

# S.E. Asia Adjusts

## States Shift Policies in New Situation

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The nations on the periphery of Indochina—the so-called dominos—are readjusting their policies for what they perceive as a radically altered balance of power in the area, according to diplomats and other officials involved with the area.

China, which had been gradually reasserting its influence in the region, has suddenly acquired much greater importance as Communist takeovers near in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

North Vietnam has also increased its stature dramatically by virtue of its military successes.

U.S. influence throughout Southeast Asia is seen as decidedly on the wane. There is a feeling that U.S. policy aims in Asia far exceed American resources—and domestic political support for those goals.

Diplomats from the area view the future with considerable apprehension, especially those whose countries gave considerable support—material as well as rhetorical—to U.S. policies in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

They foresee a victorious North Vietnam in possession of millions of dollars' worth of arms and, more than likely, bearing a grudge toward countries that supported the United States in the war. Many of the countries have been troubled for years by native Communist insurgents who would be happy to get some of Hanoi's excess military equipment.

A great deal of sympathy

is expressed for the plight of Thailand, which supplied the most support for the United States in terms of troops and bases, and which is expected to be faced with a Communist government in charge of Cambodia to the east and Communists wielding a good deal of power in Laos on the north.

The new prime minister of Thailand, Kukrit Pramoj,

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has said that his government intends to have all of the remaining 25,000 American servicemen out within a year, "conditions in the area permitting."

Most diplomats agree that the sooner the American troops leave the better for Thailand. One said that the congressional restrictions against any U.S. combat role in Indochina make the American forces' presence destabilizing to peace in the region.

Almost unanimously, the sources interviewed expect some attempt to "strengthen" or "broaden" the only viable regional grouping in the area, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The association now includes Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. "Broadening," to most of the diplomats, means bringing in at least North Vietnam, and to some, even China. Hanoi, in joining ASEAN, would be giving a signal of peaceful intentions.

ASEAN—technically an economic and cultural grouping—occasionally functions as a political force,

most notably last fall when the ASEAN states banded together to beat back an attempt to unseat the Lon Nol government at the United Nations.

Asian diplomats say they have a problem in convincing the Communist states in the area that ASEAN is not a military grouping aimed at them. China's suspicions are said to have been an important factor behind Burma's decision to decline an invitation to join.

Several sources note that various countries have moved to improve relations with China, adding that in some instances the pace was being accelerated because of the recent developments in Indochina.

Malaysia is the only country in the region that has normal relations with China, established last year. According to the sources, China's attitude toward the Communist insurgent movement and the ethnic Chinese population in Malaysia has been watched closely by the other states—all of whom have been troubled by rebel movements and all of whom have large blocs of ethnic Chinese whose loyalties are regarded suspiciously. China's circumspect behavior in these areas has gone far toward overcoming resistance in the various capitals to the idea of improved ties with Peking.

There is, furthermore, a general belief that China may not want to see North Vietnam become too dominant in the area, and the journeys to Peking are by way of searching out some counterweight to a victorious and possibly vengeful Hanoi.