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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 19, 1975

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR:

BRENT SCOWCROFT

FROM:

JAMES E. CONNOR

The attached report from Senator Mike Mansfield was returned in the President's outbox with the request that it be forwarded to you.

Please follow-up with appropriate action.

cc: Don Rumsfield

Attachment:

Report from Mike Mansfield on
"Southeast Asia and U.S. Policies After Indochina"
September 1975

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Gen. Acworth

from Gen. Mansfield

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN.....

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

SOUTHEAST ASIA AND U. S. POLICIES AFTER INDOCHINA

A report on

Burma, Thailand and the Republic of the Philippines

submitted to the

President

by

Mike Mansfield
Majority Leader,
United States Senate

September 1975

United States Senate
Office of the Majority Leader
Washington, D.C.

September 17, 1975

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

You will recall that during the August recess, after discussions with you, I visited Portugal, Saudi-Arabia and several other countries in Asia. Pursuant to that undertaking I have already transmitted to you confidential reports on Portugal and Saudi-Arabia. There is attached hereto a third report covering my observations of the situation in Burma, Thailand and the Republic of the Philippines, together with certain conclusions which I have drawn with respect to U. S. policies.

Speaking of Southeast Asia, generally, I would note that the region is in the throes of a major re-orientation. The changes which are taking place have probably been accelerated by our withdrawal from Indochina but I do not believe that they can be attributed primarily to that withdrawal. While there are some who regard our military departure from Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos as a tragedy for this nation, my own view is that it puts an end to a tragedy and opens up an opportunity to recast our policies in Southeast Asia in a much more realistic vein in terms of our national interests.

I have long believed that this nation's defensive concerns, as a Pacific power, do not extend onto the Asian mainland. Major military undertakings there have seemed to me dangerous in the extreme, involving as they do the possibility of prolonged and debilitating entrapment in areas where our interests are limited and our military effectiveness is minimal. As we sensed in Korea and discerned even more clearly in Indochina, developments on the Asian continent are not readily amenable to military control by any rational input of U. S. resources or sacrifice of American lives.

Seen in long-term perspective, the withdrawal from Viet Nam can be regarded as the most recent episode in the process of withdrawal which, with much backing and filling, has gone on for a quarter of a century. Decades ago, the involvement began in China, into which we were plunged militarily by World War II, and we are still not completely free of it. We left the Chinese mainland years ago but are even at this late date plagued by the consequences of our initial involvement. We remain snarled in the Taiwan dilemma. We have been trapped in Korea for almost a quarter of a century after an indecisive war. We have just emerged from Indochina after a devastating war.

I might add, in passing, that if we are not an Asian power and, hence, ought not to have military forces on the Asian mainland, even less suited to us is the role of Indian-Ocean power. The permanent projection of our military strength into that Ocean, as onto the mainland of Asia, may provide an illusion of power but it does so, in my judgment, at the price of complicating the problem of protecting the security of the nation. It does so at the price of a great wastage of the nation's substance and the dissipation of our affordable military strength.

The opportunity which is offered by the Indochina withdrawal, as I see it, is to cut this wastage and to concentrate our forces in the Pacific Ocean where their presence is more likely to bear some relationship to the nation's reasonable defense needs and capabilities. At this time, there is a chance to get off the Southeast Asian mainland completely by closing out the bases in Thailand. In my judgment, moreover, it would be to our advantage to stop the military build-up on Diego Garcia and the development of another permanent U. S. naval fleet in the Indian Ocean. Finally, insofar as I am concerned, we should keep alert to forestall the bureaucratic development of too intimate ties with Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore, all of which could prove new wasteful traps for the nation's military power.

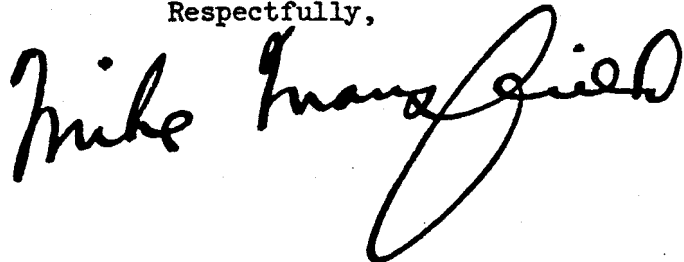
Unlike Korea, where an opportunity for withdrawal is not yet present, we do have a chance at this point to get finally free of the entrapment on the Southeast Asian mainland. The close-down of the military bases in Thailand, originally opened during the Kennedy Administration, is the last step in that process. When it is completed, we will have set the stage for the development of normal intercourse with the countries of the region. The list of such countries, in my judgment, should include, as feasible, both Viet Nams and, as soon as there is a clarification of the political situation in Cambodia, that country as well. Whatever role we can effectively play -- and it is limited at best -- in encouraging the development of peace and responsible and responsive government in Southeast Asia will be strengthened by maintaining diplomatic relations and by encouraging trade and other normal international intercourse with all of the nations of the region.

A complete military withdrawal from the Southeast Asian mainland will also permit us to take a new look not only at the Southeast Asia Treaty and other outdated security arrangements but also at our Taiwan predicament and the function of the military bases in Japan and in the Philippines. It will be possible, then, to see these installations as they should be, in terms of their utility for the defense of the United States rather than in connection with maintenance of supply-lines for military adventures on the Asian mainland.

As is indicated in the accompanying report, it would appear that the Southeast Asian nations are moving towards self-reliance and a deepening awareness of national identity and regional affinity. This change has little to do with the Indochina aftermath. It is associated, rather with the general recession of Western influence in the region which has been going on at least since World War II. It would be wise to anticipate that the Asian nations will be calling for adjustments of all the cooperative institutions and other relationships with the West which grew out of a previous heavy dependency. In my judgment, we should do our best in our own best interests to accommodate to changes of this kind. They involve in many cases the lightening of an excessive and one-sided burden which has been maintained for many decades by the people of the United States. These changes are also clearly in accord with the Nixon Doctrine which foresaw a contracting of the U. S. military presence in the region.

It would be most unfortunate if out of indignation or disillusionment we should turn our backs on Asia. More in line with our interests would be to seek to understand more clearly what is transpiring on that continent. Our young people, in particular, need as much exposure as possible to the changes in Asia since they will experience in the years ahead most of the consequences. Through diplomacy and cultural contacts we should be able to harmonize our reasonable national interests in security, trade and cultural cross fertilization with the emerging situation in Southeast Asia. The transition need not be a source of anxiety if it is approached in that fashion. Indeed, we could be on the verge of a new era which could bring great benefits both to the Asian countries and to this nation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mike Mansfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end of the last name.