Chapter V

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The Kampuchean question, unlike the conflict-situations analysed in the preceding chapters, has more direct bearing and added significance on the security perception of China. This has been so not only because of the geographical proximity but also because of China's active involvement in the conflict as a protagonist of one of the parties to the conflict. Its involvement has obviously been prompted in pursuit of its strategy of preventing any hostile power from gaining access to or control of its neighbourhood from which it could threaten political independence and territorial integrity of China itself. As a concomitant of this strategy, China is also averse, so it seems, to tolerating a strong independent nation in its periphery which is capable of acting independently of and/or contrary to China's perceived national security aspiration and regional interests.

However, in the Indochina region, China was confronted by an equally determinant nation, Vietnam, which had carried out protracted struggle to assert its independence. Vietnam had been at war for nearly three decades against colonialism and imperialism. On gaining unification and independence in 1975, Vietnam was neither ready to submit to the dictates nor be a satellite of any of the external powers, be it two major allies — China or Soviet Union. It not only strove to maintain
its independence but also sought "special relationship" with its two immediate neighbours, Laos and Kampuchea. The argument advanced by Vietnam in that regard was that it would not only safeguard against external threat but also create peaceful environments for the reconstruction of the war devastated countries.\(^1\) China suspected Vietnam's design in the region, especially in the context of Vietnam's close relationship with the Soviet Union. Such a development in its southern frontier was regarded by Beijing as a challenge to its strategy of limiting Soviet influence and establishing for itself a regional position of high status and influence. It is against this backdrop the developments leading to conflict-situation in Kampuchea beginning 1978 unfolded.

China-Vietnam-Kampuchea: A Retrospect

The swing of Sino-Vietnam relations in the contemporary period from comrades-in-arms in their struggle against the United States to the existing hostility against each other could be better appreciated by examining it in a historical perspective.\(^2\) For centuries in the past, the Vietnamese

\(^1\) Cited in Chang Pao-Min, Kampuchea Between China and Vietnam (Singapore, 1985), pp. 57-58.

experienced consistent resistance to repeated Chinese incursions, encroachments and aggressions. This has left an emotional predisposition of apprehension and distrust towards its mighty neighbour in the north. This legacy along with other issues of differences, as for instance regarding strategy of war, negotiations for ending the war, attitude towards the Super Powers, remained latent during the period of revolutionary struggle in Vietnam.³

There seems to be no doubt of the fact that Vietnam received generous aids and supports from both, the Soviet Union and China during the liberation struggle.⁴ As in the case of other areas, the Sino-Soviet rivalry for influence penetrated in this region as well. However, Vietnam could play a "balancing game" during the liberation movement; it could skillfully play off one against the other and thus reap some advantages such as more freedom in pursuit of its war strategy and availability of more aid from both the Powers. However, the Sino-Soviet competition in the Indochina region became more sharpened and open with the withdrawal of American

³ Gareth Porter, "Vietnamese Policy and the Indochina Crisis", in David W.P. Elliott, ed., The Third Indochina Conflict (Boulder, 1982), pp.72-84.

troops from Vietnam and the general curtailment of US commitments in Asia.⁵

Obviously, it would have been more in the interest of China had Vietnam remained divided with the southern half retaining ties with the United States than a unified Vietnam with strong links to the Soviet Union. After Hanoi's swift and impressive victory over Saigon in April 1975, the Sino-Vietnamese rift widened rapidly.⁶

In fact, their fraternal alliance was already weakened well before 1975. To be precise, certain developments that took place in 1968 and 1971 were really crucial for the future course of their relationship. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and the promulgation of "limited sovereignty" doctrine had a traumatic impact on the Chinese security perception. They must have been seriously dismayed by Hanoi's open endorsement of the Soviet action. To the


Vietnamese, the invitation issued by Beijing to Richard Nixon in July 1971 must have seemed equally inexcusable, coming as it did when Vietnam was still engaged in a battle against the United States.\(^7\) Thus, Hanoi-Beijing alliance was eroded mainly due to the impact of divergence in their respective attitudes and policies towards the two Super Powers.

Beijing's apprehension was that Vietnam's tilt towards the Soviet Union might promote the feasibility of the Soviet's concept of Asian collective security arrangement, i.e., the creation of a ring of hostile states on China's border. This had further escalated the differences and led to parting their ways. The other factors such as disagreements on the issues like ideology and domestic concerns, intermittently boundary and territorial disputes, differences in regard to relations among Indochina nations and the ethnic Chinese issues, all added fuel to the flame of tension between the two nations.\(^8\)

In this state of affairs, China found its connection with Kampuchea a convenient means, not only to demonstrate its presence in the Indochina but also to thwart, what it perceived


\(^8\)Detailed discussion on the various factors leading to conflict see, Bruce Burton, "Contending Explanations of the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War", International Journal (Toronto) vol.34. no.4, Autumn 1979, pp.699-722.
as the onward march of "great hegemony" and "regional hegemony." 9

Even the comrades-in-arms in their struggle against the colonialism and imperialism, Vietnam and Kampuchea could not sustain their cooperation after gaining independence in the respective states. 10 The Pol Pot regime followed a policy of keeping Vietnam at bay by adopting deliberately a hostile policy towards Hanoi, such as purging all cadres in the army and party who advocated negotiation with Vietnam to settle the problems, escalating the territorial issues into a major conflict and expelling Vietnamese nationals en-masse. In these measures China's support and abetment played a significant part. 11

Besides, many of the Kampucheans sought refuge in Vietnam and Thailand as the new regime at Phnom Penh followed


the policy of genocide and wanton repression within the
country. These dissidents organized insurgent movement
against the Pol Pot regime especially along the Vietnam-
Kampuchean border. These developments not only caused
further deterioration in Vietnam-Kampuchean relations but
also escalated border conflict.

As the increasing border conflicts were reported in
media of both conflicting nations by late 1977, China
tried to avoid committing itself irreversibly to Kampuchea.
Initially, China media reported the allegations of each side
without comment. It maintained overt neutrality in the
worsening Vietnam-Kampuchean conflict. In spring 1977,
Beijing made a four point proposal to bring about a negotiated
settlement. As their border conflict escalated into an almost full
scale war, the rapid deterioration in the Sino-Vietnamese
relations could no longer be concealed from public view.

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Besides intensifying their boundary and territorial dispute,14 the most irritating factor in Sino-Vietnamese relations at this stage was the large-scale exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam.15 In early May 1978, the Chinese announced that they would have to cut back on their aid to Vietnam in order to meet the costs of resettling the tens of thousands of overseas Chinese who had been "expelled" by Hanoi.16 It also closed three Vietnamese consulates in southern China and recalled its Ambassador from Hanoi.17 On 3 July, only four days after the admission of Vietnam to Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), Beijing announced the cancellation of all the remaining economic aid projects, withdraw its advisors and technicians from Vietnam — a reminiscence of Khrushchev's treatment of China in early 1960s.


15 For details on this issue see, Charles Benoit, "Vietnam's 'Boat People'", in Elliott, ed., n.3, pp.139-62.

16 See, Burton, n.8, p.710.

On the other hand, the relations between the Pol Pot regime and China were further entrenched despite the international pariah earned by the Pol Pot regime because of the repressive policy and genocide of its own people. It stepped up its military aid to Kampuchea, stationed Chinese military engineers along the rail line within Kampuchea as a deterrence and strengthened Phnom Penh's anti-aircraft defenses.\(^\text{18}\) It is doubtful whether Beijing leaders believed that they could protect Pol Pot's regime against an internal uprising backed by limited use of Vietnam's army. Nevertheless, it tried to deter Vietnam from such an action by threatening from its northern border as well.

These mounting threats and tensions compelled Vietnam to move closer to the Soviet Union. In a bid to increase its manoeuvering capabilities, Vietnam sought to improve its relations with the United States. However, considering the negative impact it might have on Washington's relations with Beijing, the United States did not give positive response.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{18}\) Pao-min Chang, n.1, pp.70-71.

\(^{19}\) It is pertinent to mention here that Vietnam was pushed into the Soviet embrace by the intransigent stance taken by the United States and China towards it. For a discussion of the consequences of Washington's refusal to respond to Vietnam's overtures see, Andre Gunder Frank, "Kampuchea, Vietnam, China: Observation and Reflection", Alternatives (Delhi), vol.7, no.2, June 1981, p.233; see also, Robert G. Sutter, "China's Strategy Towards Vietnam and its Implications for the United States", in David W.F. Elliott, ed., n.3, pp.186-87.
In the light of such circumstances, Vietnam sought Soviet's strategic protection by signing the Friendship Treaty on 3 November 1978. It was taken by China as confirmation of its worst fear and further alarmed it as to the degree of Soviet influence in Indochina. Beijing responded to the treaty in a predictably hostile fashion, portraying it as a prelude to the establishment of Soviet military bases on Vietnamese soil and "an important component part of the Soviet global strategy in Asia which will also increase the hegemonic acts of the Cuba of Asia." 20

Meanwhile, Kampuchean resistance forces, in a congress held in a liberated area on 3 December, decided to form the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS). 21 Under the leadership of Heng Samrin, the front intensified their struggle against Pol Pot regime and popular uprising had already spread to various provinces of the country.

Military Intervention

The forces of the KUFNS with the help of Vietnam, captured Phnom Penh on 7 January and the new government called the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Council was formed.


21 Asian Recorder (New Delhi), vol.25, no.1, 1-7 January 1979, p.14676.
Although the parties to the dispute as well as other concerned nations drew the attention of the world body to the deteriorating situation in Southeast Asia, the United Nations could neither galvanize itself into action to arrest the deteriorating situation nor could it stall the violent outbreak of the hostilities. Only after a new regime under the Heng Samrin leadership came into existence, did the Security Council meet and that too at the request of Democratic Kampuchea whose leaders at the time had been driven away from the seat of power by the Vietnamese army. When the question of its credential was raised on the first day of the session, i.e., 11 January by the Soviet Union and its allies, China strongly backed Democratic Kampuchea and castigated the new regime at Phnom Penh as a "hired tool manufactured by Vietnam single-handedly for the purpose of legalizing Vietnam's armed aggression." It further stated, "It can in no way represent any Kampuchean but only represents the lackeys of Vietnam." Since then the Democratic Kampuchea, which is no longer in control of territory and population, could retain its seat at the United Nations with the backing of the United States and its allies; as well as China and some of the nonaligned states.


During the main debate on the issue, China condemned Vietnam for its aggression against Kampuchea and said that this act was part of a premeditated plan to annex Kampuchea and establish an Indochina Federation with the full support of the Soviet Union. It further stated that Vietnam's aggression was "by no means an isolated, local and accidental event but an important step in pursuance of the Soviet strategy of global hegemonism." China introduced a draft resolution which would have called upon Vietnam to immediately halt its armed aggression. However, this draft resolution was not pressed for vote. The Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, termed the Security Council debate on the issue as an attempt to internationalize an internal conflict and strongly objected to the discussion. Thus, the United Nations was once again turned into an arena where the contending parties indulged in verbal dual to undermine the opponents' stands and images and, on the other hand, justified and promoted its own and allies' interests and actions. In such exercises on this issue, China's views coincided with over-

24 Ibid., pp.10-11.


26 See, SCOR, 34th year, 2108th mtg., 11 January 1979, p.4; see also, ibid., 2109th mtg., 12 January 1979, pp.2-3.
whelming majority of nations. While explaining its support for the resolution sponsored by seven nonaligned countries, China said that even though it considered the text was not strong enough, it felt that by calling upon all foreign forces to withdraw from Kampuchea the draft did, in effect, condemn the Vietnamese authorities. After the Soviet veto to the resolution, charges and counter-charges between China and Vietnam grew in intensity.

With the international body thus paralysed, Hanoi went ahead to sign a treaty with the new Kampuchean regime at Phnom Penh on 18 February. This treaty stipulated friendship and cooperation in all fields, including defence and stressed that Vietnamese troops would remain in Kampuchea as long as the new regime required their presence. This treaty was criticize by China as "a concrete step taken by Hanoi to cover its crimes of aggression against Kampuchea... and to legalize the stationing of Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea." Above all, it was regarded by China as an instrument to incorporate Kampuchea into the Vietnam led "Indochina Federation."

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27 SCOR, 34th year, 2112th mtg., 15 January 1979, p.3.

The preceding event created "a crisis of credibility" for Beijing. Therefore, it ventured forth on a punitive expedition ostensibly "to teach a lesson" to Vietnam for its "wanton incursions into Chinese territory." Actually, its action was to penalize Vietnam and restore China's credibility and reputation as a regional power. Its military operation neatly fits with the Clausewitzean notion of war as the continuation of politics by other means.

The imminence of China's action in Indochina was evident not only from circumstantial evidence but also from the spate of letters and messages sent to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the Security Council by the concerned parties. However, none of these contained a formal request for UN intervention. On the other hand, the Secretary-


31 Besides other activities, Deng Xiaoping made a visit to both the United States and Japan to appraise the situation in Southeast Asia and made clear indication, during the visits, of its intention to take military measure against Vietnam. For more detailed discussion see, Banning Garrett, "The Strategic Triangle and the Indochina Crisis", in David Elloit, ed., n.3, pp.206-8.

General described the situation on the Sino-Vietnam border as "very serious" but he did not draw the attention of the Security Council which he is entitled to under Article 99 of the UN Charter. On 17 February, the Chinese military incursion into Vietnam's six northern provinces began. The launching of this action only a week after Deng Xiaoping's visit to Japan and the United States gave the appearance of acquiescence of these two strategic allies to China's move. In the midst of the confusion and apprehension of direct confrontation between the two Super Powers, Beijing hoped to achieve a quick victory like that of the Sino-Indian war of 1962 and then it intended to rapidly retreat before the Soviet Union and the international community could decide on a proper course of response.

To placate the world public opinion, China declared at the outset of the invasion that it would be a limited operation of short duration with no design on Vietnamese territory.

33 Cited in Statesman (Delhi), 15 February 1979.


The Chinese forces advanced swiftly and successfully at first but their movement was soon considerably slowed down due to superior warfare and tough resistance put up by the Vietnamese who had considerable battle experience in this century. The Soviet Union also applied pressure as early as 18 February by warning China to stop its attack before it was too late and threatened that it would "fulfill the commitments it assumed under the treaty" with Vietnam.36

Eventually, China's military performance neither turned out to be easy nor so successful as it had hoped for. Its dismal performance in the war, perhaps the most serious in its thirty years of foreign policy, greatly damaged its reputation.37 The ultimate outcome of the Chinese invasion may well have made Hanoi more determined than ever before to stay in Kampuchea. Further, it facilitated China to put to test its friendship with the United States just as it tested the Soviet Union's friendship in the Korean war in the 1950s.


37 For details see, Gerald Segal, Defending China (New York, 1985), pp.112-227; see also, Banning Garrett, n.31, pp.211-12.
Interaction at the United Nations

In the midst of the violent eruption, the Secretary-General issued appeals to all concerned in the Sino-Vietnamese conflict to work towards the cessation of hostility and to "exercise maximum restraint to arrive at a peaceful settlement." The Security Council was convened after six days of violent outbreak of hostilities, i.e., on 23 February.

Prior to the adoption of the agenda, the parties to the dispute had clashed over the title of the agenda item. The representatives of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union objected to the consideration of this development as a question of the situation in Southeast Asia, since, according to them, this was designed to divert attention from Chinese aggression against Vietnam. They proposed that the current conflict-situation should be dealt exclusively. On the other hand, the representative of China maintained that Vietnam's aggression against and occupation of Kampuchea, which "gravely menaced the survival of a sovereign state", was the root cause of the threat to stability and peace in Southeast Asia and therefore should be considered separately as a first priority. Finally,

38 Cited in Statesman (Delhi), 19 February 1979.
39 SCOR, 34th year, 2114th mtg., 23 February 1979, pp.1-2.
40 Ibid., p.2.
this issue has been discussed under the proposed title, "The Situation in Southeast Asia and its Implications for International Peace and Security."

The Security Council held five meetings on the item between 23 and 28 February. During the debate, the Chinese representative Mr Chen Chu pointed out that Vietnam's aggression against Kampuchea and the Sino-Vietnamese border conflict were questions of an entirely different nature. The former was depicted as a question of the survival of a nation which Vietnam was attempting to swallow up in an effort to establish an "Indochinese Federation" and its quest for "regional hegemonism". China tried to capitalize on the broader implications of the Kampuchean war and the Soviet role in the Vietnamese adventure to focus the international community on the serious nature of the Kampuchean crisis and the righteousness of China's continuing intervention in the whole affair. Beijing contended that Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea and its domination of Laos was not an "isolated event" or "local issue", since it not only revealed Hanoi's ambition to dominate the entire Indochina but also represented "an important component of the Soviet Union's attempt to further its strategy of seeking world hegemony." More specifically, Vietnam had invited the

41 Ibid., pp.9-10; see also Ibid., 2118th mtg., 27 February 1979, p.3.
Soviets in because it needed Moscow's support in realizing its regional ambitions. And Moscow had backed Hanoi because it needed Vietnam in order to "push its policy of driving South and link up its strategic deployments in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean." Therefore, the Kampuchean problem, China urged, was a manifestation, not so much of the conflict between China and Vietnam or between the Indochinese and other Southeast Asian states, as of the Soviet and Vietnamese threat to the entire region. As such, it was of "global significance" and required common efforts and united action of all "justice-upholding" countries in order to counter this threat. By the same token, Beijing presented that its support to Kampuchea was also a contribution to contain the Soviet drive towards global hegemony. Thus at the world forum, China threw its weight to malign both the Soviet Union and Vietnam's image, without a word about the paranoiac internal policy of the Pol Pot regime which had created massive dissidents within the country.

42 Ibid., 23 February 1979, p.9.
43 Ibid., p.13.
On the other hand, China justified its war with Vietnam as a "self-defense counter-attack" measure against Vietnam's repeated border provocations. Its representative stated the provocations were due to the fact that Beijing was regarded "as the main obstacle in pursuit of expansionism" by both "the greater and lesser hegemonists who were working hand in glove, with each other..." He further contended that China's action was in "full accord with the principles of the Charter" and were permissible under Article 51 of the UN Charter. He assured that China did not want a single inch of Vietnam's territory and said, "All we want is a peaceful and stable border. After counter-attack... the Chinese frontier troops will return and strictly keep to defending the border..." Not only that, he expressed Beijing's readiness to enter into concrete negotiations to settle the boundary dispute.


46 Ibid., pp.10-12. The Article 51 stipulated, "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security."

During the consideration of the matter, the Security Council received two draft resolutions submitted by Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, and another by China. Since the content of these draft resolutions were poles apart, President of the Council, Abdalla Yaccoob Besara (Kuwait) tried to reach a consensus but the threat of a veto had "shot them all down in flames." Therefore, the Security Council adjourned the debate on 28 February without taking any action nor did it issue the usual cease-fire appeal.

Meanwhile, China proposed a "simultaneous withdrawal" of Chinese troops from Vietnam and Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea and described it as "fair" and "a key to resolving the current tension in Southeast Asia." Hanoi rejected it as a deception aimed at fooling world public opinion. Later, when China announced the withdrawal of its troops unilaterally on 5 March, Hanoi insisted on a complete withdrawal.

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49 SCOR, 34th year, 2118th mtg., 28 February 1979, p.9.
before the Sino-Vietnamese negotiation began. On 16 March, the Security Council concluded the consideration of the situation in Southeast Asia when they discussed a draft resolution, sponsored by the ASEAN, which would have called upon all parties to cease hostilities immediately and withdraw their forces to their own countries. However, due to the negative vote of the Soviet Union, it was not adopted. The Chinese representative, Chen Chu, expressed his dissatisfaction of the draft resolution for its failure to "condemn sternly the Vietnamese authorities for their crime of aggression" and also expressed serious reservations with regard to the paragraph concerning China. Nevertheless, he voted for the draft resolution as he found the basic content of it positive.

Although, the Security Council remained deadlocked once again, China, as it did during the 1962 war with India, unilaterally withdrew all its troops and initiated negotiation with Vietnam for normalising relations in April 1979. The public postures of Vietnam and China in the negotiation, illustrated the long-term strategies of the two parties towards

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54 SCOR, 34th year, 2129th mtg., 16 March 1979, p.8.
the conflict. Since both have taken diametrically opposite positions, there was no prospect of reaching any agreement. The peace talks were soon turned into a forum for public polemics rather than a serious effort at solving the antagonists' differences. Later in February 1980, Beijing refused to resume the stalled peace talks, charging that Vietnam had used the talks as "a cover for her aggression against Kampuchea, threat to Thailand and armed provocations against China."

However, at the United Nations, a resolution was passed on this issue for the first time during the UN General Assembly annual session on 14 November 1979. The resolution, among others, strongly called for the immediate withdrawal of foreign forces from Kampuchea and called on all States to refrain from acts or threat of aggression and interference in the internal affairs of Kampuchea in order to enable the Kampuchean people to decide their own future and destiny free from outside interference and to choose democratically their own government. Further, it requested the Secretary-General to follow the situation closely and to exercise his good offices in order to contribute to the peaceful solution of the problem and to explore the possibility of holding an international conference.


56 Sunday Standard (New Delhi), 29 April 1980.
on Kampuchea as one of the means for implementing the present resolution.\footnote{General Assembly Resolution 34/22, 14 November 1979.}

China's representative supported this resolution and said that its adoption demonstrated the opposition of international community against the Vietnamese aggression on Kampuchea.\footnote{UN Doc. A/34/PV.67, 16 November 1979, p.96; Tretiak, n.34, pp.755-56; see also, Robert G. Sutter, n.19, p.189.} But practically, this high sounding resolution had little impact on the conflict-situation.

Plunged in a great international discomfiture by its "punitive expedition" which resulted in no significant gain for itself, and being disillusioned with the United States' support for countering Soviet "hegemonism" in Asia,\footnote{For more extensive discussion on the topic see, Jencks, n.30, pp.801-15; see also, Garrett, n.31, pp.211-12.} Beijing resorted to minimise the Soviet threat by seeking accommodation with the Soviet Union. Towards this end, Sino-Soviet talks to solve the outstanding problems and to improve bilateral relations were held at Beijing's initiative in September 1979. However, due to the dramatic situation, arisen from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, China once again reverted back to its dogmatic hostility towards the Soviet Union. It also affected
a change in Washington's relations with Moscow which in turn favourably influenced United States policy towards China. For Beijing, this development was a blessing in disguise for it served as a vindication of its assessment of the Soviet "hegemonistic design". Faced with what both now regarded as a common and immediate threat from the Soviet Union, China and the United States forged a closer strategic relationship to foil Soviet and "Soviet backed expansionism", namely, Vietnam. 60 Henceforth, China often cited the developments in Afghanistan and Kampuchea as a co-ordinated Soviet attempt not only to subjugate these countries but also to use them as spring-boards for further expansion and thus they constituted, according to China, "an important component of its global strategic plan in its quest for world hegemony." 61 Neither the world body nor the individual nations could do anything to alleviate the tension. On the other hand, the opponent parties including China aimed to pin down Vietnam and the Soviets with the motive of "bleeding them white." 62

60 For example, at the welcoming banquet in Beijing on 6 January, Secretary Brown said that he wanted "to exchange views" on how the United States and China might facilitate cooperation on security matters. See for details, Jonathan D. Pollack, The sino-Soviet Rivalry and Chinese Security Debate (Monica CA., 1982), pp.48-49.


China: Strategy of Attrition

Beijing has played the leading role in promoting a strategy of attrition. The United States and the ASEAN states have become a party to this strategy, which takes the form of military, economic and diplomatic pressure. China also along with the ASEAN encouraged the Khmer Rouge to broaden its base of support by forming alliance with other resistance groups. The establishment of such a broadly based alliance was considered as essential not only for improving the international image of the Khmer Rouge, thereby ensuring continued support for its international representation but also ensuring viable political choice for the people of Kampuchea. Thus, as early as February 1979, China called for a broad united front and described it as "a major weapon for victory" in a nationalist struggle against foreign aggression.63 It was clearly at China's urging that in early September 1979, on the eve of the UN General Assembly debate on Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge took the initiative of making public a new political programme drafted for the specific purpose of "uniting in a large national front all the patriotic and democratic forces, at home and abroad" in order to fight the Vietnamese. This was followed by replacing the notorious

Pol Pot with Khieu Samphan as Prime Minister of the Democratic Kampuchean Government. However, these changes aroused little interest among the other resistance groups.

In the spring of 1980, there were indications that the ASEAN States who were backing Thailand, the frontline State, were getting weary of the unending conflict in Kampuchea. In fact, Beijing's intensive involvement in the Kampuchean war heightened ASEAN long standing suspicions of China's objectives in the region. The United States had also called for a political settlement of Indochina's problem. These caused serious concern in Beijing as it was against any "compromise and settlements." But Vietnam's armed incursion into Thailand on 23 June 1980 changed the situation dramatically in favour of Beijing's position. Beijing was pleased with this development and stated "... this latest act of theirs... helped people to see more clearly their wild ambition of dominating Indochina in pursuit of regional hegemonism."65


To dispel whatever doubts the ASEAN countries might still have of China's intentions in Indochina, Beijing from late 1980 onwards repeatedly affirmed at the United Nations its support not only for a free general election in Kampuchea under UN supervision after the Vietnamese withdrawal but also for an eventually independent, nonaligned Kampuchea. Its representative further expressed that once the issue was settled, China would be ready to join other countries concerned in an international guarantee that the territory of Kampuchea would not be occupied or used to encroach on the sovereignty of other countries in the region nor would there be any form of interference in Kampuchea's internal affairs.

The Chinese delegation consistently advocated the imperative need to follow the following "three basic principles" for "a just and reasonable" settlement of the Kampuchean question:

First, the foreign aggressors must withdraw all their troops immediately and unconditionally from Kampuchea in compliance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. This is a principle of key importance and the pre-requisite of any settlement. Secondly, after the withdrawal of foreign troops, the Kampuchean people should be free to decide their own destiny without any outside interference. Thirdly, Kampuchea should be restored to its status as an independent and nonaligned state.

See, UN Doc. А/35/PV.37, 15 October 1980, p.37.

In course of time, China outwardly adopted a posture of not being averse to reaching a political settlement but it insisted that the settlement should be in accordance with the UN resolutions and the withdrawal of all foreign troops should be the precondition for any political settlement. Beijing was also against holding any special international conference on Kampuchea, unless the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops was made the primary purpose of such a conference and meticulously executed within a time limit. Nevertheless, under the influence of ASEAN, China attended the international conference called on the basis of General Assembly resolution of 22 October 1980. However, the conference could not exert much impact as Soviet bloc including Vietnam declined to participate in it.

China's continued military pressure on Vietnam's northern border combined with its aid to the Kampuchean resistance, shows its determination to prolong the conflict to sap the Vietnamese energy to become a challenging neighbour and eventually elicit its acquiescence. Ironically, it proves to be counter-productive as these pressures pushed Vietnam

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69 General Assembly Resolution 35/6, 22 October 1980.
further into the Soviet orbit. As a price for its strategic protection, Moscow gained a naval base in Camr Ranh and an air base at Danang from Hanoi. These strategic gains of the Soviet Union, not only negated the United States and China's key objective of excluding the Soviets presence from this region but also poses a potential threat to China, Japan and Western interests in the area. China uses the United Nations platform to point out these developments to the international community and aims to gain a propaganda victory by making the image cost high for Vietnam and the Soviet Union.70

Meanwhile, the formation of a coalition government, consisting of Khmer Rouge, Prince Sihanouk's group and former Prime Minister, Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front further strengthened the resistance movement and it acquired respectability under Prince Sihasouk's leadership.71 Beijing welcomed the development as an indication of the Khmer people's firm determination... to close their rank in order to fight against foreign aggression and defend their national


independence and sovereignty." Henceforth, China extended aid to all the three resistance groups of the coalition government.72

The formation of the coalition government did prompt a diplomatic response from Vietnam in the form of a partial withdrawal of forces from Kampuchea, an offer to hold a limited international conference on the conflict with Kampuchea to be represented by the Heng Samrin government; and its proposal to hold talks with the coalition government without the participation of the Khmer Rouge. These moves were viewed by China as signs of insincerity on the part of the Vietnamese authorities and as attempts to resort to political tricks to get what they failed to achieve militarily.73 The Vietnamese demand for exclusion of the Khmer Rouge in its negotiation with the coalition government became a special target of China's criticism. Beijing viewed it as an attempt to split the "United patriotic forces of Kampuchea" and strongly objected to it.74


74 UN Doc. A/39/PV.41, 1 November 1984, pp.28-30; A/40/PV.63, 6 November 1985, p.17.
When Prince Sihanouk, the President of the Coalition government, gave an indication of his willingness to negotiate with Vietnam, China opposed it and threatened to cut off its aids.\(^7^5\) On the other hand, Beijing's repeated threat of "teaching a second lesson" to Vietnam has never been materialized until now. Moreover, in 1985, China's military capability was further eroded when it refrained from reacting to the Vietnamese destruction of Khmer resistance base camps and temporary occupation of Thai territory in several locations along the Thai-Kampuchean border.\(^7^6\)

China now seems to aim at achieving a diplomatic understanding with the Soviet Union to reach a settlement on Kampuchean question. Since the Sino-Soviet talks on normalization of relations resumed in October 1982, it persistently insisted the Soviet Union, as one of the pre-conditions, to pressurize its ally, Vietnam, to withdraw from Kampuchea.\(^7^7\) However, the Soviet Union expressed its desire to confine the talks to strictly bilateral matters.

\(^7^5\) Hindu (Madras), 26 February 1984.


\(^7^7\) Other two are withdrawal of Soviet military forces deployed along China's northern border with the Soviet Union and with Mongolia; and withdrawal of Soviet military from Afghanistan. In response to Gorbachev's initiative launched at Vladivostok on 28 July 1986 to resolve the obstacles in Sino-Soviet normalization, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wu Xueqian, is reported to have said that Gorbachev had evaded the issue that most concerned the Chinese, i.e., the question of withdrawing Soviet supported Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea. See, International Herald Tribune (Singapore), 14 August 1986.
Vietnam, China expressed its willingness to resume negotiation on normalization of relations if Vietnam made an open declaration of commitment to a total withdrawal of troops and if it initiated the process of its implementation. However, Vietnam argued that its troops were stationed in Kampuchea to counter the threat posed by China through Kampuchea and expressed its readiness to withdraw its troops once the "Chinese threat" ends. Beijing rejected this argument as a "downright lie". According to Beijing, the issue involved "not only concerns the survival of a small and weak nation but also effects the security of the whole region of Southeast Asia and world peace." Therefore, according to China, it was not a bilateral concern and Vietnam's airing of a "China threat" was "to seek an excuse for its refusal to withdraw its troops and persistence in aggression." China also charged that in order to perpetuate its occupation of Kampuchea, Vietnam adopted the technique of Vietnamization of Kampuchea by bringing large numbers of Vietnamese to Kampuchea for settlement.

As the situation stands, China is neither in position to enter into a military confrontation with Vietnam to change the balance of power in the region to its favour, nor has its talks with the Soviet Union reached a point where the Soviets felt the need to pressurize Vietnam to withdraw from Kampuchea. Thus, China has no alternative but to support the ASEAN proposal of "indirect talk" to find a way out from this impasse. 83

Summary Observations

From the above analyses, it is evident that the motivating force of China's belligerency against Vietnam has been its strategy to prevent Soviet penetration in this region. It perceived that Vietnam's design in Indochina has been supported and abetted by the Soviet Union. It resorted to direct military intervention to retrieve its influence and political credibility in the region.

As its military weakness was exposed by its dismal performance at the battlefield, Beijing made use of the UN forum not only to draw international attention to Soviet global design but also to gain propaganda victory, malign

83 UN Doc. A/40/PV.63, 6 November 1985, p.18; A/40/PV.65, 6 November 1985, pp.52.
Soviet and Vietnam's image, and to attempt to isolate them. Although China is acutely concerned about the threat to its own security from its southern flank, it camouflaged these concerns by projecting them as a threat to the whole region and world peace. This is one of the typical cases of China's diplomatic moves of presenting issues of its strategic interests as issues of international concern. Beijing has hitherto obtained political advantage since its stance on the Kampuchean question coincided with that of the majority of the member states. Further, China along with other member nations have so far been able to deny the Heng Samrin regime the much-coveted international legitimacy by repeatedly obtaining rejection of its representation at the United Nations.

As China's strategy of wearing down Vietnam through a protracted guerrilla war proved ineffective and Vietnam's dependence on the Soviet Union increased, Beijing changed its strategy. It is now directed on pressuring the Soviet Union to reduce aid and to "tame" Vietnam as the most important of the three pre-conditions for normalising Sino-Soviet relations.84 However, the Soviet Union had refused to discuss about its relations with a third country in their bilateral talk.

84 See, Times (London), 7 September 1986; ibid., 17 August 1986.
An ideal settlement would take the form of reconstitution of the government of Kampuchea in such a manner that it would be acceptable to Vietnam, China and Thailand. However, the objective conditions do not seem to point in that direction. The only option feasible at this juncture seems to be the proposal of the ASEAN countries to have an "indirect talk" under the auspices of the UN forum. It seems to be the only appropriate way to tackle the Kampuchean problem. The use of the UN machinery for such talks could provide a face saving device to all concerned. For the success of such efforts, it is imperative to elicit concurrence of China and the Soviet Union whose involvement on the side of the contending parties not only sustained the momentum of the conflict-situation but also made it more intractable for political settlement.