

admission of anti-Communist defeat in Indochina. For a time, the United States hoped to accomplish through military assistance what it had been unable to effect through the use of its own forces — a series of negotiated settlements for Indochina through which the anti-Communist political movements would have some meaningful share in government. With the partial exception of Laos, for which a coalition agreement was reached in 1974, such hopes were illusory.

*Setback occurred two years before collapse*

When, in 1975, both South Vietnam and Cambodia collapsed so rapidly, American officials found themselves having to explain what appeared to be a profound and sudden setback for non-Communist Asia, when, in reality, that setback had occurred over two years earlier with the United States withdrawal from direct military involvement.

President Ford's first concern focused on the implications of an American ally's loss for other U.S. security commitments. In a speech delivered early in April, he averred:

"I must say with all the certainty of which I am capable: no adversaries or potential enemies of the United States should imagine that America can be safely challenged; and no allies or time-tested friends of the United States should worry or fear that our commitments to them will not be honoured because of the current confusion and changing situation in Southeast Asia."

However, both the President and his Secretary of State knew that the real issue of American reliability as an ally was not a question of Executive branch commitment but rather one of whether the locus of foreign-policy decision-making had shifted to the Congress. If so, then the real "domino" was the prospect of a collapse abroad of Presidential predictability as a result of Congressional unwillingness to support Executive policies. Secretary Kissinger articulated the dilemma in the following manner:

*Presidential predictability questioned*

"The recognition that the Congress is a coequal branch of government is the dominant fact of national politics today. The Executive accepts that the Congress must have both the sense and reality of participation; foreign policy must be a shared enterprise. The question is whether the Congress will go beyond the setting of guidelines to the conduct of tactics; whether it will deprive the Executive of discretion and authority in the conduct of diplomacy while at the same time remaining institutionally incapable of formulating or carrying out a clear national policy of its own."

Documenting their case against the Congress for the military collapse of Vietnam and Cambodia, Executive branch officials cited Congressional structures that forbade the Government from meeting its supply commitments to these countries since mid-1973. Secretary Kissinger argued that such Congressional prohibitions were not only irresponsible but also, in effect, contributed to the destruction of an ally. If the United States was unwilling even to provide the aid friendly countries needed to defend themselves, "then we are likely to find a massive shift in the foreign policies of many countries and a fundamental threat over a period of time to the security of the United States".

The Ford Administration's public anguish over the collapse of Indochina is understandable because these are the first countries that America chose to defend militarily after 1945 that have succumbed to Communist military conquest. Moreover, at a time when both the Congressional and public moods in the United States reduced Washington's ability to supply its clients, no such constraints operated on either Soviet or Chinese aid to the North Vietnamese. But to picture these developments as a bellwether of U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World is once again to adhere to the belief that Indochina was of vital interest to the United States and that the Thieu and Lon Nol governments and the insurgencies they faced were prototypes for most of the non-Communist Third World. Rather, the more appropriate questions should be (a) whether what happened in Indochina was *sui generis* and beyond the political capacity of the United States to alter in a period of military disengagement and (b) whether the kinds of pledge the United States is prepared to keep in this era are sufficient for its Asian allies, whose own security situations must be assessed separately from developments in Indochina.

In addressing the above questions, one must first briefly examine the collapse of South Vietnam to see whether any parallel can be drawn between developments there and potential threats to other parts of Asia. Vietnamese Communist and anti-Communist adversaries have been engaged in interneicine warfare for some 30 years. Although outside intervention occurred massively, it was not a determinant, and most observers agree that the collapse of the Saigon regime and army resulted from a combination of its own poor leadership, corruption and reduced American supplies, on the one hand, and a massive, all-out military offensive by the North Vietnamese army (PAVN), on the other.