

government managed to assume a defensive posture by emphasizing that Vietnam had left it no option but to intervene with a punitive operation. In this way China gave the Soviet Union fair warning that it would be dangerous to intervene directly in this bilateral dispute, a dispute about which the US, the West and Japan had all been kept informed in a subtle way which somehow made it seem that they were in favour of China's actions.

On the battlefield Chinese troops were made unhappily aware of the obsolescence of both their tactics and their weapons. But by withdrawing their forces on 16 March, after a symbolic victory at Lang Son, China avoided the kind of escalation of the conflict which would have forced the Soviet Union to intervene directly. For their part, the Vietnamese showed considerable restraint in not ordering a general mobilization until 5 March and in delaying the transfer of their best divisions to the border area. Both countries also refrained from using their air forces for the duration of the conflict.

China abstained from giving Vietnam a "second lesson" in 1984 and 1985, after the Vietnamese offensive against the Khmer resistance movement in Kampuchea and Vietnam's incursions into Thailand. Once again Beijing's restraint was motivated not just by considerations of military weakness but also by its desire not to provoke a costly escalation of the conflict. On the one hand, China could not risk compromising its negotiations with the Soviet Union, and on the other, any renewed military action would have caused grave alarm among the members of ASEAN, most of which were only too ready to denounce Chinese ambitions in Southeast Asia.

If China seems to have lost several battles it has nonetheless no intention of losing the war, and the intransigence of its attitude to Hanoi is evidence of a strategy aimed at making Vietnam pay dearly for trying to maintain the status quo. The presence of a large number of Chinese troops just across the border and the fact that the Khmer Rouge faction of the CGDK is being supplied with arms, force Vietnam to maintain an expensive mobilization both on the border and in Kampuchea. The Chinese government also believes that the game is going in its favour and