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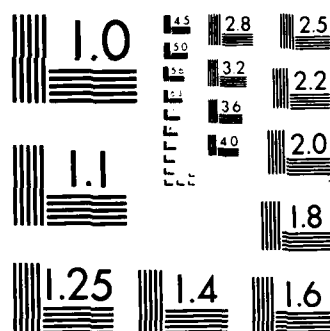
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Indochina Relations: Learning From History

MacAlister Brown

Williams College

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"...framers of foreign policy are often influenced by beliefs of what history teaches or portends.... [P]olicy-makers ordinarily use history badly."

E. May, "Lessons" of the Past, p. ix, xi

The predominant assumption about future Indochina relationships is that Vietnam will maintain a controlling influence. The reasons for this expectation spring primarily from the vast disparities between Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea in population, military mobilization, economic development, education, and political dynamism. The record of leadership by Vietnamese in the anti-colonial resistance wars against France and the United States, and the preeminent role of Vietnamese in organizing the communist party in Vietnam and its satellite parties in Laos and Kampuchea leave no doubt that Vietnam has reason to feel that it deserves a preeminent position in relation to its neighbors in what the French designated as Indochina.

Thus a projection of the recent political history of the Indochina states would reasonably arrive at the prediction that the Vietnamese communists will feel themselves qualified, even destined, to continue leading their party partners of the national liberation war into the postwar era of socialist transformation. Struggle of various sorts has been the fate and glory of the Vietnamese communist leadership for five decades, and they have no reason to abandon their superior role in the economic and social revolutions yet to be won at home. The communist party of Laos has long been regarded as partner or apprentice of its Vietnamese counterpart, and in Kampuchea the present ruling party in Phnom Penh emerged directly from a Vietnamese invasion helping Khmer exiles in 1978 who subsequently reestablished the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party.

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To predict a continuing Vietnamese involvement in advising the apprentice party governments in Laos and Kampuchea should provoke no contradiction, so long as it rests upon tangible indices of superior power, historical entanglement, and common problems and ideology. Even then one must beware of unanticipated turns of history, such as the flaring hostility between Vietnam and China after the final departure of American forces from the region in 1975. Also, the departure of a key personality from the chess board can necessitate sudden shifts in historical projections. Yet serious and avoidable errors can be made if an idea or slogan from the past is converted into a prediction of an inexorable future. This seems to have happened to the Indochina Communist Party's (ICP) allusions in the 1930s and 1951 to an Indochina Federation. The propaganda mills of several governments, most notably the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), The Peoples Republic of China (PRC), and Thailand, have ground away at demonstrating on the basis of ICP statements and resolutions up to five decades old that the Vietnamese harbor a hidden agenda to bind Laos and Kampuchea into a formal political union. Several independent scholars have echoed the argument, while others have taken pains to discredit the notion as resting on a misreading of the documentary record, and transcended by events. The Government of Vietnam has explicitly denied the validity of the federation idea since 1954.

#### Indochina Federation: Blueprint or Bugbear?

The propagandistic version of the Indochina Federation project is set forth in the Black Paper<sup>1</sup> issued in September 1978 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea which was overrun by Vietnam

three months later. This crudely written tract plays upon the name, the Indochina Communist Party, "chosen" for the party in 1930 and refers to its "slogan", to wage a struggle to create an "Indochina Federation." The historical validity of the tract, however, is very limited, even with respect to events that occurred in Kampuchea. In more recent years the publications of the expanded Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) show much greater polish and sophistication, to the point where they set forth in the style of western historiography and UN parliamentary documentation the record of Vietnam's "Indochina Federation Strategy."

A CGDK pamphlet in March 1986 makes the following points. The name alone given to the Indochina Communist Party in 1930 suffices to reveal unambiguously the federation strategy. Later, in February 1951, the manifesto of the newly formed Vietnam Worker's Party (VWP) stated:

"...the people of Vietnam are willing to enter into long-term co-operation with the peoples of Laos and Cambodia, with a view to bringing about an independent, free, strong and prosperous federation of States of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia."

A few weeks later, at the National Congress of Unification, which merged the Viet Minh front into the Lien-Viet front, Ho Chi Minh stated: "We are going to realize soon the great union of Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia." Eight months thereafter a "top secret" VWP directive told party members that "later on when conditions permit this to be carried out, the (three) revolutionary parties of Vietnam Cambodia and Laos will be reunited to form a single party." The evidence then jumps to December 1976 when the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam adopted a resolution which set Hanoi's long-term policy toward and Laos and Kampuchea as follows:

...to preserve and develop the special relationship between the Vietnamese people and the fraternal peoples of Laos and Kampuchea, strengthen the militant solidarity, mutual trust, long term cooperation and mutual assistance in all fields...so that the three countries which have been associated with one another in the struggle for national liberation, will be associated with each other forever ..."<sup>2</sup>

A more recent CGDK publication on the federation question cites the famous captured "top secret" instruction of 1951 which informed party members that "later on, when conditions permit this to be carried out, the three revolutionary parties of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos will be re-united to form a single party".<sup>3</sup>

Official Chinese statements on their disagreement and hostilities with Vietnam have not relied on historical argumentation, except to point out the extensive aid given by China to Vietnam during the wars of liberation. Chinese propaganda has attributed to Vietnam an aim for "regional hegemonism" and a policy of "aggression and expansion". This leads Vietnam to attempt to assimilate and annex Kampuchea, a policy of Vietnamization. Little attention is given to explanation of these policies, but they are linked to the "Kremlin's strategic disposition for world hegemony". The Indochina Federation idea is not entirely absent from Chinese thinking, apparently, because Deng Ziaoping harangued U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski concerning Vietnamese ambitions in terms of the federation idea. Brzezinski's predecessor, Henry Kissinger has also contributed to the controversy by quoting Le Duc Tho, his cease-fire negotiations counterpart, as boasting about Vietnamese dominance in the region. Official Chinese statements, in Beijing Review stress Vietnamese efforts to "establish regional hegemonism in Indochina", but the "Indochina Federation" idea

is not the central theme. They do, however, sometimes link Vietnamese expansionism to "the Kremlin's strategic disposition for world hegemony."<sup>4</sup>

The relative indifference shown by China toward the ICP's Indochina Federation pronouncements is consistent with a stance that foreign correspondent Nayan Chanda encountered in a conversation with the Chinese vice foreign minister, Han Nianlong in 1980. The diplomat made the astonishing claim that the Chinese had "never heard Ho Chi Minh say anything about an Indochina Federation". Rather they traced Vietnamese designs for hegemony in Indochina only from a betrayal in 1975. Privately, however, Chinese officials referred bitterly to devious Vietnamese actions during the anti-US war which pointed toward future domination of the area.<sup>5</sup>

Quite apart from official government propaganda, various Indochina scholars have utilized the Indochina Federation idea in their analysis of current events. In some cases they have even found the concept understated, already "passed into history", because "Hanoi is no longer satisfied, nor feels secure with anything less than a thoroughly united entity in the form of a Greater Vietnam".<sup>6</sup> The same formulation was expressed in August 1985 by the Permanent Mission of Democratic Kampuchea to the United Nations in its "Memorandum" which said: "for almost seven years already Vietnam's activities in and relating to Kampuchea...have aimed always at the same and only goal, that is the annexation of Kampuchea into Vietnamese 'Indochina Federation' which would become later on the Great Vietnam". The memorandum goes on to cite the magazine of the Vietnam People's Army Tap Chi Quan Doi Nahn



Dan (Dec. 1984) in which General Le Duc Anh wrote "...the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea...must build ties of special solidarity, strategic alliance and close combat coordination according to a common strategic plan...Indochina is a single battlefield."<sup>7</sup> The official counterpart of such memoranda can be found in the CGDK letter of 23 September 1985 to inform the United Nations debate on the "situation in Kampuchea" by summing up various press statements on "the Vietnamization of Kampuchea".

An unofficial model of this line of argument is found in the Indochina Report, of October 1984, published in Singapore. Its rather startling exposition of the Vietnamese presence in Kampuchea is topped by speculation as to the ultimate destination of this process, in which an Indochina Federation would be supplanted by a new model.

"The fascination that the Soviet expansionist pattern has long exerted on the Hanoi leadership has been such that, as good disciples of Stalin, they have transposed and adopted somehow or other the Soviet model in Indochina. At best, Kampuchea, as well as Laos, are becoming satellites of a new kind. At worst Kampuchea and Laos are destined to experience the fate of the forgotten Baltic countries, Lithuania, Lettonia, Estonia".<sup>8</sup>

A later report by the same publisher, "Condominium: The Case of Laos", asserts that the "special relationship" between Laos and Vietnam began in October 1945 with the arrival of Prince Souphanouvong in Savannakhet, after his conference with Ho Chi Minh. The "Committee for an Independent Laos" which Souphanouvong established at that time set as one of its guidelines "to propagate and to support the policy of the Indochinese Peoples Federation, by developing moral, cultural and economic ties". The exact source of this quotation, from the archives of the French Sûreté is not indicated. It is not a part of the joint

defense agreement negotiated by Souphanouvong between the governments of Laos and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In any event, the article concludes that Laos today has been transformed into "a forward outpost of the Soviet-Vietnamese condominium over Indochina, as well as a westward bridgehead for future Soviet-Vietnamese moves on the mainland of Southeast Asia".<sup>9</sup> The addition of the Soviet element into the Indochina complex obviously complicates the historical continuity question, but also renders it less credible. Most Indochina observers, however, remain within the confines of Vietnamese expansionism or strategic necessities.

In a long review of books on Indochina, Elizabeth Becker formulates the notion of the "Hanoi Pact", which stands for regional communism under Vietnamese control over three countries. She takes pains to say that "This is NOT to suggest melodramatically that Hanoi has had a secret master plan for fifty years, as many of Vietnam's critics say all too easily". She then highlights aspects of the story of Vietnamese Communist leadership and self-serving in contention with Cambodian nationalism, which "is far more interesting than such a simple conspiracy theory".<sup>10</sup>

Dennis Duncanson has characterized the growth of Vietnamese control as a "strategic imperative." In 1978 he expounded this viewpoint in accounting for the "special relationship" formula devised by Vietnam for its relations to Laos. The analysis takes an ominous turn, however, when he draws an analogy with the growth of Czarist Russia as described by its Foreign Minister, Gorchakov: "annexation of one 'barbarous' small khanate on Russia's borders in the interest of

order led to conflict with another beyond, and thus the boundary of civilization was inevitably extended". Hanoi, he suggests, may ultimately be tempted to vindicate Indochina's claims to Thailand's Northeast, only ruled from Bangkok since 1827, and peopled largely by Lao and Khmer peasants and a small Vietnamese minority.<sup>11</sup> After invoking Czarist Russian history, Duncanson goes on to use Soviet history to describe the possible Vietnamese demands on Thailand that would transform it into "the first in a belt of satellites modelled on Eastern Europe".

Douglas Pike, the editor of Indochina Chronology, has used his ambiguous role as chronicler and commentator to suggest on occasion "what is clearly the present operative Hanoi policy; to move Indochina toward federation". To his thinking, the change in codewords to "special relationship", then "alliance", and now "comprehensive cooperation" in political, military, economic and cultural affairs has not changed the original goal; "the sense of it is that the move is slowly but surely toward federation".<sup>12</sup>

Arthur Dommen, in his most recent book on Laos has also attributed the Indochina Federation ambition to current Vietnamese leaders. Like Pike, he does not provide any documentary backing for his assertion, but rather presents it as a flat prediction:

Once the national liberation stage of the revolution in Laos is completed (including the reabsorption of the right-bank provinces), the states will be joined in an Indochinese union with Hanoi as its capital.

He further asserts that the Vietnamese Communist Party will change its name to the ICP as part of its "master plan" to form "a union similar to the USSR."<sup>13</sup>

An economic version of the same type of analysis is found in a paper by Dr. Hans U. Luther from Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, Bangkok, in which he argues that:

"a review of recent political and economic events suggests that Laos has been designed to be part and parcel of a wider regional development scheme based on division of labour among the former Indochina countries which is structured according to so-called comparative advantage. It seems that according to this master plan, Vietnam will be the geographical base for industrial development, with its overpopulation and lack of employment, a skilled and disciplined industrial labour force, sufficient port facilities and infrastructure for export purposes."<sup>14</sup>

The economic role of Laos and Cambodia as junior partners will be appropriately rationalized. Nayan Chanda has put the same idea somewhat more delicately by suggesting that although the "Vietnam<sup>ese</sup> have never mentioned publically the idea of resource-sharing in Indochina, ...it would, however, be reasonable to think that Hanoi planners view Indochina not only as a strategic space but an economic one as well". He cites a cryptic reference; to planning on an Indochinese scale by a Vietnamese planning official in early 1980, who saw the three countries as interdependent both strategically and economically.<sup>15</sup>

The other side of ~~the~~ this argument over historical projections in the destiny of Indochina relationships can first be noted in regard to the denials by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam of any hegemonic ambitions towards its neighbors. The Foreign Ministry of the SRV released an official document in 1978 to respond to the "slandorous accusations, of the Kampuchean authorities". The Vietnamese referred to the speech of January 17, 1978 by Pol Pot, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), charging the SRV with standing for the establishment of an Indochina Federation with

only one party, one country, one people". The official Foreign Ministry refutation of this charge reviewed the Party documents in a manner similar to the work of American scholars, and concluded with the assertion that after the 1951 Congress of the ICP and following the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina in particular "the 'Indochinese Federation' question passed into history, as did French Indochina. Like Laos and Kampuchea, Vietnam has never referred to the Indochinese Federation question again." In conclusion, to a long analysis the Foreign Ministry declared that it will "continue to make every effort to strengthen and preserve the militant solidarity and fraternal friendship between the Vietnamese and Kampuchean peoples, and between the peoples of the three countries of the Indochinese peninsula".<sup>16</sup>

The most scholarly and convincing analysis of this historic question has been made by the Americans Gareth Porter and William Turley, and by Huynh Kim Khanh. The story is familiar to most scholars of the Vietnamese revolution but the highlights bear repeating.

Scholarship on the Indochina Federation concept seems to document the following.

1. The name of the Indochina Communist Party was imposed by a directive of the Kremlin written in late 1929 and implemented reluctantly in 1930 by the previously disunited communist groups in Vietnam. Huynh Kim Khanh quotes the Comintern's directive:

"The most important and absolutely most urgent task at the moment is for all the Indochinese Communists to establish a revolutionary party for the proletarian class, that is, a Communist party having a mass character. That party must be the only party, and Indochina may have only that party as the unique Communist organization."<sup>17</sup>

The Unification Conference of 3-7 February 1930, invoked by Nguyen Ai

Quoc, arrived at an agreement on the establishment of a single Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), but the Comintern remained dissatisfied. Among other errors the new party was declared guilty of narrow chauvinism and disregard for proletarian internationalism. A rectification meeting of the Party's Central Committee in Hong Kong in October 1930 obediently adopted, after some debate, the name desired by the Comintern, the Indochina Communist Party. A party periodical in early 1931 rationalized the new title as follows:

Although the three countries are made up of three different races, with different languages, different traditions, different behavior patterns, in reality they form only one country...It is...not possible to make a revolution separately for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. In order to oppose the enemy of the revolution which has a united concentration of force in the entire Indochina, The Communist Party will have to concentrate the forces of the Indochinese proletariat in a united front, under the leadership of the Indochinese proletariat...<sup>18</sup>

According to G. Porter's account, Nguyen Ai Quoc himself did not share the Stalinist view that revolutions in neighboring countries should create federated unions, which would ultimately merge into a "union of Soviet socialist republics of the world." Nor did he wish to assume a Vietnamese responsibility for leading the revolution in the less politically evolved nations of Laos and Cambodia. He proposed the Vietnamese Communist Party name at the Unification Conference, and was not present at the Rectification Conference in October, in Saigon.<sup>19</sup> This account differs in a few details from Khanh's, but the basic point regarding the origins of the Indochina designation of the Party is not in question.

William Turley's citation of the Party's documents on the founding of the ICP reveals an additional argument in favor of the Indochina

designation. A Central Committee letter explained that the three countries had grown interdependent under colonial rule, and required the support of each other to end colonial rule, and "if separated each would lack sufficient conditions for economic activity."<sup>20</sup> Thus an economic argument, of somewhat tenuous validity, was early entered into the debate. On the other hand, Turley mentions a strong arguing point against the ICP formulation, namely, that both Laos and Kampuchea lacked the requisite class structure to sustain a proletarian party.

2. The Vietnamese communists did not succeed during the 1930s in building ICP strength throughout Indochina. The Party membership in Laos and Kampuchea remained virtually exclusively Vietnamese living abroad, and the Party cells suffered repeated devastation at the hands of the French security police (*Sûreté*). The exclusively Vietnamese leadership of the ICP considered the Lao and Khmer people less capable and sophisticated than Vietnamese, and they periodically admonished their Party cohorts in Laos and Kampuchea to make a better effort at recruitment among the indigenous and peasant population.

The almost total failure of the ICP to extend its circle into the native populations of the French protectorates of Laos and Cambodia is revealed in the Party resolutions and reports acquired by French intelligence. These captured documents further suggest the degree to which communist allegiance and activity was discouraged by efficient French police surveillance and arrests. The first Lao member of the communist party, according to the Museum of the Revolution in Vietiane, was Kham Sen, whom Bernard Fall identified, perhaps too generously, as a member of the Central Committee in 1936.<sup>21</sup> A simple bust commemor-

ates him in the museum with no details offered regarding his activities, other than his death in 1963. Otherwise no Lao communist appears to be worthy of note until the defeat of Japan in 1945, when Kaysone Phomvihane returned to Laos from university study in Vietnam and joined the resistance to France. The captured reports of the Central Committee of the ICP reveal that only four tiny cells existed by 1934, and "no organization for [Lao] had yet been undertaken."<sup>22</sup> The Party Central Committee acknowledged that the normal qualifications for membership could not be applied to the Lao people, and urged what is regarded today as affirmative action. Less stringent entrance requirements, and a special reservation of positions should be used to bring in some Lao members.<sup>23</sup>

In September, 1936, after devastating raids by the Sûreté, the Party Central Committee's secret letter called for a new Popular Anti-Imperialist Front, which would bring together all nationalist organizations. With respect to non-Vietnamese people (the Lao, the Cambodians, the Hmong, and so forth) the Central Committee had reached the "profound conviction" that "because of their still low level of economic and intellectual evolution [they] understand Communism with difficulty, and consequently do not assimilate it as easily as we do."<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, their patriotism was lively and national revolutionary parties should be formed to organize "these ethnic minorities." Here was expressed, in a letter which the Sûreté thought may have been written by Nguyen Ai Quoc himself, the sense of intellectual superiority which plagued efforts by the migrant Vietnamese to broaden the base of the communist movement in Laos and Cambodia. By December 1938 a Central



Committee member of the Siamese Communist Party reported that the communists in Laos had made no progress since 1935.<sup>25</sup> It was the Japanese elimination of French authority in Indochina in March 1945, that inspired the first sustained attention by the ICP to maintaining an Indochina-wide approach to revolution.

In Cambodia the situation of the ICP from 1930 until 1945 also reveals a sense of superiority on the part of migrant Vietnamese, and very limited mobilization of Khmer members. The trajectory of the ICP in Cambodia shows striking similarities to that in Laos. The French Sûreté repeatedly intercepts Party communications and arrests its activists. The first Khmer member is recruited in 1930, but "for most of the 1930s revolutionary activity in Kampuchea remains limited to ethnic Vietnamese...and to members of the Chinese community."<sup>26</sup> By 1934, as in Laos, five cells are organized, but police raids soon destroy the organization in Phnom Penh. The Khmer population is reported by French police in 1936 as showing "complete indifference" towards the communist movement. By 1941 the ICP itself acknowledges that there was "still no trace of a party in Kampuchea."<sup>27</sup> Following the seizure of power by Japan in 1945 the communist movement comes alive in military and political actions with the Viet Minh and liberation committees and fronts, but by 1951, there are only 40 Khmer members of the ICP.<sup>28</sup>

This record of virtually exclusive Vietnamese composition of the ICP does not bespeak complete indifference by the leadership to promoting revolution throughout Indochina. The Party Central Committee did criticize and exhort the efforts made in both Laos and Kampuchea.

Yet until the end of World War II, the activity of the Indochina Communist Party outside of Vietnam rested almost entirely upon the determination of revolution-minded Vietnamese, notwithstanding the transnational organizational framework imposed by the Comintern.

3. Although the ICP accepted until 1951 the Stalinist model of party jurisdiction paralleling colonial jurisdictions, Central Committee resolutions included deviations in favor of political self-determination. The 1932 "Action Program" of the ICP spoke of the peoples of Indochina as fraternally allied with one another but it promised the right of self-determination. The idea of a single Indochina state following the revolution first appeared in a resolution on work among minorities by the First Party Congress in 1935. The future state was originally referred to as a "Union of Soviet Republics of Indochina," which was later changed to "Federation of Democratic Republics" to reflect their actual democratic phase of revolution. Again "the right to self-determination, including the right of separation to form an independent state and to adopt a political regime of their choice" was included. "The Soviet worker-peasant-soldier government of Indochina promises not to interfere in their internal affairs."<sup>29</sup> This was a patent deviation, though not expressed in public, from the Stalinist model as exemplified in the USSR.

An ICP resolution of June 1941 during World War II, when visions of a French departure were becoming more focused, again promised a choice between joining an Indochinese Federation or separate nationhood. "After driving out the French and the Japanese"....it will be "up to the peoples living in Indochina to either organize themselves

into a Federation of Democratic Republic (sic) or remain separate national states."<sup>30</sup> Three months after the defeat of Japan, as France was straining its efforts to reoccupy its Indochina possessions, the ICP ostensibly dissolved itself in order to emphasize the multiparty national front against colonialism. Notwithstanding its official resolution on "self-dissolution," the Party apparatus continued to operate "in clandestinity," and Party membership grew from 5,000 in August 1945 to "several hundred thousand" by the summer of 1950. For the first time, during this period, it began seriously to enlist Lao and Khmer members, but in numbers scarcely noticeable. The following year the Party reemerged, at a Second National Congress, February 11-19, 1951, under the name of Vietnam Worker's Party. This avoided the label of communist, which would restrict its political appeal, and focused upon Vietnamese nationalism, as Ho Chi Minh had preferred in 1930,<sup>31</sup> rather than Indochina.

To replace the trans-national approach of the now defunct ICP, it was decided to form three separate "revolutionary organizations" suited to the conditions of their respective countries. It was expected that the revolutions in the three countries would move at different speeds, with Vietnam in the vanguard.<sup>32</sup> A month after this fateful Party decision a joint "Alliance" of the revolutionary national fronts of the three nations, Lien Viet, Neo Lao Issara (Free Lao Front) and Samakhum Khmer Issarak (United Issarak Front) was formed, "based on the principles of free choice, equality and mutual assistance."<sup>33</sup> The three national fronts had been founded in May 1946 in Vietnam, April 17, 1950 in Kampuchea, and August 13, 1950 in Laos. At the latter

meeting 25 members of the ICP were present. At the Kampuchea meeting five of the leaders were definitely ICP members.<sup>34</sup>

With this organizational departure from the previous Indochina scope of the Party came two somewhat contradictory addenda: "the Vietnamese Party would reserve the right to supervise the activities of its brother parties [yet to be founded] in Cambodia and Laos," but "later, if conditions permit, the three revolutionary parties of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos will be able to form a single Party: the Party of the Vietnam-Khmer Laotian Federation."<sup>35</sup> According to Dennis Duncanson, only in the version of the Manifesto of the VWP published by China, (in English) in May 1951, was the promise of a federation of states followed by an additional phrase: "if the three peoples so desire."<sup>36</sup> One of the reasons for establishing separate national communist parties was to counter the French policy of granting nominal independence to its three Indochina protectorates, because nascent patriotic feelings within the revolutionary movement might be open to exploitation. At the same time the need for an alliance of the three movements, notwithstanding their different rates of progress, was becoming manifest as the Vietnamese-led resistance war grew in intensity.

4. The strategic unity of Indochina for purposes of expelling the French became apparent and important to the Viet Minh military leadership as their resistance war progressed. In 1947 their mountain bases were attacked by French forces jumping off from Laos and Cambodia. In 1950, General No Nguyen Giap articulated this insight:

"Indochina is a single strategic unit, a single battlefield, and here we have the mission of helping the

movement to liberate all of Indochina. This is because militarily, Indochina is one bloc, one unit, in the invasion and defense plans of the enemy....Laos and Cambodia temporarily have become the secure rear areas of the enemy..."<sup>37</sup>

By taking the offensive in Laos, Giap pushed General Henri Navarre into his fateful defensive disposition at Dien Bien Phu. In the second Resistance War against American and South Vietnamese forces, an Indochina-wide strategy again made significant use of eastern Laos and the Cambodian territory. The H<sup>2</sup> Chi Minh Trail through eastern Laos and the sanctuaries along the Cambodia-South Vietnam border, as well as the port of Sihanoukville were indispensable to the Communist strategy in South Vietnam. The tactics for securing these assets were not the same, however. In the case of Laos, the communist-led Patriotic Front (the Pathet Lao) claimed territorial control in two eastern provinces in accordance with their interpretation of the Geneva Agreement of 1954, and this area was expanded by military partnership with North Vietnam, in violation of the Geneva Agreements of both 1954 and 1962. In Cambodia the Communist movement was not so well established militarily nor cohesive in its leadership and ideological orientation, and the national leadership of Sihanouk was much stronger than the politics of family rivalries that consumed the Royal Lao Government. Hence a policy of exploiting Sihanouk's neutralism was more appropriate for North Vietnam than either unrestrained intervention or bolstering the Khmer communists for achieving the immediate goal of victory in South Vietnam.

Thus in summary, the Indochina Federation idea has appeared in specific historical contexts which no longer exist. The Comintern

strongly influenced the formation of a transnational Indochina party, but the Vietnamese found the task almost beyond them. The break up of the ICP into three national parties in 1951 was girded with devices for maintaining Vietnamese leadership, while providing gratification to national sensibilities. As the resistance wars against France and the United States progressed the strategic advantages of using all of Indochina to fight the war for South Vietnam became irresistible, and was adopted by both sides. Yet, in the course of the anti-colonial struggle waged primarily, but far from exclusively, by the Vietnamese national feelings grew stronger in Laos and Cambodia; so that the political context at the time of Communist victory in Phnom Pehn, Saigon and Vientiane in 1975 was quite different from that of 1930, or 1951 when Indochina federation ideas were first enunciated. To assume that with victory after 30 years of anti-colonial war the Communist leaders of Vietnam would automatically hearken back to the political formulas of the early years of struggle is to ignore the context created by the war itself. In Laos and Cambodia revolutionary parties stressing national renovation took power and the common foreign enemy was expelled. Military cooperation might be advantageous if new threats from abroad were to arise, but the Indochina Federation was clearly questionable as a blueprint for future relations in the region, even among three nations boasting a common source of revolutionary ideology and strategy.

### Historical Practice of International Federation

What is the historical record of federation as a device for merging nations such as the three Indochina states of today? Federation provides for the division of activities between the autonomous parts and the common or central organs of a composite whole. The exact division of responsibilities has been manifested in innumerable types of political association. The essential element of federalism, however, is the existence of multiple government within a single state. One of its most fundamental advantages is that it provides "a means to unify diverse peoples for important but limited purposes, without disrupting their primary ties to the individual polities that constitute the federal system".<sup>38</sup> One can recognize that federalism might appeal to the Vietnamese as a means of uniting the Indochina states for the "important but limited purpose" of defending and extending their socialist revolution.

There are, of course, a variety of federal systems as well as traditions. The British tradition has been expressed in the Commonwealth in Canada, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Australia, and also the United States. There are a few states in the Hispanic tradition and three Germanic federations. The Soviet Union, which once called itself a federation, represents a different tradition as well.<sup>39</sup> The term "union" brings to mind the short-lived United Arab Republic, which joined Nasser's Egypt to Syria between 1958 and 1961. Other Arab states, particularly Libya, have talked loosely about intentions to federate from time to time, but none of these projects have come to

pass.<sup>40</sup>

The distinction between a union and a federation, or even confederation, need not detain us at this point. Whatever the terminology used, the aim would be to present a common foreign policy, and to provide for joint defense, with some economic coordination also sought at a minimum. Where the federation or union is taken seriously one might expect to see provision for a common military defense force under a unified command. There would also be central organs for legislative activity and central economic planning and budgeting. Out of these activities might grow a common currency, and a centrally controlled tariff structure. In some situations an official language or languages have to be designated. Out of a common foreign policy might develop a unified diplomatic corps. Whether each of these developments will be seen as positive, rather than a loss of national or ethnic self control, will depend upon the benefits, if any, that such arrangements clearly provide to the units of the larger community. As the American Civil War amply demonstrates such perceptions of advantage are not always present or enduring throughout the polity. Federations have not infrequently fragmented, and in recent years the formation of new unions years has shown some interesting patterns.

The most recent efforts to form federated states have occurred in the Third World. In Asia, Malaysia was formed in 1963 embracing the British-created federation of Malaya and the state of Singapore and the colonies of Sabah and Sarawak. Singapore departed from the arrangement two years later and serious communal rioting took place in May 1969. The Malay element has gained increasing dominance throughout the



history of the state and the general arrangement now seems to work well enough, with thirteen separate legislatures and constitutions serving the constituent parts.

In Africa, the British again provided federal arrangements before granting independence to some of its colonies. The largest of these was Nigeria, which suffered a tragic civil war six years after independence. The British-instituted Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, did not even survive the granting of independence, as the latter state chose to become Malawi. The former Italian colony of Eritrea was pushed by the United Nations into a federation with Ethiopia in 1952 but this was soon disputed by a liberation front, which remains at odds with Ethiopia to this day. Northern and Southern Sudan remain similarly at odds with one another, in spite of formal unification since independence. One of two success stories to be found in Africa ~~are~~<sup>is</sup> the union of Tanzanyika and the relatively small island of Zanzibar in April 1964, one year after independence. The new state, Tanzania, has shown "a remarkable degree of national unity among a very large number of small ethnic groups". It also enjoys the benefit of a common national language (Swahili), and a government ideology that tends to minimize the gap between an elite and the masses.<sup>41</sup> The other success was the federation of French and British Cameroon, at the time of independence. What colonialism had torn apart was sewn into a viable political unit, but it abandoned federation for unitary rule within a few years.

At the present time all the states of Africa except three (Comoros Islands, Nigeria, and Sudan) have unitary government. Three

other states were federal at the time of independence, but their leaders moved "to unitary rule as quickly as they could do so".<sup>42</sup> The reason for this tendency is that unitary systems are easier to run than federal ones. Even though African states often preside over non-homogenous societies "unitary governments are clearly the dominant form in the continent."<sup>43</sup> The federations that survive today were established by colonial powers before independence was granted. With the exception of Tanzania there seems to be no case of established governments merging voluntarily into a successful federation or union. The federal system imposed upon Ethiopia and Eritrea did not survive, as the Eritrean people sought to separate themselves from the historic neighbor. The voluntary union of Egypt and Syria did not survive more than two years, and reflected the particular ideology of pan Arab nationalism that flourished under the charismatic leadership of Gamel Abdul Nasser. The post-Nasser gestures in the direction of transnational Arab solidarity initiated by Libya's Moammar Khadafy (with Egypt, with Morocco) have remained unimplemented.

One might ask whether there is a particular Communist version of uniting nations in a new state. Yugoslavia federated under Communist leadership in 1945 but given its multi-ethnic composition such a structure was recognized by Communists and non-Communists alike as essential to the avoidance of dangerous "Balkanization" in the area. The case of the Baltic states, which now live as republics within the Soviet Union, is notable for the fact that the entry was not truly voluntary and is still resisted diplomatically. The remaining republics of the USSR were inherited from Czars or overrun in the course

of defeating Hitler's Germany.

One need not analyze the preconditions for successful federation to conclude that the likelihood of established states voluntarily abandoning their sovereignty to join a larger political system has been shown by history to be scant indeed.

What are the most likely prospects then for the consolidation of political relationships among the Indochina states?

To apply the concept of federation literally to the three nations would open the door to such political centralization as a unified armed force, a common currency, common citizenship, central budget, unified foreign policy (with only one vote in the UN), a federal legislature, common trade and tariff policy, a federal economic plan and taxation. Such a literal translation boggles the mind. Even a loose confederation, with authority remaining predominantly in three states, bears little relation to reality. The shaky confederation of former British colonies in America (1777-1789), which ended happily with the formulation of "a more perfect union," is hardly likely to reproduce itself in the footprints of the unnatural Union of French Indochina. The mutual advantage that such consolidation would be expected to produce, would probably pale in comparison with separate quasi-sovereign existence, even though such separateness may require a disagreeable reliance on external assistance. The explosion of new states in the Third World since 1960 has imbued even the humblest of mini-states with a sense of entitlement to formal independence, which no other values or ideology are likely to supersede. Only the goal of national security, or national prosperity is likely to offer any grounds for compromise with

sovereign national identity. Unless union with Vietnam were the only means of saving the Lao leadership from military occupation or counter revolution or economic destitution they are unlikely to give up their formal recognition as a sovereign state. In the case of Kampuchea, accreditation by the United Nations is something the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) would dearly like to acquire at the expense of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea; and they seem ready to negotiate about it with all but the Khmer Rouge. To become instead a mere sub unit in an Indochina Union would mean a severe setback to national self-esteem and popular satisfaction.

To sell the idea of voluntary Indochina federation, or confederation, in any concrete institutional form would require diplomacy of extraordinary skill, working against the grain of history. The disadvantages would overwhelm the promised benefits in the mind of any nationally conscious Lao or Khmer leader. The superior role in administering the union would be expected to flow to the Vietnamese, while the Lao and Khmer resumed their inferior administrative and commercial position of the French colonial days. The disparity in education and experience alone among the three nations' cadres would cast the Lao and Khmer in a secondary role in the central organs; and the functions retained by the national political units would be subjected to even heavier pressures to conform to the requirements of ideological solidarity in the name of the Union.

Yet, diplomatic persuasion need not concern us, because Vietnam presumably possesses the power to impose a federation. Such an act of intervention, whether by military occupation or political subterfuge,

would breed disaster. Vietnam has already suffered partial penalties for its act of will in removing Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea from power, but it has not attempted to subordinate the successor regime, the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), to a formal loss of national sovereignty. Were it to do so, the viability of a Vietnamese-supported regime would be in greater jeopardy than the present Heng Samrin version. Khmer administrative personnel would be seen more widely as collaborators (Quislings), and the burden of military support and administrative bolstering would be even heavier for the Vietnamese than it is today.

History tells us that the CPK, sharing a Communist revolutionary orientation with the Vietnamese Worker's Party in 1975, would not agree to even a "special relationship" after victory.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, its Hanoi-oriented members were systematically purged by the Pol Pot leadership. The Lon Nol government in 1970 presided over a pogrom directed against local Vietnamese, which transcended their political inclinations. The xenophobic aggressiveness of Khmer Rouge forces along their border with Vietnam in 1975-78 finds its roots in centuries of animosity and conflict between Khmer and Vietnamese in the Mekong Delta region. Thus an imposed union of the Khmer and Vietnamese people would encounter passionate resistance clothed in bitter historical memories. Compared to the present unpronounced "special relationship," a forced federation would engender resistance markedly stronger than the present, growing efforts of the CGDK.

Even in Laos, where Arthur Dommen foresees that the "Laotians themselves, in another exercise of democracy will vote to integrate

their country with Vietnam and Cambodia",<sup>45</sup> the idea of willing self-abnegation is hard to imagine. The Lao Peoples Revolutionary Party has certainly not won the support of its nation to the extent of commanding a national suicide. Such a vote would surely not represent a free referendum; in which case we are dealing with a discernible act of power. If Vietnamese military and Party elements dispensed even with fraudulent voting to legitimate a forced union, the outrage that this would provide the Lao resistance elements might be dramatic. Yet the most visible impact might be seen in the resurgent exodus across the Mekong River. If Vietnamese forces actively patrolled the border to cut this off, their relations with Thailand, ASEAN and the USA would certainly worsen.

From a rational actor perspective Vietnam would be foolhardy to attempt to impose a federation, or transnational authority on its two neighbors. It would offend their national feelings, breed resistance, stimulate desertion, and probably reduce productivity. All of these losses would be offset by precious little gain. Military security for Vietnam against the threats of China and Thailand are serious concerns, but they would not be enhanced by further reducing the Lao or Khmer sense of military self-reliance. Vietnamese forces are presently able to station themselves in Laos and Kampuchea, where they see fit, without the need for consolidating or subordinating devices across national lines. In economic terms, the benefits of joint planning and complementary trade can be garnered from existing trilateral commissions, advisory arrangements and conferences. Current arrangements include meetings, on at least an annual basis, of three nation repre-

sentatives for foreign policy, Mekong River management, economic cooperation and planning, technical cooperation, news management, cultural cooperation, and un-publicized areas of military coordination. Tighter relationships might strain or snap the bonds of cooperation, which are already open to charges that the Vietnamese are engaged in exploitation of their weaker neighbors.

It appears that Vietnam's security and economic development can be augmented by close alliance with Laos and Kampuchea, and the forms of cooperation that they are now employing are probably better than any institutionalization that would smack of federation, union, or loss of national sovereignty. This leaves open the question of "Vietnamization" through colonization and intermarriage, which many resistance elements perceive to be already underway. Such a policy would have to be undertaken for the long-term, which hardly satisfies Vietnam's immediate security and prosperity problems. It would doubtless breed potential long-term consequences as did the gradual settlement of Jews into the Holy Land, or Afrikaners into Southern Africa, or Chinese into what became Indochina. So long as the Vietnamese were perceived as an intruding nationality in Laos and Kampuchea--and to lose their ethnic identity would negate the purpose of "Vietnamization"--the potential for a new chapter in national liberation warfare would exist. The uprising of Bengalis in East Pakistan against their privileged Western countrymen in 1971, and the bloody purge of overseas Chinese in Indonesia, might find their counterpart in revolts against alien Vietnamese domination in Laos or Kampuchea.

Such historical analogies are obviously crude, and one must harken

back to the opening observation of Professor Ernest May, that foreign policymakers use history badly. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable at a minimum to learn from history that nationalism is a formidable idea in current world politics, and certainly in Southeast Asia. There seem to be no contemporary examples of nations having enjoyed independence for a year or more voluntarily abandoning this condition. Domination by intruding nationalities within a state breeds stife and revolutionary violence. Were Vietnam to impose a union or federation of the three Indochina states by force it would probably generate serious resistance and raise the cost of coordinating the defense and consolidation of their socialist revolutions. The existing cooperative/consultative/advisory arrangements worked out under Vietnamese leadership among the three states are close to optional in terms of costs and benefits for Vietnam. Therefore, a rational Vietnamese policy toward the two ideological partners will probably continue to depend upon political leadership devices rather than upon centralized authority or administration.



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