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The aftershocks

World leaders fear change in U.S. policy

ANALYSIS

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WASHINGTON —Within hours after the gold-starred red and blue flag of the Viet Cong was raised over Saigon last week came the first stirrings of change. After nearly three decades, America was no longer the dominant power in Southeast Asia, and the aftershock was being felt in capitals across the world.

ITEM: In Bangkok, Thai Foreign Minister Chartchai Choonhavan let it be known there would be a "substantial" withdrawal of the 25,000-man American force there. Beginning Monday. "The amount will be enormous and will surprise a lot of people," he said. The clear hope was to please Hanoi.

ITEM: In Jakarta, Indonesia's foreign minister, Adam Malik, suggested that if Thailand and the Philippines were to take over the U.S. military bases in their respective countries, it would contribute to "greater stability" in Southeast Asia.

ITEM: In Manila, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos hinted that perhaps it was time for his country to "reassess" its defense arrangements with the U.S. He said he was ready to take over the big U.S. Air Force and Navy bases, including Clark Field and Subic Bay.

ITEM: In Tokyo, Japanese leaders were recommending to the Miki Government that it might be a good idea to scrap the U.S.-authored anti-militarist policy that has prevailed since Gen. MacArthur's post-World War II regency, and think about rearming.

ITEM: In Washington, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, D-Mont., long an advocate of bringing American troops home from Western Europe, told reporters that the U.S. ought also to "withdraw on a gradual basis" the 42,000 troops stationed in South Korea.

Cable traffic between Washington and foreign capitals was heavy as ambassadors conferred with their governments on the new turn of events; some foreign envoys were called home for "consultations and overseas, U.S. ambassadors were invited in for a little polite grilling by foreign ministers.

The key word —in Washington and in capitals around the world —was "reassessment." Foreign leaders wanted to know: Where do we go from here? What does the American defeat in Indochina mean to the rest of the world?

The general feeling was that American foreign policy — so solid, so predictable for so many years — was on the verge of change. And in the relationship of nations, change means the unknown, and the unknown implies peril.

The signals from Washington were as simple and straightforward as the White House and the State Department could make them. Friendly governments were assured over and over that the U.S. would honor its commitments, fulfill its international obligations. Potential adversaries were told, publicly and privately, that it would be wrong to conclude from the U.S. failure to use military force to reverse the tide in Vietnam that the U.S. would shy away from using force in backing up its promises in other parts of the world.

Each country must look to its own well being. No leader worth his salt can afford to ignore the possible implications of the Vietnam debacle. Kissinger realizes this.

Foremost in the thinking of American policymakers in the weeks and months ahead will be three key areas of the globe—Asia and the Pacific; the Middle East, and Western Europe.

The Hanoi government has for years been supplying and training insurgents in northwest Thailand, partly in retaliation for Thai support of the U.S. effort in Vietnam—including agreement to permit B-52s to be stationed at giant bases at Udorn and Utapao for bombing raids over both North and South Vietnam—and partly because it is the nature of Ho Chi Minh's legacy to support revolution.

Clearly, Thailand's demands for "substantial" American withdrawal are an effort to accommodate Hanoi, or

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least to temper North Vietnam's anger. The Thais are the only people of the Indochinese peninsula of independence, from the days when a friendly King Nongkut offered Abraham Lincoln some elephants to help fight the Civil War down to the present.

Malaysia has for years been fighting terrorists — mostly of the Chinese extraction — along its northern border with Thailand. The Malaysian Government may decide to ease over to a more neutralist stance, just

to be on the safe side.

The one bright spot is Singapore, whose respected Ajd pro-Western leader, Lee Kuan Yew, ridicules the domino theory as "old hash." Under Lee's leadership, Singapore has retained — even improved — her position as the crossroads of Asia and a model of dynamic development.

Lee's assessment of the future calls for "a continuing American naval presence and increased economic relations" to help Southeast Asia "adjust less ab-

ruptly and to make the task of learning to live with a Communist Indochina less painful."

Indonesia, the most powerful nation in Southeast Asia in terms of population, natural resources and potential wealth, is somewhat protected from direct pressure from the Communist tide in Indochina by the sea.

The island country's Chinese-oriented Communist Party was virtually wiped out during the bloody army coup that toppled the late President Sukarno in 1965. An estimated 250,000 Indone-

sians were put to death with great ferocity at that time.

But the Indonesian archipelago extends 3,000 miles, and loose control by the central government in Jakarta plus chronic economic difficulties could make some of the weaker links in the island chain vulnerable to Communist inroads.

There are real indications that the Jakarta government may lead a move toward neutralism by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

As for the Philippines, President Marcos' threat to take over U.S. bases and ask the 19,000 American servicemen to leave is probably not as serious as it has been made out to be.

Long troubled by Communist guerrillas on the main island of Luzon and preoccupied by another struggle with secessionist Moslems on the southern island of

State Department pledges to fulfill all obligations

Mindanao, Marcos periodically cranks up his "Yankee Go Home" theme to undercut dissident elements in Manila who seek to exploit residual anti-American sentiment for their own ends.

But the Philippines are notoriously corrupt, even by lax Asian standards, and the trail of graft and official thievery extends right up to the President himself. This, plus Marcos' harsh repression of political opponents — could open the door to a popular uprising which the Communists would surely exploit.

With the exception of Japan, South Korea is the strongest bastion of pro-

Americanism on the Asian-Pacific rim. There is no sign that President Park Chung Hee — who ordered out two million Koreans to greet the late President Johnson on his trip through Seoul nine years ago — would favor any reduction in the U.S. troop level in his country.

Oddly enough, the Communist victory in Indochina

appears to have strengthened the U.S. position in South Korea — and Park's authoritarian government — because it raised the threat of another invasion from the Communist north thus drawing all elements in fearful Seoul closer together.

Despite American weariness, the Ford Administration clearly will have to stand fast in Korea or face total loss of credibility around the world. The U.S. has an ironclad commitment, dating back 22 years to come to South Korea's defense in the face of aggression.

And Chinese fear of Soviet expansion runs so deep that Peking probably prefers a continued American "presence" in Asia as a hedge against Russian domination.

The close Japanese-American relationship — cornerstone of U.S. policy in the Pacific since postwar reconstruction days — is not significantly altered by the fall of Indochina in the view of most analysts. On the contrary, Vietnam's fate seems likely to muffle strident left-wing demands for U.S. military withdrawal from Japan and Okinawa.

But there is a danger that

Indochina's fate could awaken long dormant Japanese militarism, and this could, in turn, pose a long-term threat to peace and stability in Asia.

As in Asia, the issue in the Middle East and Europe may be summed up in one word — credibility.