



PRC-SRV CONFLICT (U) ^Δ

JULY 1979


Enclosure (2)

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PREFACE

1. (U) PURPOSE. This study reviews the Sino-Vietnamese War including the background of the conflict and IPAC assessments of the results.
2. (U) DOCUMENT CURRENCY. Information presented is current as of 25 Apr 79.
3. (U) PUBLICATION AUTHORITY. This is non-recurring finished intelligence validated and registered for production in Defense Intelligence Production Schedule (DIPS) in accordance with DIAM 57-1.
4. (U) AUTHORS. This study was written by members of the China and Southeast Asia branches of the Intelligence Analysis Division.
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*Comment
Apr. 79.*

SECTION I - BACKGROUND OF SINO-VIETNAMESE DISPUTE

Historical Animosity

(U) Historical animosity between China and Vietnam reflects long-standing, differing perceptions of divergent national interests. Vietnam's mistrust of China was apparent as early as 1957, when friction between pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions precipitated a major leadership crisis; Ho Chi Minh was challenged by pro-Beijing Truong Chinh, the ousted Secretary-General of the Lao Dong Party.

(U) The years of the Cultural Revolution did not improve Sino-Vietnamese relations; Soviet arms supplies moving across China were often lost or delayed, and Red Guards condemned "revisionist" Vietnam and attacked the Vietnamese consulate in Nanning. China showed its disapproval of the US-Vietnamese peace talks in Paris by imposing a news blackout on the subject for nearly 6 months in 1968. Although relations between the two countries warmed slightly in 1969, the deterioration of relations continued as Beijing moved toward Sino-US detente.

(U) In Sep 75, Vietnamese Party Secretary Le Duan's trip to Beijing established the gulf between the two countries when China refused to give Vietnam the amount of aid it requested. The Vietnamese also rejected China's analysis of the world situation with Moscow as the main threat. In October, Le Duan traveled to Moscow, obtained considerable Soviet aid, and gave almost total support to Soviet foreign policy positions. By Dec 75, the Soviet Union reportedly was helping Vietnam develop some 40 economic assistance projects. Thus, the differences between China and Vietnam on the question of the Soviet Union reached a peak in 1975.

Ethnic Chinese Issue Dramatizes Rift

(U) The ostensible cause of the crisis in the Sino-Vietnamese relationship in the first half of 1978 was the large number of ethnic Chinese refugees who entered China from Vietnam. It was brought about by the Vietnamese government's introduction of measures in March aimed at hastening Vietnam's "social transformation." These measures included the abolition of private trade, currency reform, the nationalization of property, food rationing, and forced relocation to new economic areas. Although these measures were aimed at all small businessmen in Vietnam, the Chinese were most affected because of their involvement in trade. Also, there were reports that

(v) the Vietnamese government exerted pressure on the ethnic Chinese to adopt Vietnamese nationality and introduced measures to improve Vietnamese security, particularly in border areas, by resettling some communities. These measures, together with Chinese support for Cambodia in the Vietnam-Kampuchea border conflict and fears among the ethnic Chinese community of conscription for the Vietnamese armed forces, compelled increasing numbers of Chinese to leave the country. By early summer of 1978, tensions were running high. China demanded that Vietnam stop its policy of persecuting and expelling Chinese residents, while Hanoi accused Beijing of deliberately inciting the Chinese to leave by using agents provocateurs.

Border Incidents Increase - Propaganda Sharpening

(U) In mid-December, China for the first time mentioned SRV use of indirect fire weapons during a border incident. Thereafter, the intensity, scale, and frequency of border incidents increased. The 25 Dec editorial was particularly strong stating that activities had "reached an intolerable point . . . Hanoi had gone far enough . . . (and) there is a limit to China's forbearance and restraint." Hanoi was warned to expect punishment. Another Chinese article accused the Soviets of inciting the situation to disrupt PRC stability and impede the modernization program. The SRV was also accused of having "redrawn the demarcation line of the border in an attempt to forcibly change the status quo there." The article additionally charged Hanoi with invading as many as 100 areas . . . "thereby nibbling away large tracts of Chinese territory."

The Moscow Connection

(U) On 3 Nov 78, the signing in Moscow of a 25-year treaty of friendship was another step in Vietnam's increasingly intimate ties with the Soviet Union. Although the treaty, according to its text, is "not intended to oppose any third country," its general tenor, and especially Article 6, clearly shows China as the object of the new alliance; Moscow and Hanoi pledged to "actively oppose all schemes and maneuvers of imperialism and reactionary force," the latter term being the standard Hanoi catchword for the Beijing leadership.

(U) In the area of operations, mountains and steep-sided hills predominate along much of the border. The highest and most difficult terrain for movement is found in the western sector of the border in Lai Chau and Hoang Lien Song provinces. Here, the border crosses a number of rugged northwest-southeast trending mountain ranges whose peaks (in places higher than 3,000 meters) are the highest elevations in Indochina. The only corridors for transportation in this area are the rough, narrow valleys of the Black, Red, and Lo Rivers.

(U) East of Ha Gian, the mountains gradually become lower-- although the peaks usually are higher than 1,500 meters-- until the border reaches the Cao Bang area. From here, the border crosses heavily eroded limestone and sandstone hills that extend intermittently to the Gulf of Tonkin. These hills frequently are rugged and steep-sided, typically separated by short but winding, narrow valleys. Elevations mostly exceed 500 meters except in a few lowland valleys in the east. Even in the east, however, several northeast-southwest aligned mountains have ridgeline elevations that reach over 1,000 meters. In the Pingxiang-Dong Dang region, there are numerous large areas of karst containing scattered lowlands, some studded with sharp limestone pinnacles.

(U) The lowest elevations along the China-Vietnam frontier are found at the extreme eastern end of the border. Here a narrow but densely populated coastal plain, approximately 10 km wide near the border, fronts the Gulf of Tonkin. The coast is irregular, with muddy shores fronted by numerous rocky islands, many of which rise precipitously to heights of 150 meters.

(U) The major rivers originate in the highlands of southern China and have cut narrow valleys in their passage southward into Vietnam. The Red River forms the boundary for about 50 km, but elsewhere the border normally follows local drainage basins. Stream water levels experience wide fluctuations seasonally because of short wet and dry season precipitation differences. Many small streams and tributaries have greatly reduced flows or are without water during the dry season.

(U) Much of the original forest cover on both sides of the border has been removed by upland dwellers using slash-and-burn agricultural methods; coarse grass has replaced the old forest stands in many areas.

Climate

(U) The southwest monsoon season (mid-May to mid-September) is hot and humid with moderate to heavy rainfall. Mean daily maximum temperatures at this time of year are in the low 30's (°C) with mean daily minimums usually 6 to 8 degrees cooler. During the northeast monsoon season (mid-October to mid-March), temperatures drop significantly, humidity levels decrease, and there is little rain. Because of the mountainous terrain, rainfall is variable with precipitation amounts ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 millimeters annually. Of this amount, about two-thirds falls during the June-September rainy season; in contrast, there is little rain in the cooler December through March dry season, with amounts averaging only 20 to 50 millimeters a month. During the period of the conflict, heavy fog occurred on several evenings.

Population

(U) The greatest population concentrations occur in the valley of the Red River around the railroad town of Lao Cai, in the area of Lang Son, and on the narrow coastal plain near Mon Cai; accurate and current population figures are not available for these areas. Densities in these local areas probably range from 100 to 200 persons per square kilometer. Over much of the remainder of the borderland densities vary from 1 to 50 persons per square kilometer.

(U) Throughout most of the border, the population consists predominantly of ethnic minorities derived originally from the non-Chinese tribal populations of Yunnan and Guizhou. While certain tribal groups may dominate in some restricted areas, wide dispersions and great intermingling of the people over the centuries have resulted in a complex ethnic distribution. Ethnic Vietnamese predominate in the principal towns.

Transportation

(U) The Sino-Vietnamese frontier contains a sparse but adequate road network. Although designed primarily to serve the agricultural population, some routes provide good transport links between the two countries. Over a dozen highways of varying quality and two railroads cross the border. Roads generally follow major stream valleys, and therefore are mostly aligned northwest-southeast in the western sector and northeast-southwest in the east. Roads vary widely in quality but are in generally good condition and can sustain light traffic during fair weather. Surfaces on the better roads are gravel or gravel and earth; other roads have packed earth surfaces. Many roads have steep gradients, sharp curves, and low capacity bridges. Landslides and washouts create additional hazards during the rainy season. Vehicular off-road movement is not feasible along much of the border because of rugged, steep slopes. Cart paths or trails serve all populated areas. Inland waterways are locally important in the China-Vietnam frontier, with the Red River system providing an inland water connection with China.

Railroads

(U) Railroads cross the border at two points: Pingxiang-Lang Son in the east; and Hekou-Lao Cai in the Red River valley in the west. The eastern railroad carried the bulk of rail traffic between the two countries before the Chinese closed all rail service to Vietnam in late December. This line was made dual gauge by the addition of a third rail to facilitate additional use of Chinese rolling stock during the Vietnam War. The western line (meter gauge) was closed to traffic in the fall of 1978.

Inland Waterways

(U) The Sino-Vietnamese borderland is drained by a highly developed river system that tends to follow the northwest-southeast alignment of the mountains. Tributaries and upper courses of many of the rivers flow through narrow gorges, parallel or perpendicular to the main structural alignment.

(U) The Red River system, the principal drainage basin to northern Vietnam is the only important inland waterway connection with the China border. The Red River is noted for its unswerving course and depth of cut: it is confined to a narrow valley and bordered on either side by mountains.

(U) It is navigable during the high water season (June-October) by steamers of 2.1-meter draft to Lao Cai, 500 km above the mouth of the river. Smaller powered craft of 5-ton capacity can reach Lao Cai throughout the year.

Economic

(U) Paddy rice economy has developed in the upper Red River and in the coastal plain. Other scattered centers have been established in certain well-watered riverine lowlands. Elsewhere, the "slash-and-burn" type of shifting agriculture prevails. It is based upon rice, sweet potatoes, corn, and, to a certain degree, opium. For the most part, the village economy is primitive and self-sufficient.

(U) Rice is the main crop and the principal food of nearly all the people. Other important food crops include corn, manioc, beans, peanuts, sweet potatoes, and vegetables. Tea and tung oil are important locally.

(U) On 5 Mar the PRC announced a unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam to "the historic boundaries" recognized by the French and the Chinese Qing dynasty in the 19th century, and proposed negotiations with Hanoi to delineate the border.

Economic Damage

(U) Apart from the destruction of military equipment and casualties, Chinese forces also caused considerable material damage. Population centers such as Cao Bang and Lang Son were systematically destroyed. Light industry, communication and transportation facilities, government buildings, and houses (one estimate for Lang Son is 90% of homes) were either destroyed or badly damaged before the Chinese withdrew. In some areas, all bridges were destroyed and stretches of the rail line between Lang Son and Dong Dang were removed.

(U) SRV officials also claim that areas from 25 to 60 km inland from the border suffered varying degrees of damage. The SRV claims that a million people were displaced and 150,000 tons of foodstuffs destroyed and 98,000 draft animals lost. Although these figures probably are exaggerated (the SRV reportedly has asked the United Nations food and agricultural organization for 50,000 tons of food), it is obvious that agricultural losses in the area occupied by the Chinese were considerable. SRV authorities also claim that 60,000 hectares of grain fields were damaged or have gone unplanted.

(U) The Vietnamese economy also suffered in other ways. The general mobilization probably resulted in some economic dislocation. However, many of those inducted spend only token hours in training while non-inducted personnel work additional hours. Some economic problems also were caused by commercial ships being diverted from Haiphong Harbor to Danang.

(U) The movement north of economic reconstruction units may have hampered reconstruction activities in other parts of Vietnam.

Soviet Involvement

(U) Through propaganda, the Soviet Union constantly accuses China of being the aggressor, of causing world tension, and of starting a policy aimed at eventual domination of Southeast Asia. Beijing was warned of possible Soviet counteractions, Vietnamese military achievements were praised, and China's withdrawal intentions doubted.

(U) In the area of diplomacy, the Soviet bloc and satellite nations, as well as Cuba, Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan, were quick to condemn China. An ASEAN-sponsored Security Council resolution, condemning foreign involvement and calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Indochina countries, was voted against by the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, and finally vetoed by Moscow. Also, the Soviets reportedly pressured India to condemn China and recognize the new Phnom Penh government.

(U) The Vietnamese also conducted some activity behind Chinese lines. According to the Chinese press, at least two areas in southern China were raided, with little success, by small Vietnamese units. In addition, the French press reported that special Vietnamese troops were operating against Chinese LOCs.

(U) A major Chinese objective was to teach Vietnam a "lesson." Although Vietnamese propaganda may indicate otherwise, the senior Vietnamese leadership is aware of China's ability to launch a limited invasion of northern Vietnam. The continued buildup of Vietnamese forces in this area is indicative of this awareness. Vietnamese propaganda and nationalism, however, may convince most Vietnamese that the Chinese withdrawal was the result of the Vietnamese defensive capability and not Chinese intentions.

(U) Vietnamese claims of Chinese atrocities, intentions to invade Laos, and occupations of Vietnamese border areas have been strident and prolonged. Also, recent indications suggest Vietnam will ask China to pay for the war damage to northern Vietnam. Vietnam also has resumed intensified operations in Kampuchea. Such actions do not indicate that a lesson has been learned. Also it is unlikely that Vietnam will alter its attitude during the peace talks.

(U) ASEAN members, particularly Thailand, have been impressed by China's resolve to challenge Vietnam and the Soviet Union. China's "paper tiger" image, acquired after Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea, has been dispelled. Indonesia, however, and to a lesser extent Singapore and Malaysia, may perceive a new phase of Chinese aggression. Indonesia is even less likely to want to establish diplomatic relations with China in the short term than before the conflict.

