



# What About That Domino Theory?

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## Bahrain

ONE WAY to test the domino theory is to talk to the dominoes. So while traveling in Europe, the Near East and here in the Persian Gulf, I have been asking officials their reaction to the rout in Southeast Asia.

The comments while hardly conclusive, are curious and instructive. They indicate, to a far larger extent than seems generally realized, how much the dominoes lie in the eye of the beholder

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CONSIDER, first, the case of Yasir Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization. He regards the domino theory as a Zionist plot designed to obscure what is actually happening in the Near East.

"Maybe," he said in an interview in Beirut, "the United States did lower its assistance to South Vietnam and Cambodia. But not Israel.

"American aid to Israel is greater than ever. The Israelis now have 1000 planes — more than ever before. They have 2500 tanks — more than ever before. So anybody who uses the domino theory is only trying to cover up the American role and confuse the issue"

An almost diametrically opposite view was asserted by Shimon Peres, the Israeli defense minister I saw him in

Jerusalem just after the suspension of the latest round in the Kissinger shuttle diplomacy

At that time there were widespread rumors that the Israelis had refused American proposals because the spectacle of Southeast Asia had caused them to doubt Washington's word. Peres denied that charge absolutely, as did many other Israeli officials.

In the Persian Gulf, the dominoes just aren't. Tom Bigley, the admiral commanding the American naval facility here in Bahrain, was himself deeply involved in trying to get more funding for Southeast Asia only a few months ago when he was stationed at the Pentagon. If anybody is sensitive to a loss of American prestige because of recent events he would be the man.

Since coming out here, nobody in the Bahraini government has even mentioned Southeast Asia. The Bahrainis don't have any doubts about the United States.

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WHAT ALL THIS says to me is that in practice other countries continue to take the United States very seriously

As to the domino theory, it is like the theory of the one and the many. It is so loose and imprecise, so subject to manifold and even opposite interpretation, that it is useless for serious purposes.