DOI: 10.35549/HR.2026.2026.57.011
Original paper

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The 1979 Sino-Vietnamese Armed Conflict in the Context of Soviet-Chinese Confrontation

Abstract
This study offers important clues to understanding the current dynamics of China's relations with Vietnam and Russia. Vietnamese conflict of the late 1970s represents a significant example of the contradictions between socialist states. It is important to emphasize that this conflict had deep historical antecedents, and its key catalyst, in addition to bilateral disagreements, was the already damaged Sino-Soviet relations. Thus, this study opens valuable perspectives for analyzing the evolution of Sino-Soviet (Russian) relations, the transformation of Sino-Vietnamese interactions, and the changing geopolitical landscape in Southeast Asia. This article examines how, after the unification of Vietnam, the national interests of China and Vietnam evolved from convergence to fundamental conflict, resulting in differences over practical interests surpassing tra-

ditional ideological ties. Key contradictions are analyzed: territorial disputes, the issue of the Chinese diaspora (Huaqiao), and the struggle for influence in Kampuchea. Particular attention is given to the role of the Sino-Soviet split, when Moscow, through military aid and a political alliance with Hanoi, contributed to the containment of China. The article concludes by revealing that Sino-Vietnamese cooperation was initially fragile and was driven by shared strategic imperatives in the period before Vietnam's unification. After 1975, the geopolitical situation changed dramatically: a unified Vietnam began to pursue a more independent foreign policy, and the deepening Sino-Soviet split created the conditions for Hanoi's reorientation. Under these circumstances, Vietnam chose a course of rapprochement with the Soviet Union, which led to the formation of a de facto anti-Chinese alliance and a final confrontation with China in the late 1970s.

Keywords:
China; Vietnam; Soviet Union; split of Vietnam and China; Chinese foreign policy; Sino-Vietnamese relations; Third Indochina War; Soviet policy in Asia

For citation:
Yan Zun, Evgeny I. Volgin. The 1979 Sino-Vietnamese Armed Conflict in the Context of Soviet-Chinese Confrontation // The Historical Reporter. 2026. Vol. 57. C. 278–301. DOI: 10.35549/HR.2026.2026.57.011

The 1979 armed conflict between China and Vietnam represented a large-scale regional confrontation with significant consequences. While its formal cause was territorial and border disputes, the deep essence reflected ideological disagreements within the socialist camp and the collision of strategic interests. Under the influence of real geopolitical factors, the previously existing "proletarian revolutionary friendship" gave way to military confrontation lasting approximately a decade. A comprehensive study of this conflict has considerable academic value. This event is a key element for understanding the diplomatic course of China in the initial stage of its reform and opening-up policy, which also affected the formation of Vietnam's strategic orientation during the Doi Moi renewal period. Moreover, the Sino-Vietnamese clash resulted from differences in the foreign policy approaches of Beijing and Moscow in the late 1970s and can serve as an important reference point for studying relations between these countries.

The object of this research is Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1975–1979, while the subject is the influence of Soviet-Chinese confrontation on the escalation of bilateral conflict and the emergence of the 1979 war. The goal of the work is to identify the mechanisms through which the global Soviet-Chinese split transformed contradictions between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), and led to armed conflict. To this end, the study analyzes the initial Sino-Vietnamese contradictions; investigates how the Soviet factor (diplomatic support, military-economic assistance) exacerbated them and radicalized the positions of both sides; it also determines the role of the USSR as Vietnam's "strategic rear" during the war; and assesses the influence of Soviet-Chinese rivalry on the deadlock character of the post-war negotiations.

The scientific originality of this work lies in the application of a three-sided (PRC-USSR-SRV) approach based on diverse sources, including the Chinese sources rarely used in

Russian scholarship (internal documents, annual diplomatic collections). For the first time in Russian scientific discourse, the regional aspect of Soviet-Chinese confrontation is comprehensively studied, where the Sino-Vietnamese war and the Kampuchean crisis are considered as interrelated consequences of the unified logic of the struggle for spheres of influence.

This study is based on historical-genetic, historical-systemic, and historical-comparative methods. The first reveals continuity in the policy of the parties after 1975 as a continuation of the logic of the Second Indochina War. The second allows analyzing the PRC, USSR, and SRV as three interacting systems, and their relations as subsystems. The third is used to compare the official positions of China and Vietnam in order to reconstruct the mechanisms of escalation.

At the theoretical level, the research relies on the concepts of "triangular diplomacy" and "regional hegemony". China and the USSR, fighting for dominance in Southeast Asia, acted as hegemonistic rivals. Vietnam, occupying a weaker position in the triangle, employed a balancing strategy to protect its interests.

Escalation of the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict

Ideological slogans of friendship and solidarity could not obscure the mounting contradictions in the sphere of Vietnamese and Chinese national interests and regional security. Both states, firmly advocating their strategic positions, entered into rivalry for dominance, which led to deep tension in their bilateral relations. First and foremost, this was a territorial dispute. The land border between China and Vietnam had long remained disputed, but the principal contradictions were particularly acutely connected with maritime boundaries in the South China Sea. Claims by both sides (especially concerning the Paracel and Spratly Islands) overlapped significantly. Regarding the question of territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea, both sides took diametrically opposite positions.

After the unification of Vietnam in 1975, the country's authorities established control over six objects in the Spratly Archipelago. In May 1975, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent an official protest to Vietnam's embassy, decisively rejecting Vietnam's territorial claims to the Spratly Islands. In response, on June 3, 1975, Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement confirming its sovereignty over the Paracel (Hoang Sa) and Spratly (Truong Sa) archipelagos.

During a visit by Le Duan, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, to China in September 1975, Chinese leaders once again clearly and firmly expressed their position, rejecting Vietnamese claims. Seeking to reduce tension, on November 10, 1975, Vietnam proposed to China to cease public polemic on disputed issues and find a way to resolve disagreements. However, China decisively rejected this proposal, considering its sovereignty over the South China Sea indisputable [1, p. 230].

Gradually, the tension escalated along the Sino-Vietnamese land border. China and Vietnam provide different data on the number of border incidents. According to Chinese estimates, in 1975 there were 439 recorded incidents, while the Vietnamese side reports only 234 (which is still considerable). In 1978, disagreements between the countries intensified: China points to 1,108 cases, while Vietnam cites 2,175 [2, p. 329] [3, p. 237]. Although the statistical assessments of both sides differ radically, their general rhetoric coincides in terms of mutual accusations of provocation. The ultimatum-like nature of territorial claims from both sides led to a permanent increase in the number of border incidents, which ultimately played a critical role in the final degradation of bilateral relations.

Another problem, related to diasporas (Huaqiao), also became a serious factor in deepening the split between Beijing and Hanoi. According to Chinese data, before Vietnam's unification, approximately 300,000 Huaqiao lived in North Vietnam and about 1.5 million in South Vietnam. In response to the growth of

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the Chinese diaspora, Vietnamese authorities initiated a "Vietnamization" policy. One measure of its implementation was the closure on September 3, 1976, of the country's only daily newspaper in Chinese, "Xinhua Bao".

Within the framework of this integration policy, Vietnamese leadership applied administrative measures compelling ethnic Chinese to obtain Vietnamese citizenship. A key instrument was the introduction of professional restrictions for those maintaining PRC citizenship. They were prohibited from working in several sectors, including fishing, forestry, printing production, and sectors related to communication technology (radio, television), vehicle and ship management [4, p. 150]. With respect to Chinese emigrants who refused to participate in the "Vietnamization" policy, the authorities applied coercive measures: relocation or deportation. By the end of 1977, more than 40,000 Huaqiao had been repatriated to China [5, p. 122].

During the period of South Vietnam's existence, ethnic Chinese capital played a dominant role in key sectors of the econo-

my. According to Vietnamese sources, it accounted for approximately 80% in manufacturing, 100% in wholesale trade, 50% in retail trade, 80% of bank credits, and approximately two-thirds of total annual investment [5, p. 123]. After Vietnam's unification, the Chinese diaspora, viewed within the state campaign as a capitalist element, was subject to expropriation of property. According to estimates by the Shanghai Society for the History of Overseas Chinese, the financial losses of this community (excluding real estate) amounted to no less than 3 billion US dollars [5, p. 129]. China viewed Vietnam's actions as anti-Chinese policy, while Vietnam regarded it as part of its socialist transformation. In the context of escalating relations between the two countries, Hanoi considered China's support for its diasporas as a means of "hegemony" and interference in the country's internal affairs. For both sides, this issue was of fundamental importance, which determined their rigid and uncompromising positions.

Differences in political approaches and strategic vision between Beijing and Hanoi further deepened the existing split, intensifying systemic contradictions in their relations. In the context of mounting pressure and strategic imbalance, Hanoi indeed faced a difficult choice: it could maintain a rigid line to the detriment of national interests or seek external points of support. Orientation toward Moscow became for Vietnam not so much an ideological decision as a pragmatic strategy for survival amid regional rivalry. However, in the context of the Soviet-Chinese split, this step was perceived in Beijing as a direct threat, which only hardened its position and deepened the regional crisis.

The Soviet Factor in the Evolution of the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict

After the departure of American forces from Indochina, China and the USSR ceased cooperation on the Vietnam issue. Their

rivalry went on to turn into a struggle for influence in Southeast Asia with Vietnam becoming the main prize. As a result, Vietnam gained some freedom of action but was forced to navigate very carefully between the two powerful countries.

In this situation, Le Duan's visit to Beijing in September 1975 became a true litmus test. The Chinese directly proposed to Vietnam a strategy of joint struggle against Soviet "hegemony", but Le Duan responded evasively, speaking of "unity of socialist countries". Moreover, trying to maintain balance, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam immediately traveled to Moscow. Just two days later, the Joint Soviet-Vietnamese Declaration was signed, where Vietnam praised Soviet foreign policy and deliberately remained silent about China [6].

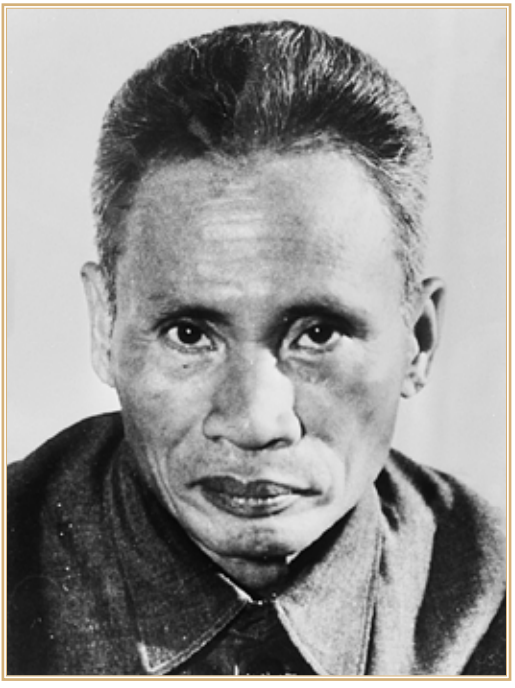
From China's perspective, such actions by Hanoi were a direct challenge to Beijing's foreign policy and exacerbated its concerns about the growing Soviet-Vietnamese rapprochement. In this connection, Mao Zedong even stated that Vietnam could become "an instrument of Soviet imperialism in Asia" [4, p. 132]. As a retaliatory measure, China reduced its aid to Vietnam, officially explaining the cause as "internal economic difficulties". Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, actively covering the successes of negotiations with Vietnam in the pages of *Pravda*, further increased its support for Hanoi. After 1975, Beijing's position toward Vietnam underwent changes: Chinese leadership, no longer considering close cooperation between Hanoi and Moscow acceptable, began openly calling on Vietnam to join an anti-Soviet coalition. In response, the Soviet Union, pressing Beijing, actively promoted the idea of "indestructible Soviet-Vietnamese friendship". As a result, the great power confrontation between China and the USSR moved to the Indochina arena, making Vietnam its central element. This ended the unique period of Vietnam simultaneously receiving massive support from both communist powers.

Although Vietnam in its foreign policy leaned toward Moscow, it attempted to maintain a certain neutrality toward Bei-

Мао Цзэдун.
From open sources

jing. This strategy became untenable after April 1977, when the escalation of the border conflict with Kampuchea led to a sharp cooling between Hanoi and Beijing. Receiving notifications from both sides, Beijing, seeking to avoid taking sides, adopted an evasive position. China refrained from any public statements, but through closed channels informed both Vietnam and Kampuchea that it had no intention of interfering in their bilateral dispute [7, p. 195].

However, Beijing's evasive position had a paradoxical result: it actually pushed Vietnam into Moscow's arms. As early as May 1977, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong visited the Soviet capital, where the parties agreed to strengthen strategic coordination on the international arena and open new directions for military cooperation. The most significant outcome was the Soviet Union's access to Vietnamese military facilities. On July 18, 1977, a Soviet military delegation, led by Chief Marshal of Aviation P. S. Kutakhov, secretly visited Da Nang, Cam Ranh, and other former American bases. Shortly thereafter,



Фам Ван Донг.
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a major Soviet naval and air base was established in the Cam Ranh Bay. Additionally, as a result of several rounds of negotiations, Vietnam and the USSR reached a strategic agreement on joint actions to overthrow the Pol Pot regime. In light of this agreement, the Soviet Union sharply changed its rhetoric, beginning openly to condemn the internal and external policy of the Khmer Rouge [8, p. 123].

Vietnam's actions provoked a sharp reaction from Beijing. At the 3rd Plenum of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party's Tenth Congress held at the end of July 1977, Vietnam was for the first time in closed discussions called an aggressive "regional hegemon", marking a cardinal toughening of Chinese rhetoric [4, p. 144]. On July 30, 1977, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Huang Hua publicly expressed support for Kampuchea, stating: "We support Kampuchea's struggle against Soviet social-imperialist revisionism and will not remain idle observers" [8, p. 125]. Although China's Minister of Foreign Affairs did not mention Vietnam

Павел Степанович Кутахов.
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directly in his speech, its subtext contained an unambiguous warning to Hanoi.

Despite the fact that disagreements between China and Vietnam were not made public, from the summer of 1977, their "brotherly friendship" existed only on paper, having long since degenerated into empty formality. So, when Le Duan, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, visited Beijing in November 1977, it was perceived as the last attempt to prevent the final break between China and Vietnam. However, the positions of the parties differed fundamentally: China continued to seek to incline Vietnam to its anti-hegemonistic (essentially anti-Soviet) line. Vietnam, for its part, hoped that Beijing would exert a restraining influence on the Khmer Rouge and take its side in the conflict with Kampuchea. Le Duan's visit was closely monitored by Moscow. As a demonstration of support, the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* specially published a statement by the Vietnamese leader in which he refused to enter into any anti-Soviet alliance [9].

Хуан Хуа.
From open sources

However, the resumption of the border conflict between Kampuchea and Vietnam on December 16, 1977, finally buried the last attempts to preserve Sino-Vietnamese friendship. China took a hard stand, condemning the introduction of Vietnamese troops into Kampuchean territory and rejecting Vietnam's demands for joint political pressure on Democratic Kampuchea. In January 1978, the Chinese government issued an official statement demanding the immediate withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchean territory and calling for the resolution of the conflict through negotiations [5, p. 161].

Within this confrontation, the Soviet Union demonstrated full support for Vietnam, clearly hoping to provoke it into more decisive steps in defiance of Chinese warnings. In January 1978, Soviet military commander Ivan Pavlovsky, addressing the Vietnamese, formulated this thought extremely briefly: "Do the Czechoslovakia" [8, p. 124]. In other words, he was proposing to carry out in Phnom Penh a scenario similar to the introduction of Soviet troops to Prague in 1968.

Иван Григорьевич Павловский.
From open sources

As a result of the conflict, it became clear to Hanoi that the main obstacle in the Kampuchean question was Beijing. In turn, Chinese leadership finally became convinced that the military-political union between Vietnam and the Soviet Union had become an accomplished fact. In February 1978, as a result of negotiations by G.V. Romanov with Vietnamese leadership, the USSR achieved an important success: Vietnam decided to finally side with the Soviet Union in its confrontation with China. This step led to an open break in Sino-Vietnamese relations. The immediate reaction was a statement by Vietnamese state *Radio Hanoi* on February 21, 1978. It included criticism of "a certain great power", accused of using Kampuchea for purposes of aggression against Vietnam [8, p. 125].

After Hanoi finally took the path of alliance with the USSR against China, its position on issues in dispute with Beijing noticeably hardened. This manifested itself, in particular, in two

Григорий Васильевич Романов.
From open sources

key moments: escalation of tension on the Sino-Vietnamese border and the beginning of a massive exodus of ethnic Chinese from the country. According to statistical data, by the end of 1978, more than 200,000 members of this ethnic group had been forced to flee or return to China [5, p. 123].

Taking advantage of Soviet support, the Vietnamese side moved away from its previous restrained position at negotiations, beginning to openly and sharply condemn China's foreign policy course. Already at the first round of negotiations in Hanoi (June-July 1978), the Chinese and Vietnamese delegations moved to open confrontation. Vietnam accused Beijing of organizing a political conspiracy under the guise of a "refugee crisis", aimed at destroying Vietnam's economy and socialist order. In response, China categorically rejected these accusations, characterizing the situation as a "managed, planned, and deliberate" anti-Chinese action by Hanoi [5, p. 130].

During the second round of Sino-Vietnamese negotiations on August 8, 1978, the Vietnamese side sharply toughened its rhetoric, publicly accusing the Chinese diaspora (Huaqiao) of being a "fifth column" implementing Beijing's policy in the region. These accusations, widely distributed by Vietnam's official media, were perceived by China as a transformation of negotiations into a propaganda instrument. Given the complete absence of progress, on September 26, the head of the Chinese delegation Zhong Sidong proposed to suspend meetings indefinitely, after which the delegation left the country.

By the summer of 1978, the Sino-Vietnamese split had become an accomplished fact. China consistently discontinued economic aid to Vietnam, recalling its experts. A symbolic event was the visit of a Kampuchean military delegation led by Son Sen to Beijing in July 1978, after which China for the first time openly declared its support for resistance to the Vietnamese regime in Kampuchea [7, p. 196]. The culmination of this information campaign was the publication on August 1, 1978, in the newspaper *People's Daily* of a programmatic article where Vietnam was for the first time publicly called a "regional hegemon" and the "Cuba of the East", symbolizing its final identification in Chinese official rhetoric as a satellite of the USSR and regional opponent.

At that time, Vietnam actively began to receive the necessary political, economic, and military support from the USSR, which enabled the carrying out of a large-scale military operation to overthrow the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea. An important step in this process was Vietnam's accession to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA/COMECON) at the 32nd conference of this organization in Bucharest in 1978. The ideological formulation of this course was served by the 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Fourth Congress, held in July of that year. At it, a decisive turn was made in the foreign policy doctrine: China was for the first time officially designated as a "direct enemy" and "enemy number one" [1, p. 243]. It was then that the strategic directive was

formulated, defining the United States as a "long-term enemy" and Beijing and Kampuchea as "direct enemies". On November 4, 1978, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between the Soviet Union and Vietnam was signed. According to the terms of this document, the USSR obtained legal grounds for a direct intervention in possible "Chinese threats" on the Indochinese Peninsula.

The consequence of this confrontation was the formation of two opposing blocs in Indochina: Soviet-Vietnamese and Sino-Kampuchean. Both sides, with active support from their allies, began accelerated militarization.

The scale of military support was significant. By the end of 1978, China had supplied Democratic Kampuchea with military armaments, including four patrol boats, 200 tanks, 300 artillery guns, 30,000 tons of ammunition, six fighters, and two bombers. Additionally, approximately 15,000 Chinese technical specialists and military advisors were stationed in Kampuchea [10, p. 379].

For its part, the Soviet Union took steps to strengthen the armed forces of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The USSR transferred to Vietnam two submarines, one destroyer, a large number of patrol vessels, and four squadrons of MiG-21 fighters. By the end of 1978, the total volume of Soviet military aid to Vietnam reached 75 million dollars [8, p. 123]. Under the pretext of responding to the situation in Kampuchea, China launched massive preparations for a conflict with Vietnam. After the covert transfer of troops in the fall of 1978, on December 8, the Central Military Council officially issued an order for war preparations. By January 10, 1979, these preparations were completed: a group of 325,000 military personnel was deployed in border areas, of which 225,000 comprised combat units [11, p. 86]. However, despite receiving guarantees of military security from the Soviet Union, Vietnam remained resolute and, as planned, on December 25, 1978, began a full-scale offensive on Democratic Kampuchea, assembling a force of 250,000 for this purpose.

Relying on Moscow's military support, Vietnam set a course for a final break with Beijing. Its policy, aimed at asserting its regional interests (including the struggle for influence in Kampuchea), acquired a harsh, and in some cases armed, character. This series of confrontational steps, fueled by territorial disputes and diaspora problems, was perceived in China as a direct threat to its security and led to the transition of confrontation into an open military phase.

To counteract Beijing's influence in the region, Hanoi increased cooperation with the USSR. However, China perceived the strengthening of Soviet presence as a direct threat to its security and began exerting pressure on Vietnam to reduce its dependence on Moscow. These actions only strengthened Hanoi's strategic concerns, pushing it to an even closer rapprochement with the Soviet Union. The deepening of Soviet-Vietnamese relations, in turn, intensified Beijing's concerns. It should be noted that the USSR did not limit itself to the role of counterweight to China but actively used Vietnam's growing dependence, advancing initiatives capable of leading to a complete break in Sino-Vietnamese relations, including support for the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime.

In international politics, attracting the influence of external powers to restrain a regional actor is a classic balancing strategy. However, by that time, Sino-Soviet relations had reached a state of almost overt enmity, which predetermined their mutually exclusive positions on the Vietnam question. As a result, stable triangular dynamics between Beijing, Moscow, and Hanoi proved impossible. This instability became a catalyst for escalation of regional conflict, which ultimately grew into direct military collision.

The Three-Sided Confrontation in 1979

The crisis in Kampuchea in early 1979 became a catalyst for a serious conflict within the socialist camp. On January 7, Viet-

namese troops took Phnom Penh, overthrowing the Democratic Kampuchea regime. On the same day, the pro-Soviet People's Republic of Kampuchea was created, which the USSR recognized the very next day and immediately began supporting with substantial economic aid. From this moment, Moscow and Hanoi established joint control over Kampuchea. Already in 1979, the People's Republic of Kampuchea received 85 million dollars in free aid from the USSR. Supplies included 159,000 tons of food, 50,000 tons of petroleum products, 4.6 million meters of textiles, medications worth 1 million rubles, as well as 660 automobiles and 106 tractors. This aid was aimed at stabilizing the situation in the country and strengthening the new government, marking the beginning of a period of close Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation in the management of Kampuchea [12, p. 55].

However, this expansion of influence provoked a sharp reaction from China. Seeking to check the Soviet-Vietnamese attempt, on February 17, 1979, the Chinese army began an offensive operation against Vietnam. The next day, three socialist countries — China, the USSR, and Vietnam — exchanged harsh statements and mutual accusations. This open confrontation brought to the surface and exacerbated long-standing ideological and geopolitical disagreements within the socialist bloc. For China and Vietnam, the conflict marked a painful historical turning point: from the rhetoric of fraternal relations, the two countries moved to full-scale armed confrontation, driven by irreconcilable national interests.

The completion of the Chinese military operation on March 16, 1979 had far-reaching strategic consequences. Having achieved its stated objectives, China achieved a breakthrough in the Kampuchean theater: Vietnam was forced to withdraw six combat divisions from this direction to defend the north. This allowed the Khmer Rouge, facing the brink of defeat, not only to avoid annihilation but also to regroup and begin a counter-offensive. Additionally, the threat of a potential "second lesson" bound down the main forces of the Vietnamese army (up to

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60%) on the northern direction, ensuring China's sustained strategic advantage [13, p. 977].

Soviet military presence exerted significant influence on the formation of Beijing's foreign policy course. After the beginning of the conflict, the Soviet Union provided decisive support to Vietnam. Already on February 18, 1979, the first group of advisors arrived in Hanoi, led by General Obaturov. Simultaneously, the USSR increased its military presence in the region: ships of the Pacific Fleet, led by the aircraft carrier *Minsk*, entered the South China Sea, and ground forces began concentrating along the Chinese border. The demonstration of strength reached its peak on March 12, 1979, when the USSR conducted large-scale exercises involving hundreds of thousands of soldiers, thousands of units of armor and aircraft [14][15].

Having received firm support from the Soviet Union, Hanoi gained confidence to oppose Chinese pressure. This deprived

Beijing of the opportunity to achieve its original goal — the so-called "lesson" to Vietnam. Instead of weakening, powerful external support only strengthened Vietnam's determination and readiness for confrontation. At Sino-Vietnamese negotiations in April 1979, held after the conflict, Vietnam expressed a rigid position backed by Soviet support. At the negotiations, the Chinese side put forward new demands, essentially addressed to Soviet presence in Vietnam, including commitments not to send troops abroad, not to enter into military alliances directed against each other, and not to provide foreign states with military bases. This could be viewed as an attempt by Beijing to limit Soviet influence in the region. Vietnam, for its part, insisted that China recognize the status quo that had emerged in Kampuchea, which was the key point on Vietnam's agenda.

After a series of diplomatic negotiations that did not yield significant results, Vietnam undertook steps to escalate the conflict in the information sphere. In October 1979, its Ministry of Foreign Affairs published *White Book*, entitled *The Truth About of Vietnam-China Relations Over the Last Thirty Years*. In this document, Beijing's foreign policy was subjected not only to systematic criticism but also the very fact of the existence of special allied relations between the two countries was disputed. China was presented as a state pursuing a course of hegemonism and expansion, and its actions were characterized as treacherous in relation to norms of international law.

China gave a harsh and immediate response to Vietnamese accusations. On October 19, 1979, during the second round of negotiations, the head of the Chinese delegation Han Nianlong directly stated that the Vietnamese side "distorts facts and engages in outright lies" in its statements [16, p. 858]. He emphasized that such a position demonstrated the absence on Vietnam's part of elementary sincerity necessary for productive dialogue, settlement of disagreements, and restoration of normal bilateral relations.

Following this, China delivered a powerful propaganda counterblow. On October 27 of the same year, the official news-

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paper *People's Daily* published an article by Hoang Van Hoan, a high-ranking Vietnamese defector and former Politburo member of the Communist Party of Vietnam. In this material, the author systematically analyzed and refuted the theses of the Vietnamese *White Book*. His criticism was aimed at the acting leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam and concluded with a direct appeal to fellow countrymen to "overthrow the fascist rule of Le Duan's clique" [15, p. 938].

Besides direct confrontation, Beijing attempted to exert indirect influence on the situation in Indochina through dialogue with Moscow. In October 1979, at negotiations at the level of deputy foreign ministers, the head of the Chinese delegation Wang Youping directly stated that "Soviet military support for Vietnam" was the key obstacle to the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations and expressed an official protest about this. However, the Soviet representative L.F. Ilichev rejected these claims, emphasizing that bilateral Sino-Soviet negotiations should not

be directed against third countries. As a result, this diplomatic channel also did not bring a breakthrough.

As a result, by December 1979, multilateral negotiations between China, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam had completely stalled. The short-term military conflict could not resolve the deep contradictions between socialist countries. On the contrary, after the breakdown of dialogue, the confrontation between the two camps only intensified and acquired a chronic character.

The split between China and Vietnam, leading to the armed conflict of 1979, was a direct consequence of the deepening Soviet-Chinese confrontation. The withdrawal of American forces in 1975 and the elimination of US influence in Indochina deprived Sino-Soviet "cooperation by necessity" of its main unifying goal. Against this background, Hanoi lost the opportunity to maneuver between Moscow and Beijing and, finding itself in the grip of long-standing contradictions with China, was forced to make a strategic choice in favor of a rapprochement with the USSR.

Thus, the Sino-Vietnamese conflict clearly demonstrated the priority of national interests over ideology. It served as a key factor in the evolution of foreign policy of both countries, led to long-term regional tension and a reassessment of alliances within the socialist camp, finally cementing the transition from cooperation to confrontation.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no relevant conflict of interests.

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Received 10.09.2025
Revised 24.01.2026
Accepted 17.03.2026