

Now the situation was different. There had been numerous developments concerning various aspects of the conflict but perhaps the most important of all was the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1985 as leader of the Soviet Communist Party. The advent of a new General Secretary, while it did not radically change a tide which had already begun to flow, would nevertheless have a gradual effect on Soviet policy in East Asia. It seems probable, though it would be hard to prove, that from the spring of 1985 the Sino-Soviet rapprochement had a definite effect on the attitudes of the three members of the Soviet Union-China-Vietnam triangle. The year 1985 was notable for "the new Soviet diplomatic offensive" in Southeast Asia and, to quote the title of an article in *Le Monde*, "For China, 1985 will have been the year of the Soviet Union."⁹⁶

It is worth recalling several events which took place at that time. First of all, in March, Mikhail Kapitsa, the Soviet Union's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs in charge of Asia, made a month-long tour of the region. Everywhere he went, and particularly in Beijing, he maintained that Moscow intended to act as a guarantor of the peace in Southeast Asia.⁹⁷ Then on 17 April, Deng Xiaoping declared that the Soviet Union could keep its bases in Vietnam provided the Vietnamese troops were withdrawn from Kampuchea.⁹⁸ At the beginning of May the Soviet Union agreed to act as an intermediary between ASEAN and Vietnam to transmit the former's proposal concerning the "proximity talks."⁹⁹

Were these incidents signs that the Soviet Union was putting pressure on the Vietnamese leaders or were they, rather, a reflection of the fact that the Vietnamese had realized that they would have to be more flexible in view of the improved relations between Moscow and Beijing? While it is difficult to give any definite reply to this question it is worth noting that on 17 July 1985 the Vietnamese ambassador in Bangkok expressed a new attitude concerning the "proximity talks": "Prince

⁹⁶ *Le Monde*, 20 December 1985, page 4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, page 1.

⁹⁸ Gregory D. Knight, "China's Soviet Policy in the Gorbachev Era," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2, Spring 1986, page 101.

⁹⁹ *SWB*, FE/7941/i; 3 May 1985.