CHAPTER 3

THE INTERESTS OF THE CONTENDING PARTIES

1. Introduction

There is a tangled web of interests and issues involved in the Kampuchean conflict, made more complicated by the involvement of extra-regional competing powers. Any analysis of the interests of each core and key players would have to begin by studying their respective perceptions and misperceptions which ultimately affect their major decisions and actions.

Two major theories have been evolved in explaining the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. The 'expansionist' theory makes the case for the fulfilment of a cherished dream of dominating a co-federation of Indochina, while the 'defensive' theory postulates the need for Vietnam to secure its southwest flank against a perceived Chinese threat. These explanations would appear to be rather simplistic for it takes little account of the factors of history, culture, ethnicity, regional and global geopolitics. By themselves, bilateral issues between Vietnam and Kampuchea and between Vietnam and China would most likely not have erupted into major conflagrations, but for the fusion of local and regional issues and the superimposition of the dynamics of global politics.

Vietnam may have found Kampuchea's rigid stance on border negotiation irksome. What was greatly worrying to the Vietnamese was Pol Pot's independent revolutionary
strategy which was not exactly complimentary to that pursued by Vietnam. By virtue of having led the anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle in Indochina, Vietnam felt itself mandated to be the principle partner in a trilateral alliance among the three Indochina states. But Kampuchea was wary of such alliances or special relationships with its implications of Vietnamese domination. It opted instead to pursue its own brand of revolution within its own time frame. Hanoi found Pol Pot’s behaviour wanting for it jeopardised Vietnam’s revolutionary struggle against the perceived common enemy. Worse, Kampuchea was seen to be acting as a proxy of China whose relations with Vietnam was fast deteriorating. The Chinese on the other hand, regarded Vietnam as a rival for influence in Southeast Asia and a pawn of the Soviet Union in the later’s attempt to encircle China.

Thus what started off as essentially a regional conflict escalated into an international crisis because of the inevitable linkage between regional and global politics.

2. **The Core Players: Vietnam, Kampuchea and China.**

3. **Vietnam and Kampuchea.**

   From the beginning of the anti-imperialist struggle, Vietnam regarded itself as the vanguard of the revolutionary forces in Indochina. Indeed it was Vietnam
and Vietnamese nationalism that provided the first pulse of life to the revolution in Indochina. Vietnamese revolution was recognised as the principle instrument that would determine the fate of Indochina and it was for this reason that indigenous revolutions in Laos and Kampuchea were viewed as secondary and complimentary to the one waged by the Vietnamese. Vietnam regarded the whole Indochina peninsula as a single theatre of operations, implying that the security and independence of Vietnam can only be guaranteed with the establishment in both Vientianne and Phnom Penh, of regimes that would give deference to the government in Hanoi.

Ho Chi Minh formed the Indochina Communist Party in 1930 to provide a political framework for the anti-imperialist struggle. When the ICP broke up into three seemingly independent communist parties in 1951, Vietnam continued to exercise a strong influence, much to the frustration of the other constituent parties, especially the KCP. The establishment of separate parties also revealed major conflicting interests between Vietnam and Kampuchea as reflected in their pursuit of different revolutionary strategies. After the 1954 Geneva Conference the United States gradually became involved in Vietnam and ultimately replaced the French as the perceived imperialist foe. In its struggle against the United States forces, Vietnam was covertly aided by Prince Sihanouk through the provision of sanctuaries to Vietnamese troops, on Kampuchean territory. Vietnam thus made a policy of supporting Sihanouk and persuaded the
Khmer Rouge to eschew any violent rebellian against Sihanouk's government, at least until Vietnam was unified. Vietnam reckoned that an armed agression against Sihanouk would undermine the anti-United States struggle. While the Khmer Rouge recognised that a peaceful political struggle in Kampuchea would not antagonise Sihanouk, however it would damage the Khmer Rogue's own revolutionary struggle. Sihanouk had already begun harassing and arresting KCP members and against this backdrop, the Khmer Rouge was not persuaded by Vietnamese arguements that it should wait until Vietnam had achieved victory before turning upon Sihanouk. This would be tantamount to subordinating the Kampuchean revolution to that of the Vietnamese. Hence the Khmer Rouge rejected Vietnamese policy and launched its own armed rebellian against Sihanouk in January 1968.

It was at this point that Vietnam began harbouring suspicions of Chinese collusion with the Khmer Rouge. China had also begun to be openly hostile to Vietnam as the latter's relations with the Soviet Union improved.

Within the Khmer Rouge itself, a struggle was taking place between elements that were pro and those that were against the Vietnamese. Younger members who had studied Marxism in France were fiercely nationalistic, as opposed to the older members who were tutored in communism under the ICP and thus shared Vietnam's vision of an Indochina Federation. Prominent
among these younger members were Saloth Sar (alias Pol Pot) and Iang Sary who eventually manoeuvred to gain control of the KCP. There were however still large segments of the Khmer Rouge membership who owed loyalty to Vietnam. These consisted of thousands of military and technical cadres who moved to Vietnam when the KCP was disbanded in 1954 and subsequently returned to activate the party. After the March 1970 coup against Sihanouk, many of these returnees held important positions and commands within the Khmer Rouge hierarchy and on the battlefield, especially in the eastern and south western zones. It was this concern of the presence of pro-Vietnamese elements within the KCP and which could ultimately undermine his position that led Pol Pot and his clique to reject Vietnamese overtures for joint military action and integration of Vietnamese cadres into the administration of Democratic Kampuchea. Indeed even as early as 1973 Pol Pot had begun to purge the party of suspected Vietnamese sympathisers. Sufficiently strong anxiety remained to push Pol Pot to advocate a policy of military confrontation with Vietnam. It was thought that a war with Vietnam would ferret out and subsequently isolate the pro-Vietnamese elements for easy liquidation.

Pol Pot was under the illusion that a war weary and debilitated Vietnam would not be able to resist Kampuchean military aggression. He had been drumming up a propaganda campaign which would have the masses believe that the Kampucheans were militarily superior to the Vietnamese. Pol Pot was even reported claiming credit
for past major military victories against imperialist forces. This illusion was carried to a rather preposterous extent where it was believed that an armed confrontation with Vietnam would not only result in a Khmer Rouge victory, but it would also enable Kampuchea to recover the "lost territories", now under Vietnamese control. Pol Pot was however shrewed enough to seek added insurance by soliciting aid from the Chinese who were only too happy to capitalise on any opportunity to tighten the screw over the Vietnamese.

Subsequent serious fallout between the two former comrades resulted in a series of increasingly brutal border conflicts beginning from the end of the Second Indochina War. Pol Pot also accused Vietnam of engineering an attempted coup against the regime in Phnom Penh in 1976. The stage was thus set for a bloody purge and a thorough reorganisation of the Kampuchean Communist Party, the military and administrative organs. The anti-Vietnamese line began to be forcefully implemented by the DK government.

Phnom Penh's manifest hostility against Vietnam ran counter to the latter's long term interest and strategy in becoming the unchallenged dominant power in Indochina. What was even more frightful to the Vietnamese leadership was China's undisguised support of the Khmer Rouge in what was perceived to be an attempt to undermine Vietnam's security. These factors provided compelling reasons to Vietnam to seriously consider
supporting if not initiating efforts to topple the Pol
Pot leadership.

With the establishment of the Heng Samrin
government in Phnom Penh in January 1979, the Vietnamese
were assured of a pliant regime in Kampuchea. But its
control of the country was far from assured. It had to
shore-up the militarily weak Heng Samrin force with close
to 170,000 regulars, aided in large measure by logistics
and equipments provided by the Soviet Union and its
COMECON allies. Despite a series of major offensives,
Vietnam had not succeeded in crushing the Kampuchean
resistance which in turn were supported by China for its
military needs, by Asean and the United States for its
non-lethal requirements, by the international community
for its diplomatic recognition and by Thailand for safe
operational base areas.

Complimenting its military offensives, Vietnam
had also attempted to transform the political and social
structure of Kampuchea in trying to consolidate its hold
over the country. Vietnamese advisors have been placed
in all the state organs, be it political, military or
party. All security matters have to be referred to
Vietnam. More than half a million Vietnamese nationals
have moved to settle in Kampuchea especially in Phnom
Penh, the province of Prey Veng and Suay Rieng, along the
main riverways of the Mekong and Basaac and around Tonle
Sap¹. Marriages of convenience between Vietnamese and Khmers were encouraged. This social transformation was further enhanced by the mandatory teaching of Vietnamese in all Kampuchean schools.

Vietnam's major interest in Kampuchea since its invasion would be the full consolidation of its control over a state deemed crucial to Vietnamese security. Throughout the subsequent military, political and diplomatic struggle in finding a settlement to Kampuchea, Vietnam had consistently held on to this fundamental principle. Only a government that is beholden to Vietnam, that would initiate major policies only at Vietnam's sufferance would be allowed the governance of Kampuchea. Hence for so long as the intentions and policies of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge are seen to be inimical to Vietnam's interests, for so long would Vietnam refuse their direct or indirect involvement in the final solution to the Kampuchea conflict.

4. Vietnam and China

China's strategic interest in Southeast Asia had been variously described as promoting a balance of influence which would be favourable to Beijing. This had been the principle guiding force in China's foreign policy posture and direction. China would suffer no

competition in exerting its influence over the region traditionally beholden to the middle kingdom.

Conflicting interests between Vietnam and China had its antecedents during the 1000-year Vietnamese subjugation under Chinese rule. While the Vietnamese may have emulated its northern conquerors in the finer art of civilized living, it did not relish the idea of being eternally under Chinese suzerainty, and thus eventually threw off the Chinese overlordship. During the anti-imperialist struggle, Vietnam may have taken inspiration from the Chinese communist victory over the Kuomintang forces, but it entertained reservations about treading the path drawn by the Chinese. The Vietnamese opted instead to chart their own revolutionary and ideological course. Implicit to these seeming divergences was the need to remain independent of China’s control and influence. Vietnam was convinced that, notwithstanding China’s support to Vietnam during the first and second Indochina wars - which was viewed more as expressions of China’s opposition to imperialism than an endearment towards the Vietnamese people, China perceived its security interest in terms of having a southern neighbour that is weak and pliant. Testimony to this was China’s perceived collusion with the major powers during the 1954 Geneva Conference which temporarily militarily divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel. Further evidence was provided by China’s advice against an armed insurgency in South Vietnam and against Vietnamese negotiations with the United States. China’s position was equated to a
desire to see Vietnam engaged in a long, debilitating struggle which would keep it divided and weak and thus vulnerable to Chinese influence.

The divergent interests between Vietnam and China further crystallised with the involvement of extra-regional competing powers and the gradual rift in Sino-Soviet relations. Sino-Vietnamese interests diverged sharply with the intervention of the United States in South Vietnam. China refused to reconcile its differences with the Soviet Union in order to form a united front together with Vietnam directed against United States imperialism. China also suspected the Soviets to be behind Vietnam's consent to negotiate with the United States in April 1968. However after Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1971 leading to the historic breakthrough in Sino-United States relations, China took a 180-degree turn and began to support Vietnamese-United States negotiations. Indeed, at the behest of the Americans, China began to pressure Vietnam to negotiate a settlement to the second Indochina war. This time around Vietnam became suspicious of Beijing, viewing the latter's motive as meant to serve China's interests, probably at Vietnamese expense. The Shanghai Communique signed between China and the United States in February 1972 which spelled out United States intention to withdraw from Taiwan was seen by Vietnam as a probable trade-off between the two countries, in return

---

Gareth Porter, "Vietnamese Policy and the Indochina Crisis", p. 73.
for a pro-United States settlement in South Vietnam. The United States revelation of China's consent to a possible "balkanized Indochina" which would imply a permanently divided Vietnam convinced Hanoi that China did not wish for a reunified Vietnam.3

The defeat of the United States in the second Indochina war led to a major re-assessment of the United States role in Southeast Asia. The decision to withdraw the United States military presence from the region drew different if not conflicting responses from major regional powers. Vietnam was delighted with the prospects of the withdrawal of United States troops, and dismantling of its bases and defence treaties from Southeast Asia. But China was apprehensive, for the United States withdrawal would result in an altered geopolitical situation which was perceived to hold serious implications for China's security. An American military withdrawal coupled with a weak political leadership in Washington in the wake of the Watergate scandal, would provide no serious deterrence against possible Soviet expansionism. Since Beijing viewed its conflict with Moscow on the basis of a zero-sum game, any Soviet expansion would thus be at the expense of China. China's interest could only be maintained by either creating a bulwark against Soviet encroachment or neutralising any potential Soviet ally. To this end, China began enhancing its relations with Thailand and the Philippines

---

3 Ibid, p. 75.
- the two countries most affected by the United States military withdrawal, and succeeded in bringing them in line with China's international stance. Beijing let it be known that it was against any unilateral United States military withdrawal from Southeast Asia and publicly criticized the Soviet Union's proposed "collective security system" as a thinly disguised attempt to achieve political hegemony.4

To counter Soviet encroachment into the Indochina countries, China began to persuade them to conform to Beijing's anti-Soviet posture. Pol Pot who was fast becoming a major recieptient of Chinese aid conceded to go along with Beijing, but Vietnam declined. During Le Duan's visit to Beijing in September 1975, Beijing offered major economic assistance for Vietnam's 5-Year Plan (1976 - 1980). As a quid pro quo Vietnam was asked to side with Beijing in an alliance against the forces of imperialism, colonialism and hegemonism. Vietnam was however not willing to be dragged into the Sino-Soviet conflict and its subsequent rejection of China's proposal foreclosed all future Chinese aid. Thus began a new era in Sino-Vietnamese relations which was to be characterised by increasing hostilities leading finally to China's invasion of Vietnam's border provinces in January 1979.

As relations with China deteriorated, Vietnam began gradually tilting towards the Soviet Union. This shift in Hanoi’s alignment was incremental rather than sudden, despite the Soviet’s strong pressure upon Vietnam for a more speedy re-alignment. Vietnam still harboured hopes of being able to chart a more equi-distance course in terms of its policy orientation vis-a-vis China and the Soviet Union. But this was not to be, given China’s increasing hostility towards Vietnam, amply testified by the quest for dominance in Indochina. China had succeeded in persuading Pol Pot to follow its international line of anti-Vietnam and anti-Soviet, though it registered less success with the Pathet Lao leadership.

China’s forceful seizure from Vietnam, of the Paracel group of islands in the South China Sea in 1974, its claim of sovereignty over the Spratleys and its non-negotiable stance over the demarcation of Sino-Vietnam land border provided frightful perceptions to the Vietnamese regarding Beijing’s territorial intentions. China’s accusation of Vietnamese persecution of its ethnic Chinese population and the consequent exodus of the latter coupled with China’s unilateral action of sending ships to Vietnam to evacuate the Chinese population further inflamed the conflict between them.

The sequence of China’s actions which culminated in the complete halt of all aid to Vietnam fully convinced the latter that its once staunch supporter had become unequivocally hostile. Vietnam thus abandoned all
pretense at neutrality and began a new international line which was to cement its relations with the Soviet Union as signified by its membership of COMECOM and the conclusion of a 25-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviets. Vietnam was to eventually became the Soviet's major ally in Southeast Asia.

The stage was thus set for China's "first lesson" against Vietnam in January 1979 and the subsequent adoption of a hard line policy designed to "bleed Vietnam white". This change in China's attitude towards Vietnam from solidarity to hostility also brought about major setbacks to Beijing's strategic interests in Indochina as well as Southeast Asia. China's antagonism towards Vietnam was a self-fulfilling prophecy, it pushed Vietnam into a formal alliance with China's number one enemy and gave access to the Soviet Pacific fleet to naval and shore facilities at Cam Ranh and Danang. China's forceful manner of settling its territorial disputes with the Vietnamese, its defence of the overseas Chinese against alleged Vietnamese persecution and finally its bloody invasion of Vietnam served to enhance non-communist Southeast Asia, their pre-conceived perception of the China threat. China's resort to the use of force in settling bilateral disputes was a lesson not easily forgotten. It certainly seriously eroded Beijing's credibility particularly with regards towards building up the spectre of an encroaching Soviet threat to the region.
Since the Kampuchean invasion, China's main interest had been to forestall the expansion of Soviet influence into the region and to oppose the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. China did not cherish the idea of a Vietnamese domination of Indochina and to this end it pursued a policy designed to weaken Hanoi's influence over both Phnom Penh and Vietiane. China provided extensive military support to the Kampuchean resistance forces calculated to exert continued pressure upon the Vietnamese. It also entered into a strategic alignment with ASEAN in an attempt to isolate Vietnam internationally. While China may have a parallel interest with ASEAN in trying to make Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea a costly venture, it differed from ASEAN in having little interest in wanting to solve the Kampuchean problem. Within the Chinese perception, a long protracted war would not only be ruinous for Vietnam, it would also prolong the confrontation between Vietnam and ASEAN and prevent the latter from making approaches towards involving Vietnam into a regional order in which both Indochina and ASEAN could coexist peacefully. China was fully cognizant that some ASEAN member countries who still regard it as a major external threat, would prefer a closer collaboration with Vietnam.

The Kampuchean war had gradually pushed Thailand towards a closer rapprochement with China. Within the framework of the Sino-Soviet conflict, the war had conveniently tied down the Soviet Union with having to continue providing massive assistance — some US$ 3
million daily, to Vietnam. Even more importantly, Soviet support for the Vietnamese war effort gave little opportunity for the former to improve relations with Asean.

The Khmer Rouge represented China's closest ally and indeed provided the only means by which China could exert an influence in Kampuchea. For this reason China felt compelled to protect and defend the Khmer Rouge in the face of increased hostility from Asean and the international community. China's attitude towards the general call for removal of Pol Pot, Iang Sary and others generally identified with the Khmer Rouge's murderous policies tended to be rather ambivalent. Despite China's support for a neutral and non-aligned Kampuchea, it was not generally believed that China would renounce the Khmer Rouge. Removing the latter from the political equation in Kampuchea would only undermine China's strategic interest.


6. Asean

When Vietnam decided upon the military option in countering Pol Pot's intransigence it undermined Asean's earlier attempt at redefining the principles by which the region could be assured of political stability, harmony and prosperity. This was the basic principles governing the concept of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality
which would require Southeast Asian countries to conform to certain standards of behaviour in their international relations. Specifically it entails respect for each others’ independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each others’ internal affairs, the pacific settlement of all intra-regional disputes and non-involvement in extra-regional power conflicts. Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea breached all these principles and cut at the very core of Asean’s corporate interests.

The occupation of Kampuchea was an avid rejoinder to Asean that Vietnam was prepared to use force to meet any perceived challenge to its security. Thailand more than any other Asean country, felt most vulnerable and was convinced that its security was threatened by the presence of some 150,000 Vietnamese troops across its border. The involvement of extra-regional powers also brought about a new geo-political configuration to the region. Worse, Asean and Indochina found themselves in an adversarial relationship, with the region polarised into two confrontationist blocs.

Asean’s major interest in the Kampuchean conflict was to secure a political settlement which would overcome or at least reduce the above adverse effects and which at the very minimum should contain the core elements of Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Kampuchea, the establishment of a free, neutral, independent and democratic Kampuchea and finally provide for a national
reconciliation of all the Khmer factions Asean also subscribed to the policy that, as a front line state, Thailand should be given due deference on all questions related to the settlement of the Kampuchean conflict.

To realise its objectives, Asean employed a three-pronged strategy that also assumed political, diplomatic, military and economic dimensions. This included the political, diplomatic and economic isolation of Vietnam, the application of military pressure upon the Vietnamese occupational force and finally the formulation of modalities for a negotiated settlement.

In the application of the above strategy Asean had successfully solicited the aid of various countries and international organisations. Asean's dialogue partners and the international community were persuaded to go along with Asean in ostracizing Vietnam and reducing it to a pariah country. China, together with the Kampuchean resistance forces provided the necessary military pressure to tie down the Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea. To the extent that there was a common desire to make Vietnamese occupation a costly venture, Asean had found it expedient to enter into a strategic alignment with China. Both however had different end goals. Asean desired a quick end to the debilitating war so that


6 This would include the EEC countries, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada and West Germany.
Vietnam could be rehabilitated and consequently play an important role in containing the long term perceived China threat, and in fulfilling the requisites for the realisation of ZOPFAN. Likewise Asean’s acceptance of the murderous Khmer Rouge in the tripartite coalition was a tactical convenience to lend credibility to Vietnamese opposition. Asean had no wish whatsoever for a return of the Khmer Rouge - in whatever guise, to power in Kampuchea.

It was precisely these seeming contradictions in Asean’s strategy that led to the open conflict between Asean and its marriage-of-convenience-partners during the International Conference on Kampuchea in New York, in July 1981. Asean’s draft resolution which was conciliatory to the Vietnamese and designed to deny the Khmer Rouge the opportunity to seize power in the event of a Vietnamese withdrawal was vehemently opposed by both China and its Kampuchean ally. Given Asean’s perceived security requirement, it genuinely felt apprehensive regarding Thailand’s close alliance with Beijing and concerned with Soviet entrenchment in Indochina.

For all these reasons, Asean had endeavoured towards a negotiated settlement of the Kampuchean conflict. Peace proposals formulated by Asean over the years have been gradually modified to be more conciliatory to the Vietnamese position. Asean’s earlier demands for unconditional Vietnamese withdrawal before
negotiations, have been modified to complete withdrawal with negotiations and finally to partial withdrawal pending negotiations. Asean was prepared to accept a government in Phnom Penh that was pre-disposed towards Hanoi, for so long as such a government is established through popular consent. Asean was fully cognizant of Hanoi’s security interests, and to this end was prepared to accept Vietnam as the dominant element in Indochina.

7. The Super Powers

USSR already involved in Vietnam even before Vietnam sought Soviet protection against China in preparation for its invasion of Kampuchea, it signalled the subsequent entrenchment of the Soviet Union into Indochina and its permanent presence in Southeast Asian regional affairs. When Deng Xiaopeng visited the United States and formalised Sino-United States relations as a strategic counter-weight against any Soviet challenge to its planned military action against Vietnam, the United States went full circle and found itself once again involved in Southeast Asia. The superimposition of the dynamics of global politics onto regional geopolitics brought about a potentially explosive situation, particularly during 1976 to 1979. This was a period characterised by a deterioration of United States-Soviet relations, and an improvement in Sino-United States relations. This development held ominous implications to regional security, especially when framed against rising tension in Sino-Vietnamese relations and increasing
belligerancy between Kampuchea and Vietnam. Worse, both Vietnam and Kampuchea were allied to powers which were in conflict. Bilateral and regional problems provided opportunities for the extension of super power influence in the region, and by the same token, an enhancement of their respective strategic interests. This had in turn contributed to the escalation of regional conflict.

8. The United States

When the United States lost the war in Vietnam in 1975, its interest in Indochina declined to the extent that no United States policy was formulated for the region in the immediate post-1975 period. However the overhanging issue of American servicemen missing in action (MIA) and the implication of the increasing Soviet military presence in Southeast Asia among other considerations, provided sufficient reasons for reactivation of United States interest, in the region.

This rekindling of United States interests coincided with the Reagan presidency. President Reagan - a staunch anti-communist, had declared the resolution of the MIA issue as a high national priority. To this end a dialogue had been initiated with the Vietnamese in an attempt to get full accounting of the more than 2400 American servicemen still listed as missing during the second Indochina war.

There was also considerable concern with the steady build-up of the Soviet military presence in
Vietnam, particularly its naval arm. Soviet access to the huge naval bases at Cam Ranh and Danang had allowed for projection of Soviet naval power in both the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The United States was fully aware of the implications of increased Soviet ties with communist Indochina and the declining rapprochement in United States-Philippines relations over the issue of Subic and Clark naval and air bases. The continued deterioration of the political stability in the Philippines complicated the regional security perception.

The United States was committed to defending Thailand as provided for in the 1954 Manila Pact, though, given the moribund state of the Pact, the United State was not likely to commit its ground combat troops to another war in Asia. Be as it may, the United States was nevertheless concerned with the apprehension felt by non-communist Asean in the wake of the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. For all these reasons, the United States felt morally compelled to denounce the Kampuchean occupation. While it had not formulated any long-term policy goals, the United States immediate interest was to assure Asean and China of its opposition against Vietnamese aggression. It was happy with the strategy employed by Asean to seek a negotiated settlement to the Kampuchean problem and to this end, had utilised its resources and influence to deny any legitimacy to the Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh. Covertly the United States administration had channelled through Asean, some US $ 15 million worth
of non-lethal assistance to the non-communist factions of the Kampuchea resistance.\textsuperscript{7}

Indirectly it had also contributed about US $ 30 million in 1984 and 1985 to the United Nations relief agencies working with the Kampuchea refugees.

It had been argued that United States was constrained from providing open armed support to the Kampuchean resistance for fear of derailing Hanoi's cooperation in seeking a full accounting of the MIA's.\textsuperscript{8}

The United States also did not want to complicate any political settlement through its direct involvement. Be that it may, the United States Congress in 1985 passed a Bill which committed the administration to provide US $ 5 million annual aid to the Kampuchean resistance.

Within the context of Sino-United States relations, the United States under President Reagan no longer regarded China as pivotal in the strategic alliance against the Soviet Union, as was the case during the Carter-Brzezinski period. Greater rapprochement in United States-Soviet relations had somewhat reduced China's once strategically important role in the anti-Soviet alliance. While the United States concurred with China in opposing the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea, it did not however share China's final objective for the solution to the Kampuchean conflict. It openly opposed the return to power of the Khmer Rouge.

\textsuperscript{7} Official Malaysian source.

\textsuperscript{8} Nayan Chanda "United States Policy Towards the Cambodian Conflict" p. 15.
9. The Soviet Union

While it is commonly believed that the Soviet Union is an opportunistic power, its emergence as an important element in the regional geo-political equation, is arguably due more to propitious regional and global developments than to its own doing. In other words, the Soviets did not really push itself into becoming a significant regional factor, it was pulled in.

Vietnam’s emergence as the dominant power in Indochina and the rift in its relations with China led to the subsequent strategic alignment between the latter and Kampuchea. Vietnam perceived this relationship as threatening to its security interest, particularly in the light of China’s encouragement and support to the increasing hostility of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. Vietnam’s attempts at normalising relations with the United States were spurned by the Carter administration which was then, more interested in normalising ties with China for the obvious implications this would have in the context of United States-Soviet rivalry. Vietnam thus had no other option but to solicit support from the Soviet Union to procure the necessary countervailing weight.

Vietnam’s move towards the Soviet Union fitted in well with the latter’s strategic interests, given the backdrop of improving Sino-United States relations, and deteriorating Sino-Soviet ties. During the official visits of Brzezinski to Beijing and Deng to Washington in
1978, official and non-official statements made thereupon, gave the Soviets a definite impression of an emergence of a possible strategic alliance between China, the United States and possibly Japan directed against the Soviet Union. Thus when Vietnam opened its doors to the Soviet Union, the latter needed no second invitation.

Soviet entrenchment in Indochina would appear to have an effect of encircling China - at least according to Chinese perception. More importantly, Soviet naval access to Cam Ranh and Danang enabled the Soviet Union to play its aspired super power role and to be reckoned if not accepted, as a permanent factor in regional geopolitics. For this reason a case can be made for the Soviets to prefer a prolonged Kampuchean conflict. The cost of US $ 3 million a day is said to be insignificant compared to the benefits that the Soviet have procured. Yet it cannot also be denied that the military advantage that the Soviets gained is at a political expense. The Soviet were constrained from improving relations with Asean which accused it of assisting Vietnam in the latter's occupation of Kampuchea. Similar accusation had been levelled against the Soviets in the United Nations and other international fora.

The Kampuchean conflict had directly and indirectly served Soviet strategic interests at both the regional as well as the global levels. The three Indochina countries which were once under Chinese influence were now closely aligned with the Soviet Union.
The naval and shore facilities that Vietnam provided for the Soviet Pacific fleet had enabled the Soviet Union to project its military presence and play a super power role in an area which was once the exclusive of the United States.