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AFTER THE FALL - WHAT NEXT: I, SOUTHEAST ASIA

The last bullets have been fired. The last bombs have been dropped. The curtain has fallen on the last act of the long U.S. involvement in South Vietnam. What is next! In this--the first of three columns--we examine the consequences of this historic change in three parts of the world where the U.S. has had important interests.

I. Southeast Asia

In this region the debacles that the U.S. has encountered and its perceived failure as an ally is a fact of life for friendly states. There are three key nations--Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines--to watch as they seek in various ways to adapt to the new realities in their area. First, they must make a judgment as to how much to discount continuing U.S. pledges in the light of our performance in South Vietnam. Next, they must calculate whether the Hanoi regime will integrate South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos into a single, fearsome, monolithic Indo-China of 50 million people or whether Hanoi will seek through the proxy leadership of the PRG in South Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and the Pathet Lao in Laos to create their Southeast Asian version of Russia's Warsaw Pact.

Already these three former allies have signalled intentions to initiate hedges toward accommodation.

The most populous, as well as the richest in resources, Indonesia, retains a fresh memory of internal struggles. Its present leaders were all part of the anti-colonial insurgency which won that archipelago its nationhood from the Dutch. Its current President, the cool and nimble military leader, thwarted President Sukarno's efforts to use the Communist Party element for his tri-polar support to eliminate another pole--the military. We have heard Suharto and his present military leadership cite the power and presence of the U.S. in South Vietnam as being the catalyst that encouraged them to face up to their internal threat. Now all that is changed. Indonesia has made public its intention to move toward non-alignment. The close call that the present leaders had from an internal Communist take-over, their personal experience as insurgents, coupled with great interest in the welfare of the people, should permit their shift toward non-alignment without radical internal changes.

Thailand has over a thousand years of history of accommodation to aggressive foreign powers. Her regime tucked itself nicely under the Japanese wing in World War II. Increasingly aligned with the U.S. in the post-war era, she was gradually led by the U.S. to provide major air and logistic bases to support the war against Hanoi. Now Thailand is accommodating again! Publicly, she has

made it clear that U.S. personnel must be phased out. Privately, she has added that U.S. commitments are no longer to be trusted.

As men, money, and materials freed up from the conquest of Cambodia and South Vietnam begin to increase the effectiveness of the insurgency in Northeast Thailand, Thai leaders should be expected to initiate a three-pronged juggling act of accommodation. Direct cooperation with Hanoi will be used to seek to lessen the intensity of the insurgency. Overtures to both Peking and Moscow will seek to win their support in restraining Hanoi's insurgency. Whether the Thai regime can buy reprieves without radical internal changes is not yet clear and depends on the calculus of conflicting interests among the three Communist powers. The act of balancing among the three for survival will be delicate even for the Thais.

The Philippines--although somewhat protected by distance and insularity--have the toughest political situation of the three U.S. allies. Their Moslem insurgency is of true nationalist origin. It has access to the money of the Moslem oil-Arabs. The Marcos dictatorship is increasingly less popular with the people. Marcos, too, has made his public signal by expressions of toughness toward Vietnamese refugee leaders and by his stated intention to seek a new relationship on the matter of U.S. bases. But, unlike

Thailand, he seems to have nowhere to go for help in lessening the virulence of his insurgency, and his ability to contain that insurgency is eroding.

We think Marcos is in real trouble and will be drawn to consider radical alternatives to survive. These could well include abrupt termination of ties with the U.S.

Thus, in three significant Southeast Asian nations, the riptide created by the wreckage of the last decade of U.S. policy there has begun to break upon their shores. The erosive effects could bring lasting negative consequences to U.S. interests.

Tomorrow we will examine the impact of the loss of an ally in Southeast Asia upon U.S. interests on the Southern flank of NATO.

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'AFTER THE FALL - WHAT NEXT: II, SOUTHERN EUROPE

We have suggested that American policies in Asia have led three allies there to seek security by decoupling their links from those of the United States. Some observers would draw a distinction between our interests in the Pacific and those in Europe and NATO.

The facts do not support this in an era of great interdependence among nation states. A perceived failure to support an ally in SEA must raise doubts in other alliances of which the U.S. is a part. Britain's Economist bannered the issue for Europe as "The Fading of America". And there is the opening with China. It is designed to capitalize on PRC hostility to the USSR and rationalize the priority given to defense requirements in the NATO center. Peiping depended on the quid of U.S. presence in SEA to keep the Soviets from extending the envelopment of China, a process started with India. Now, with the American failure in SEA, what will give China the confidence that liaison with the U.S. is other than a liability?

In NATO, the most visible deterioration of the political and defense fabric is in Southern Europe. Without the threat from this flank, the Soviets could mass against the center. Control of the Mediterranean sea lines, assured at the western approaches by Portuguese bases, offers alternative routes of supply and reinforcement to NATO.

At the eastern end, Turkey affords the alliance proximity to the USSR and the geographical coincidence of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

There is little question that detente encouraged Turkey and Greece to raise the level of argument on their historical disputes. The absence of an active threat from the north subsequently led to anti-American and anti-NATO emotions in Greece and, with the stimulation of the Congress, in Turkey. Both these nations must decide whether NATO gives them protection against a valid threat and, if not, whether the alternatives are acceptable. The issue that up to now is emotional will turn to consideration of U.S. credibility, and it will be judged by governments of wholly different political perspectives.

In Athens, Caramanlis is structuring a position well distanced from the military regime he replaced: constraints on Greece participation in NATO activities; success in obtaining U.S. withdrawal from bi-lateral base agreements; and a passiveness on Cyprus that realistically recognizes the limits of Greek power. His liberal regime is unable or unwilling to stem the flow of anti-Americanism encouraged by U.S. ineffectiveness in SEA. There are signs that the impulses to establish his political credentials are edging beyond control. While the Greek lobby pushed the Congress to cut off American aid to Turkey, the Caramanlis preoccupation

with domestic pressures delayed useful negotiations to the point where Turkey must consider armed action before their forces are immobilized by lack of spare parts.

On the Turkish side, this growing imperative is judged by a weak government and a strong military. The latter are pragmatic and deeply wounded by the act of an ally to limit arms support. They are the group most likely to link the Congressional contribution to the debacle in SEA with their own experience and conclude that U.S. purpose is changing. The Turks are proud and tough. There is little prospect that they will permit their arms to deteriorate to the point of uselessness without a political hedge--and the Soviets appear less ominous in the spirit of detente--that substitutes some power flexibility towards Greece for U.S. intractability and weakness.

The U.S. policy towards Portugal is also ineffective. Communist influence in the military government grows with the support of a left-wing that uniquely infiltrated the military. If there were a temporizing sentiment that looked to the U.S. and NATO to influence a domestic balance, it is now weakened by the defeat in SEA and the indecisiveness of American diplomacy. The Portuguese already reflect an independence of U.S. aims by stating the Azores are not available in case of a renewed Mideast conflict. The Soviets evaluate the situation and press for use of

Portuguese ports. NATO concern thus far is procedural, to deny Portuguese participation in the Nuclear Planning Group and thus safeguard its secrets. Under these conditions, Portugal keeps its eye directed inward; the elections gave preference to the Socialists at the expense of the Communists, through the military junta established beforehand that the election would not transfer power. Initially, there was hope for an evolving dissipation of Communist influence. Now, influenced by the lack of external support, the prospect is for an aggressive Socialist claim to popular power and its rejection by the military leadership that also has no option other than Communist rule. If NATO and the U.S. are unable to engage in countering this threat to the strategic integrity of the Alliance, the perceived lessons of SEA will be reinforced.

Thus, at both ends of NATO's southern flank, U.S. ineptness threatens the viability of the Alliance strategy, and events in SEA weaken the hope in those countries that a positive U.S. policy can reassert NATO influence. After the demonstrated lack of will in Asia, U.S. purpose must be expressed in new terms and actions in Europe if stability that depended on the U.S. for 30 years is to be resuscitated.

Tomorrow we will examine the impacts of the loss of an ally in Southeast Asia upon U.S. interests in the Middle East.

AFTER THE FALL - WHAT NEXT: III, MIDDLE EAST

No one devoted to the cause of peace can be pleased that Henry Kissinger did not achieve the next step of his unilateral diplomacy in the Middle East. The round of talks, however, did serve to define the limits of accommodation one can pry from Israeli insecurity and from the Arab pressures on Sadat. There is a milestone involved that is important for the future. The U.S. used up the credibility of its power so hazardously established in the tense days of October and November 1973. In the negotiations that follow, either in Geneva or wherever, the perception of U. S. strength now flows from the defeat in Southeast Asia. On that event, one must superimpose the unfortunate timing of the announced reappraisal of our Middle East policy. Its implied aim, to weaken Israel's claim for support, validates a perceived lack of continuity in meeting U.S. obligations.

There are a series of events or omissions that also appear to minimize the leverage of power that the U.S. can exert in bringing the two sides to agreement.

Continuing dispute in the Congress impedes passage of a program to gain independence from foreign energy sources. Whatever plus might have resulted from the unwise suggestion of an armed response to a coercive Arab oil

embargo has become a net minus by subsequent repudiation. Action on a corollary proposal to improve the contingency base at Diego Garcia is being delayed with the appearance of indecision and weakness. In Greece, the U.S. accommodated to the Caramanlis domestic priorities at the expense of bi-lateral base arrangements suited to a MidEast crisis. On Cyprus, the U.K. decision to constrain the Sovereign Base Areas offers little hope that facilities will be available for U.S. use.

Soviet power, on the other hand, is gaining in relative strength. Their Navy continues to enjoy logistical and repair facilities in Alexandria and access to the port of Latakia in Syria. With the opening of the Suez Canal in June, there is the promise of easy reinforcement of the Indian Ocean Fleet from the Black Sea. The Soviet-constructed airfields in Somalia give a new dimension to their power on the littorals of the Arabian peninsula. Also, in the Soviet fashion, military assistance to Syria and Egypt continues, though that to Israel from the U.S. is diminished in the name of "reappraisal".

What we are seeing is a decoupling of U.S. power from the support of diplomatic possibilities that remain. It is not enough that the Sixth Fleet is in the Mediterranean. The above actions raise serious doubts about its credibility. The willingness of the U.S. to use its power is signalled

by a continuum of policy. Over the past two decades, international stability owed much to the deployment of U.S. forces to areas of crisis on 48 separate occasions. This threatened use of power deterred or dampened local conflict and avoided subsequent armed confrontation with the USSR. Nations, large and small, grew to depend on the U.S. dedication to peace and patterned their own conduct and stability accordingly.

The deterrence of force need not be applied indiscriminately and, with the significant exception of South Vietnam, the U.S. was more responsible than not. In the nuclear age, however, the strong must act if stability is to be maintained. Peace in the Middle East will involve compromise by both parties. Its achievement may well depend on the even-handed demonstration of U.S. armed force for that purpose. One need not be a warmonger to be dismayed by adverse events that suggest the U.S. is losing the will to combine power with diplomacy. History shows no peace, or detente, sustained without strength.

There is a look of the 1914 Balkans in the mixture of Middle East political trends. King Khalid of Saudi Arabia appears to be more figurehead than ruler; his brother Fahd retains much of the power he and Faisal shared. The prospect is for an unstable administration with room for plotting as others assess the possibilities. In the

meantime, Saudi Arabia works against Soviet presence in the area. At least for now, that policy risks friction with both Syria and Iraq, though the latter are unable to concert common interests because of disputes over water sources. In Syria, the strength of Asad depends on balancing claims to his leadership and that factor constrains what he is able to do. Interposed on these difficulties of autocratic rule is a politically front-running Sadat who, more than the others, faces a populace of rising economic expectations. These are all ingredients that limit predictability of events and ^{which that} ~~suggest~~ movement towards peaceful solutions will depend on elements of power to restrain precipitate political actions, if diplomacy is to succeed.

In these circumstances, one must assume the USSR will be tempted to exploit opportunities. The main plausible deterrent is Soviet recognition of the vital Western interests in Middle East oil. But interests are persuasive only with some demonstration that they will be protected; if there is doubt, the prospects of confrontation increase markedly.

In the Middle East, more than in any other area discussed in these three columns, policy success depends on the availability of power and the will to use it. This fact emerges at the time of greatest concern with U.S. reliability. Whether we, as a nation, are able to respond intelligently to this challenge is the dominant question of peace and Western survival.