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**FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE**


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But what provokes the greatest hostility, or at least ambivalence, everywhere, Hollander argues, is America's "moral-ethical (and aesthetic) confusion." It is the "American spectacle of a moral and aesthetic free-for-all, of the astonishing ups and downs of moral (and philosophical-ideological) fashions" that most shocks outside observers because they fear its spread.

The export of these "confusions, of high and easily frustrated expectations, ethical relativism, nonmaterial insecurity, forms of spiritual malaise" alarms intellectual critics abroad because such "Americanization" seems to promise the decline of their own traditional values and institutions.

### *America's Failure of Imagination*

"U.S. Policy and the Two Southeast Asias" by Donald E. Weatherbee, in *Asian Survey* (April 1978), University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif. 94720.

Since the end of the Indochina war, the members of the anticommunist Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore—have sought to develop a "regional resilience" to the threat of communist subversion. It is an effort that depends on Western and—as yet, uncertain—American economic, political, and military involvement.

The 1975 defeat in Vietnam created a "new international reality in Southeast Asia," says Weatherbee, a professor at the University of South Carolina's Institute of International Studies. The perceived U.S. retreat from its regional commitments, the revived Sino-Soviet competition, and the swift consolidation of Communist power in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam led the ASEAN nations to conclude that the balance of power in the region had tipped sharply in favor of the communists.

In their initial reaction, the ASEAN states tried to demonstrate their independence from the United States (e.g., the demands to close all U.S. installations in Thailand, the dismantlement of SEATO, and Philippine assertiveness in negotiations over U.S. base rights) and sought "normalization" of their relations with communist neighbors.

Now, says Weatherbee, the ASEAN states realize that their attempts to have the communists recognize Southeast Asia as a "Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality" has been viewed as a sign of weakness. Rather than accept communist Vietnam's demand for the elimination of all U.S. influence in Southeast Asia as a precondition for "neutrality," the ASEAN group seeks a more tangible American role in the region, including continued military and economic assistance.

However, they find Washington hamstrung by a Vietnam "backlash," preoccupied with human rights as an overriding issue, uncertain of America's real interests, and holding to a wait-and-see attitude. Instead of broadening its association with ASEAN, Weatherbee concludes, the United States—either by intention or default—is slipping toward a position equidistant from the two Southeast Asias. It is not so much a failure of nerve; it is a "failure of imagination."