

An Interview with Amanda C. Demmer

Amanda C. Demmer is an associate professor of history at Virginia Tech. She researches and teaches about war, diplomacy, and migration. She has authored a variety of articles and chapters, and her work has appeared in the Washington Post, the New York Times, Forbes, CBS News, Apple News Today, and other outlets. Her next book project, tentatively titled America and the World: The Politics of Recognition and Normalization in U.S. History, will trace recognition as a tool of U.S. statecraft from 1776 to the present. Here she discusses her recent book, After Saigon's Fall: Refugees and U.S.-Vietnamese Relations, 1975–2000 (2021).



Amanda C. Demmer

Interview by Alexander Poster

How did you first become interested in this topic of Refugees and U.S.-Vietnamese Relations?

Answering this question honestly requires a confession. When I was a graduate student in a seminar on U.S. foreign relations, I read a throwaway line in a book stating that the United States and Vietnam did not normalize relations until the mid-1990s. I thought it was a typo. While I was aware of the lack of U.S.-Cuban relations (the intense press coverage of the Elián Gonzalez case was inescapable to me, even as a child), I had somehow never known that it took Washington and Hanoi 20 years to resume economic and diplomatic relations after the last U.S. helicopters left Saigon in 1975. I was intrigued. For that class I ended up writing a research paper that explored the domestic debates surrounding the Clinton administration's decisions to resume economic and diplomatic relations in 1994 and 1995, respectively.

The more I researched, the more I realized that this topic was not an article-length project, but a dissertation (and a topic where there is room for many more dissertations). As I began to envision what a project that spanned from 1975 to 1995 might look like, I took it as a given that the Indochinese diaspora—the migration of over three million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians out of Indochina in the two decades after 1975—would have significantly influenced the scope and pace of U.S.-Vietnamese relations after 1975. This hunch was confirmed

and again, in presidential, congressional, and nonstate archives. The centrality of migration issues to the normalization process was also absent from existing studies, which positioned me to make a meaningful intervention.

Can you describe the general nature of your research and why you believe it is important?

While the Vietnam War is one of the most written-about conflicts in U.S. history, I couldn't help but notice that most histories stopped in 1975. There are many books that contemplate the war's legacies and "lessons," but very few that trace ongoing U.S.-Vietnamese relations after 1975, and even fewer of them centered refugee politics. Accordingly, my book begins where most histories of the Vietnam War end: with the fall of South Vietnam in April 1975. Rather than a definitive endpoint, I argue the events of April 1975 are best understood as a turning point in U.S.-Vietnamese relations. Although the state of South Vietnam (the Republic of Vietnam) collapsed, I take seriously Critical Refugee Studies' contention that the nation of South Vietnam—the people—persisted after 1975. I also contend that they continued to impact the bilateral ties between Washington and Hanoi, both as migrants and as activists. My book demonstrates that to decipher the complex, often contradictory policies the United States implemented after 1975, one must understand that Washington continued to treat its former allies and the government in Hanoi as distinct entities and implemented policies to address them both.

The protracted nature of the normalization process also provided a window to better understand three major transformations of the late 20th century: the reassertion of the U.S. Congress in American foreign policy, changing domestic and international refugee norms, and the intertwining of humanitarianism and human rights in both U.S. policy and law. These insights reveal much about U.S. society and policy at the end of the Cold War.

How did the parole provisions in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 play a role in evacuations in South Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975?

The United States did not have a separate, stand-alone law for refugee admissions until 1980. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. presidents used a loophole, the parole power, which permitted the attorney general to admit (or parole) an alien into the country if it served the "public interest." It was through this mechanism that large groups of refugees fleeing communism entered the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. By 1975, however, the Cold War consensus was shattered, and executive-legislative mistrust was incredibly high, especially vis-à-vis Vietnam.

The parole power was therefore at the center of discussions throughout the U.S. governmental bureaucracy in the spring of 1975 and for the rest of the decade. After a major effort, the Ford administration was able to secure congressional approval (which was not technically required for the parole itself, but was necessary for supporting appropriations) for the parole of three categories of Vietnamese: (1) immediate relatives of U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens, (2) the Vietnamese already at Clark Air Force base (who had been snuck out of the country usually with tacit approval of the highest ranking local officials), and (3) other “high risk” individuals. The cap placed on “high risk” in 1975 was 50,000. It was obvious, however, that many more—the State Department estimated perhaps over a million—could qualify for the category. This reality meant that parole questions echoed prominently beyond 1975.

How did advocates for refugees dovetail their campaign with the POW/MIA movement?

Other scholars like H. Bruce Franklin and Michael Allen have shown just how pervasive the effort to provide a “full accounting” for missing American servicemen became after 1975. The black POW/MIA flag is the only banner besides the stars and stripes to have ever flown over the White House, and films like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) created “Rambomania” throughout the country. The popularity of the POW/MIA movement also provided a widely recognized and respected, almost venerated, language and concept upon which refugee advocates could build (I elaborate on these points in response to Question 13).

Another fascinating point of connection that I explore in my book is gender politics. Although the POW/MIA movement was incredibly diverse and diffuse, the League of Wives, which eventually grew into the National League of POW/MIA Families, was created and run by the wives and other female relatives of missing American servicemen. The leader of the League throughout the 1980s was Ann Mills Griffiths, the sister of a missing American serviceman. The heads of other organizations that lobbied on behalf of refugees, including the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association (FVPPA) and the Aurora Foundation, were also headed and run by women, Khuc Minh Tho and Ginetta Sagan, respectively.

Although they often did not verbalize this tradition, Mills, Tho, and Sagan all benefited from a society and culture predisposed to see women (especially homemakers/mothers) as a moral authority. And, if there was one thing the U.S. was lacking vis-à-vis Vietnam after 1975, moral authority was quite high on the list. By explaining and publicizing their causes as facilitating family reunification

and the observance of human rights, these women-led organizations offered policy positions that U.S. officials could argue were humanitarian and nonpolitical.

The steady migration of people from southern Vietnam by sea after 1975 certainly impacted the Carter administration's outlook on refugees. In what pivotal ways did their perspectives change?

The sheer scope and scale of the migration prompted major reevaluations. The diaspora began immediately after what Americans call the fall of Saigon, and in the late stages of the Ford Administration and the early years of Carter's time in office, both administrations perceived departures as a "cleanup process" connected to the U.S. evacuation. As anyone with a cursory familiarity with those events knows, evacuation points devolved into mob scenes and chaos reigned, with many who had wished to depart (or promised they would be able to depart) unable to do so. It was therefore not surprising that relatively small numbers fled in the wake of the chaotic U.S. withdrawal.

In the years that followed, the migration changed in scope and scale by orders of magnitude (for reasons I don't have the space to explain here). Arrivals at first asylum nations (which did not include those who perished en route) skyrocketed from measured in the hundreds in 1975 to thousands in 1976/7 to tens of thousands in 1978 to peaking with 57,000 arriving in a single month in June 1979. This was no "cleanup" operation, but something else entirely. Nonstate actors and eventually the Carter administration argued that the change amounted to an international humanitarian emergency, a refugee crisis prompted by massive human rights violations that required an immediate, multilateral response.

How did continued migration change the relationship between the State Department and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)?

The UNHCR's mandate was (and is) both contradictory and ambiguous. Intended to be a nonpolitical advocate for refugees *and* a coordinator of international policies, the tensions in the institution's mission made its place in the internal community quite nebulous and extremely context-dependent. Until the 1970s, the UNHCR was much maligned by U.S. officials, who preferred to act unilaterally when it came to refugee issues. Nevertheless, in the Cold War context, the U.S. provided the majority of the organization's funding.

From 1975 on, U.S. officials attempted to "internationalize" the issue of Vietnamese refugees with little success. In wake of the cataclysmic violence unleashed by the U.S. military in Southeast Asia, most of the region and the

world viewed Vietnamese migrants as a U.S. responsibility (and because most were internationally displaced and had not yet crossed an international border, the UNHCR argued they were not “refugees.”) As the migration surged without any major international response, first asylum nations grew desperate and began literally pushing boats back to sea and closing land borders. Receiving nations insisted they would continue to receive incoming migrants if a system of “burden sharing” to facilitate international resettlement was created. In this context, the relationship between the State Department (and the U.S. government more broadly) and the UNHCR shifted from one of general animosity to one of mutual support and perhaps even codependence. The resettlement of Indochinese refugees (Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians), the majority of whom came to the United States, remains today one of the UNHCR’s longest and largest resettlement programs.

Can you talk a bit about “kitchen table activists” and their advocacy for displaced people after the Vietnam conflict?

I borrowed this term from Lisa McGirr’s *Suburban Warriors*, which traces the role of women organizing from their homes in propelling the conservative movement. Each of the major organizations I trace was headed by women who were literally and figuratively kitchen-table activists. The League of Wives, the precursor to the League of Families, began with the wives of POWs meeting in domestic spaces to offer support, share information, and, eventually, organize into one of the most politically powerful groups in Washington, D.C. (Heath Hardage Lee has a fantastic new book out about this).

My work demonstrates that Ginetta Sagan and Khuc Minh Tho did the same thing. Ginetta Sagan founded the West Coast chapter of Amnesty International US branch (AIUSA) literally at her kitchen table in Atherton, California. Even once the branch had enough resources for a professional space, Sagan’s home, especially her massive, marble-topped kitchen table served as what one advocate called a “satellite office” for decades. The Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association, which I discuss at length below, began in Khuc Minh Tho’s living room. When Tho and fellow Vietnamese refugees arrived in the U.S. in the late 1970s, nearly everyone was separated from loved ones who were still in Vietnam, and almost everybody had a husband, brother, or son in a refugee camp. Akin to the League of Wives, Vietnamese women began meeting informally as a support group of sorts in Tho’s living room. Eventually they began to organize, and by the mid-1980s, were one of the most powerful Vietnamese American organizations in the country.

Carter administration policymakers felt pressure on two fronts: activism and lobbying from the Citizens Commission on Indochinese Refugees (CCIR) and other groups, and the continued buildup of displaced people in Southeast Asia? How did you find that they navigated those pressures?

This is the topic of my second chapter. I find that the CCIR became a mouthpiece for the frustrations and needs of first asylum nations and migrants throughout Southeast Asia. I argue that this small but very elite organization consolidated, articulated, and amplified the narrative and policies upon which the U.S. approach was built (I've got a new chapter on the CCIR coming out in *Rethinking the United States in the World: American Power in a Global Age*, edited by Michael Brenes and Daniel Besser, which is under contract with Palgrave Press).

What might surprise readers, especially given the Cold War context, Washington's long history of resettling refugees fleeing communism, and the incredibly deep and recent U.S. ties to Vietnam, is that Carter administration officials were incredibly reluctant to respond to the pressures outlined in the question. Refugees were not among Carter's priorities when he entered office, and for legal (the Refugee Act of 1980 was not yet codified), economic (difficulties of mid-1970s), racial, and other reasons, the U.S. was actually very reluctant to accept large numbers of Vietnamese refugees. It was only after the geopolitical situation changed significantly at the turn of 1978–79 as the number of departures skyrocketed that the administration was willing to make a more substantive and long-term commitment to resettling Vietnamese refugees in the U.S.

What were some of the prejudices that Vietnamese Amerasians faced, both in Vietnam and in their efforts to migrate?

The children of American GIs and Vietnamese women have drawn a great deal of scholarly interest, and thankfully I was able to rely on scholars like Sabrina Thomas, Jana Lipman, Mary Kim DeMonaco, and others when I was writing this portion of the book. Within Vietnamese society, Amerasians were often referred to as *bui doi*, “children of dust.” This derogatory term captured the reality that Vietnamese Amerasians were fatherless in a highly patriarchal society, were mixed-race in a culture with significant prejudices against miscegenation, and were the children of Americans, who the victorious Vietnamese viewed as the imperialist enemy during the conflict they called the American War. Because phenotypes like hair color and texture, eye color, height, and other attributes made Amerasians often easy to identify (although these assumptions recast Asians as foreign and not American), Vietnamese Amerasians and their families were the subject of intense discrimination in Vietnam after 1975.

Legally, Amerasians faced a multitude of challenges to migrate and became a site of contestation between the governments in Washington and Hanoi. Although widely acknowledged as the children of Americans, Amerasians did not possess the required legal documentation. This meant that they only qualified for the lowest immigration category, and thanks to the major bottleneck in the late 1970s and beyond, had little chance of migrating through normal channels. While U.S. officials called Amerasians “refugees,” moreover, Hanoi balked at that description and argued they were an American responsibility. These disparate perspectives erected significant obstacles to emigration until the late 1980s.

Did the 1980 Mariel boatlift from Cuba change how policymakers thought about migration from Vietnam?

Mariel absolutely cast a long shadow throughout the U.S. bureaucracy. Thereafter, the impetus to screen incoming migrants at the individual level was incredibly strong. Beginning in 1979, at the height of the so-called boat people crisis, the UNHCR and Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) signed a memorandum of understanding creating the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), which was designed to provide a safe and legal means to leave Vietnam to avoid the dangers of clandestine flight for family reunification and humanitarian cases. The ODP required resettlement nations and Vietnam to create lists of individuals approved for departure. If one’s name appeared on the sending and receiving country’s list, he/she/they could emigrate.

This requirement and the concomitant individual interview/screening processes created a great deal of paperwork. Until the late 1980s, the U.S. branch of the ODP was hampered by the fact that the lack of diplomatic relations meant U.S. officials could not have individuals stationed in Ho Chi Minh City like other resettlement nations. Instead, a convoluted process was created whereby U.S. officials were stationed on the ground in Bangkok and UNHCR officials acted as intermediaries on the ground in Ho Chi Minh City. The cumbersomeness of this process created a significant backlog, which prompted Hanoi to submit a formal complaint in April 1985 and suspend the program (temporarily) in December 1985.

Which federal sources were the most useful in your project, and where do you wish the sources were more fulsome?

When I started, I anticipated that sources would be hard to come by, thanks to ongoing classification. I ended up having the opposite problem. First, because nonstate actors played such a significant role, nongovernmental archives proved to be incredibly useful, both on their own and because they contained documents

and correspondence that I would not have been able to access from federal repositories. Secondly, in an effort to dispel the accusation that the government was concealing the existence of live POWs behind a smokescreen of classification, Clinton ordered basically all of the documents related to POW/MIA accounting declassified with Executive Order 12812 in 1992. Because U.S. officials linked POW/MIAs and refugee concerns as “humanitarian issues,” I had access to treasure troves of documents.

Overall, I would say that rather than a single source being most useful, what I found most compelling was a combination: looking at presidential and congressional sources in tandem. I was very lucky that *FRUS* Volume XXXII: *Southeast Asia and the Pacific, 1977–1980*, was declassified when I was revising my dissertation into a book. It would be nice to have had access to forthcoming *FRUS* volumes on the Reagan years, and to more congressional materials. Ted Kennedy’s papers were unavailable/unprocessed as I was writing, and I was not able to interview or get access to the papers of John McCain or John Kerry. Those materials would have certainly made my book better.

How did the Reagan administration’s thoughts about refugees from Southern Vietnam differ from those of the Carter administration?

Due in no small part to the apex of the so-called “boat people” migration in the late 1970s, during the Carter administration Vietnamese refugees were synonymous with those who had fled Vietnam and were on the high seas or waiting in limbo in camps throughout Southeast Asia. During the early 1980s, the Reagan administration expanded this focus to include not only Vietnamese who had crossed an international border, but those still within Vietnam, including especially Amerasians and reeducation camp detainees.

Because I discussed Amerasians above, I’ll elaborate here on reeducation camp detainees. Reeducation was initially depicted as a 10–30 day period of reeducation for the Republic of Vietnam’s (South Vietnam—the defeated regime’s) military and civilian officials. The hope was that after a brief reorientation, these individuals would be released and contribute their talents to the colossal task of rebuilding a country decimated by generations of warfare. Instead, Hanoi expanded the initial terms to “up to three years,” and then detained a significant number indefinitely, with the last detainees held until 1992. The conditions in the camps were deplorable, and, especially as time went on, drew comparisons to concentration camps and gulags.

Reagan's focus on individuals within Vietnam reflected the president's willingness, even eagerness, to criticize Hanoi's internal affairs. Hanoi's treatment of these groups also seemed to add weight to the president's assertion that the Vietnam War had been a "noble cause." While elevating Amerasians and reeducation camp prisoners on the U.S. agenda vis-à-vis Vietnam served a convenient propaganda purpose, actually securing the emigration of these groups required contact and compromise, which I argue helped facilitate normalization, even if U.S. officials insisted otherwise.

You discuss "Rambomania." How did it work for and work against the goals of activist groups?

While always a potent political issue, the release of *Rambo: First Blood Part II* in the summer of 1985 turned the issue of missing American servicemen (those listed as POW/MIA: prisoner of war/missing in action) into a national obsession. The film increased domestic awareness of the issue and fomented the belief that live POWs were being held against their will in Vietnam and that either out of negligence or subterfuge the U.S. government was unwilling to bring them home. The film also prompted more official commentary, public rhetoric, and classified meetings about the issue. For POW/MIA activists like the League of Families, then, Rambomania was a boon, at least in the short term. In the long run, the inflated expectations that the film created led to inevitably unfulfilled expectations that soured the League-government relationship.

Rambomania was also useful for reeducation camp activists. The popularity and bipartisan nature of POW/MIA accounting provided a language and policy foothold for Vietnamese families who had indisputable proof their husbands, fathers, and sons were being held against their will in camps. The rhetoric of POW/MIA accounting helped translate the concerns of Vietnamese families and empowered them to insist upon U.S. government action like the families of U.S. servicemembers did via the League.

In what ways did the thaw in the Cold War during the late Reagan administration change the Vietnamese government's outlook toward migration?

The thawing of the Cold War in the second half of the 1980s coincided with important internal Vietnamese developments. In July 1986, Le Duan, who had been the major architect behind Hanoi's war with the United States, died. His death cleared the way for the ascension of a younger generation of leaders within the Politburo. At the Sixth Party Congress that December, calls for *doi moi* or

“new thinking” in both economic and diplomatic relations mirrored concurrent developments in the Soviet Union.

Increased readiness for normal relations (not just with the U.S. but also with China and other nations) and integration into global economic and diplomatic forums created a greater (though not unlimited) willingness to cooperate with the United States. In terms of migration, these shifts prompted the highest-ranking delegation in over a decade, helped propel the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act, and Hanoi resumed the temporarily suspended ODP interviewing process, and even allowed U.S. officials to employ the same procedures as nations with whom the SRV had diplomatic relations (like letting U.S. officials be stationed/conduct interviews in Ho Chi Minh city). Collaboration on reeducation camp detainees took a bit more time but was also forthcoming with a bilateral agreement (the Humanitarian Operation Agreement) in 1989.

What did you learn about the Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association (FVPPA) and its influence on policy making?

The FVPPA was a single-issue group that lobbied for the release and emigration of former reeducation camp detainees and their families. The Association, I found, was the single most influential Vietnamese American organization that deeply informed the U.S. stance on this issue. Led by president Khuc Minh Tho and staffed by other women who were members of the Vietnamese diaspora, this organization accomplished a great deal despite meager resources and limited membership. A key source of the organization’s power was its information. Using what one newspaper dubbed the “Vietnamese grapevine,” the FVPPA amassed a detailed list of current and former detainees, their former rank in the ARVN, their family members, etc. Because Hanoi refused to publish information about individual detainees (and those records are still classified), the ODP’s requirement that an individual appear on sending and receiving nations’ lists should have been prohibitive. The FVPPA, however, filled this information gap, and U.S. officials in the State Department and Department of Defense regularly went to Tho when they needed information.

The Association also mobilized their information and connections in meaningful ways. The FVPPA published bilingual reports that circulated throughout the Vietnamese diaspora, and established mutually beneficial and close relationships with key U.S. officials like John McCain and Robert Funseth (who was the lead U.S. negotiator on the issue with Hanoi). By leveraging its quality information through what became increasingly personal connections, the FVPPA exerted a formidable, if focused, influence on U.S. policy.

In what important ways was the 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act different from the 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act?

The 1987 act improved on the 1982 legislation in a variety of significant respects. First, the new legislation permitted for the emigration of Amerasians and their “close family members,” which fixed the original problem of Amerasians’ mothers and siblings being unable to travel with them, a reality that led many to resist emigration, which undercut the bill’s claims to achieve humanitarian objectives. Second, the 1987 act made the requirements for “proof” of identity far less rigid; informal documents and physical appearance could be offered as evidence of American parentage after 1987.

Other aspects of the 1987 act involved legal acrobatics and to permit compromises with Hanoi that permitted both U.S. and Vietnamese officials to save face. Hanoi had long insisted that Amerasians were a bilateral concern and not refugees, while U.S. officials depicted Amerasians as refugees who fit within the broader multilateral responses to the Vietnamese diaspora. Ultimately, Amerasians traveled on immigrant visas (a nod to Hanoi’s argument) but were eligible for refugee benefits in the U.S. (an acknowledgement of the U.S. stance about lived realities and material needs). The agreement that provided for Amerasians’ emigration was conducted bilaterally (the 1987 Resettlement Accord), but the actual migration program for Amerasians was a subprogram of the multilateral ODP. By overcoming these disparate negotiating positions and adjusting the particularities of U.S. law, the 1987 act facilitated a much larger migration of Vietnamese Amerasians than the much-maligned attempt in 1982.

What was the Comprehensive Plan of Action, and where did it fall short?

The CPA was created in 1989 amid a surge in boat people departures, growing compassion fatigue, and shifts in international norms from resettlement to repatriation (return to one’s home country). The central premise of the CPA was that arriving migrants would be screened by countries of first asylum on an individual basis to determine their legal status, which superseded the assumption of the previous decade that all arriving boat people were refugees. If one obtained formal refugee status, then they were resettled abroad. If not, then voluntary repatriation was the first option, but forced repatriation became the norm, especially near the program’s end.

I’m not sure if the program itself fell short as much as it was tasked with impossible objectives. When do wars end? Put another way, when does the “fear of persecution” related to wartime alliances and deeds expire, and who gets to decide? As Critical

Refugee scholars have shown, obtaining refugee status is an act in narration, requiring both an attentive and sympathetic audience and a compelling story. As I show in my final chapter, the CPA became the mechanism that exposed the gap between audience (the UNHCR first asylum nations, and resettlement nations) and migrants. Bringing the CPA to its scheduled end in the mid-1990s required forced, violent repatriations, which predictably created a media firestorm. In response to the incredibly complicated difficulties the program encountered, in 1996 the U.S. and SRV created the Resettlement Opportunities for Vietnamese Refugees (ROVR), which gave repatriated Vietnamese another opportunity to apply for resettlement in the U.S.

What major lessons for refugee policy and international relations do you feel emerge from your study?

The first involves war and peace. The truism that wars are easy to begin and difficult to end has a great deal of scholarly weight behind it at this point, and my work affirms that reality. The book shows that rather than polar opposites or a linear progression, war and peace are often deeply entangled. When I teach the Vietnam War, for instance, one of the final exam essay questions is always some version of “When did the Vietnam War end? Does the conflict have a different end date for different groups involved?” My goal with this question is not to solicit a specific answer but to prompt students to wrestle with the complexity of the question.

While the book offers new insights on the connections between human rights and humanitarianism and the reassertion of Congress in U.S. foreign relations, a final point I’ll elaborate on here involves the framing of migrants as temporary “refugee crises.” It is clear that significant displacement is a permanent fixture of our geopolitical system, a reality thrown into sharp relief by the creation of an Olympic Refugee Team in 2016. The post-1975 history that I trace demonstrates just how pervasive the connection is between war and refugees and how enduring “refugee crises” can be. This is a lesson that has been repeated again and again, and, sadly, one that we are witnessing around the world today. As of May 2022, the UNHCR reported that over 100 million people around the world were displaced, many of them due to the existence and consequences of protracted armed conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, and other locales.

What have been some of the most rewarding reactions to this book and your conclusions?

The book has been reviewed in *Journal of American History*, *Diplomatic History*, and *Journal of Military History*, and the feature of roundtables in *H-Diplo*, *Passport: The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Review*, and

The Texas National Security Review. I've been really heartened by the number and overwhelmingly positive character of these reviews, which have been so rewarding after laboring on the project for so long. Because the book was released during the pandemic (and when I had a newborn at home), I wasn't able to promote the book in the ways I originally envisioned, and I'm extremely grateful to all of the scholars who took the time to comment on my work.

The most heart-wrenching and unexpected reactions stemmed from the urgent contemporary relevance the book assumed just months after publication. The fall of Kabul in August 2021 drew constant comparisons with the fall of Saigon, and suddenly my work about conducting a U.S. evacuation that included allies (ch. 1) and facilitating the emigration of allies for decades thereafter (the rest of the book) became increasingly relevant. I wrote a number of op-eds, gave quite a few interviews, and spoke with policymakers via podcast episodes and directly on the phone. I wish my work hadn't been so relevant, but it was gratifying to be able to offer insight into long-forgotten (not by scholars, but certainly by policymakers) precedents that could be useful pathways for saving lives in the present.

The opinions expressed here are those of the interviewer and do not necessarily represent the policies of the Department of State.

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