

Skepticism on Domino Theory

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WASHINGTON, March 26—Secretary of State Kissinger restated at his news conference today the classic domino theory, which links American security in one place to American security everywhere else.

News Analysis "We must understand that peace is indivisible," he said.

"The United States cannot pursue a policy of selective reliability. We cannot abandon friends in one part of the world without jeopardizing the security of friends everywhere."

In the same vein, President Ford has recently expressed the idea that foreign reactions to developments in Indochina tend to validate the domino theory. That judgment, however, is not shared by Administration foreign policy specialists, the American intelligence community of many foreign diplomats.

Interviews with Administration experts and interviews conducted by New York Times correspondents overseas show that even in those few countries where leaders feel that American credibility has been somewhat impaired by Congressional reluctance to provide more military aid to Indochina, there are no signs of a basic reassessment of policy toward the United States.

The results clearly indicate that foreign leaders gauge their relations with the United States by their own experience with Washington and their own particular alternatives to dealing with Washington, and not by events in Indochina.

President's Reliability at Issue

In the United States, the higher the Administration official being interviewed, the more likely he is to subscribe to some form of the domino theory, although not by that name.

Yet, even among these high officials, the issue is not so much the importance of Indochina and how its future relates to American security. To these officials, the real issue is the outcome of the battle between Congress and the President. To them, the real

domino is the prospect of a collapse abroad of Presidential reliability and predictability as a result of Congressional unwillingness to support Mr. Ford's policies.

Many members of Congress feel that the resort to the domino image by Mr. Ford, Secretary of State Kissinger and Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger is merely a tactic to dramatize the issue, force Congress to support the Administration policy and pin the blame on Congress if Indochina falls into Communist hands.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, said: "All of these theories are part of the effort being made by the Administration to intimidate Congress and the American people by covering up the failure of our national policy in Indochina. Why else would the Administration use such rhetoric and ignore our basic obligation to end the violence in a situation where its policy can only lead to failure?"

Term Used by Eisenhower

The domino theory—the notion that a Communist victory in Indochina would almost inevitably lead to Communist gains and a weakening of the American position in the world—has a long history. The term domino in foreign policy was first made famous by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in April, 1954.

With French forces surrounded at Dien Bien Phu in the final phase of France's Indochina war, he said: "Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the 'falling

Administration View Disputed by Aides and Diplomats

domino' principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences."

The roots of this line of thought run back to the so-called Truman doctrine of 1947, which provided a domino-like rationale for providing aid to Greece and Turkey to counter Communist threats. It branches ran into the nineteen-sixties, highlighted in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy's saying "I believe it, I believe it," as the decade wore on, the image faded, and was replaced with high officials' making the public case for helping South Vietnam in terms of maintaining the credibility of American commitments.

In recent weeks, Mr. Schlesinger and Mr. Kissinger have made public comments to the effect that the domino theory had been overly discredited. Last week in Indiana, President Ford took this one step further.

Asked if he believed that Cambodia was 'vital' to American security, the President answered, "I think it is." He went on to refer to news reports about Thailand's asking for the withdrawal of American forces and the Philippines' reviewing its relationship with the United States.

Threat to Security Seen

Then he said: "I think these potential developments to some extent tend to validate the so-called domino theory. And if we have one country after another, allies of the United States, losing faith in our word, losing faith in our agreements with them, yes, I think the first one to go could vitally affect the national security of the United States."

Administration officials say that the intelligence community has consistently rejected this analysis. According to these officials, intelligence reports continue to say that the loss of Cambodia and South Vietnam would have adverse and negative consequences for American policy, but that even in the worst circumstances these consequences would be controllable and manageable.

In Thailand, officials who were interviewed said that the Thais were reluctant to sever their connection with Washington completely because they did not see anyone else able to provide them with protection. Charunphan Issarangkun na Ayuthaya, who was Foreign Minister until recently, said that the Government was ready to talk with any government that emerged from the conflict in Cambodia.

Administration experts said they had been aware of this Thai position for several weeks. They also said that the increasing willingness of the Thais to deal with Communists in Indochina and with China

was something that Washington had been encouraging for four years.

The experts explained that this process had been speeded up by developments in Indochina, but said that they did not see the acceleration as damaging American interests. They said they did not expect Thailand to ask formally for a complete withdrawal of American forces from her territory in the next year or so.

With respect to the Philippines, these experts said that there were a few newspaper editorials questioning ties with the United States, but that there was no evidence from the Philippine Government that any

of its leaders were contemplating a reassessment of policy.

Leaders in the Philippines were said to view events in Indochina now as the foreseeable consequence of the American troop withdrawal from Vietnam and of détente with China and the Soviet Union that followed.

The unwillingness of Congress to vote more aid for Indochina is seen in the Philippines as an understandable reaction to the seemingly endless Indochina war. Administration experts saw no sign that the Philippine Government would ask Washington to withdraw from Clark Air Base or the Naval base at Subic Bay, the two major United States installations in that country.

Reports from South Korea and interviews with the Administration specialists indicated a more serious impact in Seoul, which has been heavily dependent on United States military and economic support. But they reported that the South Koreans, close neighbors of both China and the Soviet Union, were not likely to alter their policy of maintaining close ties with the United States.

Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, cited the latest developments in Indochina in expressing doubts about the reliability of the United States, but American diplomats were said to feel that strains in relations between the two Governments had already been growing before the deterioration of the situation in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Interviews with officials in Japan, Australia and leading nations of Western Europe

showed no evidence of a rethinking of relations with Washington. In fact, Administration area specialist stated that most leaders in those countries applauded the prospect of the United States, finally moving toward total disengagement from Indochina.

In the Middle East, the reactions are mixed, often confusing, but generally more serious. Some Israeli officials said that Congressional inaction on Indochina had to raise questions in their minds about a similar future Congressional reaction on aid to Israel. More specifically, these officials expressed concern about whether Israel could put her trust in any American-backed guarantee.

Worry About Kissinger

Other Israeli diplomats said that Indochina was not an issue for their country. What they worried about, they said, was not the reliability of Congress but the motives of Mr. Kissinger. Support for Israel in Congress still runs high.

From Cairo it was reported that a leading Egyptian official noted what he called the decline of American power around the world as a result of events in Vietnam, Cambodia and Portugal, and added that "another failure" in the Middle East would add powerfully to that tendency.

It is this sense that events in the world are going against the United States, coupled with what some call the "disarray" in Washington, that really troubles high Administration officials.

In private conversations, high Administration officials brush aside specific reactions in specific countries at this time. They look to more general and more intangible effects. One high State Department official put it this way: "Others watching the split between Congress and the President have to ask if the United States has a foreign policy, and are we calculable?"

Most of these high officials were pessimistic about the chances of keeping Indochina non-Communist. Asked why senior officials nevertheless persisted in raising the American stakes in Indochina through rhetoric about dominoes, they responded uniformly.

The rhetoric, they said, is aimed at Congress, not at the world.

Asked if private messages had been sent to American ambassadors overseas to explain this, they all said no.