CHAPTER III

LIBERATION AND UNIFICATION OF VIETNAM
AND CHINA'S RESPONSE
Liberation and Unification of Vietnam and China's Response

In July 1954 Vietnam was temporarily bifurcated by France into North and South, the North Communist and the South Republic. A referendum was to be held in 1956 on the question of unification of these two parts but the referendum could not be held. Neither was the ruler of South Vietnam concerned about the popular opinion in his country, nor were the western powers interested in Vietnam's unification. The Chinese, though they were comrades of the Vietnamese against the United States also disfavoured unification.

The present century has been witness to a number of wars, revolutions, national liberation movements and sporadic clashes, but none has been more prolonged, more bloody and more costly than the one waged by the Vietnamese people. Whether it was the successive dynasties of the feudal regimes of China or Mongol barbarians moving southwards during the Second World War; the democratic Americans seeking to preserve a free world in the postwar period or lately the Chinese expansionists seeking to teach a lesson to the upstart and ingrate Vietnamese Communists of the region - the Vietnamese
people have faced them all—often enough with arms in hand.¹

Before the Second World War, the whole of Indochina was a private domain of the French. In Vietnam, colonization proceeded rapidly, its several aspects manifested the motivations of the different factions in French colonialism. Missionary groups of the powerful Roman Catholic Church wished to spread the gospel among the heathen. Merchants and financiers sought to profit from the exploitation of the abundant natural resources. Ambitious politicians and administrators aspired to leave the footprints of France in a backward civilization to attain their various objectives. The French assumed full control of Vietnam’s political system, refashioned its commercial and economic structure and sought to destroy the old society.²

French rule created a new social structure in Vietnam. Those who benefited from the colonial dispensation included the large landowners and a small, mainly foreign, upper class of capitalists.

As a result of economic development, a small middle class also emerged. At the bottom of the pyramid were those exploited by the first groups—the landless tenants and an emergent working class composed of minors, plantation workers and industrial labourers. Somewhere apart from the other groups was a comparatively large intelligentsia", a disillusioned elite, ready to provide recruits for factories opposed to the colonial regime. The native struggle against the French rule altered significantly over the years. What began as a movement to reinstate the old Confucian system was transformed into a demand for drastic changes within Vietnamese society. Conflict ensued not only between the French and the nationalists but also amongst the traditionalists and the revolutionaries within the nationalist forces. When the traditionalists had shot their bolt, the reformists like Phen Bal Chan and Phan Chau Trinh took over and faced severe repression by the French. After the failure of the traditionalists and the reformists, the revolutionaries led by Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) took over the reins of the


anti-French struggle. A patriot and a Marxist, Ho Chi Minh formed the Vietnamese communist party in February 1930, and the Indochinese Communist Party subsequently the same year. The economic reform programme of the party soon endeared it to the peasants and the working classes which was amply reflected in the massive Nghe An rebellion. 5

The Nghe An experience showed the Communists the necessity of raising the revolutionary consciousness of peasants throughout Vietnam. "The French, it appeared, could be ousted if only the rural population were mobilized on the side of an armed independence movement." 6 In 1941, Nguyen Ai Quoc founded the League for Vietnamese Independence (Vietnam Duc Lap Dong Minh) which soon became famous as the Vietminh. The Vietminh was to be a forum for all nationalist forces, communist and non-communist, to fight the Nazis and the Japanese. However, Japan itself fell in August 1945 and taking advantage of the situation, the Vietminh formed a National Liberation Committee which was


like a provisional government headed by Ho Chi Minh. He was now looking for international acceptance of his government. But this was not to be. Roosevelt's death and British obstinacy in not allowing Ho Chi Minh to run his country resulted in the return of the French to Indochina. The Potsdam Conference sealed the fate of the Vietminh for the time being. The conference provided that pending a final settlement Indochina should be divided along the 16th Parallel. China was to control the northern part while the South came under British jurisdiction. The British restored the South to the French.

The Vietminh could have easily established themselves in the North but for the presence of the Chinese troops and the members of the VNQDD and the Dong Minh Mei. Hanoi was divided between the Vietminh forces and pro-Chinese forces. In the south the Vietminh continued to launch sporadic guerrilla attacks on the French bases. Forming a coalition ministry, in March 1946, Ho signed an agreement with the French, allowing the latter to

send troops to Hanoi to replace the Chinese in exchange for French recognition of the DRV as "a free state having its own government, its own parliament, and its own finances, and forming part of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union."8 This agreement settled nothing but was only a time-buying tactic to regain strength by the Vietminh. Moreover, it was a ploy of Ho to get rid of the Chinese. He is reported to have said, "It's better to sniff the French dung for a while than to eat China's all our lives."

However, the rift between the French and the Vietminh was reaching a point of no return. On 1 July 1946, they even announced the creation of an autonomous Republic of Cochin-China. And on 23 November a French cruiser bombed the Vietnamese quarter of Haiphong killing over 6,000 persons. That became a signal for the outbreak of general hostilities between the Vietminh and the French. The first Indochina War (1946-1954) was on throughout Vietnam. The

8. Ibid., p.886.
French were faced with a very formidable enemy. The French forces were shaping up poorly. But what changed the scenario at this juncture was the success of the Communists in China which sent panic throughout the western world. Filled into the cold war sketch, the Communist victory in China looked very threatening to the West, especially to the United States which over-reacted and saw China as a greater menace than it was. To the westerners the whole of South East Asia seemed threatened by the Communists and to describe this phenomenon they invented the Domino Theory. Military and financial aid was handed out to the French to fight the Vietminh which now looked "Red" to America with its newly acquired glasses. However, the massive American aid could not tilt the battle in favour of France, the morale of whose forces had reached the lowest ebb. The British had withdrawn from India and Burma and the Dutch from Indonesia. The French could smell defeat in the air but still decided to have a major showdown at Dien Bien Phu in the spring of 1954, grossly underestimating General Giap's strategic acumen. Dien Bien Phu was besieged, its
garrison decimated, the airfield destroyed and escape blocked. The French requested for American intervention who were willing for it only with British participation. The British declined and on 7 May 1954 Giap registered his greatest triumph, just on the eve of the Geneva Conference on Indochina.

The Geneva Conference was convened because the Vietminh could not be defeated. Had there been any hope of a military victory, the French would have rejected negotiation.9 The Geneva settlement of 1954 temporarily divided Vietnam along the 17th Parallel into two zones; the question of reunification was to be decided by a nation-wide election in 1956. Ho Chi Minh agreed to this settlement under pressure from the PRC. The Russians too played a role similar to that of China at Geneva.

The Geneva Conference ushered in a new era of struggle for the Vietnamese people, the only difference being that this time they were faced

9. Hugh Higgins, n.6, p.27.
with an aggressor many times more powerful than the French. To quote Ho Chi Minh, "at this moment American imperialism, the principal enemy of the peoples of the world, is becoming the direct principal enemy of the peoples of Indochina, that is why all our actions must be aimed at this one enemy." The American policy towards Vietnam was principally governed by the doctrine of containment of Communism: The formation of SEATO through the Manila Pact in 1954 signalled the resumption of the cold war in South East Asia. The Manila Pact and particularly the U.S. policy in Vietnam, in the years following Geneva aggravated tensions and frustrated the Vietnamese people's yearnings for a peaceful reunification of their country.

The French had appointed Ngo Dinh Diem as the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam in the south. Diem succeeded in crushing the initial resistance to his regime with French and American assistance. In 1955, through rigged elections, he replaced Bao Dai as the Chief of State. With the

support of America and thirty-five other countries the Republic of Vietnam became, by late 1955, an independent member of the international community. On the other hand North Vietnam lacked any countervailing support from China or the USSR and was a helpless spectator to Diem's intrasigence. Domestically, Diem's regime was based upon brute force and his family had firmly entrenched itself in all the chief administrative posts. A coup attempt in 1960 was crushed. 11 Subsequently the National Liberation Front was formed in South Vietnam the same year. Though the NLF received organizational and material support from Hanoi, the initial stimulant was undoubtedly southern. Diem ultimately fell on account of the Buddhist crisis which exposed his excesses to the world. The United States could see the pitfalls of its policy but still feigned blindness. 12 Diem was overthrown in November 1963 by his Army generals. Diem's successors were, if anything, only worse than him.

Meanwhile, in the North, the Ho Chi Minh administration was doing a commendable job after

certain initial lapses. The main emphasis was
given to agricultural and industrial development.
Politically, the Vietminh was in full control of
DRV unlike Diem in the South. It was these
achievements which endeared Ho to the souther-
ners, so much so that Eisenhower in his memoirs
remarked that if elections had been held, 80 per
cent of the people would have voted for Ho Chi
Minh. His popularity helped the NLF in gaining
grounds in the southern villages. In 1964, the
U.S. Department of Defence estimated that the
South Vietnamese Government controlled only 34 per
cent of the villages as against the NLF's control
of 42 per cent with the loyalties of the rest
being contested. Both Saigon and Washington
attributed this to Hanoi influence.

The United States was desperately looking
for a pretext to intervene directly and stem the
tide in its favour. The Kennedy administration
continued to look upon the Vietnam crisis as a
cold war tussle and stepped up military aid.
Kennedy was a prisoner of his own dilemma. With
Kennedy's death, the Vietnam war became the res-
ponsibility of Lyndon Johnson. "The choice for
the U.S. in Vietnam was between unattainable victory and unacceptable defeat." It was a mistake to think that a viable state could be built in South Vietnam without the requisite political support. It was a blunder on the part of the United States to take over the war. It was again a folly to fit the Vietnamese struggle in the cold war politics. To the Vietnamese their country's interest was paramount at all times. The direct intervention by the United States after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, further aggravated the situation for the Americans and their South Vietnamese ally. Operation Rolling Thunder was launched on a massive scale but it too failed dismally. The financial and human cost of the war was mounting each day.

Opposition to the war rose to enormous proportions in America by 1967 on college campuses as well as in governmental circles. McNamara resigned as Defence Secretary in disgust, so did his successor Clark Clifford. The economic burden of the war was telling upon the Americans.

The Tet offensive in 1968 by the NLF proved that the liberation forces could not be suppressed. But the realization dawned too late on Johnson.

Nixon was the next man in, with Kissinger as his left hand. Under the new administration the United States was interested in getting out of Vietnam but without abandoning the objective of sustaining an independent South Vietnam. Nixon and his lieutenants believed that an American withdrawal with a guarantee that the Saigon regime would not be overthrown by the Communists could be achieved. This was the promise of the ensuing negotiations for peace, and the policy of "Vietnamization" of the war.

The Guam Doctrine of 1969 was meant to reduce the U.S. role in Vietnam-like situations in future. Another aspect of the new policy was rapprochement with China. Beijing's own interest in keeping Vietnam divided suited its traditional policy of keeping its neighbours weak. Besides, China was extremely unhappy with the manner in which Hanoi had discarded Beijing and come to rely increasingly upon Soviet aid. The Sino-American alliance was a classic example of the dictum that
"my enemy's enemy is my friend." China had to settle scores not only with Hanoi but also with Moscow. Nixon's visit to Beijing in February 1972, and to Moscow in May the same year, were among other things designed to exert pressure on Hanoi to agree to peace terms that were viewed as honourable in the United States.

American policy-makers envisaged that more bloodshed was required before their plan for "gradual withdrawal" could be achieved. Accordingly, aerial bombing of North and South Vietnam was intensified. Between 1969 and 1971, the United States Air Force dropped 2,539,743 million tons of bombs in Indochina - more than the total tonnage expended by Americans during the Second World War. Nixon also ordered an incursion into Laos by a battalion of Marines. The South Vietnamese army was reinforced on a massive scale with Washington supplying it with all the latest arms. But these attempts further alienated the people and increased the Vietcong's strength. In 1970, the United States

even invaded Kampuchea to destroy the NLF and Vietminh sanctuaries. The deposition of Sihanouk in 1970 was a part of this plan. In spite of all this pressure, Washington could not subdue the Vietnamese resistance movement.

As in Geneva, the failure of the battlefield forced the aggressor to the negotiating table. The Paris Peace Agreements of 1973 provided for a ceasefire in Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea withdrawal of American troops, return of the prisoners of war, a ceasefire in place without demarcation lines. The reunification was to be carried out step by step through peaceful means. The people of South Vietnam were given the right to choose between the Thieu government and the Provisional Revolutionary Government. The United States could hardly secure anything for Thieu except certain assurances. There was no provision securing the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from the South. "It looked as if the Paris Agreements of 1973, like the Geneva Accords of 1954, had merely transferred the struggle from military to the political plane."

Fighting continued in South Vietnam with the
odds mounting heavily against Thieu, whose rule was marked by corruption, graft and mismanagement. The War Power Resolution of July 1973 had drastically reduced the U.S. President's authority to use troops without the approval of the Congress and Congress refused to aid South Vietnam militarily. In this situation of internal instability in Saigon and the lessening U.S. support for that regime Hanoi decided once again to resume the military offensive. The onslaught commenced on 10 March 1975. Saigon was occupied on 30 April 1975 and was appropriately rechristened as Ho Chi Minh City. The formal reunification took place in 1976 with Hanoi as capital. 15

China's Response to Vietnam's Unification

With the Communist victory in South Vietnam and Kampuchea in spring 1975 and the silent revolution that pushed Laos fully into the Communist orbit in December that year, the strategic political balance seemed suddenly to have improved in favour of the Communist world. After the immediate

period of panic and grave apprehension ASEAN states were more relaxed that there would be a long breathing spell before the new Communist states would be ready or willing actively to assist the fraternal communist movements in other states of South East Asia. Hardly anyone, not even in the non-communist world could have expected such fissures to develop among the new Communist states as would provoke large-scale interstate warfare culminating in Vietnam's "blitzkrieg" into Kampuchea at the end of 1978 and the Chinese march across their southern border in February-March 1979.

China certainly was not happy with the end of the war in South Vietnam, and the reunification of Vietnam. Traditionally, China has regarded the emergence of strong states on its borders as a threat to its security. China was further distressed to note Hanoi's ambition to dominate Laos and Kampuchea and to assist fraternal Communist parties in the rest of South East Asia, traditionally an area of Chinese political influence. Vietnam needed to be reverted to the historical role of China's "Vassal" state; the Chinese leadership
therefore insisted that Hanoi join them in condemning the Soviet Union for "hegemonism". When Le Duan, Secretary General of the Vietnamese Lao Dong Party visited Beijing in October 1975 to seek economic aid for reconstruction, China made any further aid conditional on Vietnam on this matter condemning Soviet "hegemonism". China's pressure on Vietnam continued until 1977. During this period there was a steady deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations. The three specific issues, apparently on account of which this deterioration took place were: the offshore islands, the expulsion of Vietnamese of ethnic Chinese origin and border claims. The real issues however were political, centring around the question of political hegemony in the short run over Indochina and eventually over all of South East Asia.

Territorial disputes have not been a direct cause of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, but they are a latent source of friction, which under adverse political circumstances could become explosive. China and Vietnam share 1100 kilometres of common border, which was delineated by Sino-French treaties signed during the colonial period. In
1957-58, the CPC and Vietnam agreed to respect this boundary line and maintain the status quo at the border, although there were differences over the actual sites of border markings. As the relations between the two countries turned sour, border incidents increased markedly after 1975 and flared up in 1978 at the height of the Sino-Vietnamese dispute over the treatment of the overseas Chinese in Vietnam.

The division of territorial jurisdiction in the Gulf of Tonkin area between the sea coast of North Vietnam and China's Hainan island is another source of friction between China and Vietnam. The problem of the disputed islands is potentially more serious, especially in the context of oil exploration in South China Sea. The Spratley and Paracel islands had been subject of disputed claims between China and Vietnam in the nineteenth century. Apart from their strategic location in the South China Sea, on the maritime artery between the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific,

16. For the Chinese version of the dispute, see "Memorandum on Viet-Premier Li Xiannian's talks with Premier Pham Van Dong, 10 June 1977," Beijing Review, no.13, March 1979.
these uninhabited islands suddenly became valuable in the eyes of China because of some preliminary geological surveys, indicating rich oil deposits. Hanoi's rejection of Beijing's advice with regard to the unification drive provoked Beijing to occupy the Spratley islands. 17

The ethnic Chinese in Vietnamese are another source of friction between the two countries. Generally speaking, the term Hoa or ethnic Chinese refers only to the latest wave of immigrants - either strictly overseas Chinese (that is those who hold Hongkong, Macao or Taiwanese identity papers) or Vietnamese citizens of Chinese ancestry who arrived in the early part of this century, have retained the Chinese language and dialects, customs and ethnic self-identity. This phrase does not refer to the numerically unspecified group of Ming Huong (people of the Ming country), who left China for Vietnam in the seventeenth century to avoid living under the Ching dynasty and have since

17. For a discussion on certain legal aspects of the status of the Spratleys, see Martin A. Katchen, "The Spratleys: Ground for Asian Peace," Asian Survey (Berkeley), vol. 17, no. 12, December 1977, pp. 1167-1181.
become assimilated into the Vietnamese nation. 18

The massive exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam to China in 1978 and to South East Asia by boats in 1979 seemed to the outside world as explicable only in terms of racist policies towards an ethnic minority paralleling the Nazi policy toward the Jews. But Vietnamese policy toward the ethnic Chinese can be understood only in the context of the development of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. While racism towards the Hoa in the form of resentment toward an unassimilated and privileged minority had long existed among ethnic Vietnamese, there had also been a long established Communist party policy of discouraging Vietnamese from anti-Chinese sentiments or actions, in contrast with the non-communist Vietnamese government in the past. 19


The ethnic Chinese have been a serious problem for several governments in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, as they constitute a formidable economic force. They control most retail trade and manufacturing industries in most South East Asian nations and can effectively thwart any government efforts to implement economic and financial measures inimical to their interests. Their potential for acting as a fifth column for China is another cause for concern for legal governments.

The mass exodus of ethnic Chinese can be ascribed to many factors, the question of nationality being one. In 1955 it was agreed between the Central Committee of Vietnam Workers Party and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party that Chinese residents in Vietnam would be placed under the leadership of the Vietnam Workers Party and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and gradually turned into Vietnamese citizens. In 1961 the Chinese even went a step further in recognizing Vietnamese jurisdiction by proposing that Chinese residents in Vietnam who came back to visit China would not be issued Chinese passports, but would only be granted "tourist" visas. For almost a quarter
century since 1955, no serious problems existed between China and Vietnam regarding the overseas Chinese except during the time of the Red Guards.20

In South Vietnam, the overseas Chinese controlled practically all important aspects of the economy, especially the production, manufacture and distribution of essential commodities. In 1956, President Ngo Dinh Diem tried to control the overseas Chinese through a policy of forced naturalization. Most overseas Chinese opted for Vietnamese nationality, and thus through a simple process of changing nationality were able to retain virtual control of the South Vietnamese economy.

When the Communists took over South Vietnam, the overseas Chinese immediately looked to the Chinese government on the mainland as their new protector in an uncertain situation. The first point of contention between China and Vietnam concerned the status of these Chinese. The

Vietnamese authorities claimed that after 1956 the Chinese in South Vietnam were "no longer Chinese residents, but Vietnamese of Chinese origins" and that this was a "reality left by history." The Chinese government had never accepted the legitimacy of the Ngo Dinh Diem government and therefore did not regard measures taken under his regime as valid.

The Hao problem aggravated in 1976 when the election for the National Assembly approached. Hanoi decided to ignore the 1955 oral agreement calling for Sino-Vietnamese consultations on the problem of the Hao in South Vietnam after liberation and mandated that all Hao in the South had to register for the National Assembly election under the nationality they had acquired during the previous South Vietnamese regime. The Vietnamese did not want to encourage a pattern of Hao loyalty to the PRC by restoring Chinese nationality after two decades of Vietnamese citizenship.

The PRC protested this Vietnamese move in June 1977, putting Hanoi on notice that it would

21. Ibid., p. 1042.
regard the Hoa in the South as Chinese nationals whose interests Beijing had a right and responsibility to protect. 22 The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) was thus even more inclined than it would otherwise have been to see China's hand behind the scattered acts of resistance to Vietnamese citizenship among the Hoa in the South in 1977 and early 1978.

The most sensitive problem relating to the Hoa in 1977 centred on the Sino-Vietnamese border area where the Hoa represented a much higher proportion of the population than in the country as a whole. In the process of improving security in the northwest border provinces which involved primarily moving the population some distance from the actual border, the SRV began in October 1977 to expel those Hoa who were regarded as living illegally in Vietnam - Chinese who had entered Vietnam after relations were established between the two Communist states, but had never acquired official papers. This security measure, which

affected a relatively small percentage of the Hoa in the border area, continued up to the time of the Chinese invasion.

The major exodus of the Hoa people from Vietnam, which began with the SRV's campaign for the socialist reform of capitalist trade in Ho Chi Minh City in late March, created the impression that it was largely a response to a crackdown on Chinese merchants there. But a closer examination of the socialist reform campaign and of the exodus itself shows that the main cause of the exodus lay elsewhere.

The campaign to eliminate South Vietnam's merchant class was the culmination of a struggle between the revolutionary government and the capitalists in the South, the overwhelming majority of whom were Hoa, for control of the economy. The timing of the campaign was determined by the SRV's larger strategy for the socialist transformation of South Vietnam, which required the early liquidation of the economic and political influence of the capitalist class. The Vietnamese leadership feared that permitting the merchants to continue to operate would inevitably encourage a "spontaneous tendency toward capitalism" in agriculture.
Moreover, they viewed the capitalists as the natural centre for political opposition to the new revolutionary regime. The removal of the capitalists from the cities was thus to be carried out as soon as the administrative-political apparatus in the South was strong enough to manage it. 23

After the break-off of diplomatic relations with Kampuchea and when China began to side openly with Kampuchea, the Vietnamese government decided in March 1978 to clamp down on private business to "shift bourgeoisie tradesmen to production" and "accelerate the socialist transformation of private capitalist industry and commerce in the South." The tough measures carried out in March and April 1978 included seizure of private properties, currency exchange, and sending people to new economic zones. The overseas Chinese were the hardest hit. Chalon, the Chinese quarter, came to a virtual standstill. Many overseas Chinese were forced to leave for new economic zones, others left the country in a mass exodus. 24 Hanoi's

23. Porter, n. 19, p. 56.

24. For an excellent account on this aspect of mass exodus, see Bruce Grant, The Boat People: An "Age" Investigation with Bruce Grant (New York 1979), pp. 82-107.
decision was ideologically correct and practically necessary. Its attempt to clamp down on private business was not intended to "persecute," "ostracize" and "expel" the overseas Chinese as alleged by Beijing. 25

The exodus was aggravated in May 1978 with both Hanoi and Beijing giving indications that a way was in the offing. Thus, in May 1978, the PRC took the occasion of the Hoa exodus to begin terminating its aid projects and denounced Vietnam in a major media campaign. Finally, Beijing announced on 25 May that it was sending ships to bring the "Victimized Chinese residents."

The Sino-Vietnamese dispute over the treatment of the overseas Chinese in Vietnam and skirmishes along the Sino-Vietnamese border occurred exactly at a time when the border clashes between Vietnam and Kampuchea entered a crucial stage. Neither side made any attempt to hide the Kampuchea connection to their dispute.

One day after the spokesman for the overseas Chinese affairs accused Vietnam of "ostracizing, persecuting and expelling" Chinese residents from Vietnam, Hanoi Radio on 25th April 1978 blamed "imperialists and international reactionaries" for releasing false information" to slander Vietnam and to back Phnom Penh's acts of war." 26 Hanoi explained the linkage between China's action over Vietnam's treatment of the overseas Chinese and the Vietnamese-Kampuchea conflict as follows:

China caused the exodus of overseas Chinese from Vietnam by spreading rumours that "China supports Kampuchea against Vietnam, the war will be expanded, Chinese in Vietnam will be harmed... They should seek ways to quickly leave Vietnam." 27 On the Chinese side, a Foreign Ministry Note delivered to the Vietnamese Embassy in Beijing on 13th December 1978 claimed that "the new escalation of the Vietnamese authorities' anti-China activi-

26. FBIS, 26th May 1978

27. Interview with Xuan Thuy, a secretary of Vietnamese Communist Party's Central Committee on 11 August 1978. FBIS, 5 May 1978.
ties was inherently connected with their current massive aggression against Kampuchea. 28

When the second Indo-Chinese war ended in 1975, Vietnam did not achieve an influential role in Kampuchea as it did in Laos. Since Vietnam viewed the solidarity of the people of the three Indo-chinese States as "a factor of decisive importance... in the long term cause of national defence and construction carried out by each people", it had great interest in building and fostering the "military solidarity of fraternal friendship between the three nations". 29 The split between the new governments in Kampuchea and Vietnam presented China with an opportunity to thwart Vietnam's influence from spreading throughout Indochina.

The Vietnamese-Kampuchea conflict was a result of many factors: ethnic hatred, traditional hostility, territorial dispute, ideological and


policy differences and conflict of personality.30

Probably the most important ingredient was their
different conception of post-liberation bilateral
relations among Indo-Chinese states. The Vietnamese
emphasized the experience of the "common struggle"
of the three Indo-Chinese peoples--first against
French colonialism and then against U.S. imperialism
and called for the development of a postwar "special
relationship" among the three countries. Although
still not clearly defined, the Socialist Republic
of Vietnam(SRV) has since 1975 made the "special
relationship" between itself and Laos and Kampuchea
the bedrock of its foreign policy objective.

However, given their historic fear of Vietnamese
ambitions and their more recent suspicion of
Vietnamese motives, the Khmer Rouge leadership
rejected Vietnamese advocacy of a "special relation-
ship" based on a Vietnamese--devised "common
destiny." Indeed in the Khmer Rouge view point,

30. For a thorough analysis of the worsening
Kampuchea-Vietnam relations since libera-
tion, especially on the border question see
Stephen P. Hodder, "The Cambodian-Vietnamese
Conflict" in Southeast Asian Affairs(Singapore),
1979, pp.157-186.
a common destiny under Hanoi's direction would at best mean a "Finlandization" of Kampuchea and Laos and more likely lead to perpetual subjugation of Kampuchea within Vietnam's sphere of influence.

Vietnam was meanwhile disturbed with the growing friendship between Beijing and Phnom Penh and Chinese activities in Kampuchea. At first, without naming China, Hanoi Radio in February accused the "imperialists and international reactionaries" of having helped Kampuchea to "build up and equip overnight a dozen divisions armed with long-range artillery and warplanes which Kampuchea did not have before 1975". 31

By end 1978, Vietnam was surrounded on both sides by the Chinese: Chinese troops on its northern border and Chinese advisers in Kampuchea across its southwest border. This situation resembled that of the Chinese in the mid-1960s with Soviet troops in the north, American troops in the south, and the Red Guards at home. Probably, at this juncture Hanoi concluded that the way out was to strike west. 32

32. Nguyen Manh Hung, n.20, 1047.
However, before finally embarking upon the adventure, Hanoi took a strategic defensive measure by concluding a Treaty of Friendship and cooperation with Moscow on 3 November 1978. Four months earlier, the Soviet Union had admitted Vietnam as a full member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON).

Beijing was considerably shaken by the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty. A xinhua correspondent wrote:

The Moscow-Hanoi duet shows that a deal has been struck between master and flunky. This is a grave picture in the present situation in Southeast Asia... This will heighten the vigilance of Southeast Asian and other Asian people towards the Vietnamese regional hegemonists and the global hegemonists behind them, the men in the Kremlin. 33

Secure behind the Russian guarantee, Vietnam was now prepared for an operation in Kampuchea. During the last two weeks of August, the Soviet Union airlifted a massive supply of arms to Hanoi. 34 On 3 December 1978, Hanoi Radio announced the formation of Kampuchea National United Front for National Salvation. On 7 January the Front forces marched into Phnom Penh and set up a pro-

Vietnamese government there.

The same day, the Chinese Government issued a statement expressing concern for the grave situation confronting Kampuchea and support for Kampuchea's demand that the Security Council hold an emergency meeting and that the United Nations intervene. The statement said: "We firmly support the Kampuchean people in their effort to fight their sacred national war of self-defence to the end."\(^{35}\) The Chinese had been preparing themselves for such an eventuality. While warning Hanoi against such a step they had prepared for war and resorted to hectic diplomatic manoeuvre, before finally attacking Vietnam in middle February 1979 soon after the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea.

It is correctly said that war is the continuation of politics by other means. The Chinese leadership right from the helmsman Mao to the strongman Deng were schooled in the tradition of warfare as an instrument of foreign policy. Quite naturally, therefore, China embarked upon the

\(^{35}\) Beijing Review, 12 January 1979, p.3.
punitive war on Vietnam.

The "Chinese self-defence counter-attack" into the SRV on 12 February 1979 may prove to have been a turning point in the history of the Marxist-Leninist movement. It was the first invasion of the Communist country by another without any pretence of an ideological justification or invitation by that country's people. Moreover, the war flew in the face of the Maoist doctrine of Third World solidarity. 36

Irritants like the expulsion of the Hoa minority, confiscation of their property, alignment with Moscow, and the border provocations were no doubt serious enough, but might not have been sufficient to provoke the Chinese to engage Vietnam in direct, but limited conflict. The fall of Combodia, although not necessarily unexpected, made the Chinese perceive Vietnam's ambition as threatening not only China's interests on the Indochina peninsula, but also its position among the non-communist ASEAN states of South East Asia. With the fall of Phnom Penh, Chinese leaders

began to speak of "giving Vietnam a lesson."

The Soviet-Vietnamese treaty must have persuaded the Chinese of the utility of normalizing China-US relations in restoring a regional balance of power in China's favour, as already noted in the previous chapter. An examination of Deng's remarks in the United States bears out the contention that he was using his trip not only to try to improve bilateral ties, but also to elucidate China's position on critical global and regional issues. On 29 January, for example, in a speech welcoming Deng, President Carter invited China to join the United States in a "common journey" towards peace and stability in the world. In contrast, Deng described this world as "far from tranquil," stating: "The factors making for wars are visibly growing. The people in the world have the urgent task of redoubling their efforts to maintain world peace, security and stability."37

On 30 January Deng said that he could not dismiss the possibility of using China's armed forces against Vietnam..."to safeguard China's

security and borders we cannot allow Vietnam to run wild everywhere. In the interest of our own country, we may be forced to do what we do not like to do." 38 The next day he issued his famous "lessons" warning with regard to Vietnam: because of Vietnam's intervention in Kampuchea and border incidents with China, China was prepared to act against Vietnam: "if you don't teach them some necessary lessons, it just won't do." Later, he added: "I can tell you that what the Chinese people say counts." However, he added cautiously: "any action taken by the Chinese is through a careful consideration. We will not take any rash action. As to what measures we will adopt, we are still studying the problem." 39

On 13 February, Hanoi placed the entire country on the highest level of preparedness for a war with the Chinese, but apparently they did not expect China's action to commence when it did on 17 February 1979. The Chinese objectives were

regional and global. To have any chance of attaining them, the military conflict had to succeed; failure would deny Beijing the political payoff. As it turned out, the campaign failed for China.

Vietnam itself learned no lesson; it not only continued but even intensified the policies which the Chinese "lesson" was designed to halt or slow down. It showed China that it had sufficient men and material to deal China a strong riposte in the field. While Vietnamese casualties may have been high, China suffered 20,000 casualties (killed and wounded). Additionally, the border did not calm down, despite negotiation in Hanoi and Beijing throughout the summer of 1979, and also Vietnam was not deterred from maintaining its influence over Kampuchea.

China's "punitive war" on Vietnam did not "teach" Vietnam "a lesson." The other two major objectives of Beijing behind the attack were, to prevent Hanoi and restrain it from expansionism. When the war failed in its objective, Beijing

---

embarked upon diplomatic manoeuvres to isolate Hanoi. China along with ASEAN and other countries opposed Heng Samrin's occupation of the Kampuchean seat in the U.N. General Assembly. China also tried to win over ASEAN member countries into isolating Hanoi, but its success in this quest has been mixed, because the ASEAN countries are sceptical of China's aims and objectives. After all, they have known what it means to face the consequences of Beijing's sympathetic support to the insurgencies within their own territories. Besides, the ASEAN countries perceive the presence of a strong Vietnam as a bulwark against Chinese expansionism. The differences of perception existing between Hanoi and ASEAN countries about Sino-Vietnamese relations surfaced during the U.N. sponsored International Conference on Kampuchea which was convened on 13 July 1981.

The conference on Kampuchea ended a five-day session by adopting unanimously a declaration calling for a ceasefire by all the conflicting parties and the withdrawal of "all foreign forces" from the troubled land in the shortest possible time. But even six years after its
adoption, the resolution remains wishful thinking and the Kampuchean imbroglio has not improved in spite of efforts of various countries to find a solution. Beijing has embarked upon diplomatic manoeuvre to isolate and pressurize Hanoi to restrain itself. It is also extending military assistance to the forces opposed to the pro-Hanoi Heng Samrin regime in Kampuchea. Hanoi on the other hand is showing considerable flexibility to the Kampuchean imbroglio which we shall discuss in the next chapter.