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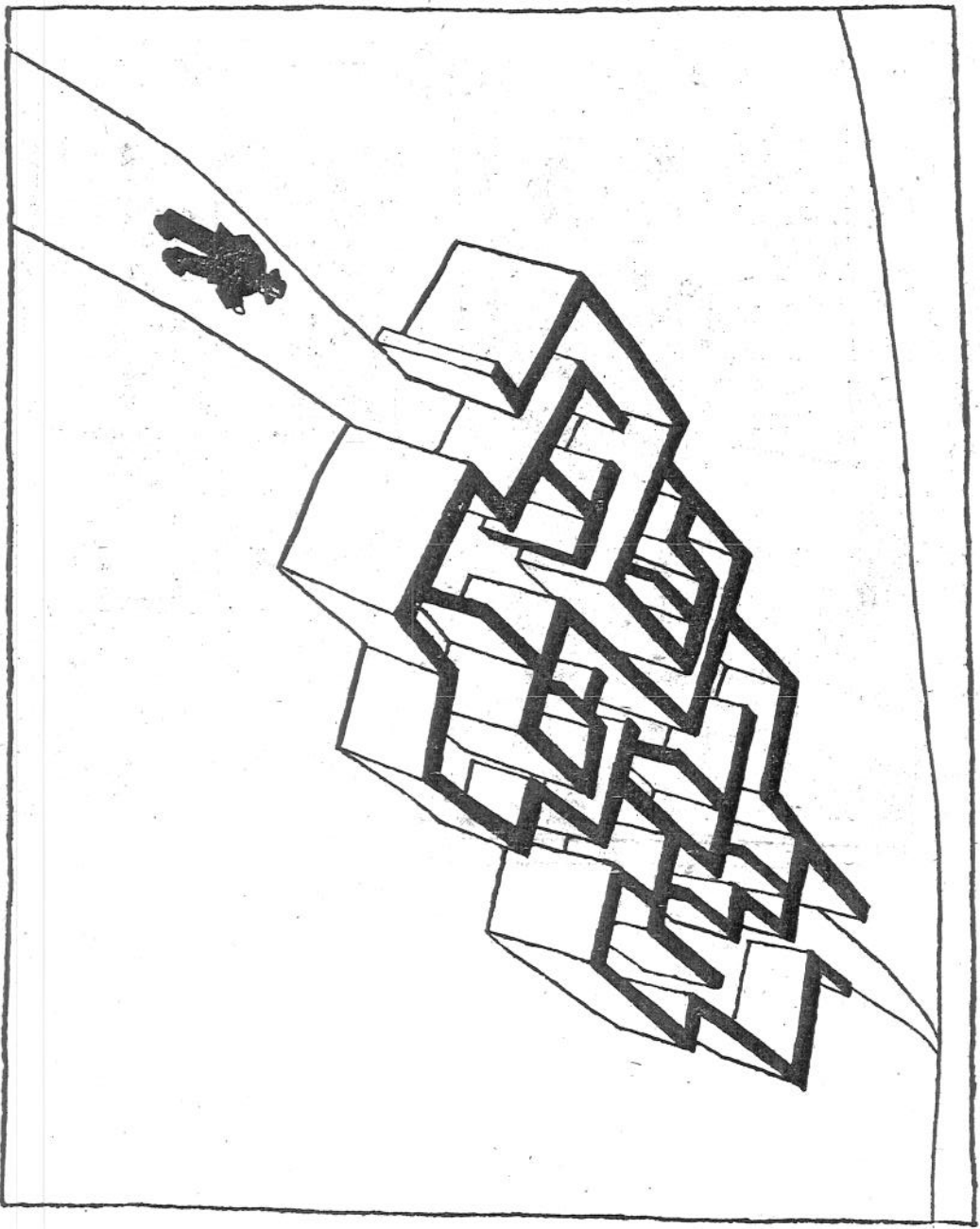
# A New Opportunity in Foreign Policy

Most people here and abroad long ago discounted the possibility of anything but an American setback as the eventual outcome in Southeast Asia. Bad as the scene was, accordingly, the surrender in Saigon does not have to spell prolonged trouble.

On the contrary, a terrible burden has finally lifted from the United States, thus presenting an opportunity for a more effective policy in areas that truly count. So the end in Vietnam could mean deliverance or disaster—and which one depends on the behavior of American officials.

One encouraging portent is the state of domestic opinion. Americans have been steeling themselves against the unhappy ending for months. By huge majorities, the Congress, acting at the clear direction of the country, has repeatedly resisted appeals for more military aid to Southeast Asia. Because previous American efforts against throwing good money after bad were so ample, because the majority was so broad and because the pseudo-commitments of Mr. Nixon were so illegitimate, it will not be easy to finger any particular group as responsible for defeat.

Nor does there have to be a turning inward in disgust on a scale that would justify that dirty epithet, neo-isolationist. Whether in corporations, unions, farms, universities or government, whether as investors, consumers, travelers, students or policymakers, Americans are bound by hoops of steel with foreign lands. Having liquidated the primary source of division in foreign policy, Americans can realistically think of rebuilding the consensus about national security that marked



By Stuart Leeds for The Washington Post

pre-Vietnam days.

The foreign outlook is not worse. A few countries—Thailand, the Philippines and perhaps Singapore—will have to scramble to undo the opportunism which made them strive to be No. 1 boys for Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon in times past.

But the most important Asian countries—notably Japan, which has diplomatic relations with North Vietnam and a working aid program—have already made adjustments to the new reality without fraying American ties. The European allies, and most of the countries of Africa, Latin America, the Mideast and South Asia, are going to find it easier—not harder—to reach common ground with the United States now that Vietnam, a prime source of discord, is out of the way.

The more so as the Communist world is showing unexampled restraint about events in Southeast Asia. The Russians and Chinese—pushed years ago by the desire for rapport with

Washington into an awkward stance toward Hanoi—now sound almost neutral. Note, for example, the miraculously dispassionate rhetoric of Tass in announcing the surrender: "A most dangerous seat of international tension has been liquidated."

In these conditions, the fear of great new danger seems highly exaggerated. The talk of Communist assaults on Thailand, South Korea or Formosa, in particular, ignores the military and political realities—not to mention the cool relations between China and Russia.

In the Middle East, the Israelis will perhaps be even more suspicious about settling with the Arabs on the basis of an American guarantee. But the true lesson, and one that the United States can now drive home to the Israelis, is that over-persistence does not pay off; that it makes sense to settle

with the Arabs now, before the tide of their power swells in a way that will belittle the surge of Communist strength in Southeast Asia.

The unfinished business of detente with Russia can plainly go forward more safely than before. Washington no longer has to pay Moscow exorbitant fees—such as the wheat deal—for a hands-off policy in Vietnam.

Perhaps most important, there is a chance for some steady and serious high-level attention to a prime international problem that the United States has been pleased to ignore. That is the international economic problem, engaging recession, inflation, gyrating commodity prices, uncertain currency rates and, in some cases, national bankruptcies.

But America's influence in the world can be made whole again only if there is a truce in the guerrilla war now

waging between the executive and the Congress. The Congress, for its part, needs to support established leaders who look forward to the problems ahead, not backward to the fights behind.

But the key lies with the Secretary of State. The future of the American role requires that he be more explicit about his purposes, that he allow some others to play some hands, that he cease blaming whatever goes wrong on others, that he take economic issues and libertarian causes more seriously. No doubt that is asking a lot, but Dr. Kissinger, after all, is the strong man of this administration—the man with the most internal fibre. If he cannot make these changes, he has become more a part of the problem than of the solution, and he should draw the consequences.