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**Vietnam Modifies Its
Kampuchean Strategy**



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Over the past several months, Hanoi has been embarked on a new strategy aimed at discouraging ASEAN support for the Kampuchean resistance while eroding international opposition to Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea. This approach, which couples an aggressive military campaign along the Thai-Kampuchean border with stepped-up diplomatic contacts, already has shown signs of success that will reinforce Hanoi's determination to remain in Kampuchea.

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Setbacks in 1981

During the last dry season (November 1980-May 1981) Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea remained mostly in defensive positions, where they concentrated on extending Vietnam's administrative control of the country. Much of this effort was aimed at supporting national elections held in April 1981 that were intended to build domestic support for the puppet Heng Samrin regime. With the exception of one unsuccessful assault against a Democratic Kampuchean (DK) base, there were no large-scale military sweeps through contested areas. As a result, DK forces were able to extend their areas of operation and make gains in strength and organization.

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The Vietnamese also lost ground on the international political front during 1981. Their bid at the United Nations last fall to have the DK unseated as the legitimate government of Kampuchea failed. Two key resolutions passed at the International Conference on Kampuchea in July, calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Kampuchea and the holding of UN-supervised elections, constituted a major defeat for Vietnamese policies in Kampuchea.

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New Approaches

These security and diplomatic setbacks apparently convinced Hanoi to alter its strategy. The 1981-82 dry season has seen the Vietnamese launch the most

aggressive military campaign in Kampuchea since their invasion three years ago. Several important guerrilla bases have been overrun, and resistance forces have been compelled to regroup. This year the Vietnamese are strengthening their positions in newly gained areas, apparently intending to remain in forward positions through the coming rainy season.



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The Vietnamese also have stepped up diplomatic activities aimed at portraying a conciliatory image. Communiques from the Indochina Foreign Ministers Conference in February, for example, reaffirmed Hanoi's willingness to participate in a regional conference on Kampuchea and establish a demilitarized zone along the Thai-Kampuchea border. Hanoi has also used recent visits of French, Indian, and UN officials to project a readiness to hold bilateral discussions with Thailand on the Kampuchean issue. Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach is currently visiting several West European countries to discuss economic aid.

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This kind of diplomatic and military activity is aimed in part at creating dissension within ASEAN, and Hanoi has some reason to be encouraged. Indonesia and Malaysia have already voiced misgivings over the long-term viability of ASEAN's hardline policy.



By stepping up contacts with West European countries, Hanoi also appears to be trying to build on recent breaches of Western support for ASEAN's approach, such as the renewal of French economic aid and the granting of EC humanitarian assistance to Vietnam.

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Prospects

Hanoi's new strategy is unlikely to produce an immediate change in ASEAN policy. Vietnam's already strong position in Kampuchea limits ASEAN's policy

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EA EAJ 82-009
14 April 1982

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options. Moreover, ASEAN's consensus that Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea and the growing Soviet presence are serious threats to regional stability has so far outweighed arguments—particularly by Indonesia—to adopt a more conciliatory approach. [redacted]

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Hanoi's other goals will be equally difficult to achieve quickly. West European officials are unlikely to grant large amounts of aid, and they may use Thach's visit to express concern over Vietnamese actions. Moreover, it remains an open question whether Vietnam will ever be able to break the back of the resistance. There are less than three weeks remaining in the current dry season, and the resistance is sure to recoup some of its losses when the rains begin to bog down Vietnam's already strained logistics system. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, Hanoi probably believes its strategy will pay off in a few years. Continuing military successes over the next several dry seasons would further discredit the resistance in the eyes of the Khmer population and weaken the commitment by both domestic and foreign supporters to aid anti-Vietnamese forces. Moreover, if Hanoi can confine the resistance to the peripheries of Kampuchea, political, social, and economic development could be expanded under the banner of the Heng Samrin regime. [redacted]

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Such developments would increase Hanoi's maneuverability, perhaps allowing a token withdrawal of troops from Kampuchea. The Vietnamese are betting that this, coupled with even small, additional offers of aid from sympathetic countries, will eventually erode international opposition to their occupation of Kampuchea and compel ASEAN to make its peace with Vietnam. [redacted]

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East Asian Journal [redacted]

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Supplement

14 April 1982

Southeast Asia

Vietnamese Strengthen Control Along Kampuchean-Thai Border

The Vietnamese are establishing forward bases in territory along the Thai border captured from Democratic Kampuchean forces during the ongoing dry-season campaign. [redacted]

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In Battambang Province, the scene of heavy fighting in recent months, the Vietnamese reportedly are conscripting Kampuchean civilians for road construction, moving supplies into forward areas, and relocating villagers away from the border. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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The Vietnamese evidently want to maintain an aggressive posture going into the coming rainy season in an attempt to forestall strengthening of the resistance forces' position. During last year's wet season, Democratic Kampuchean forces made substantial improvements in strength, organization, and areas of control, and Hanoi probably fears that any easing of Vietnamese pressure could result in similar gains this year. The recent Vietnamese moves will not only facilitate continuing military operations, but also greatly enhance logistic support for units planning to remain along the border. [redacted]

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