

Virtually the whole PAVN had moved south of the 17th Parallel by April 1975. American officials pointed out that the buildup of Communist forces in the northern part of South Vietnam for the spring 1975 offensive began soon after the August 1973 Congressional decision to forbid the use of U.S. air power, thus eliminating any penalties to the North Vietnamese for offensive operations. Once North Vietnam was able to create a position of military superiority in the South by late 1974 while U.S. military supplies to Saigon dwindled, it was merely a matter of timing for Hanoi to inaugurate its move down the peninsula. Military analysts noted that the PAVN appeared to be following Soviet military doctrine through the extensive use of field artillery and tanks to mass overwhelming Soviet-supplied fire-power before moving from one area to another. Field artillery and tanks were crucial to this strategy as the U.S.S.R. had supplied the North with hundreds of such pieces since 1974. Russian anti-aircraft weapons neutralized the South's air force, which had already been crippled through a lack of spare parts and a decentralized command system whose political purpose was to prevent an air-force coup but the negative military effect of which was to prevent the concentration of air-power in the regions where it was needed. Thieu's decision to withdraw from the central highlands was probably based on the belief that the ARVN did not possess enough supplies to hold the region until new U.S. aid should arrive after the next Congressional appropriations season (1976). The withdrawal became a rout, however, because of a total absence of military preparation, leadership and planning for civilian refugees. The North Vietnamese followed the retreating Southerners, dropping off political cadres and occupation forces as they moved down the peninsula. In the process, the Vietnamese Communists (and their Khmer Rouge counterparts in Cambodia) captured well over \$4 billion (U.S.) of American military equipment, which might well have the unintended effect of loosening Hanoi's almost total dependence on the Soviet Union for military supplies. (The parallel between the North Vietnamese acquisition of American equipment in 1975 and the Chinese Communist capture of U.S. equipment from the Nationalists between 1947 and 1950 is striking.) Hanoi's military press disseminated instructions on the collection and care of this "war booty". It was clearly destined for incorporation into the Vietnamese Communists' military inventory.

At this point, one can only speculate

about the kinds of policy the Vietminh will follow in the South. Dinh Ba Thi, the chief PRG delegate in Saigon, claimed that non-Communist "third forces" members were being given positions of responsibility in areas taken over since the March offensive. And Hanoi's military press has noted that captured ARVN personnel may be used to maintain and instruct the PAVN in the use of captured equipment.

### Problems ahead

The North has overrun so much of the South so rapidly that there are bound to be serious problems of administration and population control. To attempt the immediate imposition of a North Vietnamese-style peasant-mobilization polity is probably beyond Hanoi's political capability given the current urban demographic structure of the South (almost 60 per cent of the population in cities). Therefore, the North may well prefer a Southern Communist-controlled coalition government for an indefinite transitional period, during which the population will be relocated in the countryside and the standard of life in the cities will be reduced from the artificially high, service-sector dominant style that characterized the era of American largesse.

As for external relations, the chairman of the PRG Consultative Council has announced that his government is willing to establish ties with the United States (the DRV had earlier taken a similar position) and has even hinted that foreign investment and enterprises would be invited to continue, suggesting the need for external assistance in the South during the reconstruction period. How long this proffered welcome to outsiders will last is, of course, an open question.

### Asian reactions

Of major concern to both the United States and its Asian allies is the impact of a Communist victory in Indochina on the credibility of other American security commitments and on the region's general political orientation. While it is much too soon for any definitive description of these reactions, there is enough early evidence for some analysis of policy choices open to three Asian states that maintain military ties with the United States but to which the importance of Indochina varies. These are Thailand, the Philippines and Japan.

A Communist Indochina might be perceived as a threat by other Asian states under any of the following conditions: (a) as a base for subversion and infiltration against its immediate neighbours;

*Relocation  
of population  
to counteract  
artificial  
life style*