

Administration Trapped

By Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Ford administration is dismayed by the image of frustration that the United States is projecting across the international horizon, officials concede in private.

For the first time in years, only reversals and setbacks to American foreign policy dominate the news. From Southeast Asia to Southern Europe to the Middle East the reports are bleak, with a new catastrophe each day in Vietnam or Cambodia.

Many troubled insiders acknowledge that the administration itself has un-

wittingly pyramided its problems, by overdrawing the potential global consequences of congressional failure to vote emergency aid for Indochina. What the administration did not foresee was that its political strategy of attacking Congress would coincide with a devastating, premature collapse of the South Vietnamese government's hold on the territory it ruled.

As a result, numerous U.S. officials fear that the Ford administration has entrapped itself in a self-defeating project by resurrecting the disputed "domino theory," which holds that damage to American security interests in one nation can produce a chain re-

action on others, like a row of falling dominoes.

By stretching this dubious linkage, American policy is impaled on the premise that what happens in Danang, Saigon or Phnom Penh automatically

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undermines vital American security interests around the world.

"The doomsayers carried this thing much too far," one veteran American diplomat said last week. "The world is not collapsing around us. We have passed through much more serious cri-

by Its Own Domino Theory

sis periods before. Now how do we convince people of that?"

President Ford has scheduled a major foreign policy address to Congress for April 9 or 10 to try to counter the impression that the United States is off-balance globally, its credibility shredded, its power impaired.

The damage is not easily repairable, many senior U.S. officials agree. The Ford administration has been on an unusual course of dramatizing setbacks to U.S. foreign policy, in an attempt to put pressure on Congress to lift restrictions on American diplomacy.

At the same time, by reaching back to some of the rhetoric and rationalizations of the Nixon and Johnson administrations, the Ford administration has reawakened traumatic memories of 14 years of U.S. involvement in Indochina.

In this dual process, the administration has stumbled into some of the same patterns of disputes, contradictions, and credibility challenges that plagued its successors:

- On alternate days, and sometimes on the same day, the administration has appealed to Congress for cooperation to restore national unity and purposefulness, while indicting Congress

for undermining its foreign policy in Indochina, in Turkey, in Greece and elsewhere.

- Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said last Wednesday that "events in Portugal, Greece, Turkey and Indochina" rebounded on his Arab-Israeli diplomacy by raising for "our friends" [Israel] "the question of our durability." Israeli sources claimed the opposite, that Egypt believed the United States was so in need of a diplomatic success that it expected Kis-

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U.S. officials say Thieu overreacted to enemy advances. Page A14

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singer to force an agreement down Israel's throat.

- Publicly, Kissinger disavowed any "recriminations" about who was most at fault in the breakdown of his Egyptian-Israeli diplomacy. But the next day's headlines reported the President's open criticism of Israel, representing recriminations privately expressed by Kissinger.

- The administration has held to a course of fixing blame on Congress for all the calamities that have befallen South Vietnam, while remaining virtually silent officially about the astonishment among U.S. strategists over Saigon's inept battle plans, which abandoned half of South Vietnam to the Communists.

- While the Ford administration presses a recalcitrant Congress for \$300 million in emergency military aid for South Vietnam, Saigon's withdrawing troops have left behind military stockpiles estimated to be worth tens to thousands of millions of dollars. One report from Saigon set the total loss at more \$1 billion in American weapons and equipment.

The cumulative picture of disarray on the American foreign policy scene, however, is by no means as pervasive as it may seem. The bulk of U.S. diplomatic relationships continues on a normal course, and at the major power level there are no imminently threatening crises although senior diplomats worry that the Soviet Union or China may be tempted to exploit the deterioration of American authority.

Nor is the executive branch alone, or Congress alone, solely responsible for the tide of adversity.

Kissinger said last week:

"I have pointed out at many press conferences over the years that the central authority of a major country cannot be under persistent attack with-

out ultimately paying a price in foreign policy.

"We have gone through the experience of Vietnam, through the anguish of Watergate. And I think the cumulative effect of nearly a decade of domestic upheaval is beginning . . . to take its toll.

"Foreign governments, when they deal with the United States, make a bet in their dealings on the constancy of American policy and on the ability of the United States to carry through on whatever it is we promise, or fail to promise, or threaten.

"And this is one of the big problems in foreign policy today. It is not a problem of the Congress at this particular moment, because the executive also shares a responsibility for it over a period of a decade.

"At this moment, it is senseless to try to assess the blame. At this moment, the great need is to pull together and to see whether we can restore a sense of national purpose. . ."

As dispassionate as that assessment may seem, Kissinger's most persistent critics on Capitol Hill charge that the appeal to unity still has a lopsided objective.

Kissinger and the executive branch as a whole, Congressional critics claim, really seek restoration of executive authority to conduct foreign policy with almost the same open-ended powers that Congress wants to check. Administration planners deny that, and keep reiterating, as Kissinger did last week, that they are prepared to work with Congress in "a cooperative spirit."

Congressional suspicions that the executive branch constantly seeks to circumvent its legislative intentions, especially where Indochina is concerned, were renourished again just last week.

The administration claimed it had corrected a "miscalculation" that produced an extra \$21.5 million in the

Army's account books, thus allowing the Pentagon to begin delivering more military aid to Cambodia. Doubting that claim, senators asked the General Accounting Office, the congressional auditing agency, to investigate.

GAO's conclusion: the Pentagon's action "violates the spirit" of the legal restriction imposed by Congress, but technically not the law itself; in either case the Pentagon scaled down the claimed overcharge from \$21.5 million to \$16.9 million, and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted to deduct that amount from any new funds.

Despite this climate of suspicion the executive branch and Congress know they both must deal somehow with new patterns in foreign affairs where this is no clear precedent for an American course of action.

The Mediterranean region, where developments affect the southern region of the North Atlantic alliance and can have strategic impact on the explosive Middle East, is a prime zone now of U.S. military concern. "The Mediterranean," from an American policy standpoint, one U.S. official said succinctly last week, "is a mess."

This accounts for Kissinger's assertion last week that events in Portugal, Greece, Turkey, as well as in Indochina, were "a factor" in his inability to negotiate a new military disengagement between Israeli and Egyptian forces, because they represented a weakening of American ability to sustain its power in the region.

To many diplomatic specialists, that was an extremely overstretched claim of domino-theory linkage, as well as a gratuitous admission of American diplomatic weakness. Kissinger, of course, disagrees.

Whether developments in Portugal, Greece and Turkey had any bearing on the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations is

open to question. There is no dispute, however, that each nation presents a large problem for American diplomacy.

Greece took its military representatives out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization last year, and served notice it would renegotiate U.S. base rights in Greece, in protest over NATO, and especially American, lack of support in the Greek-Turkish crisis over Cyprus. Kissinger's diplomacy was the chief target of Greece, which charged the United States with tilting toward Turkey.

Turkish relations with the United States were strained, in turn, by a congressional cutoff of U.S. military aid to Turkey last Feb. 5 because Turkey used American equipment to land troops in Cyprus and seize 40 per cent of the island. Turkey threatened to sever military ties with the United States while Kissinger protested that the action of Congress endangered Turkey's continuance in NATO and would have major strategic consequences.

The Portuguese problem for American diplomacy is the third challenge to the cohesion of the NATO alliance.

There is no comparable split between the administration and Congress over what both perceive as a serious risk in Portugal. The hope for democratic rule in Portugal, which last April emerged after 48 years of military dictatorship, hangs precariously on elections scheduled for April 25.

Portugal's Communist Party, the only political party that functioned during the decades of autocratic rule, and parties allied with the Communists, now hold powerful positions in the Portuguese government and in the Armed Forces Movement that controls the power behind scene.

There is concern through the 15-nation NATO alliance about the direction that Portugal will take. NATO has a

double dilemma not simply that Portugal may go Communist and pull out of NATO, but that Portugal may come under Communist control and decide to remain in NATO. The alliance has no procedure for ousting a member; it also cannot share anti-Communist military secrets with a Communist nation.

The United States and Portugal were in the process of renegotiating U.S. base rights in the Azores when the 1974 coup occurred. These negotiations, in which the new Portuguese regime seeks hundreds of millions of dollars of U.S. economic assistance, are being delayed until after the projected elections.

The Portuguese experience has aroused widespread speculation that there may be a repeat performance in Spain, which has a parallel history of authoritarian rule.

A House Foreign Affairs Committee study mission to Europe, headed by Rep. Charles Wilson (D-Tex.), reported last week, "What Portugal today endures, Spain anticipates," referring to expectations raised among opponents of aged Spanish ruler Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

Spain is not a member of NATO, but the United States has strategic bases in Spain, including a nuclear submarine base.

The list of present and potential changes in national or regional shifts that can have significant foreign policy ramifications for the United States runs on.

Thailand, the closest approximation of a "domino" to events in Indochina, with Cambodia on its border, has called for a withdrawal of all U.S. airmen and aircraft from its territory within 12 months. Shifts of positions by other nations are taking place, not simply because of the developments in Indochina, but to a greater extent due to the ending of the East-West cold

war, and the practice labeled, "detente."

The latter is the major continuing evouiton in international affairs, requiring most nations to make some adjustment of policy.

Kissinger, an architect of East-West detente, found himself under attack last week for what amounted to a reverse application of the domino theory.

Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) a leader among conservative forces in Congress, charged that Kissinger's "headlong rush into detente with the Soviet Union" produced a rebounding effect on American interests, resulting in the "current tragedy in Cambodia, the collapse of our policy in South Vietnam and instability in Europe" and other adverse consequences.

Evidently, domino strategy can be played from either end.

Kissinger to Stay in Office

At Least to January, 1977

By a Washington Post Staff Writer

PALM SPRINGS, Calif., March 30 — Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger will remain in the administration at least until the end of President Ford's current term. White House press secretary Ron Nessen said today.

Nessen made the comment when he was asked about a story in the Chicago Tribune today saying that the President had asked Kissinger to stay on until January 1977.

"In a recent conversation between the President and the secretary, the President expressed his desire for Secretary Kissinger to stay on at least until the end of this term," Nessen replied. "Secretary Kissinger said that was his desire, too."

The President, who has announced plans to seek election next year to a full term, has always given Kissinger his staunch support.