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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Cambodia: Year 10

Some people would prefer to forget, but the war in Indochina didn't end with the U.S. retreat from Vietnam 10 years ago this April. The killing has continued right along, most recently in Cambodia, where this past week Vietnamese troops routed the last of the refugee and anti-Vietnam guerrilla camps as part of their annual dry-season offensive. Vietnamese troops even charged in hot pursuit into neighboring Thailand, though they later retreated. The episode reminds us that the world's troubles don't vanish simply because U.S. policy ignores them.

It's clear by now that the real agony of Cambodia began in 1975, with the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. First, the murderous Khmer Rouge killed a million or more Cambodians in their "peasant revolution." Then in 1978 Vietnam invaded, installing a puppet government and taking a large step toward realizing its historical dream of dominating all of Indochina. Several hundred thousand Cambodians have since fled to border camps near Thailand, preferring even that makeshift life to the rule of Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin. They share the camps with the various anti-Vietnamese insurgent groups that have been harassing Vietnam's 160,000 invading troops for more than six years. That's why the Vietnamese use the dry weather each winter to attack the guerrillas' base camps near Thailand.

This year's attacks are reportedly the bloodiest in years, but that doesn't mean the Vietnamese are winning. Indeed, if anything, the Cambodian resistance has grown stronger year by year so that most analysts now figure the war is a stalemate. The Cambodian resistance gets arms from China and small amounts from Singapore. Vietnam follows the typical pattern of Soviet clients, accepting some \$2 billion a year of Moscow's cash to subsidize its 1.1-million-man army, the world's third largest (after Russia's and China's). Even with that aid, the war's cost has kept Vietnam the economic pauper of fast-growing Asia.

So the ferocity of this year's at-

tacks may signal renewed worry in Hanoi that its occupation may not be so easy after all. In particular, Vietnam seems to be aiming its attacks at the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, an anti-communist resistance group that with 15,000 or so fighters is the largest and fastest-growing guerrilla alternative to the Khmer Rouge (which has about 30,000). Hanoi knows that so long as the murderous Khmer Rouge remains the strongest resistance group, much of the world will figure things are a Hobson's choice and try to forget Indochina.

The mystery in all this is U.S. policy. America provides "humanitarian" aid to the refugees along the Thai border, but no weapons to the guerrillas. The mystery is why not. Son Sann, the anti-communist resistance group's leader, makes frequent trips to the U.S. to drum up aid; he says he'll be happy with anything. The neighboring Thais, who fear a Vietnam with a secure hold on Indochina, also support the guerrillas. Morally, too, aid to Son Sann's group makes sense because it helps reduce the influence of the Khmer Rouge, which has China as a patron. Indeed, we wonder why the U.S. hasn't used its new friendship with China to persuade Peking to drop the Khmer Rouge.

America's non-policy in Southeast Asia hasn't yet cost the U.S. much, because the Indochinese fighting remains a draw and the rest of Asia is stable and growing. But a Vietnam that has comfortably turned Indochina into a Soviet satellite would present a much larger threat—as suggested by the expanding Soviet presence at Cam Ranh Bay, the one-time U.S. naval base in Vietnam.

The non-communist Khmer insurgents aren't much different from the Afghan guerrillas or Nicaragua's contras. They are people willing to risk their lives to fight for freedom against Soviet or Soviet-armed opponents. They don't want the U.S. to commit its own troops. They only want the wherewithal to fight for themselves. As Vietnamese tanks and helicopters fire away, it seems almost perverse that the U.S. denies their request.

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