

Doan Van Toai and David Chanoff

CHINA, THE U.S., AND VIETNAM: APPROACHES TO A SOVIET COLONY

USSR out of Vietnam.

Soviet Strategy in Southeast Asia

Last October the United Nations General Assembly again asked Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia. Again the request was supported by an overwhelming number of nations (105 to 23), fourteen more than in 1981. Again the request has not affected Vietnam's imperturbability. Despite UN criticism and the far more important facts of severe domestic food shortages and dangerously poor economic performance generally, Vietnamese leaders have no intention of withdrawing either from Cambodia or Laos. Nor have Western economic and diplomatic sanctions, in place many years now, had the slightest success in ameliorating either Vietnam's determined aggression against its neighbors or its systematic internal suppression of human rights. On the contrary, domestic police-measures have become increasingly harsh since the shortlived euphoria of victory in 1975, and the Vietnamese have clearly established themselves for the long run in Cambodia and Laos. Vietnam's leadership feels that time is on its side, that eventually the world will accept Vietnamese hegemony in the region as a fait accompli. As foreign minister Nguyen Co Thach has commented, "If the U.S. does not normalize relations with Vietnam this year and if the UN does not unseat Pol Pot this year, then they certainly will over the next several years, or the next ten years. We have the patience to wait."

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The fact is that the stakes in Cambodia and Laos are simply too high for Vietnam to be induced to leave, unless the Soviets reduce their objectives in Southeast Asia. And current Soviet strategy in the region calls for a consolidated Indochina under Vietnamese leadership.

One objective of this strategy is to establish a militant and aggressive second front in the Soviet Union's ongoing conflict with China. An overly hostile Indochina under Hanoi's leadership achieves that goal and constitutes an important additional link in the iron necklace of clients and allies that Russia has forged around its Asian neighbor and antagonist, including North Korea, Mongolia, the USSR itself, India, and now Afghanistan. It is for this reason that Cambodia and Laos will continue to be held under strict occupation by Vietnam, as will Afghanistan by the Soviets. Eventually, the two formerly independent Southeast Asian countries are slated for absorption in a Socialist Union of Southeast Asia which planners at Vietnam's Nguyen Ai Quoc

Institute are projecting for the 1990s. The recent softening of Chinese public attitudes toward the Soviets is one consequence of China's realization that her strategic position has been severely compromised.

The second Soviet objective is the establishment of a major naval presence in East Asian waters. This has already been largely accomplished through implementation of the secret military articles of the 1979 Friendship Treaty, which gives the Soviet navy and air force access to Vietnam's coastal and river systems. Freedom of operation for these forces has now been further expanded with the formal resolution in Vietnam's favor of a long-standing dispute between Cambodia and Vietnam concerning control of waters off the southern tip of the Indochinese peninsula. It is an interesting side note to history that the military provisions of the Friendship Treaty closely parallel Vietnamese concessions to the French in 1884 which were instrumental in France's consolidation of her Indochinese colonial empire.

The Chinese Response

China is most directly threatened by the Soviet thrust into Southeast Asia, and consequently is most serious about stopping the Russian/Vietnamese consortium. She does not, however, have the muscle for a direct confrontation, a point made vividly clear during her abortive 1979 "lesson." Accordingly, Chinese strategy has focused on denying Vietnam stable control of Indochina. In pursuing this policy, China can be counted on to intensify her diplomatic campaign to prevent legitimation of the Vietnamese puppet government in Cambodia. At the same time, the People's Republic hopes to create for Vietnam an endless guerrilla war both in the jungles of Cambodia and within Vietnam itself.

Due in large measure to Chinese efforts, the Cambodian Coalition Government (an improbable alliance between the Khmer Rouge, Prince Sihanouk, and nationalist leader Son San) was formally established in Singapore on June 22 of last year. Until now, only China and Singapore have given public support to the coalition while others, including the U.S., have been content to provide moral encouragement. Recently Son San lamented that his forces have received from China only enough material to equip about one thousand soldiers, from Singapore only enough for three thousand, and from the United States nothing.

At this level of support, the coalition government does not pose a serious military threat to Hanoi. By itself it creates only a nuisance in the field and some relatively innocuous diplomatic difficulties, neither of which has yet to impress the Vietnamese invaders.

China, however, is also aiding indigenous military opposition within Vietnam's own borders. The most important native recipient of Chinese largess has been FULRO (Front Uni pour la Lutte des Races Opprimées), the persistent Montagnard insur-



gency that has given the Vietnamese regime fits for years. A BBC documentary last fall reported that FULRO maintains active guerrilla operations in seven cities and provinces in the center of Vietnam. In October the Party *Daily News* (*Nhan Dan*) reported extensively on battles between government troops and FULRO guerrillas. At the same time

country's two-thousand-year history addresses that point most eloquently.

But even so, China's strategy in this area seems marked by desperation. Success in creating an Indochinese sinkhole for Vietnamese energies and Soviet aid would allow the People's Republic continued freedom to seek forms of strategic understanding with the United States. Failure

The coming of Soviet carriers and subs to Cam Ranh Bay gives the U.S. Pacific Fleet food for thought of the sort it hasn't had to chew on for almost forty years.

Nhan Dan noted the operations of what it called "reactionary forces" in the Delta, without however identifying these forces.

It is clear that inside Vietnam today there is significant government concern about the increasingly active opposition. At the end of last September, Pham Hung, minister of interior, convened an extraordinary general meeting of police and security forces in order to promulgate new procedures for "punishing and suppressing reactionary forces." Another remarkable incident took place in Saigon last May 19 when the official Buddhist spokesman, Venerable Thich Don Hau, publicly opposed the government policy of seizing Church property. The Unified Buddhist Churches, which Hau represents, was one of the key organizations opposing the Thieu regime and American "intervention" in the sixties and early seventies. Two other important religious groups, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hoa, are reported to be conducting armed resistance activities in the Delta. These sects made up large contingents within the early Vietcong movement, but since unification they have been suppressed ruthlessly. Deserters from the Vietnamese occupation army in Cambodia have also claimed that dissident groups of soldiers have organized antigovernment guerrilla activities along the Vietnam-Cambodia border. It has to be kept in mind that refugee information is often exaggerated and must be treated carefully. But what does appear from a variety of sources is that a pattern of active resistance, armed and otherwise, is revealing itself in Vietnam today.

In this context Chinese efforts to tie Vietnamese manpower and resources down in the Indochinese jungles appear somewhat more realistic. Nobody has to be convinced about the viability of protracted guerrilla warfare inside Vietnam. The

would mean being forced to come to terms with a foreign-affairs picture altered in favor of deference to the Soviet Union. Chinese agitation over the issue speaks clearly through the ambivalence and temporization of her interactions with the Soviets over the past several months. One senses here a crux in Chinese foreign policy with profound ramifications for the West.

American Goals and Policy

Solidified Soviet influence in Indochina poses an immediate menace to China, and consequently to the direction her foreign policy has taken over the past decade. But China is not the only one feeling threatened. Japan, historically sensitive about the area, is unhappy with the unfolding Soviet strategy. And for the United States, the implications of Soviet maneuvering go beyond even its potential to affect the Sino-Soviet-American equation. The long, harbor-rich coast of what used to be South Vietnam is the key to the projection of naval strength into the South Pacific as well as the South China Sea, a fact not lost on Japanese planners prior to World War II and not forgotten by American naval strategists today. The coming of Soviet carriers and subs to Cam Ranh Bay gives the U.S. Pacific Fleet food for thought of the sort it hasn't had to chew on for almost forty years.

In view of the still unresolved national trauma over Vietnam, the U.S. has now got to make some hard decisions. About what our goals are in Indochina there is little disagreement. Former national security adviser Richard Allen spelled them out as clearly as anyone in a letter to one of the authors of this article (DVT): (1) the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and Laos; (2) genuine independence for Cambodia and Laos; (3) reduction of Soviet influence in the region; and (4) the strengthening of ASEAN and the preservation of Thai security. The

United States and its allies would like to see Vietnam running an independent course vis-à-vis China and the USSR, respecting the territorial integrity of its neighbors and open to relations with the West—a course similar to that of Yugoslavia. It should be added that in light of the new potential for a Sino-Soviet rapprochement these objectives have to be regarded with increased urgency.

The question is, how to move Vietnam in the desired direction. Present American policies, like UN resolutions, have proved useless. The stick of diplomatic sanctions is not big enough. Nor, considering massive Soviet economic support, is the carrot of recognition sufficiently attractive. And there simply doesn't seem to be a wide spectrum of alternatives. Two other courses, however, are worth considering.

One was suggested by Truong Nhu Tang, a founder of the NLF, minister of justice in the South Vietnamese Provisional Revolutionary Government (Vietcong), and currently a political refugee living in France. Testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1981, Tang argued that the United States should support independent opposition movements in Afghanistan and Indochina whose aims are in accord with American policies. The former minister emphasized that such aid should be undertaken in concert with regional allies. He also pointed to the paramount importance of Indochina as a field for American-Chinese

cooperation and he described the serious extension of resources this policy would entail for the Soviet Union. As a means of encouraging the Vietnamese to rethink their foreign posture, Tang's proposal stands in direct opposition to the increasingly popular notion of an early normalization of Vietnamese-American relations.

In the past, many American scholars and diplomats viewed Ho Chi Minh as above all a great nationalist, a kind of Asian Tito who was fighting less for an ideology than against foreign domination. With proper inducements, the argument ran, there would be no essential barriers to post-war cooperation between Ho's heirs and the United States. By 1978, this prognosis had very nearly become reality. Agreement between Carter's State Department and Hanoi on a wide range of issues foundered only on Vietnam's persistent demands for war reparations. Proposals advocating the normalization of relations between Hanoi and Washington prior to any Vietnamese movement away from her Indochinese conquests or from her Soviet patron are based on the carryover vision of Vietnam's leadership as maintaining Ho Chi Minh's apparent emphasis on independence.

The corollary to this argument is that the more pressure the United States applies, the deeper we will drive Vietnam into the Russian embrace. In 1981 hundreds of American intellectuals signed an appeal to President Reagan calling for normalization as a step toward separating Vietnam from the Soviet orbit. Exactly this policy has already been followed by a number of Western nations, notably France, Sweden, and Holland.

Unfortunately, advocates of normalization neglect to take into account two fundamental factors, one psychological and one political. We all recall that during the war many Americans argued that United States presence was the primary obstacle to Vietnamese peace and prosperity. In the end, American withdrawal resulted not in peace but in a much expanded war and unprecedented internal social and economic dislocation. Ex-minister Tang has recently pointed out that it was precisely America's sudden departure from responsibility that unleashed the most radical Northern plans for the South and crippled the more moderate revolutionary factions (*New York Review of Books*, October 21, 1982). Henry



Kissinger has described in crystalline detail Vietnamese intransigence in the face of every pressure except the determined willingness to use power. We know that once the Paris agreements were signed, Northern leaders waited only until the American will to enforce the accords was shattered by Watergate before violating them in the most cynical fashion.

If one thing should be clear to the U.S. State Department in the light of all our contact with the Vietnamese Communists, through years of war and years of negotiation, it is that they do not respond well to gestures of good will. On the contrary, experience indicates that they make concessions only when faced with strength. Perhaps in this predisposition they do not differ from most men and governments. In any case, it must be taken into account when we consider the advisability of normalizing relations in order to move the Vietnamese in the direction we would like them to go.

On the political front, immediate normalization assumes that Communist Vietnam still has the necessary executive will and economic autonomy to separate from the Soviets if not under duress, an assumption that blissfully ignores developments over the last four years. Hoang Van Hoang, former Politburo member and one of Ho Chi Minh's closest associates, writes from his exile in China about "the presence of Russian advisors on every level of the government, military and mass organizations, sealing Vietnam's dependence on the Soviet Union." Hoang's accusation was given added dimension by the Vietnamese minister of labor, Dao Thien Thi, who commented in the *Party Daily News* of last April 24 that "many tens of thousands of Soviet advisors have been coming to Vietnam to train Vietnamese workers." Le Duan, Party general secretary, stated unequivocally to the Fifth Party Congress last March that "firm and solid cooperation with the Soviet Union is the unbreakable cornerstone of Vietnamese policy. We must teach this just cause and principle to all Party members and to all the people, not only in this generation but in those that follow . . ." And last October 4, on a state visit to the Soviet Union, Vietnamese president Truong Chinh declared in his official address before Secretary Brezhnev that "we, the Vietnamese people, will guard Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation as we would guard the irises of our eyes."

Chinh's statements and Le Duan's are simply verbal reflections of Vietnam's grim economic realities.

Vietnam receives aid from the Soviet Union at the rate of four- to six-million dollars a day and in return is locked into economic agreements that require delivery of Vietnamese industrial production to the USSR. Its total debt to the Soviets from the war years on is not known with any precision, but is thought to be in the neighborhood of five billion dollars. What is known is that

Vietnam has resorted to the most bizarre financial stratagems to raise currency, from expulsion of the ethnic Chinese at a flat rate of four ounces of gold per head plus confiscation of property, to the sale of export labor to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

All of this comes on top of the 1980 World Bank report that placed the standard of living in Vietnam (with a

per capita income of \$160/year) between that of India and Bangladesh. The economic facts suggest strongly, then, that Vietnam is now more beholden to the Soviet Union than any of the Warsaw Pact countries have been since the 1950s. Under these circumstances, U.S. recognition would not appear to be an especially powerful inducement to the Vietnamese to shift the di-

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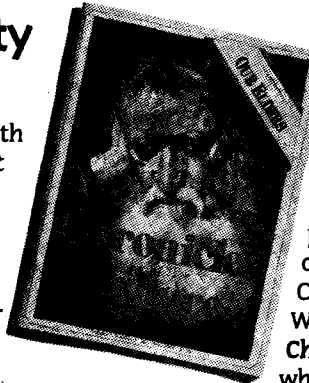
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NON-LIBERAL CRITICISM AT ITS BEST.

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rection of their foreign policy.

This leaves Tang's proposal, or some variant of it, as the only other option. The question is whether it is meaningful. To answer this, one first has to recognize that opposition movements are not merely military operations, perhaps not even primarily military operations. Their basic function is psychological—to weaken the hold a regime has on its people and to exacerbate internal differences. These are precisely the tactics used by the Vietnamese Communists so successfully against the United States during the war, as we remember all too painfully.

But Vietnam in its turn has now become prey to internal dissension. Vietnam today is replete with intra-Party discord and distrust. After the

Fourth Congress in 1976, nearly one-quarter-million Party members were deprived of their affiliation (and all the privileges that go with it). During the Fifth Party Congress last year, another 300,000 were purged. Many cadres serving with the army have deserted to Thailand and others live in continual fear of changes in Party policies. The prevailing atmosphere is of passivity, disloyalty, and vindictiveness.

Experts themselves in psychological warfare, the Vietnamese can be expected to manifest a high level of sensitivity toward their own vulnerability to domestic opposition. For this reason, aid to indigenous resistance movements carried out purposefully with Vietnam's neighbors does have a chance of turning Vietnamese thoughts to the benefits of American and Chinese neutrality,

if not friendship. Not insignificantly, enhancing the viability of popular opposition will also provide additional incentives for Russian disengagement in such places as Afghanistan and Indochina.

Whatever decisions we make about Indochina, we now have to make them both quickly and with adequate consideration of our long-term strategic goals. Nguyen Co Thach, Vietnam's foreign minister, recently told the *Far Eastern Economic Review* that Americans think in terms of two years, French in terms of four, and the Vietnamese in terms of ten. Thach was calibrating his remarks for Western ears. He represents a party that waited not ten but thirty-five years for its triumph and would have been willing to wait as many more. This, if anything, was the lesson of the Vietnam war. We were fighting

an enemy as patient as he was implacable.

Defending our long-term interests requires the same order of perseverance, and there is no mistaking our interest in Southeast Asia. The region interlocks the South Pacific and encompasses many of our traditional allies. From a geopolitical standpoint it is vital to us, and our heritage of commitment to the area is second only to our commitment to Europe. Consequently, the resources we put into that region's defense have to be judged in terms of our ability to stay the course. There is no assurance that committing aid to the domestic opponents of Soviet-supported Vietnam will provide the leverage necessary to affect Hanoi's intransigence. But given the alternatives, it is an option that deserves serious consideration. □

Benjamin Zycher

SO YOU WANT TO DRILL FOR OIL: AN EARTHLY COMEDY

The oil development game.

Are you, dear Reader, a wild horse or burro? Unless affirmative action has degenerated more than we realize, one would suspect not; and, if not, the Wild Horses and Burros Act of 1971 is seemingly of little concern. Alas, if you believe yourself safe from such laws, then you do not understand the legislative production of modern American government, a fairly well-protected monopoly. Regardless of whether you stand on two legs or four, you and your family and your neighbors and their families are affected in important ways by the law cited above and by a host of others affecting the availability and use of onshore and offshore territory for development and production of energy resources.* A simple reading of this list of laws—let alone a journey through the permit morass dictated by them—makes for a tedious undertaking. How tedious is it? Read on.

My goal here is to convey a sense

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of the complexity, the inconsistency—in a word, the absurdity—of the actual process of obtaining permission for energy resource development for federal onshore sites. And so we form the People's Community Oil Company (PCOC), the avowed

purpose of which is to discover and produce new sources of domestic crude oil. As luck would have it, we happen to know of a sizable piece of government property currently producing little more than weeds and mosquitoes. PCOC's in-house geolo-

gist notes excitedly that the land is a promising prospect for large oil and gas deposits. We thus decide to seek a lease for exploratory drilling: this is how it is done.

We first must file with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) a topographic map showing the location and general physical features of the area. BLM consults with a Geological Survey (GS) District Engineer (DE) to see if our plans endanger other important resource values. Unfortunately, at least two are mentioned. First, there are reports that the area is a prime breeding-ground for a particular kind of locoweed listed on the endangered-species list. That this weed kills cattle is of no particular concern, since cattle are not an endangered species, or at least have not been since price controls on meat were removed. In response, we hire a botanist who surveys the region and reports that the weed in question is a common one that would thrive were we to disturb the land. BLM accepts this, but points out, second, that exploration and drilling activity would

