-vis Vietnam. Migration programs for South Vietnamese not only occurred alongside the POW/MIA

campaign; US officials linked these causes by defining them as family-reunification based humanitarian issues. Collaboration on humanitarian issues facilitated normalization.

NORMALIZATION AND NONEXECUTIVE ACTORS

Labeling migration programs and POW/MIA accounting as "humanitarian" concerns evoked a long history of humanitarian action. Generally speaking, scholars define humanitarianism as an impulse to assist those suffering beyond the nation's borders.[38] While misery emanates from many places, war and its concomitant hardships have consistently attracted relief efforts.[39] In the wake of WWI, humanitarian aid became an important pillar of US foreign relations, and the sheer scope and scale of the horrors of WWII accelerated those trends by prompting the professionalization and globalization of humanitarian organizations.[40] The massive financial resources and logistical coordination required to provide assistance on a global scale prompted ever-closer relationships between large humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross and the US government.[41] By the 1970s, humanitarian organizations had amassed a good deal of moral capital, credibility born from a long history of assisting vulnerable populations in often dangerous situations. At the same time, because the large, well-established humanitarian agencies became increasingly reliant on government dollars, these organizations took great pains to emphasize their independence and insisted that they, and their causes, were nonpolitical.[42] This rhetoric of apolitical morality played a prominent role in US-SRV normalization.

So did human rights. In comparison to humanitarianism, the idea that every individual possesses universal human rights is of much more recent vintage. Human rights became enshrined in global geopolitics with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). As humanitarian workers were triaging the bloodletting of World War II, the newly formed United Nations codified the UDHR and a series of other international accords and conventions in an attempt to thwart future catastrophe, efforts collectively constituting a "human rights revolution."[43] While human rights were powerfully articulated in the 1940s, in the 1970s grassroots actors and transnational NGOs pushed governments to put the words enshrined decades prior into action. This surge of activism elevated human rights to a place of greater prominence and permeance in international relations.[44] The diffusion of human rights rhetoric and activism echoed powerfully in Washington, where Congress and then the

White House incorporated human rights into US foreign policy.[45] Although scholars make important distinctions between humanitarianism and human rights, by the fall of Saigon both offered poignant moral languages, had roots intimately tied to war, and flourished thanks to the rise of powerful NGOs, increasing state support, and ever closer links to US foreign policy.[46]

Humanitarianism and human rights shared another important feature: ties to refugee advocacy. Because war prompts dislocation, one of the most important pillars of twentieth-century humanitarian action was in response to the "refugee question."[47] The displacement of millions during WWI and WWII demanded an international, multilateral response.[48] In the aftermath of WWI, the League of Nations formed the High Commissioner for Refugees, and by the early 1950s, the UN codified a legal definition of refugee in the Refugee Convention and created the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[49] The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which contains multiple provisions explicitly related to migration, and this international refugee infrastructure were thus overlapping and mutually reinforcing.[50]

The international responses to the migrations inaugured by WWI and WWII, in short, formed a key link between what were related yet distinct bodies of thought and action: humanitarianism and human rights. Of all the ways that these two phenomena became increasingly entangled in the second half of the twentieth century, crafting a response to the Indochinese diaspora stands apart as an area where the two became linguistically, legally, institutionally, and politically coupled. A study of US-SRV normalization provides keen insights into how this larger process played out in the last decades of the twentieth century.

I explore the creation and consequences of American policy on three levels: nongovernmental influences on US policy; debates that occurred in Washington among elected officials and various branches of the US bureaucracy; and, finally, the scope, nature, and impact of the normalization process. While vast differences in resources and power separated the individuals and institutions operating at each of these levels, each group substantively influenced the US approach to Vietnam after 1975 in a symbiotic policy-making process that saw meaningful input from grassroots, national, and transnational actors.

Nonstate actors have played significant roles in US foreign affairs throughout American history.[51] While building on a long history of nongovernmental involvement in policy making, the methods and influence individuals and institutions wielded after 1975 owed a great deal to

the immediate context of burgeoning transnational advocacy networks, especially the global human rights movement.[52] If humanitarian agencies had long saved lives by providing material and medical assistance, human rights activists attempted to accomplish the same ends using information and political pressure. Amnesty International (AI) is the quintessential example of this approach. By assembling a global infrastructure, engaging in fact-finding missions, publishing regular and widely read reports based on first-hand accounts, and mobilizing its worldwide membership into vast letter-writing campaigns, Amnesty commanded widespread respect as an influential and self-proclaimed impartial actor in the international arena. While Amnesty played a small but important role in US-Vietnamese normalization, the imprint of AI's methods formed the context in which other NGOs pertinent to US-SRV normalization operated. Some of the most prominent of these included the UNHCR; the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, or simply "the League," as it was known; and the Citizens Commission on Indochinese Refugees (CCIR), a subcommittee within the International Rescue Committee.[53]

While these national and international NGOs left a significant imprint on US policy, grassroots-level organizations also mattered a great deal. This is especially true for the South Vietnamese migrant population that has garnered the least scholarly attention to date: reeducation camp prisoners. The nongovernmental advocates most crucial to the United States' reeducation camp policy were not traditional Washington power-brokers. The Aurora Foundation, a California-based human rights NGO, and the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association (FVPPA), a Virginia-based South Vietnamese American advocacy group, exerted a particularly decisive influence on US policy regarding reeducation camp detainees.[54] Both the Aurora Foundation and the FVPPA were founded by women born outside of the United States who mobilized influential transnational networks to secure information that became vital to US policy making: Ginetta Sagan and Khuc Minh Tho, respectively.

Ginetta Sagan was both a leader in the American human rights movement and a victim of human rights violations.[55] She was born in 1925 in Milan, Italy, and she and her parents joined the anti-Fascist movement during World War II. Both of her parents were murdered as a result of their resistance work and Sagan herself was imprisoned and tortured. Thereafter, she immigrated to the United States where she married, started her family, and founded the West Coast branch of Amnesty International's American chapter (AIUSA) in 1968. In addition to serving multiple terms

on the AIUSA's board of directors in the 1970s and 1980s, Sagan also founded her own organization, the Aurora Foundation, to advocate on behalf of individuals outside of Amnesty's mandate, including, most prominently, Vietnamese reeducation camp detainees. Sagan's reports found receptive ears in US policy-making circles, and in 1996 Clinton awarded Sagan the highest civilian honor in the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, in recognition of her lifelong advocacy on behalf of political prisoners in Vietnam and elsewhere.[56]

While Sagan advocated on behalf of reeducation camp detainees using a human rights framework, Khuc Minh Tho and the FVPPA centered their advocacy around family reunification.[57] In 1961, Tho lost her first husband, a graduate of the South Vietnamese Military Academy, when she was five months pregnant with their third child. At twenty-two years old, Tho was a widowed mother of three trying to raise her family amidst the increasing American escalation of the war. Tho's father, brothers, and second husband all also served in the ARVN, and when South Vietnam collapsed she was working at the RVN embassy in the Philippines. Tho resettled in the United States in 1977, while her three children all remained in Vietnam and her second husband was incarcerated in a reeducation camp. The organization that became the FVPPA began meeting informally in Tho's living room; a little over a decade later, the lead US official who negotiated the Humanitarian Operation (HO) program gave Tho the pen he used to sign the agreement to symbolize the central role the Association played in creating and sustaining the momentum for the accord.[58] Both the Aurora Foundation and the FVPPA's successes illustrate the meaningful role even the most unlikely of nongovernmental actors played in crafting post-1975 US policy toward Vietnam. They also demonstrate the extent to which US policy was, as in the pre-1975 period, the result of highly contingent processes in which the decisions of individual actors mattered a great deal.[59]

The second aspect of US policy making that I examine is the national level debates that occurred among American officials responsible for formulating US policy toward the SRV. Although presidential initiative and support remained vital, officials outside the White House played a definitive part in shaping the scope and pace of normalization. Congressional efforts to wrestle back foreign policy prerogatives from an "Imperial Presidency" left a lasting impression on US-Vietnamese relations after 1975.[60] Executive deception during the military phase of the Vietnam War, revealed most notoriously in the *Pentagon Papers*, inspired a backlash among legislators who, through initiatives like the

War Powers Resolution of 1973, sought to circumscribe the excesses of executive influence and reclaim Congress' constitutional powers involving war and peace.[61]

After April 1975, US-Vietnamese relations became an ideal arena for legislators to assert their influence. The reasons for this are multifaceted. After the US evacuation of Saigon, Vietnam never again occupied a primary place on the nation's foreign policy agenda. No longer *the* issue, the United States' Vietnam policy was of far less relative importance, and therefore less likely to demand the intense executive oversight it commanded between 1964 and 1975. Early in the normalization process, the most active members of Congress were those with personal ties to refugee concerns, World War II, and/or the Holocaust such as Edward M. "Ted" Kennedy (D-MA), Rudy Boschwitz (R-MN), Stephen Solarz (D-NY), Robert J. "Bob" Dole (R-KS), and Claiborne Pell (D-RI). As time passed, Vietnam War veterans, including John Kerry (D-MA), John McCain (R-AZ), and Douglas Brian "Pete" Peterson (D-FL), became the most prominent congressional leaders in regard to US-SRV normalization. Growing assertiveness from veterans occurred largely thanks to the rehabilitation of the US military in the American mind in the 1980s and early 1990s, a trend that imbued veterans with a powerful form of political capital.[62] Especially because none of the post-1975 US presidents served in the Vietnam War, veterans in Congress possessed valuable leverage to become prominent voices on the topic. Finally, the ill-defined, amorphous nature of the normalization process itself invited widespread involvement from various sectors of the US bureaucracy. For all of these reasons, Capitol Hill played an instrumental role in US-Vietnamese normalization.

Because members of Congress and nonstate actors contributed decisively to the formation of US policies, I use the term *nonexecutive actors* to capture the nature of the key advocates and alliances that played such a fundamental role in this aspect of US foreign relations. Nonexecutive actors helped build a striking bipartisan base of support for migration programs for South Vietnamese not only in the 1970s but for decades thereafter. Given the ability of the Vietnam War to inspire profound, emotional disagreements, how can we explain this sustained, widespread support? In addition to the fact that many US officials supported the same programs for disparate reasons, the ubiquity and potency of humanitarian and human rights rhetoric help explain why so many nonexecutive actors who harbored very different opinions about the Vietnam War supported the same migration policies.

In addition to vaulting many NGOs to places of prominence on the world stage, the global human rights movement also provided a moral language that left a lasting imprint on US officials in Washington and on the American public more broadly. While the horrors of WWII prompted the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, Barbara Keys persuasively argues that it was the immediate context of the Vietnam War that explains why human rights rhetoric and activism became so popular in the United States in the 1970s.[63] Keys and others have demonstrated that human rights activism appealed to both liberals and conservatives – to those who saw "human rights promotion" as "an antidote to shame and guilt" inspired by the Vietnam War and to those who had viewed the war as "just and necessary" but still needed a new way to "revive Cold War priorities."[64]

American officials, however, mobilized human rights rhetoric in very specific ways.[65] While scholars draw distinctions between human rights and humanitarianism, many of the central actors involved in US-Vietnamese normalization conflated the two. This tendency reflected the ways refugee advocacy created intimate connections between long-standing humanitarian efforts and the recent surge in human rights, a process furthered in numerous ways by the American and international responses to the Indochinese diaspora. US policy makers, for instance, repeatedly demanded that Hanoi address the handful of war-related concerns Washington deemed "humanitarian."[66] While there were many additional issues that could have warranted inclusion under the umbrella of "humanitarian" – like the lasting effects of Agent Orange, to name only one possibility – US officials narrowly defined "humanitarian" vis-à-vis the SRV as synonymous with causes that involved family reunification for South Vietnamese and Americans: migration programs and POW/MIA accounting.[67] Because these concerns – especially the diaspora and Hanoi's reeducation policy – were so intimately tied to human rights activism of the era, the US definition of "humanitarian" was both extremely specific, prioritizing Americans and Vietnamese with ties to the United States at the expense of others, and also tethered to very broad overlapping moral lexicons.

This US definition of humanitarian reinforced existing precedents and reflected a unique, context-specific response to the Vietnam War. The importance of family reunification in US immigration policy far predated the post-1975 migration programs. As historian Roger Daniels notes, "family reunification" has been "a cornerstone of American immigration policy since 1921."[68] Family reunification's place in US migration policy

grew dramatically during World War II and the early Cold War, especially with regards to migrants from Asia, thanks to special provisions for military brides and international adoption.[69] The 1952 McCarran-Walter Act and the landmark 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act codified this trend even further by earmarking family reunification as a preference category that counted outside of national and then hemispheric limits.[70] Family reunification precedents became even more politicized amid debates about the definition and sanctity of the family that raged in American political culture throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[71] The emotional advocacy of family reunification based groups like the League and FVPPA, organizations led by women demanding answers to questions about their loved ones, drew on the moral credibility of humanitarian advocacy and benefited from the surging popularity of human rights to create a powerful bipartisan base of support for family-reunification policies. These programs, in turn, became the basis of the American approach toward Vietnam after 1975.

ORGANIZATION

As a nonlinear, often contradictory process that saw input from a variety of nonexecutive actors, the best way to explore the American approach to US-SRV normalization is to trace events as they occurred. This book unfolds in three parts. Part I examines US policy from 1975 to 1980, when American officials responded to major geopolitical changes in Southeast Asia and the Cold War more broadly. These years were characterized by fluidity and contention as US policy makers debated the nature and extent of any American commitment to the South Vietnamese people in the wake of the RVN's collapse. During this tumultuous period, US officials offered starkly different approaches to relations with Hanoi, ranging from outright refusal to consider formal ties to advocating for the immediate resumption of relations without preconditions. By the end of the decade, this vacillation narrowed toward consensus as the regional and international landscapes changed sharply in late 1978-early 1979. Within a matter of months, the United States officially recognized the government in Beijing; Vietnam invaded Cambodia, inflaming the Third Indochina War; and the Indochinese diaspora reached cataclysmic proportions. At the end of the year, the preexisting and recently heightened animosities between Washington and Moscow escalated further with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. With regard to US-SRV normalization, these profound changes led American officials to implement contradictory

policies. US officials suspended talks on the status of formal relations and demanded that Hanoi meet two conditions before the negotiations could resume: withdraw its troops from Cambodia and facilitate a "full accounting" of missing American servicemen. These stipulations tabled formal talks until 1991. In the meantime, however, US officials insisted that Hanoi collaborate with Washington and other international partners on migration programs for the South Vietnamese.

Chapter 1 revises current depictions of what Americans call the fall of Saigon by tracing the Ford administration's conscious and consistent (though classified) efforts to include South Vietnamese in US evacuation plans. These efforts secured the evacuation of over 130,000 American allies and laid the foundations for future American policy. After April 1975, the loci of policy initiative shifted outside of the White House. Thereafter, nonexecutive actors created the momentum for expanding migration programs for Indochinese migrants. Chapter 2 explores the ways that various aspects of US policy toward Asia became entangled in the late 1970s. Despite initial efforts to keep them separate, US efforts to resume formal relations with China, pursue normalization with the SRV, respond to the exodus of overland and oceanic migrants, and institutionalize human rights into US foreign policy all became deeply intertwined. This chapter uses the advocacy of the Citizens Commission on Indochinese Refugees (CCIR) to illuminate these connections and to demonstrate how nonexecutive actors rose to play prominent roles in American statecraft.

Part II charts US normalization policies during the 1980s. Throughout the decade, a surprising level of bipartisan consensus underwrote US policy. Chapter 3 highlights the ways Washington expanded its agenda vis-à-vis the SRV to include not only POW/MIAs and South Vietnamese who had fled their homeland by boat but also Amerasians, reeducation camp detainees, and others with ties to the United States who remained in Vietnam. Nonstate actors like the League, the Aurora Foundation, and the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association were prominent actors in this larger policy reorientation. While the Reagan administration's focus on groups who remained in Vietnam reflected the president's willingness, even eagerness, to criticize Hanoi's internal affairs, each cause had another common feature: successful resolution – defined in terms of either migration or repatriation of remains – required SRV cooperation. Chapter 4 uncovers the growing collaboration between Washington and Hanoi on humanitarian issues during the second half of the 1980s. Relations between the former foes thawed considerably over the course

of the decade, even as the status of formal economic and diplomatic ties remained unaltered.

Part III details US-Vietnamese relations from 1989 to 2000, with a focus on the years 1989–1996. As Washington and Hanoi resumed official ties, culminating with economic relations in 1994 and diplomatic relations in 1995, the consensus that fueled US policy during the 1980s dissolved. Debate once again became the order of the day as American officials confronted the daunting task of bringing the programs they earmarked as "humanitarian" to a close. The range of nonexecutive actors involved in the process and the fact that humanitarian programs involved incredibly emotional issues of family reunification and moral obligation made an already challenging situation extraordinarily difficult. Chapter 5 explores US-Vietnamese relations during the Bush administration. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and a political settlement in Cambodia in October 1991 created an atmosphere of flexibility and opportunity in the international arena that had been absent for decades. In this new environment, US-SRV collaboration deepened, as the two nations took steps down the US-authored Roadmap to Normalization. These trends proceeded apace during the mid-1990s, developments I trace in Chapter 6. Even as official economic and diplomatic relations resumed, migration policies and POW/MIA accounting remained crucial to the normalization process.

Ultimately, the resumption of formal relations inaugurated major changes and left other facets of US policy in place. By lifting the embargo and extending formal diplomatic recognition to the SRV, Washington jettisoned the policies that perpetuated a warlike state between the former adversaries and paved the way for deepening ties between the two countries. Those relations had already been altered drastically, however, as by 1995 over one million South Vietnamese had resettled in the United States. With the loosening of restrictions in the mid-1990s, moreover, this massive migration began to flow much more freely in the other direction. The ties among Vietnamese families and between Vietnamese Americans and the land of their ancestors increasingly bound their homeland and adoptive nation together. These demographic connections, and their economic and political ramifications, furthered the normalization process in ways state officials could encourage but never control.

Even as American officials changed the tone with which they treated the government in Hanoi, the US commitment to the South Vietnamese, in many ways, persisted. On the one hand, by making the resolution of humanitarian issues preconditions for formal relations, American officials

committed themselves to bringing migration programs to a close, which contracted resettlement opportunities. At the same time, however, US policy makers created new loopholes for South Vietnamese with wartime connections to the United States, most notably in the 1996 McCain Amendment and 1996 Resettlement Opportunities for Vietnamese Refugees. Although Washington and Hanoi had reestablished formal relations, US officials still regarded the bonds between the American and South Vietnamese peoples as exceptional and pressing enough to warrant new programs.

Recognizing and centering the immediate and enduring importance of migration programs to US-Vietnamese normalization recasts our understanding of the end of the Vietnam War. Normalization was a process, not a moment, and a highly contentious, often contradictory process at that. While the fall of Saigon in April 1975 and the resumption of ties in the mid-1990s were important milestones with major implications, they are also imperfect markers of the boundaries of war and peace. Even though the Republic of Vietnam disappeared from the geopolitical map in 1975, the South Vietnamese people remained at the center of ongoing relations between Washington and Hanoi, actively influencing international relations both as migrants and as advocates. While POW/MIA accounting received much more attention from Hollywood and the American people and was therefore at the forefront of US policy and rhetoric, migration programs for South Vietnamese were just as integral to the normalization process and forever changed US-Vietnamese relations by creating a robust and growing demographic of Vietnamese Americans. The activism of nonexecutive actors, especially members of Congress and NGOs, dictated much of the scope and pace of this larger process.

Because normalization took decades, moreover, US policy became deeply intertwined with a myriad of larger phenomena. A close examination of the American approach to normalization helps us better understand three major transformations of the late twentieth century: the reassertion of the US Congress in American foreign policy, the Indochinese diaspora and changing domestic and international refugee norms, and the intertwining of humanitarianism and human rights. By tracing these domestic, regional, and global phenomena, *After Saigon's Fall* captures the contingencies and contradictions inherent in US-Vietnamese normalization and also reveals much about US politics and society in the last quarter of the twentieth century.