

2012

# H-Diplo

## H-Diplo Roundtable Review

[www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables](http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables)

Volume XIII, No. 14 (2012)

11 January 2012

*Roundtable Editors:* Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse  
*Roundtable Web/Production Editor:* George Fujii

Introduction by Yafeng Xia

**Nicholas Khoo. *Collateral Damage; Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*.** New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. 280 pages, 7 tables. ISBN: 978-0-231-15078-1 (cloth, \$50.00).

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XIII-14.pdf>

### Contents

---

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University .....            | 2  |
| Review by Xiaobing Li, University of Central Oklahoma .....         | 7  |
| Review by Robert Sutter, George Washington University .....         | 12 |
| Review by Carlyle A. Thayer, The University of New South Wales..... | 15 |
| Review by Zhao Xuegong and Wang Chao, Nankai University .....       | 19 |
| Author's Response by Nicholas Khoo, University of Otago .....       | 22 |

### Copyright © 2011-2012 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

---

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

Introduction by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University

---

Nicholas Khoo has published an original and persuasive book on how the Sino-Soviet split affected the Sino-Vietnamese relationship and caused its eventual breakdown in 1979. In *Collateral Damage*, Khoo attempts to do two things. First, on the basis of newly-available Chinese language sources and translated Russian documents, he makes the case that the developments in China's relationship with the Soviet Union were critical in explaining the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance; second, he seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on the relevance of realist theory in interpreting critical events during the Cold War. Khoo finds unpersuasive previous lines of interpretation which attribute the fundamental cause of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance's termination to non-material causes such as ideology, culture, and/ a variety of other issues, such as Vietnam's attempt to establish a sphere of influence over its neighbors Cambodia and Laos, land and maritime border disputes, and Vietnam's treatment of its ethnic Chinese community (6-8). As reviewer Robert Sutter aptly puts it, "Khoo's use of realist theory to discern the main determinant – i.e. China's view of the USSR as its principal enemy – in the demise of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance provides an important corrective to some prominent assessments that have found realist theory wanting in explaining Chinese foreign relations during the Cold War

All five reviewers find the book to be an important addition to the literature : Xiaobing Li notes, "Well balanced in its presentation, it goes beyond the existing scholarship on this topic", Robert Sutter argues that it is "a cogent and persuasive argument on the causes of the demise of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance"; Carlyle Thayer describes it as "an original and compelling analysis of the breakdown of the Sino-Soviet alliance and its impact on the Sino-Vietnamese alliance"; and Zhao Xuegong and Wang Chao assess it as being "very useful for understanding the complicated situation in East Asia during the cold war years."

Nonetheless, they also have some reservations on Khoo's analytical approach and sources. They hope that more Chinese, Russian and Vietnamese archival sources will be introduced to the study of this subject. I agree with Robert Sutter that "this book will not end the debates over what drives Chinese foreign policy and specifically what caused the breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese alignment in these decades."

Since Khoo has responded to some of the reviewers' concerns, I will briefly discuss two points which he did not address. These, I think, are essential questions for the understanding of Chinese foreign relations during the Cold War.

The first concerns when Chinese leaders began to regard the Soviet Union as the main threat to China's national security. Khoo writes that "the principle threat to China had begun to change from the United States to the Soviet Union" by 1966. (44) Robert Sutter questions this assertion and believes it should be even later. Since the 1950s, China's defense strategies had been directed against the United States, and the main area of expected attack was along the southeast coast and the Sino-Indian border in the southwest. From the 1950s to the early 1960s, China's main industrial enterprises and infrastructure

were in Northeast and Northern China while the area south of Shanghai was intended to be relinquished in times of war. In the wake of the Sino-Soviet split, by 1964, Mao Zedong came to realize that China could no longer rely on the Soviet Union for resisting a possible invasion from Japan and the United States from the north.<sup>1</sup> At a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee politburo meeting in July 1964, Mao said: “Do not only pay attention to the east but not the north; and do not only pay attention to imperialism but not revisionism. We must prepare for war on both fronts.”<sup>2</sup> This was the first time Mao formally raised the issue of preparedness for a potential defensive war against the Soviet Union.

When the Vietnam War escalated in early 1965, through diplomatic signaling China and the United States came to a tacit agreement that neither would cross the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>3</sup> In Mao’s view, the United States no longer constituted the main threat to China’s security. The larger threat of war might come from the Soviet Union from the north. In April and May, based on a series of important instructions on strategic issues from Mao, the Central Military Commission of the CCP convened meetings to redesign China’s strategic battle plans. It decided to strengthen the national defense works in the “Three Norths”—China’s northern, northeastern, and northwestern regions – which, along with the southeastern region, were identified as China’s main strategic regions.<sup>4</sup> Defense against the Soviet Union had become a focal point in China’s national security strategy.

Since the early 1960s, the CCP leaders viewed the Soviets as revisionists, not “imperialists,” as Khoo asserts (p. 7). China adopted a policy of “fighting with two fists” – one against U.S. imperialists and the other against Soviet revisionists. Before 1964, anti-revisionism was primarily in the ideological sphere. From 1964 on, China’s defense strategy was to prepare for a two-front war against both the U.S. and the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Fujian Provincial Archives, 101/12/120, pp. 73-76; Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi ed, *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1949-1976* [Chronology of Zhou Enlai] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1997), vol. 2, p. 654.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Zhongchun, “Soviet Factors in the Sino-American Normalization, 1969-1979,” in William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li, eds., *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> See Li Danhui, “38<sup>th</sup> Parallel and 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel: A Comparison of Sino-American Information Exchanges during the Korean and Vietnam Wars,” *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu* [Studies of CCP History], no. 3 (2001). Also James Hershberg and Chen Jian, “Informing the Enemy: Sino-American ‘Signaling’ and the Vietnam War, 1965,” in Roberts, *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, pp. 193-258.

<sup>4</sup> Han Huaizhi, *Dangdai Zhongguo de junshi gongzou* [Contemporary China Military Works] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1989), vol.1, p. 55; Wang, “Soviet Factors in the Sino-American Normalization,” p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> I want to thank Professor Danhui Li, Center for Cold War International History Studies, East China Normal University for advising me on this point (Yafeng Xia’s e-mail exchanges with Danhui Li, 3-4 December 2011).

On 29 June 1968, in his talks with a visiting Vietnamese delegation headed by Pham Hung, Zhou Enlai said, “The Soviet Union has become the country of socialist imperialism.”<sup>6</sup> This seems to be the first time that a senior Chinese leader described the Soviet system as “socialist imperialism.” After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, a *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily] editorial on 23 August, entitled “The Complete Collapse of Soviet Modern Revisionism” openly pinned the label of “socialist imperialism” on the Soviet Union – a socialist country pursuing imperialist policies.<sup>7</sup> Khoo mentions this point and used word “the Soviet Union as a ‘social-imperialist’ superpower”. (48)

The second point concerns China’s domestic debate over its policy toward the USSR, the United States and Vietnam. In a recent article, Mingjiang Li, a political scientist at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore highlights “the policy differences between Mao and other more moderate Chinese leaders” over Beijing’s policy toward the Soviet Union in early 1962,<sup>8</sup> but Chinese documents demonstrate that there was no clear divide between Mao and other moderate leaders and no organized opposition to Mao’s Soviet policy. Mao’s senior associates, including Liu Shaoqi, president of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the first vice chairman of the CCP, Premier Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, general secretary of the CCP, Peng Zhen, politburo member and mayor of Beijing, and Wang Jiaxiang, the director of the CCP’s International Liaison Department (ILD) supported Mao’s anti-Soviet revisionism strategy.<sup>9</sup>

Although some scholars have argued that Wang Jiaxiang “pushed for an alternative international strategy” in spring 1962,<sup>10</sup> he was not charting a different foreign policy course. As the head of the ILD, Wang was only making policy suggestions.<sup>11</sup> Although Mao had retired to a second line role in Chinese politics in early 1962<sup>12</sup>, he was still in firm

---

<sup>6</sup> Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tønnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung and James G. Hershberg ed., *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977*, Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Working Paper No.22, pp. 137-38.

<sup>7</sup> *Renmin ribao*, 23 August 1968.

<sup>8</sup> Mingjiang Li, “Ideological Dilemma: Mao’s China and the Sino-Soviet split 1962-1963,” *Cold War History*, vol. 11, no.3, August 2011, p. 411.

<sup>9</sup> Danhui Li and Yafeng Xia, “Jockeying for Leadership: Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1961-July 1964,” forthcoming.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.393. Also, Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Yafeng Xia, “Wang Jiaxiang: New China’s First Ambassador and the CCP’s First Director of International Liaison Department,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 16 (Fall 2009), p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> Author’s e-mail communication (21 November 2011) with Professor Han Gang, East China Normal University. Professor Han is a leading authority on the history of the CCP. He argues that Mao Zedong retired to a second line role after the so-called 7,000-cadres conference in early February 1962. He would return to the first line at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Although Mao later complained that “his

control of the PRC's major policy-making, especially foreign and defense policies. At time, Mao's senior colleagues might not have been aware of his true thinking and could have speculated on what they thought Mao's views were. Wang's proposal was in accordance with Mao's preferences in the 1950s and with the foreign policy guideline of the Eighth Congress of the CCP in 1956. It was a continuation and evolution of the détente policy toward the Soviet Union that started in late 1960, which Mao personally approved.<sup>13</sup>

My study of China's policy-making toward the United States in the process of U.S-China rapprochement in early 1970s demonstrates that Mao made all important decisions regarding China's policy toward the United States. As a charismatic leader at the height of his personality cult, Mao did not need to consult other senior officials regarding China's foreign and domestic policies. Chinese sources give no indication of any organized opposition to Mao's policy toward the United States. Mao had the final word on all major decisions.<sup>14</sup>

### Participants:

**Nicholas Khoo** (Ph.D., Department of Political Science, Columbia University, 2007), is a lecturer in the Department of Politics at the University of Otago, New Zealand. He specializes in Chinese foreign policy, the international relations of Asia, the international politics of the Cold War, and international relations theory.

**Yafeng Xia** is an Associate Professor of East Asian and diplomatic history at Long Island University in New York. He is a 2011/2012 residential fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington D.C. He is the author of *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-72* (2006). He has published widely on Chinese foreign relations during the Cold War. He is currently at work on a monograph on the early history of the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, tentatively titled *Revolutionary Diplomacy and Institution Building: New China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1949-1958*.

**Xiaobing Li** is Professor and Chairman of the Department of History and Geography and Director of the Western Pacific Institute at the University of Central Oklahoma. He is also the Executive Editor of the *Journal of American Review of China Studies* and *Journal of the Western Pacific*. Among his recent and forthcoming books are *China's War for Korea* (Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2012), *Legal Reforms in China* (University of Kentucky Press, forthcoming 2012), *China at War* (ABC-CLIO, forthcoming 2011),

---

power has fallen into the hands of others, he actually was in firm control of major policy making even when he was in the second line.

<sup>13</sup> For a study on the Sino-Soviet détente from mid 1960 to October 1961, see Danhui Li and Yafeng Xia, "Competing for Leadership: Split or Détente in the Sino-Soviet Bloc," *The International History Review*, vol. 30, no. 3 (September 2008), pp. 545-74.

<sup>14</sup> For details, see Yafeng Xia, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969—February 1972," *The Journal of Cold War Studies*, 8:4 (fall 2006), pp. 3-28.

*Encyclopedia of the Korean War* (Assistant Editor for Spencer Tucker, editor; ABC-CLIO, 2010), *Voices from the Vietnam War* (University of Kentucky Press, 2010), *Civil Liberties in China* (ABC-CLIO, 2010), *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Paperback Edition; University of Kentucky Press, 2009), *New Historiography in the Contemporary West* (in Chinese; Co-Editor with Tian; Shanghai, China: Lexicographical Press, 2008), *Voices from the Korean War; Personal Stories of American, Korean and Chinese Soldiers* (Co-author with Peters; University of Kentucky Press, 2005), and *Mao's Generals Remember Korea* (First Co-Editor with Allen R. Millett and Bin Yu; University of Kansas Press, 2001).

**Robert Sutter** is Professor of Practice in International Affairs at the Elliott School of George Washington University. A Ph.D. graduate in History and East Asian Languages from Harvard University, Sutter's government career (1968-2001) involved work on Asian and Pacific affairs and U.S. foreign policy for the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of State, and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He has published 19 books, over 200 articles and several hundred government reports dealing with contemporary East Asian and Pacific countries and their relations with the United States. His most recent book is *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (Rowman and Littlefield 2010).

**Carlyle A. Thayer** is Emeritus Professor, The University of New South Wales (UNSW) at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA), Canberra. He holds a PhD in international relations from The Australian National University. He served in Vietnam with the International Voluntary Services (1967-1968), conducted field work for his doctoral dissertation in 1972, and first visited Hanoi in 1981. Thayer is the author of over 450 publications including: *War By Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Vietnam, 1954-1960* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989); co-author *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1992) with Ramesh Thakur; co-editor of *The Soviet Union as an Asian Pacific Power: Implications of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987) with Ramesh Thakur; co-editor *Reshaping Regional Relations: Asia-Pacific and the Former Soviet Union* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993) with Ramesh Thakur; and *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999) with Ramses Amer.

**Zhao Xuegong** is Professor of international history and director of the Institute of American History and Culture at Nankai University, China. He is the author of *Great Transformation: US East Asia Policy since the WWII* (2002, 2007) and *The Turbulence of October: Inside the Cuban Missile Crisis* (2009). **Wang Chao** is an undergraduate student of History College at Nankai

Western strategists and historians have long speculated about the international Communist interventions in Vietnam, but have no definite proof of the extent of outside involvements. Between 1964 and 1974, Vietnam had become a battlefield, testing ground, and even a training site for some of the Communist forces, including the Soviet armed forces and the Chinese army. The Russian and Chinese support for North Vietnam, including troops, equipment, finance, and technology, proved to be the decisive edge that enabled the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong to resist American forces and eventually subjugate South Vietnam. Soviet and Chinese support made it a long war and one that was impossible for the United States to win. Nevertheless, the Vietnam War also tested the limits of the Communist alliance. Soviet and Chinese military aid to North Vietnam between 1965 and 1973 did not improve Sino-Soviet relations, but rather created a new front and new competition as each attempted to gain leadership of the Southeast Asian Communist movements. *Collateral Damage* offers a timely new perspective in understanding international relations among the Communist states during and after the Vietnam War.

In *Collateral Damage*, Nicholas Khoo attempts to tell the story of how the alliance between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) fell apart. He begins by arguing that the cause of the termination of the alliance was, in simplest terms, the Vietnamese friendship with the Soviet Union, and that this alliance was a necessary and sufficient cause to produce hostilities between the former allies. His book is arranged chronologically, logically moving from one historical period to the next, exploring the various events that changed the relationship between China, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam. In his first chapter, Khoo lays the groundwork for his thesis. He begins by asking why the reader should be interested in yet another study of the interactions between China, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam. He provides two reasons: "First, this book seeks to contribute to an important and emerging debate on the fundamental cause of the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance" (2). He postulates that "recent literature on China's foreign relations, which has had the benefit of greater access to Chinese sources, has tended to minimize the centrality of the Soviet factor in Chinese Cold War era foreign policy" (2). He then cites studies conducted by Chen Jian, Qiang Zhai, Arne Westad, and Sophie Quinn-Judge as examples of this interpretation. Khoo maintains that *Collateral Damage* presents a view contrary to that expressed in recent literature, and he argues that "the threat represented by the Soviet Union was the central and overriding concern of Chinese foreign policy-makers, a fact that was strongly reflected in Sino-Vietnamese relations. In effect, increasing Sino-Soviet conflict following the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s provided the critical context for an increase in Soviet cooperation with the Vietnamese communists, and was the fundamental cause of the cracks in the Sino-Vietnamese alliance that manifested themselves more fully in the period following the end of the Vietnam War, eventually resulting in the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979 and the Third Indo-China War (1979-1991)" (3).

A second point Khoo introduces and applies is of a theoretical nature. He states that in recent literature, authors argue that China is a social state whose behavior was determined by non-materialist variables. Khoo counters this by suggesting that the PRC is a "neorealist state whose international behavior is fundamentally determined by concepts emphasized by neorealist theory" (4). He also proposes that his study adds depth to the existing theory of Chinese foreign policy known as "principal enemy" theory, which states that the "friend of my enemy is my enemy." Khoo states that he "will apply the logic of this argument to China's relations with the Soviet Union and North Vietnam, attempting, in essence, to demonstrate how Vietnam, by aligning itself with China's principal enemy, the Soviet Union, became China's secondary enemy" (4). With its fresh insights into the activities in Indochina, this book offers a comprehensive analysis of the Sino-Soviet rivalry in Vietnam from the 1960s to the 1970s. It covers not only the diplomatic, but also the domestic, economic, and military aspects of this rivalry. Well balanced in its presentation, it goes beyond the existing scholarship on this topic.

Throughout the book, Khoo delves into other authors' perspectives, and explains the failure of their analyses. In a review of recent literature on Sino-Vietnamese relations, he brings up Chen Jian, who focuses heavily on the Chinese side, effectively minimizing the role of the Soviet Union, and also, Khoo argues, focuses too much on ideology as the driving factor behind China and Vietnam's relations (6-7). The author goes on to explain that his book adopts a case-study analysis of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, analyzing in chronological order four periods: 1964-68, 1968-73, 1973-75, and 1975-79. Khoo goes back to his main argument and states that his methodology will involve analyzing each period with respect to the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, and whether or not it was a consequence of wider developments relating to the Sino-Soviet relationship and Soviet-Vietnamese relations (13). Beginning with his first time period in the 1960s, he talks about the increasing cooperation between Moscow and Hanoi during the Vietnam War. Khoo claims that the increasing Sino-Soviet conflict had a major impact on Soviet-Vietnamese relations, and "caused the new Soviet leadership to take a more nuanced and effective approach to undermining Chinese influence in North Vietnam" (23). As the Vietnamese became more friendly with the Soviet Union, China distanced itself further from Vietnam: "Hanoi continued to send delegations to Beijing, but there was no reciprocity" (39).

In chapter three, revolving around the 1968-73 period, Khoo claims that the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia represented a major turning point in Sino-Soviet relations, and that "this act instantly transformed the Soviet Union into Beijing's principal enemy" (45). The author examines two incidents, the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Sino-Soviet border conflict, and how subsequent to both instances, there was an increase in Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation which caused an increase in Sino-Vietnamese conflict (46). He also states that the main cause of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict stemmed from their rivalry for influence in Cambodia, which directly led to the Sino-Vietnamese war in 1979. Khoo explains that by the time the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, the Chinese were already angry at Vietnam over agreeing to negotiate with the U.S. in Paris, and later because of their support for the Soviet invasion. The author maintains that "the reason for Chinese anger lay in its increasing concern about the Soviet Union," and its influence in Vietnam, again going back to the author's main premise (53).



As the author reiterates, Vietnam and its relation to the Soviet Union was the key factor in the deteriorating relations between the DRV and PRC. Khoo further asks whether the reverse was true with regard to China's rapprochement with the U.S. and a deterioration of relations with Vietnam. He answers plainly that it was not. Again, the author cites other writers who claim that China's rapprochement with the U.S. was a main cause in the collapse of their relations, but Khoo rejects this line of thinking. Later he states: "The question we are concerned with answering is this: Did the Chinese betrayal of their Vietnamese comrades through the Sino-American rapprochement cause the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance... the existing evidence suggests not. Rapprochement was neither necessary nor sufficient for the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance" (68-69). Khoo claims that a whole series of independent events and decisions needed to take place for the termination of the alliance to occur, and that rapprochement alone was not enough to do that.

The author concludes that "the Chinese viewed their relationship with the Vietnamese communists primarily through the prism of a deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship. When Hanoi and Moscow consolidated relations after the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, Sino-Vietnamese relations declined. Similarly, when the Vietnamese and Soviets increased cooperation in the Paris peace negotiations and Hanoi accepted increased Soviet military and economic aid after the Sino-Soviet conflict in 1969, Sino-Vietnamese conflict increased" (76). Khoo makes these points in order to link back to his main argument that modern scholars are wrong and that Vietnamese cooperation with the Soviet Union was the reason for the alliance's collapse.

After going over further events until the 1979 war in explaining the complex relations between China, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam, Khoo states that "this book has attempted to show that the relevant actors in Beijing, Hanoi, and Moscow methodically and strategically worked to pursue their state's interests as they defined them. In the case of China, its behavior corresponded with what we have called principal enemy theory. Here, because of the Sino-Soviet conflict and the subsequent Soviet threat to China, Moscow became Beijing's principal enemy" (163). The author maintains that as a consequence of this, China viewed Vietnam's deepening cooperation with the Soviets with increasing displeasure. He claims that "ultimately, the Chinese and Vietnamese both had a non-negotiable position on Cambodia... This led to the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance of 1978, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, and the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war" (163).

A reassessment of the history of the Vietnam War requires not only the development of new analytical approach, but also the exploration of new primary sources to support generalizations and arguments. Although Khoo offers a new conceptual framework in this book, he has not yet employed recently released Communist documents in the 2000s from Beijing and Moscow. The opening up of new primary sources from the "other side" has reached an unprecedented degree and stimulated a large and enthusiastic audience. This book could have benefited from exploration of newly available Chinese sources. Some of the PRC governmental documents have been released in recent years. In 2004 and 2008, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declassified tens of thousands of diplomatic

files from the early years of the PRC. The Archives of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs have 330,000 volumes of documents, which are mainly in paper form, with some microfilms, photos, audio, and video tapes, and compact discs, which record China's foreign policy and diplomatic activities since the founding of the PRC in 1949. The Archives declassified about 10,000 volumes of the documents in 2004, 60,000 in 2006, and 45,000 in 2008. A large number of documents show China's involvement in the wars in Vietnam. The newly declassified documents from these sources shed light on many historical questions in the Cold War.

Another criticism involves the author's extensive use of the secondary Chinese language materials "that have become available since the early 1990s" (13). In China, scholars and historians are working on their research on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Vietnam relations through a similar historical approach. For some political reasons, however, Chinese historians still have a long way to go before objective, truthful, and scientific research on the history of Chinese participation in the Cold War, including involvements in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, can be published in their home country. The study of Sino-Soviet and Sino-Vietnamese relations remains inconclusive and incomplete since it is a sensitive topic.

Beginning in 1958-59, because of complicated domestic and international factors (the most important of these factors was whether Moscow or Beijing should be the center of the international Communist movement), the Sino-Soviet alliance, which was the cornerstone of the Communist international alliance system, collapsed. The great Sino-Soviet polemic debate in 1960-62 undermined the ideological foundation of the communist revolution. In retrospect, few events during the Cold War played so important a role in shaping the orientation and essence of the Cold War as the Sino-Soviet split. The conflicts between the two Communist parties extended to strategic issues in the 1960s. The 1964 transition in the Soviet leadership from Khrushchev to Brezhnev did not improve Sino-Soviet relations. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution sweeping across China beginning in 1966 completely destroyed any hope that Beijing and Moscow might continue to regard each other as "comrades in arms." As the Sino-Soviet relationship worsened, it gradually moved from hostility to outright confrontation, and eventually to the Sino-Soviet border war in the late 1960s. The Soviet Union felt compelled to use all means possible to win Vietnam as a political ally over China in the international Communist movement.

China did not want to see an increase in Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. To keep the Soviets out and North Vietnam on its side, China was willing, at first, to provide more military assistance to North Vietnam. China had been the largest supplier of war materials to North Vietnam among the Communist states until 1967, providing about 44.8 percent of the total military aid that year. Meanwhile, China began to send its troops to Vietnam. On April 17, 1965, the first PLA troops entered North Vietnam. By March 1966, China had dispatched 130,000 troops to Vietnam, along with surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), railroad, combat engineers, mine-sweepers, and logistics units. Three years later, China had sent twenty-three divisions, including ninety-five regiments plus eighty-three battalions, totaling 320,000 troops. The Chinese forces in North Vietnam enabled Ho Chi Minh to send more NVA troops to the South to fight American ground forces and to intensify warfare in the region.

North Vietnam knew that the Soviet Union and China were rivals in the Communist camp, competing for the leadership in the Asian Communist movement, including Vietnam. Each claimed itself to be a key supporter of the Vietnamese Communists' struggle against the American invasion. The Vietnamese thus brought both Soviet and Chinese Communist troops into North Vietnam, increasing the competition between the Chinese and Soviet Communists. According to the Vietnamese, however, China and the Soviet Union played different roles in their war against America and the South. Their relations, although they may have been parallel, functioned at different levels through different historical stages. China seemed like a mother figure, supplying food, clothing, and logistics, while the Soviet Union was more like a father figure who provided modern military training and new technology. When the Chinese played a more important role in the early years of North Vietnam's "people's war" to survive and grow, the Soviets played a crucial role in the later years in terms of the modern warfare technology and knowledge that the Vietnamese required in order to succeed and win the final victory. The Chinese seemed to be no match for the Soviet Union's superior military technology. After Beijing divorced Moscow, Hanoi had learned how to fight, but still needed to know how to win. No matter how hard Beijing tried, Hanoi went its own way to Moscow after 1968. Soviet military technology won the Vietnamese over by undercutting the Sino-Vietnamese alliance and downgrading the ideological factor.

Beijing lost Hanoi and turned to Washington in the early 1970s. In the meantime, Moscow confronted the West and China simultaneously, which seriously overextended the Soviet Union's strength and power. The Cold War in East Asia—as far as some of its basic features are concerned—virtually approached its end in the late 1970s, almost a decade before the conclusion of the global Cold War. This development, as we can now see clearly, presaged the way in which the global Cold War would end. Overall, this work will remain a valuable resource for studying the relationship between China, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union, and the key issues that drove divisions between China and the Soviet Union. Khoo's book should appeal to readers, historians, and education professionals interested in the issue, as well as those interested in foreign policy and Asian studies.

Nicholas Khoo has performed a great service in offering a cogent and persuasive argument on the causes of the demise of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance during the later decades of the Cold War. Khoo's well documented analysis relies on a wide range of available source material and scholarly assessments, including Chinese-language material released since the end of the Cold War.

He carefully considers and shows the shortcomings of alternative explanations in scholarship of recent years regarding the behavior of Chinese, Vietnamese and Soviet decision makers that led to the end of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance in a border war in 1979 after two decades of deteriorating relations. Khoo finds recent scholarship has strayed too far from realist theory in endeavoring to understand Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War. In explaining the actions of Chinese and Vietnamese leaders, he returns to the wisdom of some of the early Cold War scholarship on Chinese foreign relations in the 1960s and 1970s. Using the state-centered realist perspective prevalent in assessments at that time, he makes the case that Vietnam's ever closer alignment with the Soviet Union during a period of intense Sino-Soviet rivalry and conflict fundamentally altered the perceptions and behaviors of China and Vietnam toward one another. The ultimate result was the 1979 war and over a decade of protracted conflict over territorial and other issues, with a focus on Chinese support for armed resistance to Vietnam's military involvement in Cambodia.

Khoo charts the change in Chinese-Vietnamese relations beginning with the fall of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and the emergence of a new Kremlin hierarchy led by Leonid Brezhnev. The new Soviet leaders showed ever greater interest in building closer relations with Vietnam for a variety of reasons, including the intensifying Soviet rivalry with China. As Sino-Soviet tension rose, reaching a high point during the publicized military clashes along the Sino-Soviet border in 1969, China came to view the Soviet Union as its primary adversary and saw rapidly developing Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation as a threat to China. As Vietnam and the Soviet Union had strong interests in developing even closer cooperation, China's focus on Moscow as its "principal enemy" during years of great tensions in Sino-Soviet relations until the 1980s fundamentally altered China's approach to Vietnam and Vietnam's approach to China, resulting in the end of their alliance.

Khoo's use of realist theory to discern the main determinant—i.e. China's view of the USSR as its principal enemy-- in the demise of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance provides an important corrective to some prominent assessments that have found realist theory wanting in explaining Chinese foreign relations during the Cold War. It notably stands in contrast with the influential work of Chen Jian and other specialists who have given less emphasis to the importance of the Soviet threat in China's foreign policy calculations in the late 1960s and early 1970s while offering explanations of Chinese foreign policy behavior based on Maoist ideological fervor and world view. The Khoo work will strengthen the arguments of specialists who see realism as the dominant strain in the foreign policy decision making of the People's Republic of China.

However, while this reviewer found the Khoo assessment to be more persuasive than other competing scholarly perspectives, this book will not end the debates over what drives Chinese foreign policy and specifically what caused the breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese alignment in these decades. Among the salient reasons for continued scholarly uncertainty and debate is the absence of sufficient reliable and accessible information on what Chinese and Vietnamese decision makers were thinking as they dealt with the often tumultuous developments of the late 1960s and 1970s. Khoo's assessment focuses more on China than Vietnam and musters good evidence to show a pattern of the primacy of the Soviet factor in Chinese calculations in dealing with Vietnam after the mid-1960s. But the twists and turns in Chinese foreign policy during this period were many. Showing Chinese leadership calculations clearly at each turn is beyond the scope of existing source materials. Thus, the many specialists who see Chinese-Vietnamese frictions as driven fundamentally by bilateral disputes over territorial issues and influence in Indochina and Southeast Asia may not be persuaded by Khoo's analysis and may continue to focus on evidence they see supporting their line of assessment.

Khoo's emphasis on the importance of the Soviet threat also shows some uncertainties in the presentation in the book. At times, he avers that the USSR was seen as China's main threat in the mid-1960s, even though the authoritative Chinese depiction of the Soviet Union as China's main adversary appears later, in 1969. He seems to depict the Soviet threat to China and China's "conflict" with the Soviet Union as being worse in 1973 than earlier. In fact, China at this time appeared in a better military and international position to deal with Soviet pressure than in 1969. Its military preparations included deployment of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles. China's international standing was much improved with the opening to many countries, entry into the United Nations, and alignment with the United States against Soviet 'hegemonism.' Unlike in 1969, Chinese and Soviet forces were not shooting at one another in 1973 and later.

This reviewer also sees a shortcoming in the absence of consideration of domestic debate in China over policy toward the USSR and Vietnam, among other key issues facing Chinese leaders at this time. Khoo rarely addresses possible domestic debate over foreign policy in China. The Chinese leadership is depicted as unified and focused on dealing with salient issues, notably the danger of Soviet pressure and threat. In a reference to possible leadership disagreement over foreign policy, Khoo notes on page 67 that Chinese memoirs and released documents show little resistance to Mao's plan to open to the United States.

To this reviewer, this kind of treatment is incomplete. While released Chinese documents may not discuss leadership differences, foreign scholarly and specialist assessments of Chinese statements and media show sometimes glaring differences in opinions on how China should deal with the United States, the Soviet Union and other salient foreign policy questions. The enormous changes in Chinese foreign policy during the 1960s and 1970s obviously created winners and losers in the Chinese leadership. The political and personal stakes of leadership competition were very high in the continuing tense political struggles during the ongoing Cultural Revolution. The stakes were seen vividly in the death of Defense Minister Lin Biao and his family and the arrest and imprisonment of the Chinese military high command in 1971, the second purge of Deng Xiaoping in early 1976 after his

rehabilitation in 1973, and the arrest and imprisonment of the radical leaders known as the gang of four in October 1976.

Among a few other questions posed by this fine book, the author gives almost no attention to the reported disruptions in the late 1960s of Soviet arms shipments to Vietnam by rail through China. Were these few and far between and of little consequence? At the time they were seen as a graphic indicator of Chinese dissatisfaction with Vietnam's increasing alignment with the USSR. Also, the presence of many thousands of Chinese military road builders in Laos throughout this period is referred to a few times but is not systematically assessed. Do we know China's motives for this activity and the respective views of Vietnam and the Laotian communists?

A final reflection on this kind of book is that emphasis on searching for the most important cause in Chinese foreign policy behavior may lead to greater precision in the analysis of specific instances and issues. However, the turmoil in Chinese foreign relations throughout the first forty years of the People's Republic of China probably requires an eclectic approach giving due consideration to realist and non-realist theoretical perspectives as specialists continue their efforts to build a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind Chinese foreign policy behavior and their implications.

Nicholas Khoo has written an original and compelling analysis of the breakdown of the Sino-Soviet alliance and its impact on the Sino-Vietnamese alliance in his recently published book *Collateral Damage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). Khoo bases his analysis on new Chinese sources as well as recent English-language literature on the subject.

In *Collateral Damage* Khoo sets out to examine why the alliance between Beijing and Hanoi degenerated “from close cooperation to intense conflict? (2).” Khoo employs principal enemy theory as his framework for analysis. This is grounded in the neo-realist school and stresses the importance of material factors in inter-state behaviour. Khoo depreciates the explanatory power of ideational frameworks such as constructivism in particular.

*Collateral Damage* is organised into six chapters and follows a chronological approach. In chapter one Khoo considers three broad explanations of why the Sino-Vietnamese alliance was terminated: (1) specific bilateral issues; (2) the Soviet Union as China’s principal enemy; and (3) theory of alliances or balance of threat theory (5). Khoo asks himself this question: “In explaining the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance, what was the relative role of the Soviet factor, as opposed to a variety of bilateral issues such as disputes over ideology; land and maritime borders; the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam; and Vietnam’s bid to establish a sphere of influence over Cambodia and Laos? (3).”

Khoo specifies that his dependent variable is the direction of the conflict in Sino-Vietnamese relations and his independent variable is Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation (12). He interrogates and dismisses explanations 1 and 2.

Khoo’s central thesis is that the casual factor determining China’s policy towards Vietnam lay in the Sino-Soviet relationship. When China determined that the Soviet Union was its principal enemy, China then viewed its relations with Vietnam within this framework. When Soviet-Vietnamese relations improved, Sino-Vietnamese relations deteriorated. Conversely, when Soviet-Vietnamese relations declined, Sino-Vietnamese relations improved.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the following issues: the termination of the Sino-Soviet alliance and its implications for China’s policy towards Vietnam (1964-1968); the Sino-Soviet conflict during the Vietnam War (1968-1973); Sino-Soviet relations from the Paris Peace Agreements until reunification (1973-1975); and the breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance leading to the 1979 border war (1975-1979). Khoo ends his analysis with a discussion of the factors that influenced the normalisation of Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1990-1991 and then provides an overview of his main thesis and theoretical framework.

In each of these chapters Khoo applies his principal enemy framework to a particular period of time to explain Chinese policy towards Vietnam. Khoo tests and dismisses alternate hypotheses advanced in the scholarly literature.

Without taking issue with Khoo's main thesis and conclusion, this commentary raises three sets of lower order issues that arise from Khoo's methodology: sources, unit of analysis, and alliance theory.

First, as noted above, Khoo has advanced our knowledge of Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese relations by introducing new Chinese language material and recent English-language literature. Quite clearly the publication of Chinese language materials has grown over the past decade and has provided rich insights into Chinese decision-making with respect to Vietnam. Russian language materials too have added to our knowledge but their access by foreign scholars has been limited. Vietnam has only recently begun to release material from its archives.<sup>1</sup> This material is only just beginning to be exploited by foreign scholars.

One weakness in Khoo's use of English-language sources is his neglect to consult the full range of material on Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese relations written by western Vietnam specialists<sup>2</sup> and, conversely, his frequent reliance on western China and Soviet specialists to interpret Vietnamese intentions and behaviour. Two examples will suffice. Khoo argues that Vietnam's fourth national party congress in December 1976 marked a major turning point towards Moscow with the dismissal of all former ambassadors to China from the Central Committee. To document his point Khoo cites Robert Ross.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Vietnam also dismissed all former ambassadors to the Soviet Union at the same time (Thayer 1988). In addition, Vietnam also adopted a five-year plan dependent on a 'quadrilateral balance' in foreign assistance in which Soviet aid was balanced by expected contributions from the United States, and Chinese assistance was balanced by aid from Eastern European and other donors.<sup>4</sup>

The second example concerns Khoo's discussion of the ethnic Chinese (or Hoa) aspect of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Here Khoo overlooks the copious publications of Swedish

---

<sup>1</sup> Pham, Quang Minh, "Teaching International Relations in Vietnam: Changes and Challenges," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol. 9, 2009, 131-155.

<sup>2</sup> See William S. Turley, "Vietnamese Security in Domestic and Regional Focus: The Political-Economic Nexus," in Richard Ellings and Sheldon Simon, eds., *Southeast Asian Security in the New Millennium* (Armonk: M E. Sharpe, 2009), 175-220; Alexander Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty in the Breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese Relations," *Pacific Affairs* 52(3), 1979, 381-409; and Carlyle A. Thayer, "Development Strategies in Vietnam: The Fourth National Congress of the Vietnam Communist Party," *Asian Profile* [Hong Kong], (June 1979), vol. 7, no. 3, 275-286; *ibid.*, "Foreign Policy Orientations of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," in Kernal S. Sandhu, ed., *Southeast Asian Affairs* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1977), 306-324; *ibid.*, "Vietnam's External Policy: An Overview," *Pacific Community* [Tokyo] 9(2), 1977, 212-231.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China's Vietnam Policy, 1965-1979*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Thayer, "Development Strategies in Vietnam: The Fourth National Congress of the Vietnam Communist Party," 284.



scholar Ramses Amer.<sup>5</sup> If Khoo had addressed Amer's arguments he may well have been able to strengthen his case that the ethnic Chinese issue was not the prime cause of the breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

Second, Khoo generally treats Vietnam as a unit of analysis that responds to shifts in the material balance of power by aligning itself with China or the Soviet Union. Thus Khoo argues that Vietnam began its decisive turn towards the Soviet Union as early as 1964 and relies on the work of Stephen Morris, whom the author deems unreliable.<sup>6</sup> Khoo ignores Vietnam's tilt towards China in December 1963 when the ninth plenum of the Vietnam Workers' Party adopted the resolution on the international situation, 'Oppose revisionism and rightist opportunism, the principal threats to the communist movement and international workers.'

Vietnam's decision to lean towards China for support was based on the Soviet Union's promotion of peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world which Hanoi deemed as revisionist. The ideological justification for Vietnam's pro-China tilt was challenged by a number of leading party officials who still viewed the Soviet Union as the leader of the world communist movement. The dissenters were arrested and brought to trial in 1967 in what was then termed the "anti-party" or the "anti-revisionist affair" (Stowe 2001 and Quinn-Judge 2005).<sup>7</sup> During the mid-1960s a number of senior Vietnamese officers who attended training courses in the Soviet Union refused to return home and lived out their lives in exile.

Third, Khoo's use of balance of threat theory places heavy reliance on the concept of "alliance," first between China and Vietnam and later between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. This privileges material factors in the bilateral relationship, particularly the military dimension. Quite clearly, Vietnam did not have a formal alliance with China or the Soviet Union comparable to the 1950 mutual security treaty between Moscow and Beijing. And neither was Vietnam ever a member of the Warsaw Pact. The use of the term "alliance" in Khoo's analysis fails to capture an important dimension of Vietnam's external outlook. Vietnam's communist leaders always thought of themselves as part of the socialist camp even when they were planning the unification of the country by force. Vietnam expected support from both China and the Soviet Union in this endeavour. Vietnam's policy after 1964 was to try and preserve some semblance of unity in the socialist camp. Vietnam's

---

<sup>5</sup> Ramses Amer, *The Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam and Sino-Vietnamese Relations* (Kuala Lumpur: Forum Malaysia, 1991) and *China, Vietnam and the Chinese Minority in Vietnam*. Copenhagen Discussion Paper No. 22. Copenhagen: Center for East and Southeast Asia, University of Copenhagen, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Carlyle A. Thayer, Review of Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War* in *The International History Review* 22(3), 2000, 729-731.

<sup>7</sup> See Judy Stowe, "Revisionnisme a Vietnam," *Communisme*, no. 65-66, 2001, 233-249 and Sophie Quinn-Judge, "The Ideological Debate in the DRV and the Significance of the anti-Party Affair, 1967-68," *Cold War History*, November, 5(4), 2005, 479-500.

alignment with the Soviet Union can be taken as a given, a starting point for analysing Hanoi's policies towards China. What needs to be explained is not Vietnam's alignment with the Soviet Union, but moments when Vietnam aligned with China. In the 1960s China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a shock to Hanoi.

In the 1970s when China advanced Chairman Mao's 'three worlds theory,' Vietnam was an adherent to the Soviet formulation of 'three revolutionary currents.' Mao's theory characterized the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union as one of "colluding and contending." This was anathema to Hanoi (Thayer 1984). The first revolutionary current in their view was the leadership of the Soviet Union over the second current (advanced industrial countries) and third current (movements for national liberation).

The introduction of the above three points is not meant to detract from Khoo's excellent exposition of his thesis. Khoo set out to explain how the termination of the Sino-Soviet alliance impacted China's relations with Vietnam. His analysis is robust. The purpose here is to add some depth in our understanding of Vietnam as a unit actor.

The Chinese and Soviet relationship with Vietnam during the Cold War hegemonic wars in Indochina witnessed a number of vicissitudes linked to the Sino-Soviet rivalry. These ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance and finally resulted to a war between the former two wartime comrades in 1979. In *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance*, Nicholas Khoo brings a fresh perspective to the long-held debate on the causes of the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance in light of the Chinese-language documents released since the end of the Cold War. Khoo argues that the Sino-Soviet conflict was a constant factor in influencing the durability of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance. Hanoi's regional bid for hegemony, namely Vietnam's attempt to establish a sphere of influence over Cambodia and Laos, played out as a proxy war in the Sino-Soviet rivalry. Khoo finds alternative explanations to be less convincing in terms of both timing and geopolitics. In addition to his cogent analysis of the causes of the termination of Sino-Vietnamese alliance, Khoo endeavors to argue by use of neorealist theory to explain the origins of the Sino-Soviet conflict and also to examine the applicability of principle enemy theory to help interpret Chinese foreign policy in the Cold War and post Cold War era.

### Scope of Analysis

Khoo projects his analysis of the Sino-Soviet conflict and the ensuing impact upon the Sino-Vietnamese alliance into the dynamics of the trilateral relations between China, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam during four time periods from 1964 to 1979.

The first stage of the Sino-Soviet conflict took place during the period from 1964-1968. With the ideological divergence looming large after the fall of Nikita Khrushchev, China perceived the new leadership of the Soviet Union as still adhering to a revisionist line. This perception was followed by China's refusal to countenance the coordinated trilateral "United Action" advocated by the Soviet Union, which was viewed by Mao as an ideological and potential strategic threat to China. The increasing Sino-Soviet conflict had a significant impact on Soviet-Vietnamese relations. First, after the de facto Soviet-Vietnamese alliance established after 1965, increasing cooperation between Moscow and Hanoi in areas of diplomatic, economic and military aid led to a competing effort to stimulate Sino-Vietnamese cooperation. Second, from the mid- 1960s onward, followed by the gradual shift of China's perception of its main threat from the United States to the Soviet Union, burgeoning Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation caused increasing Sino-Vietnamese conflict over the issue of Soviet material aid to North Vietnam and the deviation of Hanoi's war strategy from that of China.

The second stage of Sino-Soviet conflict emerged after the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968. This marked a watershed in Sino-Soviet relations and the ongoing trends of the Cold War. The act of invasion instantly transformed the Soviet Union into China's principal enemy. Khoo notes that prior to the development of the Chinese view of Moscow as its principal enemy, there was a qualitative deterioration observed by China

during the Cold War as China considered itself to be encircled by the Soviet Union and the United States. Denounced by Beijing as the 'social-imperialist' superpower, the Soviet Union posed an escalating threat to China's allies in Eastern Europe. By 1968, China's security stagnated into a quagmire which limited its capabilities, both in terms of internal balancing --because of the resources diverted to Vietnam War -- and external balancing against the Soviet threat through alliances with other states, an option which had been terminated by China's own actions and its ideological proclivities. In contrast to the deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia resulted in an improvement in Sino-Vietnamese relations due to each power's respective considerations. For the Soviet Union, Hanoi's support was linked to its encirclement policy directed against China; for Vietnam, it was conducive to maintain and increase support from the Soviet Union. The Vietnamese decision directly led to an expanding conflict in Sino-Vietnamese relations, and the tension was further intensified by the 'negotiating while fighting' strategy adopted by Vietnam as it entered into negotiations with the United States.

During the third period from 1973-1975, the Sino-Soviet conflict was even more interconnected with the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. On one hand, the Sino-U.S. rapprochement and China's de facto alliance with the United States helped to balance the threat from the Soviet Union. On the other hand, with the increasing Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation and Beijing's opposition to the prospect of a unified Vietnam, the Sino-Vietnamese conflict expanded with China's aid to forces antithetical to North Vietnamese interests, namely to support the insurgence of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

The final stage of Sino-Soviet conflict emerged after the American failure in Vietnam and was defined by an assertive Soviet foreign policy, which was reflected in the three spheres of the military threat to China, Soviet-U.S. relations, and Soviet policy toward the Third World. The increase in Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation led to a steady increase in Sino-Vietnamese conflict. China saw the regional conflict in Indochina primarily through the prism of the Sino-Soviet conflict, and the irrevocable tension finally led to the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1979 and the termination of the alliance.

### **Contending theories**

In his examination of the alternative explanations of the triangular Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese relationship, Khoo first rules out the explanation of an external cause of the Sino-U.S. rapprochement in Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese trilateral relations, and then refutes the major competing bilateral thesis which locates the durability of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance in a particular bilateral issue, and attributes the cause of Sino-Vietnamese conflict to the bid for regional hegemony.

Regarding the Sino-U.S. rapprochement, the author argues that although it had a corrosive effect on Soviet-Vietnamese relations, it was neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the termination of the alliance. First, the geographical consequences of the Sino-U.S. rapprochement were more deleterious to Vietnamese security than to Soviet-U.S. détente. Second, the time lag between the Sino-U.S. rapprochement which occurred in 1972, and the Sino-Vietnamese conflict which became clear in 1978 is insufficient to explain the

necessary cause of the two events. Third, the conscious decision of the Vietnamese to align with the Soviets and with Soviet aid, and thereby to establish a sphere of influence over Cambodia and Laos, suggested a dominating influence from the Soviet Union. As a result, the escalating conflict between China and Vietnam in the post 1973 period was defined by the closer Vietnamese alignment with the Soviets.

The author challenges the bilateral thesis in explaining the causes of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. The view that it was based upon the Vietnamese attempt to establish a sphere of influence over Cambodia and Lao fails to consider the motives behind Vietnam's behavior. It overlooks the important role of the Soviet Union which both supported Hanoi and provided it with the capability to defy China's warnings on the issue. A convincing explanation informed by principal enemy theory should place the Sino-Vietnamese conflict against the larger backdrop of the Sino-Soviet conflict. In this interpretation, the Chinese viewed the intensification of Moscow's material and diplomatic cooperation with Hanoi as constituting a strategy to consolidate a Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. In this respect, Vietnamese foreign policy was seen as a piece of Soviet encirclement policy aimed at China. This security problem was referred to as China's perception of the deterioration in relations since the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, and the threats from the Sino-Soviet conflict further drove the Sino-Vietnamese alliance into collapse.

This book is very useful for understanding the complicated situation in East Asia during the Cold War years, especially relating to China-Vietnam-Soviet relations. However, we also think it needs to be improved in its thesis which should consider the broader background, namely from an international history approach to study the interactions of related countries, including China, Vietnam, the Soviet Union and the U.S. The author uses many newly-released Chinese materials, but does not cite the necessary Vietnamese and Russian documents.

Before I address the points raised by the various participants, I would like to thank Thomas Maddux and Xia Yafeng for organizing this roundtable. I would also like to express my thanks to Li Xiaobing, Robert Sutter, Carlyle Thayer, Wang Chao and Zhao Xuegong for taking the time to evaluate *Collateral Damage*.

It is appropriate to open with a preliminary comment on my primary aim in writing *Collateral Damage*, which is an interpretive one.<sup>1</sup> To be more specific, the book seeks to illustrate how a basic realist model can be used to explain the dynamics of China's respective relationships with the Soviet Union and the Vietnamese communists from 1964 to 1991.<sup>2</sup> Soviet-Vietnamese relations are discussed in that context. As Robert Sutter correctly notes, this is quite a different vantage point from some of the excellent studies on Chinese foreign policy that have been published in the last decade. To varying degrees, and with a prominent exception,<sup>3</sup> these studies find realist theory wanting. Instead, ideology is viewed as a more persuasive lens by which to understand the dynamics of China's Cold War era policy.<sup>4</sup> While the efforts of these researchers in unearthing new material are both valuable and impressive, I am not persuaded by the theoretical thrust of this literature. It is imperative to explain why. In the realist perspective, ideology is a "cloak"<sup>5</sup> that masks the operation of state interests. These interests are defined in the first instance, not in ideological terms, but in terms of the pursuit of security, and when required, power.<sup>6</sup> To the extent that realists believe that there is a hierarchy of causes in world politics, ideology comes into play as a secondary or tertiary cause.<sup>7</sup> *Collateral Damage's* theoretical perspective is thus one that Chinese Cold War foreign policy studies have moved away

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> For an important recent study adopting a realist perspective see, Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp.7, pp.205-237; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p.221; Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp.1-17.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), p.145.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2006); Kenneth Waltz, *Man, State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p.145; Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, pp. 46-48.

from. This has not been without cost. Even if analysts disagree with the claims of realist theory, or the interpretations offered by realist-informed studies, a greater and more sophisticated engagement with the realist literature will arguably temper some of the conclusions drawn from non-realist based studies.<sup>8</sup> The field can only benefit from such a development.

All the participants in this roundtable discuss the issue of source material. Each feels that the manuscript could have been bolstered by my having consulted additional material on certain aspects of the Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese relationship. I agree, and shall elaborate a little on where I have found some of the suggestions to be particularly helpful. Carlyle Thayer usefully suggests that consulting Ramses Amer's writings could have strengthened my point in Chapter 5 that the ethnic Chinese issue is not the primary determinant of the basic trajectory in the Sino-Vietnamese alliance. He also correctly notes that additional coverage of the writings of certain Western Vietnamese specialists in Chapter 5 would have led to a different interpretation of Vietnamese behavior at the Fourth National Party Congress in 1976.<sup>9</sup> Thayer draws my attention to the fact that the Vietnamese leadership balanced the dismissal of all its former ambassadors to China, with the dismissal of all its former ambassadors to the Soviet Union. Li Xiaobing correctly points out that the narrative could have benefitted from my consulting PRC government documents that were declassified over the last decade, and most recently in 2008. Using this material would indeed have bolstered Chapter 2 of the book, which deals with the 1964 through 1968 period. In that respect, it is important to note that international researchers are only able to access archival material in the Chinese Foreign Ministry archives for the 1949 to 1965 period.

Sutter raises the interesting and related point of the limitations of our existing sources of data. While he finds *Collateral Damage* to be "more persuasive" than existing accounts in the literature, he nevertheless suggests that the book "will not end the debates over what drives Chinese foreign policy and specifically what caused the breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese alignment in these decades." In this view, the "absence of sufficient reliable and accessible information" with respect to Chinese and Vietnamese decision-makers means that "showing Chinese leadership calculation clearly at each turn is beyond the scope of existing source materials." Sutter is, of course, correct about the challenges of obtaining high quality (particularly archival) source material on intra-communist bloc relations in Asia, and the implications this has for any analysis. On this score, recently published research suggests that there may yet be cause for cautious optimism.<sup>10</sup> Noteworthy in this

---

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Khoo "Realism Redux: Investigating the Causes and Effects of Sino-U.S. Rapprochement," *Cold War History*, 5 no.4 (November 2005), pp. 531-551.

<sup>9</sup> Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, p. 119.

<sup>10</sup> Kosai Path, "The Economic Factor in the Sino-Soviet Split, 1972-75: An Analysis of Vietnamese Archival Sources," *Cold War History*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (November 2011), pp. 519-555; Edward C. O'Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Balazs Szalontai, "From Battlefield into Marketplace: The End of the Cold War in Indochina, 1985-1989," in

respect is H-Diplo editor Xia Yafeng's own research, which bears directly on an important issue covered in *Collateral Damage*. According to Xia, Chinese documents and memoirs that have been released since the 1990's suggest that neither Lin Biao, nor other leaders played any appreciable role in, or mounted any opposition to, China's policy toward the United States in respect to rapprochement.<sup>11</sup> This finding is utilized in both the text and extended note of *Collateral Damage*.<sup>12</sup> In this particular instance, Xia's research essentially supports both the interpretation I offer of Sino-American rapprochement, and the utility of the unitary rational actor model which is adopted in the book.

Having dealt with the common points raised, I will now focus on the comments of particular panelists. Carlyle Thayer suggests that there are important limitations in the use of the word "alliance" to describe Hanoi's view of the world. This is an astute point which I am sympathetic to. While the word "alliance" is probably the best that we have to characterize the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, it does not fully capture the intensity of the bond that developed between the Chinese and Vietnamese in their respective struggles for autonomy and independence. Thus, there is a deep element of tragedy in the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations that is covered in the text, and which lingers on into the present period.<sup>13</sup> Given the sacrifices the Vietnamese communists bore during the Cold War, they arguably had more right than any to ask their Chinese and Soviet comrades to put aside their differences for the overall good of the Communist bloc.<sup>14</sup> Hanoi's allies did not do so, and this had a destructive effect on Sino-Vietnamese relations. Thayer also suggests that I have overlooked Hanoi's tilt toward Beijing beginning in December 1963, which was undertaken in response to Moscow's policy of peaceful co-existence with Washington. My response to this observation is merely to note that I was aware of this development, but excluded it from the discussion as it fell outside the time-period of my analysis.

Robert Sutter and Xia Yafeng draw attention to the important issue of when exactly the Soviet Union was viewed by China as its main threat. In responding to this point it is important that I first re-state my view as articulated in the text. It was the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 that represented a fundamental turning point in Sino-Soviet relations, and by extension, the Cold War.<sup>15</sup> As I argue, "this act instantly transformed the

---

Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergey Radchenko eds. *The End of the Cold War and the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 155-172.

<sup>11</sup> Xia Yafeng, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1968-February 1972," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 no. 2 (2006), pp. 2-28.

<sup>12</sup> Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, pp.67, 190.

<sup>13</sup> See Nicholas Khoo, "Fear Factor: Northeast Asia and China's Rise," *Asian Security*, 7 no. 2 (July 2011), pp. 109-112.

<sup>14</sup> See quote by Zbigniew Brzezinski in Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, p.212, footnote number 3.

<sup>15</sup> Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, p. 45, p. 157.



Soviet Union into Beijing's principal enemy."<sup>16</sup> The 1964-68 period covered in Chapter 2 represented a transition period where the principal threat posed to China began to change from the U.S. to the Soviet Union. In mid-June of 1965, Zhou Enlai is cited as viewing the U.S. as the main threat to China, against the backdrop of an increasing Soviet threat.<sup>17</sup>

Sutter suggests that there are some "uncertainties in presentation" in respect to the timing of the threat posed by the Soviet Union to China. He observes that China's military capabilities were better in 1973 than 1969, and that "Chinese and Soviet forces were not shooting at one another in 1973 and later." This assessment of Chinese capabilities in respect to the Soviet Union strikes me as under-stating Chinese vulnerabilities and fears across the time-period examined. *Collateral Damage* presents a narrative of progressive improvements in Soviet conventional and nuclear deterrence capabilities that the Chinese desperately scrambled to counter via internal and external balancing.<sup>18</sup>

Relatedly, Xia's comment suggests (but does not state explicitly) that whereas I have identified the emergence of the Soviet Union as China's principal enemy in 1968, he would locate the date sometime in the period during April-May 1965.<sup>19</sup> As evidence, he cites the Central Military Commission's meetings during this period that identified the "Three Norths," China's northern, northeastern, and northwestern regions as "China's main strategic regions." It should be noted that Xia's view challenges the conventional interpretation of the Third Line Defence, including Lorenz Luthi's important article on the subject.<sup>20</sup> I find Xia's proposition to be an interesting one. Nevertheless, I would suggest that we require both more evidence, and a more direct claim from Xia on this matter. Suffice it to say that I will look forward to his research on this issue.

In responding to Sutter's comments that pertain to research methodology, it is, I think, helpful to briefly elaborate upon the methodology adopted in *Collateral Damage*. I adopt a qualitative process-tracing approach, where alternative causes are evaluated and their relative cogency assessed.<sup>21</sup> Sutter advocates the merits of "an eclectic approach, giving

---

<sup>16</sup> Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> See in particular Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, pp. 104-106.

<sup>19</sup> Thus, Xia notes: "When the Vietnam War escalated in early 1965, through diplomatic signaling China and the United States came to a tacit agreement that neither would cross the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. In Mao's view, the United States no longer constituted the main threat to China's security. The larger threat of war came from the north."

<sup>20</sup> Lorenz Luthi, "The Vietnam War and China's Third-Line Defence Planning before the Cultural Revolution, 1964-1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10 no.1 (Winter 2008), pp.26-51.

<sup>21</sup> For further elaboration on this approach see Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Jack Snyder, "Richness, Rigor, and Relevance in the Study of Soviet Foreign Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 9 no. 3 (1984-85), pp. 169-193.

due consideration to realist and non-realist theoretical perspectives.” My focus on identifying the primary determinant in the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance may leave the impression that it is at variance with Sutter’s. In principle, if not in practice, the two approaches can complement each other. Indeed, this may be an avenue for future research to explore. To elaborate, taking Sutter’s comments in its entirety, I understand him to be saying that the realist approach advanced in *Collateral Damage* is a fruitful “first-cut” explanation, which can then be supplemented, at appropriate points, by reference to other factors including domestic politics, and individual decision-makers. If this is a correct interpretation, then there is potential for further studies that accept the basic explanation laid out in *Collateral Damage*, but seek to elucidate the relative influence of other factors in their capacity as secondary or tertiary factors in influencing the trajectory of Sino-Vietnamese relations. This hierarchy of causes approach is compatible with the approach I adopt.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, it is particularly helpful that Sutter has identified some issues which could add further depth and nuance to the text.

It remains for me to conclude by thanking the participants in the roundtable for their role in making it an informative and constructive experience.

---

**Copyright © 2011-2012 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.** H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

---

---

<sup>22</sup> Carr, *What is History?*, p. 117.