

April 30, 1980

## **INDOCHINA: FIVE YEARS OF COMMUNIST RULE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

April 30 marks the fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese. Phnom Penh also fell to insurgent Communist forces in April, though not so dramatically. Prior to the Communist victory, many supporters of the United States policy had predicted that South Vietnam and all of Indochina would undergo a bloodbath. In contrast, critics of American involvement predicted that once the United States abandoned its unjustified intrusions, Vietnam and Indochina would settle into a peaceful existence after some initial societal rearrangements. The critics made it very clear that there would be no bloodbath, all killing would cease and, in fact, it was the United States which caused a bloodbath with its war activities. This paper will examine the facts of the last five years. Specifically, it will establish that there was a series of bloodbaths, not primarily in the sense of personal governmental vendettas (which there were), but in the more literal sense of blood made to flow so copiously from wars and governmental social policy that it has nearly drowned the societies of Indochina.

### **CAMBODIA, APRIL 1975**

On April 16, 1975, the Vietnamese-supported communist forces of the Khmer Rouge occupied Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge were a large part of GRUNK (Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea) nominally led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who had been overthrown by Lon Nol in 1970. The defeat of the Lon Nol forces not only ended American involvement in Cambodia, but it signaled the beginning<sup>1</sup> of what one author has called "the greatest pogrom of all time." The next day, April 17, the Khmer Rouge or Angka

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1. Asian Survey, January 1979.

(The Organization) as it preferred to be called at this time, ordered the immediate evacuation of the city. No Cambodian citizen (there were many Chinese and Vietnamese) was exempted. Thus, thousands of war-wounded and critically ill were forced out of the hospitals and onto the roads into the countryside. The evacuation affected every city in Cambodia, with the result that an estimated 2½-4 million urban residents, many of whom were ill, were pushed into the jungle.<sup>2</sup> The Angka's war on civilization had begun.

#### CAMBODIA: YEAR ZERO

In July 1975, the bona fide bloodbaths began. Angka ordered the "taking away" (execution) of doctors, professors, teachers, lawyers, and dentists. Then they came for any military person (from general to private) who had fought for the Lon Nol regime. Finally, anyone who was known to have an education was ordered executed. Cambodians destroyed their eyeglasses for fear of seeming to be educated. It is surely one of the great ironies that orders such as these should have been issued by men who were educated at universities in France.

In February 1976, Prince Nordom Sihanouk, who was to lose 3 daughters, 2 sons, 3 sons-in-law and 14 grandchildren in the pogrom resigned as monarch and the State of Democratic Kampuchea was proclaimed, although the identities of the new governmental leaders remained unclear. In the Spring of 1976, the Swedish Ambassador to Peking, Kaj Bjork, visited Phnom Penh and reported that the new government was "taking pains to wipe out everything that reminds them of the old society."<sup>3</sup> This "wipe out" included not only the contaminated people of the old society, but also all cities, vehicles, knowledge and even the use of money. In the primitive paradise of the jungle the Angka were going to create the pure socialist man - no matter what it cost. In March 1976, Radio Phnom Penh had stated that the official population of Kampuchea was 7,735,299.<sup>4</sup> Six months later this was revised downward to five million.

#### SOCIALISM IN KAMPUCHEA

While many eyewitness accounts emerged from refugees and foreigners who fled the Khmer Rouge, much confusion existed regarding the internal situation until September of 1977. Then the Angka admitted it was an alias for the Kampuchean Communist Party (KCP). On September 27, 1977, the seventeenth anniversary of the founding of the KCP, the General Secretary of the Party,

2. Asian Survey, January 1977; New York Times, June 12, 1975.

3. Asian Survey, January 1977.

4. Ibid.

Pol Pot, proclaimed to the world the thinking and intent of his party.<sup>5</sup> Pot said that until April 1975 the Khmer (Cambodians) were a "half-slave satellite of U.S. imperialism." Now the Khmer were free and this was a direct result of the urban evacuations since the root of all evil derived from the city itself. Pot told the youth not to worry about formal education: "you should learn while working...the more you work the more you learn." Pot made clear that the ideology of the Party concentrated on five areas: 1) national defense and self-reliance; 2) radical egalitarian collectivism; 3) strict morality; 4) agricultural and industrial modernization; and 5) dictatorship of the proletariat. To these ends all foreign dominance was ended. The urban evacuation broke the economic dominance of the Vietnamese and Chinese. There were no banks or even money. Rapid collectivization proceeded in 1977 as private households ceased. The birth rate dropped drastically with the sexual segregation of living quarters. Communal kitchens produced all meals. The slightest offense was punished by death, usually with a shovel or hoe to save bullets.

Unfortunately, in their rush to build a new society, the Pol Pot regime collided with certain economic realities. Agriculture and industrial modernization proved to be difficult without cities and without personnel who could read. Furthermore, the extremes of drought and typhoon severely affected a country which had exported more than 500,000 tons of rice and 50,000 tons of rubber before 1970. China and North Korea sent advisers, and Kampuchea did accede to reality enough to receive pesticides and medicines from some foreign nations. This was necessitated by the fact that Pol Pot admitted malaria afflicted more than 80 percent of the labor force.<sup>6</sup>

The number of refugees by September 1977 reached 30,000 in Thailand and 60,000 in Vietnam. It should be borne in mind that all reports indicated that only 10-20 percent of those who attempted to flee the country actually lived, particularly after the regime declared a five kilometer deep free-fire zone on the Thai-Cambodian border. Late in 1977, about 300,000 workers and peasants from areas controlled by the Khmer Rouge prior to 1975 were allowed to trickle into the cities of Phnom Penh (200,000), Kompong Som (50,000) and Barrambang (20,000).

#### CONFLICT WITH VIETNAM: NATIONALISM AND COMMUNISM

Despite Vietnamese support for the Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot and his men did not trust Vietnam. One of the reasons given for the February 1975 decision to evacuate Cambodian cities was to destroy the Vietnamese power and to destroy Vietnamese spy rings.<sup>8</sup> Khmer

5. FBIS, October 4, 1977.

6. Wall Street Journal, November 29, 1976.

7. Far Eastern Economic Review, September 23, 1977.

8. FBIS, October 4, 1977.

animosity toward Vietnam is not new. In an interview with American reporters two days before the Vietnamese Christmas invasion of 1978, Pol Pot reminded his guests that Vietnam had destroyed Champa in 1471 in what is now South Vietnam, after centuries of aggression; that one million Khmer still lived in the Mekong Delta; and finally that the Khmer still referred to the Mekong Delta as "Lower Kampuchea."<sup>9</sup>

One should recall that the name "Kampuchea" itself refers to the earliest foundations of the Khmer people and the establishment of the great Angkor Empire of the 9th century. In short, the hatred of the two peoples is very old.

When the Khmer Rouge launched their revolt against Lon Nol in 1970, they were joined by Khmer Viet Minh, who had moved to North Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva accords.<sup>10</sup> As early as 1973 Pol Pot (also known as Saloth Sar) had conducted a purge of some Khmer Viet Minh.

Vietnam had wanted a settlement of all land and sea boundaries, but Cambodia would not accede to Vietnamese claims. The U.S. ship Mayaguez was apparently an innocent victim of an early sea dispute in May 1975. Pol Pot visited Hanoi in June 1975, and Le Duan returned the favor in August 1975. The negotiations were apparently fruitless since Cambodia publicly sided with China on foreign policy issues that August, and the real struggle began.

The border disagreements intensified the conflict within Angka and in September, 1976 occurred the first of nine attempted coups against Pol Pot.<sup>11</sup> Led by a pro-Vietnamese faction within the Army, the unsuccessful coup set off another blood-letting of pro-Vietnamese Khmer which extended into 1978. Five of the twenty members of the Central Committee were executed. In 1978 itself, orders were given to summarily execute all non-Khmer throughout the country. Party membership was no protection, and despite friendly relations between Phnom Penh and Peking, Khmer of Chinese extraction were persecuted as much as Khmer of Vietnamese extraction.

In January 1977 the first Khmer attacks on Viet border areas began with brutality extreme even by Vietnamese standards. Fighting fluctuated throughout 1977, with Kampuchea publicly accusing Vietnam of trying to establish an Indochina Federation. Pol Pot confirmed Hanoi's worst ideological and national fears in September 1977 when he led a Kampuchean delegation to Peking. The Kampucheans were enthusiastically received by the Chinese. At a state banquet, Chairman Hua glowingly described the Kampuchean Communist Party as a "staunch Marxist-Leninist party." This

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9. Christian Science Monitor, December 4, 1979.

10. Current History, December 1978.

11. Ibid.

was a pointed slap at the "social-imperialist-revisionist" parties of the Soviet bloc. Hua also commended the "heroic Cambodian people" who "are not only good at destroying the old world but also good at building a new one."<sup>12</sup> Pol Pot answered on the same cheerful note by saying that victory in April 1975 would have been impossible without the "most precious aid" of Mao's thought. He promised to continue to support China and to implement Mao's "precious aid" in Cambodia. As Francois Ponchard has noted, Mao's principles have been taken to their logical conclusions in Cambodia.<sup>13</sup>

In January 1978, Vietnam launched an invasion of Kampuchea which sought gradually to destroy the Khmer army, and to build an indigenous, pro-Vietnamese Khmer political force from among the 150,000 Khmer who had fled Pol Pot's terror. On December 25, 1978 Vietnam launched an offensive with 150,000 regular troops and 20,000 Khmer troops of the Kampuchea National United Front for National Salvation (KNUFNS, for short). By January 7, 1979 Phnom Penh fell and Pol Pot's force fled to the Cardamon Mountains in western Cambodia. Cambodia's agony entered a new stage.

#### CAMBODIA, 1979: WAR AND REFUGEES

On January 8, 1979 a People's Revolutionary Council was proclaimed in Phnom Penh under the leadership of Heng Samrin,<sup>14</sup> who had led an unsuccessful revolt against Pol Pot in May, 1978. On January 11, 1979 he proclaimed a People's Republic of Kampuchea. On February 18, 1979 he signed a Treaty of Friendship with Vietnam. The Indochinese Federation had become a reality.

The fighting did not cease in 1979. Vietnam increased its occupation forces to 200,000 in order to fight Pol Pot's forces, numbering between 20,000-30,000, in a ferocious guerrilla war that did not permit the civilians to remain neutral. By July, 1979, with only 5 percent of the rice fields under civilization,<sup>15</sup> the long suffering people of Cambodia faced mass starvation.

Refugees had become an international issue. After the spectacle of seeing Vietnam cast thousands upon the open sea, the world saw thousands of Khmer refugees, who had fled the fighting, in squalid camps in Thailand. In desperation, Thailand forced 40,000 Khmer back into Cambodia in July 1979. Thailand agreed to delay further expulsions after numerous protests but reminded the world that these Khmer were "displaced persons" and not refugees. In short, they would not be allowed to remain in Thailand indefi-

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12. FBIS, September 29, 1977.

13. Francois Ponchard, Cambodia: Year Zero (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978).

14. Asian Survey, January 1980.

15. Ibid.

nitely. In August, it was estimated that 800,000 Khmer were under Pol Pot's control, 2 million under Heng Samrin and 500,000 on either side of the Thai-Khmer border. The figures are very hard to verify. In January 1980, there were an estimated 140,000 Khmer refugees in U.N.<sup>17</sup> camps and 600,000-800,000 straddling the Thai-Cambodia border.

#### PRESENT SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish precisely how many Cambodians have survived the horrors of the internal and foreign policy of the Pol Pot regime. Many sources insist three million have perished out of 7.5 million. As long as the fighting continues, it will be difficult to establish the precise figures. It would appear that the Heng Samrin government, supported by 200,000 Vietnamese soldiers, controls approximately 2.5 million Khmer. In November 1979 the population of Phnom Penh was reported to be about 270,000. A few schools and three hospitals, with 1000 beds apiece, had opened. Between 80-90 percent of the Cambodian professionals have perished. Approximately one million Khmer refugees reside on both sides of the Khmer-Thai border. Pol Pot has about 20,000-30,000 soldiers claiming to control 800,000 people. Aside from the struggle between the Vietnamese army in Cambodia and Pol Pot's forces, a number of Khmer are both anti-Vietnamese and anti-Pot Khmer Rouge. The rather amorphous Khmer Serei or free Khmer claim 10,000-20,000 fighters who actively recruit among the refugees. In October 1979, former Prime Minister Son Sann formed the National Liberation Front of Khmer People. His forces are hard to determine but he is working with China, Thailand, and cautiously with the Khmer Rouge. Prince Norodom Sihanouk established a Confederation of Khmer Nationalists in 1979 and has spent considerable time in the United State and Europe meeting with foreign leaders and Khmer Nationalists. He has been endorsed by Lon Nol and ex-prime minister Tam.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, Sihanouk's world travels are paid by his good friend Kim Il-sung of North Korea. Sihanouk has vociferously denounced both the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese, causing alienation from the Chinese who have backed the Khmer Rouge consistently since 1975. Sihanouk stated publicly that Communism may be good for the Chinese but not good for the Cambodians. Sihanouk claims to have an army of 5,000 men in Thailand, but the Thais will not allow Sihanouk into the country. They do not trust him, based on past experience, and Sihanouk may yet have to deal with the Khmer Rouge.

The Khmer Rouge (Democratic Republic of Kampuchea) made cosmetic governmental changes earlier this year, when Khieu

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17. R. Sean Randolph, Current Status of Cambodian Refugees, Republican Study Committee, January 25, 1980.
  18. New York Times, November 12, 1979.

Samphan became the Prime Minister and Head of State. Pol Pot remained Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Diplomatically, the Khmer Rouge retained its seat in the United Nations in September 1979 and had the satisfaction of seeing Vietnam humiliated by the November 1979 United Nations resolution calling for withdrawal of all foreign troops in Cambodia. Most foreign countries have continued to recognize Pol Pot's government as the legitimate government of Cambodia, although Great Britain dropped recognition while also refusing to recognize Heng Samrin's government. Both Thailand and China have remained adamant that Vietnam must leave Cambodia. Thailand claims to be neutral, although it will not recognize the Heng Samrin government. The United States condemns Heng Samrin, Pol Pot and Vietnam. Hanoi has regularly accused China, Thailand and the United States of collusion.

#### VIETNAM, 1975-1976: THE NEW ORDER

While most of the world has known since the Paris Peace Accords of January 1973 that South Vietnam would eventually fall to North Vietnam, few people expected the collapse to be quite so dramatic. Not only did the South Vietnamese military machine collapse like a proverbial house of cards, but the manner in which the United States cavalierly abandoned its ally of more than two decades stunned not only American allies but even the North Vietnamese. On April 3, 1975 President Gerald Ford publicly assured the world that American losses in South Vietnam should not be viewed as a sign that the United States would not honor its commitments. More than one Asian leader wondered aloud whether anything the United States said could ever be believed. On April 21 President Thieu resigned as President of South Vietnam and charged that the United States was an "untrustworthy ally." This was documented on April 30 (the day Saigon fell) when a letter dated January 5, 1973 was made public. President Nixon promised in this letter to "take swift and severe retaliatory action" if North Vietnam violated the Paris accords. The humiliation of the United States before the entire world could not have been more complete. Presumably to calm American consciences, President Ford personally flew out to California to greet the thousands of South Vietnamese refugees who fled the April debacle, and he formally declared the end of the Vietnam era on May 7, 1975.

Of course, for 50 million Vietnamese, 1975 was the beginning of sufferings worse than the war with the Americans. There was no bloodbath per se, although there were enough executions to make a Buddhist leader publicly criticize the Communist government. Sporadic resistance from South Vietnamese army elements numbering approximately 20,000 was reported. Resistance also arose from the Hoa Hao, a religious sect with a well organized military.

Hanoi decided to reorder South Vietnamese society in two ways. First, there was to be massive re-education of those who had been actively involved with the Thieu regime - whether civilian

or military. Secondly, Hanoi planned to establish New Economic Zones (NEZ) which would eventually reclaim 2.5 million acres of jungle. Of course, the reclamation required people and the cities would provide the "volunteers." In October 1975 Hanoi announced that approximately 1.5 million of Saigon's four million residents would be moved to the New Economic Zones. A sign that the reconstruction of South Vietnam was going to be less than pleasant came on October 22, 1975 when the Hanoi government expelled all but four non-communist foreign reporters.

In an attempt to encourage foreign benevolence Hanoi announced in February 1976 that foreign tourist facilities were being prepared. A Saigon official announced in Moscow that private enterprise would be permitted after reunification of North and South Vietnam.

In April, elections for the National Assembly took place, and Hanoi became the official capital of Vietnam. Earlier, Saigon had been renamed Ho Chi Minh City. On July 2, 1976 Vietnam formally proclaimed reunification. The North Vietnamese flag, anthem, emblem, and capital were to be used by the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The much vaunted National Liberation Front (NLF) and Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) were exposed as Hanoi tools since Northerners totally dominated the new government cabinet.

The April elections were not open to all candidates and voters since those being "re-educated" could not campaign. Among the prominent figures who could not participate was Fr. Tran Hua Thanh who had spearheaded the "Anti-Corruption Movement" against the Thieu regime.<sup>19</sup> The leader of the militant Hoa Hao was also arrested.<sup>20</sup> The selective participation in the election also applied to the voters. Military and civilian officials of the former South Vietnamese government, as well as a new class of individuals who have "lost their citizen rights" were barred from voting.<sup>21</sup>

On December 14, 1976 the Vietnamese Communist Party (Lao Dong) held its first Congress since 1960. More than thirty Communist parties from around the world sent representatives. Behind all this glitter lay some harsh realities. The party slogan in 1976 was "economics is in command." Of course, economics is notorious for its penchant to recognize reality, at some point. The General Secretary of the Communist Party, Le Duan, had said in June 1976 that the Party and the people would build the material and technical base for Socialism, and "gradually to improve the living standards of the working people."<sup>22</sup> He reminded his audience that building Socialism would require 15 to 20 years, and then it would be on to Communism. Hanoi Radio supported

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19. Washington Post, August 29, 1976.

20. New York Times, July 3, 1976.

21. Far Eastern Economic Review, May 7, 1976.

22. Asian Survey, January, 1977.



Le Duan by proclaiming "this is our Third Resistance; economy is our new battlefield."

The realities of Vietnamese life were difficult. 85 percent of the population was engaged in producing, processing and distributing food. North Vietnam had failed consistently to supply its own food needs during the war and hoped that the South would solve this problem. Unfortunately, there were problems in the South. Somewhere between 40,000 and 200,000 southerners were being held in re-education camps during that year. There were already 200,000 North Vietnamese soldiers in the South, and an estimated 500,000 northerners were sent south to administer the society.

By September 1976, Hanoi admitted that 600,000 people from Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and 200,000 from other cities had been evacuated to the New Economic Zones. At the Party Congress in December, leaders spoke of moving four million people from the cities to the New Economic Zones. "Millions" would also be moved into industry.<sup>23</sup> This massive population movement, which would have involved one of every two adults in South Vietnam, caused a respected authority, Douglas Pike, to write that "the social effect on the South will be more profound than anything which has happened there in the 20th century."<sup>24</sup>

#### 1977: FOREIGN POLICY TRIUMPHS

1977 was a year of triumph for the Vietnamese government but a year of sorrow for the Vietnamese people. The Carter Administration had moved quickly to implement its human rights crusade against Chile, Argentina and South Africa. It was more reasonable about Vietnam. In return, Vietnam made every effort to assure the United States that it wanted full diplomatic relations and all the money the United States could give. In March 1977, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong met Leonard Woodcock, then President of the United Auto Workers (UAW), who was leading a diplomatic mission to Hanoi. In May and June, a diplomatic mission from Hanoi met in Paris with the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific Affairs, Richard Holbrooke. This was the beginning of negotiations intended to normalize relations. Holbrooke had been editor of Foreign Policy and a leading critic of American involvement in Vietnam. Despite some setbacks, by December 1978 Holbrooke stated that politically and strategically the U.S. position in Asia was "stronger than it has been at any time since World War II."<sup>25</sup>

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23. China News Analysis, March 11, 1977.

24. Asian Survey, January, 1977.

25. U.S. News and World Report, December 25, 1978.

The negotiations between Vietnam and the United States showed tangible results when the United State did not oppose Vietnam's application for U.N. membership in July 1977, as it had in 1976. On September 20, 1977 Vietnam was admitted to the United Nations with the U.S. abstaining. In a speech to the General Assembly on September 21, Vietnam's delegate stated that Vietnam was ready to normalize relations with the United States. It was not to be.

In February 1978 Secretary of State Cyrus Vance requested the recall of Vietnam's chief delegate to the United Nations, Dinh Ba Thi, on the grounds of espionage in a December 1977 case. A spectacular diplomatic incident was avoided when the delegate refused to leave but was recalled by Hanoi. From this point, the Carter Administration hesitated until events in Indochina overwhelmed everyone. Part of the reason for hesitation centered on the none-too-delicate socialist transformation in neighboring Laos. Vietnamese bayonets supported the Pathet Lao domination of Laos which was completed by August 1975. By the end of 1977, Laos and Vietnam had signed a Friendship Treaty; foreigners had been expelled; thousands had been arrested in order "to teach city dwellers how to follow the Communist revolutionary line"; and nearly 40,000 Vietnamese troops were stationed in Laos, along with several thousand Vietnamese and Soviet advisors. By early 1978, the serious fighting between Vietnamese forces and Meo tribesmen had sent thousands of refugees into Thailand as well as producing unknown thousands of casualties on the part of the Meo (Hmong) people.<sup>26</sup> Reports of Vietnamese use of poison gas against the Meo became common. The Meo refugees were added to the thousands of Laotian refugees who had fled the Pathet Lao-Vietnamese takeover in 1975.

#### DISORDER UNDER HEAVEN

The sorrow of 1977 for the Vietnamese people came from on high - both the bureaucrats and the heavens. Vietnam experienced some of the worst weather of its history with killing cold weather, drought and then floods. In the north, the natural disasters were compounded by bad agricultural management since many capable cadre had gone south. Originally, the Party had proposed rapid collectivization of the south leading to national sufficiency by 1980. This would mean that there would be 500 giant agrofarms with approximately 100,000 workers per farm. The initial measures were handled so badly that the government admitted that there had been "confused management" by "apathetic mandarins."<sup>27</sup> Consequently, grain was at least 5-10 percent below minimum requirements. Fortunately, Moscow was supplying an estimated \$1.5 billion in aid a year and China was supplying an estimated \$300 million in

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26. Foreign Report, February 1, 1978.

27. U.S. News and World Report, July 10, 1978.

aid a year. These agricultural disasters were compounded by 10 percent unemployment (about 3.5 million) and the total failure of the New Economic Zones. Approximately 1.3 million had been settled there without proper food, clothes housing or agricultural necessities. Another 475,000 were due to be settled in 1978.

The accumulation of disasters forced Hanoi into some unusual admissions. In August 1977 the Party admitted in its official press that the country was facing serious and widespread food shortages. It went so far as to admit there had been "big mistakes in leadership" regarding the agricultural policy. By October Vietnam admitted to the world that food production was 20 percent below normal and requested Denmark for emergency food aid because of the rice shortage. In contrast during the last full year of the war in 1974, South Vietnam had produced a rice surplus.

#### ECONOMIC PERSECUTION OF THE CHINESE

If this was not bad enough, the Party decided in March 1978 that further economic measures were necessary. Originally, private business was to cease in 1979, but due to the corruption of the south and its deleterious effect on northern cadre, this was hastened. In March, all private businesses were closed. These were about 30,000 in number and predominantly Chinese. This had an electric effect on the entire Chinese community in the north and south. It was disastrous for the economy since the Chinese supplied 60 percent of the coal miners in the north as well as a large number of fisherman. In the south, the Chinese were the backbone of the economic distribution system. In May, the amalgamation of the two currencies of north and south further disrupted the ruptured economy. The almost immediate result was that the standard of living fell to that of 1960. That was not all. In September and October of 1978, Vietnam suffered its worst flooding in history, which was exacerbated by cadre incompetence. Three million tons of rice were lost; 10-20 percent of the domestic animals died and over 500,000 homes were destroyed leaving four million people homeless. The 1978 rice crop was 7 million tons short.

#### VIETNAM'S TWO FRONT WAR

In the midst of this unprecedented combination of disasters, many of which were self-inflicted due to ideological rigidity in the haste to produce a socialist transformation of the South, Hanoi found itself embroiled in lethal conflicts with China and Cambodia. A number of the specifics regarding the Vietnamese-Cambodian problem have been treated earlier, but it is important to add that the Vietnamese felt a special urgency to resolve the Cambodian dispute because much of the area of conflict between the two countries centered around rich agricultural areas, and it had already forced 1.2 million Vietnamese inland because of the fighting. More than a million displaced farmers were the last thing Hanoi needed at this juncture.

The reasons for the Sino-Vietnamese war of 1979 remain complex due to definite ancient and contemporary causes. From 111 B.C.-939 A.D., China ruled Vietnam as a province and thereafter China (no matter who ruled the country) made repeated attempts to bring Vietnam back into its empire. Vietnamese distrust of the Chinese could not be deeper. Also, China has on more than one occasion formed an alliance with Cambodia against Vietnam, again throughout many centuries. As noted earlier, Vietnam has maintained its own imperialistic impulses through its "March to the South," to which Pol Pot referred. In 1930, Ho Chi Minh and others founded the Indochinese Communist Party - not the Vietnamese Communist Party. In short, there is enough paranoia to go around for all parties.

Moscow complicates this further. The Vietnamese Communists have generally modeled their structures and ideals along Soviet lines and the present leadership has been referred to more than once as "17 aging Stalinists." Vietnam took aid from both Peking and Moscow as long as it could maintain a balance. With the 1971 rapprochement between China and the United States, Vietnam became understandably nervous, and has since charged that China wanted North Vietnam to delay its conquest of South Vietnam for as long as possible. In October, 1975 Le Duan visited Peking and refused to sign an anti-hegemony clause in the joint communique. In fact, he left early, flew to Moscow and signed an economic agreement. When Cambodia sided openly with Peking's foreign policy and China began to build up the Pol Pot armed forces, relations between Vietnam and China deteriorated badly.<sup>28</sup>

Hanoi blamed Peking for the fierce fighting between Vietnam and Cambodia in 1977. Peking answered the charges in January, 1978 by sending increased aid and 10,000 advisors to Phnom Penh. This was sealed by the visit of Chou En-lai's widow to Phnom Penh.

This is the background to the March and May 1978 economic moves against the ethnic Chinese by Hanoi. Peking responded in June 1978 by ceasing all economic aid to Hanoi in a move reminiscent of the Soviet Union's action against China in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Not only did China stop its \$300 million per year economic aid, but it withdrew over 1000 specialists forcing the shutdown of 100 technical projects. Coming in the midst of the plethora of disasters, the Chinese blow was staggering. In July 1978 Hanoi joined COMECON, the Soviet economic bloc.

By early 1978, nearly 250,000 Vietnamese from both north and south, had fled the country. Most of these refugees were ethnic Vietnamese, but with the economic measures, thousands of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam began to flee. By July 1978 China had absorbed nearly 170,000 refugees, mostly from northern Vietnam, and closed

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28. Current History, December, 1978.

its border, demanding that Vietnam discuss the whole issue of ethnic Chinese. Vietnam said the ethnic Chinese could not be Vietnamese citizens while China said they could. Vietnam said all 1.8 million ethnic Chinese would have to leave the country at some time. The matter remained in dispute until the Sino-Vietnamese war when Vietnam took more drastic steps against them.

In January 1978, Vietnam had warned that it would "resort to legitimate self-defense" unless Kampuchea ceased its border attacks. The fighting continued intermittently throughout the year with the United States adding some interesting fuel to the fire which seemed to insure a larger war. On January 8, 1978, National Security Advisor Brzezinski stated that the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia was a proxy war between China and the Soviet Union. On February 3, Secretary of State Vance requested the recall of Dinh Ba Thi, as previously mentioned. On April 21, President Carter announced that Cambodia was "the worst violator of human rights in the world today." On August 21, the world was treated to the astounding spectacle of the very embodiment of the anti-war movement, Senator George McGovern, calling for an international military intervention to halt the "clear case of genocide" in Cambodia. In August, Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong told a visiting United States delegation that Vietnam was "eager" for full diplomatic relations and that Vietnam no longer insisted on three billion dollars in reparations, which had been a serious obstacle. In September, Carter extended a total trade embargo against Vietnam. With 8,000 Soviet advisors within its border, 135,000 Vietnamese troops and 20,000 men from the KNUFNS on Kampuchea's border, Vietnam signed a 25-year Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union on November 3, 1978. China and the United States normalized relations on December 15. Vietnam invaded Kampuchea on December 25.

#### VIETNAM 1979: THE CHINA WAR AND REFUGEES

The Chinese invasion of February 17, 1979 not only followed closely upon Vietnamese occupation of Phnom Penh on January 7, but also on the rather sensational visit of Deng Xiaoping to the United States from January 28-February 5. It is understandable that Vietnam might assume something more than coincidence. Seldom has there been greater historic irony.

China began the invasion with 200,000 troops but increased that to 600,000 after very stiff opposition. Vietnam had opposed the invasion with 50,000 regional troops, 50,000 militia and five divisions of regulars around Hanoi. China withdrew by March 15 after the seizure of Lang Son. China claimed Vietnam had suffered 50,000 casualties while admitting to 20,000 casualties. Vietnam claimed it had inflicted 62,500 casualties on China, while admitting none of its own.<sup>29</sup> The war did force Hanoi to withdraw some

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29. Asian Survey, January 1980.

troops from Kampuchea, but not enough to substantially affect its war in that country.

The effect of the Chinese war was ruinous for Vietnam. The already weakened economic infrastructure of northern Vietnam suffered the destruction of more than 100 state farms, forests, and nursery gardens. The Chinese killed or stole 250,000 pigs and 160,000 cows and water buffalo. Thousands of acres of forests and riceland were destroyed.<sup>30</sup> The economy of the entire country continued to suffer with the fourth year of bad weather in 1979 resulting in a 2.5 million ton shortage of rice. By the end of the year, there had been a general mobilization of all men between the ages of 18-45 and all women between 18-35. Every citizen was to have 2 hours of military training a day. The society was burdened with a militia of 1.5 million; an army of 615,000 and a security force of 50,000. There were still an admitted 50,000 prisoners being re-educated.

Undoubtedly, much of the frustration was released on the ethnic Chinese. The "boat people" became a cause for great world attention before it shifted to the Cambodian refugee horrors. The boat people did not begin their saga in 1979. It had begun as a steady trickle in 1975. By January 1978, an estimated 90,000 Vietnamese had fled their country. By January 1979, this figure approached 400,000, but many of those now fleeing were ethnic Chinese from north and south Vietnam. These ethnic Chinese were forced to pay between \$2,000 and \$10,000 in gold in order to take their chances on a leaky boat. The Vietnamese government was fully involved in a well organized system to force "undesirables" to emigrate. It has been estimated that Hanoi made \$115 million in 1978 alone, which was 2.5 percent of their GNP.<sup>31</sup> Given the lack of exports and increasing reliance on Soviet aid (which is never without its strings), the refugees became (and remain) a substantial business which would gain the government billions in gold and property. Each refugee showed his gratitude to the government for allowing emigration by signing all property over to the state. Those who refused to sign the necessary papers became the targets of the Vietnamese Navy.<sup>32</sup> It is also sobering to recall that no one will ever know how many have died naturally on the open seas. The estimates range from 25-70 percent depending on the weather.

The international outcry at this barbarity produced a United Nations conference on refugees in Geneva. In July 1979, Vietnam graciously agreed to stop the expulsions in exchange for a more "orderly" process. Hanoi conceded that 3 million Vietnamese wanted to leave and it would permit 10,000 per month with United Nations cooperation. To date, bureaucratic red tape has resulted in a total of less than 1000 leaving under this program.

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30. Washington Post, August 15, 1979.

31. Far Eastern Economic Review, June 15, 1979.

32. New York Times, June 17, 1979.

Despite this agreement, Hanoi apparently has continued to encourage emigration, since an estimated 2500 leave by sea per month. Another 2000 (mostly ethnic Chinese) have become known as "wheel people" by fleeing Vietnam via Cambodia to Thailand by paying in gold to travel a route by truck, car and bicycle.<sup>33</sup>

Hanoi suffered a number of humiliations in the last half of 1979. In July, Hoang Van Hoan defected and surfaced in Peking. He was a personal friend of Ho Chi Minh; a founding member of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930; a founder of the Viet Minh in 1941; Vietnamese Ambassador to China from 1950-57; and subsequently became a member of the Politburo and Central Committee until 1976. He denounced "Le Duan and Company" and confirmed nearly every accusation that had been made against Vietnam. He compared the treatment of the ethnic Chinese to Hitler's treatment of the Jews. He denounced the Vietnamese occupation of Laos and Cambodia and accused "Le Duan and Company" of prostituting Vietnam to the "interests of a foreign power."<sup>34</sup>

Another testimony which effectively admitted the tragedy of Vietnam came from a man in good standing with Le Duan. He was Dr. Tan That Tung, a personal friend and personal physician to Ho Chi Minh. He had served as surgeon-general of the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu. He admitted in Hanoi: "A whole generation will bear the stigmata all their lives." He admitted that the end of Western and Chinese aid, particularly since the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, was seriously weakening the fabric of Vietnamese society.<sup>35</sup> Vice-Director of the Agricultural Ministry, Mai Luong, stated in August 1979 that Vietnam would be 4.5 million tons short of food in 1979. Workers were so weak they could not work a full day. Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach admitted that due to refugee flight there was a serious shortage of boats, and supplies of fish had been cut in half. Finally, he admitted that the American withdrawal had left the South without fertilizer, pesticides or spare parts for farm machinery.

As mentioned previously, Vietnam received the world's opinion of its internal and foreign policies in September and November at the United Nations when Pol Pot's delegation was seated and the General Assembly passed a resolution calling on all foreign troops to withdraw from Cambodia.

## PRESENT

1980 found the Vietnamese Communist Party with severe problems. 200,000 soldiers are bogged down in a ferocious guerrilla war in Cambodia, while 50,000 more fight hill tribesmen in Laos. Vietnam

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33. Washington Post, March 4, 1980.

34. New York Times, August 10, 1979.

35. New York Times, August 20, 1979.

finds itself viewed as the international pariah. To supersede Pol Pot in that category is no small feat. Finally, the internal economic situation, exacerbated by the Chinese invasion, is catastrophic. Le Duan consolidated his grip on the Vietnamese Communist Party through a major governmental change which saw the replacement of the Economic, Foreign, Interior, and Defense Ministers. The last named was the famous Vo Nguyen Giap. The future seems bleak for everyone, particularly the refugees. In July 1979, Vietnam had said it felt it was reasonable to wait six months before beginning a new expulsion of undesirables. Given the economic realities, Hanoi may feel that the creation of refugees is very beneficial and profitable to Vietnamese society. It would seem that the "Vietnamese Gulag Archipelago" (to use Le Monde's 1978 characterization) will continue with re-education camps, New Economic Zones and refugee control.

#### CAMBODIAN OVERVIEW

Indochina is no closer to peace than it was in 1975, and one might easily assert the opposite. Before the United States extricated itself from the "quagmire," many argued that it was a simple matter to have peace. All the United States had to do was leave Vietnam. Indeed, it did seem eminently logical that if one side surrendered or gave up, there would no war since normally it takes two sides to make a war - a fact conveniently overlooked by many anti-war leaders. As we now know, the reality was more complex.

In Cambodia, the communist victory initiated one of the bloodiest revolutions of this century. Before Vietnam conquered Cambodia in January 1979, an estimated three million Cambodians had died as a result of Angka's perceptions of socialist reality which was epitomized by its slogan: "the war caused the death of hundreds; the revolution requires the death of thousands."

With the Viet-Khmer War, the suffering of the Cambodians entered a new stage. The flow of refugees has become a deluge which threatens the stability of Thailand. Cambodia itself is now gripped by a racial-ideological war which makes no distinction between civilian and soldier. The Vietnamese have 200,000 troops "supporting" an estimated 40,000 troops of Heng Samrin. The Pol Pot-Khieu Samphan forces seem to number about 30,000. The Khmer Serei fight the Vietnamese with about 20,000 men. The Khmer Serei and the Khmer Rouge also fight each other when the opportunity allows. While casualty figures are imprecise, hundreds, if not thousands, will die each month for as long as the Vietnamese stay. The tone of the war can be felt by a Democratic Kampuchea (Pol Pot) battle communique which boasted that the Vietnamese suffered over 2000 casualties in January and February of 1980. Of these casualties, "1325 were killed by punji stakes, punji pitfalls and booby traps." The Vietnamese apparently have retaliated by poisoning wells and food, and by using Soviet-supplied nerve gas and chemical warfare.



The economy of Cambodia is in a shambles and the major problem remains how the people will feed themselves, despite massive international aid. Economic recovery is complicated not only by the war but also by the hostility between the Heng Samrin Khmer and the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese have publicly questioned the honesty and ability of their puppet-allies. The Khmer understandably resent the manner in which the Vietnamese run their country.

#### U.S. OPTIONS IN CAMBODIA

The United States has responded to the tension between Vietnam and Thailand due to Cambodia by training Thai soldiers and supplying weaponry to the military. The United State has found that its de facto alliance with China has complicated matters. China steadfastly supports the Khmer Rouge and only the Khmer Rouge. The Chinese are also training Laotian refugees for resistance inside Laos. Since the United States can hardly afford to support the Khmer Rouge or Vietnam or Heng Samrin, a quandry exists. It would seem that the United States could be of genuine service to Cambodia and itself by supporting those factions within the Khmer Serei that have the organization and vision. This would require some patience, firmness, money and weapons. Moreover, aside from public statements concerning the U.S. desire to see Vietnam out of Cambodia, the American government must begin to think and act in terms of a force which would establish a non-totalitarian Cambodia.

#### VIETNAM OVERVIEW

In Vietnam, communist victory has not brought peace. According to orthodox communist doctrine, true peace can only come with the conquest of capitalism - and this is supposed to be scientifically verifiable. Indochinese dialectics have proven this to be false. Vietnam has managed to involve itself in two national-communist wars.

Economically, Vietnam (both north and south) was better off during the Vietnam War. Ideological rigidity has ensured the shattering of Vietnam's economy to such an extent that there is very little industry, a crippled agriculture, a thriving black market, widespread corruption, a large, incompetent, parasitic bureaucracy and millions of people who are desperate to get out of the country by any means possible, even if it kills them. It is a situation that has been duplicated with remarkable regularity in nearly every country liberated by scientific socialism.

There is no relief in sight for the country since the Vietnamese rulers will not give up their imperialistic adventures. After all, as a Vietnamese leader recently remarked, since China is trying to divide the three fraternal countries of Indochina, Vietnam must unite these countries more firmly - in self-protection.

The wars in Laos and Cambodia insure that the Vietnamese military machine and Party rigidity will remain since there is no way to withdraw short of exterminating all opponents - which is very likely. Meanwhile, thousands die in Indochinese fighting.

#### IS NATIONAL SOCIALISM DEAD?

A disturbing question has arisen in the wake of the Indochinese realities, to wit, is Indochinese Communism actually a variant of National Socialism (Nazism)? Space does not allow an elaborate comparison, but the governmental rationale for internal policies and refugee exploitation raises the need for a brief examination. This is particularly appropriate since many of the media and a number of governments raised the specter of the Nazis and the Holocaust in protesting the tragedy of the "boat people."

In August 1979, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister said that due to the Chinese "expansionists" Hanoi was faced with three major problems: first, the Chinese agitation among Laotian hill tribesmen; second, the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, particularly around Saigon; and third, Chinese support for Pol Pot. He made it clear that Vietnam would not hesitate to take any measures necessary to insure Vietnamese dominance. In commenting specifically on the refugees, the Foreign Minister observed that the refugees came from among 1.5 million of the old regime and 1.8 million ethnic Chinese who were untrustworthy. The total in just these two categories is nearly 3.5 million people.

This pattern of thought regarding undesirables, whether political or racial, is sobering when one recalls the Indochinese realities. Ethnic Vietnamese account for 80 percent of Vietnam's 50 million, leaving at least 10 million questionable citizens. In Laos, the ethnic Laotians account for only 50 percent of the population of 3.5 million. In Cambodia, Heng Samrin and his Vietnamese "allies" control only about 2.5 million Khmer. Vietnam's "final solution" to its problem could be very bloody, indeed.

#### NEW ECONOMIC ZONES AND RE-EDUCATION CAMPS

In applying socialism to the national realities of Vietnam, Vietnamese leaders have not hesitated to try any means to solve their real or imagined problems. While blaming American imperialists and Peking expansionists whenever possible, the Party created New Economic Zones in the jungle which were filled with "misfits, draft dodgers and economic subversives." Refugees that resulted from this scheme and other internal policies were explained away as "people intoxicated with the old regime who do not wish to adapt to the new happiness." It is difficult to determine the precise number of residents in the New Economic Zones, but the government has consistently proclaimed the need to fill the zones with four to five million "volunteers" and undesirables from the

city and countryside, such as the ethnic Chinese, montagnards and Hoa Hao. Apparently, the "intoxicated" ones will effectively be given a choice between the jungle or the sea. The New Economic Zones are apparently envisioned as a first step in the restructuring of the entire society through massive population movements.

An insight into the "new happiness" has been provided by a number of sufferers. The government admits to "re-educating" with varying intensity between 1.5-2.5 million people. Hanoi also admits to continuing to "re-educate" 50,000 on a permanent basis. 50,000 would seem to be much too low when one considers the nature of the governmental policies and the resistance to them.

In 1978, a survivor who fled Vietnam presented to the world two documents signed by people of varying backgrounds who had not only opposed Thieu and Diem, but some even the French. They were all being "re-educated." One of the signers had been the Vice President of the NLF. Others had been active Communists for years. These men proclaimed to the world that 800,000 people were imprisoned. Vietnam was described as a vast prison. They charged that 20 percent of all prisoners died in the camps. Attempted escape was punished by death. Due to the terrible conditions of the camps, they asked all humanitarians to help them by sending "a dose of cyanide so that we may end our suffering."

#### RESISTANCE IN VIETNAM

The treatment of the southern part of Vietnam has provoked widespread hatred and resistance. Hundreds of thousands have shown their desperation by leaving their country - no small matter to a Vietnamese. Others have remained and formed the "National Recovery Forces." Cells have been established from Hue to the Mekong Delta and the resistance includes intellectuals, ex-shopkeepers, farmers and communists. Apart from these forces, but working with them, are the guerrillas who are composed primarily of the ex-South Vietnamese soldiers numbering approximately 25,000. Attacks by the montagnards upon the North Vietnamese have been reported consistently. While the resistance is obviously quite insufficient to overthrow the Hanoi government in the near future, it does tie down substantial numbers of soldiers and it has made northerners very nervous since assassination is very common. The wheel of fortune has turned.

#### U.S LESSON AND OPPORTUNITY

The United States is faced with similar choices in Vietnam and Cambodia. Surely two of the great lessons of the Vietnam War should be that the United States cannot fight wars for other people, and the United States cannot force other people to fight their wars in American style. Americans can support with money

and weapons people who have the will and the organization to create a non-totalitarian reality which is also beneficial to a country. Indochina in 1980 represents an opportunity for America to demonstrate patience and resolve. The United State could make history by supporting peoples' wars which would, for once, liberate the people.

## TOTAL REFUGEES

Discussions of the refugees prove to be difficult because of the "numbers game" and even the definition of refugee. The United Nations does not consider a person a refugee unless he is outside his own country, which would mean technically that the Vietnam war itself produced very few genuine refugees. Most public estimates need to be treated very gingerly. It is often stated that more than one million Indochinese refugees have been produced since 1975. "More than" is well chosen. It would appear that approximately 750,000 Vietnamese, 200,000 Laotians and one million Khmer have fled their countries.

The one million Khmer would include the hundreds of thousands on the Thai-Khmer border. The 750,000 Vietnamese includes about 350,000 ethnic Chinese. These very tentative figures, of course, reflect those who survived since no will ever know how many thousands died while escaping.

The flow of refugees has varied depending on the internal policies and foreign politics. The Vietnamese government has benefited financially and politically. Financially, the refugees are worth billions, particularly when one recalls that the government admits that 3-4 million want to leave and it has no real objection. Allowing for the variations in price, every 100,000 refugees could provide the government from \$200 million to \$2 billion in hard currency. Of course, an added bonus is the personal property left behind. Politically, the number of refugees not only scares the neighboring Southeast Asian countries, but it relieves the Party of unwelcome citizens.

It is also appropriate to note in view of the attention given to the psychological damage to Vietnam veterans, one should not forget those Indochinese who have survived the last five years. It is impossible to measure the trauma that undoubtedly has damaged millions.

## CONCLUSION

In surveying the events of the last five years in Indochina, one must consider a few fundamental issues. Allowing for the nationalist conflicts, the interior dynamics of the societies remain communist, socialist or Marxist - whatever term one may prefer. Anti-war figures in the years before 1975 tended to ignore this fundamental point and asserted that everything was

the result of the United States attempting to contain the forces of nationalism throughout Indochina. This is fundamentally false.

There is no conflict between nationalism and communism, and one could make the point that it breeds a form of nationalism more virulent than any capitalist could possibly imagine. The regimes of Le Duan and Pol Pot have demonstrated that one can kill a countryman as gleefully and self-righteously as any centuries-old antagonist. It is the dynamics of this slaughter and destruction that is unique to the National-communist. It is so well planned and abundantly justified.

If a scientific application of the scientific Marxian analysis fails, then the Party ignores the blunder and blunders forward on the same path. If there are too many people, well, reduce the number. It does have a perverse logic. Can one actually say the Pol Pot and Le Duan are aberrations of the socialist reality? Alexandr Solzhenitsyn has stated repeatedly that one must return to the French Revolution. There one can examine the Great Terror and the plans for the depopulation of France. Was Lenin an aberration? Stalin? Mao Zedong? One should bear in mind that China has continued to support Pol Pot since his first day in power and surely this support is not simply national interest. Moscow has never wavered in the support of Vietnam, which has become Moscow's pro-consul in the Southeast Asia section of the Kremlin's growing world empire.

Thus, seven years after the conclusion of a peace treaty and exactly five years after the military conquest of Cambodia and South Vietnam by communist military forces, no peace has come to Indochina. In fact, in five years, since the "end" of the war, more intense fighting has erupted in the area than in any period during the fifteen years of American military involvement in the region. It is generally estimated that from 1960 to 1975 approximately 1.2 million Americans, Vietnamese and Cambodians died, including both civilians and military personnel. While no concrete figures are available for the more recent carnage, it now appears likely that the combination of boat people who have perished fleeing Vietnam, Hanoi's war with Cambodia and China, and the genocidal communist experience under Pol Pot has resulted in over twice as many deaths in the five years of "peace" than those sustained during fifteen years of American engagement in the area.

Moreover, in attempting to radically re-arrange societies in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the communists have uprooted many more people than ever suffered dislocation from either American bombing or other consequences of the Vietnam War. Similarly, within Vietnam, even five years after the fall of the Thieu government, more Vietnamese remain political prisoners in so-called re-education camps than were held by Saigon at the height of the conflict with Hanoi.

Finally, at present, there is no end in sight for continued fighting in Cambodia and the massive movement of refugees. Vietnam has also failed to diffuse a potential renewal of conflict with China, while domestic discontent among Vietnamese themselves appears to be increasing with military austerity compounded by disastrous socialist economic experimentation. Thus, the Hanoi regime can see no light at the end of the turmoil as long as they maintain their twin doctrines of creating a rigidly ideological and ethical society.

Only increasing international pressure and some reduction of Soviet support for Hanoi could lead to a moderation of Hanoi's policies and some alleviation of escalating suffering of the people of Indochina for the past two decades.

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