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## SOVIET POLICY IN VIETNAM: SMALL RISKS, BIG GAINS

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Since the end of the Vietnam war, the Soviet Union has steadily expanded its military and political presence in Southeast Asia and become a major factor in the balance of power of this region. It has established a solid foothold in Vietnam and replaced France and the United States as the dominant power in Indochina, intruding thereby into "the historical backyard" of China<sup>1</sup> and posing a threat to the latter's security. It has given support to communist Vietnam's invasion and domination of its Indochinese neighbours by force, thereby abetting "social imperialism". It has firmly backed Vietnam in its confrontation with ASEAN and China, thereby heightening tension and prolonging conflict in Asia. It has thus come to represent a serious problem for all the nations having interests in the Southwest Pacific.

The establishment of a strong, visible, expanding, and worrisome presence by the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia after 1975 was no doubt a remarkable, <sup>a new</sup> but unexpected, development, as historically this area had never been considered a vital one by the rulers of Russia, Czarist or Communist,

The Czars did not rule long enough and did not have the power to eliminate the Japanese obstacle and look so far south; their Asian dreams were shattered in Russia's war with Japan in 1905 when the Japanese destroyed the Russian Far Eastern Fleet at

at Port Arthur in the first days of the war, and the Russian Baltic Fleet in the Tsushima Straits a few months later.

In the first few years after the October Revolution, Lenin was too busy with Germany and Eastern Europe to have time for Asia, much less for Southeast Asia. Stalin, too, was preoccupied with Europe and still more so. To Stalin's successors, until 1975, Indochina was not a major concern either. It was "expendable"<sup>2</sup>, or essentially "a stick to beat the Chinese"<sup>2</sup>. OK

By 1986, however, the Soviet Union had established in Vietnam "a full-fledged air and naval base which can support a prolonged, if not permanent military presence" in Southeast Asia<sup>4</sup>, and was proceeding apace with a military, political, economic and cultural integration of Vietnam which looked very much like an annexation. ~~In fact, it exercised over Vietnam a protectorate which was no less real than that exercised by France on that country before 1954. And it had made these big gains at small risks to itself. It is therefore interesting to look at the path by which the Soviet Union has travelled to get to such a remarkable position, and to assess its implications for Southeast Asia, and for the Asia-Pacific region.~~ X OK

The history of the Soviet Union's penetration of Vietnam can be divided into four major periods: 1) the Lenin period, from 1917 to 1924; 2) the Stalin period, from 1924 to 1953, with two sub-periods: 1924-1947 and 1947-1953; 3) the Khrushchev period, from 1954 to 1964; and 4) the post-Khrushchev period, from 1964 to the present day, with two sub-periods: 1964 to 1985 under

Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, and from 1985 onward, under Gorbachev.

From the foundation of the USSR in 1917 to the death of Lenin in 1924, for the Soviet leadership Vietnam hardly existed. Lenin's major concern in 1917 and in the next three years was the USSR's survival, and in his eyes, this depended essentially on the success of the revolution in Germany. But more than any other leader of the international communist movement of the time, Lenin saw the great potential of the East and the colonies for the world revolution. This realisation found expression in his Theses on the National and Colonial Questions which were presented to the Second Congress of the International in 1920. *Lenin* *02*

~~In the preparation of his theses, Lenin became acquainted with the Asian view, which was defended vigourously by M.N.Roy. But Roy was an Indian. There was no Vietnamese communist in Lenin's sight yet. The first one did not arrive in Moscow until the second half of 1923, but by then Lenin was already away from Moscow due to illness. And so, Lenin died without meeting any Vietnamese communist, and without having anything to do with Vietnam, or to say about Vietnam, directly.~~ *02*

The Soviet leader who first mentioned Vietnam was Trotsky.

<sup>in</sup> In a speech at the Founding Congress of the Third International in March 1919, <sup>part!</sup> He made a reference to <sup>known then</sup> (Vietnam) but only a passing one, saying that the workers and peasants of "Annam" (as Vietnam was known then) Algeria, Bengal, Persia and Armenia, "will obtain the possibility of independent existence only on the *02*

day when the workers of England and France will have overthrown Lloyd George and Clemenceau and taken state power into their hands"<sup>5</sup>. Trotsky's speech reflected the focus on Europe among the top Soviet leadership at the time. Another reference to Vietnam, again a passing one, could be found in the Manifesto of the First Congress of the Toilers of The East in 1921, in which Indochina was mentioned together with China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Pacific Isles, and the Dutch East Indies.<sup>6</sup> 1/02

However, there could be no real movement toward the advancement of the interests of the Soviet Union in Vietnam until the appropriate instrument for it had been created. That instrument -- the lever, in Lenin's theory -- was naturally a local communist party. Exploratory work was undertaken in 1920 in Indochina itself. In April that year, the French Ministry of Colonies received reports from the French consul in Vladivostok that an organisation had been set up in that city with the purpose of setting up propaganda centers in a number of Asian cities, among which Saigon. In September of the same year, the Security Service of Indochina reported to the Governor General that Russians had landed in Saigon, one of whom was Antonikovski, and that in November, two Russians were expelled from the colony. These Russians, said Le Courrier du Vietnam, which told the story, had come to Saigon "to bring marxism-leninism to our people through the French revolutionaries".<sup>7</sup> on

Russians trying to set up a Vietnamese anti-French communist revolutionary movement in a country teeming with overt and covert

French agents is obviously an oddity. In Vietnam, an effective lever against French rule could be only Vietnamese. Thus, a Vietnamese had to be found that would be capable of setting up and leading a communist party in Vietnam, with all the guarantees expected by the Communist International. That Vietnamese turned out to be Nguyen Ai Quoc, the future Ho Chi Minh. And it was in Paris that he was discovered.

Among the Comintern agents operating in Paris in the early 1920's was one of the Vouliouvitch brothers. A leading figure in of the Communist Youth International (founded by Lenin), he was scouting for talented young men, and one of the Vietnamese approached by him was Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh). This encounter, says Lacouture, had a major influence on Ho's future decisions.<sup>9</sup> One of these was to vote for membership of the Third International at the Tours Congress of the French Socialist Party in December 1920. But a no less significant result of the encounter was the fact, recorded by Michele Zecchini, that immediately after Ho became a member the French Communist Party, "he had funds at his disposal to make speaking tours throught France and the African colonies"<sup>10</sup>.

At this time, Ho also came into contact with Dmitry Manuilsky<sup>11</sup>, who was an important figure of the Comintern leadership. Manuilsky was greatly impressed by Ho's speech on the colonial question at the Second Congress of the CPF in 1922. Close relations between them developed, and these close relations were to prove crucial for Ho's career as well as for the

Communist International's action in Southeast Asia in later years. In particular, Manuisky invited Ho to Moscow to speak on colonial questions at the Fifth Comintern Congress<sup>11</sup>, and was to send him to Canton in 1924, to Southeast Asia in 1928, and to Vietnam in 1938.

Until his death in 1969, Ho was the most faithful, the most solid, the most powerful and the most effective instrument of Soviet policy in Vietnam, and even after his death, through his very thorough indoctrination of his disciples, his influence continued to be felt, i.e., Soviet interests continued to be well safeguarded. Moscow's small investment in Ho was to pay very big dividends.

Having discovered Ho, the next step for Moscow was to bring him to the Soviet Union for training and testing before entrusting him with important tasks. Since Manuisky had spotted Ho and invited him to Moscow, it is logical to infer that it was Manuisky who was responsible for organising Ho's trip to the Soviet capital also. The trip was very carefully organised. Ho left Paris for Berlin in mid-June 1923, was provided with all necessary help and papers by the Soviet Mission in Berlin on special instructions from Moscow<sup>12</sup>, and arrived safely in Saint Petersburg on June 30, 1923.<sup>12</sup>

In Moscow, Ho was assigned to work at the Eastern Department of the Comintern, where he broadened his knowledge, acquired more experience, and became acquainted with a number of important figures in the Department, in particular M. Borodin and

C.A.Dallin. The latter, who had been sent on mission to the Far East, supplied Ho with important information about China, especially about the Vietnamese revolutionaries militating there. Of course, Ho also maintained close relations with Manuisky, and it was on the latter's recommendation that he was assigned by the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) to Canton to work with the Borodin mission there in December 1924. Ho was also assigned two other important tasks: helping the Chinese Communist Party organise the peasants in southern China, and laying the ground for a communist movement in Indochina. He carried out his assignment with devotion and competence, and earned the full confidence of the Comintern.

Ho was to remain a trusted agent of the Comintern in the following two decades. But he was used essentially in his individual capacity, as an agent of this organisation, working directly under its authority, and carrying out special assignments for its Eastern Department, in particular the promoting of communism in Southeast Asia in his capacity as representative of the ECCI and head of the Southern Bureau<sup>14</sup>. Ho played a key role in the founding of the Communist Party of Siam (Thailand) and the Communist Party of Malaysia in April 1930<sup>15</sup>. With regard to the Communist Party of Indochina (CPI), he was not a member of its leadership, but was above it, in his capacity as representative of the Comintern to the Party. In any case, the CPI was founded only in February 1930.

Without a party, Vietnam was to remain low in Moscow's

priorities. This was true before Lenin's death, and remained true thereafter. Like Lenin, Stalin was concerned primarily with Europe, then China and Japan, or, China because of Japan. In his realist scheme of things, Asia meant China, as a potential ally, and Japan, as a potential enemy.

Besides the Chinese and the Japanese giants Indochina hardly counted. Before 1930 Stalin made a single passing reference to it in 1925<sup>16</sup>. In 1930, he made another, in his report to the XVI Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In it he spoke favourably about the Yen Bay rebellion, and commended the Indochinese revolutionaries to the Eastern peoples<sup>17</sup>. This was the time when the official Comintern line imposed by him was "class against class".

There is no record of any serious meeting between Stalin and Ho before 1950. The only meeting reported was by Hong Ha, who said that at the Fifth Congress of the Third International in 1924 Ho had met and talked with Stalin, who was head of the delegation of the CPSU.<sup>18</sup> However, this meeting was obviously a casual one. At this Congress, as McLane has pointed out, "Indochina was evidently so far from the Comintern's consideration that even Nguyen Ai Quoc made no reference to his homeland in his remarks on French colonial policy"<sup>19</sup>. The reason for this lack of sustained interest in Indochina was that "in the scheme of Soviet strategies in East Asia, Vietnam was not critical -- or less critical than the other areas. Moscow's capacity for cultivating Asian revolutionary movements....was not



unlimited; Indochina's for the present was expendable"<sup>20</sup>

It was only from the Sixth Congress (1928) onward that the Comintern began to take a more sustained interest in Vietnam, and, even then, it acted through the CPF, as, following a decision of the Second Congress (1920) the metropolitan parties were responsible for the communist movements in their colonies. Accordingly, at its creation, the CPI was a section of the CPF. Moreover, although it acquired the status of an independent section in 1931, and of a national section in 1935, it remained under the guidance of the CPF for almost two decades after its foundation.

The CPI surely received also orders from the Comintern to maintain close contact with the CPF, for Ho constantly insisted strongly on this necessity in his communications with his party. A.Reznikov, a Soviet author, has stressed the guiding roles of the CPF and of the Comintern as mentors of the CPI as follows:

"The French Communist Party exerted considerable beneficial influence on the development of the communist movement in Indochina. Many issues relating to the activity of the Communist Party of Indochina were discussed in the Comintern with the participation of the FCP members. The FCP carried on that activity in accord with Lenin's idea that metropolitan parties were duty bound to render every possible support to promote the communist and national liberation movement in the colony"<sup>21</sup>.

At the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (1935), the CPI was represented for the first time. Its delegate, Le Hong Phong, was elected an alternate member of the ECCI. At the same congress, the CPI was recognised as a national section. This recognition came at the precise time when the Comintern was embarking on a

major shift of strategy as a result of Stalin's decision that fighting rising fascism was a more important than revolution. The militant "class against class" line and united front from below, decided at the Sixth Congress in 1928, was dropped in favour of United Front and united front from above (Popular Front for the European parties, and Democratic Front for the parties of the colonial countries).

For the CPV, adopting the Comintern line meant shelving its fundamental revolutionary aims -- national independence and radical agrarian reform -- i.e., emptying the Vietnamese revolution of its content. But, in full conformity with proletarian internationalist discipline, the newly recognised CPI dutifully executed the new line laid down by Moscow. The latter, through the CPF and through Ho Chi Minh, saw to it that there would be no leftist deviation.

When Le Hong Phong, the CPI's first delegate to a Comintern Congress, returned from Moscow, on examining the resolutions of the CPI's First Congress, he saw that "certain points did not correspond to the resolutions of the Comintern Congress". He therefore called a conference of the Central Committee, which met in Shanghai in July 1936, to inform the members of the resolutions of the Comintern Congress ~~and of the political report by Dimitroff~~ and to present a resolution calling for a change of orientation in the strategic direction, and a change of tactics. The Committee "unanimously" passed the resolution, which was afterwards "endorsed" by the Comintern.<sup>22</sup>

62  
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The survey of fifty years of activities of the CPV (1930-1980) noted that the Plenum convened by Le Hong Phong decided that if the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal tasks laid down by the Party at its foundation remained always valid, "the direct and immediate objective at present is not the overthrow of the power of French imperialism and carrying out the land reform, but the fight against colonial reactionaries, servants of fascism, and demand for democratic freedoms, the improvement of living conditions and peace". To those ends, the Plenum decided to create an Indochinese Anti-Fascist National Front, which became afterwards the Indochinese Democratic Front<sup>23</sup>.

During the critical years of 1934-1937, the CPF and the Comintern exercised a direct and strong influence on the strategic and tactical decisions of the CPI. Reznikov has noted that in 1937 French Communists rendered "great help" in the movement for organising a Democratic Front; they sent their representative to Indochina; a Democratic Front was set up "which considered the anti-fascist struggle its principal task, pointed to the danger of Japanese aggression and supported the liberation war of the Chinese people"<sup>24</sup>. These were precisely the tasks which, via the Comintern, Stalin set for the communist parties of Asia.

With regard to Comintern direct action, Reznikov has noted that, in 1934, a meeting of several big party organisations with the Foreign Bureau of the CPI (located in Shanghai) was convened. The meeting thought that the greatest danger was right-wing

opportunism, but it concluded that the Party needed to campaign also against the left deviation, and "that reflected the influence of the Comintern Executive whose representative had worked with Party delegates in the Foreign Bureau". With regard to the CPI's key First Party Congress, which took place at Macao in March 1935, "the CPI had worked in contact with the Comintern Executive" and "Comintern members took part in preparing the congress documents". Up to 1934, the CPI generally pursued a policy of rallying forces, consolidating ranks, fortifying local organisations and relations between them. Their experience of struggle "and the advice of the Comintern increasingly brought its leaders to the conclusion that they needed a policy of a united front to make use of the anti-imperialist potential of national-bourgeois groups"<sup>22</sup>.

The guidance of the CPI by the Comintern was also, and this should be stressed, particularly exercised through Ho Chi Minh, who was a representative of the ECCI in Southeast Asia, and Comintern representative to the CPI. Reznikov has pointed out that it was "as representative of the Comintern" that Ho summoned the communist delegates to the conference which gave birth to the CPI on February 3, 1930; that the Comintern "emphasized the outstanding services of Ho Chi Minh as founder of the Communist Party of Indochina", rendered its aid to the communist movement in Indochina "through the good offices of Ho Chi Minh", and drafted its decisions relating to the activities of Communists and the liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people "with his

participation" and sent them to him "first of all"<sup>26</sup>.

A casual reading of the History of the Communist Party and of Ho Chi Minh's writings would show that, from the moment he wrote Duong Cach Menh (The Road of Revolution) in 1927 for the training of his first communist disciples in Canton until the moment he made his last recommendations to his Party in his Testament in 1969, Ho constantly insisted on the obligation of the CPV members to carry out strictly the policies laid down by the Comintern, and to absolutely maintain "the purity of marxism-leninism" and practice "proletarian internationalism"<sup>27</sup>.

We have dealt at length on the above facts because a full knowledge of those facts is essential for an understanding of Soviet policy towards Vietnam in the twelve years (1935-1947) following the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. ~~That policy-- Stalin's policy --~~ had three major components: defend the Soviet Union, fight fascism (for Vietnam, that meant fighting Japan), and form a united front with anti-fascist capitalist nations or groups, ignoring their imperialist or bourgeois character (for the CPV, this meant shelving communism, adopting a moderate nationalism, and collaborating with Vietnamese non-communists or even anti-communist nationalists).

In Stalin's scheme of things, Vietnam's independence became inevitably "expendable", and if it could be achieved, that would be essentially a fall-out from Soviet policy, and not an important aim of this policy. In fact, it was made possible largely by other factors, in particular by Japan's undermining,

and then, brutally overthrowing French rule in Indochina.

Except for a short interruption of 22 months, the united front strategy was to be pursued in Vietnam from 1935 onward, i.e., until the proclamation of a new, confrontational "line" by by Zhdanov in September 1947. The united front line provided the CPI with an enormous fall-out between 1935 and 1939, as the French authorities, in application of the Popular Front policy, relaxed their harsh measures against the communists and other revolutionaries in Indochina.

However, between August 23, 1939, date of the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, and June 21, 1941, date of the invasion of the Soviet Union by German troops, the united front strategy was interrupted; Moscow proclaimed the war an "imperialist war", and communists were told to practice "revolutionary defeatism", i.e., not only to refuse to participate in the national war effort, but even to take advantage of the situation to work against their governments.

In Indochina, the CPI had no need to change its strategy, as the enemy was still French imperialism allied with Japanese fascism. But French policy changed. As in France, the colonial authorities outlawed the Communist Party and mercilessly hunted down the communists. This forced many of the latter to flee the country and seek refuge in China.

When the Soviet Union was drawn into the war on June 21, 1941, for the Vietnamese communists the situation, and hence the tasks, remained basically unchanged. Before, as after that date,

conforming to Comintern policy, they were duty-bound to support the Soviet Union by fighting fascism. In Indochina, the fascists remained the Japanese. However, the CPI again reaped a fall-out from the situation: it could at the same time fight the French authorities in Indochina without infringing Comintern policy by claiming that it was fighting not the Gaullist forces -- the official allies of the Soviet Union --, but the French colonial authorities in Indochina, which were Vichyites and allies of the Japanese fascists. It was therefore on the side of the Allies. Moreover, in supporting the Soviet Union, it could also claim that it was supporting the Allied cause. This was the line propagated by Ho Chi Minh from 1938 onward. 1938 was the year when Ho was sent back to the East, empowered with wide powers by the ECCI<sup>20</sup>, to join in the fight against Japan, first in China, then in Indochina.

For the Soviet Union, Indochina thus presented no problem,<sup>fn</sup> In any case, for the entire duration of the war, the Soviet leaders were too busy with their own problems to concern themselves with revolution in the colonies, especially as these colonies belonged to their allies, and constituted a source of strength for these allies. The Comintern thus became not only superfluous, but embarrassing, and it is not surprising that Stalin decided to dissolve it in May 1943<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>even</sup> The dissolution of the Comintern did not seem to disturb the Vietnamese communists at all, for in the resolutions of the Party <sup>the year</sup> in 1943 and thereafter there was no mention of it. For the CPV

business was as usual. So long as Moscow had not proclaimed a new line, the decisions of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern continued to apply, even after the dissolution of that organisation. The CPV leaders probably viewed this dissolution as a tactical move by Stalin, a move which they themselves were to make in November 1945 when, for tactical reason, they decided to dissolve the CPI.

In ~~August~~ 1945, <sup>With</sup> the end of the war, the fight against Japanese fascism ceased to be an objective, and problems emerged. <sup>But</sup> One of those problems was the position of the Soviet Union, ~~or~~ of Stalin, in regard to Vietnam. *referred to in document*

From the practical point of view, Stalin was sceptical about the ability of communists to capture power in the East and in the colonies, especially after the Chinese communists were crushed by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927. As a cold realist, Stalin thought primarily in terms of Russian interests, Russian security, Russian power, and Russian ability to influence the course of events, i.e., essentially in terms of Europe, which was more within range of Russian artillery. *you*

At the same time, as a practising leninist, he was always seeking forms of action best suited to advance the interests of the Soviet Union, viewed as the bulwark of the world revolution. In 1935, with the rising danger of fascism, and especially after the invasion of his country by Germany in 1941, the appropriate form was united front. Accordingly, he joined Great Britain (with the British Empire), the United States, China, and Fighting



France (with what was left of the French Empire) in a united front against Germany, Italy, and Japan.

United front was still the official policy of the Soviet Union <sup>after</sup> when Japan surrendered in August 1945. And for another two years, Stalin was to continue using it for advancing Soviet interests. For all communist parties united front therefore remained in force. In the particular case of Vietnam, it explains for a large part why Moscow did not intervene, and did not even seemed interested, in that country in 1945-1947. Kou

Harold Isaacs, who was in Vietnam in 1945, reported that he spoke to many "Annamite Communists", but he had met with no one among them who thought that the Russians would bring strong support to the Vietnamese cause. They said that "the Russians would be interested only if we served some purpose of theirs. Right now, unfortunately, we do not serve any such purpose"<sup>20</sup>. Ho Chi Minh, too, did not expect Russian aid then. In his conversations with Major A. Patti, the chief of OSS in Hanoi, he said that he placed "more reliance on the United States to support Vietnam's independence" before he could expect help from the USSR<sup>21</sup>.

Technically, as well as politically, what Ho said was true. At that time, Vietnam could expect no aid from the Soviet Union. Firstly, because the Soviet Union, just emerging from the war, was materially in no position to help anyone in view of the extensive destructions it had suffered. And secondly, because Stalin was more interested in communism gaining power in France

than in Vietnam, and Soviet intervention in Vietnam, i.e., interference in the internal affairs of France and at the expense of French imperial interests, would damage the chances of the French communists of capturing power through the electoral process. This view was shared by the CPF, which made no secret of it to the CPI and to others.

Under Comintern rule, the CPF still had responsibility for the CPI. In Vietnam, the French communists warned their Vietnamese comrades to see to it that their struggle "meets the requirements of Soviet policy", and to avoid "premature adventure" in Vietnamese independence that might "not be in line with Soviet perspective"<sup>22</sup>. In France, in public statements, and in private conversations with French and Vietnamese anti-communist personalities, French communist leaders did not hesitate to criticise the Vietnamese for being "marked by all the defects of youth" or for being "politically immature" <sup>23</sup>, and to say publicly that they favoured keeping Vietnam in the French Union. Jacques Duclos even told Sainteny "to make the canons talk if necessary", or "to strike hard blows if we have to come to that"<sup>24</sup>.

Moscow's position on Vietnam in 1945-1947 was stated very clearly by Stephane Solosieff, the Soviet representative in Hanoi in 1945. In conversations with Major Patti he made the following points:

- 1) The French should not expect to return to the status quo, but should instead pursue a policy of "gradual withdrawal".

2) The Vietnamese were "not quite ready for total independence" and were in need of protection against a powerful nation like China or Thailand.

3) The French were "the best equipped" of the Western powers to reconstruct the country and guide it towards self-government.

4) The Indochinese would have to assume a role of "responsible nationalism", although they might "not be able to handle it alone", and "with enlightened French help and American technical assistance" they could achieve independence "in a few years".

5) The Soviet Union would not be able to "interpose itself in Southeast Asia", and Soviet interference there would create a conflict with the traditional French and British interests "which would not be in the best interests of the Soviet Union" at that time<sup>25</sup>.

Since Solosieff did not seek to disguise his role, it is legitimate to assume that he surely had contacts, although unpublicised ones, with Ho and the CPI leaders, and the latter were undoubtedly well aware of Moscow's position.

What Solosieff said was only an elaboration on the position adopted earlier by Stalin at Teheran and Potsdam. In his talks with President Roosevelt at the Teheran Conference (November 28-December 1, 1943) Stalin was reported to have "completely agreed" with Roosevelt's idea of a trusteeship for Indochina. He found the idea "excellent". And excellent indeed it was for the Soviet Union, as earlier, at the Cairo Conference (November 22-26,

1943), Roosevelt had said he envisaged a board of trustees of six to seven members, one of whom a Russian. Stalin said that the Allies had not shed blood to restore French rule over Indochina; at the same time, although he thought that Indochina should be independent, he also thought it was "not yet ready for self-government"<sup>26</sup>. On the other hand, at Potsdam (July 1945), the Soviet Union raised no objection to the division of Indochina between China and Great Britain, first for military, then for occupation purposes. It thereby claimed no role in Indochina.

In 1947, Soviet general strategy changed. Confrontation between two camps was proclaimed, after the stiffening of the attitudes of the Western powers had blocked the free expansion of Soviet dominance in Eastern as well as Western Europe by the "creeping advance" strategy within the framework of the war time united front. The new strategy was signaled in the speech given by A. Zhdanov at Wiliza Gora, Poland, in September 1947, on the occasion of the creation of the Cominform, which was considered a reincarnation of the Comintern.

Moscow's new confrontational line was conveyed to the Southeast Asian communists at the Calcutta Conference of Southeast Asian Youth in February 1948, and was the signal of communist armed uprisings all over Southeast Asia in the following years. The CPV, however, had already started armed struggle in December 1946. It was one step ahead of others, and was cited in example for other parties. <sup>film etc.</sup> As Brimmell has stressed, it could now "bask in Moscow's favour and reap the moral reward

4-12

of having acted correctly all along"<sup>27</sup>. This was in fact a tribute to Ho Chi Minh, who always seemed to possess a telepathic ability for reading the Comintern leadership's, as well as Stalin's, thoughts unerringly.

The CPI was also one step ahead in discussing the Zhdanov speech. The Central Committee of the Party adopted a resolution on January 17, 1948 -- one month before the Calcutta Conference -- which set the tasks for the new stage. What strikes about this resolution is the instruction to members to watch the international situation very closely, in particular "to be prepared to cope with manifold changes of the situation" in China and in France because, it said, "our resistance is subject to the very great influence of the development of the situation in those two countries"<sup>28</sup>. This was also what Moscow was doing at the time.

Moscow's shift of strategy was aimed essentially at harrassing and weakening the West, especially in Europe. ~~As mentioned earlier,~~ Stalin did not believe that communist parties in colonial countries could seize power. He did not even believe that this could happen in China. In fact, he had more faith in Chiang Kai-shek's government than in the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), and was to maintain relations with this government until its total collapse in 1949. This attitude was also that of the CPI, for Ho Chi Minh equally adopted an attitude of great caution in regard to the Chiang Kai-shek government until 1949, carefully abstaining from making statements hostile to it, and observing an

attitude of deference to it until after it was clear that the CPC had won decisively<sup>29</sup>.

Although the Soviet Union paid more attention to Vietnam after 1947, and came out in support of the Vietnamese revolution, this support was mostly verbal and very restrained. The Ho Chi Minh government, proclaimed in September 1945, and recognised by France in March 1946, was not given recognition, either de jure or de facto by Moscow. Recognition will be given only on January 30, 1950, almost two weeks after Communist China's recognition (January 18, 1950), and only after it had become clear that the Chinese communist government had become firmly established in Peking.

The last point is worth noting, for it is typical of Soviet behaviour in regard to Vietnam. Moscow would normally observe an attitude of caution and abstain from open and full commitment until after the CPV had emerged a clear winner, and in committing itself Moscow would make sure it could reap a substantial gain while incurring little risk for itself.

In 1950 and the following years Soviet support for Vietnam was essentially verbal. The real support, in terms of the supply of material and human resources to the Vietnamese communist fighting forces, was left to China. According to Hoang Van Hoan, who was in Peking when Ho arrived there secretly in early January, Mao Tse-tung, after agreeing to recognise Ho's government to give it international stature, asked the Soviet ambassador in Peking, Rossin, to send a message to Moscow

requesting that the Soviet Union did the same, and that Stalin receive Ho Chi Minh in person to get a full briefing from the latter. Moscow agreed, and Ho flew immediately to Moscow to see Stalin. The latter received Ho in the presence of Wang Jia Xiang, the Chinese ambassador to Moscow, and at this meeting it was decided to assign to China the task of providing the main help to the Vietnamese<sup>40</sup>.

It is generally agreed that it was thanks to massive Chinese aid that the Vietnamese won a resounding defeat over the French in the Sino-Vietnamese border campaign in the autumn of 1950, and at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in the spring of 1954. There is no record of aid from the Soviet Union to Vietnam before 1955, except Stalin's order to send Ho Chi Minh half a ton of quinine although, according to Khrushchev's memoirs, at the above secret meeting, Ho had made very clear that he badly needed aid in the form of arms and ammunitions<sup>41</sup>.

Moscow began aid to Vietnam only after the Geneva peace settlement, i.e., after it was clear that there was no more risks of serious confrontation with the West, especially with the United States. Indeed, already from 1951 onward, under Stalin, the search for a way of reducing such risks had already begun. Armed confrontation was no longer considered the best form for dealing with the West; new and better forms were found for that purpose, in particular isolation of the West from the Third World through peaceful coexistence <sup>42</sup>.

Moscow's change of strategy was to lead to the Geneva peace

settlement and the inauguration of peaceful coexistence. But Stalin did not live long enough to see the logical development of the new policy. The role of putting out the fire of Indochina and bringing in an era of peaceful coexistence devolved upon Khrushchev, under whose leadership the Geneva peace agreement was concluded. The CPV was to complain bitterly and publicly twenty five years later that this agreement was concluded "on the back of the Vietnamese people".

The complaint, made against the Chinese in a White Book on Vietnamese-Chinese relations<sup>43</sup>, could have been directed also at the Soviet leaders, for it has been established that at the Geneva Conference on Indochina in 1954, the Soviets also exerted strong pressure on the delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) to yield on important issues so that peace could be concluded<sup>44</sup>.

Once more, the Vietnamese communists were "expendable"; they were "the sacrificial lambs of a basic turn in Soviet foreign policy that had been under active consideration for some years and was now consummated"<sup>45</sup>. Consummated with it were also the aims pursued by the CPV leaders: total independence and unification of the country under its rule. These were sacrificed so that the Soviet Union could achieve aims which it considered more important: in Europe, to prevent the adoption of the European Defense Treaty by the French Parliament in order to block the rearmament of Germany; in Asia, to avoid a military confrontation with the United States and China -- into which the Soviet Union



would be inexorably drawn and Soviet boys would get killed --. The Vietnamese communists were sacrificed so that the way could be opened for peaceful coexistence. At Geneva, says McLane, Russian disengagement from the Zhdanov course in Southeast Asia was completed, six years after this course was launched, and for better or for worse, "the lanes were now open for peaceful coexistence"<sup>46</sup>.

For the next five years, until 1960, in his quest for detente, or even entente, with the United States, Khrushchev will impose peaceful coexistence on the CPV. For the latter, this meant a freezing of its plans of bringing South Vietnam under its control by military means, as the possibility of reunification by political means was excluded because the government of South Vietnam had declared that it was not bound by the Geneva agreement, which it had not signed. In 1956, when the scheduled elections failed to take place, the Soviet government did not make a big issue of it, although it was a co-chairman of the Geneva Conference. In 1957, it even proposed the simultaneous admission of both South and North Vietnam to the United Nations. This proposal was withdrawn after vigorous protests by Hanoi.

Moscow could continue to ignore Hanoi's discontent so long as Peking agreed with the Soviet line, and there was nothing the CPV could do against it. But the constraints imposed on the CPV could no longer be maintained fully the moment there was a split between Moscow and Peking. This started with the announcement by Khrushchev at the XX Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 that

peaceful coexistence was to be the general line of Soviet foreign policy, a decision strongly opposed by the Chinese. The split was to widen increasingly over the years, and compel Moscow to give backing to the CPV in its forward policy in South Vietnam by military means.

Chinese opposition to the strategy advocated by Khrushchev and the latter's concessions to the CPC, although made with much reluctance, resulted in the acceptance of wordings of the declarations of the 1957 and 1960 World Congresses of Communist Parties permitting the CPV, with encouragement and support of the CPC, to proceed with an aggressive forward policy in South Vietnam by openly military means from 1959 onward without risk of being exposed to charges of violating international communist discipline. This was to lead to full fledged war and American direct intervention in South Vietnam, and the bombing of North Vietnam in 1965.

Khrushchev was not in favour of extended armed struggle in the South, which carried with it the risks of escalation and Soviet involvement. But with the Chinese backing the DRV and providing an alternative source of support and aid, the CPV could ignore Khrushchev's admonitions. This so angered Khrushchev that in 1964 he threatened to disengage from Vietnam altogether. He gave vent to his disenchantment with the CPV in his memoirs. He said that Soviet-Vietnamese relations were "originally good" but later "deteriorated", and this was not the fault of the CPSU, but "entirely the result of Mao Tse-tung himself and his influence on

Vietnam". He complained about "the hostility towards us of the pro-Chinese elements in Vietnam", and that was "a bitter pill to swallow"<sup>47</sup>.

Fortunately for the CPV, Khrushchev fell in October 1964, and under Brezhnev and his successors, Soviet policy was reversed. The Soviet leaders, in their stepped up competition with China for influence in the Third World, gave the CPV firm support and considerably increased aid, permitting it to withstand the onslaught of the United States, break the will of the Americans, win the war, and bring South Vietnam under its control in 1975.

The end of the Vietnam war brought with it new developments which led to profound changes in the political and strategic situation in Southeast Asia. <sup>Taking note of this</sup> These changes, ~~in turn, were to draw~~ the Soviet Union <sup>drawn</sup> deeply into the region. Many of them stemmed <sup>from the fact that while Moscow favoured the total victory of the DRV and an increase of its power and influence in Southeast Asia so as to better serve Soviet interests as an "outpost of socialism" in the region,</sup> ~~from the fact that while Moscow favoured the total victory of the DRV and an increase of its power and influence in Southeast Asia so as to better serve Soviet interests as an "outpost of socialism" in the region,~~ Peking was <sup>strongly opposed to such a development.</sup> ~~strongly opposed to such a development.~~ Soviet policy was therefore bound to clash with that of China, and a major arena for this clash will be Vietnam.

Much of Moscow's efforts in Southeast Asia after 1969 was motivated by its rivalry with China, says Robert C. Horn. This applies to the region as a whole, and to individual countries. Whether the Soviets proposed a system of collective security for Southeast Asia, or whether they sought the support of individual countries of the area, their efforts were "primarily directed

against the Chinese"<sup>48</sup>. After having done much before 1975 to whittle down American influence in the area, and especially in Vietnam, the Soviets now tried hard to prevent the Chinese from moving in and building up their influence there.

To act from a strong position, the Soviets needed a firm foothold. Vietnam was naturally suited for that role. But until 1978, the Soviets were unable to overcome the CPV's reluctance to accept Soviet bases on Vietnam's soil. The Sino-Vietnamese conflict changed that. This conflict, says Daniel S. Papp, was "God sent for the Soviet Union". It permitted it to secure base rights in exchange for economic and military assistance badly needed by the Vietnamese<sup>49</sup>. The latter, in getting embroiled in an armed conflict with its giant neighbour, needed a strong countervailing power. This countervailing power could only be the Soviet Union.

Moscow was prompt to seize the opportunity, especially as the attending risks were small: the United States, still suffering from "the Vietnam syndrom", were practically paralysed; China did not yet have the power to back up its policies, and besides, its overriding concern was modernisation; the ASEAN nations, although doing well economically, were militarily no match for the Soviet Union, or even for Vietnam.

In exchange for its protection, support and aid, the Soviets extracted a high price from the CPV: the right to use air and naval facilities in Vietnam, in particular the incomparable Cam Ranh Bay, and full integration of the Socialist Republic of

Vietnam's (SRV) into the Soviet bloc. From 1979 onward, Soviet military presence in Vietnam became increasingly visible. This followed Vietnam's joining the Council for Mutual Economic assistance (CMEA) on June 28, 1978, the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on November 3 of the same year, and the "lesson" given by China to Vietnam because of the latter's invasion of Cambodia. As a result of this "lesson", the Soviet were able to "cash in for its military assistance to Vietnam"<sup>50</sup>.

Soviet ships began to use Vietnamese ports in February 1979. Soviet naval aviation began intelligence gathering flights in the Gulf of Tongking with TU-95 Bear aircraft, first from Vladivostok in February, then from Vietnam bases themselves in mid-April<sup>51</sup>.

The Soviets expanded their naval presence in Vietnam very rapidly after a secret personal inspection of the Cam Ranh Bay in December 1979 by Admiral S.Gorshkov, chief of the Soviet navy, advocate of a forward naval strategy and the building of a "blue water navy". To him, here was surely the "long missing link in Soviet naval strategy" which would complement Eden and Cuba, enhance the Soviet air and naval facilities in Southeast Asia, and largely contribute to the expansion of Soviet sea power in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. It is thus not surprising that Cam Ranh Bay has become what the Pentagon considers to be "the largest Soviet naval forward deployment base outside the Soviet Union"<sup>52</sup>.

The growth of Soviet military capabilities deployed out of Vietnam was extremely rapid. In September 1982 some 10 naval vessels were using Cam Ranh on a continual basis for refuelling and shore leave. In early 1983, the number rose to 20. In December of the same year, 13 TU-16 and TU-95 aircraft were operating out of Cam Ranh and Danang. In April 1984, 30 vessels, conducted amphibious landing exercises on the Vietnamese coast. By late 1984, 20 to 26 surface ships and 4 submarines were operating out of Cam Ranh Bay. By May 1986, 6 submarines, three of which nuclear, and 20 to 30 vessels were using Cam Ranh, and this base became the home port for a battalion of Soviet naval infantry. Soviet ships from the Indian Ocean patrol also used Cam Ranh<sup>53</sup>.

Not only Cam Ranh has been turned into a naval base and a relay station for Soviet ships moving to and from Vladivostok and Eden; with floating dry docks and floating piers, it has also become a repair station for the region; and with long range intercept facilities, satellite and electronic intelligence and communication facilities, it has become the largest intelligence listening post outside the Soviet Union after Cuba and Eden<sup>54</sup>.

It is clear that just for the containment of China and the protection of Vietnam against Chinese attacks the Soviets do not need such a massive military build up. This build up should be seen rather as the basis for a larger world strategy aiming at expanding Soviet influence in the Third World at the expense of the United States. It psychologically enhances the Soviet hand in its efforts aiming at influencing the Third World in order to

promote socialism from a stronger position by demonstrating the Soviet Union's capability to give effective support and protection to its friends and allies.

As Leszek Buszynsky has pointed out in a very penetrating study, "the Soviet Navy was intended to be an instrument of the expansion of the socialist system", and expanding conventional role of the Soviet Navy is intended to promote Soviet influence in Third World areas by protecting supply lines to national liberation movements and revolutionary democratic or socialist allies such as Cuba and Vietnam<sup>55</sup>. Indeed, Admiral Gorshkov himself has stressed that the Soviet Navy was created "for the defence of the security of the motherland, of all countries of the socialist system"<sup>56</sup>.

At the same time as the Soviets were building up their military potential in Vietnam, they were also busy integrating the Vietnamese armed forces into the Soviet system in the name of modernisation. A Soviet Military Advisory Mission (SMAM), 3000-5000 men strong, now operates in Vietnam. It reminds us of USMAAG (United States Military Assistance Advisory Group) in the years of American dominance of Vietnam. The conditions facing the VPA (Vietnam People's Army) were very similar to those of the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) before 1975, or even worse, as the CPV leaders were highly militaristically-minded and feel a more urgent need for the modernisation of the instrument of their power. Indeed, General Le Duc Anh, Minister of Defense acknowledged in an article in Quan Doi Nhan Dan (People's Army

Paper) in November 1987 that

"in building and developing its armed forces Vietnam has received Soviet assistance under a comprehensive and basic plan. Large amounts of modern Soviet equipment and weapons of a technological standard far exceeding Vietnam's economic and industrial capacity have again been sent over to equip units of the VPA (Vietnam People's Army). Many Soviet specialists in various domains have been despatched to assist Vietnam in the lofty spirit of socialist internationalism"<sup>57</sup>.

The PVA thus became utterly dependent on the Soviet Union. And the more its leaders craved for modernisation, the more it was sucked into the Soviet system, for modernisation is very expensive, and the SRV, with its economy in shambles, could not conceivably afford it on its own. The magnitude of Vietnam's dependence on the USSR by 1982 was "staggering"<sup>58</sup>. This is true also of economic and other forms of aid.

Soviet economic aid to Vietnam increased considerably after 1975. From 1965 to the end of the war total Soviet aid to Vietnam amounted to US\$ 6,810 million, of which economic aid was 3,420 million, a yearly average of 342 million. During the immediate post-war period, there was a sharp escalation, especially from 1978 onward. From a yearly average of US\$ 812 million between 1976 and 1980, it rose to a yearly average of 1,256 million between 1981 and 1986<sup>59</sup>.

According to Vo Nhan Tri, Soviet economic aid to the SRV for the 1976-1980 Five Year Plan varied from US\$ 2.6 to 3.5 billion, (520 to 700 million per year) depending on the source. For the 1981-1985 Plan, it rose to US\$ 6.5 billion <sup>(13.2 million per year)</sup>. For the 1986-1990 Plan, it will again rise, to US\$ 8 or 13.5 billion (1600 million

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to 2600 million per year), depending on the source<sup>60</sup>. Whatever the estimate, those sums are large, by any country's standard. By Vietnam's standard, they are colossal. Considering the hopeless situation in which the CPV leadership had plunged the country, Soviet aid was obviously the pillar on which the SRV rested. If this pillar was removed, the whole edifice would surely collapse. Just as militarily, so also economically, Vietnam had thus become completely dependent on the Soviet Union. This naturally strengthened Moscow's leverage, and facilitated the integration of the country into the Soviet system.

The institutional framework<sup>note</sup> for the integration of Vietnam into the Soviet Union is the result of four basic agreements: 1) Vietnam's admission to CMEA on June 27, 1978; 2) the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, signed on November 3, 1978; 3) the USSR-Vietnam Long Term Program for Economic, Scientific, Technological Cooperation, signed on October 31, 1983, and 4) the Joint Declaration signed by Le Duan and Gorbachev on June 28, 1985. By these agreements, Vietnam was bound tightly to the Soviet Union politically, diplomatically, militarily, economically, technologically and culturally, i.e., in every possible way, and so for the long term.

The term used constantly by both Soviets and Vietnamese officials, "all round", very exactly describes this kind of relationship. A French official of the colonial period would be gasping at the extent of Vietnam's penetration, close to annexation, by the Soviets, something far beyond what the French,

in their assimilation drive, had dreamed of being able to clamp on the Vietnamese.

Vietnam <sup>became</sup> ~~has become~~ locked into a technology that was markedly inferior to that of its non-communist neighbours who had had free access to Western and Japanese machines and training. It is worth noting that Moscow had sent over 100 Soviet "prominent experts on economics" to help Vietnam, and "hundreds" of senior Vietnamese officials had been sent to the Soviet Union to learn about economics<sup>61</sup>. This undoubtedly is one of the main reasons why the Vietnamese economy constantly deteriorated, and finally "collapsed". This <sup>was</sup> is the term used publicly by the new General Secretary of the CPV, Nguyen Van Linh, in 1988<sup>62</sup>.

Inevitably, a large income gap developed between Vietnam and its neighbours. Income per head in Vietnam in 1982 was US\$ 160, compared to 609 in Indonesia, 731 in the Philippines, 749 in Thailand, 1800 in Malaysia, 5302 in Singapore. Since 1982, the gap has widened, as the economic situation in all Southeast Asian non-communist countries steadily improved while that of communist Vietnam steadily deteriorated. Membership of the Soviet bloc was certainly not a blessing for the Vietnamese people.

With regard to politics and ideology, Le Duan described the situation quite well in his political report to the Fifth National Congress of the Party in March 1982, when he said that "solidarity and cooperation in every field with the Soviet Union has always been the cornerstone of the foreign policy of our Party". To be closely united and to cooperate with the Soviet

Union was for the Party "a principle, a strategy, and even a revolutionary feeling", and the Party must "educate future Vietnamese generations to hold fast to that principle", he added<sup>63</sup>. At the Sixth Congress of the Party in December 1986, Nguyen Van Linh, Le Duan's successor, pledged to "fully support the domestic and foreign policies adopted by the Twenty Seventh Congress of the CPSU"<sup>64</sup>.

Thus, with very small risks, the Soviet Union reaped very big gains. Without losing one single man in combat, without firing a single shot, without risking a real military confrontation with the United States or China, it had gained a magnificent base, a firm ally, and a stronger position in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Vietnamese, Frenchmen, Americans, and Chinese had died to make this possible. Indeed, the only real winner in the Vietnam wars was the Soviet Union.

The gains obtained so easily were made possible by Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation. But, as Vo Nhan Tri has pointed out, it was "cooperation between the rider and the horse", in which the Soviet Union was the rider and Vietnam the horse<sup>65</sup>. Vietnam had to accept the role of the horse because, as Nguyen Co Thach, Vietnam's Foreign Minister, has put it neatly: "Vietnam would be nothing without the Soviet Union"<sup>66</sup>.

The problem for the Soviet leaders since 1979 has been to consolidate and expand their foothold in Vietnam. There was an apparent conflict between this objective and the other objectives they were known to be pursuing. These objectives were a

normalisation of relations with China, and acceptance by the ASEAN countries as a welcomed regional principal actor<sup>67</sup>.

The consolidation of the USSR's position in Vietnam required the full confidence and unreserved cooperation of the CPV leaders, and this means unqualified support for the SRV in its policy of domination of Indochina, especially for its efforts to subjugate Cambodia by force, and in its confrontation with China, the two questions being tightly bound to each other. On the other hand, normalisation of relations with China means cessation of support Vietnam's efforts to bring Cambodia under its exclusive control, in particular pressure on Vietnam to withdraw its forces from that country, China's principal condition for normalisation. Likewise, acceptance by the ASEAN countries is conditional on pressure on Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia and to renounce the expansion of its influence by force.

Until the accession of Gorbachev to the leadership of the CPSU, the Soviet leaders did not have a clear cut Asian policy. Gorbachev's predecessors, Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, wavered between China and Vietnam<sup>68</sup>; and they did not have a dynamic Asia-Pacific policy. Gorbachev brought a fresh approach to both questions.

On the one hand, the Asia-Pacific was upgraded. In a resounding speech at Vladivostok on July 28, 1986, Gorbachev declared that the 27th. CPSU Congress had assigned a "special place" in its plans to this region, that "the situation in the Far East as a whole, in Asia and the ocean expanses adjoining

it.....is to us of a national, state interest", and "The Soviet Union is also an Asian and Pacific country"<sup>69</sup>.

On the other hand, Vietnam was clearly favoured over China. The choice was made by Gorbachev immediately after his accession to the leadership of the CPSU, and was reflected in his meeting with Le Duan in June 1985, i.e., only three months after he took over the helms of the Soviet Union. At this meeting, he told Le Duan that "the Vietnamese Communists and all working people in the SRV may rest assured that the cause of socialist construction on Vietnamese soil, the cause of Vietnam's freedom and independence will continue to have support in our solidarity" and, further, that "the policy of strengthening Soviet-Vietnamese friendship and cooperation is a fundamental policy of our Party and country". He also added that he considered Vietnam "a reliable outpost of socialism in Asia" (and not just in Southeast Asia)<sup>70</sup>. This was something remarkable because it was quite new.

At this meeting Gorbachev exchanged opinions with the Vietnamese delegation on the preparation of the 27th Congress of the CPSU and the Sixth Congress of the CPV, which were still many months away. He therefore undertook a coordination of the two parties' plans even before their official formulation, an indication of the degree of intimacy between them. It was also at this meeting that Gorbachev agreed to trebble aid, from 3 billion to 8.7 billion rubles<sup>(for 1986-1990, 8.7 billion rubles)</sup>, for Vietnam's Fourth Five Year Plan (1986-1990) in spite of many reports about Soviet dissatisfaction with Vietnam for wasting Soviet aid. *OK*

The greatest fears of the CPV leaders, always mindful of what had happened at Geneva in 1954, were that the Soviet big brother would sacrifice the SRV's interests in its desire to normalise relations with China and gain acceptance by ASEAN, and would cease supporting the SRV's hegemony over Indochina, and especially over Cambodia. These fears were put to rest by Gorbachev in July and December 1986.

In July 1986, in his Vladivostok speech, Gorbachev made a strong appeal for normalisation of Sino-Soviet relations and Sino-Vietnamese relations, but stressed that the latter case was "a sovereign matter for the governments and leaderships of both countries"<sup>71</sup>. In December of the same year, on the occasion of the Sixth Congress of the CPV, he sent Yegor Ligachev, the CPSU's number two man, to Hanoi to give the CPV leaders the assurance that the Soviet Union would not develop relations with China "at the expense of any country's interests, and not at Socialist Vietnam's expense"<sup>72</sup>.

With regard to Cambodia, in his Vladivostok speech, Gorbachev stressed that that country "has earned itself the right to choose its friends and allies", and "it is impermissible to try and draw it back into its strategic past"<sup>73</sup>. In other words, he fully endorsed Vietnam's claim that the situation in Cambodia was an "irreversible" reality. This means that the Soviet Union will continue to give the SRV economic and military support for its hegemonistic scheme in Indochina, although it knew full well that such a course would make improvement of relations with China

and ASEAN extremely difficult, not to say impossible. But, obviously, Gorbachev had made his choice: solidarity with Vietnam came first.

In recent years, Moscow has affirmed its solidarity with the SRV in many ways. It has publicised the "unity of views" and "common approaches of the CPSU and the CPV" to questions of international politics<sup>74</sup>. It has publicly acknowledged that the SRV "plays an influential role" in issues relating to the consolidation of security in Asia "and not only in Asia"<sup>75</sup>, thus recognising to the SRV a more than regional status. It has made clear that it "supports the resourceful policy of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia" and "invariably supports" the efforts of these countries "to protect the independence and national sovereignty" and "strengthen their fraternal alliance and all-round cooperation"<sup>76</sup>, i.e., formally endorsed Vietnam's "special relationship" with Laos and Cambodia. Lastly, it has admitted that it always closely coordinated its policies and actions not only in Cambodia, but in Asia, with the SRV<sup>77</sup>.

In 1988, there were reports of a number of events considered by many as "significant": Jakarta "cocktail party" on Cambodia; Soviet promises to Thailand to "talk" to the SRV about Cambodia; Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev's various diplomatic moves for a settlement of the Cambodian problem leading to normalisation of relations with China; tensions between Moscow and Hanoi etc....But, in view of what has just been said, it is permissible to think that those, and other similar events, will

have little effect on the present Soviet-Vietnamese relationship. The SRV and the Soviet Union are bound together by a strategic alliance, which cannot be ruptured easily. The SRV has become a key piece in Soviet grand strategy in Asia and the Pacific. As a consequence, the Soviet Union will carefully avoid antagonising the SRV so that it can continue to exploit in all tranquillity the big gains it has obtained in Vietnam at so small risks.



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76. - ibid -.

77. Shevardnadze's interview with Nhan Dan, art.cit.