

INTRODUCTION

The conflicts in Indochina no longer provoke international public opinion. There is an insidious tendency for the situation there to appear banal and for attention to be diverted to other regional conflicts. At the same time, the United States is still so traumatized by its defeat in Vietnam that it neither can nor will attach any further priority to Indochina in its foreign policy.

Since 1978 the complex nature of the dispute, the numerous issues at stake, and the character of the actors involved have combined to produce an intractable situation. Even though it is not long since Southeast Asia was seen as the focal point of international affairs, the international community now appears to believe that the vital points of tension have shifted elsewhere. However, the fact that Kampuchea has been occupied by Vietnamese troops since 1978 and the increased tension along the border between China and Vietnam has made Indochina a microcosm of all the various international antagonisms. These involve animosity between East and West, and between China and the Soviet Union, as well as the many regional antagonisms which result from the area's history and political geography.

From the point of view of a political analyst Indochina has thus become an arena wherein the best intentions, the most carefully considered initiatives and the most rational proposals all come to naught. By studying the successive attempts at mediation, all of which have proved illusory, one can reach a better understanding of the relations between the various forces, the pressures to which they are subject, and the effect of historical antagonisms upon them; above all one can better appreciate how all the parties involved retain their independence and