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Clients and Commitments:
Soviet-Vietnamese Relations, 1978-1988

Sally W. Stoecker

December 1989

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This Note examines the evolution of the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship over the past decade in three contexts: (1) Soviet behavior in supporting the Vietnamese troops during the invasion of Cambodia in late 1978 and in defending them during the Chinese incursion of Vietnam in early 1979, (2) the level of Soviet economic and military aid, and (3) the impact of General Secretary Gorbachev's "new thinking" on Soviet-Vietnamese relations. The record shows a Soviet disinclination to take risks in this region of the world, chiefly because of the proximity to China, even in the late 1970s during the height of Brezhnev's interventionism. Under Gorbachev, not only does interventionism appear remote, but tangible results in reducing tensions in Southeast Asia already have been achieved. Specifically, by September of 1989, thousands of Vietnamese troops left Cambodia, thus fulfilling the third "precondition" set by China on the path to improved Sino-Soviet relations.

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PREFACE

As part of its research into non-NATO contingencies, the Arroyo Center has undertaken a study, entitled "Moscow and the Future Third World Threat Environment," of the types of threats that Army planners are likely to encounter in the Third World. This study examines the broad changes discussed by Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, as well as other aspects of Soviet policy, including trends in power projection capabilities and use of proxy forces. Overall research has been conducted for TRADOC, U.S. Army.

The present Note is one of several case studies that examine Soviet behavior in specific regional conflicts in the Third World. It examines the dilemma that the Soviets face in supporting the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, while simultaneously incurring substantial political costs for their aid to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. It also reviews the Soviet response to crises in Indochina in the late 1970s and attempts to forecast how the Soviets may respond to future conflicts in this region.

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SUMMARY

Although ties between the Soviet Union and Vietnam have become stronger over the past decade, they have also grown increasingly complex. Vietnam relies almost exclusively on the Soviet Union for economic and military aid, while the Soviet Union views its access to the Vietnamese base at Cam Ranh Bay as indispensable for its intelligence-gathering and power-projection capabilities. Yet, in so doing, the Soviets pay a political price because their military aid supports the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. This occupation is vehemently opposed by China, ASEAN countries, and the West—groups with which the Soviets would like to improve relations.

Moreover, the continuing Soviet aid to Vietnam comes at a time when the Soviets are attempting to carry out extensive domestic and foreign economic reforms. Despite these pressures for economic change, Vietnam remains sufficiently important to Soviet political and military objectives that Moscow will pay a very high price to preserve the relationship. Nonetheless, it is becoming evident that the Soviets are actively encouraging the Vietnamese to engage in serious discussions with resistance spokesmen, in order to resolve the situation in Cambodia and withdraw its troops.

THE SOVIETS AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONFLICTS

The role that the Soviets played in Vietnamese conflicts during the late 1970s suggests a Soviet aversion to taking major risks in peripheral military conflicts. During both the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam the following year, Soviet military assistance was limited to logistic and materiel support, advice, and a naval presence. The Soviets never became physically involved in the fighting. Suggestions that they might take part in combat were voiced only after the peak of the crisis, when the Chinese had begun to withdraw their troops.

The reasons for this were largely geopolitical. Given the proximity of the Chinese army to both the Soviet Union in the Far East and to Vietnam in Southeast Asia, the last thing the Soviets wanted to risk was direct confrontation with China on either of these fronts. It is also possible that the Soviets did not want to antagonize the ASEAN countries. Finally, a lesser factor may have been the Soviets' unwillingness to provoke the West when it was negotiating the SALT II agreement.

SOVIET ECONOMIC AND MILITARY AID TO VIETNAM

Despite the political costs, Soviet economic and military assistance to Vietnam has remained at consistently high levels. According to reports from the 27th CPSU Congress, economic aid to Vietnam in the twelfth five-year plan will double, despite reports that the Vietnamese are mishandling the Soviet funds.

In an effort to remedy some of the Soviets' economic ills, Vietnamese "perestroika" ("doi moi") appears to be making some headway in Vietnam under the new party chief Nguyen Van Linh. Reports of the increased use of market mechanisms and the emergence of entrepreneurs are testimony that Soviet-style—or perhaps Chinese-style, given the presence of the ethnic Chinese in the Vietnamese economy—efforts at economic reform are taking place in Vietnam. However, just as in the Soviet Union, the restructuring and development have a long way to go.

Thus military aid to Vietnam appears to have reached a plateau, but it is still quite generous. A large portion of that aid is channeled to Vietnamese troops in Cambodia and some of it in support of the large Soviet military presence at Cam Ranh Bay. Regardless of whether Vietnamese troops are totally withdrawn from Cambodia, it is unlikely that the Soviet presence will be substantially diminished. Not only do the Soviets want to maintain access to Cam Ranh Bay, but the Vietnamese also depend on the Soviet presence as a deterrent to China.

THE ASIAN DIMENSION OF GORBACHEV'S NEW THINKING

In an attempt to undo the Brezhnevite preoccupation with Western Europe and the United States at the expense of opportunities elsewhere, Gorbachev is seeking to improve ties with all countries, including ASEAN countries and the People's Republic of China. For economic reasons, he would like to promote trade with more prosperous countries and expand the Soviet Union's horizons beyond costly client states.

While it can be argued that no major opportunities have arisen in the past decade for the Soviets to exploit militarily in Southeast Asia, it is also true that the political costs associated with intervention often far outweigh the benefits. Gorbachev is advocating the relaxation of tensions and the promotion of cooperation and interdependence among most Asian countries. As has been the case in Vietnam, this does not equate so far with a reduction in military and economic aid to favored client states, however.

The political and economic costs of the occupation have been high. However, recently, the situation has begun to change significantly. The Soviets have begun to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and Mongolia, and now the Vietnamese are recalling their troops from Cambodia at a steady pace. These actions have had a threefold effect of warming relations with the People's Republic of China, ASEAN countries, and the West. The Soviets' pledge to take an active role in the Vietnamese troop withdrawal suggests that the Soviets may be more willing to use a "carrot and stick" approach with Vietnam—a country that is almost totally dependent on the Soviet Union for economic and military assistance. However, given the chronic state of the Vietnamese economy, it is not clear that the "stick" is actually needed.

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The author is indebted to Frank Fukuyama, formerly of RAND, for his supervision and support of this Note and Jonathan Pollack for his constructive criticism of earlier drafts.

Nayan Chanda of the *Far East Economic Review* and Dennis Halpen of the Department of State provided valuable insights into the situation "on the ground" in Cambodia, based on their personal visits to the region.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	iii
SUMMARY	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
Section	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE SOVIETS AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONFLICTS: 1975-1988 ...	4
Background	4
The Soviet Role in Supporting the Vietnamese Against the Chinese and the Kampuchians	6
III. SOVIET ECONOMIC AND MILITARY AID TO VIETNAM	13
Economic Assistance	13
Military Assistance	18
IV. THE ASIAN DIMENSION OF GORBACHEV'S "NEW THINKING" ...	20
Gorbachev's Asian Offensive	20
The 27th CPSU Congress	21
Gorbachev's Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk Speeches	22
Why Asia?	24
Obstacles to Improved Soviet-ASEAN/PRC Relations	24
V. CONCLUSIONS	27

I. INTRODUCTION

The Soviet relationship with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), while growing stronger over the years, has also become increasingly complex. Despite severe economic problems in the Soviet Union, the Soviet leadership has continued to support the faltering economy in the SRV and in turn finances the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Providing large amounts of aid to the SRV has harmed not only the Soviet pocketbook but also its international image.

Until recently, it appeared that the Soviets were "stuck." Although the political cost of the Vietnamese occupation was high, the Soviets did not want to push Hanoi too hard toward the negotiating table, for fear of losing not only a socialist ally but also access to Cam Ranh Bay and other military bases. A compelling sign of this commitment was Gorbachev's promise to increase the level of economic aid to the SRV in 1986.

Within the past year, however, there have been significant changes in Soviet foreign policy behavior; these changes may facilitate the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia by late 1989.¹ The balance of Soviet troops have left Afghanistan, a Soviet division has been pulled out of Mongolia, and the Vietnamese have withdrawn about 60,000 troops (two-thirds of the original number) from Cambodia. The Soviets and the Vietnamese may now believe that Soviet support is indispensable to the survival of the SRV; therefore, the Soviets can use the economic and military aid "stick" to advance the withdrawal without the risk of losing their presence there. Moreover, because Vietnam depends on Soviet military assistance as a deterrent to China, it is unlikely that the Soviets would be forced to leave.

The Vietnamese certainly appreciate the opportunity costs of their continued occupation of Cambodia. Potential foreign investors and trading partners are waiting in the wings until the troops are pulled out. Clearly, given the chronic state of the Vietnamese economy, the occupation is becoming increasingly hard to justify.

Economic imperatives appear to have outstripped the once-preeminent ideological factor as the basis of Soviet assistance. It is ironic that the Soviets—who previously promoted the establishment of the Indochinese Communist Party and later hailed the SRV as one of a select group of legitimate socialist countries worthy of Soviet aid for ideological reasons—have now, under Gorbachev, become far less doctrinaire than the SRV.

¹The Vietnamese pledge to withdraw all troops from Cambodia by September 1989 was issued on April 5, 1989. See *Far East Economic Review*, April 13, 1989, p. 14.

Vietnam has consistently been hailed as one of a select group of truly "socialist" countries, firmly grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideals, having appropriately followed the party line since the inception of the Indochina Communist Party in 1930. Vietnam is the only country besides Cuba that the Soviets can describe as a legitimate socialist state—a critical factor for a country attempting to gain credibility for communism in this region of the world.

With the arrival of Gorbachev and his policy of "glasnost," which has permitted open attacks on the Soviet system and led to a reappraisal of Marxism-Leninism as the foundation of Soviet ideology, a gulf seems to have developed between the SRV and the USSR. No such attacks are permitted in the SRV. In fact, the revision of history that is occurring in the Soviet Union, particularly the renewed "de-Stalinization" campaign, is "not welcome" in the SRV.²

This study examines the evolution of the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship between 1978 and 1988 in an effort to identify and analyze sources of agreement and dissension between the Soviet Union and the SRV, and it examines past Soviet behavior towards Vietnam in an attempt to chart future Soviet-Vietnamese policy. It analyzes Soviet behavior in three contexts: how the Soviets responded to Vietnam's involvement in military confrontations in the late 1970s, the level of Soviet military and economic aid to Vietnam in the past decade, and the impact of Gorbachev's "new thinking" on the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship.

Three major questions will be addressed:

- What were the boundaries of Soviet military involvement on behalf of Vietnam in the past? What generalizations can be made about the likelihood of Soviet intervention in this region?
- What are the costs and benefits of Soviet economic and military aid to Vietnam?
- What are the implications of Gorbachev's "new thinking" on international security for Soviet policy toward Vietnam? What are the prospects of a withdrawal of Soviet-backed Vietnamese troops from Cambodia?

²S. Schmemann, "In Hope and Dismay, Lenin's Heirs Speak," *The New York Times*, January 22, 1989, p. A17.

To address these questions, we have tapped a variety of Soviet, Asian, and Western sources. Insight into Gorbachev's attitude towards Southeast Asia has been gleaned largely from the proceedings of the 27th CPSU Congress in March 1986 and from his speech at the port city of Vladivostok a few months later. Numerous articles in academic journals, newspapers, and books since these noteworthy occasions have expanded on the theme of "new thinking" and foreign policy.

Although these sources provide a sense of Gorbachev's general ideas and desires, they should not be considered proof of the Soviets' foreign policy of the future. Gorbachev is still consolidating power. To date, it is not clear that all of his foreign policy positions are supported at home.

II. THE SOVIETS AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONFLICTS: 1975-1988

BACKGROUND

To appreciate more fully the origins of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and subsequent Chinese invasion of Vietnam, it is useful to recall that historical antagonisms have existed for centuries between the Chinese and the Vietnamese. The centuries-old "Khmer" hatred of Vietnam was manifested in the continuous Vietnamese absorption of Cambodian territory, especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Because of this history of Vietnamese expansion into Cambodian territory, the Khmers understandably viewed Vietnamese motives with skepticism and were less than enthusiastic about a union or alliance of any sort.¹ In contrast, the Vietnamese have felt historically privy to a "special relationship" with their companion Indochinese states, Laos and Cambodia, where the Vietnamese ruled. They have also viewed Cambodia as Indochina's "fence state," or buffer, against Thailand. This obvious mismatch in the interpretation of the nature of the Indochinese relationship is a fundamental source of tension that is unlikely to change.²

Another major strain on Cambodian-Vietnamese relations has been their continuing border war. The basis of this war was the application of an agreed-on "Brevie Line" in 1939 to the division of territorial waters and a vaguely defined land border drawn up by the French in 1954.³ Cambodia's loss of territory to Vietnam led it to adopt a position of "nonnegotiability" regarding its borders and a very hostile attitude toward the Vietnamese. In contrast, the Vietnamese have viewed the border imposed on both Cambodia and Vietnam by the French colonists as one that both parties should observe. The Vietnamese have also sought to refute the notion that they collaborated with the French in defining the boundaries.

The border dispute assumed an increasingly active character in the early 1970s, resulting in armed clashes between Cambodian and Vietnamese forces. By 1977, the disputes had festered and escalated. The Cambodians dispatched naval patrols to cordon off

¹N. Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War after the War*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1986, chapter 2. As Chanda points out, the Vietnamese policy of "eating silkworms," that is, gradually absorbing Cambodian territory, has been kept alive as testimony of Vietnamese designs.

²D.W.P. Elliott, in the introduction to *The Third Indochina Conflict*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1981.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 21-67.

zones and contain the Vietnamese threat. However, the Vietnamese, who were angry with the Cambodians for ending negotiations, viewed the patrolling as provocative. In response, the Vietnamese reinforced their frontier. Over the ensuing months, the border clashes escalated into forays into one another's territory, culminating in the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia on December 16, 1978.

Another issue that exacerbated the regional situation was the treatment of the *Hoa Qiao* (resident Chinese population) in Vietnam.⁴ These Chinese residents, who were harassed by young Marxists for their "bourgeois" economic practices, were pressured by the Vietnamese to relocate from cities such as Cholon where they had established businesses and trades to "new economic zones" in the countryside near Cambodia.⁵ The overall nationalization of the economy and unifying of South and North Vietnamese currencies further upset the *Hoa Qiao* efforts to maintain an autonomous economy in Vietnam and led to many arrests and business shutdowns.⁶

Peking publicly accused Vietnam of persecuting Chinese residents and unilaterally sent boats to Vietnam to bring more than 150,000 *Hoa Qiao* to China. As a result, Sino-Vietnamese relations hit an all-time low. Not only were condemnations hurled at one another, but the Vietnamese also restricted Chinese docking time in order to disrupt the flow of returnees. Nonetheless, the Vietnamese authorities eventually allowed the *Hoa Qiao* to leave, viewing their growing hostility as a threat to internal security.⁷

Two other events that occurred in 1978 more firmly cast the Vietnamese in the shadow of Soviet protection and prepared the way for the imminent invasion. Vietnam joined the Soviet economic organization, CEMA (Council of Economic and Mutual Assistance), and signed a friendship treaty with the Soviets. However, the wording of article VI of the friendship treaty was sufficiently vague that it gave the Vietnamese the *impression* that the Soviets would provide protection in the event of a Chinese attack without actually committing the Soviets to such a course of action.⁸

⁴R. Thakur, "Coexistence to Conflict: Hanoi-Moscow-Peking Relations and the China-Vietnam War," *Australian Outlook*, No. 34, 1980, p. 68.

⁵K. Chen, *China's War With Vietnam, 1979: Issues, Decisions, and Implications*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, Calif., 1987, p. 55.

⁶R. S. Ross, "Indochina's Continuing Tragedy," *Problems of Communism*, November-December 1986, pp. 91-92.

⁷L. Buszynski, "Vietnam Confronts China," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XX, No. 8, August 1980.

⁸*Washington Post*, May 15, 1979, and *Mainichi Shimbun* in Bangkok, May 16, 1979.

In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the two parties signatory to the treaty shall immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating that threat and shall take appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and the security of the two countries.⁹

All of these activities culminated in the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in December 1978, which was immediately followed by a Chinese attack on Vietnam in February 1979. In assessing Soviet behavior in these "incursions," one needs to ask the following questions: What was the extent of Soviet involvement in the planning and execution of the Vietnamese offensive? Was the Soviet defense of the SRV commensurate with Vietnamese expectations? What patterns of Soviet behavior, if any, emerge from these episodes?

THE SOVIET ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE VIETNAMESE AGAINST THE CHINESE AND THE KAMPUCHEANS

There was abundant strategic warning of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. First, the problems of the ethnic Chinese and the unrelenting border conflicts were exacerbated by Pol Pot's consolidation of power in Phnom Penh.¹⁰ Second, the Soviets began airlifting military supplies such as MiG aircraft, guns, missiles, and radars to Vietnam in early August in preparation for the attack and in response to a buildup of Chinese forces along the Vietnamese border. Over the summer and into the fall, the Vietnamese army drastically increased its troop strength along the eastern frontier of Kampuchea and created base camps in South Vietnam to train guerillas to take over from the Vietnamese once the coup was completed.¹¹ These preparations enabled the Vietnamese to launch a "blitzkrieg" attack into Kampuchea, capture Phnom Penh, and install its own leader, former Khmer Rouge commander Heng Samrin, on January 7, 1979.

⁹"The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the SRV and USSR," November 3, 1978, Radio Hanoi.

¹⁰These events are described in great detail by R. Ross, *Indochina Tangle: China's Vietnam Policy 1975-1979*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988.

¹¹See Elliott, *Third Indochina Conflict*, pp. 58-59, and N. Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 218.

Soviet Advice on the Invasion

According to one correspondent, Soviet Commander in Chief of the Ground Forces Pavlovskii visited Laos in January 1978 to discuss the Cambodian situation with Vietnamese defense minister Vo Nguyen Giap. Pavlovskii, who commanded the Soviet invasions of Czechoslovakia and later Afghanistan, apparently advised the Vietnamese to imitate the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia by employing a quick-paced armored attack into Phnom Penh to remove Pol Pot.¹²

Despite such reports, the degree of Soviet involvement in the planning should not be overemphasized. The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) is a strong, well-organized, and competent army with an excellent track record. It is unlikely that Giap would have needed to rely on Soviet military advice.

The Soviets supported the Vietnamese invasion primarily through grants of economic and military aid, including the airlift and sealift of Soviet materiel, shuttling of Vietnamese troops and equipment to the Cambodian theater, and the dispatch of Soviet military advisers to Vietnam to train air force personnel.

Retaliation by the Chinese

The Chinese planned to "punish" Vietnam for its behavior in Cambodia. However, the decision to invade was made when Deng Xiaoping prevailed in a power struggle with Hua Guofeng in December 1978.¹³ Evidence of the forthcoming plan was gradually revealed by increasing troop strength along the Sino-Soviet border, the redeployment of Chinese MiG 19s and 21s to the Vietnamese border, and the establishment by mid-November of a communications relay station in Guangxi Province.¹⁴ Just a few weeks before the invasion, Deng Xiaoping foreshadowed the event by telling reporters in Washington that if "you do not teach [the Vietnamese] some necessary lessons, it just won't do."¹⁵

¹²Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 216.

¹³Chen, *China's War with Vietnam*, pp. 70ff.

¹⁴Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 322-323.

¹⁵R.D. McFadden, "Hanoi, Peking, Ancient Foes, At War Again," *The New York Times*, February 18, 1979.

Deng Xiaoping appears to have reasoned that an invasion of Cambodia would be appropriate for several reasons: There were too few Soviet troops on the Chinese border to warrant concern over a two-front conflict, they believed that no international condemnation was likely to ensue, such a conflict would not interrupt military modernization processes, and the conflict could, in fact, serve as an impetus for further military modernization.

To demonstrate its support for Vietnam in a more conspicuous manner and to monitor Chinese border developments, the Soviets deployed a small fifteen-ship task force to the South China Sea on February 8, 1979. One part of this task force consisted of seven ships, most of which were intelligence gatherers located between Hainan Island and the North Vietnam coast. The rest of the task force was composed primarily of modern cruisers more widely dispersed throughout the South China Sea. Most analysts at the time agreed that the purpose of the task force was to gather intelligence and to "warn" the Chinese of Soviet support for Vietnam in the face of an impending attack.¹⁶

On February 17, 1979, some 85,000 Chinese soldiers penetrated Vietnam with tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs) along 26 border points, gradually narrowing to five main axes of attack. Their "human wave" tactics proved unsuitable for the many traps set by the tactically clever Vietnamese. Thousands of Chinese were lost to mines and booby traps. After a rapid reshuffling of commanders, Chinese armed forces captured four provincial capitals in Vietnam, destroyed a significant amount of military infrastructure, including C3 lines in the North, and inflicted 20,000 casualties.¹⁷

Soviet Behavior

The Soviet response to the Chinese invasion of Vietnam did not differ markedly from that of one month previous: Military hardware continued to be delivered to Vietnam, Tu-95 reconnaissance aircraft were dispatched to the area, and major airlifts of supplies were conducted.

The naval task force that assembled in the South China Sea gradually accumulated additional cruisers and frigates as the fighting proceeded. For example, the day after a TASS statement was issued to the effect that the Soviets would uphold their treaty obligations in the face of a Chinese invasion, a Petya-class frigate was sent to join the task

¹⁶R. Burt, "Soviet Positions Ships Off Vietnam's Shores, U.S. Officials Disclose," *The New York Times*, February 8, 1979.

¹⁷Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 356-360.

force.¹⁸ Some Western analysts determined that the Soviets, owing to their superior mobility along the Chinese frontier, had a variety of advance routes from which to choose; selecting an invasion route was but a matter of time.¹⁹ Moreover, there were reports that Moscow's Warsaw Pact allies were predicting that the Soviets would bomb Chinese ports in retaliation for the invasion.²⁰ But Moscow sat still and made public its intention not to intervene only on February 22. As long as the Chinese attack remained "limited"—that is, spared Hanoi—the Soviets vowed not to participate in the fighting.²¹ On March 2, Brezhnev warned the Chinese to refrain from "more crimes"—again, without committing the Soviets to any form of action. A few days later, the Chinese began to withdraw. Well after the withdrawal of Chinese troops, the Soviets conducted military maneuvers along their southern border with China, ostensibly to remind the Chinese of Soviet strength. On March 21, TASS reported on the willingness of Soviet citizens to assist the Vietnamese and take up arms against the Chinese. But few believed that the maneuvers would escalate to an invasion of China.²²

This late intervention threat of the Soviets is not unique to the Chinese invasion. It characterizes many Soviet responses in crisis situations.²³ By threatening to intervene well after the peak of the crisis, the Soviets avoided a head-on collision with the Chinese yet appeared to be looking after the Vietnamese. Moreover, the Soviets could not be chastised for failing to keep their end of the bargain because the treaty of friendship was worded quite vaguely regarding the form and content of Soviet military assistance to the Vietnamese. Hence, the failure of the Soviets to intervene militarily on behalf of the Vietnamese did not violate their pact with them.

The Soviets' mild-mannered approach in supporting the Vietnamese against the Chinese can perhaps best be explained in the broader political context of superpower and regional relations. First of all, the Soviets doubtless wanted to avoid direct confrontation

¹⁸D. Middleton, "Soviet Has Many Choices on China Border," *The New York Times*, February 20, 1979.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰D. Middleton, "Vietnam Drive: Big Clash Seen," *The New York Times*, February 22, 1979.

²¹"Soviet Said to Rule Out Intervention If War Is Limited," *The New York Times*, February 23, 1979.

²²R. Burt, "Soviet Manuevers Reported Near the China Border," *The New York Times*, March 17, 1979.

²³The many conflicts in which the Soviets have threatened to intervene well after the peak of the crisis are described in F. Fukuyama, "Nuclear Shadowboxing: Soviet Intervention Threats in the Middle East," *Orbis*, Fall 1981, pp. 579-605.

with the Chinese, although there may have been a remote possibility of U.S. intervention on behalf of the Chinese. But a more likely response would have been public outcry and condemnation of direct Soviet involvement in the crisis and an effort to raise the ante.

Although the Soviets were not pleased with the ongoing U.S.-Chinese normalization efforts, Brezhnev's public dismay was muted. In fact, in a foreign policy speech delivered at the time, Brezhnev made no reference to U.S. complicity in the Chinese invasion, apparently in light of the impending ratification of the SALT II agreement to which he accorded greater diplomatic significance.²⁴

The Vietnamese Appraisal of Soviet Military Assistance

There are few clues to the Vietnamese view of Soviet assistance during the invasion. It appears that Soviet aid was limited to generous amounts of arms shipments and logistic support. It could very well be that logistic and materiel support, reconnaissance aircraft, and naval presence were all that the Vietnamese permitted the Soviets to undertake, *or* all the options the Soviets saw for themselves. In fact, it appears that Soviet military advice, planning, and participation in the fighting against the Chinese were limited. At least publicly, the Vietnamese did not call for Soviet assistance until the day of the invasion.²⁵ Throughout the following week, the only sign of support beyond aid and airlift was the incremental deployment of Pacific fleet cruisers to the South China Sea.²⁶

The Vietnamese-Cambodian Conflict in the 1980s

If the Vietnamese had counted on a rapid removal of the Khmer Rouge from Cambodia in 1978, time has shown them to have miscalculated severely. In fact, the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia with Soviet backing has persisted longer than the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Only within the past two years has there been a movement toward a negotiated settlement.

In 1982, the ASEAN countries and the People's Republic of China persuaded the 35,000-strong Khmer Rouge to join two non-Communist factions to form a political coalition, the CGDK (Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea) against the

²⁴"Brezhnev Condemns Chinese, but Voices No Military Threat," *New York Times*, March 3, 1979.

²⁵F. Butterfield, *New York Times*, February 18, 1979.

²⁶D. Middleton, "Soviet Has Many Choices on China Border," *New York Times*, February 20, 1979; "Vietnam Drive: Big Clash Seen," *ibid.*, February 22, 1979, and "The Chinese Push: Waiting for the Climax," *ibid.*, February 27, 1979.

Vietnamese. Non-Communist resistance fighters who had opposed the Khmer Rouge since 1975 formed the KPNLF (Khmer Peoples' National Liberation Front) with a force of about 16,000 in 1979 led by Son Sann. The former leader of neutral Kampuchea, Prince Sihanouk, formed his own army of 7000 troops in 1981, the ANS (Armee Nationale Sihanoukiste). These two groups and the Khmer Rouge formed a tripartite coalition in 1982. Although the CGDK has suffered its share of infighting and disorganization,²⁷ the existence of non-Communist factions within the resistance has drawn money and support from ASEAN countries and the United States, who are unwilling to aid the Khmer Rouge for political reasons.

The military situation in Cambodia, until the 1984-1985 dry season offensive during which the Vietnamese eliminated a sizable number of resistance bases along the Thai border, was best described as a stalemate. Both the Vietnamese and the Cambodian resistance have respective combat strengths and weaknesses, which tend to balance out in the long run. For example, the dry season tends to favor PAVN, which launches successful armored offensives against the Khmer Rouge from December through April. On the flip side, the resistance is better adapted to fight during the rainy season. It usually gives the Vietnamese a run for their money during the months of May through November.

Reports from Cambodia about the combat situation there have been very difficult to verify, given the nature of the conflict. While PAVN claims to be training the PRKAF (Heng Samrin's army) to operate independently in Cambodia so that PAVN can withdraw, desertion is so high among both groups that it is impossible to evaluate the combat situation. Reports about the Vietnamese success in sealing off the Thai-Cambodian border by means of extensive road-clearing and mine-laying operations also appear to be somewhat inflated.²⁸ Nonetheless, most of the data indicate that the resistance, including the Khmer Rouge, has suffered not only combat defeats but also massive desertions to a greater degree than the Vietnamese, thus facilitating a gradual turnover of the fighting to the PRK army, provided that the Khmer Rouge can be contained.²⁹

²⁷See R. Tasker, "Factions within Factions," *Far East Economic Review (FEER)*, January 9, 1986, pp. 12-13, and J. McBeth, "Divided We Stand," *FEER*, March 6, 1986, pp. 28-31.

²⁸J. McBeth, "Back to the Future," *FEER*, January 2, 1986, and M. Heiburt, "The Shadow of War," *FEER*, May 7, 1987, p. 36.

²⁹Whether or not the Khmer Rouge can be contained is a hotly disputed issue. Many believe that the concept of power sharing is anathema to the Khmer Rouge and therefore they may reemerge, better organized and more powerful, in the future. See S. Erlanger, "The Endless War," *New York Times Magazine*, March 5, 1989, p. 24, and G. Porter, "Cambodia: Sihanouk's Initiative," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1988.

Patterns of Soviet Behavior

Having reviewed the Soviet role in supporting Vietnam during two conflicts in the past decade, it is possible to suggest patterns of Soviet behavior in this region.

Even during the height of Brezhnev's Third World interventionism in the late 1970s, the Soviets proved "risk averse" in this region. Although they provided materiel and logistic support, they did not intervene militarily on behalf of the Vietnamese. The Soviet response in 1978 and 1979 to the invasion of Cambodia and Vietnam was conditioned not only by the requirements of the Vietnamese but also by broader diplomatic considerations—such as the perceptions of China and the United States. During the Chinese invasion of Vietnam, Brezhnev supported the Vietnamese with sealift and airlift of materiel and deployed warships off the Vietnamese coast, thereby sending a strong signal of support to Vietnam without becoming involved outright in the fighting. Soviet offers of military intervention were expressed weeks after the danger that Soviet intervention may have wrought had subsided. It appears that the Soviets had no intention of intervening militarily because such an action might have resulted in a protracted and very dangerous war with the Chinese and might have upset other negotiations.

Militarily, the Soviets continue to derive benefits from their association with PAVN and from their access to Cam Ranh Bay, which contributes to their capacity to project power in Southeast Asia. Politically, however, the benefits to the Soviet Union of supporting the SRV are growing less compelling as the Soviet Union tries to convince the world of its peaceful intentions. Clearly, the continuing Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, which Soviet economic and military funds underwrite, does not foster a conciliatory image.

In light of Gorbachev's "new thinking" on foreign policy and international security, the Soviets are further deterred from intervention. With themes such as "peaceful coexistence," "interdependence" among all countries, and the downplaying of the role of the military, it seems unlikely that the Soviets would take advantage of an opportunity for military aggression at this time and risk international condemnation.³⁰

³⁰See, for example, E. M. Primakov, "Sovetskaia strategii mira," in P. N. Fedoseev, *Mir i razoruzhenie*, Nauka, Moscow, 1987.

III. SOVIET ECONOMIC AND MILITARY AID TO VIETNAM

ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

It is now necessary to explore the consistency and magnitude of Soviet economic and military aid to Vietnam. Why does the Soviet economic contribution to Vietnam appear to be increasing at a time when the Soviet Union is attempting to mend its domestic economy and when Vietnamese economists continue to mismanage the aid the Soviets provide them?

Since the mid-1960s, the Soviets have been the primary donors of economic aid to Vietnam. In fact, gross deliveries of economic aid have doubled from \$500 million to \$1 billion in the past decade. (See Figure.) Soviet Central Committee Secretary Medvedev, reporting from the Sixth CPV (Communist Party of Vietnam) Congress in December 1986, reported that the 1986-1990 five-year plan will witness a doubling in Soviet economic aid in comparison with the previous five-year period.¹

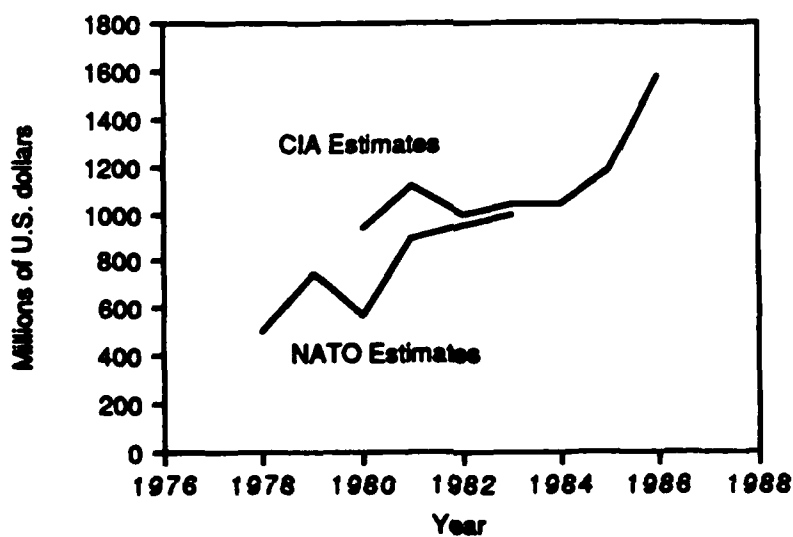
The increase in aid seems to contradict Gorbachev's well-publicized efforts to curb spending and cultivate ties with large, often capitalist-oriented countries, such as India, Mexico, and Brazil.² Nonetheless, Vietnam, Cuba, and Mongolia continue to receive the lion's share of Soviet economic aid; their shares average more than 90 percent of total Soviet economic aid to less developed countries.

Tensions Nonetheless

Despite the magnitude and general consistency of Soviet economic aid to the SRV, the past six years have been punctuated with periods of tension and disagreement over the "effective utilization" of Soviet aid. Although many of the monetary problems were aired at the Fifth CPV Congress in 1982, Soviet dissatisfaction with Vietnamese economic progress has been far more discernible in the Soviet and Vietnamese press since the Sixth CPV Congress in December 1986. The criticism voiced by both leaderships is undoubtedly a result of Gorbachev's emphasis on "self-criticism" and openness—efforts to expose weaknesses and uncover means of correcting them.

¹V. A. Medvedev, "Meetings on Vietnamese Soil," *Pravda*, December 18, 1986, p. 4.

²F. Fukuyama, S. Bruckner, and S. Stoecker, *Soviet Political Perspectives on Power Projection*, The RAND Corporation, N-2430-A, March 1987.



*Sources: *Handbook of Economic Statistics*, Directorate of Intelligence, CIA, CPAS 88-10001, September 1988, p. 181, and NATO estimates in L. Buszynski, *Soviet Foreign Policy and Southeast Asia*, Croom Helm, London, 1986, p. 183.

Fig.—Soviet economic aid to Vietnam

The following section examines the Fifth and Sixth Congresses for evidence of tensions between Moscow and Hanoi and attempts to identify reasons for the continued Soviet commitment.

The Fifth CPV Congress

Soviet chronologies and discussion of the Fifth CPV Congress are misleading; they state that the sessions were held in 1981, when in actuality they were held almost one year later.³ The reason for the delay in the commencement of the Congress that year was Soviet indecision over the size of its aid commitment to the SRV in the face of "mismanagement and ineffective use" of previously granted aid.⁴ An Asian source revealed that the Soviet commitment did indeed plummet to \$730 million in comparison with the aid commitments of previous five-year plans. However, Western analysts have disputed those figures, maintaining that Soviet aid held steady at about \$1 billion, even in 1982.⁵

In any event, it is clear that there was a debate within the Soviet elite as to the amount of aid to be given to a country that has been unable not only to solve its inflation and unemployment problems but also even to feed its population. It is also interesting to note that Gorbachev headed the Soviet delegation to the Fifth CPV Congress and may very well have been responsible for the delay because of his dismay over Vietnamese economic mismanagement.

At the close of the Fifth Congress, the Party issued a communique stating the economic goals for the next five years. They resolved to do the following: solve the food problem; hasten the development of agriculture, production, and the export of consumer goods; establish a basis for the development of heavy industry; complete "socialist transformations" in the South; and strengthen defense and political security.⁶

³M. Isaev and A. Chernyshev, *Istoriia Sovetsko-Vyetnamskikh otnoshenii, 1917-1985*, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, Moscow, 1986, p. 290.

⁴L. Buszynski, *Soviet Foreign Policy and Southeast Asia*, Croom Helm, London, 1986, p. 182.

⁵Testimony of John E. Monjo, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, *USIS file*, September 1983. See Buszynski, p. 183.

⁶A telling sign of the lack of progress made between the Fifth and Sixth Congresses was that the very same goals were iterated at the close of the Sixth Congress.

The Sixth CPV Congress

In contrast to the Fifth Congress, the Sixth was witness to much open criticism of Vietnam's poor economic performance. Vo Van Kiet, chairman of the Vietnamese State Planning Commission and key economic reformer, made clear that the economic goals of the Fifth Congress had not been met chiefly because too much money had been spent on large-scale industrial projects that were left uncompleted.⁷ Kiet also noted that China was making great strides in its economic recovery, having adopted some capitalist measures, and urged the Vietnamese to follow suit.⁸ The newly elected General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh said in an interview that "bold use must be made of the potential of all economic structures in the country, including private and individual structures. But this does not mean that elements of capitalist exploitation will be restored. The leading role will always belong to the socialist sector."⁹ Since the December 1986 Congress, several Soviet-Vietnamese exchanges have taken place at high levels. Reporting on meetings with Secretary Linh, Gorbachev stated:

Comrade Nguyen Van Linh and I have discussed in detail an entire complex of problems of Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation. This cooperation has taken on a multifaceted complexion and grand scale. The weak aspects of economic ties, however, have become apparent and are incompatible with the new situation. We agree that the economic mechanism and forms of cooperation must meet the demands of the day and increase substantially their effectiveness.¹⁰

Much of the blame for the poor state of the Vietnamese economy has been placed on 12 years of costly rice subsidies. According to the *Washington Post*:

Simply put, since agricultural reforms ended the system of farmers growing a quota of rice for the state, the government has been forced to buy rice from peasant farmers at near-market rates. The state then sells that rice in urban

⁷*FEER*, January 1, 1987, p. 11.

⁸See L. Simons, "With New Energy, Vietnam Gets Down to Business," *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 1987, p. 64.

⁹*Pravda*, April 17, 1987. Ligachev, the Soviet secretary and head of the Soviet delegation to the Sixth CPV Congress, was equally candid in his appraisal of the economic mismanagement. See also *Izvestiia*, December 19, 1986.

¹⁰See *Pravda*, May 20, 1987, p. 2.

areas at highly subsidized prices, creating huge budget deficits. According to Vietnamese foreign minister Thach, Vietnam lost "millions of rubles" in Soviet aid [as a result of] this.¹¹

The food situation in the SRV has reached crisis proportions. Emergency relief measures were enacted in early 1988 because of food shortages in five northern provinces. Poor crop yields, coupled with transportation and distribution bottlenecks, led to many instances of starvation.¹²

Even if Gorbachev is frustrated with the Vietnamese lack of reform and management, he should be pleased with the degree to which his influence has been felt in the realm of "glasnost" or "openness." General Secretary Linh, like Gorbachev, has set out on an openness campaign of his own, exposing the Vietnamese society to economic misconduct and mismanagement, and making public the arrests of corrupt officials. But the parameters of Vietnamese "perestroika" (in Vietnamese, "doi moi") are still much more confining than in the Soviet Union.¹³ It is still believed that the government must control the media, that contact with the West must be limited, and that Marxism-Leninism must not be attacked.¹⁴

Nonetheless, the exigencies of the economic situation have also made room for a limited amount of private enterprise and have fostered the emergence of a wealthy "business class." If such practices appear to be inconsistent with Marxist-Leninist theory, the Vietnamese economics editor of *Nhan Dan* sets the record straight:

We are using capitalists to improve our economy. Marxism is against exploitation—not against being rich. Sometimes we misunderstand Marxism...that there will be no rich people and everyone will be equal can only happen in the *advanced phase* of capitalism. In the meantime, we have to put up with people being rich because they are talented and have a good mind.¹⁵

¹¹K. Richburg, "In South Vietnam, It's Business as Usual," *Washington Post*, July 15, 1987, p. A18.

¹²F. Z. Brown, "The Next War in Vietnam," *International Economy*, November/December 1988, p. 47.

¹³See Richburg, *Washington Post*, July 14, 1987, p. 11.

¹⁴F. Z. Brown, "The Next War in Vietnam."

¹⁵K. Richburg, "In South Vietnam," *Washington Post*, July 15, 1987, p. A18.

MILITARY ASSISTANCE

As with economic aid to Vietnam, the Soviet contribution to Vietnamese defense needs and support for the Soviet's own military objectives in the region have been consistently high and show no signs of declining. The Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979 spurred massive increases in Soviet military aid to Vietnam. In fact, it was four times greater than that of the previous year.¹⁶ Since that time, military aid appears to have leveled off at about \$1 billion per year. Much of that money supports the war in Cambodia and improves defensive capabilities at Cam Ranh Bay.¹⁷ Some 2500 Soviet military advisers reside in Vietnam at the present time.

The Vietnamese fully appreciate the extent of their reliance on Soviet military aid:

Only with Soviet assistance can our armed forces have the means to conduct modern war, since our needs are beyond the capacity of our country's industrial sector and will continue to be so for several more decades. The cost of war material is so enormous that it will be a long time before our national economy can support these requirements.¹⁸

Soviet Activities at Cam Ranh Bay

The former American base at Cam Ranh Bay has enabled the Soviets to perform a number of military tasks. For example, they can more easily threaten China's southern flank and Western supply lines through the Straits of Malacca, defend against threats emanating from Clark and Subic U.S. bases in the Philippines and conduct reconnaissance on them, keep ships on station longer in the Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and Pacific Ocean by permitting refueling and repairs to be performed at Cam Ranh Bay, and "show the flag."

Since 1979, the Soviets have almost tripled the size of their arsenal at Cam Ranh Bay. One Western analyst points out that in September 1982, ten naval vessels (including one submarine) were deployed there. By April 1984, that figure had increased to 30 vessels, four of which were submarines and one a Kiev class carrier. There are currently more than 40 naval vessels, a squadron of MiG-23s, and Tu-95s. Soviet ships on patrol in the Indian ocean frequently refuel at Cam Ranh Bay.¹⁹

¹⁶*Tap Chi Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, November 1983, quoted by D. Papp in a paper presented at the Kennan Institute, "Power or Pawn? The Soviet Role in Vietnam," September 1986.

¹⁷D. Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1987, p. 197.

¹⁸*Tap Chi Quan Doi Nhan Dan*.

¹⁹Papp, "Power or Pawn?"

Two other signs of the increasing growth and importance of the Cam Ranh Bay facility include the recent completion of a seventh pier, which reportedly increases Soviet dock space by 20 percent, and the completion of the first combined anticarrier warfare exercise in the South China Sea.²⁰

The steady growth of Soviet capabilities at Cam Ranh Bay in the 1980s would seem to contradict Gorbachev's call for reduced tensions and defense expenditures, although much of the construction has been to complete projects undertaken at Brezhnev's behest.

Gorbachev attempted to score a major propaganda coup in a speech to Krasnoyarsk residents in 1988 when he announced Soviet preparedness to withdraw all naval support at Cam Ranh Bay in exchange for the "liquidation" of U.S. military bases in the Philippines.²¹ Although he must have realized that the United States would never seriously consider such a proposal, in presenting it he managed to create a rationale for the continued Soviet presence at Cam Ranh Bay—as a deterrent to the U.S. threat in the Philippines.

These trends suggest that in the near term, the Soviet financial commitment to the SRV is unlikely to decline, despite the mismanagement of Soviet funds by the Vietnamese. The next five-year plan (1991), however, may reveal a leveling off of Soviet assistance if, indeed, the expensive Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia comes to an end.

²⁰*Soviet Military Power*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987, p. 137.

²¹M. S. Gorbachev, "Vremia deistvii, vremia prakticheskoi raboty," *Pravda*, September 18, 1988, p. 2.

IV. THE ASIAN DIMENSION OF GORBACHEV'S "NEW THINKING"

In contrast to Brezhnev, whose foreign policy was conducted in a bipolar, East-West framework, Gorbachev is promoting improved relations with all countries, and especially Asia. He intends to improve the Soviets' overall relationship with China and ASEAN countries, and he has encouraged the Vietnamese to do the same. This Soviet attitude toward the East is a major part of Gorbachev's "new thinking" in foreign policy, which assumes "a qualitatively higher level of flexibility and readiness to reach sensible compromises with one's negotiating partners."¹

This section addresses Gorbachev's new directions in foreign policy and their implications for Soviet-Vietnamese relations and the prospects for a withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia by late 1989.²

GORBACHEV'S ASIAN OFFENSIVE

Gorbachev's newly touted "Asian offensive" has several historical antecedents. Cultivating ties with Asian countries has been a long-term goal of the Soviets, and scholars referred to Asian offensives in the mid-1960s and 1970s.³ What has differentiated this Asian offensive from the others has been its vigor and magnitude.

In Gorbachev's view, the aging Brezhnev leadership failed to foster relations in the East, having become preoccupied with the U.S.-Soviet relationship. As Gorbachev sees it, the greatest potential dynamism lies in the East, where "state to state interdependence" must be exploited.

¹A. F. Dobrynin, "Za mir bez iadernogo oruzhiia, navstrechu XXI veku," in Fedoseev, *Mir i razoruzhenie*, Nauka, Moscow, 1987.

²For a detailed examination of Gorbachev's "new thinking," see C. Glickham, "New Directions in Soviet Foreign Policy," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Supplement, September 6, 1986.

³For a thorough examination of such offensives, see R. Horn, "Soviet-Vietnamese Relations and the Future of Southeast Asia," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 4, Winter 1978-1979, p. 593, and "Moscow's Southeast Asian Offensive," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 4, March-April 1975.

The underpinnings of Gorbachev's "Asian offensive" were reflected in the materials of the 27th CPSU Congress held in March 1986, although much of the "new thinking" along these lines had taken place in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Concerned over the high expense and minimal return on "self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist states" in the Third World, Karen Brutents, deputy chief of the International Department of the Central Committee, among other academicians, was calling for a shift of focus away from small, expensive, and economically and politically unstable Third World states toward cultivating more economically stable and capitalistic countries.⁴ It should be noted that the "debate" over policy towards the Third World continued well after Gorbachev took power. A prominent Soviet academic, Georgy Mirskiy, supported countries on the noncapitalist path of development such as Angola and Mozambique, and he questioned the current fascination with capitalist-directed states exhibited by other scholars.⁵

A renewed Soviet interest in the Far East in general, and in the People's Republic of China in particular, was also foreshadowed by Soviet political observer Fedor Burlatskiy. Drawing parallels between the technical "stagnation" of the Maoist and Brezhnevite regimes, he criticized the "economic isolation" into which both sides had fallen and assessed the new PRC Chairman's initiatives to reform the economy favorably.⁶

The following section reviews some of the party documents that lay the foundation for Gorbachev's "new thinking" and examines his Vladivostok speech for its illumination of his objectives.

THE 27TH CPSU CONGRESS

At the 27th CPSU Congress, Secretary Gorbachev set the stage for his opening toward the East and to the world in general in several documents and speeches. Seeking to add legitimacy to his comments, Gorbachev discussed his new foreign policy approach in the context of the dialectic:

⁴F. Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*, The RAND Corporation, R-3337-USDP, February 1986; and *The Tenth Period of Soviet Third World Policy*, The RAND Corporation, P-7390, October 1987.

⁵See G. Mirskiy, "K voprosu o vybore puti i orientatsii razvivaiushchikhsia stran," *MEMO*, No. 5, 1987, pp. 75-79.

⁶F. Burlatskiy, "Mezhdutsarstviie, ili khronika vremeni Den Siaopina," *Noviy Mir*, No. 4, 1982.

The course of history and social progress demands now, all the more, constructive, creative interaction of states and peoples throughout the planet. In combination with competition and the historical rivalry of two systems is the growing tendency toward interdependence of states of the world community—this is the real dialectic of contemporary world development. From this struggle emerges a contradictory, but interdependent and integrated world.⁷

This theme is taken a step further when Gorbachev discusses “peaceful coexistence” among states of differing social systems in which cooperation can flourish and military arsenals can be diminished:

[The peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems] is not merely the absence of war. This is an *international order* in which neighborliness and cooperation, not military might rule, science and technical achievements are exchanged, and cultural goods are used by all peoples.⁸

Gorbachev also made it clear that a solid foundation for cooperation with capitalist countries was necessary and desirable when he stated, “The practice of the Soviet Union’s relations with liberated countries shows that a real foundation exists for cooperation with young states travelling along the *capitalist path*.”⁹

With regard to China, Gorbachev optimistically spoke of the overall improvement in relations, despite differing approaches to international problems, and pointed out that “enormous cooperative reserves” existed between the two countries, capable of answering the needs of both sides.¹⁰

GORBACHEV’S VLADIVOSTOK AND KRASNOYARSK SPEECHES

If the material from the 27th CPSU Congress laid the general groundwork for Gorbachev’s Asian initiatives, the speech he delivered when presenting the Order of Lenin to the port city of Vladivostok on July 28, 1986, certainly refined them. Besides listing the many countries with which to expand ties,¹¹ Gorbachev made rather controversial and

⁷“Resolution of the 27th CPSU Congress on Policy,” *Pravda*, March 6, 1986, p. 1.

⁸“CPSU Party Program,” *Pravda*, March 7, 1986, p. 4.

⁹See part III, CPSU Party Program, “Strengthening Relations with Liberated Countries,” *Pravda*, March 7, 1986.

¹⁰*Pravda*, February 26, 1986, p. 8.

¹¹Gorbachev plans to expand ties with the following countries: Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, Sri Lanka, India, Brunei, and the Maldives Republic. He plans to “maintain diplomatic relations” with the following countries: New Guinea, West Samoa, The Kingdom of Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati, The Republic of Nauru, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. See *Izvestiia*, July 29, 1986, p. 2.

conciliatory remarks regarding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Mongolia and Afghanistan and strong overtures to the People's Republic of China for improved Sino-Soviet relations. Perhaps most important in Gorbachev's remarks was his substantive offer to settle the Sino-Soviet Amur River border dispute on the basis of a midchannel agreement. This is a departure from the previous Soviet stance, in which the Soviets insisted on Soviet claims to the entire river.

Among Gorbachev's remarks were the following:

Relations [with China] are vitally important for a number of reasons, proceeding from the fact that we are neighbors; that we share the longest land border in the world....In recent years there has been a noticeable improvement in relations. I want to repeat that the Soviet Union is ready at any time and at any level to seriously discuss with the Chinese the questions of additional measures for creating good neighborliness....Both China and the Soviet Union have similar priorities, such as the hastening of socioeconomic development. So why not support one another in realizing these plans when they benefit both sides?¹²

In a more recent speech in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, Gorbachev's overtures to China were stronger than those made in Vladivostok. After citing the progress made during the Soviet visit in Beijing to resolve the stalemate in Cambodia, Gorbachev called for full normalization of relations:

We are in favor of a full normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China and the development [of relations] commensurate with our mutual responsibility for a peaceful policy. We are ready to begin preparations immediately for a Soviet-Chinese summit meeting.¹³

While the speech consisted of abundant praise and appeals for cooperation with many regions of the world, including Japan, it is clear that since the Vladivostok speech Gorbachev has indeed pursued policies of "good neighborliness" with an eye to meeting China's requests. The withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, a reduction of troop strength in Mongolia, and the current retreat of Vietnamese soldiers from Cambodia all testify to Gorbachev's sincere desire to improve relations with China.

¹²Ibid.

¹³M. S. Gorbachev, "Vremia deistvii, vremia prakticheskoi raboty," *Pravda*, September 18, 1988, p. 2.

WHY ASIA?

Why has Gorbachev embarked on a mission to cultivate relations with Asian countries—at the expense, perhaps, of more doctrinaire client states? Presumably, there were a number of factors at play in Gorbachev's decision to promote the reduction of international tensions and to seek cooperation and "interdependence" with progressive Asian states.

First, and perhaps most compelling, are the economic imperatives at home. A prerequisite for attending to domestic ills is a reduction of international tensions through arms control and trade agreements. Thus, if the Vietnamese continue to withdraw troops from Cambodia, Gorbachev could conceivably reduce the amount of military aid channeled to Vietnam and score points with countries such as China and the ASEAN countries, who have adamantly opposed the occupation up to this point. Commercial opportunities would also unfold.

Second, if Gorbachev can improve relations with China, this in turn may lead to a diminution of the troop presence in the Far East for both China and the Soviet Union—yet another source of savings. Third, against the backdrop of the Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, which has received a very favorable reception, the removal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia would also demonstrate to the West that the Soviets are sincere about reducing tensions and thereby improve East-West relations as well.

OBSTACLES TO IMPROVED SOVIET-ASEAN/PRC RELATIONS

The long-standing obstacles among the Soviets, Chinese, and ASEAN countries that have traditionally impeded progress toward a settlement now appear to be slowly disappearing. Gorbachev has come a long way toward meeting the three Chinese conditions for Sino-Soviet normalization: (1) many Soviet troops have been pulled out of Afghanistan, (2) one division has withdrawn from the Mongolian border, and (3) Soviet-backed Vietnamese troops are withdrawing from Cambodia.¹⁴

In August 1985, the first communique was issued by the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' conference announcing the Hanoi-Phnom Penh agreement to withdraw Vietnamese troops by 1990.¹⁵ This positive gesture apparently resulted from the 1984-1985

¹⁴R. Delfs, "Soviets Bearing Gifts," *FEER*, November 13, 1986, pp. 32-35. The Chinese also offered major economic aid to Vietnam in exchange for a withdrawal of troops from Cambodia, soon after the Vladivostok speech. See B. Nahaylo, Radio Liberty Report 306/86, August 11, 1986.

¹⁵C. McGregor, *The Sino-Vietnamese Relationship and the Soviet Union*, Adelphi Paper No. 232, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, Autumn 1988, p. 45.

Vietnamese dry season offensive, during which many of the resistance bases were destroyed and virtually all of the borders were closed between Cambodia and Thailand. Because the Khmer Rouge were especially hard hit, many believed that this would enable the Cambodian army to take over the fighting while the Vietnamese withdrew.

Despite some delays, a net withdrawal of 10,000 to 12,000 Vietnamese troops did occur following the 1987-1988 dry season offensive. In June 1988, Hanoi also removed its military high command from Cambodia.¹⁶

ASEAN countries, needless to say, are anxious to see Vietnamese troops withdrawn from Cambodia and have been led to believe that this is a near-term possibility. During Shevardnadze's visit to Indonesia and Thailand in 1987 (the first Soviet visit to these countries in 20 years), both the Thais and the Indonesians pressed the foreign minister on the issue of a Cambodian settlement. Shevardnadze led some Thais to believe that he was very interested in a settlement, stating that Afghanistan could serve as a model for a Cambodian solution.¹⁷

In the summer of 1988, the Soviets made the unprecedented move of sending Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev to Beijing to discuss the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, thereby symbolizing the importance attached to this issue and the "active role" the Soviets would play in seeing the occupation discontinued.¹⁸

The Soviets (perhaps the most enthusiastic supporters of all) appear to have come to the conclusion that, given the dire circumstances of the Vietnamese economy, their leverage in the form of economic and military aid can now be used to persuade the Vietnamese that it is time for withdrawal. There are even reports that they have openly declared that they can no longer "foot the bill"—much of which goes to finance the war in Cambodia.¹⁹ Eastern bloc sources apparently view Heng Samrin's failure to thank Moscow for its economic and military assistance in a recent Party speech as evidence of a disagreement between Heng Samrin and Gorbachev over the timing of the troop withdrawal.²⁰

¹⁶At the present time, approximately 60,000 troops have been withdrawn; the Vietnamese have pledged to withdraw the remaining troops by September 1989.

¹⁷Foreign Broadcast Information Service, USSR, International Affairs, Hong Kong in English, March 7, 1987, p. E-4.

¹⁸J. Pollack, "Moscow Takes a Hard Look at Vietnam," *FEER*, September 22, 1988. On the recent improvements in Sino-Soviet relations, see J. Pollack, "China's Changing Perceptions of East Asian Security and Development," *Orbis*, Winter 1986.

¹⁹"Talk and More Talk," *FEER*, September 15, 1988.

²⁰M. Heiburt, "Withdrawal Symptoms," *FEER*, July 14, 1988, and J. Pollack, "Moscow Takes a Hard Look at Vietnam," *FEER*, September 22, 1988.

It is not only the Soviets who have a stake in seeing the September 1989 withdrawal become a reality. The Vietnamese also have compelling economic reasons to do so. Runaway inflation and food shortages plague the country. Nonsocialist foreign investors endowed with much-needed capital and technology are waiting for the troops to leave in order to enter Vietnam.²¹

In an interview, Nguyen Xuan Oanh, the "priest" of free market economics in Vietnam, plainly admitted that a prerequisite for most foreign investment in the country would be the troop withdrawal from Cambodia. He also drew attention to the U.S. trade embargo, which Japan is also following, noting that before big banks come to Vietnam, more groundwork must be done. Cadres need to be trained in market economies and managers trained in the West. But the bottom line is this: No one will come until Cambodia is rid of Vietnamese troops.²²

²¹F. Brown, "The Next War in Vietnam," *International Economy*, November/December 1988, p. 50.

²²Ibid.

V. CONCLUSIONS

For Soviet involvement in Vietnam, the 1970s and 1980s have been very different decades. The 1970s, under the leadership of Brezhnev, were characterized by participation, albeit indirect, in three major Southeast Asian conflicts: the war in Vietnam, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. Since 1979, the Soviets have exhibited restraint in Southeast Asia. Especially since the advent of the vigorous new leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev commencing in 1985, the Soviets have been forced to deal with severe economic problems at home and, in so doing, redirect their attention from interventionism in foreign conflicts to domestic problems.

The historical record shows a Soviet disinclination to intervene directly in many conflicts, including those in Southeast Asia. While the Soviets have provided large amounts of economic and military aid to Vietnam, they have stopped short of sending in Soviet combat troops to assist their clients, in large part because of fear of provoking the Chinese. Cleverly worded agreements such as the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1978 did not commit the Soviets to intervention on behalf of the Vietnamese, but simply to consult one another about the "appropriate measures" to be taken.

Today, the prospects for Soviet adventurism in Southeast Asia appear increasingly remote as Gorbachev continues to implement his "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy by reducing the Soviet troop presence in many parts of the globe. About 10,000 Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia during the 1987-1988 dry season offensive, with even more substantial withdrawals in 1989 reaching a reduction of 60,000 troops. The Vietnamese, with the support of Cambodia and Laos, have pledged to eliminate completely the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia by September 1989.

The Soviet-Vietnamese relationship does not appear to be deteriorating substantially. Soviet aid has remained steady, but economic assistance also increased during this five-year plan. Meanwhile, the Soviets continue to derive significant political and military benefits from their access to the base at Cam Ranh Bay.

What seems to be different, with regard to the relationship under Gorbachev, is a greater willingness on the Soviets' part to use the economic and military aid "carrot" to move the Vietnamese toward a settlement of the situation. It is difficult to judge, however, whether the troop withdrawals in 1988 were a result of Soviet pressure or a realization on the part of the Vietnamese that the opportunity costs of the occupation of Cambodia could no longer be justified in the wake of deteriorating economic conditions throughout the country.