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THAILAND

POST VIEWS FALL OF SOUTH VIETNAM, HANOI'S NEXT MOVE

Bangkok POST in English 1 May 75 p 8 BK

[Editorial: "No Other Sensible Course"]

[Text] The surrender of Saigon by President Duong Van Minh must have been painful to him but there was no other sensible course for him. It has saved lives and brought to an end the deaths of so many human beings and the destruction of so much property. With the United States pulling up its stakes, there was no more hope of the South Vietnamese being able to further withstand the onslaught of the Soviet supported North Vietnamese-Vietcong forces.

The fall of South Vietnam to the North Vietnamese is the culmination of the efforts of Hanoi to reunify the country under its domination. What the North Vietnamese do with regard to Laos and Cambodia will indicate whether they are the real imperialists of Southeast Asia or whether they have been only interested in bringing all the Vietnamese people, no matter what their creed, under their banner.

If Hanoi makes Laos and Cambodia part of its empire, then we in Thailand have to be aware of the presence of an aggressive power in our region. The Vietnamese and the Thais have rivalled each other through history for power over this area but we in Thailand have become civilised and peace-loving, though we are still ready to fight for our country, institutions and freedom.

If Hanoi is ready and willing to allow the Laotian and the Cambodians to have their own kind of government and to be neutral, without being subject to North Vietnamese desires and objectives, then Thailand should extend a warm hand of friendship across the border. But Thailand cannot display any weakness because Hanoi only respects strength. Now is the time for Thailand to consult with its ASEAN allies on a common stand and to achieve greater unity to discourage any expansionist aims.

ASEAN should at the same time invite Hanoi as well as Laos and Cambodia to join in the proposed zone of peace, neutrality and freedom--that is, freedom for each country in the zone to practice what its people believe in political or economic systems, and freedom to maintain its national heritage and identity. ASEAN should also be ready to cooperate in Vietnamese efforts at recovery and rehabilitation.