

adopt a conciliatory tone in order to accuse its opponent of intransigence, and there will probably be a lengthy bargaining process concerning the form of any negotiations. To the extent that each side believes that time is in its favour, this scenario possesses certain advantages. For China and its "allies" in the struggle against Vietnam, the objective will be to persuade the latter to honour its own commitments in 1990. Despite symbolic withdrawals of its troops (or rotations) Hanoi will still be faced at that time with significant resistance and will thus be unable to withdraw. If, however, it then fails to honour its commitments it will lose face and its political credibility will be considerably damaged. By continuing to take no notice of the positive signals which have come from Vietnam, China puts a little more pressure on Vietnam to keep its promises. One of those whom I interviewed in Hanoi put it this way: "We have realized for a long time that the Chinese have set a trap for us by insisting on the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of our forces, but by insisting on this they make it impossible for us to carry it out."¹¹⁸

Most of the members of ASEAN, apart from Indonesia and Malaysia, would not be dissatisfied with this scenario, for if the situation goes on Vietnam will become even weaker. As far as the United States is concerned China's unrelenting opposition to Vietnam would allow it to wait for more favorable internal political conditions before resuming a genuine dialogue with the Vietnamese. In addition, Washington sees China's firmness as being the best guarantee of a more gradual rapprochement between Beijing and Moscow.

Despite the political and economic costs involved, this scenario would also have certain advantages for the Vietnamese, since it would enable them to establish themselves more firmly in Cambodia and make the situation there less easily reversible once they had shown that it had been forced upon them by the attitude of the Chinese. A further advantage for the Vietnamese, which would involve a corresponding loss for China and ASEAN, would be the latter's inability to keep the Sihanoukist National Army within the CGDK coalition, since in the long term the Prince might get tired of China supporting the Khmer Rouge. If

¹¹⁸ The author's interview with a deputy minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanoi, July 1987.