



# VIETNAM COMMENTARY

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## Jumping on the Peace Bandwagon: The Bogor Talks

*Khien Theeravit\**

The four-day Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) in Bogor, Indonesia, ended on 28 July 1988, but the Cambodian problem remains unresolved. The meeting was only of symbolic significance: for the first time since the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and the resistance forces — the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) — met for direct talks. There were no concrete achievements.

Barlier, Prince Sihanouk, President of the CGDK, and Hun Sen, the PRK's Prime Minister, met for two rounds of talks in France, nudged by Paris and Moscow, respectively. Encouraged by this breakthrough, Indochinese well-wishers, as well as opportunists, began to place themselves in a prominent post on the peace bandwagon. The JIM was a part of this move.

Moscow seemed to be eager to settle by whatever means possible both the Afghan and Cambodian problems. At a meeting with Vietnamese leader Nguyen Van Linh in May 1987, Soviet leader Gorbachev stressed that the Cambodian problem could be resolved only on the basis of the unification of all national patriotic forces. This indicated that he and Linh might have agreed at that point that the Khmer Rouge (KR) could be included in the peace settlement process. Moscow's motive behind this move cannot be seen separately from the Soviet Union's overall global strategy. Regarding Indochina, Moscow appears to believe that the Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Cambodia, scheduled to be completed in 1990, is genuine, and it is concerned over the consequences of such a unilateral withdrawal. Soviet Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov was said to have told then Thai Premier Prem Tinsulanonda in May 1988 that all interested parties should work out measures to prevent a power vacuum after the Vietnamese withdrawal.

France's motive is less clear. The French are believed to have successfully convinced Sihanouk to meet with Hun Sen. They also dealt a heavy blow upon the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which backs the CGDK, by persuading Sihanouk to abruptly resign from the CGDK presidency on 11 July 1988, just two weeks before the JIM was to begin. These two acts seem contradictory to Cambodian interests. The questions now being asked by Indochina watchers are: Are the French trying to recover their lost influence in Indochina? Why did they try to sabotage the ASEAN-promoted JIM? Are they only interested in getting rid of the KR? Are cer-

tain French officials working in their private capacities or do they have the backing of their government?

### The Basic Interests of the Parties Involved

Both Khmers and non-Khmers were involved in the JIM. The four Khmer factions have a common interest, and that is peace and stability in their own country. The non-Khmer parties may or may not share that desire, but they have their own interests.

Hanoi has been seen as less willing than its Soviet patron to make any concessions on Cambodia. It initially appeared unenthusiastic about meeting with the Khmer resistance leaders. This reluctance can be interpreted in various ways. One is that Hanoi genuinely believes that the PRK forces will be strong enough to prevent a power vacuum after a Vietnamese troop withdrawal. The other is that Hanoi has never thought of a genuine troop withdrawal anyway. Nevertheless, Hanoi eventually participated in the JIM because host Jakarta assured it that the meeting would be held in two stages, with the four Khmer factions participating in the first stage, and Vietnam, Laos and ASEAN members joining the talks at a later stage. Thus Hanoi's status was equal to that of ASEAN's — that is, Hanoi participated as an interested, not an involved, party.

There were three main reasons for Hanoi's participation in the JIM. First, it wanted to keep in line with Moscow's new diplomatic offensive. Second, the number of Vietnamese casualties in the Cambodian war has been disturbing. (Lt-Gen Le Kha Kheiu, deputy Commander of the "Vietnamese volunteers" in Cambodia, was reported to have said on 3 June 1988 that about 55,000 "Vietnamese volunteers" had been killed since 1977, and that an equal number of men had been wounded). Lastly, Hanoi's economic hardship, resulting from the economic boycott of Western powers, has become unbearable. Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach led his delegation to the JIM in the hope of securing outside assistance to get rid of the "Pol Potists". This would enable Hanoi to maintain overwhelming influence in Cambodia. Promoting self-determination in Cambodia was farthest from Hanoi's mind.

The PRK had no choice but to bend with the Moscow-Hanoi wind. While it had to accept the strategy

of diplomatic offensive, it was fully aware of its weaknesses, and was deeply concerned over the uncertainty of the outcome of the power games. As early as June 1987 the Phnom Penh regime had devised its own strategy for maintaining its interests through diplomatic struggles. Hun Sen reportedly told a gathering of 19 Ministers and Governors in Phnom Penh on 18 June 1987, among other things, that during the period of negotiation the PRK would adopt a strategy of "talk fight-fight talk"; that it would cooperate with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc in an attempt to normalize relations between China and Vietnam so as to curb the spread of Chinese influence; that it would provoke disunity among the rank and file of the enemy in order to destroy the Pol Pot forces; and that it hoped to use Sihanouk to beat China and the United States. The main concern of the PRK faction at the talks was to find a means of surviving, if not emerging as a dominant power, after the Vietnamese troop withdrawal.

The KR went to the JIM to demonstrate that it had popular support and that it was prepared to prove the claim by taking part in a general election after the Vietnamese troop withdrawal. The KR reiterated at the JIM that it had no desire to control any future coalition government. However, it would not accept the proposal that its guerrilla forces be dissolved and be replaced by international peace-keeping forces.

The Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) went to the JIM, conscious of the split among its rank and file which has rendered its position weak. Its main interest was to present itself as a non-communist political force to be included in the power-sharing equation in any future coalition government.

The Sihanoukist faction was the weakest on the battlefield, but strongest in the international arena. Sihanouk used his dramatic resignation a fortnight prior to the JIM to discredit the KR, his coalition partner, by accusing it of frequent armed attacks against Sihanoukist forces in the battlefield. The motive for Sihanouk's resignation, which came after a four-hour meeting with two high-ranking French diplomats, is not clear. It was speculated that he would feel more at home in Paris than in Beijing or Pyongyang, where he had lived in exile over the past nine years; that he might have wanted to distance himself from China and Thailand, the hard liners against the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia; that he might want to move future negotiations to Paris or Harare (Zimbabwe), the present host of the non-aligned movement; and/or that he might be playing a trick against the other Khmer factions by putting himself above others, rather than project himself as a mere equal partner. Although the Sihanoukist delegation to

JIM was headed by his son, Prince Ranariddh, Sihanouk himself went to Jakarta in a private capacity and summoned all the Khmer factions to meet him and to listen to his prepared proposal. He appears to have succeeded in confusing the Khmers by his endless political maneuverings.

Among the ASEAN participants, Indonesia was the most enthusiastic about the JIM. President Suharto is said to have a strong desire to equate himself with his predecessor, President Sukarno. He made great efforts to lay the ground for Indonesia to become eligible for the next chairmanship of the Non-aligned Movement. Moreover, Jakarta wanted to drive home the point that Indonesia's foreign policy was not dictated by Thailand, and that it was not anti-Hanoi. This might have been spurred by strong anti-Chinese sentiments in Jakarta.

Thailand and Singapore were united in their view of the Cambodian problem. Both perceive the Vietnamese threat as real and current, and they see the need for the existence of the KR forces in order to give Vietnam a costly lesson. To them, giving support to the resistance forces is justifiable and legitimate so long as the invasion forces remain in Cambodia. They went to the JIM to defend these positions.

Moscow and Beijing were not parties to the JIM. Moscow has realized through its Afghan adventure the negative consequences of using military invasion as a means of expanding its influence. It has, therefore, actively encouraged Hanoi and Phnom Penh to change from the military strategy to a diplomatic one. Beijing was less enthusiastic about the JIM. For Beijing, the logic is simple. The Vietnamese found their own way into the Cambodian quagmire; they now find themselves in trouble, both at home and abroad; they should, therefore, be left alone to find their own way out. In any case, the Chinese had the wisdom to judge that it was not in their interest to oppose the ASEAN move to organize the JIM.

## Accords and Discords

The only concrete result of the JIM was in form, not in substance. Hanoi and the PRK met with the CGDK, including the KR. This, in itself, was a tremendous psychological breakthrough.

Nguyen Co Thach did not lose face. He shrewdly covered it up in a large crowd of ASEAN delegates. By so doing, he was once again able to maintain his long-held pretense that Vietnam was not a party to the Cambodian conflict, that the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia were "volunteers" and were there by "in-

vation". But fictitious as these claims were, ASEAN has endorsed it. This has clearly demonstrated that Hanoi's diplomatic skills are formidable. Perhaps, one can sacrifice principle in favor of pragmatism. An act of pragmatism requires an end, and the end can justify the means. What then has ASEAN acquired in this process of sacrificing principle?

The JIM agreed that Vietnam would withdraw its troops from Cambodia. But, prior to the JIM Hanoi had repeatedly announced that it would completely withdraw by 1990. Hence, there is nothing new in this respect. The participants could not agree on a withdrawal timetable, or a system for monitoring the withdrawal. Instead, Hanoi tried to establish a link between troop withdrawal and the level of support outside powers were giving to the CGDK. Host Jakarta included this Vietnamese demand in a statement issued at the end of the meeting. It ignored the long-established principle that resistance to any foreign aggression is legitimate. So, on this issue the JIM produced no concrete result to compensate for the principle sacrificed. The JIM also failed to resolve another crucial problem: the formation of an interim coalition government with specific devices to guarantee a peaceful transition to a power-sharing arrangement among the four coalition partners and the unification of the armed forces of the four factions.

The second point on which some claim to have made progress at the JIM was the agreement among the JIM parties that the KR should not be allowed to return to power. This is, in fact, nothing new. Earlier, the KR leaders had repeatedly pledged that they would never take over political power alone, that they wanted to share power with other parties.

The third accomplishment of the JIM is said to be the agreement to set up a working group of senior officials from ASEAN, Vietnam, Laos and the four Khmer factions to examine specific aspects of a political solution to the Cambodian problem. The working group would present its findings by December 1988. This can hardly be labeled a success. It might just as well be a face-saving device and end up with or without concrete results.

What has JIM done to benefit the Cambodian people? Nothing! The fighting will go on. The Khmer refugees cannot hope for any improvement. The JIM did not come up with any serious discussion, not to mention any concrete results, to alleviate the burden of the countries bearing the consequences of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

Whatever aims Jakarta hoped to achieve through the JIM, the net gains are clearly in favor of Hanoi. First, the Hanoi-Phnom Penh scheme of splitting ASEAN unity seems to be working. ASEAN

delegates could not agree among themselves over a joint statement to be issued after the meeting. The Indonesian Foreign Minister did issue one in his capacity as chairman of the JIM. This statement clearly reflected Jakarta's tilt towards Vietnam. (The Indonesian statement said, among other things, that all participants had agreed that the problem must be linked with the Vietnamese troop pullout within the framework of the political settlement and the prevention of the recurrence of the genocidal policies and practices of the Pol Pot regime.)

Second, the JIM was an image-building opportunity for Hanoi, for it allowed Hanoi to equate the Indochinese states with ASEAN. It allowed Hanoi to create the impression that these two regional groupings were capable of working together with the exclusion of China on a problem in which China claims to have a vital interest. The JIM and the setting up of the working group might imply an attempt to drive a wedge between Thailand and China. And, Jakarta and Hanoi seem to share this objective.

Finally, Hanoi and the host tended to exaggerate the positive aspects of the JIM, for different reasons. As a result, the world might well be misled to believe that peace is at hand. Through diplomatic maneuverings, Hanoi may find a way to ending its political and economic isolation without making any concession.

### What Is To Be Done?

Nationalism takes time to beat colonialism but it will certainly triumph eventually. The Russians are beaten by Afghan nationalism, and so are the Vietnamese by Khmer nationalism. In the long-term interest of Cambodia, and of Southeast Asia as a whole, one should have patience and try to deal with the Cambodian problem with determination, not by expediency. These are some concrete suggestions that could be taken into consideration:

- (1) The basic issues must not be sidestepped. An aggressive act should not be legitimized. The accent at the JIM was on the past atrocities of the Pol Pot regime, not on the Vietnamese aggression. This is misleading. One should not be led to believe that the atrocities of Pol Pot's rule were the real cause of the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia. Vietnamese expansionism was the root cause behind that invasion and occupation. According to the principle of self-determination that governs international relations, a foreign government has no right to say which individual, party, or faction deserves or does

not deserve to rule his or its country. In this case, only the Cambodian people have that right. A foreign country may express its objection to an undesirable behavior of a foreign government by putting pressure on the target government, such as military quarantine, economic boycott and political isolation, but not by military invasion or by the imposition of leadership from outside. In Cambodia Hanoi set aside the rule of law in favor of the law of the jungles.

(2) One should not rely solely on Sihanouk to settle the Cambodian problem and to rule his country. Sihanouk is an undisputed Cambodian patriot, but he is a difficult man. Those who deal with him are often left baffled. Means and objectives can be shifted back and forth. The shifts are mainly motivated by a desire to play one party against another, and, logically, Sihanouk is suspicious of being used by others in turn. Thus, Sihanouk ends up having no sincere friends, only collaborators at best. The Prince now wants to set up a coalition government, artificially propped up by external forces. If realized, such a government can hardly be stable. But, Sihanouk is a Cambodian. He has the right to do whatever he wants in his country.

(3) The international community must be determined to put pressure on Hanoi not to interfere with the internal matters of Cambodia. In Hobbesian terms, so long as Hanoi still violates the covenant of the Leviathan, others can separately or collectively punish Hanoi in the name of "the sword of justice," and direct it from brutish natural state to civil society. It is justified to use whatever means, violent or peaceful, political or economic, to force Hanoi into civil society. But one should not presume to negotiate on behalf of Cambodia any terms of settlement. Outsiders may be opportunistic or ignorant about the real interests of the country.

(4) The international community must not encourage aggression by unilaterally making concessions to

Hanoi's demands. It is highly irresponsible for those who live in distant areas to encourage Hanoi to continue to commit crimes against its own people and its neighbors. The idea of using aid to lure Hanoi away from the Soviet bloc has not worked and will never work. The idea of playing Vietnam off against China is not the right approach. It is harmful to international order. Those who think along these lines are not trustworthy, for they may also try to use Thailand against Vietnam so that they can reap benefits from Thailand's weaknesses.

(5) Those who are friendly towards Thailand should realize that Thailand has suffered severely from the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Bangkok needs support, as expressed by such countries as Singapore, China, the United States and Japan. Third countries should refrain from making conditions that encourage Hanoi to inflict greater damage on Thailand. Specifically, they should not insist that the Vietnamese are better than the Pol Potists in ruling Cambodia, that the Chinese are using Thailand, or that Thai territory is being used as sanctuary by the resistance forces. These arguments are used by Hanoi to justify its aggressive acts against Thailand.

(6) Third countries should refrain from dancing in tune with Moscow, which seeks peace in form but continues to expand its influence in reality. Moscow and Hanoi are beaten militarily in Afghanistan and Cambodia respectively. Their new diplomatic efforts are aimed at creating conditions that would force the victorious enemies to accept the *fait accompli*, which they have not been able to do so far by purely military means. Peace is farthest from their minds. The JIM was clearly a case in point.

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## A Visit to the Thai-Cambodian Border: Some Thoughts

Bruce Weinrod\*

Those who think and write about geopolitics are sometimes susceptible to theoretical policy-making exercises. That is why first-hand visits which confront the reality and results of international rival-

ries, ambitions and ideologies are so important and necessary.

I visited the Thai-Cambodian border not as a Southeast Asia specialist but rather as a student of US-

Soviet relations and of regional conflicts in which these two nations are involved. I had no special background knowledge before I arrived, and I make no claim to sophisticated expertise at the conclusion of my visit.

The trip to the border takes around four hours from Bangkok. Having spent a good part of my 18-month United States Army service in the jungles of Panama, I was particularly impressed by the stark beauty of the thick foliage near the border. And the jagged hills lurching straight up from the leafy terrain and rice paddies were striking. It is through passages in those very hills, I was told, that Vietnamese and resistance military personnel slip in and out of Cambodia to the camps and nearby areas located on the Thai border.

Using the sleepy border town of Aranyaprathet as our base, we ventured off to two camps over unimproved roads. Intermittently in the distance, we spied burnt-out areas — a result of Vietnamese artillery shell lobbed from up to 20 miles away.

The camps themselves, which hold over 200,000 Cambodians, send distorted signals to a Western observer. Because they are not located adjacent to, or in the midst of, a modern urban area, there is an absence of stark contrast to highlight the poverty of these settlements. Indeed, they are nestled in a bucolic setting of tropical colors.

But once one enters the camps, the reality of poverty and hopelessness is all-pervasive. What I recall most vividly were the camp residents parading purposelessly in single file without end on both sides of the dusty roads. Since these Cambodians are classified as economic migrants rather than political refugees, there is little possibility of their acceptance by other nations.

At each of the camps we visited, we met with the Cambodian "camp administrator". The Site 2 camp, located a one hour's drive over smooth roads, is under the control of Son Sann's forces and holds around 160,000 refugees. The camp administrator, Thu Ton, was forthcoming and candid in his comments. He did not see the likelihood of a genuine Vietnamese withdrawal despite Hanoi's recent pledges.

The 32,000 inhabitants of Site 8, the other camp, are controlled by the Khmer Rouge (KR). We pressed its administrator, Seng Sok, on several key points. He maintained that the Vietnamese had not really withdrawn from the border area but had merely rotated troops. He also felt that the Vietnamese would not pull out their troops from Cambodia.

The crucial problem with the KR is, of course, their complicity in the ghastly slaughter of the 1970s. Sok was evasive on his own whereabouts during

those days, but he said that the KR would not follow that path again. (Sok told us he was a writer but I subsequently read an interview where he claimed he had been a farmer). Nevertheless, we also heard comments from knowledgeable observers that the KR forces were attacking non-communist resistance forces and even shelling their own camps to gain sympathy. I was not persuaded by Sok's remarks. But even if there had been a general change in KR thinking, the crimes of the 1970s should not be ignored.

The United States, thus, is faced with a policy dilemma. Two evils are present. The first evil is the Vietnamese conception of Cambodia and its attempts to forcefully impose a collectivist system on the Cambodian people. The second evil is the criminal record of the KR.

The camp visit made clear to me how complex and deep-rooted the challenges to a resolution of Cambodia's problems are. The United States can and should play a role on the margins, but the keys to the solution are China, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and, to some extent, Thailand.

Any settlement must be acceptable to China or it will not work. To this extent Chinese and US interests are parallel. But China must also eventually find other means to protect its interests than exclusive reliance on the KR since KR dominance is an outcome unacceptable to a broad group of nations.

If Moscow were to cut aid to Vietnam, Hanoi would have to decide whether it could pay the higher cost of continued involvement in Cambodia. But given Vietnam's behavior after the 1954, 1962 and 1973 "peace" agreements, and its failure to implement earlier pledges of troop withdrawal from Cambodia, any genuine resolution of the Cambodian issue must have real teeth in it. While, some observers have suggested that Hanoi would settle for a partition of Cambodia at the Mekong River, it would be a mistake for other interested nations to agree to this.

In the meantime, Thailand — and the United States — could do more. First, the Thais need to strengthen their military so that it is a genuine regional force to counterbalance the Vietnamese. Second, Bangkok should respond more forcefully to Vietnamese intrusions into its territory. Third, the Thai government should subtly encourage the strengthening of the non-KR Cambodian forces. Only if they are stronger on the battlefield can they play a forceful role in a settlement.

This is also where the United States can play a role. First, why cannot the refugees, including those in the KR camps, be given educational instruction, not only in reading and writing, but in human rights and democratic values in general? And why cannot the

Thai authorities arrange for elections to be held in the camps? This would not only allow the inhabitants to be administered by people of their choosing, but would give them practical experience with democracy. After all, the ostensible objective of the United States is an independent, democratically-governed Cambodia. Entrepreneurial activities should also be encouraged and training in useful job-related skills should be a high priority. Democracy and stability would be difficult to sustain without at least an incipient middle class. Along with the United States, Japan could play a helpful role in funding all of these activities and should also refrain from major trade with Hanoi. The United States should also step up its overall financial and technical support to the non-communist resistance.

One question that arises is why the disparity in insurgents. There are actually more young men in the non-Khmer Rouge camps but far fewer fighters. If the Thais, and the rest of the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN) for that matter, can encourage a strengthened non-communist resistance force, and make plans for restricting the military capability of the KR in the event of a settlement being reached, a settlement acceptable to the non-communist world is more likely.

After over a decade of existence, it is time to stop treating the people of these camps as a temporary phenomenon. Helping them to prepare for the future would be a policy where morality and self-interest converge. It is thus time for the non-communist governments of Asia, as well as the United States, to give more attention to these people and to the non-communist factions of the resistance. By doing so, the long-term chances for an outcome in the interests of the free world will be substantially increased.

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## The Cambodian Quagmire: A Way Out for Vietnam

Mohd Azhari Karim\*

Expectations of peace in Cambodia have been generated once again by the recent flurry of diplomatic efforts. As always, it is the role of Vietnam in supporting or opposing any move for a settlement that comes to the fore. This time, however, all interested parties, including the Vietnamese and the Khmer Rouge (KR), have met together, and this has given rise to new hopes of realizing peace and stability, which have long eluded the country.

### The Problem

The problem can be stated briefly in terms of the disliked symptoms and the preferred goals. Cambodia has been occupied by Vietnamese troops since December 1978 and has been ruled since then by the Vietnamese-imposed Heng Samrin government. There has been continuous fighting between, on the one side, the Heng Samrin forces, backed by Vietnamese troops, and the resistance forces, comprising the KR, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and the Sihanoukists, on the other. The

fighting inside Cambodia has seen a swelling of the refugee population along the borders with Thailand. In Phnom Penh the government is weak and has done little to improve the economy or restore basic social services. These are the disliked symptoms.

In contrast, the preferred situation would be one in which Cambodia was ruled by a stable, elected government and the people's right of self-determination was guaranteed soon after the Vietnamese left the country. The key to peace is getting the Vietnamese to withdraw their troops from the country. In order to persuade them to do so, the Vietnamese will have to be convinced of the wisdom of withdrawal. One way open is for us to put ourselves in the position of the Vietnamese decision-makers and to try to understand their partisan perceptions. It is important that we anticipate what happens if they say "yes" and decide to withdraw. (Indeed the Vietnamese have announced a phased withdrawal, which they say has already begun and will be completed at the latest by early 1990.) To do this, we could analyze the situation in terms of what choices the Vietnamese decision-makers have (the Currently Perceived Choice Chart), what we could propose to get the Vietnamese to say "yes" to

withdrawal (the Target Balance Sheet), and the options the Vietnamese can be comfortable with (the "Yessable" Propositions).

### Currently Perceived Choice Of the Vietnamese

Question: Shall we now decide to withdraw?

If Yes	If No
- there will be hostile countries on two sides — China and Cambodia	+ there will be a safe border with Cambodia
- the Vietnamese revolution will have been abandoned	+ we will have been loyal to the revolution
- plans for a dominant role in the region will have been abandoned	+ plans for a dominant role in the region will not have been abandoned
- the resistance in Laos will be encouraged to step up their activities	+ Laos will remain secure
- the Vietnamese army may become a problem at home	+ the Vietnamese army will be put to good use
<b>But</b>	<b>But</b>
+ we will gain international acceptance	- we will remain an international outcast
+ we may start to receive Western economic aid	- Western countries will continue to withhold aid
+ the cost of the war may be lessened	- we will continue to be saddled with the war costs
+ we can position more troops on the border with China	- the border with China will remain vulnerable

### Target Balance Sheet of the Vietnamese

Question: Shall we accept the X plan for withdrawal?

If Yes	If No
+ we can explain it to our constituents	- we will remain an international outcast
+ it will ensure our national security	- we will not receive Western aid
+ we will not suffer a loss of face	- the costs of war will continue
+ we will gain international acceptance	
+ Western aid is certain	

### "Yessable" Propositions

We can be comfortable with a plan that:

- (1) comes from a legitimate source,
- (2) we helped to create,
- (3) allows us to be true to our prior words,
- (4) ensures that the KR is not in control of the government,
- (5) restores the rights of the Cambodians,
- (6) allows us to get Western aid and to trade freely with other countries,
- (7) can be explained in terms of the "new thinking" in Vietnam,
- (8) concedes that some mistakes were made by the previous government,
- (9) makes the China border secure by political means, and
- (10) does not constitute defeat but is pursuant to an international agreement.

### What ASEAN Must Do

If ASEAN is serious about restoring the full rights of the Cambodian people, it must enlist Vietnamese ideas and interests. It must also seek the help of a facilitator who is acceptable to the Vietnamese side. Such a person can be the representative of the United Nations Secretary-General or any other person or persons deemed suitable to convey a peace plan to the Vietnamese. The facilitator must be armed with a draft memorandum to be presented to the Vietnamese that contains a description of the problem, the currently perceived choice of the Vietnamese, the target balance sheet of the Vietnamese and the set of circumstances that might permit a full withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia.

Finally, ASEAN must ensure that any peace plan that is conveyed to the Vietnamese should, in addition to the above, bear the following elements:

- (1) an international agreement involving China and the ASEAN countries as well,
- (2) the support of the United States and the Soviet Union,
- (3) the guarantees of Vietnam's neighbors,
- (4) the question of US and Western aid,



- (5) a "Government of Reconciliation" in Cambodia,
- (6) the role of the United Nations in respect of ensuring a safe border, supervising elections, monitoring the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and providing for the rehabilitation of refugees.

- (7) an official statement from Vietnam.

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## Sensei and Pupil: The Issues that Divide

Douglas Pike\*

The squabble between Vietnam and China earlier this year over the sovereignty of the uninhabited Spratly archipelago in the South China Sea has again brought into focus the long history of Sino-Vietnamese animosity. Hanoi's behavior in the region during the past decade, both with respect to China and Southeast Asia, suggests it has four major regional foreign policy objectives:

- (a) To secure a cooperative, non-threatening Indochina (that is, Cambodia and Laos), eventually perhaps achieving a federated or confederated arrangement. This is Hanoi's over-riding concern because it is security-based.
- (b) To increase its political and diplomatic influence among the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This would be in part for its own sake, and in part to forestall the formation of any sort of common anti-Vietnam front, as the Chinese urge. This could be a regional relationship, that is an ASEAN-Indochina Federation.
- (c) To limit the activities of the superpowers in the region where possible, particularly the activities of the United States but also that of China and (in a sense) the Soviet Union.
- (d) To nudge its Southeast Asian neighbors to the left, hopefully to the point that the ASEAN countries become a string of people's republics. For the time being this is no, doubt, more a wish than an active policy of Hanoi's.

### Points of Contention

Some of these objectives directly challenge Chinese national interest; none can be said to be en-

tirely compatible with them. Thus competition for influence in Southeast Asia is the first point of contention between Vietnam and China. To some extent the Vietnam-ASEAN relationship that emerged after the end of the war was inadvertent. In 1975 Hanoi seemed to have a strong sense of identification with the Third World, including even the capitalist nations of Southeast Asia. It said at that time that it wanted to maintain equidistance between the socialist and non-socialist world. But it was forced off this course by internal difficulties that tilted it towards the Soviet Union. Then Hanoi said it sought flexible external relations in Southeast Asia. Competition between Vietnam and China in the region — with the exception of the Cambodia issue — remains amorphous and ill-defined at the present.

The second specific contentious issue is the future political configuration of Indochina, centering on the notion of an Indochina Federation that would incorporate Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. China opposes such a development while the Vietnamese consider it not only desirable, but inevitable. China's feelings on the matter are obvious from its actions in Cambodia, the fundamental aim of which is to prevent federation if it can.

Resistance in Cambodia represents the third contending issue. The battle line there is now clearly drawn as a surrogate war, one that at the time of writing neither side appears able to win. Possibly the future governing structure of Cambodia can be separated as an issue from the issue of federation of Indochina. China and Vietnam agree that the central issue in Cambodia is the excessive influence the other is attempting to establish in that country. Theoretically at least, this means that a possible acceptable settlement would be one in which neither has such influence. A new governing arrangement in which both Vietnamese and Chinese influences were diminished, but in which each had a Khmer faction on

which it could base its future presence, could end the present suffering.

Laos is a fourth specific issue and here the point of contention is essentially similar to that involving Cambodia, that is, China feels that Vietnam's influence in that country is excessive. Laos also represents a potential security threat for Vietnam. The Chinese have close ties with the ethnic minorities in the Laotian hills through their cousins in China and could mount a troublesome anti-Vietnam resistance. Such a campaign would also, of necessity, alienate the Lao. China apparently regards the Lao as unwilling collaborators with Vietnam and considers that any hostile move on its part would throw Laos irrevocably into the Hanoi camp. Thus, to date, the Chinese have restrained themselves in Laos, foregoing anti-Vietnamese opportunism.

The fifth specific issue is Vietnam's intimacy with the Soviet Union, which has resulted in an extensive Soviet naval presence in Indochina and an association that is an alliance in all but name. Here China faces a genuine problem in strategy: how to put distance between the two allies. China's basic approach is what might be called the technique of protracted intimidation, that is, sustained pressure of various sorts — military, diplomatic and psychological — on both Vietnam and the Soviet Union in the hope that eventually the Soviets will see it as in their interest to distance themselves somewhat from Vietnam and the Vietnamese will seek a *modus vivendi*.

Finally, there are a clutch of lesser issues between Vietnam and China. Mistreatment of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam has been particularly embarrassing for China in terms of its image among overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. Extraordinary intransigence has surfaced between the two over the various small islands in the South China Sea that Chinese sailors traditionally call the Isles of Dangerous Places. China considers her claims to the Spratly and Paracel groups to be clear and just; the Vietnamese act in a more opportunistic than righteous manner. The matter is more than nominally important because the islands are believed to be rich in oil.

## The Subliminal Level

The issues discussed above concern the Sino-Vietnamese relationship at the surface level. Beneath them lies a subliminal relationship which perhaps is more important and of greater "reality" than any specific issue.

Vietnam's enhanced status that resulted from its

victory in the Vietnam War convinced its leaders at that time that they must alter their pupil-teacher relationship with China, replacing this centuries-old pattern of the deference of the pupil to his master with a new one, defined by equality. China's view, on the other hand, was that conditions had not changed that much, that the original association based on mutual obligation still obtained and that the overriding principle that must prevail was harmony of relations.

While this may appear to outsiders, especially those from the United States or Europe, to be an obscure exercise in Oriental metaphysics, the fact is that it represents a reality that already has had grave meaning for millions. Much of Vietnam's behavior in Cambodia is traceable to this subliminal struggle with China. The Chinese "lesson" in the 1979 border war was part of the redefinition effort. The Soviet presence in Vietnam most certainly is a contribution, although probably an unwitting one on Moscow's part. Hence, this is no metaphysical exercise, but a psychological condition with profound meaning for the future.

## The Future

The present poor state of relations between Hanoi and Beijing came about as much through error or blunder on the part of both parties as for any other reason. That there would be competition between them in Southeast Asia, that there would be no turning back to the simple "lip-and-teeth" years, seemed inevitable. But relations need not have deteriorated as badly as they did. The Hanoi Politburo acted ineptly. It could have handled China more skillfully. Had Ho Chi Minh been alive he probably would have been able to avoid a breach. The Chinese were clumsy in their efforts to force distance between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. A more carefully designed policy, one built around economic aid, could have preserved some Chinese influence in Hanoi.

The studies that I have conducted over a decade, based on interviews with Vietnamese nationals on their attitudes towards China (and the Soviet Union), strongly indicate that most Vietnamese — probably including future policy-makers — believe that in the long run Vietnam and China must get along. China is simply too vast, and too close, to allow Vietnam to treat it as a permanent enemy. That is a fact of a thousand years standing. A viable Vietnam requires peace with China. Deep down, every Vietnamese, even the most rabid China-hater, accepts this ultimate truth. However, this does not and cannot mean "eating Chinese dung" as the Vietnamese put it. Rather, it requires a proper mix of Vietnamese asser-

tiveness and deference to China, something that is difficult to achieve because of the premium Asia places on "face". Sooner or later a workable relationship will have to be established. Arriving at that point is Hanoi's overriding foreign policy problem.

The generational transfer of political power now under way in Hanoi, marked by the advent of a new party Secretary-General, Nguyen Van Linh, and a new Central Committee as well as a new National Assembly (both with at least 50 percent first-timers) has altered the substance/issues of the ever-present factionalism. It appears that doctrinal infighting in Hanoi in the future will be restructured, the former "pragmatists" becoming "reformers", the former "ideologues" becoming "conservatives". With respect to relations with China, there is probably a consensus between the two sides that an improved relationship with China is both necessary and desirable. If there is a quarrel on this point, it has to do with the pace of change, not with its necessity or desirability. However, both sides also probably assess that Vietnam is largely locked into a cold war that China intends to continue, and, therefore, realistically there is little Vietnam can do to change Chinese policy. Thus the "renovationist" or *glasnost* spirit in Hanoi will probably have less effect on policy-making with respect to China than it has on other areas for decision-making, such as the economy, relations with

ASEAN and relations with the United States.

Future Sino-Vietnamese relations will be subjected to the constant pull and haul that results from the obvious geographic fact that Vietnam shares the same region with China while the Soviet Union does not. From this follows the equally obvious geopolitical fact that Vietnam cannot deal with China in the same manner and using the same policies as the Soviet Union can. Moscow may be able to afford a permanent cold war with Beijing, but because of China's proximity and size, Hanoi cannot. When improved relations are established by Vietnam and China, the essential geopolitical condition of Southeast Asia will not be appreciably changed. There always will be a certain degree of struggle for power among China, Vietnam, and the ASEAN countries. This will not be necessarily destructive. Competitiveness, within bounds, is normal and generally beneficial, since it tends to keep excesses in check. Much worse would be a Southeast Asia dominated by a single power.

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## The Seduction of Confidence-Building: Idealists of the East

Zakaria Haji Ahmad\*

It has long been recognized that the manifold problems of security in the nuclear age have led to the "intellectualization" of the study and analysis of issues that affect peace and international order. This has in turn produced a proliferation of institutes and centers of strategic and security studies and international relations, a phenomenon that has been paralleled in the Third World even as issues that affect the extant international balance of power are primarily a concern of the First and Second Worlds. It has been tempting to establish "think tanks" in many countries, whether "developing" or not, so as to provide an institutional basis for the analysis of the complex issues in nation-building and national, regional and international security. In Southeast Asia, in the last two to five years, there has been an emerg-

ing spate of such institutes of strategic studies.

But while these developments and efforts do have their positive aspects, it is less certain if regional security is being enhanced as a result. In the field of strategic studies itself have emerged various schools of thought that emphasize war or peace, a paradigmatic schism that can also be seen as the divide between realists and idealists. Granted that the thrust of any research program or undertaking is a matter of individual or national decision, there are compelling signs that an idealistic *leitmotif* has become the modus operandi of some of these research institutes. This itself may not be a bad thing, but when viewed against the larger context of developments in East and Southeast Asia, it becomes necessary to be forewarned of its debilitating and deleterious consequences for the

security of the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the region as a whole.

In the context of an apparent diminution of conflict in regional context, and a perceived withdrawal of the Soviet Union as the *eminence grise* in East-West relations, there has appeared a tendency to view Moscow much more openly and positively. Such a window of opportunity as afforded by an apparent decline of conflict and enhanced avenues for peace, translated in events such as the Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) in late July to achieve a dialogue between the warring factions in Cambodia, are naturally welcome but it would be highly perilous to assume momentous circumstances have arrived in the history of mankind that herald the demise of conflict. But, why not, as some of the idealists would argue, if these developments converge with other efforts to denuclearize the world (such as the "nuclear weapons-free zone" proposal for Southeast Asia) and achieve no-conflict situations in places such as Nicaragua and Angola?

Given these circumstances, it would perhaps be understandable that a follow-up conference was held in July in Southeast Asia on the theme "Confidence-Building and Conflict-Reduction". Expanding on the same theme of its first roundtable in 1987, the scope of its coverage was enough to illustrate that its sponsors feel they are riding the crest of these momentous times. Closer examination, however, indicated that there is more than meets the eye in exercises of this nature. It is valid that war is too important to be left only to the generals, to paraphrase Clemenceau, but the emergence of intellectuals in the formulation of strategy has led perhaps to the rise of those whose armchair theories only serve to aggrandize their self-serving interests as well as those who are more insidious. It is these same sponsors who have acted out a role that usurps the official ASEAN interlocutor role of maintaining the dialogue with the Vietnamese and who have advocated that Kuala Lumpur serve as the "Helsinki of the Pacific Basin".

It is this very same group who have pushed the marxist analysis of economics being the inevitable dialectic that runs human progress, and who advocate that it is "the primacy of economics" that we must devote our attention and energies to, not the vigilance necessary to counter would-be adversaries in the old military and diplomatic way of East-West confrontation. Such thinking plays into the hands of the Soviet Union whose recent reform movement and diplomacy of smiles are but part of a catch-up game.

Under the veneer of ersatz scholarship and

beautiful prose, we are led to believe that the barriers to peace can be overcome by the right attitude and approach of "confidence-building", by discoursing in seminars among contemplative men of wisdom from all sides of the spectrum, that by such synergisms the propensity to reduce conflict simply becomes more concrete. Who would, for example, have suggested that the Cambodian conflict could be reduced by invoking the "Yugoslav" or the "Laotian" or the "Swiss" or the "Austrian" or the "Burmese" solutions, the references to these already a dire twisting of situations and context clearly unique and non-replicable in the mainland Southeast Asian milieu? It is this same group of scholars who have had the gall to suggest that the Soviets have an enduring interest in the Cambodian question thus:

*"Cold rationality argues most strongly that it is in the interest of the Soviet Union — as much as in the interest of all the countries of Southeast Asia — that a just, viable, productive and speedy solution be found. Such a solution would guarantee all the serious costs that the USSR now has to bear"*  
(Emphasis added)

All this thinking and the idea of a certain capital being a Helsinki of the east is being mooted by the very group that wants to promote confidence-building (was it there, to begin with?), through woolly ideas that bear no real relevance to the challenges at hand. And it seems more clear trickery is at hand by those adept at manipulating language and imagery in the aura of openness and "new" approaches, especially those in the Kremlin and their fellow symphony members in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. It is even more ominous that these same confidence-builders are now pushing also for the withdrawal of the United States from the Philippines, and eventually Southeast Asia, under the guise of assisting Washington in its woes as a declining superpower. To soften the process, the idea mooted is one resting on a "gradual" withdrawal ostensibly because an abrupt departure is recognized as too damaging to the security of the region.

Confidence-building, then, is only a game that Moscow and its sympathizers are adroitly propagandizing in this "second era of detente". In short, we may well be witnessing the classic seduction of the idealists in our midst who believe confidence-building will lead to the eradication of conflict and war.

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## Interest Sections: A Booby Trap

Nguyen Van Canh\*

In March of this year, Republican Senator John McCain and seven others introduced a resolution (Resolution 109) in the US Senate calling for the establishment of "Interest Sections" in the capitals of Vietnam and the United States to resolve "specific issues" (humanitarian) between the two countries. The resolution was supported by Senators Dodd and Pressler.

### Inconsistent with Current US Policy

Following his visit to Hanoi in August 1987, presidential envoy Gen John Vessey declared that "the United States will send representatives to Vietnam to examine the plight of war orphans and cripples in return for the nation's pledge to accelerate efforts to locate MIA's". Gen Vessey also said that the United States considered these matters as "humanitarian concerns" and would not link them to "broader political issues". The State Department has confirmed that this is the official policy of the US administration. Moreover, the Vessey mission also received bipartisan support from the US Congress.

However, Resolution 109 undeniably links humanitarian issues to political matters. Although it does not specifically call for full normalization of diplomatic relations, it is, in fact, a surreptitious step in that direction. It clearly contradicts the intent of the US Congress and is inconsistent with current US policy.

### Continuous Dialog

The proponents of the resolution argue that the purpose of their resolution is to "provide the facility for an ongoing continuous dialog between the two nations" to speed up the resolution of the issues pending between the United States and Vietnam. The truth, however, is that there has been plenty of dialog between Hanoi and Washington. Sen McCain himself has admitted that "there are incessant streams of congressmen and senators that travel to Vietnam with amazing frequency". In early 1988, several members of congress had made trips to Hanoi: John McCain, Larry Pressler, Chester Atkins, Tom Ridge; also

former congressman John LeBoutillier ... On the Executive side, the State Department has pointed out that its officials had "frequently" met with the Vietnamese to discuss the unresolved issues (Missing-in-Action or MIA's, Prisoners-of-War or POW's, political prisoners, Amerasian children, Orderly Departure Program or ODP). The meetings took place in "Hanoi, New York (United Nations), Bangkok, Geneva and other locations", and at these meetings there were "both policy level and technical level negotiations". There is thus no communication problem with Hanoi. The difficulties lie in "disagreement on substance" and "Vietnamese unwillingness to go forward", as has been stressed by the State Department.

### Aid by Private Charities

Under the Vessey agreement, the US government has allowed private organizations to provide aid not only to Vietnamese children who were disabled during the war, but also to children who suffer disease and malnutrition which are not war-related. Furthermore, the US medical mission could lead to granting food aid". However, Vietnam's Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach recently criticized the United States for not having complied with secret agreements requiring provision of such aid directly by the US government. He emphasized that if the US government did not get directly involved, the search for MIA's would be jeopardized.

### Hanoi's Intentions

What are Hanoi's intentions behind this demand? Hanoi seeks (a) to nullify in fact the existing US laws which forbid the provision of aid to Vietnam by getting the US government involved in the provision of aid, (b) to make it easier for American corporations to invest in Vietnam under the New Foreign Investment Code (adopted last December), and to lobby for the lifting of the US trade embargo, and then the establishment of full diplomatic relations and granting economic aid. After Washington's first step, Hanoi wants what Nguyen Co Thach has called a "two-way traffic": the setting up of an Office for Hanoi in

Washington and another for Washington in Hanoi. This is precisely what Sen McCain and his friends have proposed in Resolution 109. This resolution is indeed a "big leap forward" for Hanoi.

### Angling for Aid

Hanoi's economy is in total disarray. Food production has declined as a result of the imposition of socialism on the peasants. Last May, Hanoi warned that the country was severely short of food. Some 7-8 million people are threatened by starvation. Hanoi has been unable to solve the food problem for a growing population (1.2 million more mouths to feed each year). Furthermore, its debts (currently over US\$7 billion) have accumulated and have grown larger every year. No resources are available to pay off these debts. And it has not been able to obtain further credits. Early this year, Hanoi failed to negotiate with Thailand a purchase of 65,000 tons of paddy on credit. Vietnam's reserves in US dollars for the past six years have been at US\$16 million. This amount is not sufficient to cover the costs of two weeks' imports.

Yet, Hanoi now maintains the third largest army after China and the Soviet Union (1.1 million men in the regular forces, and 1.8 million in the militia). The maintenance of these forces and the consolidation of its presence in Cambodia absorb a considerable share of financial resources. The Soviet Union annually provides US\$2 billion in economic aid and US\$1 billion in military aid. However, Moscow's ability to finance Vietnam indefinitely is limited, as it has to meet its own pressing needs. Hanoi, therefore, has to look for other sources of funds. Looking to the West is the solution. Hanoi has been isolated since it invaded Cambodia in 1978. No Western country is willing to come forward with aid to it as long as America has not moved. So America is Hanoi's key target. If Hanoi could normalize its relations with America and secure American economic aid, then Japan and the Western European countries would follow. This could help Hanoi escape from its present isolation. The United States will thus help consolidate the regime in the present situation.

### Affection Misplaced

When Sen McCain introduced his resolution, he stated at a press conference that he wanted to "help the American people and the Vietnamese people

resolve "the issues that still exist between them. He further asserted that he held "no particular affection for the Vietnamese (communist authorities)". Another Vietnamese veteran, Frederick Down, who was crippled because of the war, vehemently stated before the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the US Senate that "we did not like the politics of Vietnam, but we like the people". However, the affection Senator McCain and Frederick Down have for the Vietnamese seems misplaced for the establishment of "interest sections" will in effect help a totalitarian regime in the task of consolidating itself and committing further crimes against the Vietnamese people. Instead of relieving the Vietnamese people of their suffering, Resolution 109 will in fact have the opposite effect.

### Other Adverse Effects

Linking the resolution of the POW/MIA issue — a humanitarian issue — to a political matter, that is, the establishment "interest sections", will in fact jeopardize the opportunity of bringing POW/MIA's home. As Ann Mills Griffith of the League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia said in a letter to the US Senate on 29 March 1988, Resolution 109 "has enticed Hanoi's cooperation through political concessions, and places the POW/MIA issue into conflict with the US strategic and policy interests. In such a context, humanitarian issues invariably lose". Besides, it is a fact that the MIA issue has long been used by Hanoi as a weapon to blackmail America. Such a move as proposed by John McCain would give the wrong signals to Hanoi's leaders and thereby encourage them to continue on the same path. And, the POW/MIA problem will never be solved. The position taken by the League of Families of American Prisons and Missing in Southeast Asia is a logical one. Its view is based on some 13 years of experience in dealing with Hanoi's leaders and deserves close attention.

The "interest sections" concept also works against the policy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN has brought pressure to bear on Hanoi's leaders to withdraw their troops from Cambodia and to restore independence and sovereignty to the Cambodian people, that is, to accept a political solution to the problem. Since the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia the United Nations General Assembly has passed seven resolutions calling for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. But, Hanoi has defied all international opinion and persisted in its policy of occupying the country. From time to

time, it invited the international press to witness a phased withdrawal of its "volunteers". There have been six such "withdrawals" in all. However, the total number of troops remained unchanged — at some 135,000.

Recently, Hanoi announced that it would withdraw 50,000 troops from Cambodia by the end of this year. It also attended the recent Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM). Apparently, the Soviet Union has had a change of mind and has put pressure on Hanoi to alter its course in Cambodia. To make concessions to Vietnam at this point, however, could be counterproductive.

### Short-cuts are Counterproductive

Negotiation, for Vietnamese communist leaders, is war by other means. Therefore, all available tactics are to be used to defeat the enemy. In these circumstances, negotiation would be a long process. Any short-cut will have adverse effects. Moreover, the Vietnamese should be prevented from engaging in protracted talks. At the Paris conference in 1968, for example, the United States had to spend almost six months on reaching an agreement on the shape of the table alone. And the negotiations dragged on until President Nixon decided to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong in December 1972. This led to the signing of the agreement on 27 January 1973.

In June 1982, Nguyen Co Thach told Mike Wallace that Hanoi would unilaterally allow political prisoners to go to America. Six years have passed, and only today are there indications that the prisoners will be released. However, there are still many foreseeable obstacles in the way of bringing

these prisoners out of the country.

Leverage is also needed to solve other matters, for example, that of concentration camps. Some 65 identifiable camps still exist at the present time although the Hanoi authorities declared in mid-February 1988 that only 159 hard core persons remain in the camps. The establishment of "interest sections" as proposed by Sen McCain would not help resolve such matters. McCain himself admitted before the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs when submitting the resolution that "I am not guaranteeing that the establishment of an interest section will bring progress".

Senator McCain, the prime mover of Resolution 109, has now come round to realize what Hanoi really wanted when it urged him to push for the establishment of "interest sections". On 3 August 1988, Nguyen Co Thach announced that Vietnam had decided to suspend temporarily its cooperation on humanitarian issues (the search for MIA's and the emigration of former detainees of Vietnamese "reeducation" camps) because of America's "hostile policy". Hanoi's decision followed a statement to Congress by Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur to the effect that the US administration did not favor the establishment of "interest sections".

By so doing, Hanoi clearly showed its hand: by seeking the establishment of "interest sections" what it wanted was the solution of a political issue: the normalization of US-Vietnam relations by other means, by using people with good hearts, but with little understanding of Hanoi's tactics, like Sen McCain and the other members of Congress who sponsored Resolution 109.

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As the Vietnamese communist leadership engages in an unprecedented stern self-criticism, in the name of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, there is also an urgent need within the academic, media and diplomatic communities to reassess objectively the legacy of communism in Vietnam. *Vietnam Commentary* is conceived to open a broad debate on Vietnam and thereby provide new insights into the Vietnamese political system, its economy, society and other aspects.

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