

The Global Realignment of Forces and its Impact on the Indochina Question

VLADIMIR REISKY DE DUBNIC

I. Introduction

The process of the current global realignment of forces is characterised by five distinct but intertwined developments, four of which directly affect Indochina's future: (1) The deepening of the Sino-Soviet struggle, (2) the rapprochement between China and the United States, (3) the United States-Soviet detente and their closer economic relations, (4) the rapprochement between Japan and China, and (5) the probable rise of Western Europe as an independent factor in world politics.

The first four developments have in fact enabled the United States to disengage herself militarily from Indochina without the balance of power in Asia shifting towards the Soviet Union. The prospects of the intensification of United States-Soviet economic relations has served as a carrot and the rapprochement with China has served as a stick to induce the Soviet Union to press Hanoi to accept the ceasefire. The new China-Japan relations do not exclude the possibility of a coalition which would bear on the political future of all South East Asia. In sum, the United States' disengagement from Indochina has coincided with a new international situation. This new situation may not prevent Hanoi from again attempting a military solution; if it should do so the fruits of victory would not necessarily be Hanoi's, for the process of international realignment of forces will bring new factors to bear on the development of the region.

II. The United States' disengagement

When the United States entered the Vietnam War China was her adversary number one. At the time of the United States' military disengagement from Vietnam China had nearly become an ally; the United States made a point of being on the same side with China in the India-Pakistan military conflagration over Bangladesh. When the good offices of Moscow and Peking with Hanoi did not seem to be effective it was the bombing which was supposed to make Hanoi reasonable. A skillful orchestration of a threefold approach, the diplomacy of playing the Chinese card, economic incentive for the Soviets, and bombs for Hanoi brought about a ceasefire in Indochina.

During the sixties not much thought was given to the possibility of exploiting the contradictions between the three differing communist interests: Moscow, Peking and Hanoi's. Were it not for the United States' military involvement in Indochina, the area would have become a bone of contention between the Soviets and the

Chinese, and United States relations to Hanoi could have developed somewhat along the lines that United States-Yugoslav relations developed. But the original mistake of intervention could not be undone and thus the goal of American diplomacy became to pay the least penalty for this mistake: to disengage, and in the long run derive advantages from the contradictions between the Soviets and China.

The latter part of the tenure of Dean Rusk as Secretary of State was signified by the attempt to extricate the United States from Vietnam via the Moscow diplomatic route. But for Moscow America's involvement in Vietnam was welcome, for it distracted Washington from more important issues. To induce Moscow to persuade Hanoi to accept a ceasefire, the Soviets' arm had to be twisted. This was done by the United States' new China diplomacy. After President Nixon's trip to Peking a global realignment of forces appeared to have been set in motion. The implication for Moscow became obvious: If Moscow had refused to press Hanoi for a ceasefire it could have led the United States to play the China card more forcefully.

Since the United States did not win the war her role can be only marginal in Indochina; but neither did she lose the war, for she managed to extricate herself from Indochina without causing the collapse of South Vietnam. If history should ever judge this war as the first war America lost, it would have to be viewed as a loss in installments. The diplomatic spadework for disengagement has proved to be successful; the economic one less so. The United States, by pledging reconstruction aid to Hanoi, wanted to buy time. But this tactic worked both ways, for if the United States bought time for its client South Vietnam, time also was gained by Hanoi to recuperate from her heavy war damages.

The economic approach had other weaknesses; it was unrealistic on two grounds: (1) massive aid to Hanoi would scarcely find the approval of Congress, (2) Hanoi's resolve to unify Vietnam under her rule could never be modified by economic incentives. The thesis that Hanoi could be induced by economic means not to attempt to take over South Vietnam represented a type of economic determinism the Communists in Hanoi would not accept. President Nixon's warning that the United States would react sharply if Hanoi should mount a major offensive was needed to supplement the unconvincing economic approach. The strongest card to play was the diplomatic one. This was an unaccustomed role for the United States, for in the post World War II era it was the military and economic means which had constituted the mainstay of United States policy. The use of the diplomatic lever as the main instrument of policy was viewed as unnecessary in the face of overwhelming American strength; furthermore the bi-polar world left little room for diplomatic maneuvering. But the breakup of the Sino-Soviet alliance offered opportunities which were not open to the great powers previously.

The American withdrawal from Vietnam cleared the way to gaining an important potential ally-China. The Taiwan question appeared not to stand in the way anymore. The early departure of the United States' troops from Taiwan was guaranteed by Mr. Kissinger during his meeting with Premier Chou En-lai in Peking in February, 1973¹. The United States seemed to be moving toward a tacit alliance relationship with China; thus there was no reason for China to wish for a new

flareup of the Indochina conflict which could endanger such a new relationship. If the United States plays her strongest card well — the diplomatic one — she could save South Vietnam from Hanoi's takeover; for Hanoi would be denied the necessary military aid from the Chinese and also from the Soviets, provided the Soviets should perceive that Hanoi's takeover of South Vietnam would drive China and the United States closer together. In essence the United States', Soviet, and Chinese policies towards Indochina were functions of the mutual relations of the three powers.

For the United States, the key to overall peace in South East Asia rests today on two pillars: her alliance with Japan and her cooperation with China. The United States has abdicated the ungrateful role of world policemen and there is no single country which would like to take upon herself that role. If the Nixon doctrine means anything it means that the United States is not willing to carry the burden of peacekeeping alone; but this does not imply that she wants to abdicate exercising influence. The United States can, by her global diplomacy, retain some leverage in Indochina via pressures on the sponsors of Hanoi. Ultimately her role may fade away, for the simple reason that she is not an Asian power. But paradoxically the more her influence fades the more her presence may be wanted. Due to the Sino-Soviet struggle, the United States may be able to play a role in South East Asia which will not be distasteful either to the Soviets or to the Chinese. For any total United States disengagement from the area would mean an eventual danger for China and for the Soviets that one or the other power would move into the vacuum. During the unsettling time of the current global realignment it seems to be in the United States' and China's as well as the Soviet Union's interest not to permit any one power to achieve hegemony over any contested area in Asia.

The United States' current theory of global linkages, which is essentially a positive version of the falling dominoes concept, gives her a rationale for at least a residual presence in far off countries: to preserve influence in vital area A it is necessary to maintain influence also in less vital areas B and C, etc. Thus the overall Indochina situation is linked to the security of Thailand, which is linked to the security of South-East Asia, and this in turn constitutes an element of the balance of power in Asia. The upsetting of this balance would affect the security of both the United States and Europe. One qualification ought to be made here: if the balance of power in Asia is upset by China or Japan this would not necessarily adversely affect Europe, but if it is upset by the Soviet Union it would, for in gaining paramouncy in Asia the Soviet Union would be free to turn against her neighbor, Western Europe.

The proposition that the United States' military disengagement will not have as its consequence the complete loss of American political influence in Indochina is tenable as long as the detente between the United States and the Soviet Union and between the United States and China is lasting and as long as the Sino-Soviet conflict persists.

¹ Die Zeit, March 2, 1973, quoting Koyodo News.

III. Indochina does not constitute a closed system

The departure of American forces has made it appear as if the future of Indochina will be decided by internal political and military dynamics. But there are laws in international politics and there is a pattern of great power behavior which gives the states of Indochina a rather narrow chance of operating outside the context of the international situation. For no small or medium country of strategic significance constitutes a politically closed system. If the states of Indochina should try to erect a shield against foreign influence by way of neutrality, they would soon realise that a country can be outside a sphere of influence system only by tacit or explicit assent among the great powers. The lasting neutralisation of an area can be achieved in situations where there is an overall basic consensus on the legitimacy of the international system, but this consensus does not as yet exist.

There are geopolitical, ideological and economic factors which make it unlikely that Indochina will be left to itself: the Soviet objective to contain China and quarantine her ideologically, the Chinese policy to prevent it, and Japanese economic interests constitute elements of new foreign entanglements in the area. The peoples and governments of the countries of Indochina aspire to be free from foreign influence of any sort, and their experiences with intervention only fortify their desire to be left alone. But the very devastation of the area makes Indochina dependent on foreign assistance. Hand in hand with massive assistance goes political presence. There are few examples in history where large-scale aid is not politically conditioned. The perceived need of one Indochina state for protection against encroachments by another also constitutes an incentive for the weaker Indochina states to look for protectors. A new sphere of influence system established by a fait accompli is a distinct possibility.

To what degree external influence may be increased or limited in Indochina depends to a great extent on the political skill and willpower of its leaders. Undoubtedly strong collective willpower generated by a determined indigenous leader can under certain circumstances limit external influences. Ho Chi Minh's prestige and leadership and his policy of straddling Moscow and Peking assured the government of North Vietnam a degree of independence. The national interest does not change with the passing of strong leaders, but the ability to pursue it may lessen.

The question whether Indochina can be relatively free from foreign influence and domination depends also on the priorities the great powers set for themselves. The United States' domestic situation was certainly one of the determining factors in her military disengagement from Indochina. The Soviet Union is faced with a serious crisis in agricultural production and is determined to overcome the technological gap between East and West. This may temporarily make her more amenable to putting Indochina on the back burner in order to settle more pressing problems. China, should she perceive a benign attitude in what she considers the two "hegemonial" powers, would also have no momentary impetus to foster her influence over Indochina. North Vietnam is conscious of the fact that if it throws its lot in with Moscow it will lose the support of China or vice versa. Thus the strategy of Hanoi is not to lean to one side or the other. But such an ambiguous attitude may lessen Soviet and Chinese interest in supporting Hanoi's bolder

aspirations, especially should Moscow as well as Peking be preoccupied with domestic problems. The powers which in the past exerted the greatest effort to influence the outcome of the war in Vietnam, the United States and the Soviet Union (in the later years the USSR furnished 80 per cent of the war materiel to North Vietnam, China only 20 per cent), may recede from the picture; but this would not yet make Indochina immune to a sphere of influence system, for the calculations of the bi-polar world are no longer valid. In the long run Japan and China would become the natural beneficiaries of any vacuum of power in Indochina.

It is in the nature of the ideological "Weltanschauung" of Hanoi to perceive the United States-Soviet detente to be a temporary tactical expedient. Such a perception may embolden North Vietnam to attempt a takeover of South Vietnam by military means. Should it succeed, the fate of Indochina would not remain in the hands of Hanoi, for China would hardly tolerate a Soviet-friendly North Vietnam dominating all of Indochina.

Historically the area was under Chinese influence until the Opium War in the mid-nineteenth century, and Anam (Vietnam) had to pay tribute to China once in four years on an average ranging from one to thirteen years². Should a new version of tribute — a demonstration of ideological solidarity with China — be demanded, how would Hanoi react? If it accedes it will fall into China's orbit, if it resists it will have to look for Soviet support which would result in North Vietnam falling completely under the Soviet sphere of influence; and if it tries to stay aloof from the ideological and power political dispute between the two communist giants it still cannot escape being profoundly affected by the Sino-Soviet struggle. North Vietnam, whatever her perception of her role may be, cannot afford to ignore the interests of her powerful neighbor to the north.

IV. Indochina in the contest of United States triangular diplomacy and the Sino-Soviet conflict

The United States' recent application of classical diplomacy which does not recognize permanent enemies or permanent allies, has rendered relations among nations more flexible and put the ideological struggle between the two different social systems on a seemingly secondary place. Hanoi has acknowledged the new international climate only in part — and on paper rather than in fact, by signing the cease-fire agreement of 1973. North Vietnam did not abandon using military means to gain as much ground as possible before the United States-Chinese rapprochement and the United States-Soviet detente gained momentum. One of the reasons that Hanoi appears out of step with the ostensible "low profile" posture of its sponsors can be explained in two different ways: (a) either one or both sponsors secretly prod Hanoi to push forward militarily, since the danger that the conflict would be enlarged has been diminished by the American military

² John King Fairbank and Ssy-yu Teng, *China Administration: Three Studies*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961, pp. 146, 149.

withdrawal, or (b) the sponsors do not prod but also do not hinder Hanoi from pursuing a military solution. They may calculate that their new relationship with the United States would not be affected by their client's belligerent posture, for both powers claim that they do not control Hanoi. On its part the United States has also not adjusted to the new relationship with China, for it continued to bombard Cambodia's anti-government forces and to assist the Lon Nol regime, a regime which constituted an obstacle to Cambodia becoming a sphere of influence of China. The bombing of Cambodia was an example of military considerations (the protection of South Vietnam's flank) overriding the larger political issue of trying to settle the whole question of Indochina on a classical pattern of division into spheres of influence. The United States may eventually support China's interest in Cambodia current contrary policies notwithstanding³ in the hope that China will in turn not oppose a United States residual role in South Vietnam.

The United States triangular diplomacy, which must be governed by the principle of equitable agreement, faces in the Indochina question a major test. The nets of this diplomacy have been cast and China and the Soviet Union both have more to gain by an Indochina settlement than by exacerbating the conflict, for one would assume that the improvement of the two countries' relations with the United States should be more important to them than jeopardizing these relations by actively supporting Hanoi.

Are the United States' and China's interests in Indochina compatible? If we take China's defense considerations as the currently overriding factor of her policy, then there exists an overall basic compatibility between the United States and China. Chairman Maos's widely-quoted admonition "dig tunnels deep, store grain everywhere and never seek hegemony" repeated in the foreign policy platform of the CPCH Tenth Party Congress⁴ reflects in a nutshell China's national priorities. There are no divergencies between the US and Chinese positions on Indochina which could not be settled by diplomatic means. China in 1962 was on record as favoring a neutralization of Indochina; subsequently her position hardened, but today she appears to be primarily concerned that the area does not fall under Soviet influence. All other considerations are secondary and her policy is subject to change to serve this one main goal, to keep the Soviets out of Indochina. Thus in this sense the US and Chinese positions are compatible. Minor contradictory behavior of the United States in Cambodia such as supplying the Lon Nol regime does not seem to worry the Chinese, and Premier Chou En-lai in quoting Samdeh Sihanouk appears to agree with him that "the problem of peace in Cambodia is not difficult to solve"⁵. Just as US bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong where Soviet ships were damaged had no influence whatsoever on the US-Soviet rapprochement, so the bombing of Cambodia hardly damaged US-Chinese relations.

³ Peking Review, No. 35 and 36, September 7, 1973, p. 22.

⁴ The United States government declared that it will continue to provide Cambodia with all the military and diplomatic assistance allowable under the law, even after the August 15 deadline for halting United States air support. Facts on File, July 29–August 4, 1973, p. 634.

⁵ Peking Review, No. 16, April 20, 1973, p. 7.

Should China perceive that Hanoi leans towards the Soviet Union, she would cease supporting a unification of Vietnam under Hanoi, but she would nevertheless press Saigon to give a share of power to the Vietcong. According to Japanese sources a tacit agreement was reached between the United States and China in 1972 whereby a coalition government in South Vietnam including the Vietcong would be set up in Saigon, which would be more friendly to China than to the Soviet Union⁶. Should Hanoi begin to lean toward China, then China would support Hanoi's reunification efforts. But it is unlikely that this support would be militant, for it would jeopardise China's rapprochement with the United States. A US-Chinese understanding on the Indochina question is predicated by the Soviet behavior toward China and by the intensity of the United States detente with the Soviet Union.

The one million Soviet troops on the Chinese border to which Chou En-lai has frequently referred as a proof of hostile Soviet intent, and the threats of a Soviet use of nuclear weapons, as evidenced in Soviet broadcasts to China⁷, made it a matter of prudence for China to seek accommodation with the United States. To prevent a second Soviet front against China from developing in the South, it is imperative for China to try to foil any Soviet effort to establish a permanent Soviet military presence in Indochina. Any such Soviet attempts would be likely to be counteracted by China actively supporting a new form of liberation struggle against Soviet presence in Indochina.

The Chinese appear to favor a limited United States presence in Asia as a countervailing force to the Soviet Union. Should the Sino-Soviet tension subside, then the presence of the United States' military personnel in Thailand and the American naval presence in the South China Sea would be viewed by China more critically, unless the United States' presence in South East Asia should also be viewed as a countervailing force against possible future Japanese expansion in the area.

There are two platforms in China's foreign policy which, seemingly restrain the United States-China rapprochement: One is the Chinese opposition against the superpowers, the second restraint is the ideological commitment to the national liberation struggle in the developing countries.

According to Premier Chou En-lai the seventies will bring the end of the supremacy of the two superpowers⁸. The Chinese opposition to a politically and militarily bi-polar world system is shared by France and other medium powers. To break up the bi-polar world has become the aim of Western Europe and Japan. The United States has adjusted to this global mood and conceived the concept of a concert of "five powers". The anti-superpowers posture of China today applies

⁶ Financial Times, August 15, 1972, quoting the Japanese newspaper Nihon Keizai, Shim-bun.

⁷ A Moscow broadcast in a program in Mandarin to China entitled: "Is it possible for a country to fight a protracted war on its soil in the atomic age?" attacks the "pitiful theoreticians" of the defensive and Mao's querilia warfare concepts and praises the Soviet military theoreticians who hold that a war in the future would inevitably be a thermonuclear war. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), No. 10, January 15, 1970, p. A2.

⁸ Premier Chou En-lai's interview on French TV of July, 1970, Archiv der Gegenwart, 14-28, August, 1970, p. 25657B.

primarily against the Soviet Union and thus it has no detrimental consequences to United States-Chinese relations.

China's preoccupation with her own national security in the face of the perceived Soviet threat overrides her policy of supporting the liberation struggle in the developing countries. This support is mitigated by the Chinese concept of self-help. The matter is, however, complicated by China's competition with the Soviets over the good will of these revolutionary movements. Both China and the Soviets are unlikely to forsake their vested interest in the liberation movements. Shortly after Mr. Kissinger's first trip to Peking in 1971 there appeared a theoretical article in the Chinese press discussing Mao's work "On Policy" of 1940; the article called for "combining alliance and struggle"⁹, and it centered around Mao's advocacy of a "revolutionary dual policy". Viewed in the context of Mr. Kissinger's first negotiations in Peking it appears that the intent of the article was to remind the Party of the appropriateness of using flexible tactics without abandoning the "firm revolutionary principle". The timing of the article gives it the appearance of serving as a general guide for the United States-China rapprochement and of being intended to counteract a possible ideological shock in the Party. The "revolutionary dual policy" serves as an ideological safety valve and policy alternative, should the US-Soviet detente progress so much that it would be perceived by China as a collusion against her. Since the United States has ceased to play the role of global policeman, the Chinese support of national liberation struggles does not put the United States and China on a collision course. China has come to the conclusion that the United States has become reconciled to a marginal role in South East Asia; hence her olive branch to the United States appears not to be in contradiction with the policy of supporting national liberation movements in Indochina. This policy may even be used by the Chinese against the Soviets. The Chinese appeals to fight the Social Imperialism of the Soviet "new Czars" may not take hold in Hanoi, but, it might elsewhere in Indochina, especially should the Soviets establish a permanent political presence in the area.

There cannot be a Chinese "low profile" attitude toward the area if there is not a low Soviet profile. Due to China's current relative military inferiority towards the two superpowers, China may remain satisfied if the United States should play a role in Indochina, especially if this role should in practice lead to an offsetting of any Soviet attempts to encircle China. Herein rests the possibility of a tacit sphere of influence system in South East Asia whereby China, the United States, and the Soviet Union and sometime in the future Japan would balance off their influences.

China is apprehensive of Soviet encirclement attempts: (1) the Soviet-Indian Friendship Treaty, which in Chinese view violates India's neutral stand: (2) the Soviet endeavors to gain the economic cooperation of Japan and deflect Japan from a China-friendship policy¹⁰; (3) Soviet endeavors to cooperate with the

⁹ "Unite the people, defeat the Enemy, A Study of On Policy", Peking Review, No. 35, August 27, 1971.

¹⁰ The Chinese broadcast in commenting on Gromyko's visit to Japan quoted the Japanese sources where Gromyko's extraordinary interest in Japan's policy towards China were noted; the Chinese commentator added: "Gromyko tried to cover up his criminal design to oppose

United States and enlist the United States in an anti-China coalition; and (4) Soviet efforts to build an Asian Collective Security System which in China's eyes is nothing else but an attempt at an anti-China alliance¹¹.

The profundity of the gulf between China and the Soviet Union can perhaps best be expressed by three Chinese perceptions: that the Soviet Union is not an Asian power, that the Soviet Party is not really a Communist party, and that the Soviet system is not a socialist system. The first denial is the one which might outlast the other two. It is not that China would aim to expel the Soviet Union from Asia (nearly two-thirds of Soviet territory is in Asia) but rather that from the Chinese view the Soviet Union is essentially a European power and thus has no right to meddle in Asian affairs. For China the optimal arrangement in Indochina would be the locking out of her principal adversary, the Soviet Union, from the area. If contrary to Chinese objectives, Hanoi should lean heavily toward the Soviet side the Chinese would view the North Vietnamese leaders as traitors to the communist cause and consequently would attempt to isolate Hanoi. The flexible Chinese attitude can be well illustrated by Chou En-lai's observations expressed during a meeting with a visiting Japanese Socialist in April, 1972, when he observed that the world was becoming a theater in which an enemy might turn into an ally and a friend might become a foe¹².

V. The Soviet interest

The Soviet Union derived from the protracted United States' military involvement in Vietnam significant benefits. The US became preoccupied with Vietnam and consequently her cultivation of her relations with Western Europe and other important areas of the world suffered. The war impeded the normalization of the United States-China relations. The ironic byproduct of the war was that it was US treasure and blood which unwittingly defended Soviet interests in Indochina: in order not to let the area fall under Chinese influence. With the United States' military involvement being phased out and with the United States-Chinese rapprochement, the Soviet Union is today the only great power which aims to prevent China from gaining influence in the area. It would not be surprising if the Soviet Union should in time try to convert North Vietnam into a Soviet strategic military outpost against China. But with the United States' military withdrawal Hanoi is less dependent on Soviet supplies and thus would be able to resist Soviet moves to establish permanent military facilities. Should Hanoi, however, become engaged in a major military offensive against South Vietnam her dependence on the Soviet Union would increase. Thus from the point of view of regional Soviet interests, as distinguished from her interest of improving her relations with the United States, Hanoi's undertaking a military offensive would be advantageous to the Soviets.

Socialist China in collusion with Japanese militarism". FBIS, February 4, 1972, PRC International Affairs, p. A5, A6.

¹¹ "The so-called 'system of collective security in Asia' is nothing more than an anti-China military alliance." Peking Review, No. 27, July 4, 1969.

¹² From a paper presented to the Yale University Advanced Research Seminar on "Japan by 1980" by Shinkichi Eto, Professor of International Relations, University of Tokyo.

The possibility of more intensive Japan-China cooperation would leave the Soviets in a rather isolated position in Asia. Hence the persistent effort by the Soviet Union to tie Japan to itself by offering her lucrative economic cooperation. The Soviet apprehension of having to play a secondary role in Asia will stimulate her to fortify her ties with India and try to gain bases in Indochina. If she should not succeed in the latter at least she would try to deny China a sphere of influence.

With the United States out of Indochina militarily the Soviet Union and China will become locked in a struggle for influence in the area. The question is what form this struggle will take. The Soviets suffer some handicaps. Their presence in Indochina is historically unprecedented, culturally out of place and geographically disadvantageous. The Soviets cannot offer Hanoi total security against China and can hardly offset Chinese political gains in Cambodia. In order not to be locked out of Cambodia the Soviet Union has undertaken a major diplomatic change of course and announced that it will support the Peking based government of Prince Sihanouk as the legal government of Cambodia. But the Soviet prospects of gaining a foothold in Cambodia are remote.

The Indochina civil war, which under other historical circumstances could be resolved locally, is, due to the ideological and power-political implications of the Sino-Soviet struggle, likely to trigger further foreign involvements, direct or by proxy. The Soviet version of assistance on the basis of proletarian internationalism leads to hegemony of her party over another. The stage for interference is set: Soviet help may trigger opposing Chinese help to different Communist groups or parties. The Soviet Union in her effort to isolate China will try to gain Hanoi's ideological and diplomatic support. Hanoi's support for the Soviet advocated Asian Collective Security System would appear to be the minimal Soviet expectation. But such a Soviet inspired system would imply Soviet leadership in Asia and this would not be acceptable to Japan.

VI. The Japan-China rapprochement

Japan may play a very significant role in Indochina within this decade provided she obtains the blessing of China. Chinese tacit approval of Japan's gaining influence in Indochina cannot be excluded. The Chinese-Japanese resumption of diplomatic relations in September 1972, appears to be the precursor of Japan's more assertive Asian diplomacy. China, by not asking for war reparations from Japan, put Sino-Japanese relations on a footing of potential alliance based on common interest. If things should progress according to Mao's perceptions these common interests must look ominous to the Soviet Union. The statement of Mao that the Soviet Union should devolve the Japanese islands "stolen" by the Soviet Union after World War II, made Mao's China potentially an ally of Japanese nationalism in 1964.

The future Tokyo-Peking bonds of mutual interests might determine the destiny of Asia. One could visualize a new Asian co-prosperity sphere based on Sino-Japanese cooperation, where the role of non-Asian countries (according to the

Chinese this includes the Soviet Union) would be severely limited. If this should be the march of history then Indochina and all South East Asia would be brought under two spheres of influence — a Chinese and a Japanese one.

This combination depends of course on Japan's reaction to the global realignment of forces. Will she tend to stress her relations with China or with the Soviet Union or with the United States, or will she balance among the three and get the maximum benefit from such a position?

Russia has a carrot to dangle: the return of former Japanese territories and the economic opening of Siberia to Japan. This is a formidable inducement for cooperation which worries China. China's suspicions about the intent of Soviet diplomacy toward Japan are considerable. Upon Mr. Gromyko's visit to Tokyo, China accused the Soviets of colluding with Japanese militarists against the peoples of Asia. According to a Peking broadcast of February 7, 1972, a Chinese government spokesman implied that the Soviet Union had worked toward a resurgence of Japanese militarism. Peking also raised again the question of the "Northern Territories" in order to complicate relations between the Soviet Union and Japan¹³. Moscow radio commented that the outcome of the Tokyo talks with the Soviet Foreign Minister "overturned the Chinese leaders' vicious scheme"¹⁴. The determination of China to deflect Japan from close relations with the Soviet Union parallels the Soviet Union's determination to deflect closer Sino-Japanese relations. Thus Japan is in the best position of all the powers for it has only to wait to see what country will offer more for cooperation.

It may be precisely because of Chinese apprehension about Soviet-Japanese cooperation, that China would look with favor on a Japanese presence in South East Asia, to deflect Japan's energies from joining the Soviets to develop Siberia. When the dust settles in Indochina, the countries of Indochina may lean more and more toward Japan for economic assistance. Undoubtedly Soviet, Chinese and United States' as well as West European reconstruction assistance will play a role, but the benefit of aid may accrue to the powers with the closest proximity: China and Japan. The position of China on Vietnam will be determined by (a) the development of the Sino-Soviet struggle and (b) the conduct of Hanoi. The position of China on Laos and Cambodia is likely to be governed by the objective to establish a Chinese political presence there, in order to offset the Soviet influence in Hanoi.

Japan is not eager to join the club of the great military powers. It perceives the United States, the Soviet Union, and China as the pillars on which Asia's security must rest. Japan is in favor of establishing a non-nuclear zone in the Asian Pacific area, jointly guaranteed by three main nuclear powers. The Vice Premier of Japan hoped that this plan "will be seriously studied as part of the Asian security system and as a stimulant to closer relations between the United States, China and the Soviet Union"¹⁵. Due to the Sino-Soviet conflict and due to the decreasing role of the United States in Asia, Japan's friendship is going to be coveted by all the

¹³ FBIS, USSR International Affairs, III, 10 February 1972, p. D2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Miki Takeo, "Future Japanese Diplomacy", Japan Quarterly, Vol. XX, No. 1, January-March, 1973, pp. 20-24.

great powers, and thus her political weight in Asia is likely to grow faster than generally expected. To gain the confidence of the small Asian countries Japan's visibility in the game of great power politics must be kept low.

Miki stressed that Japan's future diplomacy "must not approach Asian countries with any such consciousness as that of belonging to the rank of the great powers. Japan must in all modesty place its relations, be they with large, medium or small powers, on the same equal footing"¹⁶. In order not to alarm the small Asian countries Miki did not interpret the new Sino-Japanese friendship as a sign of Japan joining the ranks of the great powers. He warned against a false impression "that Japan allied itself with China and planned to dominate Asia", he stressed that Japan and China "pledged not to seek domain over Asia" and viewed China as an "ally of small and medium countries". A low profile is a prudent posture to take for gaining influence in South East Asia.

The gap between the views of Japan and China with regard to the security structure of the Asian Pacific area is rapidly narrowing. Japan praises China's role of not wanting to be a superpower, and calls for giving a new meaning to the US-Japan security treaty, freeing it from being directed against China. Japan takes a rather aloof attitude to the Soviet proposals for an Asian collective security treaty. There does not seem to be any chance for a general collective security system in Asia as long as the Sino-Soviet dispute exists. A foundation for new tacit security arrangements can be discerned in the Japan-USA-China triangle. Such a constellation would enable Japan to play a more active role in South East Asia.

VII. The prospects

There are five basic options open to the United States, the Soviet Union and China on the Indochina question:

- Option 1: Leave the solution of the conflict up to the fortunes of the civil war. One or two of the great powers might encourage the continuation of the local military conflict in order to solidify influence over their client states. This could ultimately lead to spheres of influence on the basis of a *fait accompli*.
- Option 2: The powers would agree on some form of neutralization of the area.
- Option 3: A tripartite sphere of influence settlement negotiated by way of secret diplomacy.
- Option 5: A sphere of influence arrangement based on two separate tacit understandings: between the United States and China on the one hand and the United States and the Soviet Union on the other.
- Option 4: A disengagement of the United States and the Soviet Union from the other.

Option one could result in a military stalemate which could lead to other options. Option two, while theoretically advantageous to all parties concerned, is unlikely

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

to materialize, because of the absence of a basic consensus among the involved great powers. (A selfdeclared neutralization by any state in Indochina without the guarantee by the big powers would not endure for long.) The Soviets would not trust neutralization to prevent Chinese influence. In the eyes of China neutralization would not make the Soviets shy away from attempting to gain preponderant influence in some states in Indochina. For the United States neutralization would at least make it appear that her engagement was not entirely in vain. Countries whose influence is declining (as the United States') or is not yet established (Japan's) should benefit from neutralization. But neutralization is at this time not feasible, for different concepts of legitimacy and resulting total mistrust among the parties characterise the situation in Indochina. Henry A. Kissinger wrote long before he had to taste the truth of his words as negotiator with Hanoi: "The distinguishing feature of a revolutionary power is not that it feels threatened — such feeling is inherent in the nature of international relations based on sovereign states — but that nothing can reassure it . . . Diplomacy, the art of restraining the exercise of power, cannot function in such an environment."¹⁷

Option three, a tripartite understanding between the United States, the Soviet Union and China seems impractical essentially because of the Sino-Soviet struggle. The military abstinence of the United States from Indochina turns the area even more into an arena of Sino-Soviet rivalry. This rivalry may kindle a new type of military conflict in which some of the governments and movements in Indochina would be clients of the Soviets and others of the Chinese¹⁸. The second reason why a tripartite settlement seems impractical rests in the fact that there is no functioning international system. The old system is defunct and the new does not yet exist. The Soviets still cling to bipolarity, claiming that it is too late in history (whatever that means) for a third power to become a superpower; but they foster multipolarity wherever such a development could affect the cohesion of the West: they acknowledge West Germany and Japan's increasingly independent role. The models for a new international system cross ideological lines. We are still very distant from a new world order; the legitimization of a new international system must await the birth of that system. The Chinese long range nuclear missile capability¹⁹ ended the age of military bipolarity but the Soviet Union is not yet ready to accept China as a co-equal power. In such a situation even a tacit tripartite settlement of the Indochina question appears unrealistic.

Option four would entail a limited understanding between the US and the Soviet Union on the one hand and the US and China on the other, whereby the Soviets would have a sphere of influence in North Vietnam, China in Cambodia and the United States in South Vietnam. Laos would remain a "grey area" relatively free of

¹⁷ Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored*, Grosset and Dunlap, New York, 1964, p. 2.

¹⁸ The periodic clashes of Khmer Rouge troops with North Vietnamese units in Cambodia (Facts on File, August 26–September 1, 1973, p. 718) could provide a scenario for a Chinese and Soviet involvement by proxy.

¹⁹ According to the Institute for Strategic Studies of London, China had in 1971 enough atomic fission material for 120 A and H bombs and was in possession of 20–25 intermediate range rockets (1500 km range). *The Military Balance 1971–1972*. I.S.S. London, September, 1971, p. 40.

any single predominant influence. Such a two-pronged understanding would leave the problem between China and the Soviet Union in the air. Hanoi's claims about her two thousand year victorious struggle against the Chinese, the French and finally the Americans is an indication that Hanoi could develop — with Soviet prodding — an anti-Chinese policy. Other states of Indochina however may look towards China as a protector against any possible expansionistic designs of Hanoi.

The theoretical model for salvaging United States influence in South Vietnam would be based on two separate agreements: (1) A United States-Chinese agreement whereby China's sphere of influence would be Cambodia, with the understanding that the future government of Cambodia would not permit the use of her territory for invasions or intrusions into South Vietnam or Thailand. (2) A United States-Soviet agreement whereby both countries would acknowledge each other's political presence in the two Vietnams. Since neither China nor the Soviet Union would be inclined to acknowledge their respective spheres the instability of such a model is self-evident.

The continuing diplomatic probes for new tacit alignments contribute to a situation of flux and it is precisely this situation and the absence of a legitimate international system which give Hanoi and a number of small states in the world the possibility of a certain freedom of maneuvering. But this does not imply that sphere of influence will not be established. The states and warring factions in Indochina need outside sponsors to be able to continue the war or to commence their reconstruction. Support would not come without political conditions. The international and domestic setting of the Indochina conflict provides almost a built-in situation for outside interference. The United States now relies primarily on her diplomatic leverage, which lies outside of the area, but which can be used for the purpose of strengthening her residual influence in South Vietnam. China awaits her opportunities as the closest and most powerful neighbor; the Soviet Union hopes to build up her position in Hanoi, which grew from her role as Hanoi's chief war material supplier.

A foreign sphere of influence system may be exercised by subtle means and does not necessarily have to include crude manifestations of power offensive to the national sentiment of the small nations. Economic and/or ideological ties may suffice to bring a small country into the political orbit of a large one, without necessarily stirring up serious resistance. While a great power sphere of influence system in Indochina is not the ideal solution, it could eventually bring some sort of peace to the area. Any peace bought for the price of the division of a country is basically an unstable solution, and a period of testing is inevitable where one side tries to dislodge the other; after this test period each side may learn to respect the sphere of the other²⁰. The United States has retreated militarily but not politically and it still has some cards to play: (1) Large-scale economic cooperation can be offered to the Soviet Union and to China; (2) The United States can

²⁰ Raymond Aron views partition as "a substitute for neutrality in the age of ideological conflicts" and observes that partition presents little danger of misunderstanding since the line of division is clear. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, Doubleday and Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, pp. 501, 503.

move her relations with China from rapprochement to a tacit alliance, should the Soviets not cooperate on an Indochina settlement acceptable to the United States.

China's foreign policy is currently distinctly anti-hegemonial, and this, together with the American example of troop withdrawal, may set the tone for a "low profile" tacit system of spheres of influence, for no great power wants the whole area to fall under the influence of one single country.

The change of priorities in United States' foreign policy as the preoccupation with developments in the Middle East, and the economic difficulties besetting the Soviet Union, may cause both countries to disengage from Indochina more completely than they originally intended (option five).

The geopolitical and economic importance of the region and the rivalries between the states of Indochina make it unlike that the area would be left to itself. The emergence of China as a major power and the spectacular economic expansion of Japan raise the possibility of an entirely new system of spheres of influence, in which China and Japan would become the most likely beneficiaries should a vacuum of power in the area become apparent. For the United States and the Soviet Union, Indochina never represented a vital interest. Indochina was for them a function of the great power struggle. It is precisely the process of global realignment of forces which has made the Indochina conflict, at least for the United States, less crucial than before.

China's open mind to find common ground for cooperation with the United States, the latter's detente prospects with the Soviet Union, the Sino-Soviet struggle and the China-Japan rapprochement are interrelated developments which are so far reaching that the struggle in Indochina is bound to enter a new phase, the outcome of which will be ultimately affected by the developments in the Sino-Soviet relations and by the economic power of Japan.