

1977, as head of a provisional revolutionary council. The regime of Pol Pot-Ieng Sary collapsed and China suffered a humiliation which surpassed her worst imaginings. Vietnam had succeeded in defying its powerful neighbour and in so doing abandoned its policy of seeking reconciliation with the other states in Southeast Asia. In its usual way, the Vietnamese government had pursued a strategy which combined clever timing (Christmas), with a favourable international situation and the use of military tactics well suited to achieving quick results; it thus succeeded in confronting the international community with a *fait accompli*.

Among the various reasons which led Vietnam to take this action was the need to secure its borders and put an end to military incursions into its territory. Most of all, however, it wished to placate public feeling in the South, where people were very unwilling to participate in a new struggle against Kampuchea. Vietnam paid little attention to international opinion and preferred instead to install a puppet government in Phnom Penh. On 18 February it concluded a treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation with this same government; the treaty was a duplicate of the one signed with Laos in July 1977. In this way Vietnam made its military presence legitimate.

On 17 February, the day before this treaty was signed, China threw more than 100,000 men into an attack on its border with Vietnam. This "lesson" which China intended to teach Vietnam came to an end on 5 March when China announced that it was withdrawing its forces. The operation had not been a great military success and had made China aware of the dilapidated state of its forces and the weakness of its commanders. The attack by China did not attract any reprisals on the part of the Soviet Union and was warmly welcomed by the members of ASEAN.

Thus, by the end of February 1979 the conflict between China and Vietnam had been superimposed on the problem of Kampuchea. This increased the stakes and introduced many more conflicting interests. The period of calm in Indochina had been short-lived and once again it had become a focal point of international tension.