

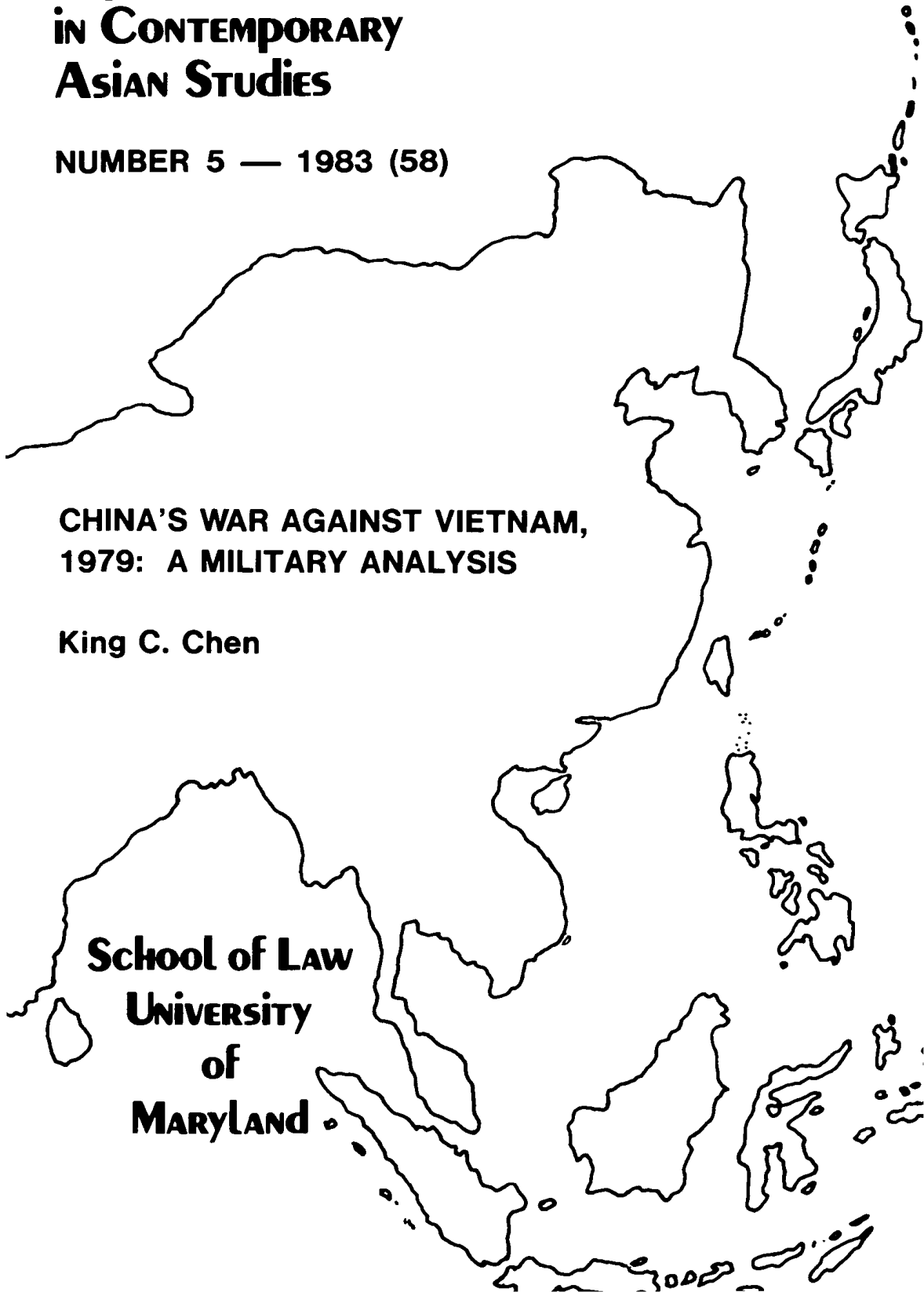
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**CHINA'S WAR AGAINST VIETNAM,
1979: A MILITARY ANALYSIS**

King C. Chen

**School of LAW
University
of
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CHINA'S WAR AGAINST VIETNAM, 1979: A Military Analysis*

KING C. CHEN

Never before had a socialist fraternal country launched a war against another as China did against Vietnam in 1979. The Soviet intervention in Hungary of 1956 was executed in the name of the Warsaw Pact forces under the "agreement" of the Pact members of which Hungary was (and still is) one. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was carried out in a similar fashion. China and Vietnam concluded no military agreement similar to the Warsaw Pact, nor had Vietnam "agreed" to China's military attacks. China's war with Vietnam was truly an unusual development in the Communist world.

Ho Chi Minh had repeatedly stated that China and Vietnam were comrades and brothers. As Marxist comrades, both sides are supposed to settle their disputes in a consultative and persuasive attitude along the party line and the Marxist theory. As oriental brothers, they are to resolve their problems in the spirit of brotherhood or in accordance with the principle of award and punishment for the maintenance of the family's relations. In this context, the "punitive" war against Vietnam was an action based more on traditional Chinese mentality and moral norms than on Marxist doctrine.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the Chinese military aspect of the war: its strategy, objectives, command system, war casualties, and, especially, evaluation and implications for the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

I. Military Strategy and Objectives

In writing on war in 1938, Mao Zedong interpreted Lenin's (actually Clausewitz's) views on the meaning of war and politics.¹ Mao wrote,

* This article is adapted from a book project: "China's War against Vietnam." The Pinyin system is used for names and materials from China (PRC); the Wade system, for names and materials from Taiwan (ROC).

¹ Lenin wrote: "War is simply the continuation of politics by other . . . means." See V. I. Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International," *Collected Works*, Vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 219. Lenin's statement was a quotation from Clausewitz. He

"When politics develops to a certain stage beyond which it cannot proceed by the usual means, war breaks out to sweep away the obstacles in the way."² China's "punitive war" against Vietnam, albeit in the name of "self-defensive counteroffensive," was launched under exactly such a policy consideration.

Broadly speaking, the Chinese leadership had pondered over a "punitive" action for almost two years (1977-1979).³ Its general purpose was "to sweep away the obstacles" by the military means in a hope that normal Sino-Vietnamese relations would be restored. Although the use of military forces to settle international disputes should be disapproved and condemned, Beijing's action was taken apparently as a last resort.

1. STRATEGY

Since its founding in 1927, the PLA has survived and grown under the doctrine and operations of "people's war."⁴ Even in the nuclear era, Beijing still praised, as recent as July 1977, the might of people's war over

also praised him: "such is the formula of Clausewitz, one of the greatest writers on the history of war." Mao, however, made no mention about Clausewitz but Lenin. Karl von Clausewitz's original phrase was: "War is not a mere act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means." See his book, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), Book One, p. 87 and Book Eight, p. 605.

² Mao Tse-tung, "On Protracted War," *Selected Military Writings* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963), p. 227.

³ Interviews in Hong Kong, Lo and Chen, March 27-28, 1979, and Lu, April 12, 1981 in New York.

⁴ Among numerous studies on the Chinese military affairs, the following volumes are often cited as very useful references: William W. Whitson (with Chen-hsia Huang), *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-71* (N.Y.: Praeger, 1973); Samuel B. Griffith II, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army* (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1967); John Gittings, *The Role of the Chinese Army* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Alexander L. George, *The Chinese Communist Army in Action* (N.Y.: Columbia U. Press, 1967); Alice Langley Hsieh, *Communist China's Strategy in the Nuclear Era* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962); Ellis Joffe, *Party and Army: Professionalism and Political Control in the Chinese Officer Corps, 1949-1964* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1965); Chester J. Cheng (ed.), *The Politics of the Chinese Red Army* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Publications, 1966); Michael Y.M. Kau (ed.), *The Lin Piao Affairs* (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975); Harvey W. Nelson, *The Chinese Military System* (Boulder, Colo.: West-view Press, 1977); and Harlan W. Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945-1981* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982).

On the subject of "people's war," see, among others, Lin Piao, "Long Live the Victory of People's War," *Peking Review*, September 1965; Samuel B. Griffith, *Peking and People's War* (N.Y.: Praeger, 1966); David P. Mazingo and Thomas W. Robinson, *Lin Piao on "People's War": China Takes a Second Look At Vietnam* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1965); and Chalmers Johnson, *Autopsy on People's War* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1973).

that of nuclear weapons:

The might of people's war is tens of thousands of times greater than the nuclear arms of imperialism and social-imperialism. People's war is the most effective magic weapon to deal with them.⁵

If we are to develop a formula for "people's war," we can conclude that it must be fought generally on six conditions to assure its victory. These conditions are (1) the organization of a party, army, and united front with the party in command; (2) support from the masses; (3) underdeveloped countries; (4) foreign intervention; (5) conventional weaponry and backward technology; and (6) strategies of protracted war.⁶ The victory of the Chinese revolutionary war was conditioned by these factors; so was the Vietnamese national liberation war. In its fighting experience, the PLA placed a special emphasis on defensive strategy and on the factor of manpower-over-weapons.⁷ This is a legacy of Mao's military doctrine, significantly germane to China's "punitive war" against Vietnam. A discussion on it is appropriate.

Whatever their attempts might be, the Beijing leaders since 1949 have constantly cautioned the Chinese people against potential external threats. The following examples will substantiate this observation. China's intervention in the Korean war was labeled by its leaders as a war of "resist-America and assist-Korea." The U.S. containment policy in East Asia in the 1950's was interpreted as "American imperialist encirclement" of China. After the Vietnam war escalated, Mao saw in 1965-66 the danger of America's "invasion" of China; it never materialized. As a result of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Sino-Soviet border conflicts, Mao perceived the Soviet military buildup on the Sino-Soviet border as a serious threat to China's security. Before Japan's recognition of the Beijing government in 1972, China expressed her concern over the revival of Japanese militarism. In 1973, China adopted an "anti-hegemony" policy, aiming at the two superpowers, especially the Soviet Union. For more than one decade, China has campaigned for "digging tunnels deep," "preparation *against* war" and the organization of an "international united front" *against* the "most dangerous source of world war" —Soviet social-imperialism.⁸ (emphasis added)

⁵ Hsieh Chan, "The Atom Bomb Is a Paper Tiger," *Peking Review*, No. 30 (July 22, 1977), p. 17.

⁶ The six components are drawn from an unpublished paper of this author on "revolution and people's war."

⁷ For a more detailed discussion on the PLA's fundamental strategies and tactics, see Whitson, *The Chinese High Command*, Ch. 11.

⁸ See, for instance, Hsinhua correspondent, "Soviet Social-Imperialism: The Most

All of the above examples indicate one single perception of the Beijing leaders, i. e., China has been constantly encircled by real or potential hostile forces, threatening its security. In such a perception, they have emphasized a defensive military strategy although they have never ignored an offensive one. Guided by such a strategy, the PLA has directed its training and developed its weapons for the defense of China's security against foreign "invasion." Even after China had developed nuclear weapons, its strategy remains unchanged. As the previously cited article explains:

In order to defeat the nuclear weapons of imperialism and social-imperialism, we too must develop nuclear as well as other weapons. We were not scared of nuclear arms when we did not have them. Nor do we make a fetish of them when we have got them. It is *purely for defense*. . . ' (emphasis added)

China's emphasis on defensive strategy at the present time is motivated by two factors: its need of a period of peace for its much-delayed modernization program and its limited military capability. True indeed, Beijing's military leaders may have their ambitions to promote their power and positions by launching attacks on China's neighbors.¹⁰ Yet, such attacks in the past have been short-term and low-risk except for the Korean intervention.

But, its offensive strategy should also be discussed, especially in reference to the 1979 "punitive" war. Up to the present time, the PLA still inherits Mao's military thinking of strategic offense based on its experience in the civil war. It merits a quotation here:

3. Make wiping out the enemy's effective strength our main objective; do not make holding or seizing a city or place our main objective...
4. In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force (two, three, four and sometimes even five or six times the enemy's strength), encircle the enemy forces completely, strive to wipe them out thoroughly and do not let any escape from the net...
5. Fight no battle unprepared, fight no battle you are not sure of winning...¹¹

Dangerous Source of World War," *Peking Review*, No. 5 (January 30, 1976), pp. 9-13; and No. 29 (July 15, 1977), pp. 4-10, 21.

⁹ Hsieh Chan, "The Atom Bomb . . ." p. 18.

¹⁰ For instance, one interpretation suggests that the March 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict was first provoked by Lin Piao with an ambition to promote his position in the Chinese hierarchy. See Thomas W. Robinson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute," *The American Political Science Review*, December 1972, pp. 1175-1202.

¹¹ Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963), p. 347.

With such offensive principles, the PLA not only won the civil war, but scored several victories in the Korean war and the border conflicts with India and the Soviet Union. Needless to say, these gains were not achieved by advanced weaponry, but by overwhelming manpower. In consequence, Mao's theory of "men over weaponry" in deciding the outcome of a war has been regarded by the PRC for years as an "iron law" of "people's war." It calls the atomic bomb a "paper tiger." Such a theory has been upheld up to the present. A few examples are discussed here for explanation.

In 1955-1956, when the PLA leaders underwent for the first time the debate on military modernization, including a nuclear program, the factor of "manpower" was defended as the decisive factor of war. As Tan Zheng (T'an Cheng), then Vice-Minister of National Defense, put it:

...when we emphasize the importance of technology we do not mean that the role of men and the role of political factors can be reduced. On the contrary, the factor of *men is always the decisive factor in a war*... Technology is handled by men and no new technology can play its part unless it is combined with the factor of men.¹² (emphasis added)

Military modernization made almost no progress for longer than two decades after China had first probed the issue in 1955-56. Even thirteen years after China's first nuclear testing (1964-77), during which more than 24 similar testings were successfully carried out, the manpower factor was still regarded as the top priority of the Chinese military thinking.¹³ For instance, *Renmin Ribao* carried two articles in May and June 1977, asserting that manpower, not nuclear weaponry, was the decisive factor in warfare.¹⁴

The "Four modernizations" campaign has certainly encouraged the Chinese people to place their high hope to the improvement of the

¹² T'an Cheng, "Questions of Political Work at the New Stage of Army-building," speech to the Eighth National Congress of the CCP on September 23, 1956, in *Current Background*, No. 422, October 18, 1956, pp. 13-21.

¹³ Drew Middleton, "Chinese Military Regards Manpower as No. 1 Asset," *The New York Times* (NYT), December 2, 1976, pp. 1, 14; also Russell Spur, "China's Defense: Men against Machine," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER), January 28, 1977, pp. 24-30.

The PRC made its first nuclear testing on October 14, 1964, and its 25th on September 17, 1977. By that date, the USSR had already carried out more than 167 nuclear testings, and the United States more than 278.

¹⁴ Hu Hsüeh, "Get Rid of the Blind Belief in Nuclear Weapons," *Renmin Ribao* (RMRB), May 13, 1977, p. 6; Chi Chuan, "Long Live the Spirit of Millet Plus Rifles," *Renmin Ribao*, June 3, 1977, p. 5. "Millet plus rifles" (or "Hsiao-mi chia pu-ch'iang") was a phrase and a way of life during the guerrilla era of the CCP. The "spirit" of it means the "spirit" of "people's war," clearly showing some reservation on the drive of modernization of military technology.

economic situation as well as modern weaponry. Among several indications, an article from the National Defense Science and Technology Commission typified the military expectation:

In any future war against aggression, if anyone still thinks it is possible to use broadswords against guided missiles and other nuclear weapons... then he evidently is not prepared to possess all the weapons and means of fighting... This is a foolish and even criminal attitude... Our armed forces must have an automatic computerized countdown, communications and command system, and rapid, motorized modern transportation facilities.¹⁵

For a short while, the drive for military modernization seemed to have supported a new strategic thinking which attempted to push aside the doctrine of “people’s war” as obsolete and even as an obstacle to modernization. (This Commission and other advocates for military modernization can be arbitrarily called as “military modernizers.”) But resistance soon developed among mostly the “veteran fighters.” At the “all-Army Political Work Conference” in April-June 1978, the resistance force reasserted its old theory and strategic line. While Deng Xiaoping emphasized the importance of adjusting the military development to “new historical conditions,” the resistance force argued that “revolutionization should command modernization.” It made Hua Guofeng present such an argument.¹⁶ It is beyond doubt that the 41-day Political Work Conference must have been an important and controversial meeting. In adopting the new principle of adjusting the direction of military development to “new historical conditions,” the Conference concluded with the reassertion of strengthening ideology work and the endorsement of the new slogan that “revolutionization commands modernization.”¹⁷ It seems that the two forces (the “military modernizer” and the resistance force) had reached a temporary but controversial compromise.

A further explanation appeared two months later. In celebrating the PLA’s Establishment Day on August 1, Defense Minister Xu Xiangqian argued strongly in an important article that the theory of “people’s war” ought to follow the principle of “seeking the truth from facts” and closely coordinate it with “modern conditions.” Under new historical conditions, Xu continued, the strategy and tactics of “people’s war”

¹⁵ Radio Peking, January 20, 1978, Theoretical Group of the National Defense Scientific and Technological Commission, “Integration of ‘Millet Plus Rifles’ with Modernization—Criticizing the Crimes of the Gang of Four in Undermining Modernization of National Defense,” in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)*, January 23, 1978, pp. E1-E6.

¹⁶ See Hua’s and Deng’s speeches at the Conference in *Hongqi* (Red Flag), No. 7 (July 1, 1978), pp. 17-22, and 30-37.

¹⁷ “Revolutionization Commands Modernization,” Editorial, *RMRB*, June 10, 1978.

should be flexibly applied and "national defense" must be highly modernized for modern warfare. "Only then, can revolutionization truly command modernization."¹⁸ Apparently, Xu was speaking for the PRC's military policy, skillfully tilting toward the "modernization" side.

The military modernizers continued to compete with the resistance force. On December 2, 1978 (16 days before the important 3rd Plenum of the CCP opened), Tao Hanzhang, Deputy Commandant of the PLA Military Academy, wrote a sophisticated article strongly urging for military modernization. His article was written shortly after his official visit to Great Britain in October 1978. He argued emphatically that China must not only catch up to American and Soviet military technology, but pursue correct military theory and establish a modern command system as well.¹⁹ On the day when the 3rd Plenum began (December 18, 1978), the Editorial Board of *Junshi Xueshu* (Military Scholarship) published a highly assertive article in both *People's Daily* and the *Liberation Army Daily*, emphasizing the importance of complete comprehension of Mao's military thought. It advocated study and development of Mao's military theory, condemned the "ostrich policy" toward new weaponry, and demanded an untiring research on new questions of modern warfare.²⁰ At the 3rd Plenum, Deputy Defense Minister Su Yu repeated almost the same thesis of the Editorial Board's article, adding that even though "weaponry is a main factor of war, manpower is also a decisive element."²¹ Moreover, Rao Shoukun, Commander of the North Sea Fleet, severely criticized the "ossification of thinking" of some "veteran comrades" at a meeting on January 23, 1979, and urged that the military men must "study again, learn from advanced things in foreign armies, and study the characteristics and demands of modern warfare."²² Furthermore, Zhang Tingfa, Air Force Commander, repeated a similar view on February 11, 1979 at a meeting of the CCP cadres in the Air Force. From all these statements, one can see clearly that the "military modernizers" were engaged in a campaign against the resistance force and for the modernization of weaponry and military thinking. Following Deng's leadership

¹⁸ Xu Xiangqian, "Tigao Jingti, Zhunbei Dazhang" (Be Vigilant, Prepare for War), *Hongqi*, No. 8 (August 1, 1978), pp. 42-50. Also see William T. Tow, "Chinese Strategic Thought," *Asian Affairs*, VII, No. 4 (March-April 1980), pp. 248-269.

¹⁹ *Mei-chou Fei-ch'ing T'ung-hsin* (Chinese Communist Affairs Weekly, Taipei; hereafter, *Mei-chou T'ung-hsin*), June 1, 1979, pp. 4-6.

²⁰ "Wan-zheng di Zhun-que di Zhangwo Mao Zedong Jun-shi Si-xiang," (Completely and Correctly Grasp Mao Zedong's Military Thought), *Jiefangjun Bao*, *RMRB*, December 18, 1978.

²¹ *Mei-chou T'ung-hsin*, February 16, 1979, p. 14, and June 1, 1979, pp. 7-8.

²² Radio Beijing, January 23, 1979, in *FBIS*, January 26, 1979, p. E24.

and modernization drive, they managed to move slightly ahead of their competitors.

In any event, before the “modernizers” and “new military theorists” had had a chance to win the competition and develop a new military theory, the “punitive war” broke out. It was a war being fought under the strategy of people’s war without its name. The manpower factor was still overwhelming. Yet the PLA’s command system, operational tactics, logistics, and, above all, weaponry were not in “modern conditions.” They were behind the times.

2. OBJECTIVES

It was reported that an important briefing session was held in Beijing in the afternoon of February 16, about 17 hours before the outbreak of the war, for leading Chinese officials. The purpose of the briefing was to inform directly the attendants about the imminent war and indirectly their respective provincial and city authorities through them.

The meeting was presided over by Hua Guofeng. Hua briefly stated that after repeated considerations and discussions, the “Central” leadership had decided to launch a war against Vietnam the next day. Then Deng Xiaoping explained the nature and objectives of the war.”

The nature of the war was a “self-defensive counter-attack.” It was “limited in time and space,” and also limited to the ground fighting—similar to the Sino-Indian border war of 1962. No naval or air forces would be used. It was also a testing war for the Chinese army which had had no actual fighting experience for almost twenty years since the Sino-Indian border war. The Sino-Soviet border conflicts were small-scale and short confrontations. The Chinese army would gain some war experience from this “counterattack.”

The main objective, Deng continued, was to give Vietnam a “lesson.” Vietnam had become “extremely arrogant,” boasting to be the “third” strongest military power in the world. Apart from its invading Kampuchea and expelling Chinese residents, Vietnam also made repeated border incursions to China and killed Chinese soldiers as well as civilians. China had to fight back, to give Vietnam a “punishment.” China did not want an inch of Vietnamese territory. As soon as the Chinese forces had achieved the objectives, they would unilaterally withdraw.

What were the exact objectives of the “punishment”—to wipe out a

” Deng’s account is based on this author’s interviews in Hong Kong with persons from China, March 27, 28, and 29, 1979. One of them, Mr. Lu, visited New York on April 9-15, 1981 and held further conversations with this author. Also *Ming Pao* (Hong Kong) March 4, 1979; *The Seventies*, April 1979, pp. 25-26.

few divisions of Vietnamese forces and military bases, or to occupy a portion of the border land? Deng did not disclose. The only known statement he had made was on February 26 (9 days after the war had broken out). He said that China would not mind military achievements. Apparently, Deng did not want to state the objectives clearly so that he, or the Beijing leadership, would not be held responsible for any future failure in achieving them.

We can perceive that Beijing's objectives might have been the destruction of a few divisions of Vietnam's regular army and several military centers. In doing so, the war would serve as a retaliation to the expulsion of the Chinese residents and border conflicts. It might also relieve significantly Vietnam's continuing military pressure on Pol Pot's forces. Moreover, it would show China's determination to meet the challenge of the Soviet-Vietnamese encirclement, and might win ASEAN nations' support. In a traditional and remote sense, it would also demonstrate to the world China's reassertion of dominant position in Asia.

II. The PLA's Strength and Command Arrangement

The total manpower of the PLA is about 4.3 million in the army, the navy, and the air force.²⁴ The army, which is still the main force of the PLA, has 3.6 million men in 175 divisions (121 infantry, 11 armored, 3 airborne, and 40 artillery). These forces are stationed in eleven firstclass military regions,²⁵ with a heavy deployment in Beijing and Shenyang areas (52-55 divisions and 4,700 tanks). The Guangzhou and Kunming MR's have approximately 12-16 divisions.

1. THE MANPOWER AND EQUIPMENTS

Prior to the 1979 "punitive" war, the army had 9,000-10,000 tanks (T59), mostly outdated. Its anti-tank weapons—conventional 100-mm anti-tank guns and rocket launchers—were old. It possessed no advanced firing equipments and techniques, such as laser or infrared rays. Its artil-

²⁴ The figures of the PLA's strength, including the weaponry and equipments in the following paragraphs, are drawn, otherwise indicated, mainly from the following sources: *The Military Balance 1978-1979* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1978); *Jane's Weapon System 1979-80*, Tenth edition, ed. by R. T. Pretty (New York: Franklin Watts, 1979); *Studies on Chinese Communism* (monthly), 1978-80 (Taipei); *NYT*, February 14, 18, 1979.

²⁵ These eleven military regions are: Beijing, Shenyang, Lanzhou, Xinjiang, Jinan, Nanjing, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Chengdu, and Kunming. The Dongjiang (eastern Xinjiang) Military Region, established immediately before the "punitive war," is a second-class region under the Xinjiang MR.

lery had 16,000-20,000 field guns and rocket launchers. Their effectiveness was limited by their low mobility and their lack of sophisticated, sensitive, range-sighting devices. Some of the guns were Second World War leftovers. They were so old that if they were not used in Vietnam in 1979 they would have been discarded as "waste materials."²⁶ Its transportation facilities were mostly behind the times and the ratio of trucks to troops was low. In the "punitive" war, logistics proved to be a serious problem.

Prior to the war in February 1979, the Chinese navy had a manpower of 280,000-300,000. Its North Sea Fleet had about 300 vessels, East Sea Fleet, about 450; and South Sea Fleet, about 300. It included 6-8 Luta-class destroyers, 16 destroyer escorts, and 40 submarine chasers. Although the destroyers were equipped with surface-to-surface missiles, its expansion had been slow mainly because of the backwardness of military technology and financial difficulties.

China had 73-75 submarines by February 1979. The fleet included 48-50 Romeo(R)-class, 21 Whisky(W)-class, 1 Golf(G)-class, 2 Ming-class (Chinese-made), and 1 Han-class (Chinese-made). Except for those Chinese-made, they were mostly Soviet products during the Second World War. Only the G-class submarine was comparatively new with a possible equipment of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM); the others were far behind their American and Soviet counterparts.

Up to February 1979, China had made considerable improvement to its fast patrol boat fleet. Equipped with approximately 400 guided missiles (the Styx SS-N-2), the fleet of 141-160 fast boats had provided China with a fast-moving and formidable force to patrol the Chinese coast. In addition, China had 440-500 gun boats without guided missiles which could serve as an auxiliary force to the fleet.

Two areas of weakness should be improved. One has been its amphibious force, including its small unit of landing craft; the other, its anti-submarine capability. China had (and has) almost no effective force against nuclear submarines.

The air force in early 1979 had about 400,000 men. Its 5,000 combat planes were generally backward or obsolete. For instance, its 4,100 interceptors were mostly MIG-15's, MIG-17's, and MIG-19's, with only 80 MIG-21's. Some of them were armed with Atoll air-to-air missiles, some with cannon.²⁷ China produces Shenyang F6's (MIG-19 model), F8's

²⁶ *Cheng Ming* (Hong Kong), No. 18 (April 1, 1979), pp. 10-11.

²⁷ *Newsweek*, January 21, 1980, p. 51; Harlan W. Jencks, "China's 'Punitive' War on Vietnam: A Military Assessment," *Asian Survey*, August 1979, p. 808. The Atoll air-to-air

(MIG-21 model) and F9's (F6 model), but they are underpowered. They have no capability to meet the challenge of MIG-23's or MIG-25's. Even their best missile, according to an observer who accompanied Defense Secretary Harold Brown to China in January 1980, was a "twenty-year old" weapon by American standards.²⁸

With a general background of the manpower and weaponry of the Chinese armed forces, let us turn to the specific command and force arrangement for the war.

2. THE COMMAND AND FORCE ARRANGEMENT

Deng Xiaoping was named as the overall Commander of the "punitive" war. Xu Xiangqian and Nie Rongzhen were appointed Deputy Commanders; Geng Biao, the General Chief of Staff. It appears that the war authority came directly from the "Party Central."

Under the "Central" commandship, two fronts were established: northern and southern. The Northern Front, which included the Shenyang, Beijing, Jinan, Lanzhou, and Xinjiang MR's, was placed under the commandship of Li Desheng (Commander of the Shenyang MR). Before the war began, the Chinese government had already evacuated 300,000 inhabitants from exposed border areas in Heilongjiang and Xinjiang, and put the entire Northern Front on maximum alert.²⁹ It was a precaution against a possible Soviet strike from the back. After one week of fighting in the south, the potential tension in the north eased off because a Soviet attack appeared unlikely.

Since the war was being fought in the south, the arrangement for the Southern Front was more important and complicated. Xu Shiyou (Commander of the Guangzhou MR) was appointed the Commander; Yang Dezhi (new Commander of the Kunming MR), the Deputy-Commander; and Zhang Tingfa (Commander of the Air Force), the Chief of Staff. In the Southern Front, they divided into the Eastern and Western Wings. The Eastern Wing covered Guangxi and Guangdong provinces under the commandship of Xu Shiyou. The Western Wing was under Yang Dezhi, covering Yunnan. The Air Force was under Zhang Tingfa. The South Sea Fleet was deploying in the Zhanjiang-Hainan area.

Drawing from several military regions, the Chinese assembled approximately 31 divisions (330,000 men, about 10 percent of the total ground forces) and 1,200 tanks on the border. In the Eastern Wing under Xu

missile is a U.S. heat-seeking Sidewinder missile of the early 1960's. Since then, the U.S. has gone through eight different models, each with more sophisticated electronics than the last.

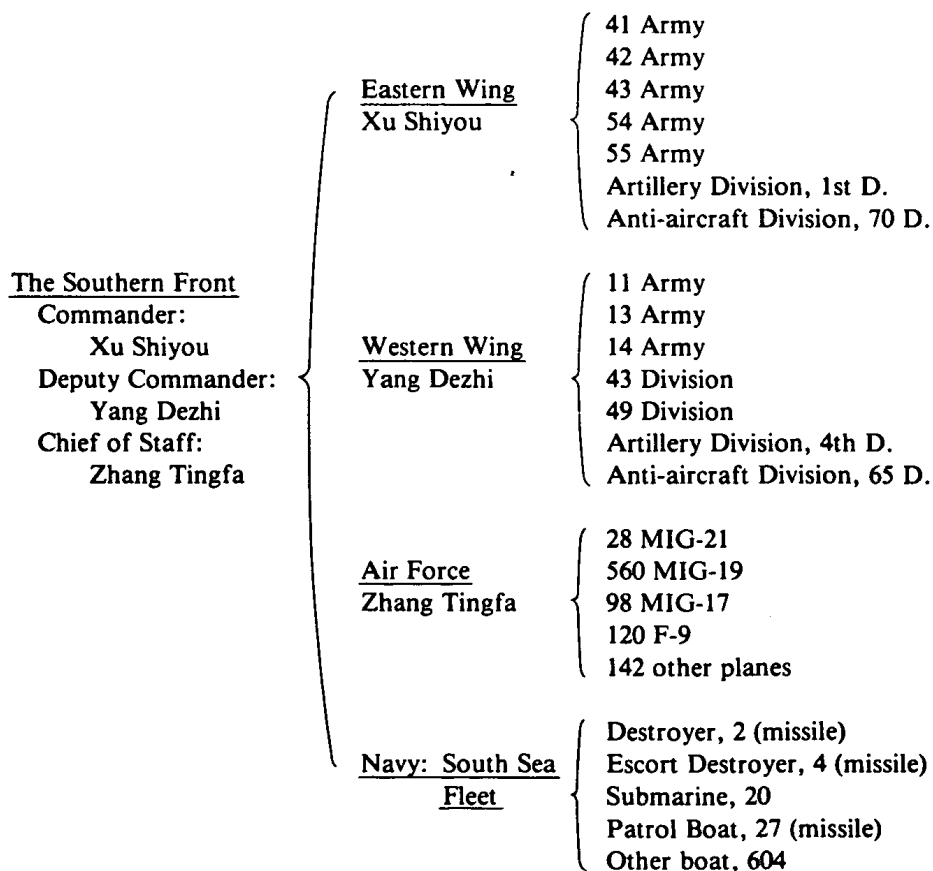
²⁸ *Newsweek*, January 21, 1980, p. 51.

²⁹ *AFP*, (by Georges Biannic) February 21, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 22, 1979, p. E3.

Shiyou, there were 5 armies (A) and 2 divisions (D). They were: 41A and 55A (Guangdong), 42A (Guangxi), 43A and 54A (Henan), 1D-Artillery (Guangdong), and 70D-Antiaircraft (Hunan). In the Western Wing under Yang Dezhi, there were 3 armies and 4 divisions: 11A and 14A (Yunnan), 13A (Chengdu), 43D, 49D, and 4D-Artillery (Yunnan), and 65D-Antiaircraft (Fujian). Several divisions from Nanjing and Fujian (Fuzhou) were placed as reserve units. They carried T-62 light tanks, T-59 tanks; 122mm, 152mm artillery pieces; 107mm and 140mm multi rocket-launchers; 37mm anti-aircraft guns; Sam-2 missiles (probably never used); and others. 948 aircraft (February-March 1979) stationed in 15 air bases in Yunnan, Guangxi, Guangdong and Hainan. The South Sea Fleet had deployed 2 destroyers (missile), 4 destroyer escorts (missile), 27 fast patrol boats (missile), 20 submarines, and 604 other boats.³⁰

To illustrate the force arrangement in the Southern Front, a chart is drawn below from the above sources.

CHART 1. FORCE ARRANGEMENT IN THE SOUTHERN FRONT



In addition to the regular forces, regional and militia units were also employed for logistics and security duty in the front and the border area. On the Xisha Islands (the Paracels), a garrison of 1,000 men increased their anti-aircraft gun positions. So did the number of patrol boats around the Islands. The air force in Guangdong and Hainan kept a close watch on the area from Hainan to Xisha.

On the Vietnamese side, the Vietnamese People's Army in early 1979 had a manpower of approximately 600,000 men. When the war broke out, Hanoi stationed about 150,000-200,000 men in Kampuchea, 100,000 men in Laos, 100,000 in the south, and 200,000-250,000 in the north. Around the Hanoi area, there were only five regular divisions (308D, 320D, 329D, 386D, and 431D) and four brigades (45B-artillery, 329B-engineer, 202B-armored, and 241B-antiaircraft). But in the Vietnamese-Chinese border area, there were 150,000 local troops and militia, including six regional divisions (325D, 332D, 334D, 337D, 338D, and 386D) and one regiment (241R). Two regular divisions (3D and 346D) were known near Lang Son area.³¹ The local forces were well-trained and well-equipped. Their strength may have been superior to some of the Chinese regular units.

Vietnam had approximately 300 combat aircraft in early 1979, including 70 MIG-19's, 70 MIG-21's, and some American-made F-5's captured in 1975. But in 1979 Vietnam's MIG-21's were more advanced than China's because they had sophisticated electronic equipment. Meanwhile, Chinese planes were vulnerable to Hanoi's large array of Soviet-built surface-to-air missiles and radar-guided antiaircraft batteries.³² In response to the Chinese buildup at the border, Hanoi had transferred some of its MIG-21's from the south to the north.

Prior to February 1979, Vietnam's navy had 2 Soviet-built PETYA destroyers (with anti-submarine missiles), 30 fast patrol boats (supplied by

³⁰ Figures given here are drawn from the following sources: *Fei Yueh Chan-cheng chih Chan-shu Chan-fa Yen-chiu* (*Chan-shu Chan-fa*; A Study on the Strategy and Methods of the Sino-Vietnamese War. Taipei, 1979), pp. 7-8 and appendix I; *Tui Fei-Yueh Chan-cheng chung Fei-chun Chan-shu Chan-fa chi ch'i Wu-ch'i chih Chien-pao* (hereafter *Chien-pao*; A Brief Report on the Chinese Strategy, Methods, and Weaponry During the Sino-Vietnamese War; Taipei, 1979), pp. 21-25; photographs, pp. 22-25; *Da Gong Bao*, March 3, 4, and 7, 1979; *FEER*, March 9, 1979, p. 15; *NYT*, February 14, 18, and 23, and August 15, 1979, p. A3, p. 10, p. A10, and p. A3; *AFP*, February 20, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 21, 1979, p. A3. The 948 aircraft included 28 MIG-21's, 560 MIG-19's, 98 MIG-17's, 120 F9's, and others. The 15 airbases included 5 in Yunnan, 5 in Guangxi, 1 in Guangdong, and 4 on Hainan.

³¹ The figures of manpower and weaponry of the Vietnamese armed forces are adopted from *The Military Balance 1978-79* (London), pp. 68-69; *Chan-shu Chan-fa*, pp. 11-12; *NYT*, February 14, 18, 23, 1979; *FEER*, March 9, 1979, pp. 14-15.

³² *The Military Balance 1978-79*, p. 69; *NYT*, February 14, 1979, p. A3.

China), 32 other patrol boats, and some American-made vessels. Its quantity and firepower were lower than China's.

In comparison, the figures show that prior to the war the Chinese forces on the border area were quantitatively superior to their Vietnamese counterparts by 3 to 1. Undoubtedly, China had employed Mao's strategy that "in every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force" against the Vietnamese enemy. Manpower was upheld as the "decisive" factor. Yet, both Chinese strategy and manpower soon met a serious test.

III. The Military Operation

For the sake of simplicity, the PLA's "self-defensive counterattack" is divided into two periods: the first period covers February 17 to 26, the second covers February 27 to March 5. Chinese withdrawal began on March 5 and was completed on March 17. In order to bring the complicated situation into a better focus, the reaction of the Soviet Union and the United States during the sixteen-day war period will also be discussed.

1. FIRST PERIOD: FEBRUARY 17-26

At 5:00 AM on February 17, 1979, a Chinese force of approximately 100,000 men kicked off their "counterattack" by launching extremely powerful artillery shellings, followed by tank units and waves of troops. In the East Wing with the front-command post in Nanning, two main columns of forces advanced simultaneously. The first, led by 42 Army, advanced from Longzhou to Dong Dang, aiming at Lang Son. The second, led by 41 Army, moved from Jingxi and Longzhou to Cao Bang and Dong Khe. In addition, a division (165D) of 55 Army advanced from Fangcheng to Mon Cai (on the coast).³³ The main target was Lang Son.

In the West Wing with the front-command post in Mengzi, three major columns attacked fiercely. Led by 13A and 11A, the first column advanced from Hokou to Lao Cai, a capital city on the railline to Hanoi; the second from Wenshan to Ha Giang (east to Lao Cai); and the third (led by 42D of the 14A) from Jinping to Lai Chau (west to Lao Cai).³⁴ Obviously, the target was Lao Cai.

Understandably, the Chinese blitzkrieg was devised for a maximum gain. But the Beijing authorities had never spelled it out. Speculation from the Vietnamese side centered around three targets:

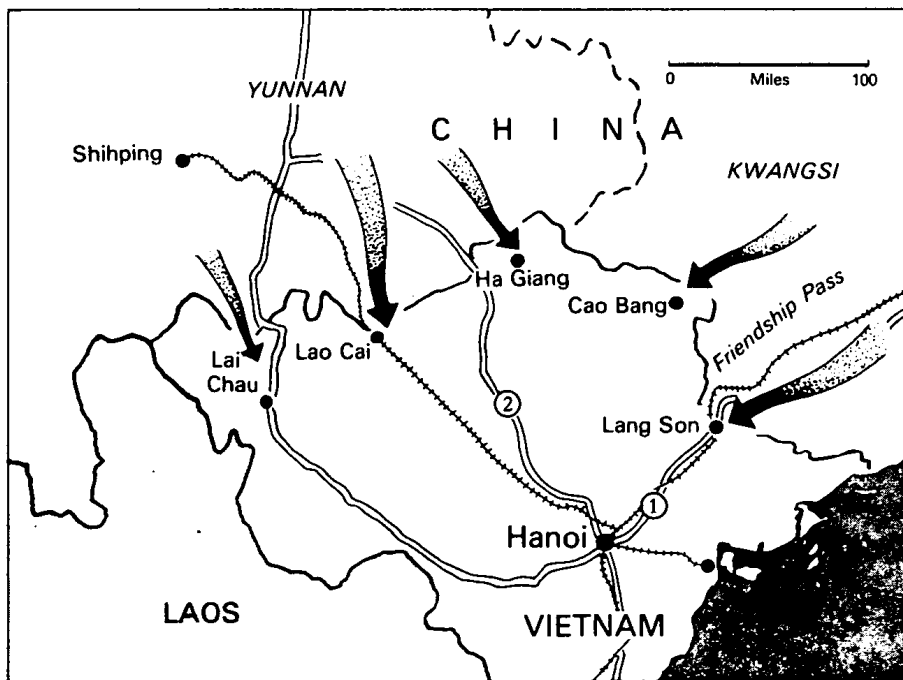
³³ *Chan-shu Chan-fa*, p. 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

- (1) Quick occupation of a strip along the border, about a few dozen kilometers in depth, which would include the towns of Cao Bang, Lang Son and Lao Cai. . . From the springboard, more assaults would be launched depending on the situation.
- (2) Destruction of Vietnamese military forces and weakening of Vietnam's national defense capacity by "making a clean sweep" of the border guards, annihilating a major part of the regional troops, and mauling some of the regular units.
- (3) Destruction of Vietnamese economic bases...³⁵

Advancing rapidly at the outset, the Chinese forces soon met with difficulties. The rugged terrain of the mountainous border area was substantially unfavorable to the movement of division-sized forces, trucks and other motor vehicles. The Chinese, lacking modern logistic equipments and being refrained from using air transportation,³⁶ were forced to rely on old trucks, horses, donkeys and laborers for logistics. They were

MAP 1. CHINESE ATTACKS ON VIETNAM, FEBRUARY 1979



³⁵ *The Chinese Aggression: Why and How It Failed* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1979), p. 4.

³⁶ A Japanese news agency reports a statement by the Chinese spokesman: "The Chinese air force has not been involved in the war." *Kyodo*, February 24, 1979.

also compelled to divide and redivide their forces from the division to company and even platoon level. Their advancing speed was greatly reduced. The previously cited Vietnamese source, albeit exaggerative, reported as follows:

The invaders found themselves bogged down and encircled. The people's war fought by the Vietnamese side, in which only local forces were used, effectively stopped all Chinese assaults and broke all their spearheads.³⁷

What were the Vietnamese strategy and tactics that blunted the Chinese attacks? In brief, they fully employed local troops and militia along the border area for the fighting while assembling their regular army in the plain south of Cao Bang and Lang Son. The purpose was twofold: to weaken the Chinese forces by the border fighting and to prepare for a major battle with the weakened Chinese in the plain. It would put the Chinese in an extremely disadvantageous position: they would have a long logistic line and would be out of their artillery coverage range from the border.

The Vietnamese border defense was amazingly strong. As a Vietnamese source stated: the border provinces (Lang Son, Cao Bang, Hoang Lien Son, Quang Ninh, Lai Chau and Hu Huyen) literally formed an "impregnable fortress."³⁸ Such a fortress was characterized by tunnels, caves, and trenches manned by well-trained and well-armed militia all over the mountain range. They also employed various tactics and forms of warfare, such as tunnel warfare, jungle warfare, surprise attacks, booby-traps and land-mines, laser ("death ray") weapons, and bamboo "punji" stakes (familiar to Americans who had been in Vietnam during the Vietnam war).³⁹ The current, young generation of the PLA is lacking fighting experience. This weakness, coupled with the unfamiliarity of the rugged terrain, brought about enormous sufferings for the PLA.

Facing these mostly unexpected obstacles inside Vietnam, the Chinese forces, in addition to their division and redivision to the company and platoon level, adopted counter-strategy and counter-tactics. They were reportedly under orders not to advance more than 50km into Vietnam⁴⁰ so as to avoid the traps of a "major battle" on the plain. Meanwhile, the Chinese reserved more than half of their forces inside China as fresh and

³⁷ *Chinese Aggression*, p. 10.

³⁸ "Communiqué of the Ministry of National Defense of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," in *Chinese Aggression Against Vietnam: Dossier* (Hanoi: Vietnam Courier, 1979), pp. 94-95.

³⁹ *Chan-shu Chan-fa*, pp. 18-21. Laser ("death ray") weapons were reportedly being used by Vietnam as a "testing" process for the Soviet Union.

⁴⁰ *Guang Jiao Jing* (Wide Angle, Hong Kong), No. 78, March 16, 1979, p. 8.

energetic units for replacement when needed. In doing so, they would not leave their "weakened" forces in the lurch. Moreover, they employed the tactics and methods of "fire-wave" and "human-wave," tunnel search and dynamite detonation, mine-explosion, surprise attacks, circlement, and other forms of guerrilla warfare.⁴¹ But in the first few days of the fighting, China made almost no news release on the war. Although Vietnam made some, information on the war situation was so scarce that even the Soviet researchers of the Far East Institute under the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow were unable to write up a relatively comprehensive war report as requested.⁴²

In brief, the first day of the Chinese attacks was a powerful and successful beginning. "Fire wave" and "human wave" were coordinated well. The heaviest fighting, according to Hanoi radio, was in the northwest border areas of Bat Xat, and Muong Khuong, and around the northeast frontier towns of Dong Dang, Huu Nghi, and Thong Nong.⁴³ The Chinese advanced more than ten miles into Vietnam and took several border towns. They had also crossed the Hong (Red) River, pushing hard towards Lao Cai.

As soon as the war broke out, the United States made its official position clear. While maintaining a neutral stand, the State Department called on February 17 for an "immediate withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea and Chinese troops from Vietnam."⁴⁴ It also stated that the "Chinese invasion of Vietnam was preceded by the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea." On the following day, the Soviet government issued a statement citing its treaty obligations with Vietnam, urging China to "stop before it is too late" and demanding an "immediate withdrawal of Chinese troops" from Vietnam.⁴⁵

On the second and third days (February 18-19), hard battles increased. The Vietnam resistance was incredibly strong. Although morale was high, the Chinese manpower on the division level could hardly maneuver. Only small units could operate. The Chinese forces were gingerly and painfully applying their revised tactics and methods, including tunnel search,

⁴¹ After some losses because of the explosion of boobytraps and mines, the Chinese used buffaloes to touch off the explosion so as to clear the way for the advancing forces.

⁴² As reported by a Soviet researcher of that Institute at a University Seminar on Communism of Columbia University in New York, September 29, 1981, to which this author also attended.

⁴³ *Radio Hanoi*, February 18, and February 19, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 21, 1979, pp. K6-K8. After the war broke out, the West Wing under Yang Dezhi fought more successfully than did the East Wing under Xu Shiyu.

⁴⁴ *NYT*, February 18, 1979, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *TASS*, February 18, 1979.

dynamite detonation, mine explosion and others as previously discussed. Advance was made tunnel by tunnel, hill by hill. Their slow progress was observed as a "pause" for reinforcement or withdrawal.⁴⁶ But they took Muong Khuong (Hoang Lien Son province), Trung Khanh (Cao Bang province), and Dong Dang (Lang Son province). The battle of Dong Dang was a fierce encounter in which the Chinese defeated the Vietnamese "Flying Tiger Regiment" (regular army).⁴⁷ In the Mon Cai area (Quang Ninh province), the conflict became a seesaw match. Both sides suffered heavy losses.

While the battle continued during the week from February 20 to 26, several important developments took place. First was about the early accounts of the war. On February 20, Beijing reported for the first time that the Chinese had caused "very heavy" losses on Vietnamese forces since the beginning of the war. They had advanced 10 miles into Vietnam, occupying 26 points. There were 10,000 killed and wounded on the Vietnamese side, only 2,000-3,000 on the Chinese side.⁴⁸ In addition, seven Vietnamese missile bases were destroyed. But the Vietnamese gave a different account. After only three days of fighting, the Vietnamese had inflicted "heavy casualties" on the Chinese. In Cao Bang province alone (including Trung Khanh), four Chinese battalions were badly damaged and scores of tanks and armored cars destroyed.⁴⁹ As both sides made different claims, accounts of the fighting became contradictory.

The second development was China's capture of Lao Cai and Cao Bang, and readiness to launch a battle at Lang Son. On February 21, the Chinese forces, reinforced with two divisions, resumed their more powerful attacks. After fierce, seesaw fightings, they captured the cities of Lao Cai and Cao Bang on the following day. As they continued to advance, they occupied more areas in the provinces of Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Quang Ninh. New fightings also broke out in the Mon Cai (coastal town) area. It was reported that Vietnamese reinforcements—regular combat divisions, artillery and armor—had moved northward.⁵⁰ The Chinese forces began fighting with the reinforced Vietnamese regulars on February 22.⁵¹ By February 26, more and more Chinese troops were assembled near Lang Son. While the fightings continued in the Lao Cai

⁴⁶ *NYT*, February 19 and February 20, 1979, both p. A1.

⁴⁷ *Xinhua*, February 25, 1979.

⁴⁸ *Xinhua*, February 20, 1979, *AFP*, in *FBIS*, PRC, February 21, 1979, p. A2.

⁴⁹ *Chinese Aggression*, pp. 25-26; *NYT*, February 19, 1979, p. A1, and February 20, 1979, p. A7.

⁵⁰ *NYT*, February 23, 1979, p. A10.

⁵¹ *Kyodo* (Beijing), February 23, 1979, in *FBIS*, PRC, February 23, 1979, p. A13.

⁵² *NYT*, February 20, 1979, p. A7.

and Cao Bang areas, the battle of Lang Son began.

The third development was the repetition of the Chinese public message that the "punitive war" was a limited operation in time and in space and that the Chinese would withdraw from Vietnam immediately after the limited objectives had been obtained. The first of such a statement was made by Deng Xiaoping on February 19 when he held a conversation with Alejandro Orfila of Argentina, Secretary-General of the Organization of American States. Geng Biao made a similar comment to a Western ambassador on February 23 in Beijing, adding that the war would last "about another week, maybe a little more . . ."⁵³ On the same day, Deng Xiaoping again offered a similar view to Roy Jenkins, Chairman of the European Economic Community.⁵⁴ Deng was a little more specific when he talked with Takeji Watanabe, president of KYODO news service, also on February 23. Deng said that the fighting would end in "about 10 days" or "a few days more," and that China would pull out as soon as its objective was achieved.⁵⁵ A supplementary statement was made on February 25 by Wang Zhen, a deputy premier for industry, at a banquet for Eric Varley, Britain's Industry Minister. Wang also stated that China had "no intention" of moving into Hanoi.⁵⁶ Undoubtedly, these public messages were disseminated for external as well as internal consumption. Externally, they served as evidence to dissuade the Soviet Union from intervening, a response to the United States' call for withdrawal,⁵⁷ a tranquilizer to ease off several nations' anxiety about a much larger war, and an unusual disclosure to puzzle Hanoi. Internally, the messages disappointed warriors but cooled down war opposers.

The fourth development was Soviet moves. In addition to a squadron of 11 Soviet naval vessels staying off the coast of Vietnam, the Soviet Union sent on February 21 a cruiser of the Sverdlov class and a destroyer of the Krivak class to the South China Sea. It was reported that the two ships would join the Soviet squadron off Vietnam.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Soviet airlift of arms to Vietnam was reported to have begun. Two special Soviet

⁵³ *AFP* (Beijing), February 23, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 26, 1979, p. A6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. A7.

⁵⁵ *Kyodo* (Beijing), February 26, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 26, 1979, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁶ *NYT*, February 26, 1979, p. A1.

⁵⁷ The American calls for the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Vietnam and Vietnamese troops from Cambodia were repeatedly made by the State Department and President Carter through a message to the Beijing leaders carried by Treasury Secretary W. Michael Blumenthal. *NYT*, February 23, 1979, p. A10.

⁵⁸ *NYT*, February 22, 1979, pp. A1 and A6. The 16,000-ton Sverdlovs are the largest surface combatants in Soviet Navy. They have been rearmed with launchers for surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles.

and Bulgarian flights with military supplies flew to Hanoi via Calcutta. A military delegation from Moscow also had departed for Hanoi.⁵⁹

In continuing to voice Moscow's support, Soviet military men spoke out. First Deputy Defense Minister Marshal S. L. Sokolov demanded in Moscow on February 22, in celebration of the 61st Soviet Army and Navy Day, that Peking take its "hands off" Vietnam.⁶⁰ On the same occasion in Hanoi, Colonel N. A. Trarkov, military attache of the Soviet Embassy, also demanded China's immediate withdrawal. Trarkov, in a militant mood, further stated that the Soviet Union would "carry out its obligations under the Soviet-Vietnam treaty."⁶¹ Apparently, Trarkov's message was more for Vietnamese, than for Chinese, consumption.

Despite these tough talks, a realistic and sober message was offered by Soviet officials to several Western and Asian diplomats in Moscow. It indicated that the Soviet Union would not plan to intervene in the Sino-Vietnamese war as long as the scale of fighting remained limited.⁶²

In sum, at the end of the first period of the fighting (February 17-26), the development of the war became relatively clear: The Chinese had taken several border cities while maintaining no intention to advance to Hanoi; the war would continue for ten more days or so; and the Soviet Union would not intervene in the conflict. Meanwhile, casualties were extremely high.

2. SECOND PERIOD: FEBRUARY 27-MARCH 4

Despite the continuing fighting in the areas of Lao Cai, Cao Bang and Mon Cai, the war during this period was centered around Lang Son. Approximately 10 miles to the Friendship Pass and 85 miles to Hanoi, Lang Son faces a rugged region in the north and an open plain in the south. It is a post hard for the northern forces to take but favorable to launch a major drive towards Hanoi. It is a strategically important city to Hanoi's defense.

The battle of Lang Son began on February 27. China dispatched two more divisions from Dong Dang and Loc Binh (southeast of Lang Son) for reinforcement. New and fresh units also crossed into Vietnam.⁶³ The stormy Chinese attacks met with fierce Vietnamese resistance on Hills 417, 473,

⁵⁹ *AFP* (Beijing), February 23, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 26, 1979, p. A7; *NYT*, February 23, 1979, pp. A1; and *AFP* (New Delhi), February 23, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 26, 1979, p. K2.

⁶⁰ *VNA* (Vietnam News Agency; Hanoi), February 24, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 26, 1979, p. K2.

⁶¹ *VNA* (Hanoi), February 24, 1979, in *FBIS*, February 26, 1979, p. K1.

⁶² *NYT*, February 23, 1979, p. A11.

⁶³ As stated by Chinese officers at an interview in China; see Jonathan Mirsky, "China's Invasion of Vietnam: A View from the Infantry," *Journal of the Royal United Services for Defense Studies* (Vol. 126, No. 2, 2 June, 1981, London), p. 49.

556, 568, 608, and 800.⁶⁴ Heavy casualties were reported on both sides. Thousands of corpses scattered along Highway 1A (southwest of Lang Son to Hanoi).⁶⁵ As the Chinese forces attacked, they also began systematically cutting off all the roads connecting with Lang Son. The PLA, albeit on a small scale, was employing Mao's strategy of "the countryside surrounding the city" to avoid a Vietnamese trap of a "second Verdun" at Lang Son.⁶⁶ It is important to note, while the battle of Lang Son was running apace, the Vietnamese forces managed to attack two Chinese border towns in Guangxi: Malipo and Ningming.⁶⁷ There was no significant damage, but it revealed some degree of vulnerability of the Chinese rear.

By March 2, the PLA had generally surrounded Lang Son. It had secured its control over most of the hills around that city except the strategically indispensable Khua Ma Son mountain. *Renmin Ribao* described the mountain as the "key position for launching attacks from and defending Lang Son."⁶⁸

The final assault was launched on March 3 preceded by the seizure of Hill 303. Tanks led the infantry in a head-long rush for only ten minutes; then the hill was captured. Shortly after, the Vietnamese artillery on Khua Ma Son mountain heavily bombarded the PLA on that hill. The Chinese tanks once again coordinated with the infantry. After fierce exchanges of fire power, mine explosion, and tunnel blowing-up, the six Vietnamese firing positions on the mountain were destroyed one after another. Finally rockets fired from the mountain's top signaled its capture.⁶⁹ Soon after, Lang Son was taken. In this newly captured strategic city, the Chinese forces found extensive tunnel works, including a road wide enough for several vehicles to drive abreast along it and an assembly hall for political meetings and entertainment.⁷⁰

Minor fightings were also reported in other areas. According to Vietnamese sources, Dong Dang was completely leveled. The Chinese forces, for psychological warfare, offered rice to the Vietnamese people in Cao Bang and Cam Duong after they had taken or destroyed the areas.⁷¹ After Lang Son was reportedly taken, fightings were still in progress around Loc Binh and Mong Cai. To secure their withdrawal, the Chinese forces blew up

⁶⁴ *Chinese Aggression* (Hanoi), pp. 23-24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁶ *Guang Jiao Jing*, No. 78 (March 16, 1979), p. 7.

⁶⁷ *Renmin Ribao*, March 3, 1979, p. 4; *NYT*, February 28, 1979, p. A1.

⁶⁸ *RMRB*, March 4, 1979, p. 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *FEER*, May 4, 1979, p. 12.

⁷¹ *Chinese War Crimes* (Hanoi: Vietnam Courier, 1979), pp. 21-24; *Beijing Review*, No. 10 (March 9, 1979), pp. 15-16.

the bridge south of Lang Son.⁷²

On March 5, the Chinese government announced the withdrawal of the PLA from Vietnam.⁷³ Ironically, the Vietnamese government called, on the same day, for a nationwide general mobilization for the war. A circular from the Central Committee of the CCP to all the party offices throughout the country gave some additional information about the war. It stated that the PLA had "advanced 30 . . . to 80 miles, taken the capitals of Lang Son, Cao Bang, and Lao Cai and 17 other countries and cities, and damaged severely 4 regular divisions and 10 regiments of the enemy forces."⁷⁴ On the same day, Li Xiannian, at an interview with a Japanese editor, warned Hanoi against any Vietnamese attack during withdrawal.⁷⁵ In reply to Li's warning, Hanoi offered China a red carpet exit. It announced on March 7 that to show Vietnam's "good will for peace," Vietnam would "allow" the invading Chinese army to withdraw.⁷⁶

The Soviet position during this period should be mentioned here. In harsh language, both Kosygin and Brezhnev criticized China's attack as a "cynical and barbarous act of international piracy," demanded an immediate end of the Chinese "war of aggression," and warned China of Soviet "loyalty to the [Soviet-Vietnamese] treaty."⁷⁷ But there was little further Soviet action beyond these warnings except for the continuation of arms airlift and naval deployment off the Vietnam coast. Cuba, on the eve of the Chinese withdrawal, also warned China that she would offer Vietnam all assistance, including troops if necessary.⁷⁸ Since the Soviet Union had not militarily involved itself in the war, a Soviet promise of post-war aid to Vietnam became obliged and easy to pledge. So, Kosygin, in his visit to India on March 10, made such a commitment to Hanoi.⁷⁹

A dilemma developed in the United Nations. Originally requested to Norway, Portugal, Great Britain, and the United States for a debate on "the situation in Southeast Asia and its implications for international peace

⁷² *Fei-Yueh Chan-cheng P'ou-hsi Pao-kao* (An Analytical Report on the Sino-Vietnamese War. Hereafter, *P'ou-hsi Pao-kao*. Taipei: 1979), p. 14.

⁷³ *RMRB*, March 6, 1979, p. 1; *Beijing Review*, No. 10 (March 9, 1979), pp. 12-13.

⁷⁴ *Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Shengli Jieshu dui Yue Ziwei Fanji Baowei Bianjiang Zhanzheng di Tongzhi* (A Notice of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Victorious Conclusion of Self-Defensive Counterattack against Vietnam and Border-Protection War. Hereafter, *Tongzhi*. Beijing: 1979), p. 2. This *Tongzhi* was a semi-secret circular; it also instructed all the party offices not to "publish, broadcast, or post it."

⁷⁵ *NYT*, March 5, 1979, p. A1 and A12.

⁷⁶ *Nhan Dan*, March 7, 1979.

⁷⁷ *VNA*, March 2, 1979 and March 3, 1979 in *FBIS*, March 5, 1979, p. K3.

⁷⁸ Cuban Ambassador Fernando López Muño's interview with *El Sol*, a Mexico City daily, in *NYT*, March 4, 1979, p. 11.

⁷⁹ *NYT*, March 11, 1979, p. 3.

and security," the Security Council found itself irreconcilably divided after five meetings on February 23, 24, 25, 27, and 28.⁸⁰ The debate was serious and acrimonious. The ASEAN members⁸¹ disapproved the invasions by both China and Vietnam and urged them to pull back their forces. The American delegation, led by Andrew Young, favored a resolution along the line of the ASEAN position, asking for the withdrawal of "foreign" troops; no nation was named. The USSR and PRC argued against each other. The Soviet delegation, led by Mikhail A. Kharlamov, warned that the Soviet Union would not support a resolution that did not condemn *China* and call for the withdrawal of *Chinese* troops (emphasis added). It submitted (together with Czechoslovakia) a draft resolution on February 23 which condemned China for its invasion, demanded the withdrawal of all Chinese troops and a full reparation for Vietnam's war damages, and called for an arms embargo against China.⁸² Chen Chu, the Chinese delegate, criticized the Soviet encouragement of Vietnam's attacks against China and its aggression against Kampuchea. The Chinese delegation submitted its draft resolution on February 24, calling for the immediate withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea.⁸³

As the war ran apace, disagreements on proposed resolutions dragged on. Both the Soviet and Chinese resolutions had no chance to pass. Even the most agreeable ASEAN draft resolution, which was submitted on March 16⁸⁴ when the withdrawal of Chinese troops was completed, would also face a Soviet veto, especially it fluttered around the diplomatic terms by using "parties to the conflicts" and asking "all the parties" to withdraw without condemning China. To the Chinese delegation, the ASEAN resolution was acceptable because it would cover China's invasion, and urge the Vietnamese to withdraw from Kampuchea. If the Security Council pushed to adopt the ASEAN resolution, it would not only invite a Soviet veto and a more serious Sino-Soviet quarrel that most Third World nations feared, but also appear to accept a one-sided "pro-China" resolution. Trying hard to remain neutral, most of the Council members backed off. Consequently, the Security Council had failed to come up with a resolution throughout the war.⁸⁵ This experience ironically confirmed what a United Nations diplomat

⁸⁰ *UN Chronicle*, Vol. XVI, No. 3 (March 1979), pp. 5-17, 42-46; also *UN Documents*, Provisional, Security Council, 34th Year-Plenary, 1979, s/pv. 2114-2118 (February 23-25, 27-28, 1979).

⁸¹ Founded in 1967, the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) included Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

⁸² *UN Chronicle*, March 1979, p. 5.

⁸³ *Beijing Review*, March 2, 1979, pp. 19-22; *UN Chronicle*, March 1979, p. 5.

⁸⁴ *UN Chronicle*, Vol. XVI, No. 4 (April 1979), p. 46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-49; *NYT*, March 5, 1979, p. A12.

had told this author in the first week of the war: "When there is a dispute between big powers, the United Nations disappears!"⁸⁶

IV. An Evaluation

The PLA began to withdraw on March 5. It was a "rotation" process of withdrawal. In other words, as the front units withdrew, the units in the rear safeguarded the movement for an orderly retreat until the rear units appeared to be in the front; then the second run of retreat began. It was easy to manage because the retreat line was short and the Vietnamese were not pursuing. The withdrawal was complete on March 16. Despite Deng Xiaoping's assertion that the PLA "could have gone all the way to Hanoi if they wanted,"⁸⁷ the quick withdrawal was a right decision of Beijing for financial and military reasons. As Chen Yun pointed out at the Central Work Conference in April 1979, if the war continued six more months, the financial burden would be unbearably heavy. "After all," Chen argued, "what purpose will it serve even if we capture Hanoi?"⁸⁸

The PRC leaders held several discussions on the evaluation of the war. Different views and criticisms were voiced. In acknowledging a heavy loss on the Chinese side, both Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun pushed aside any further arguments and thorough evaluation. Whereas Chen Yun implied that such a "no-win" war should not be repeated for financial reasons, Deng asserted a political victory of the war in spite of some military losses. Consequently, it was still a Chinese victory, Deng declared.⁸⁹ Since Deng was the actual leader of the government, his views prevailed over those of Chen Yun.

1. GAINS AND LOSSES

During the 16-day fighting, the Western Wing under Yang Dezhi fought more successfully than the Eastern Wing did under Xu Shiyu. Casualties were also lighter in the West. Xu's less successful commandership in the war, which was criticized severely by the "whatever" faction, coupled

⁸⁶ A diplomat at the United Nations told this author on February 21, 1979: "We have a saying in the UN: When there is a dispute between small countries, the dispute disappears. When there is a dispute between a large country and a small country, the small country disappears. When there is a dispute between big countries (big powers), the United Nations disappears!"

⁸⁷ *AFP*, March 11, 1979, in *FBIS*, March 12, 1979, p. A4.

⁸⁸ *Mei-chou T'ung-hsin*, July 27, 1979, p. 15.

⁸⁹ *Tui Fei-Yueh Chan-cheng chih Yen-chiu* (A Study on the Sino-Vietnamese War; hereafter, *Chan-cheng chih Yen-chiu*, Taipei, 1979), pp. 2-5; *Mei-chou T'ung-hsin*, March 23, July 27, 1979, pp. 9-10, and 14-16.

with his opposition to de-Maoization led to his removal from the post of the Commander of the Guangzhou Military Region in January 1980.⁹⁰ On the contrary, Yang Dezhi was promoted to be the General Chief of Staff of the PLA in March 1980.

As the war ended, there were several conflicting accounts on casualties. Hanoi Radio claimed that the Vietnamese forces had killed or wounded 42,000 Chinese.⁹¹ General Wu Xiuquan, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the PLA, stated that the Chinese had killed or wounded 50,000 Vietnamese, compared with 20,000 on the Chinese side.⁹² Another source revealed the losses were "about equal."⁹³ In a succinct form, a table of both sides' major losses is compiled as follows:

TABLE 1. WAR LOSSES

	Chinese	Vietnamese
Killed	26,000	30,000
Wounded	37,000	32,000
POWs	260	1,638
Tanks, armoured vehicles	420	185
Heavy mortars & guns	66	200
Missile stations	0	6

Sources: *Tongzhi*, p. 2; *P'ou-hsi Pao-kaio*, p. 16; *Chan-cheng chih Yen-chiu*, p. 2; *FBIS*, May 3, 1979, p. E1; *NYT*, March 5, 27, 28, April 9, and May 3, 1979; *CSM*, March 7, 1979; and *Cheng Ming*, April 1, 1979, p. 10.

The Chinese treated the Vietnamese POWs with leniency.⁹⁴ Among the Vietnamese POWs, a colonel and a lieutenant colonel were reportedly to be the highest in ranking.⁹⁵ Visitors from Guangxi to Hong Kong in late March 1979 informed this author that Vietnamese POWs were treated well but that there were at least 30,000 wounded Chinese soldiers in all the major

⁹⁰ *Chung-kung Wen-ti Tzu-liao* (Chinese Communist Data Weekly, hereafter *Tzu-liao*; Taipei), February 25, 1980, pp. 1-5; September 22, 1980, pp. 24-25; November 3, 1980, p. 23. Xu, born in 1906, practiced Chinese "Kung Fu" (Wu Shu) until he joined the Communist revolution at 16. His revolutionary career was apparently benefited by his skills of the Chinese martial art. Still interested in "Kung Fu," he was invited to attend the National Wu Shu Performance and Exchange Conference on May 9, 1979 in Nanning, Guangxi.

Most Hua's supporters were also identified as the "whatever faction," meaning that whatever Mao said was right. It included Wu De, Wang Dongxing, Ji Dengkui, and others.

⁹¹ *Radio Hanoi*, Domestic Service, March 4, 1979, in *FBIS*, March 5, 1979, Vietnam, p. K25.

⁹² *AFP* (Hong Kong), May 2, 1979, in *FBIS*, May 3, 1979, PRC, p. E1.

⁹³ *Christian Science Monitor* (*CSM*), March 7, 1979, p. 12.

⁹⁴ *NYT*, March 28, 1979, p. A6.

⁹⁵ *Cheng Ming*, April 1, 1979, p. 10.

hospitals in Guangxi.⁹⁶

In other areas of the gain-and-loss balance sheet, the Chinese had gained perhaps 50-55% of their set limited objectives. Generally speaking, the PLA maintained its initiative in war, following closely its plans for advance and retreat. It operated considerably well, albeit slowly, in the unfamiliar, rugged terrain, including its anti-tunnel and anti-mine warfare. Due to a lack of modern logistic equipments, it made full use of the militia for logistic functions.⁹⁷ It destroyed six missile stations, numerous bridges, roads, railines, and electric power poles. As one reporter described shortly after the war:

Everywhere bridges have been blown up and roads have been mined and destroyed. The hospitals in Lao Cai, Lang Son and Cao Bang were demolished. In all three towns . . . everything lies in ruins and all is silent. About 80 per cent of the buildings were destroyed. Not a single electric power pole remains standing in or around the three towns. . . . There is a water shortage throughout the region and electricity has been cut off. Nearby villages also lie in ruins. . . .⁹⁸

The destruction in the region was rather thorough. Although no one can deny that the great majority of it was done by the Chinese, it may not have been done totally by them. As the same reporter wrote, "It would be impossible to determine how much of the damage was caused by Chinese troops . . . and by Vietnamese troops as they attempted to regain Vietnamese territory."⁹⁹ Regardless of a possible minor share of Vietnamese troops in the destruction, the immediate reaction of the Vietnamese people who suffered from the ruins was undoubtedly an intensive hatred for the Chinese.

Although the superior Chinese forces had partially damaged several Vietnamese regular divisions, such as the 3rd at Dong Dang, the 345th and 316th (A) at Lao Cai and possibly the 346th at Lang Son,¹⁰⁰ they had not

⁹⁶ Mr. Li's and Mr. Chen's interviews, March 28, 1979, Hong Kong.

⁹⁷ *Chan-cheng chih Yen-chiu*, pp. 6-7. The PRC was reportedly to have mobilized more than 50,000 militia men from Guangxi and 30,000 from Yunnan. They were organized in 102 battalions and several hundred companies, including mortar company, heavy machinegun company, anti-aircraftgun company, medicare company, road-repairing company, transportation company, donkey-horse transportation units, and other logistic units. The militia system improved significantly after the National Militia Work Conference in July—August 1978. Its campaign slogan was "Every-man-is-a-soldier." See *Mei-chou T'ung-hsin*, March 30, 1979, p. 11; Chang Tai, "National Militia Work Conference," *Studies on Chinese Communism*, Vol. 12, No. 9 (September 15, 1978), pp. 20-27.

⁹⁸ Jean Thoraval of *AFP* from Hanoi in *NYT*, March 27, 1979, p. A3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Kyodo*, March 29, 1979, in *FBIS*, March 29, 1979, p. E7. *RMRB*, March 1, 1979, p. 2. 345 and 316A divisions were reinforcements.

been able to destroy substantially one or two divisions. One of the biggest Chinese weaknesses was the backward weaponry and logistics. The lack of modern weapons and logistic equipments, in comparison with Vietnam's, greatly disabled the Chinese forces to possess a superiority in firepower, troop mobility, attacks, and communications network.¹⁰¹ In addition, they underestimated Vietnamese military power. For instance, Deputy Defense Minister Su Yu reported to the 3rd Plenum of the CCP in late December 1978 that the PLA could take Hanoi in one week with only partial strength from the Guangzhou and Kunming Military Regions.¹⁰² In fact, it took the PLA 16 full days to capture Lang Son (85 miles to Hanoi) with a strength of 10 divisions drawing from six military regions—a strength almost as much as that of the Guangzhou and Kunming MR's combined.

Inexperience in war also contributed to the weakness of the Chinese forces. The Chinese leaders were aware of situation, but they probably had not expected specifically two subsequent developments. One was the inability of low-ranking officers to make independent judgments and coordinating operations at critical moments;¹⁰³ the other was the morale problem. They reduced considerably the effectiveness of Chinese assaults.

The morale problem was not an isolated case of the military involved in the war. It was, and still is, a general issue in the military as well as in the entire population during the post-Mao era. A broad discussion on the issue here is beyond the scope of the study; yet it is appropriate to review briefly the problem specifically related to the war.

In the Eastern Wing under Xu Shiyu, the morale of some units, albeit small in number, was so low that superior officers would have to force their men to advance.¹⁰⁴ Low morale was also seen in the rear. According to the previously cited semi-secret document, several local leaders and cadres in a few places "far away from the front" nervously made arbitrary decisions, after the war broke out, on evaluating their families and residents. Several cadres were even "absent from duty, creating serious ill effects."¹⁰⁵ The Vietnamese mass media also publicized the Chinese morale problem as one of the three factors for China's "defeat."¹⁰⁶ This issue remains today as one

¹⁰¹ *Chan-cheng chih Yen-chiu*, pp. 7-9; *P'ou-hsi Pao-kao*, pp. 18-27; *NYT*, March 6, 1979, p. A10.

¹⁰² *Mei-chou T'ung-hsin*, February 16, 1979, p. 14.

¹⁰³ *Chan-cheng chih Yen-chiu*, p. 10; *Chinese Aggression*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁴ Mr. Lu's interview in New York, April 12, 1981. He stayed in China until late 1978 and is currently in Hong Kong.

¹⁰⁵ *Tongzhi*, p. 8. The "places" were apparently Bose, and Gueixien, Guangxi province.

¹⁰⁶ The other two factors were obsolete Chinese logistics and Vietnam's regional forces that contained, isolated, and whittled the Chinese down. *VNA* (Hanoi), April 6, 1979, in *FBIS*, April 9, 1979, pp. K2-K3.

of the several serious problems in the Chinese forces yet to be resolved.

2. EVALUATION

In spite of the fact that both China and Vietnam had claimed a victory over the other,¹⁰⁷ no one had achieved its major objectives. So far as China is concerned, its publicized "limited objectives" were only partially obtained. First of all, it had not *destroyed* some of Vietnam's strong divisions. Secondly, it was unable to pacify the border area free from armed conflicts. Thirdly, it had not forced the Vietnamese army to withdraw from Kampuchea. Fourthly, it failed to influence the Hanoi government to change its policy toward the Chinese residents in Vietnam. On the other side of the ledger, China had raised doubts for Hanoi about Soviet willingness to intervene with force against China. Moreover, the PRC had also obtained some support from the ASEAN for its attempt to stop Vietnam's further move in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, it had caused an immediate ill-effect on the Vietnamese economy.

But, a much more significant evaluation should be placed on China's strategy. How did the doctrine of "men-over-weapons" come out from the test? Or more broadly, was Mao's theory and strategy of "people's war" proved to be correct or anachronistic?

Obviously, the strategy of "people's war" in "modern conditions," as discussed earlier, was employed in the war. And some of the senior military leaders still stuck to the old doctrine of "people's war" as a magic talisman of defeating the enemy.¹⁰⁸ As a result of the 16-day war, both the backward weaponry and the outdated strategy were exposed to the Beijing leadership. While they accepted the fact of backward weaponry, the senior military leaders had difficulties in admitting their outdated strategy. But the "military modernizers" maintained that times had changed, and strategy had accordingly to be changed.

The admission of the outdated strategy and erroneous military thinking came in a subtle way. On March 26, 1979, the *Liberation Army Daily* (Jiefangjun Bao) carried an editorial evaluating the war. It stated that the war had

educated and tempered our people, consolidated their unity, and enhanced their patriotism and enthusiasm for transforming China. It also helped clear

¹⁰⁷ China's claims have been repeatedly cited above. The editorial of *Renmin Ribao* of March 7, 1979 repeated such claims. For Vietnamese claims, see *VNA* (Hanoi), April 6, 1979, in *FBIS*, April 9, 1979, pp. K2-K3; and Commentator: "The Chinese Aggressors' First Strategic Defeat," *Nhan Dan*, March 10, 1979, in *Ibid.*, March 12, 1979, pp. K2-K3. The Soviet Union also claimed a victory for Vietnam. See *CSM*, March 6, 1979, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Held mostly by Wang Dongxing and other "whatever" faction men.

away some *erroneous ideas* on the question of *war* and a number of *other questions*.¹⁰⁹ (emphasis added)

What were the “erroneous ideas” and “other questions” on war that had been cleared away? The military paper did not specify. Even if the “erroneous ideas” meant Mao’s theory and strategy of “people’s war,” it would not make such an outright confession. Nevertheless, one thing is sure: these “erroneous ideas” and the previously cited “ossification of thinking” in military affairs were under severe criticism. This editorial was the first document openly admitting some of these ideas on war along the line of the on-going general de-mythologization of Maoism at that time.

A clear answer to this issue was finally offered six months later. Using the occasion of celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic, Defense Minister Xu Xiangqian wrote an article, expressing strongly the official position:

Our *military thinking* must tally with changing conditions. If we *treat* and *command* a modern war in our *old way* we did in the 1930’s and 1940’s, we are bound to meet with a big rebuff and suffer a serious defeat. As we know, in war history, there were numerous defeats that were caused not by the inferior *manpower* or *weaponry*, but by the *backward military thinking* and *erroneous war command*.¹¹⁰ (emphasis added)

Such an admission of the Chinese backward military thinking would definitely not have been voiced if Mao were still in power. Clearly, this self-criticism related closely to the de-Maoization campaign and the rise of Deng.

Deng Xiaoping was right in saying that the “punitive war” would expose the weaknesses of the PLA for improvement. Now the “weaknesses” have been exposed. Apart from the previously discussed items, the military thinking of “people’s war” is probably the most serious drawback.

In launching this “punitive war,” China has taught both Vietnam and itself a lesson. Beijing’s military authorities must have reached the conclusion that the PLA is incapable of fighting a modern war before it is modernized in both weaponry and strategy.

V. Implications: Efforts for Rapid Modernization

As of mid-1982, the impact of the “punitive war” on the PLA has given an added impetus to the drive for military modernization. Briefly, the drive

¹⁰⁹ Editorial, “Love and Defend Our Motherland,” *Jiefangjun Bao* (Liberation Army Daily), March 26, 1979, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Xu Xiangqian, “Wei Shi-xian Guo-fang Xian-dai-hua er Nu-li Fen-dou” (Struggle Hard to Carry Out Defense Modernization), *Hongqi*, No. 10 (October 2, 1979), pp. 28-33.

can be divided into two areas: (1) the place of Mao's military thinking, and (2) regularization (professionalization) and modernization of the military system and weaponry. A few words on each area will be appropriate.

The place of Mao's military thinking. How to properly assess Mao's military thought has been part of the difficult problem of an overall re-evaluation of Mao since his death in 1976. After a long delay and debate, the party leadership had reached "a formal judgment of Mao's achievements and mistakes"¹¹¹ by May 1981, and incorporated it into the party document, "On Questions of Party History," in June.¹¹² It maintains that Mao's triumphs outweighed his debacles. On Mao's military thought, an article by Song Shidun, Central Committee member and Director of the Academy of Military Science, can probably better express the leadership's viewpoints than many other similar articles at that time. It reasons that Mao's military thought is the "crystallized" *collective* wisdom of the entire party and the army after the practice of a long period of war, and not developed by a single "genius." Several principles on war are outdated and should no longer be employed, but, it continues, Mao's military thinking should still be used as the "arrow" to aim at the "target" of future warfare. To this end, the Chinese should study in depth Mao's military thought, analyze the characteristics of modern warfare, and learn from foreign experiences which will be beneficial to the Chinese army.¹¹³ Such a reevaluation, though not definitive, is probably the best the Beijing leadership can do and should be considered a victory of the "military modernizers" over the resistance force. It clears the way for a drive to update military strategy.

Regularization (professionalization) and modernization. At a military maneuver in northern China in September 1981, Deng Xiaoping, in his capacity of the Chairman of the Military Council, called for the building of a "modernized, regularized revolutionary army."¹¹⁴ This call was the first such appeal in 23 years after the downfall of Defense Minister Peng Dehuai in 1958.

Ever since Deng's call, a series of editorials and articles have been published in *Jiefangjun Bao* emphasizing the importance of military re-

¹¹¹ Foreign Minister Huang Hua's interview, *NYT*, May 1, 1981, p. A11.

¹¹² "On Question of Party History," (adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on June 27, 1981), *Beijing Review*, No. 27 (July 6, 1981), pp. 10-39.

¹¹³ Song Shilun, "Mao Zedong Military Thought is the Guidance of the Victory of Our Army," *Hongqi*, No. 16, 1981, pp. 5-15.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Editorial: "Build Up a Strong, Modernized and Regularized Revolutionary Army," *Jiefangjun Bao*, October 1, 1981.

gularization.¹¹⁵ In a more specific way. General Chief of Staff Yang Dezhi set forth several proposals for the drive: (1) to strengthen the leadership of different levels; (2) to strictly execute the regulations and rules; (3) to promote the army quality by improving training programs and encouraging research projects; and (4) to reform and strengthen the system.¹¹⁶ The key issues here are the promotion of quality and the reforming of the system. It will take some time to implement them. But Beijing is moving in the right direction.

The PLA training program in fact has been improved since the war against Vietnam. For instance, it carried out "real fighting and real explosion (live ammunition)," as well as "coordinating training" of different forces instead of a single force such as infantry in most cases. These trainings are different from the past; and they have spread to Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Beijing, Nanjing, Jinan, Shenyang, and other Military Regions. Emphases are placed on combat abilities, command and control systems, independent judgment of middle and low ranking officers, and logistics.

The modernization of weaponry has also been sped up since 1979. By early 1982, China has possessed several advanced forces:¹¹⁷

ICBM:	4 CSS-3 (range 6,000-7,000 km; early 1979: none)
IRBM:	65-85 CSS-2 (range 2,500 km; early 1979: 30-40)
MRBM:	Some 50 CSS-1 <i>Tong Feng</i> (East Wind) (range 1,800 km; early 1979: 30-40)
Aircraft:	3 regt with 90 B (Hong)-6 med bbrs (early 1979: about 80)
Submarines:	102 subs (early 1979: about 75)

More significantly, the PLA carried out in June 1982 a large-scale, "real-explosion" military maneuver in Ningxia province. It exploded a strategic nuclear bomb, and employed missiles, aircraft, and tanks.¹¹⁸ It was different from past maneuvers. It indicates that the PLA may have adopted a new strategy of modern warfare, including the employment of nuclear weapons instead of the old strategy of the "people's war."

In sum, the PRC's military modernization has made some headway in both weaponry and strategy. Its success or failure hinges on the overall modernization program. Yet, it is clear that the war against Vietnam had helped the "military modernizers" push forward the drive.

¹¹⁵ *Jiefangjun Bao*, September 27, October 7, 1981, and January 22, 1982.

¹¹⁶ Yang Dezhi, "Several Problems of the Building of Regularization [of the Army]," *Jiefangjun Bao*, January 22, 1982.

¹¹⁷ *The Military Balance 1978-79*, pp. 56-57; and *ibid.*, 1981-82, pp. 72-75.

¹¹⁸ *UP*, July 13, 1982 (Beijing), in *World Journal* (New York), July 15, 1982.

Postscript

Since this article was written in September 1982, the Vietnamese forces have overrun a Kampuchean refugee base, killed 200 refugees near Thailand, and battled with Thai troops inside Thailand in early April 1983. Subsequently, the Chinese forces on the border have shelled at the Vietnamese army for about a week (April 16-21) and killed 16 Vietnamese soldiers. The Chinese move, apparently, was a retaliation to the Vietnamese raids on the Kampuchean refugees who were under the protection of Sihanouk and Pol Pot. And yet, it clearly indicates that with a substantial amount of the PLA stationing on the Sino-Vietnamese border, border clash can break out at any time.

All international wars end at negotiation tables. There will be no exception to the Chinese-Vietnamese conflict. The key to a possible settlement of this "brotherly" dispute depends on conditions. Since the suspension of their post-war negotiations in 1980, Vietnam has repeatedly urged Beijing to resume the talks. China refused. They hold different positions and conditions. The Chinese argue that Vietnam should first accept the United Nations Resolution 34/22 of 1979 on withdrawal of foreign troops from Kampuchea and stop provoking border incidents against China, then meaningful peace talks can be resumed. On the contrary, Hanoi asks China to stop all of her assistance to Pol Pot's and other anti-Vietnamese armed units and withdraw her support to Democratic Kampuchea (Pol Pot's) in the United Nations, then Vietnam will evacuate her troops from Kampuchea and settle her dispute with China. Both sides are adamant on their respective positions. No prospect for negotiations is in sight.

In a broader perspective, there are two possibilities that may lead to a settlement between the two nations. First, the Chinese-Vietnamese conflict is partly a result of the Sino-Soviet dispute and Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. If a Sino-Soviet rapprochement, currently in slow progress, can move forward smoothly and substantially in the near future, it will render a positive effect on Chinese-Vietnamese negotiations. Second, the change in leadership and policy in both Hanoi and Beijing to be more friendly towards each other may also lead to a rapprochement. It requires constructive interactions from both sides.

If there are no unpredictable factors that will serve to improve the Chinese-Vietnamese relationship in the near future, I will not be surprised to see another border conflict between China and Vietnam as well as between Vietnam and Thailand. It will take at least one

decade (1979-) to iron out their differences before a normalized relationship can be established between Hanoi and Beijing.

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