

205

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
8 March 1978

The Vietnam-Cambodian Conflict: Vietnam's incursion into Cambodian territory in late December and early January was almost certainly meant to halt persistent Cambodian border provocations. By mid-January, most Vietnamese military units had withdrawn from Cambodia, and Cambodian forces had infiltrated back into Vietnamese territory at several points along the border. Continuing Cambodian aggressiveness has resulted in subsequent clashes, but since 5 February, when the Vietnamese proposed a three-point peace plan, hostilities have remained at a relatively low level.

The plan includes provisions for a five-kilometer withdrawal from the border by both sides, negotiations, and "an appropriate form of international guarantee and supervision." It has been rejected by Phnom Penh, but even without negotiations, tensions along the border could be eased if the Cambodians reduce their provocations.

The conflict has intensified Chinese-Soviet competition for influence in Indochina. Chinese political support and military aid to Cambodia has heightened Sino-Vietnamese friction, although Peking has tried to appear even-handed in public remarks on the current fighting. The Soviets, who have made gains politically in Hanoi primarily because they have been able to supply the Vietnamese with about twice the economic aid that the Chinese have provided since the end of the war, hope to exploit the situation for further gains.

Hanoi's effort to force the Cambodians to negotiate a settlement was clearly less decisive than the Vietnamese leaders had hoped, but there are major restraints on further military action. Renewed incursions into Cambodia would undermine Hanoi's diplomatic campaign to present itself as the aggrieved party and would aggravate suspicions of Vietnam that already exist in the region. More importantly, they could compel greater Chinese support for Phnom Penh, even further setting back prospects for improving Sino-Vietnamese relations.

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: DEC 2001

Copy Carter Library