

Basic changes

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in U.S. policy

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WASHINGTON — The United States is developing a post-Vietnam foreign policy that may well involve the most basic changes since World War II.

The policy of "containment" of communism is gone, wiped out by Vietnam.

The so-called "Nixon Doctrine" is also on recent history's junk heap. Only bits and pieces of it remain.

No new name has been chosen officially to describe the evolving policy, but Undersecretary of State Joseph Sisco has made a try. His choice — "Selective Engagement."

That means that the United States is going to pick and choose far more carefully who it supports in the world and how it supports them.

Secretary of State Kissinger is trying to get down to what one official has described as "the bedrock of real American interests" — one the public and Congress could be expected to support.

A difficulty is that neither Kissinger nor anyone else has been able to define exactly what American "interests" are in terms the public, or even Congress, can understand.

No formal announcement of an attempt to put together a new policy has come from the White House, but one top-level State Department official concedes that "a re-examination of our posture worldwide" is under way.

"It started in the Pacific, with the end in Vietnam," he said, "but it's much bigger than that."

Current European trips by both President Ford and Kissinger are a result designed to dramatize continuing United States interests there.

The outlines of a new policy already are discernible. The reason for no formal announcement is also clear. Officials are not anxious to shake up allies.

More than that, the announcement of a "reappraisal" or "reassessment" in foreign policy normally is used as a diplomatic device aimed at bringing a recalcitrant party into line.

Ford and Kissinger already had fired that weapon against Israel, with an announcement of a "reassessment" of Mideast policy when Vietnam fell. They didn't want to run the risk that Israel would fail to get the intended message by adding a new announcement of a world-wide reassessment.

Overall, what the re-examination means is that the age of the American empire is gone.

"We are no longer predominant," says Kissinger.

but "we are inescapably a leader."

Sisco put it more bluntly: "It is clear the United States can no longer play the role of world policeman."

In Vietnam, according to Kissinger, "Americans learned of the limits to what even we can accomplish; that not every struggle anywhere in the world is necessarily one in which the United States must involve itself; that not every injustice man inflicts upon his neighbor is something that America must or can seek to remedy."

"While the Cold War structure of international relations has come apart, a new stable international structure has yet to be formed."

The Cold War structure was simple. It was "us" vs. "them" — the United States and all the allies it could round up versus the Soviet Union and all of its allies. Communist China was assumed to be a part of the Soviet bloc.

The new world of the 1970s, is far more complicated.

As Kissinger has explained, there are many power centers now, not just the United States and Soviet Union. China, the Europeans, Japan and the newly powerful oil-producing states all must be considered power centers.

The rest of the world also is developing. Owners of other raw materials other than oil are beginning to flex their economic muscles.

The United States is trying to determine anew what is really important to it and Kissinger is trying to build a new series of international organizations designed to meet emerging problems.

At the same time the United States is trying to decide how important specific countries, or areas, may be in the new world. Some tentative major decisions already are apparent. Among them:

- Thailand, often referred to as the possible "next domino" in Southeast Asia, is largely being written off. It is expected to strive for neutrality and an accommodation with its new Communist neighbors in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

- Other Southeast Asia countries — Malaysia and Singapore also are expected to strive for neutrality. Officials do not foresee efforts to equip them to fight possible communist insurgencies, as in Vietnam.

- Korea is considered the most dangerous built-in situ-

ation in the Far East, because of the unpredictability and aggressiveness of the North Koreans, plus an unattractive, but friendly, dictatorship in South Korea. situation in Korea is seen threatening to the "stability" of Asia, because Japan, China, Russia and the United States are all involved.

Any basic change in the

- The Philippines and Indonesia are also considered

serious potential problem areas, the more so because of undemocratic governments. protected by the North Atlantic Alliance, but NATO is in a sad state of disrepair, Its entire southern tier, from

- Central Europe is considered most vital of all American interests. It is

Portugal to Turkey, is threatened by economic and political disorder.

- Israel also is considered a basic American interest, but the United States is attempting to cultivate other friends in the Middle East, in Arab countries and Iran, largely through the sale of

arms.

But top administration officials frankly are not sure how far Congress and the public may be willing to go to protect any of these interests or commitments.