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THE SOVIET-VIETNAMESE ALLIANCE IN STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE 1/1

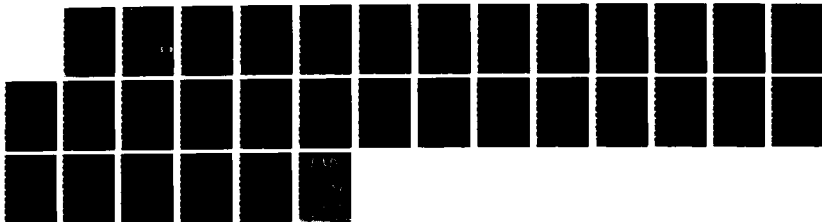
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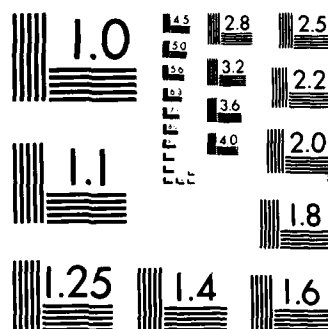
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The Soviet-Vietnamese Alliance
In Strategic Perspective

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The Soviet-Vietnamese alliance is the product of three deeply rooted conflicts: the global superpower conflict between Moscow and Washington; the Sino-Soviet rivalry in the Far East; and the Sino-Vietnamese struggle in Indochina. The first two rivalries have long provided the Soviet Union with strong incentives for obtaining military bases and political influence in Southeast Asia that it can use to project its power against two major adversaries - the United States and China. The Soviets initially tried to advance their influence in Southeast Asia by establishing a military and economic aid relationship with Sukarno's Indonesia in the 1960's. But these efforts to project Soviet power into the strategic waterways of Southeast Asia collapsed when the Indonesian military crushed the communists, got rid of Sukarno, and took power in 1965.

In the aftermath of their failure in Jakarta, the Soviets immediately turned their attention to Vietnam. By providing military, economic and diplomatic support to Hanoi in its struggle with the United States during the 60's and 70's, Moscow positioned itself for the strategic breakthrough that came in 1978 as a result of the third deeply rooted rivalry - that between Hanoi and Beijing.

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The immediate cause of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict that erupted in 1978 was Hanoi's decision in that year to abandon its balanced position in the Sino-Soviet dispute and to come down unequivocally on the side of Moscow; to join the Moscow-based economic organization known as COMECON; and to establish a strategic agreement with Moscow within the framework of a network of so-called friendship treaties that Moscow had built throughout Asia and Africa. The Vietnamese did all of this, no doubt, because they needed Soviet support against China in their planned invasion of Kampuchea which took place on Christmas Day of 1978, a month after they signed the friendship treaty with Moscow.

Although the Vietnamese, from their own strategic point of view, must have considered that they had good reasons for overthrowing Pol Pot and installing their own puppet government in Kampuchea, no Chinese government of whatever ideological complexion could have accepted this action. For Beijing, this action represented not only a forceable overthrow of a neighboring client state, but collusion with a Soviet adversary that was systematically setting out to encircle China with military power.

In sum, the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance is the product of a complex set of power rivalries that provide both the Soviets and the Vietnamese with very strong incentives to

embrace each other. Each side benefits very considerably. The Soviets obtain access to military bases in Vietnam that enable them for the first time in Russian history to become a major player in Southeast Asia, the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The Vietnamese obtain an insurance policy against China and any other combination of powers determined to roll back their newly acquired and long sought empire in Indochina. And the Vietnamese acquire substantial amounts of diplomatic, economic and military assistance that they could get nowhere else at a time of deep diplomatic isolation and enormous economic and social strains.

THE SOVIET-U.S. RIVALRY

If this analysis is correct, it is unlikely that there will be any major changes in the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance unless there are some major breakthroughs in the three power rivalries I have referred to. Let us briefly examine each of these rivalries and their impact on Soviet-Vietnamese relations. I will begin with the Soviet-American competition.

Although the Soviet Union and the United States are now entering a period when they both seem to want some respite from their intense confrontation in recent years, it is difficult to believe that there will be any substantial accommodation between the superpowers.

The Soviet Union and the United States are deeply divided by an ideological contest and by a global competition for power and influence. The Soviet Union is a rising, expansionist power unsatisfied with the present distribution of power in most all of the regions of the world. The Soviet-American rivalry is a classic confrontation between a great land power and an even greater sea power. By its transoceanic alliances

and network of bases in Europe and the Far East, the sea power encircles the land power in an effort to contain it and thereby reenforces the land power's historically rooted fears of having to fight a two-front war. The land power thus seeks to cut the ties of the sea power at both ends of the Eurasian continent - to split the United States from NATO and from its Far Eastern friends and allies as well. Were the Soviet Union to succeed in this endeavor, it would tilt the balance of global power significantly in the Soviet favor. The United States cannot allow this to happen. It thereby seeks to strengthen its transoceanic alliances and the naval and air power on which the credibility of those alliances depend. Thus, whatever accords on arms or reductions of tension that the two powers agree to, the global rivalry will certainly continue.

In the Far East particularly the military and political rivalry between the two superpowers is likely to intensify as the global strategic center of gravity moves from Europe to Asia.

The United States is well on the way towards establishing a 600 ship navy and it is adding several new carrier task forces to its fleet. The Seventh Fleet has been equipped with Tomahawk cruise missiles, some of them nuclear-capable;

the Carl Vinson, a nuclear-powered attack carrier, and the New Jersey, a battleship retrofitted with cruise missiles, have also been added to the U.S. Pacific Fleet; two additional squadrons of F-16s are now based on Japanese territory; and a new battleship group, led by the U.S.S. Missouri, has greatly increased American surface strength.

The Soviet Union, meanwhile, continues to upgrade its own land, naval and air forces in the Far East. It has stationed large numbers of SS-20 intermediate range nuclear missiles in Siberia and even if there is an intermediate range missile agreement between the two superpowers in the near future, the Soviets will retain substantial numbers of SS-20s in Siberia. The Soviet Pacific Fleet is already the largest of Moscow's four fleets and some time in the 1990's it will have its first nuclear powered aircraft carrier capable of carrying catapulted aircraft. By adding substantial numbers of Backfire bombers to those stationed in the Far East, the Soviets have already achieved the capability to control portions of the ocean close to their own border. Access to Vietnamese military facilities, and particularly to Cam Ranh Bay, greatly strengthens the Soviet position in this historic rivalry with the U.S. It enables the Soviets to have warm water ports, repair and storage facilities

midway between Vladivostok and the Indian Ocean; to maintain a more or less permanent naval presence in the South China Sea and to maintain an intelligence collecting center for long range spy planes.

Moscow's political competition with the United States in Asia is also likely to intensify. From the Soviet point of view, the Far East is a theater of growing strategic importance in which its own political influence lags substantially behind that of the United States. Indeed, the gap between Soviet military power and political influence is greater in the Far East than in any other region of the world. Japan under Prime Minister Nakasone has moved closer to the American alliance and Nakasone has even called Japan an unsinkable American aircraft carrier. China, while professing a policy of independence and moving to reduce tensions with the Soviet Union, has recently allowed the United States Navy to make a port call at Qingdao, has engaged in periodic strategic consultations with high ranking American military leaders, and is entering into a web of close economic relations with the entire Western world. In Southeast Asia, apart from Indochina, Soviet influence has never been significant and the Soviet-supported Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea plus

the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan have made the ASEAN countries even more suspicious of Soviet intentions.

The new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, is determined to change this unfavorable situation in Asia as signalled by his famous speech of July 28, 1986 in Vladivostok. Recognizing that past Soviet policy in the Far East has been counter-productive, Gorbachev hopes to improve relations with China, Japan and ASEAN - thereby increasing the distance between those countries and the United States. So far, however, he has been unwilling or unable to make the kinds of concessions that are needed to make substantial breakthroughs with any of them.

What is the significance of this continuing superpower strategic rivalry in the Pacific for the future of Soviet-Vietnamese relations? The main point, I believe, is that the Russians - with so few friends or allies in the regions - are unlikely to jeopardize their military facilities in Vietnam by doing anything that would seriously alienate the leaders in Hanoi. Moscow is likely to pay almost any price the Vietnamese insist upon in order to continue maintaining their military facilities. In this respect, the Soviet position in Vietnam is somewhat similar to the U.S. position in the Philippines. Were either superpower forced out of its

bases in Southeast Asia, the strategic environment in the Pacific could change radically in favor of the other. Both superpowers will therefore pay a lot to maintain their present positions. That is why it should not be surprising that the Soviet Union recently doubled its aid to Vietnam during the coming five year plan period. Soviet military and economic aid to Vietnam has been steadily rising since 1978. (See Appendix.)

THE SINO-SOVIET CONFLICT

Let me now turn to the Sino-Soviet rivalry and its impact on Soviet-Vietnamese relations. There has been a substantial reduction of tensions between Moscow and Beijing in recent years and a substantial increase in economic and cultural relations. Improving relations with China is clearly the centerpiece of Gorbachev's new Vladivostok initiative. He has offered a new compromise formula on the long stalled border talks, pulled out a division of troops from Outer Mongolia, offered to cooperate with the PRC in space exploration, called for discussion with the PRC on the lowering of land forces on the border and called for a variety of cooperative economic projects.

Perhaps even more importantly, in an effort to improve relations with China, Gorbachev has shown some willingness to distance the Soviet Union slightly from both India and Vietnam, China's two Asian adversaries. In recent appearances in New Delhi, Gorbachev was extremely ambiguous and vague when pressed by Indian reporters on what the Soviet Union would do in the event of another Sino-Indian conflict. Moreover, the Soviets have been making a variety of efforts to get the Vietnamese to soften their position on Cambodia in order to appease China.

Gorbachev's efforts to improve relations with China are motivated by a variety of considerations. Although the Soviet Union has no illusions that a 1950's-type alliance with the PRC will be possible in the future, Moscow does see an opportunity to exploit the new independent foreign policy that has been enunciated by the PRC leadership since 1982. And the Soviets are encouraged by China's efforts to move towards the swing position in the strategic triangle rather than to ally with the United States against the Soviet Union.

The Soviets are also encouraged by China's evident willingness to improve economic and cultural relations with the Soviet Union despite the lack of improvement in strategic areas. And some Soviet writers seem to have the ideologically motivated view that since both China and the Soviet Union are socialist countries, this will provide the basis for some degree of cooperation against the "imperialist" world.

What then are the prospects for some kind of substantial breakthrough in Sino-Soviet relations?

Since 1982, there has already been a gradual improvement in these relations.

- Tensions along the border have been much reduced and border talks have been resumed.

- The two countries are much less critical of each others' foreign policies and the level of polemics is down substantially from the days when China called Russia "social imperialists" and the Russians called the Chinese Han chauvinists.
- The two sides have begun referring to each other as comrades, a word which implies that there are no serious ideological differences between them. Both now give positive assessments of each others' reforms. Indeed, some Chinese writers are once again openly portraying the Soviet economic model as a positive model for China.
- There has been a substantial increase in trade and the Soviet Union has agreed to provide technical assistance to refurbish a number of factories they built during the 1950's.
- Cultural ties between the two countries have expanded.

In sum, the mid 1960's deep freeze in the relationship has ended; channels of communication have been opened at several levels; mutual polemics have subsided; economic and cultural cooperation has broadened; and there has been a slow but substantial improvement in the relationship.

But in contrast to the improvement in economic and cultural relations and the reduction of tension on the border, the strategic and geopolitical rivalry between Russia and China remains. The Soviets have not substantially cut back

their military encirclement of China; nor have they gone very far towards meeting China's three conditions for normalization which reflect a Chinese demand for a cutback in this encirclement. On the contrary, the Soviet land and air forces opposite China have been qualitatively strengthened and so has the Soviet Pacific Fleet off of China's coast. The Soviets also continue to maintain a substantial number of SS-20 intermediate range nuclear missiles targeted on China.

Nor have the Soviets gone very far towards meeting other Chinese conditions with regard to Outer Mongolia, Afghanistan and Cambodia. Moscow has withdrawn only one division of troops from Mongolia. The Chinese demand a total withdrawal. The Soviets have made a sham withdrawal of a few air defense regiments from Kabul. The Chinese demand a total Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Finally, the Soviets have not withdrawn their support for Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. They have rather increased their military and economic aid to Vietnam and called the situation in Cambodia "irreversible."

Thus, from Peking's point of view, the Soviet military encirclement of China continues.

Moreover, it seems rather unlikely that in the foreseeable future the Soviets will withdraw completely from either Outer Mongolia or Afghanistan or that the Vietnamese

will withdraw completely from Cambodia. Outer Mongolia has been a Soviet satellite since the 1920s and it is strategically important for the Soviet Union in the event of a clash with China. Moreover, the Mongols do not want the Soviets to withdraw from Mongolia because they are extremely fearful of Chinese irredentism.

A complete Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan would be extremely dangerous under existing conditions. The Soviet puppet communist government would collapse and a violently anti-Soviet government would probably replace it. Although Moscow now talks like it wants to cut its losses in Afghanistan, it remains doubtful that it is prepared to pay ^{the} price of complete withdrawal.

With regard to Cambodia, the Soviets have only limited ability to influence the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese are determined to dominate Laos and Cambodia for what they regard as important strategic and geopolitical reasons. The Soviets cannot afford to pull the plug on Vietnam without losing their strategically important bases.

Meanwhile, a fourth new obstacle to Sino-Soviet normalization now looms on the horizon. This has to do with the spread of Soviet military power to North Korea. In recent years, the Soviets have been given permission to overfly

North Korean territory and to make naval port calls at North Korean ports in exchange for supplying Pyongyang with modern jet fighter planes and increased economic aid. From Peking's point of view, this new Soviet-North Korean military relationship further tightens the Soviet noose around China.

Finally, even if there were a normalization of relations between China and the Soviet Union - whatever that means - it will not change certain basic facts in the Sino-Soviet-American triangle.

- The Soviet Union will continue to maintain one quarter of its land forces and substantial amounts of its nuclear and air forces opposite China.

- The Soviet Union and the PRC will remain potential enemies with a long border and no buffer zones.

- Prejudice and fear will continue to govern Soviet relations with a country which contains the largest population in the world and possesses the will and resources to reclaim its historic greatness.

- Soviet and PRC interests will continue to clash all over the Asia-Pacific region from Korea to Indochina to South Asia and as China becomes stronger, this geopolitical competition will grow.

-China will continue to have much more to fear from the Soviet Union and much more to gain from the United States in terms of its two most important needs - security and development. Chinese-American relations will therefore remain closer than either Sino-Soviet or Soviet-American relations and China, for its own reasons, will remain a massive barrier to further Soviet expansion in Asia.

The upshot of this for Soviet-Vietnamese relations is that although Moscow will try its best to have both its Chinese and its Vietnamese cake at the same time, it will not be able to. It will be forced to choose between Peking and Hanoi by Peking and, faced with such a choice, it will continue to come down on the side of Hanoi. Moscow would be seriously tempted to abandon Hanoi in favor of Peking only in the extremely unlikely event that Peking was willing to make substantial cuts in its strategic and economic ties to the West. Although Moscow dreams of such a possibility, it does not seem likely - particularly since Moscow is not prepared to make the kinds of drastic cutbacks in its own military power and expansion that has pushed China towards the West in the first place.

THE SINO-VIETNAMESE CONFLICT

Let me turn now to the third and perhaps most crucial power rivalry that is at the root of the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. That is the Sino-Vietnamese conflict.

The depth of this conflict is well illustrated by an anecdote told to me by Roger Hilsman, former director of the Office of Intelligence and Research in the Kennedy Administration, about his recent visit to Hanoi. While touring the Vietnamese military museum, Hilsman expressed some disappointment that there was only half a room devoted to the war with the Americans while there were some 14 rooms devoted to the Chinese and two or so to the French. Mr. Hilsman, his Vietnamese interlocutor responded, "The Chinese occupied us for a thousand years and we fought them for another thousand; the French were here for 150 years; you Americans were just a passing episode."

Nayan Chanda, in his superb book, Brother Enemy, also provides considerable insight into the historical and geopolitical background of this age old conflict between China and Vietnam. As Chanda points out, through several centuries before the modern era, China ceaselessly sought to subjugate Vietnam and Vietnamese efforts to achieve supremacy on China's

southern border provoked unremitting opposition from Chinese rulers. The Vietnamese always justified their efforts to extend their tutelage over Cambodia and Laos principalities by security considerations and long before the French established control over Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, the Nguyen emperors were well on their way to doing the same.

There is clear geostrategic logic behind the concerns of both the Vietnamese and the Chinese. For the Vietnamese, as General Giap wrote in 1950, Indochina is a single strategic unit, a single battlefield. Vietnam could not be independent and secure if either Cambodia or Laos were under the domination of a hostile power. This geostrategic logic was borne out during the first Indochina war when the French launched major attacks on Vietminh strongholds from Laos and Cambodia. And it was borne out again in the second Indochina war when the North Vietnamese exploited the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos and base camps in Cambodia to supply their forces in South Vietnam.

One conclusion to be drawn from this record was the one drawn by the Vietnamese army daily in 1979:

"For more than a century now, history has always linked the destinies of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. When one of them is invaded or annexed, the independence and freedom of the rest are also endangered, making it impossible for them to live in peace. Therefore, the enemy of one country is also the enemy

of all three countries. To maintain unity among themselves and to join one another in fighting and winning victories - this is the law for success in the revolutions of the three countries.

In a further elaboration of this theme of the indivisibility of the security of the three Indochinese states, the Vietnamese claimed that just as unity guaranteed the independence of all three countries, outside powers for their part constantly sought to control all three by creating divisions among them. "In their plots to annex Indochina and expand into Southeast Asia," a Vietnamese general claimed in 1984, "the Peking reactionaries cannot help but follow this law." (Chanda, Brother Enemy, p. 123.)

If the indivisibility of security in all three Indochinese states was one geostrategic conclusion to be drawn by the Vietnamese from their own history, another was the importance of balancing China's power. In the 900 or so years after the invading Song army suffered an ignominious defeat in its attempt to subjugate Vietnam in the 10th century, the Vietnamese fought off a score of invasions from the north. A Vietnamese official was later to sum up the accumulated historical wisdom on this score: "In all of history," he said, "we have been secure from China in only two conditions.

One is when China is weak and internally divided. The other is when she has been threatened by barbarians from the north. In the present era, the Russians are our barbarians." (cited by Chanda, p. 135)

For the Vietnamese, then, the appearance of a pro-Chinese Pol Pot in Cambodia in the immediate aftermath of the American departure from Vietnam must have looked like a repetition of an old historical threat. When Pol Pot began to purge Vietnamese trained cadres from his own communist party and to contest certain areas of the Vietnamese-Cambodian border - all with apparent Chinese support - the leaders in Hanoi decided that they could not afford to wait. To assure their own security in the one indivisible strategic area, they had to subjugate both Cambodia and Laos. And to do this, they had to ally themselves with the Russians.

But if there was an inexorable geostrategic logic behind Vietnam's calculations, there was a similar logic behind Peking's thinking. China's basic goal throughout its history was to assure order and stability on its southern border. It conceived of itself as an impartial suzerain and only occasionally used its military might to play the gendarme. Rather it preferred that its smaller and less cultured neighbors to the south pay tribute to China and in exchange, when they were squabbling among themselves or offending China,

the imperial court would send emissaries to reprimand the offending vassals.

Behind this role of an impartial suzerain lay China's desire for an untroubled south that deferred to China. In modern parlance, we might suggest that China wanted a Finlandized south. The way to get it was to ensure that there existed a balance of power among the smaller states in the region so that no one of them could pose a threat to China's own stability. Thus, there was, as Chanda points out, a "certain inevitability in the Chinese opposition to the Vietnamese bid for hegemony in Indochina." This opposition was certainly reinforced when the Vietnamese allied themselves with the Soviet Union in order to obtain that hegemony. From Peking's point of view, it was bad enough that Vietnam was seeking to establish an empire on China's southern border - something that any Chinese government would resist. It was intolerable that this empire would be allied with China's main security threat to the north, a country that was already encircling China on a number of other fronts.

Viewed in this historical and geostrategic context, it is not easy to foresee a quick end to the Chinese-Vietnamese conflict over Indochina. Many Americans, particularly the old Vietnam hands, are too quick to see the present Indochina conflict in terms of America's own experience in Vietnam and

to conclude that the Vietnamese will ultimately triumph. It is true that the French and Americans did tire of their protracted conflicts in Indochina and eventually went home. But the Chinese are neither Americans nor French and they are home. The Chinese have the capacity and the staying power to cause a great deal of trouble for Vietnam in its efforts to remain the hegemonic power in Indochina. Together with Thailand, which is also opposed to Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina for solid geostrategic and historical reasons, the Chinese can continue indefinitely to support the Khmer resistance with weapons and material. And China can continue to tie down substantial numbers of Vietnamese troops on Hanoi's northern border - thus preventing the Vietnamese from consolidating their empire and returning to a normal peaceful existence. Moreover, at a time when the Russians are intent on improving relations with China, the Vietnamese will not be able to count on Soviet support for any aggressive actions in Indochina that might bring Hanoi into a direct military confrontation with the Chinese. If one adds to this picture the fact that the Vietnamese have an economy in shambles, the picture for Hanoi is certainly not a bright one. Indeed, over the longer run, one is tempted to suggest that Vietnam will have to come to terms with China.

If it is true that the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance is the product of the three power rivalries I have described, what are the prospects for its future? Perhaps the most important point to make is that there are virtually no prospects for an end to any of these rivalries in the near future. There is the chance - even the likelihood - that there will be some lessening of tension in all three rivalries. Sino-Soviet relations are improving to a considerable degree; the Americans and the Russians may be heading for some new arms control agreements; and the Vietnamese - no doubt under some pressure from Moscow - are holding out an olive branch to China.

Still, when all is said and done, it is difficult to imagine that these new patterns of reduced tension will influence the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship to any substantial degree. Because of its rivalry with Washington and Beijing, Moscow will continue to have a strong interest in its new forward base in Vietnam. And Hanoi, because of its deep and obsessive fear of China, will continue to have little alternative to dependence on the Russians.

FUTURE SCENARIOS

Over the longer run, I can imagine several different scenarios that could radically alter the present pattern of Soviet-Vietnamese relations.

First, the Soviet Union accepts China's condition for normalization of relations and agrees to greatly reduce its support for Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. The Soviet Union would be unlikely to undertake such a drastic action unless there was a substantial reason to expect a serious deterioration in China's relations with the West and an equally substantial improvement in Sino-Soviet relations. Under such circumstances, Vietnam would be forced to move closer to the West.

Second, Vietnam makes peace with China and agrees with Peking on a mutually satisfactory solution to the question of who governs in Phnom Penh. A settlement with China, ASEAN and the United States then follows. Were this to happen, Vietnam would probably initiate a substantial readjustment of its relations with the Russians and move towards a more balanced position between Moscow, Peking and the West.

Third, fighting between China and Vietnam intensifies

and the Soviet Union is forced to throw its weight on one or the other side. If Moscow were to choose Beijing, this might drive Hanoi closer to the West. If Moscow were to continue to choose Hanoi, this would drive China even closer to the West. It should be recalled in this context that it was Moscow's neutrality in the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1959 that was one of the contributing factors in the Sino-Soviet split and the Soviet-Indian rapprochement.

At the moment, all of these scenarios look improbable. It is more likely that the Soviet Union will not reduce its support to Vietnam, that Vietnam will not make peace with China, and that the present pattern of relations will continue.

SOVIET ECONOMIC AND
MILITARY ASSISTANCE

I will conclude with some comments on the degree of intimacy between Moscow and Hanoi and the policy implications that I see for the West.

Soviet military aid to Vietnam has steadily grown in the period since 1975:

1976	\$44.7	million
1977	\$80	million
1978	\$700	million
1979	\$890	million
1980	\$790	million
1981	\$450	million
1982	\$900	million
1983	\$1.2	billion
1984	\$1.3	billion
1985	\$1.7	billion
1986	\$1.5	billion (est.)

(Douglas Pike, The Soviet Union and Vietnam, p. 136.)

The Soviet Union supplies about 97% of Vietnamese military hardware and the remainder comes from East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Soviet aid to the Vietnamese army has included armored vehicles, light tanks, artillery pieces, trucks and large quantities of individual infantry weapons. The Vietnamese navy has been greatly strengthened with combat

vessels, naval support ships, missile attack patrol boats, amphibious assault landing ships, and even two diesel-powered attack submarines. Some of the Vietnamese warships are equipped with antiship missiles. The Soviets have also strengthened the Vietnamese air force with MIG 21s, fighter bombers and the latest MI-24 Hind attack helicopter. (Pike, p. 137).

According to Pike, Soviet military aid to Vietnam has two broad purposes: to increase Vietnam's defensive capability against China and to increase the USSR's offensive capability against China.

The chief Soviet role in Cambodia is that of quartermaster for Vietnam. It is estimated that the war in Cambodia costs Vietnam about \$12 million a day and that about 80% of this amount comes directly or indirectly from the USSR.

On the economic front, Vietnam is also extraordinarily dependent on the Russians. It is an impoverished country, barely able to feed itself. It has little heavy industry and only limited light industry. Soviet exports to Vietnam have risen steadily in the past two decades. In any one year, the Soviet Union supplies Vietnam with between 80 and 100 percent of Vietnam's demands for petroleum, cast iron, fertilizer, steel, cotton and nonferrous metals. (Pike, p.95.) According to Pike's estimates, Soviet economic aid has grown

from \$700 million in 1978 to an estimated \$1.6 billion in 1986. The Soviet Union accounts for some 60% of Vietnam's total trade and if one adds other East European countries, the figure would probably be closer to 75%.

In return for this extraordinary degree of dependence on the Soviet Union, the Vietnamese have allowed the Soviets to develop their largest military base outside Eastern Europe in Vietnam. By mid-1986, the Soviets had an average of 20 to 25 warships in the harbor at Cam Ranh at any one time, in addition to about the same number of Soviet freighters and other service vessels. Moreover, according to Western and Thai intelligence services, there was a fourfold increase in the number of ships calling at Cam Ranh from 1980 to 1984.

WESTERN POLICY

In assessing the implications of the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance for Western policy, several points should, I believe, be kept firmly in mind. First, the combination of power rivalries described earlier will probably ensure for some time to come that both Moscow and Hanoi will derive substantial strategic benefits from their association. Second, Hanoi is and will remain extraordinarily dependent on the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance and it is very unlikely that this dependent relationship will be altered substantially in the foreseeable future. Third, in contemplating policy towards Vietnam, the United States must keep firmly in mind the interests of Thailand and of China. Any unilateral initiatives undertaken by the United States towards Vietnam that go against the interests of Thailand or China could cause great damage to American security interests in the Pacific. The Vietnamese and the Soviets are ceaselessly trying to exploit divisions within ASEAN over Cambodia. The United States should not assist them in this effort.

At the moment, the United States is pursuing a rather low profile policy in Indochina and allowing the ASEAN countries and China to take the lead. Some opponents of this policy are

calling for new overtures to Vietnam. I see little advantage in increasing U.S. contacts with the Vietnamese at the present moment and some dangers in doing so. We should not encourage the Vietnamese to believe that they can substantially improve their relations with the West until they withdraw from Cambodia. And we should not run the risk of stirring doubts in Bangkok and Beijing about our reliability.

On the other hand, it might be desirable for the United States to take a somewhat more active role in Indochina by increasing aid to the non-communist resistance in Cambodia. Such assistance would increase American leverage over the Cambodian resistance movement and send a signal to Thailand, China and the rest of ASEAN that we have recovered from the "Vietnam syndrome" and intend to play an active role in bringing about an Indochina solution that will be satisfactory to our friends and allies. It would also send a signal to Hanoi that we intend to leave them no choice between an indefinite stalemate in Cambodia and a settlement on terms closer to Western interests.

END

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