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## Clinton lifts Vietnam embargo



WASHINGTON (AP) -President Clinton made a controversial gesture of reconciliation toward Vietnam on Thursday, lifting the NATIONAL 19-year U.S. trade embargo

against a nation whose divisive war left a legacy of suspicion over the fate of missing American soldiers and airmen.

The move opens an important emerging market for American goods in Southeast Asia and was greeted with enthusiasm by U.S. business interests already setting up operations in the former enemy capital of Hanoi

Clinton made his announcement after describing his thinking in several private meetings with veterans groups and anxious family members of the missing servicemen. Reaction from those groups was largely negative.

Clinton said he was convinced the step would further efforts to get a full accounting of the missing Americans, and that his decision was not based on enabling U.S. business to make profits there

"We would lose leverage (on resolving MIA questions with Vietnam) if there were no forward movement," Clinton said. He said there had been much progress in recent months in accounting for 2,238 American MIAs and POWs in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Senate Republican leader Robert Dole of Kansas said, "While many of my colleagues think lifting the trade embargo on Vietnam is the right course, I believe it is the wrong decision at the wrong time for the wrong reasons.

Clinton's decision to risk the wrath of veterans groups was made easier by a nonbinding 62-38 vote in the Senate last Thursday favoring an end to the embargo. Some veterans and family groups maintain that Vietnam has recovered the remains of hundreds of MIAs but refuses to turn them over to U.S. authorities.

Even though Clinton minimized the benefits American businesses would receive, it is no secret that Vietnam is regarded as ripe territory for foreign investors. It is one of Asia's fastestgrowing markets and nearly all other countries that had once joined in the embargo have reestablished commercial ties with the communist

American businesses have pressed for an end to the embargo.

In Hanoi, American business leaders hailed Clinton's move, saying it would finally give them the chance to compete in a \$1 billion market.

Vietnam is "the hottest emerging market in the

world right now," said Eugene Matthews, president of Ashta International Inc., an investment and consulting firm. Ashta is one of 34 U.S. firms that have opened offices in Vietnam in anticipation of the U.S. embargo being lifted. European and Asian nations already have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the country

Clinton's efforts to avoid military service during the Vietnam War - and his opposition to that war - made his decision all the more sensitive. But Clinton said that every American of his age knew someone who died or was wounded in the fighting.

Clinton insisted that removing the trade embargo was not the same as restoring full diplomatic relations with Vietnam.

Many family members and veterans groups preferred that Clinton keep the embargo in place to encourage continued Vietnamese cooperation on the MIA issue.

Ann Mills Griffith, head of a Vietnam MIA-POW family group, boycotted Clinton's meeting with family groups because she was told by the White House that Clinton had already made up his mind to lift the embargo.

She said the president has "clearly broken" his promises concerning conditions for lifting the embargo. "I fault the bureaucracy ... for misinforming the president and giving him advice that doesn't hold water," she said. Clinton said his decision was guided by progress in four key

- Recovery of remains of American soldiers in Vietnam. Clinton said that since last July remains of 39 American servicemen had been

Resolution of "discrepancy cases" in which there was reason to believe people could have survived. Clinton said that since July, the number of such cases had been reduced from 135 to 73

Further assistance from Vietnam and Laos in conducting searches along their common border. The first such investigation took place in December and located new remains and crash sites,

Release of any documents from Vietnam that could shed light on the fate of those still missing. Clinton said that since July, important documents had been released from the Vietnamese archives.

In terms of ability to generate emotions, few issues can match the one involving the MIAs. There is a strong suspicion among many MIA family members and veterans groups that some of the missing are still alive, but the administration has said there is no credible evidence of that

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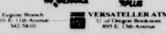


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