MOSCOW'S SHADOW OVER VIETNAM
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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One assumption about the Soviet Vietnamese relationship that has gained popularity, particularly since Moscow began normalization talks with Beijing, is that Moscow will sacrifice Vietnam's interests. Many observers have been expecting Moscow to pressurize Vietnam to make concessions to China and the ASEAN countries that would bring about a political settlement in Cambodia. Indeed, it must be at Soviet urging that Hanoi has begun a troop withdrawal, which it says will be completed by early 1990. Further, the Soviets must have had a hand in inducing Hanoi and its proxies in Phnom Penh to attend the recent Jakarta Informal Meeting, alongside the Khmer Rouge. Vietnam has also of late attempted to break out of its isolation by assiduously courting the United States and China. But, to infer from all these developments that Hanoi will feel betrayed and will now try to extricate itself from Moscow's grip or that it can be weaned away from Moscow makes light of the factors that bind the two allies. Even if the Cambodian problem were resolved and Vietnam received some aid from the West, it would need to be prepared to meet the perceived Chinese threat with military wherewithal that only like-minded Moscow can provide. As for Moscow, which aspires to be considered an Asia-Pacific power, it is through Vietnam that it has attained a foothold in Southeast Asia where it had none previously. The military facilities at Cam Ranh Bay enable the Soviets to check Chinese influence as well as to force the US navy in what was once virtually an American lake to take Soviet power into consideration. Ton That Thien, who specializes in the study of Vietnamese communism, examines in this report the long record of Soviet-Vietnamese relations from the Lenin years to the Gorbachev era, with a view to understanding both the changes and the continuing features in Moscow's attitudes and policies towards Vietnam and the depth of that relationship.

Introduction

Since the end of the Vietnam War (1975) the Soviet Union has established a permanent, increasingly visible and rapidly expanding military and political presence in Indochina, and has emerged as a major factor in the balance of power in Southeast Asia. In fact, the Soviet Union has become the predominant power of Indochina, and is casting a long shadow over Southeast Asia. It has thus intruded into "*the historical backyard of the Chinese empire, Chinn's natural sphere of influence*"[1] and replaced France and the United States as the new imperial power in Indochina. As a *"social imperialis*t" power seeking to assert its

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presence and expand its influence in the Asia-Pacific area through its hold on Vietnam, it represents a serious problem for all the nations having interests in Southeast Asia.

The establishment of a permanent, visible and expanding presence by the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia after 1975 is no doubt a remarkable development, and especially a rather unexpected one, in view of Moscow's known attitude towards this region in the previous several decades. In a study of Soviet policy towards Southeast Asia (1966) Charles McLane has shown that Moscow had given little attention to this area, that in Soviet eyes the importance of this area was always secondary to Europe's, and as late as 1954, Vietnam was considered "*expendable*"[2] Other authors have likewise stressed the historical fact that Southeast Asia had never been considered by Moscow as a vital area, and that Indochina was viewed "*primarily as a pawn*"; in the years following World War Il, Stalin gave it scant attention because it was "*outside the range of Soviet artillery*",[3] and in the 1960s Moscow used the Vietnamese issue essentially "*as a stick to beat the Chinese*".[4]

By 1986, however, the Soviet Union had acquired in Vietnam "*a full-fledged air and naval base which can support a prolonged, if not a permanent, military presence*" in Southeast Asia,[5] and was proceeding apace with the military, economic, political, and even cultural, integration of Vietnam into the Soviet system. In fact, the Soviet Union has established in Vietnam what amounts to a protectorate, which, in some ways, is more extensive than the protectorate France had once exercised over that country.

The history of the Soviet Union's penetration of Vietnam can be divided into five major periods: (a) the Lenin period, from 1917 to 1924; (b) the Stalin period, from 1924 to 1953, with two sub-periods, namely, 1924-1947 and 1948-1953; (c) the Khrushchev period, from 1954 to 1964; (d) the post-Khrushchev period, from 1964 to the end of the Vietnam War; and (e) the post Vietnam War period.

Part I: Vietnam - A Marginal Concern in Lenin and Stalin's Time

From the success of the Russian revolution and the founding of Communist Russia in 1917 to the death of Lenin in 1924, Vietnam hardly existed for the Soviet leadership. Trotsky made a passing reference to it in a speech at the Founding Congress of the Communist International in March 1919. He said that the workers and peasants of "Annam" (as Vietnam was referred to by the French at that time) and those of Algeria, Bengal; Persia and Armenia "*will obtain the possibility of independent existence only the day when the workers of England and France will have overthrown LIoyd George and Clemenceau and taken state power into their hands*".[6] There was another reference to Vietnam in the Manifesto of the First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East in 1921, in which Indochina was mentioned together with China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Pacific Isles, and the Dutch East Indies.[7]

(A) Lenin: Finding the Appropriate Lever for Vietnam

On the spot, in Indochina, there was some scouting done in 1920. According to an article in *Le Courrier du Vietnam*, in April of that year, the French Ministry of Colonies was alerted by the French consul in Vladivostok about the establishment of an organization in the city with the purpose of setting up

propaganda centers in Shanghai, Saigon and Singapore. 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 on 20 November, two Russians were expelled from the colony"[8]

These Russians, said *Le Courrier*, had come to Saigon *"to bring Marxism-Leninism to our people through the French revolutionaries"*[9]

However, there was no real movement towards the advancement of Soviet interests 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, and this meant finding the man capable of setting up and leading such a party, with all the necessary guarantees expected by the Communist International. It was not until 1924 that such a man was found. The man was Nguyen Ai Quoc, the future Ho Chi Minh. Until his death in 1969, Ho Chi Minh was the most solid, the most powerful and the most effective instrument of Soviet policy in Vietnam, and even after his death, through his thorough indoctrination of his disciples, his influence continued to be felt, that is, Soviet interests in Vietnam continued to be well safeguarded.

The next step after having discovered and trained Ho was to use him for creating the "lever" for the Soviet Union's policy in Vietnam. In December 1924, under the name of Lee Swei, Ho was sent to China to work with the Borodin mission in Canton. His real assignment was to lay the ground for the creation of a communist movement in Indochina. This was accomplished by 1930. In February that year, the Communist Party of Vietnam was founded. (On orders from Moscow the party was renamed the Communist Party of Indochina a few months later.) The following year the party was recognized by the Comintern as an independent section of that body. Until then, and even for many years thereafter, Vietnam was very low in the Soviet Union's priorities.

(B) Stalin Concerned Mainly with China and Japan

Lenin, who died in 1924 without having met Ho Chi Minh, had little to do directly with Vietnam. Lenin was succeeded by Stalin, in whose realist scheme of things Asian meant China, as a potential ally, and Japan, as a potential enemy. Vietnam did not count much. Before 1930, Stalin made but one single passing reference to Indochina, in 1925.[10] In 1930, he made another, in his report to the Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). That was on the occasion of the Yen Bay rebellion. He spoke favorably of this rebellion and commended the Indochinese revolutionaries to the Eastern peoples."[11] There is no known record of his having met Ho Chi Minh before 1950. In the writings of Ho and of the party, there is no mention of any meetings between Ho and Stalin.

As for the Comintern, until the Seventh Congress, it had paid little attention to Vietnam. The records of Comintern congresses and of plenary sessions of its Executive Committee (ECCI) revealed no specific discussion of Indochina other than the report of the Communist Party of Indochina (CPI) delegate to the Sixth Congress (1928), says McLane, and at the Fifth Congress (1924), attended by Ho, "*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*".[12] 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 other areas. Moscow's capacity to cultivate Asian revolutionary movements ... was not unlimited; Indochina's for the present was expendable*",[13]

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 French Communist Party (CPF), as it had been decided at the Second Congress (1920) that the parties of countries having colonies were responsible for guiding the communist movements in those colonies. The CPF was, therefore, responsible for the Indochinese communists. And in 1927, it was prodded by the Comintern to accelerate the creation of a communist party in Indochina. At its creation, the CPI was a section of the CPF, and although it acquired the status of an independent section in 1931, and of a national section in 1935, it remained under the CPF's guidance for almost two decades after its foundation. And, no doubt, the CPI must have also received orders from the Comintern to maintain close contact with the CPF, for in his communications with the party, Ho constantly insisted on this necessity. On the role of the CPF and the Comintern in the Indochinese communist movement, A. Reznikov, a Soviet author, said:

> *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.*[14]

At the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (1935) the CPI was represented for the first time, and its delegate, Le Hong Phong, was elected alternate member of the ECCI. At that same Congress, the CPI was recognized as a national section. Bu this recognition came at a time when the Comintern was embarking on a major shift of strategy as a result of Stalin's decision that fighting the danger of rising fascism was a more urgent task than revolution. The militant "*class against class*" line - united front from below -decided upon at the Sixth Congress in 1928, was dropped in favor of "*United Front*" - that is, united front from above. (Popular Front for the European Parties, and Anti-Imperialist United Front for the Parties in the Colonial Countries).

(C) The Comintern Line after 1935 - Shelving Vietnam's Independence

For Vietnam, adopting the new Comintern line meant shelving its revolutionary aims, both national and social - that is, its independence and radical agrarian reform. But, in full conformity with proletarian internationalist discipline, the newly-recognized CPI dutifully executed the new line laid down by the Comintern, and the latter, directly, through the CPF and through Ho (Nguyen Ai Quoc), saw to it that there would be no leftist deviation.

In the *Le Courtier* article cited above, it was pointed out that on examining the resolutions of the CPI's First Party Congress after his return from Moscow, Le Hong Phong saw that "*certain points did not*

correspond to the resolutions of the Comintern Congress". He, therefore, called for a conference of the Central Committee in Shanghai in July 1936. At this conference, "*after informing the members of the resolutions of the Comintern Congress and of the political report by Dimitrov*", he advocated a "*change of orientation in the strategic direction, a change of tactics, the creation of a broad popular front against the colonial reaction, fascism, and war, and demand for better living conditions and for peace*". The Committee unanimously passed the resolution proposed by him, and this resolution was afterwards "*endorsed*" by the Comintern." [15]

In the survey of fifty years of activities of the CPV (1930-1980), the Central Committee's Commission for the Study of the History of the Party noted that the plenum of the Central Committee 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 of 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 later became the Indochinese Democratic United Front." [16]

During the critical years of 1924-1937, the CPF and the Comintern exercised a strong and direct influence on the strategic and tactical decisions of the CPI. Reznikov noted that in 1937 "*French Communists rendered great help in the movement for organizing a Democratic Front; they sent their representative to Indochina*"; and 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*".[17] These were precisely the tasks which Stalin, via the Comintern, set for the communists of Asia.

With regard to the Comintern's direct action, Reznikov noted that, in 1934, a meeting of several big party organizations with the Foreign Bureau of the CPI (located in Shanghai) was convened, The meeting thought that the greatest danger was rightwing opportunism, but it concluded that the party needed to also campaign against leftist deviation, and "*that reflected the influence of the Comintern Executive whose representatives had worked with party delegates in the Foreign Bureau*"[18] On the CPI's key First Party Congress, which took place in Macao in March 1935, Reznikov noted that "*the CPI had worked in contact with the Comintern Executive*" and "*Comintern members took part in preparing the congress documents*".[19] Up to 1934, said Reznikov, the CPI generally pursued a policy of rallying forces, consolidating ranks, and fortifying local organizations and the 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*".[20]

The Comintern's guidance of the CPI was also - and it should be stressed - particularly exercised through Ho, who was the Comintern agent in Southeast Asia, and its representative to the CPI, two functions that he carried out dutifully throughout his life, before, as after, the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943. Reznikov has noted that it was *"as representative of the Comintern*" that Ho summoned communist delegates to the conference which gave birth to the CPI on 3 February 1930. The Comintern *"emphasized the outstanding services of Ho Chi Minh as founder of the Communist Party of Indochina"*,[21] Moreover, the Comintern rendered its aid to the incipient communist movement in Indochina *"through the good offices of Ho Chi Minh"* and the decisions of the Comintern relating to the activity of communists and the

liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people *"were drafted with his participation and sent to him first of all ".*[22]

A casual reading of the party's official history and of Ho Chi Minh's writings would show that, from the moment he wrote *Duong Cach Minh* (The Road of Revolution) in 1927 for the training of the first communist candidates until the time he made his last recommendations to his party in his Testament in 1969, Ho constantly insisted that the CPV members were obliged to carry out strictly the policies laid down by the Comintern and to absolutely maintain *"the purity of Marxism-Leninism"* and practice *"proletarian internationalism".* [23]

(D) 1935-1945: Moscow Imposes United Front Line

We have dwelt at length on the above facts because a full knowledge of those facts is essential for understanding Soviet policy regarding Vietnam, as well as the policy of Ho and the CPY, in the twelve years (1935-1947) following the Comintern's Seventh Congress. That policy - Stalin's policy - had three major components: defending the Soviet Union, fighting fascism (for Vietnam, that meant fighting the Japanese), and forming a united front with anti-fascist capitalist nations or groups, ignoring temporarily their imperialist or bourgeois character.

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. In fact, it was made possible largely by other factors, in particular by Japan's removal of French rule in Indochina, and by the decision of Admiral Jean Decoux, the Governor-General of the colony, to take the side of Marshall Petain rather than of General de Gaulle in 1940 as well as to accept without opposition the occupation of Indochina by Japan.

Except for a short interruption of 22 months, the united front strategy was to be pursued in Vietnam from 1935 onward, that is, until the proclamation of a new, confrontational *"line*" by Zhdanov in September 1947. The interruption lasted from 23 August 1939, the date of the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, to 21 June 1941, the date of the invasion of the Soviet Union by German troops.

Between 1935 and 1939, the united front benefited the Vietnamese communists enormously as the French authorities, in application of the *"Popular Front"* policy, relaxed their harsh measures against the communists and other revolutionaries in Indochina. But during the period of interruption of the united front strategy, the situation changed. Moscow proclaimed the war an *"imperialist war",* and communists were told to practice *"revolutionary defeatism"* - not only to refuse to participate in the war, but even to take advantage of the situation to work against their governments. For the Vietnamese communists there was no need for a change of strategy because in Indochina the enemy was French imperialism and/ or Japanese fascism. However, there was a change in French policy. As in France, the communist party was outlawed, and communists were mercilessly hunted down by the colonial authorities. This forced many to flee the country and seek refuge in China.

When the Soviet Union was drawn into the war in June 1941, for the Vietnamese communists the situation, and hence their 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. The fascists here remained the Japanese. However, they reaped a fall-out from this policy: they could at the same time fight the French authorities in Indochina, who were considered servants of fascism. This was the result of Admiral Decoux's decision to place Indochina under the authority of the Vichy government instead of that of de Gaulle, and to accept without opposition the occupation of Indochina by the Japanese, that is, to make the French authorities in Indochina de facto enemies of the Allies. In fighting these authorities, the Vietnamese communists could claim to be on the side of the Allies. Moreover, in supporting the Soviet Union, they could also claim that they were supporting the Allied cause.

For the Soviet Union, Indochina thus presented no problem. 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, in fact, not only superfluous, but embarrassing, and it is not surprising that Stalin decided to dissolve it in May 1943.[24] This dissolution did not seem to disturb the Vietnamese communists at all, for in the resolutions of the party in 1943 and thereafter there is no trace of any mention of it.

For the Vietnamese communists, business was as usual, with or without Comintern. So long as Moscow had not announced any new strategy, the strategy adopted by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern continued to apply, even after the dissolution of that organization. The CPV leaders probably viewed this dissolution as a tactical move on the part of Stalin, a move which they themselves were to emulate in November 1945 when, for tactical reasons, they decided to dissolve the CPI.

In August 1945, with the end of the war, the fight against Japanese fascism ceased to be an objective, and problems emerged. One of those problems was the position of the Soviet Union, or of Stalin, in regard to Vietnam. There are two aspects in this position, one theoretical, and one practical.

Theoretically, Stalin's basic view concerning the East (the colonies) was stated in a famous article in November 1918 in *Zhisn Natsionalnostei*, "Don't forget the East". For him the East *"provides inexhaustible reserves and is the most reliable rear base for world imperialism",* and the task of communism was to deprive world imperialism of its most reliable and inexhaustible reserve.[25] This basic idea was completed by a second one, expressed six years later in an interview with the Japanese correspondent Fuste of the *Nichi-Nichi*. In it he said, *"The colonial countries form the basic rear of imperialism";* revolutionization of the East will provide the impetus to touch off the revolutionary crisis in the West. *"Attacked from both sides - from the rear and from the front - imperialism is bound to perish"*. He also rejected the idea of *"Asia for the Asiatics"*.[26]

(E) 1945·1947: Leaving it to the French and Americans

From the practical point of view, however, Stalin was skeptical about the ability of communists to

capture power in the East and in the colonies, especially after the Soviet fiasco in China in 1927. As a cold realist, Stalin thought primarily in terms of Russian security, Russian power, Russian interests, and Russian ability to effectively influence the course of events. The slogan *"socialism in one country*", adopted in 1928, appropriately expressed his approach to international politics. His distrust of and contempt for the Comintern (the *lavotchka* - the boutique) was well known. At the same time, as a practicing Leninist, he was always seeking forms of action best suited to advance the interests of the Soviet Union. Thus, in 1935, and especially after the invasion of his country by the Germans, the appropriate form was united front, and accordingly, in 1941, the Soviet Union joined Great Britain (and the British Empire), Fighting France (and what was left of the French empire) and the United States in a united front against Germany, Italy and Japan.

United Front was still the official policy of the Soviet Union when Japan surrendered in August 1945, and for another two years, Stalin was to continue using it for advancing Soviet interests, especially in Europe. For other communist parties, united front, therefore, remained in force. In Vietnam's case, it explains, for a large part, why Moscow did not intervene, and did not even seem interested, in that country in 1945-1947.

Moscow's indifference towards the Vietnam cause was bitterly deplored by Vietnamese communists. Harold Isaacs, who was in Vietnam in 1945, reported that he spoke to many "*Annamite* Communists", but that none of them thought the Russians would bring strong support to the Vietnamese cause. They said that *"the Russians would be interested in us only if we served some purpose of theirs. Right now, unfortunately, we do not serve any such purpose"*,[27] Ho, too, did not expect Russian aid then, and in his conversations with Major Archimedes Patti, the chief of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Hanoi, he even went so far as to declare that he was a *"free agent"* and did not feel indebted to Moscow. "*I place more reliance on the United States to support Vietnam's independence before I could expect help from the USSR",* he said.[28]

Technically, as well as politically, what Ho Chi Minh said was true. At that time, no aid could be expected from the Soviet Union. One obvious reason for this is that 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 during the war. But another reason, and a much more important one, is that Stalin was more interested in communists gaining power in France than in Vietnam, and Soviet intervention in Vietnam, that is, interference in the internal affairs of France and at the expense of French imperial interests, would damage the French communists' chances of capturing power through the electoral process.

Besides, under Comintern rules, the CPF still had primary responsibility for the CPV.

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 perspectives".*[29] In France, in public statements, as well as private conversations with French and Vietnamese anti-communist personalities, French communist leaders did not hesitate to speak out in favor of keeping Vietnam in the French Union, and to "*make the cannons talk if necessary",* or to *"strike hard blows if we have to come to that".*[30]

Moscow's position regarding Vietnam in 1945-1947 was best stated by Stephane Solosieff, the Soviet representative in Hanoi in 1945. He kept a very low profile, but in conversations with Patti, he made the following points:

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

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

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

(d) 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".*

(e) The Soviet Union would not be able to *"interpose itself in Southeast Asia"* and Soviet interference in Southeast Asia 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." [31]

Since, according to Patti, Solosieff did not seek to disguise his role, and since he had to look after the interests of several hundred Soviet citizens in Vietnam, it should be assumed that he had contacts with Ho and his government, and that the official position of Moscow was well known to the latter.

What Solosieff said was only an elaboration on the position adopted by Stalin in his discussions of the Indochina question with President Roosevelt at the Teheran Conference (November-December 1943). Roosevelt discussed the question of trusteeship with Stalin, and specifically brought up the question of Indochina. Stalin was reported to have *"completely agreed"* with Roosevelt's idea of a trusteeship for Indochina. He found the idea *"excellent".* And excellent it was for Moscow, for earlier, at the Cairo Conference (22-26 November 1943), Roosevelt had envisaged a board of trustees of six to seven members, one of whom would be a Russian (the others being a Frenchmen, one or two Indochinese, a Filipino and an American). During his discussions with Roosevelt at Teheran, Stalin said that the Allies should not shed blood to restore French rule over Indochina; on the other hand, although he thought that Indochina should be independent, he also thought it was *"not yet ready for self- government".*[32]

(F) New Soviet Line, 1947: Confrontation replaces United Front

In 1947, Soviet policy changed. United Front gave way to the "two-camp" confrontational strategy after the stiffening of the attitudes of the Western powers had blocked the expansion of Soviet influence in Eastern as well as Western Europe by the "creeping advance" strategy within the framework of the wartime united front. The new strategy was signaled by the speech given by A. Zhdanov at Wiliza Gora, Poland, in September 1947, on the occasion of the creation of Cominform.

The new confrontational line adopted by Moscow was conveyed to the Southeast Asian communists at the Calcutta Conference of Southeast Asian Youth in February 1948. It was to be the signal for communist armed uprisings all over Southeast Asia in the following years. The CPV, however, in starting armed struggle in December 1946, was one step ahead of others. It was, therefore, cited as an example for other parties, and could now *"bask in Moscow's favor and reap the moral reward of having acted correctly all along".*[33]

The CPV was also one step ahead in discussing the Zhdanov speech. The Central Committee of the party met in mid-January and adopted a resolution on 17 January 1948 - one month before the Calcutta Conference - which set the tasks for the new stage. What is striking about this resolution is the instruction to members to watch the international situation very closely, in particular, *"to be prepared to cope with the manifold changes of the situation"* in China and France because, it said, *"our resistance is subject to the very great influence of the development of the situation in those two countries "*.[34] The reference to China is very significant indeed, for the fate of the Vietnamese revolution depended on what happened in China more than on anything else, including the shift of attitude by Moscow.

This shift was aimed only at harassing and weakening the West. As mentioned earlier, Stalin did not believe that communist parties could seize power in colonial countries or that this could happen in China. In fact, he had more faith in Chiang Kaishek's government than in the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), and was to maintain relations with this government until its total collapse in 1949, carefully abstaining from making statements attacking it, and observing an attitude of ambiguity until after it was clear that the CPC had won decisively.[35] This cautious attitude towards the CPC was not lost on Ho, and it was to have a profound influence on the CPV.

So, although Moscow paid more attention to Vietnam after 1947, and came out to support the Vietnamese revolution, this support was mostly verbal and still rather restrained. The Ho government, proclaimed in September 1945, and recognized by France in March 1946, was still not given any recognition, either de jure or de facto, by Moscow.

Recognition was to be given only on 30 January 1950, almost two weeks after Communist China's recognition (18 January), and especially after it had become clear that the Chinese communists had defeated the Kuomintang decisively. This last point is worth noting, for it is typical of Moscow's behavior in regard to Vietnam. Moscow would normally observe caution and abstain from open and full commitment until after the CPV had emerged a clear winner. This was to be repeated after 1975.

(G) Soviet Support: Verbal

Thus, in 1950, Moscow flew to the support of Vietnam after the Chinese communists had won a decisive victory and established full control over China. But, as pointed out by McLane, this support was still verbal. The real support, in terms of the supply of material and human resources to the Vietnamese communists, was left to China. And it has been generally admitted that it was due to massive Chinese support from 1950 onward that the Vietnamese revolutionaries, who had been cooped up until then in the jungles of northwest Vietnam, could redress the balance of forces, come out of the jungles, go on the offensive, and finally defeat the French in 1954.

Until 1955, there was no record of aid from the Soviet Union to Vietnam, except perhaps Stalin's orders to send Ho Chi Minh half a tonne of quinine on receiving Ho's request for aid, in particular, for arms and ammunition.[36] When Stalin received Ho Chi Minh in Moscow, sometime between 1950 and 1953, it was done in secret, and if Khrushchev had not disclosed it in his memoirs,[37] this meeting would have remained a secret.

Recorded Soviet aid to Vietnam began then after the Geneva peace settlement, that is, after it was clear that there was no more risk of Moscow being involved in any serious confrontation with the West, particularly with the United States. Indeed, from 1951 onward, reducing the risks of a confrontation with the West had been the aim pursued by Stalin. The futility and the costliness of the Korean war, the militant anticommunist mood in the United States, and the development of *"neutralism"* among a number of important Asian and African countries - for which Soviet orientalists had coined the name *"national democratic states"* - had convinced Stalin that armed confrontation was no longer the best form for weakening the West, and that new forms seemed available for that purpose, in particular isolation of the West from the *"Third World".*

All the above was to lead to the Geneva peace settlement and the inauguration of the new strategy of peaceful coexistence. But Stalin did not live long enough to see the logical development of the policy he was searching for. The role of putting out the fire of Indochina and bringing in the era of peaceful coexistence devolved on Khrushchev, who emerged as the successor of Stalin after some jockeying for power in the CPSU. But the Geneva peace accord was to be concluded, as the CPV was to complain bitterly and abrasively, *"on the back of the Vietnamese people".*

The complaint made against the Chinese in the White Book on Vietnam-Chinese relations[38] 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. [39]

Once more, the Vietnamese 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 now was consummated".*[40] Consummated with it also were the aims pursued by the CPV leaders: total independence and unification of the country under their rule. These were sacrificed so that the Soviet Union could prevent the rearmament of Germany through the adoption of the European Defense Treaty by the French Parliament, and so that a military confrontation between the United States and China - into which the Soviet Union would be inexorably drawn - might be avoided. They were sacrificed also to open the way for peaceful coexistence. At Geneva, said McLane, Russian disengagement from the Zhdanov course in Southeast Asia was completed, six years after this course was launched, and, for better or (or worse, *"the lanes were now open for peaceful coexistence".*[41]

Part II: From Khrushchev to Gorbachev - Vietnam Upgraded

For the next four years, and practically until 1960, Khrushchev was to impose peaceful coexistence on

the CPV in his quest for detente, or even entente, with the United States. For the CPV, this meant a freezing of its plans of bringing South Vietnam under its control, 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. But so long as Peking went along with Moscow, there was nothing the CPV could do to evade this predicament. The possibility of escaping from it came with the Sino-Soviet split, which began in 1956 with the announcement by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February of that year that peaceful coexistence and pacific transition to socialism were to be the general line of Soviet foreign policy. This split was to widen increasingly over the years, and enhanced the CPV's chances of pursuing a policy conforming to their wishes.

(A) Khrushchev Imposes Peaceful Coexistence

Chinese opposition to the strategy advocated by Khrushchev and the latter's concessions to the CPC resulted in the acceptance of wordings of the declarations of the 1957 and 1960 World Congresses of Communist Parties permitting the CPV, with the encouragement and support of the CPC, to proceed with a forward policy regarding South Vietnam from 1959 onward. This was to lead to full-fledged war with direct American intervention in Vietnam and the bombing of North Vietnam in 1965.

The story of the Vietnam War does not concern us here, except in so far as it affected Soviet policy. Khrushchev was not in favor of extended armed struggle in the South, which carried the risks of escalation and Soviet involvement. But, with the Chinese backing the DRV and providing an alternative source of aid, the CPV could ignore Khrushchev's opposition. This so angered Khrushchev that in 1964 he threatened to disengage from Vietnam altogether. He expressed his disappointment with the CPV in his memoirs, saying 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 Tsetung 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".*[42]

With Khrushchev's fall in October 1964, Soviet policy, under Brezhnev, 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. All this is well known and needs no elaboration here.

The end of the war brought with it new developments which have led to profound changes in the political and strategic situation in Southeast Asia. These changes, in turn, opened up for the Soviet Union great opportunities for establishing an increasingly visible presence in the region. The final outcome of all that is (a) the emergence of the Soviet Union as a dominant power in Indochina - in fact, as the new imperial power replacing France and the United States and shutting out China, the traditional dominant power of the region; (b) the establishment and rapid expansion of Soviet military

presence in the region; and (c) an interlocking of Soviet and CPV interests so tight that it would make a Vietnamese disengagement from the Soviet fold well nigh impossible, and any hope of seeing the Soviet Union let go of Vietnam voluntarily in any future - short term, medium term, or long term - rather idle. There are local as well as global reasons for this situation.

(B) The China Factor

Locally, there was *"the China factor".* Much of the motivation for Soviet efforts in Southeast Asia since 1969 had been provided by Moscow's rivalry with China, wrote Robert C Horn. This applies to the region as a whole as well as 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".*[43] After having done much before 1975 to whittle down American influence in the area, and especially in Vietnam, now the Soviets were trying hard to prevent the Chinese from moving in and building up their influence there.

To act from a strong position, the Soviet Union needed a firm foothold. Vietnam seemed naturally suited to play 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. Vietnam's importance was upgraded in Moscow's eyes. 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.[44] As Vietnam became embroiled in an armed conflict with its giant neighbor, the CPV needed a countervailing power. That countervailing power could only be the Soviet Union. And Moscow was prompt to seize the opportunity, especially as the attendant risks were small: the United States, still suffering from *"the Vietnam syndrome*", was not likely to react strongly or at all; the Chinese still did not have the operational capabilities to back up their policies; the ASEAN nations, although doing well economically, were militarily no match for the Soviet Union, or even for Vietnam.

There is no need to deal in detail with the Sino-Vietnamese conflict here. It suffices to say that the major causes of this conflict were ideological divergences (China's 180-degree shift of alliance in 1971), the dispute over the delimitation of frontiers, the treatment of the "Hoa" (Chinese residents in Vietnam) by the Vietnamese authorities, and above all, Vietnamese hegemonism in Laos, and especially in Cambodia, and China's firm opposition to it.[45] The conflict led to open war in February 1979, and attempts by China to isolate Vietnam diplomatically and economically in order to *"bleed it white".* This policy, in which ASEAN concurred and cooperated, was very successful. And this, coupled with the possibility that China could always give Vietnam *"a second lesson"* and especially actively help anti-Hanoi Vietnamese rebels, forced Vietnam to seek from the Soviets the help it needed desperately, and for which it had to pay a high price.

The price was allowing the Soviet Union to use air and naval bases in Vietnam, in particular the one the Soviets wanted most for their global naval strategy - the incomparable naval base of Cam Ranh Bay. In May 1975, the Chinese press mentioned the presence of Russian ships at Cam Ranh. In September,

Deng Xiaoping told the former British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, that the Soviet Union wanted a naval base in Vietnam. But it was not until 1979 that Soviet military presence in Vietnam became visible. This followed Vietnam's joining the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) on 28 June 1978, the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on 3 November of the same year, and the *"lesson"* given by China to the Vietnamese following the latter's invasion of Cambodia. As a result of the Chinese *"lesson"* the Soviet Union was able to *"cash in for its military assistance to Vietnam".*[46]

(C) Vietnam's Importance in Soviet Naval Strategy

Soviet ships began using Vietnamese ports in February 1979, when a Soviet tank landing ship (LST) visited Danang. A cruiser moved into Cam Ranh Bay in late March. By the end of the Sino-Vietnamese hostilities in March, some 15 ships were operating in the South China Sea and general purpose submarines were deployed in the area. In addition, Soviet naval aviation began intelligence collection flights in the Gulf of Tonkin with Tu-95 Bear aircraft, first from Vladivostok in February, and then from Vietnamese bases beginning mid-April. [47]

The Soviets expanded their naval presence in Vietnam very rapidly after a secret personal inspection of Cam Ranh base in December 1979 by Admiral S Gorshkov, chief of the Soviet navy, who advocated a *"forward"* naval strategy and the building up of a *"blue water"* navy to permit the Soviet Union to project its power and to defend the socialist community globally. For this the Soviet navy needed a logistic infrastructure, and Cam Ranh Bay fitted nicely into the Soviet scheme. One need not be a naval strategist to imagine the reactions of Admiral Gorshkov when, from the air or the peaks of surrounding hills, he surveyed the huge Cam Ranh Bay, which in 1905 had comfortably accommodated the whole Baltic Fleet (52 ships) of Admiral Rozhdveshensky, There, under his own eyes, was the *"long missing link in Soviet naval strategy"* which would complement Aden, South Yemen, and Cuba, enhance the Soviet air and naval facilities in Southeast Asia, and contribute greatly to the expansion of Soviet sea power in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

From Cam Ranh, it would take Soviet ships only one day, instead of the 20-30 days from Vladivostok, to reach operational areas, and from there Soviet planes can undertake reconnaissance missions over most of the Indian Ocean east of India and in the Pacific as far as Australia and Japan, while long-range strategic bombers can strike at the Philippines, Guam, Midway, deep inside China and ASEAN without refueling. The Soviets can also watch over or disrupt one of the busiest sea lanes of the world through which 120 ships travel on an average day.[48]

Considering that Vietnam, with its unequaled Cam Ranh base, without mentioning Danang and many others, was something the Soviet military have been dreaming to lay their hands on for their strategic deployment in the expansion of Soviet power and influence, the containment of China and protection of Vietnam against attacks by China inevitably lose their primary character. Just for these two latter purposes the Soviets do not need a massive military buildup in Vietnam, and to turn Cam Ranh into

what the Pentagon considers to be *"the largest Soviet naval forward deployment base outside the Soviet Union ".*[49]

The most startling aspect of Soviet-Vietnamese relations in the 1980s, says Papp, is the growth of the USSR's own military capabilities deployed out of Vietnam. Papp gives the following figures to show how fast this growth has been. In September 1982 at least 10 naval vessels, including one attack submarine, one major surface combatant and two minor surface combatants, were using Cam Ranh on a continual basis for refueling and shore leave. In early 1983, 20 ships, including three nuclear attack submarines and the aircraft carrier Minsk were operating out of Cam Ranh. 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, including the assault ship Ivan Rogov and a Kiev class aircraft carrier, conducted amphibious landing exercises on the Vietnamese coast, with 400 men of the Soviet naval infantry and 50 armored cars. By late 1984, 20 to 26 surface ships and 4 submarines were operating out of Cam Ranh Bay. By May 1986, 6 submarines, 3 of which were nuclear, and 20 to 30 surface ships 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. [50]

Not only has Cam Ranh been turned into a naval base and a relay station for Soviet ships moving to and from Vladivostok and Aden, but with floating dry docks, and floating piers, it has also become a repair station for the region. Further, with long range intercept facilities, and satellite and electronic intelligence and communication facilities, it has become the largest intelligence listening post outside the Soviet Union, after Cuba and Aden.[51] As a result, Vietnam has become very important to the Soviets. This explains Moscow's great efforts to integrate Vietnam into the Soviet system.

(D) Vietnam Integrated into Soviet System

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 modernization. A Soviet Military Advisory Mission (SMAM), with 3000-5000 men, 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 of Vietnam's armed forces today are similar to those of the South Vietnamese armed forces in that they are utterly dependent on the Soviet Union as the latter were on the American forces before 1975. Indeed, their position is worse as their need for modernization is greater. The more the Vietnamese armed forces need modernization, the more they are sucked into the Soviet system, for modernization is very expensive, and Vietnam, with its economy in a shambles, just cannot afford it on its own. To quote Papp again, *"the magnitude of Vietnam's reliance on the USSR by 1982 is staggering.*[52] This is true of military as well as economic and other forms of aid.

Soviet economic aid to communist Vietnam, which averaged only US$80 million per year between 1955 and 1960 and US$103.2 million per year between 1961 and 1965, increased substantially to US$180 million per year between 1965 and 1975, and made a big jump after 1975, especially after

1980, as shown by the figures below.

Soviet Economic Aid to Communist Vietnam (in million US dollars)

	1955-1960	1961-1965	1966-1975
Grants	480.00	24.00	303.60
Loans		516.00	1496.40
	480.00	540.00	1800.00
	1976-1980	1981-1985	1986-1990
Grants		267.60	
Interest-free	960.00	720.00	
Loans	840.00	3000.00	10440.00
	1800.00	3987.60	10440.00

Source: "Economic Cooperation with Soviets based on Marxist-Leninist Principles", in Nong Nghiep (Agriculture) Review, Hanoi, 5 November 1987 (JPRS·SEA-aa·005, February 1988). Original figures in roubles were converted at the rate of 1 rouble = US 1 .00.

Thus, Soviet economic aid, which averaged US$360 million per year between 1976 and 1980, doubled to US$797.5 million between 1981 and 1985, and shot up to US$2088 million between 1986 and 1990.

In addition, military aid averaged US$308.2 million per year between 1965 and 1975, US$812 million between 1976 and 1980, and US$1,156 million between 1981 and 1986 (US$3.2 million per day).[53] From Vietnam's viewpoint, these are huge sums indeed, and considering the increasingly hopeless situation in which its leadership has plunged the country, Soviet aid is the pillar on which Vietnam rests at present. Remove that pillar and the whole edifice will collapse. Vietnam is thus leaning very heavily on the Soviets, and this dependency has been made greater by its institutionalization.

The institutional framework which binds Vietnam to the Soviet Union is the result of four basic steps: (a) Vietnam's accession to the CMEA on 27 June 1978; (b) the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed on 3 November 1978; (c) the USSR-Vietnam Long Term Program for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation signed on 31 October 1983; and (d) the Joint Declaration signed by Le Duan and Gorbachev on 28 June 1985. There was also a protocol on the coordination of the state plans of the two countries, signed in July 1981. By these agreements, Vietnam is bound tightly to the Soviet Union economically, and politically, and for a long term.

The recurring terms in all the above agreements are *"coordinating", "joint, "common '', "long term", "intensify", "synchronizing", "identity", "all round"*. The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, says A Volodin, is *"a dynamically developing mechanism of all round cooperation",* and from it springs *"a complex of ties encompassing virtually all aspects".* It makes scientific and technical cooperation *"ever more effective",* and through it the exchange of cultural values acquires *"an intensive nature".*[54] Speaking of Soviet-

Vietnamese scientific and technical cooperation, A Yermalaev says that such a cooperation has reached a "*qualitative new stage''*, and that Vietnamese and Soviet scientists are being bound to *"a common methodological and ideological approach".*[55]

(E) Rider and Horse Relationship

A French official of the colonial period would be gasping at the extent to which Soviet science, technology, methodology, and especially culture, are being pushed on Vietnam, for the process has gone far beyond what the French, in their assimilation drive, had attempted. Unfortunately for the Vietnamese perhaps, as Volodin reports, over 100 Soviet *"prominent experts on economics"* have been sent to help the Vietnamese, and *"hundreds*" of senior Vietnamese officials have been sent to the Soviet Union to learn about economics.[56] This should explain why Vietnam's economy has been in such a shambles in spite of the injection of Soviet aid. Moreover, Vietnam is being locked into a technology that is markedly inferior to that of its non-communist neighbors which have free access to the most up-to-date Western and Japanese machines and training. The gap between Vietnam and its neighbors in terms of living standards, which is already large will thus widen over time. Comparative income per head in 1982 was: Vietnam US$160; Indonesia US$609; Thailand U5$749; Philippines US$731; Malaysia US$1800; Singapore US$5302.[57] Since then income per head in all Southeast Asian countries has kept on rising, while in Vietnam it has continued to decline.

With regard to politics and ideology, the Joint Communique issued on 4 November 1983, on the occasion of the visit of G A Aliyev, member of the Soviet Politburo and First Vice Prime Minister, said that cooperation between the Soviet Union and Vietnam rests on *"identity of views",* and the two parties pledged to continue to develop relations *"at all levels",* to *"intensify the coordination of their actions in the ideological field"*, and to *"deepen further the socialist economic integration".*[58] *"Solidarity and cooperation in every field with the Soviet Union is always the cornerstone of the foreign policy of our Party",* said Le Duan in his political report on the occasion of the Fifth National Congress of the party (March 1982). To be closely united and to cooperate with the Soviet Union is for the party *"a principle, a strategy, and even a revolutionary feeling",* Le Duan continued, and the party must *"educate future Vietnamese generations to hold fast to that principle, understand better and better that strategy, and use it as a powerful moving force..."*[59]

This idea of "cornerstone" has been repeated by the CPV leaders on every major occasion since then, both in Hanoi and Moscow.[60]

As for the Moscow, thanks to its special position in Vietnam, it has been able to establish a solid base in the South China Sea, with vast possibilities of expanding and making its presence felt more and more in Asia and the Pacific. This fits in well with Gorbachev's assertion in his July 1986 Vladivostok speech of a bigger and more active role for the Soviet Union in Ole Asia-Pacific area: *"The Soviet Union is also an Asian and a Pacific country".* [61] That was made possible by Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation. But, as Vo Nhan Tri has pointed out, this is *"cooperation between the rider and the horse",* in which the Soviet Union is the rider, and Vietnam the horse.[62] Vietnam has to accept the role of the horse because, as Nguyen Co

Thach, Vietnam's Foreign Minister, has said: *"Vietnam would be nothing without the Soviet Union",*[63] thus the only real winner in the Vietnam Wars has been the Soviet Union. Without losing one single man in combat, without firing a single shot, without risking a real military confrontation with the United States or China, the Soviet Union has gained a magnificent naval base and a stronger position in the Pacific. Vietnamese, Frenchmen, Americans and Chinese have died to make this possible.

(F) Gorbachev's Dilemma: China and ASEAN, or Vietnam?

The main concern of the Soviet Union regarding Vietnam since 1979 has been the consolidation of its presence in that country and the use of it as a base for the furtherance of the broader goals of Soviet policy in Southeast Asia. This policy, as Leszek Buszyinski has pointed out, has been *"an expression of wider Third World policy which has the aim of gaining advantage against a supposedly antagonistic capitalist world".*[64] This Third World policy was to be carried out in two stages: (a) weakening of Western influence, and (b) socialist constructions".[65]

The achievement of Soviet goals in Southeast Asia required an improvement of relations with the ASEAN countries. But since these countries have been drawn in a confrontation with Vietnam because of the latter's invasion and occupation of Cambodia, and since the Soviet Union has given backing to Vietnam in its expansionism at the expense of Cambodia, any improvement of Soviet relations with the ASEAN countries is conditional upon a withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from that country. This, in turn, can happen only if the Soviet Union exerts pressure on Vietnam.

On the other hand, since the fall of Khrushchev, Soviet leaders - Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, Gorbachev - have all sought to normalize Sino-Soviet relations. This search became more active from 1982 onward, and was given a particularly strong impetus after Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985.[66] Gorbachev has made it quite clear that he wants Sino-Soviet relations to improve *"in a major way".* In particular, he is very keen on having a summit meeting with Chinese leader Deng Xioping. As Igor Rogachev, deputy Foreign Minister in charge of Far Eastern and Asian Affairs, has stressed, it is *"abnormal"* that the Soviet Union and the United States have held multiple summits *"whereas the two big socialist countries have not had any such meeting",*[67] China, however, has insisted since 1979 that real improvement of Sino-Soviet relations is conditional upon the halting of Soviet support for Vietnam in Cambodia, and Moscow's application of pressure on Vietnam to pull out all its troops from that country. Prime Minister Li Peng in his report to the Seventh National People's Congress. on 25 March 1988 said it had "consistently" been China's view that *"the key to a fair and reasonable political solution of the Kampuchean problem is the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese troops at the earliest date".*[68] With regard to the problem of normalization of Sino-Soviet relations, the Chinese are willing to meet with their Soviet counterparts, said Li Peng, but *"with the necessary pre-condition that the Soviet Union stop supporting Viet Nam and its aggression against Kampuchea and urge Viet Nam to withdraw its troops from Kampuchea as soon as possible".* Such actions on the part of the Soviet Union, he said, *"will greatly accelerate"* the process of normalization of Sino-Soviet relations. Here, as with ASEAN, the Soviet Union has found itself in a comer.

The problem for the Soviet Union has boiled down to a very delicate choice between Vietnam, on the one hand, and ASEAN and China, on the other hand. There is a serious conflict here between the commitments made formally to Vietnam and the achievement of broader Soviet strategic objectives which the Soviet Union may consider more important but whose realization depends on the cooperation of Vietnam.

(G) Soviet Commitments to Vietnam

The formal commitments to Vietnam, still standing as of June 1988, include:

(a) An obligation to defend Vietnam against (Chinese) attack, under the Treaty of 3 November 1978.

(b) The assurance by Gorbachev in his Vladivostok speech about the irreversibility of the Cambodian situation, that is, continued support for Vietnam's domination of that country. Gorbachev said that it was *"impermissible"* to force Cambodia to return to its tragic past.[69]

(c) Refusal to exercise pressure on Vietnam to placate China. The normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations, said Gorbachev in the same speech, was *"a sovereign matter of the governments and leadership of both countries".*[70]

(d) No accommodation of China at the expense of Vietnam. This pledge was made by Yegor Ligachev at the Sixth CPV Congress in December 1986. Ligachev declared that the Soviet Union wanted to develop relations with China *"on a principled basis, without damage to the interests of other countries".*[71] At a press conference, he was more specific. The Soviet Union, he said, would not develop relations with China *"at the expense of any country's interests, and not at Socialist Vietnam's expense".*[72]

(e) Protection of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and support for their alliance.

This pledge was made to Nguyen Van Linh, General Secretary of the CPV, in May 1987, on the occasion of the latter's visit to Moscow. The joint statement issued on that occasion said that the Soviet Union would *"invariably"* support the efforts by Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos *"to lay the foundation of socialism, protect the independence and national sovereignty of their countries and strengthen their fraternal alliance and all-round cooperation".*[73]

With regard to China, Moscow has stepped up its diplomatic overtures since Gorbachev took over the helm. The aim of this offensive is to wean China away from the United States and stop it from moving further towards a strategic relationship with this country, and even to draw China back into the socialist camp. This is part of the strategy of isolating and weakening the United States in the world.

Achieving the broader Soviet strategic aim requires a parallel approach to ASEAN to induce the countries of this group to distance themselves from the United States, as well as from China, to

have closer relations with Moscow, and to accept a Soviet presence and role in the security system of the region. Since 1986, the Soviet Union has called for the establishment of such a system of collective security. And, since Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech, the call for this collective security has become much louder. It is, as Buszyinski has pointed out, the *"vehicle"* of a policy aimed at forging links with the region *"in an effort to undermine the American presence and to construct political barriers against the expected assertion of Chinese influence".*[74]

However, so long as Vietnam continues to display aggressiveness and expansionist designs at the expense of its neighbors, and so long as the Soviet Union is perceived as Vietnam's backer and partner, whose massive economic and military aid has made it possible for Vietnam to persist in pursuing those designs, Moscow can make little headway in its efforts to establish closer relations with these countries. Moscow faces a serious dilemma here. Vietnam constitutes a major obstacle to Soviet efforts to achieve broader, longer term goals - that is, improving relations with China and ASEAN. Will the Soviet Union sacrifice Vietnam for the achievement of these goals?

Part III: Vietnam - An Instrument of Soviet Policy

The history of the Soviet Union's relations with Vietnam, which has been examined earlier in this study, shows clearly that Moscow has essentially viewed Vietnam as an instrument of its policy, and that each time the Soviet leaders considered that there were Soviet interests more important than Vietnamese interests at stake, then the latter had to yield. Discussions and arguments were, of course, permissible. But, in the end, the views of the CPSU, and more particularly, the views of the leaders of the CPSU, must prevail, in the higher and long term interests of world communism. After all, that is the essence of Leninism and of democratic centralism at the international level of the communist movement. That is pure Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism to which the CPV leaders have repeatedly proclaimed their "*fidelity*".

(A) Vietnam's Leninism Solves Moscow's Dilemma

When one examines the CPV's behavior since its foundation in 1930, one is struck by an interesting fact: although Stalin had officially dissolved the Communist International in 1943, for the CPV this organization seems to have never ceased to exist. This has provided Moscow with a convenient way out of its present dilemma regarding Vietnam and the region for it does not have to impose, or appear to impose, its will on the CPV; Vietnam toes the Soviet line <u>on its OWN.</u> Vietnam has become a willing instrument of Soviet policy for ideological and practical reasons.

Ideologically, the CPV has taken pride in always being a *"pure"* Marxist-Leninist party.

This is, no doubt, a result of Ho Chi Minh's influence. Since the days when he held the first course in communism for the first communist cell in Canton in 1925 until his death in 1969, Ho never tired of

insisting that the CPV must remain a truly Marxist-Leninist party. In several of his writings, Ho stressed that as early as 1920, he had absolute faith in Lenin and Leninism. This means two things: (a) as a good Leninist party, the CPV must always place the interests of the international communist movement above its own interests; and (b) the CPV must always accept the leadership of the CPSU. The leaders of the CPV have affirmed that this is what they had done before 1975, and intend to continue doing in the present and in the future.

At the CPV's Fifth National Congress (March 1982), Le Duan stressed that the party had always practiced the *"Leninist foreign policy"* advocated by Ho, and that such policy was *"an integral part of the strategy and tactics"* of the party *"at all stages of development of the Vietnamese revolution".*[75] And, at the Sixth Congress (December 1986), Nguyen Van Linh, Le Duan's successor, reiterated the *"fidelity"* of the party to Marxism-Leninism; he also pledged to *"reinforce the solidarity of the international communist and workers' movement on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism",* and to *"fully support the domestic and foreign policies adopted by the Twenty-Seventh Congress of the CPSU".*[76] The "cornerstone" aspect of Vietnam's foreign policy has already been referred to. Here it should be added that this idea can be traced back to Ho. Writing on the anniversary of the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution, Nguyen Co Thach pledged *"to remain forever loyal to the policy of close solidarity and cooperation with the Soviet Union"* and said the CPV was acting *"upon the teachings of Ho Chi Minh".*[77]

(B) Practical Considerations

From the practical point of view, too, Vietnam is tightly bound to the Soviet Union and has little room for maneuver. The shield Vietnam has been using to deflect the Chinese attacks was provided by the Soviet Union; likewise, the sword it has been wielding in Cambodia was also provided by the Soviet Union.[78] It is obvious that without this shield and this sword, Vietnam cannot carry out a sustained confrontation with China and ASEAN over Cambodia.

Even if Vietnam no longer needs massive Soviet military aid as a result of a settlement of the Cambodian conflict, it would still be tied to the Soviet Union because it would still need massive Soviet economic aid. Vietnam's economy has not stopped deteriorating spectacularly. Nguyen Van Linh, elected three years ago to stop this deterioration, has recently admitted publicly that Vietnam's economy has "*collapsed"*,[79] Even the army organ, *Quan Do; Nhan Dan*, has admitted that it is *"definitely true"* that *"Vietnam can only develop its economy with the cooperation and assistance from the Soviet Union and other fraternal socialist countries"* (underline *"only"*).[80] If the Soviets were to pull out completely from Vietnam because the latter, as a result of a fit of bad temper, demanded the evacuation of Soviet forces from Cam Ranh Bay and other naval and air bases, Vietnam would be left with a gaping financial hole of over US$9 billion (not including military aid), and hundreds of uncompleted projects, and there is little hope that the CPV leaders will be able to stop the rot in the economy. It is difficult to imagine that the United States or other Western countries will, or can, rush in to fill such a gap at short notice, Even if they did agree to give substantial aid to Vietnam, they would also demand that Vietnam withdraw its troops from Cambodia. Vietnam will have gained practically nothing. On the contrary, it

will have a great deal to lose, for a total Soviet pullout would mean the collapse not only of the Vietnamese economy, but also, and especially, of the Vietnamese armed forces. In addition to ideological considerations, it is difficult to imagine that the Vietnamese military, which wields great influence in the CPV's Central Committee and Politburo, would accept such a self-destruction. The Soviet Union's leverage is, therefore, very strong.

There have been reports recently of friction between Hanoi and Moscow, of Soviet pressure on Vietnam to make concessions to China and the ASEAN countries on Cambodia, and of Vietnam's seeking a rapprochement with China and the United States. These reports were followed by news that the Vietnamese National Assembly had voted to delete from the preamble of Vietnam's Constitution the hostile references to China and the United States.[81] This has been interpreted as a move to appease the two countries as well as to clear the way for American aid to counterbalance a halting or drastic reduction of Soviet aid in case Vietnam does not toe the Soviet line. This interpretation is based on a precedent: Moscow had refused to make firm commitments for the financing of Vietnam's Third Five-Year Plan (1981-1985) until 1983, although as early as 1981 Vietnam was already in a desperate situation following the cessation of all Chinese aid, as well as the suspension of aid from non-communist countries as a result of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. The Soviet Union withheld aid apparently in order to force the Vietnamese to support its policy of normalization of Sino-Soviet relations.

(C) Convergence of Soviet and Vietnamese Views

Since 1983, however, the situation has changed considerably, and the above moves should be considered as part of helping Moscow in *glasnost* and *perestroika*, on the one hand, and getting American aid to complement (not substitute) Soviet aid and persuading China to relax hostilities with Vietnam, on the other hand. As mentioned earlier, the CPV leadership has pledged to give *"full support"* to the domestic and foreign policies adopted by the Twenty-Seventh CPSU Congress. This pledge was conveyed to Gorbachev by Nguyen Van Linh during their meeting in Moscow on 17-22 May 1987, a meeting which was a decisive event not only for the Soviet Union and Vietnam, but for Southeast Asia as well. Much of what has happened recently in Southeast Asia, particularly with regard to Cambodia, can be traced back to that meeting. Contrary to the popular view, Soviet and Vietnamese policies have been not on a collision, but on a convergence course. One need only examine carefully the Soviet-Vietnamese joint statement of 22 May 1987, the article by Nguyen Co Thach on the occasion of the October Revolution that was cited above, and Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's interview with *Nhan Dan* on 15 March 1987 to be convinced that beliefs in Soviet *"pressure"* on Vietnam, in Vietnam being *"forced"* out of Cambodia are sheer delusions.[82]

The Soviet-Vietnamese joint statement of 22 May 1987, for example, stressed *"the common approaches of the CPSU and the CPV to pressing questions of economic reconstruction and international politics"* and added that the Soviet Union *"supports the resourceful policy of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea"* and that the Soviet Union and Vietnam *"are at one"* with the national reconciliation policy of the government of

the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Further, the Soviet Union, it said, *"invariably supports"* efforts by Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia *"to protect the independence and national sovereignty of their countries and strengthen their fraternal alliance and all-round cooperation".* (Emphasis added.)

On Moscow's part, the military facilities it has acquired at Cam Ranh Bay give it a presence in an area where it had none before. Such a presence is necessary for it to assert the kind of role that Gorbachev sought in his Vladivostok address.

The reality thus is that Vietnam's recent moves regarding Cambodia, in particular its announcement of a withdrawal from Cambodia and its participation in the inconclusive *"cocktail party"* in Bogor, Indonesia, are the result of a coordination between Hanoi-Vientiane-Phnom Penh and Moscow and their conviction that Vietnam ought to turn its attention more to economic problems at home. They reflect both Moscow's and Hanoi's desire for a period of detente in order to strengthen themselves domestically. The CPV leaders feel the need to settle the Cambodian problem because of the country's dire economic problems. They must redress the desperate situation in order to strengthen the party and regain popularity, as Truong Chinh explained at the CPV's Sixth National Congress.[83] In an article in *Tap Chi Khoi San* in May 1987, Phan Doan gave the real reason behind the current Vietnamese peace offensive. He said, "*in the coming 10-15 years concentrate on rebuilding the country after so many years of war".* And, adding a Gorbachevian note to it, he said that the background of peace *"requires us to renovate our thinking"* about national security and how to safe guard it. The best way for it, he said, would be *"to tie it to the system of world security, especially in the Asian-Pacific region and in Southeast Asia",* and this could be done by *"increasing our contribution to the joint struggle of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries..."* [84] We are thus back to Vladivostok, *glasnost*, *perestroika*, and Lenin.

Conclusion

So, the CPV's choice is the same as what it has always been: turning to the Soviet Union, aligning its policy on that of the Soviet Union. The Soviet-Vietnamese relationship remains a rider-horse relationship in which the Soviet Union is always the rider. At present, under Gorbachev, the CPV has taken great care to stress that the objectives as well as the style adopted by the Sixth National Congress of the CPV followed from the decisions of the Twenty-Seventh Congress of the CPSU and from Gorbachev's *"famous initiative"* in Vladivostok.[85] As Nguyen Co Thach has put it, the Soviet Union is for the CPV *"the trail blazer pointing the way to socialism and communism".*[86] In his speech on the anniversary of the October Revolution on 2 November 1987, Gorbachev, with obvious nostalgia, recalled the Third Communist international, saying, although the time of the Comintern was over, *"the world communist movement lives on".* He also added that *"the new way of thinking"* should begin by posing some tough questions, *"of course, tackling them from the Leninist positions and using Leninist methodology".*[87] The CPV leaders would certainly agree with this statement, because, as mentioned earlier, for them, the Comintern has never ceased to exist and Leninism is as valid as ever.

This situation is the logical result of the "correct" application - in the Leninist/Bolshevik sense - of "pure" Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism. Primary responsibility for this situation does not lie so much with the Soviets as with Ho Chi Minh and his followers, who have striven very hard all their lives to be really "true" Marxist-Leninists and proletarian internationalists - and taken very great pride in it. Moscow has only taken advantage of the blinding passion of the CPV leaders to spread its shadow wide over Vietnam. And it has done very well indeed.

NOTES

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1. Bhebani Sen Gupta. *Soviet Asian Relations in the 1970s and Beyond* (New York: Praeger. 1976). p. 206.

2. Charles B McLane. *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia. An Exploration of Esteem Policy under Lenin and Stalin*(Princeton: Princeton University Press). 1966. p. 473.

3. Donald S Zagoria, *Vietnam Triangle: Moscow, Peking, Hanoi* (Pegasus New York, 1967), pp. 35-36.

4. Robin Edmonds, *Soviet Foreign Policy, The Brezhnev Years* (Oxford: Ox/Old University Press. 1980). p. 46.

5. Thai Quang Trung, "The Moscow-Hanoi Axis and the Soviet Military Build Up in Southeast Asia". in *Indochina Report*, No 8, October 1986, (Singapore: Information & Resource Center). p. 23.

6.Quoted in McLane, *op. cit*., p. 8

7. Text in Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert C North. *Soviet Russia and the East 1920-1927* (Stanford Stanford University Press, 1957). p. 230.

8. *L'lnternationale Communiste et la Revolution Indochinoise*" (on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Comintern), *Le Courrier du Vietnam* (Hanoi). No 4, 1984.

9. *ibid. Antonikovski was to play an important role in the recognition of the CPI by the Executive Committee of the Comintern in 1931. The recognition was based on a report of which he was a co-author.*

10 .McLane, *op. cit*., p. 106.

11. McLane, op. cit., p. 149. Yen Bay was the rebellion against the French colonial authorities in Indochina in February 1930 by the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang Party or VNQDD (Vietnamese Kuomintang). It failed and was followed by very harsh repressions by the French authorities. The VNQDD was practically annihilated. thus clearing the way for the communists.

12 . *ibid.,* p. 105

13 .*ibid*., p. 107

14 . A Reznikov, *The Comintern and the East, Strategy and Tactics* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), pp. 177- 178.

15 . L'Internationale Communiste et Ia Revolution Indochinoise", *Le Courrier du Vietnam* (Hanoi), No 4, 1984.

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17 . Reznikov, op. cit., p. 180.

18 . *ibid.,* p. 176.

19 . *ibid.,* p. 174.

20 . *ibid*.

21 . *ibid.,* p. 169.

22 . *ibid.,* p. 167.

23 . See *Lich Su Dang Cong San Viet Nam*, Documents (History of the Communist Party, Documents), in Vietnamese, in three volumes, (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Khoa, 1979); and Ho Chi Minh, Toan Tap (Complete Works) in Vietnamese, four volumes (to 1947), (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1980 to 1984); Tuyen Tap (Selected Works), two volumes, 1920 to 1969, in Vietnamese, (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1980); President Ho Chi Minh's Testament (Hanoi: Foreign languages Publishing House, 1969).

24 . On the dissolution of the Comintern, see Monique Desanti, *L'Internationale communiste* (Paris: Payot, 1970); Pierre Frank, Histoire de l'Internationale communiste, 1919-1943 (Paris: Editions de la Breche, 1979).

25 . Text in Eudin and North, op. cit., p. 156.

26 . *ibid.,* pp. 336-337.

27 . Harold Isaacs, *No Peace for Asia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1967 (1947). pp. 146-147.

28 . Archimedes L. Patti, *Why Viet Nam*? (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 372.

29 . Isaacs, *op. cit*., p. 173.

30 . See Bernard Fall, "The French Communists and Indochina", (Chapter 2), in *Vietnam Witness*, 1953·1966 (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), pp. 23 and ff.; Jean Sainteny, *Histoire d'une paix manquee, Indochine 1945-1947* ; (Paris: Amiot Dumont, 1953); (Admiral) Thierry d'Argenlieu, *Chronique d'indochine, 1945-1947* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985).

31 . Patti, *op. cit*.,p.179.

32 . Edward R Drachman, *United States: Policy toward Vietnam, 1940- 1945* (Rutherford, Madison, Teanech, Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970), pp. 47-50.

33 . J H Brimmel, *Communism in Southeast Asia*, *A Political Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 263.

34. *Lich Su Dang Cong San Viet Nam* (History of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Documents), Vol. II, (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Khoa Mac Lenin, 1979), p. 171.

35 . See K C Chen, *Vietnam and China 1938-1954*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 198 and ff.

36 . N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1970), p. 481.

37 . *ibid*.

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39. On the Geneva Conference, see Jean Lacouture at Philippe Devillers*, La fin d'une guerre, Indochine, 1954* (Seuil, Paris, 1960); Franchois Joyaux, *La Chine et Ie premier reglement du premier conflit d'Indochine* (Paris: Publications de Ia Sorbonne, 1979); Robert F Randle, *Geneva 1954,The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

40 . McLane, *op. cit.,* p. 473.

41 . *ibid.*, p. 464.

42 . Khrushchev, *op. cit.,* p. 486.

43 . Robert C. Horn, in Sundershan Chawla, Melvin Gurtov and Alain-Gerard Marsot, *Southeast Asia under the New Balance of Power* (New York: Praeger, 1974), pp. 46 and 48.

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47 . *ibid*.

48 . These data are from Thai Quang Trung, *art. cit*., pp. 25-27.

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