
Interview: Foreign Minister of Vietnam

Nguyen Co Thach: 'Light at the end of the tunnel in Indochina'

EIR's Peter Ennis and Paul Zykofsky interviewed Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach in New Delhi during the Non-Aligned summit meeting.

EIR: Has the summit been successful?

Thach: We can say it is successful, because the aim is unity and consolidation of the unity of the movement, for peace, for independence, and for economic development.

We should take into account the schemes of imperialism and reaction to split the movement, to sabotage the movement by creating noise on the question of Kampuchea, the question of returning the movement to its original objective, and to wreak havoc on the question of Afghanistan.

But, as you see, the schemes have failed. All of the time of our foreign ministers' conference was given to the Kampuchea question, but there is no contradiction in this and saying the schemes failed. The foreign ministers' conference had to put an end to this debate, and let the summit conference have debate on other issues. Secondly, if you take into account the tasks, the problems, and challenges, this summit can meet the problems and challenges. Thirdly, this summit can respond to the aspirations of the people of the Non-Aligned countries.

For these reasons, we can say the summit has been very successful, even if there still are some problems not yet solved. Even those are local, not the problems of interest to all.

EIR: What were the other issues of concern to Vietnam at the summit, in addition to the Kampuchea issue?

Thach: Our first concern was the unity of the movement, and the struggle for peace, for independence, and economic development. That is the common problem of all of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We participated in all of the committees, the subcommittees, and so on, at the summit. We had a small number of people here, but we participated in the whole summit. We were present throughout the entire plenary. Some delegations left the plenary hall for sleeping, but we were present around the clock. We were interested in the common interests of the movement.

EIR: I understand that there recently was a summit of the Indochinese states. Can you tell us what happened at that meeting?

Thach: The summit was successful in the sense that this was the first summit of the Indochinese countries after liberation. This summit will form a new stage of our revolution.

Before, we were concerned with liberation. Now, we are concerned with how to consolidate the peace, to safeguard our independence, and to build up our countries. So, the tasks are different from previous years. This solidarity is for new tasks.

Secondly, if you see that the solidarity between the three countries of Indochina is among independent countries, this debunks all allegations that Vietnam would like to have an Indochina federation, or military blocs. Our solidarity is looser than the ASEAN countries, and especially there is no integration like in the Common Market. It is very good for us to consolidate our independence, and our solidarity on the principle of mutual respect for independence of each country.

Thirdly, we have reiterated our peace proposal to China, to the ASEAN countries, and to America.

Fourthly, we have declared publicly that the Vietnam forces will partially withdraw annually from Kampuchea, according to the [state of] security of Kampuchea. We are [present] on the request of the Cambodian people, and we will withdraw totally at the request of the Cambodian people. When the Chinese stop their threat, it means we will withdraw totally. And this, we think, is a very important statement. It is welcomed by many countries, but only China and the ASEAN countries have rejected it.

EIR: Malaysian Foreign Minister Ghazalie Shafie told me in an interview that the longer Vietnam stays in Kampuchea, the worse the conditions will be in that country.

Thach: In Malaysia?

EIR: In Kampuchea. What's your reaction to this?

Thach: You see, you must see the actual situation on the spot in Kampuchea. Four years have passed. In those four years, the situation in Kampuchea, Vietnam, and Laos have improved. The security of Kampuchea is improving. If this

were not the case, we would not withdraw our forces annually. The declaration of annual withdrawal means the security of Cambodia is improving.

They say the reverse. Actually, there are two options. Now, we can settle the problem between ASEAN and Indochina on Southeast Asia, the sooner the better. This is the best option. The second option is that the present situation will drag on. And if time goes on, the situation in Kampuchea will improve.

In my country, the situation was very difficult in 1978 and 1979. But in 1981 and 1982 the situation was better. Now we have seen not only a little, but some light at the end of the tunnel.

So, they have some illusions that Vietnam will collapse. I have told them: Never will Vietnam collapse. For four years we have stood with our heads very high. There is no sign of Vietnam collapsing.

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EIR: What role is China playing in this situation? Is China pressuring the ASEAN countries to take this hostile stand? Also, Ghazali Shafie claimed that the Chinese government does not want Pol Pot to return to power, that it was the previous Chinese government controlled by the Gang of Four that supported Pol Pot. Is that true?

Thach: China has said that American imperialism is the worst thing in the world and that American imperialism would never change its nature. And you have seen that they have a very pompous wedding between Deng Xiaoping and Reagan, and they have had a very long honeymoon.

So, don't trust the word of Deng Xiaoping; only consider the Chinese deeds. Now, what are their deeds? They continue to give support to the Khmer Rouge. They say they never interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. But they continue to support the Maoists in Southeast Asia. They have diplomatic relations with Vietnam, but they continue to feed their Vietnamese puppet in Peking, Hoang Van Hoan. Don't trust their words. As I said yesterday at a press conference,

don't watch the movement of the magician's right hand; it is the hand that remains still that is more tricky.

EIR: Ghazali Shafie claimed that the only reason China supports the Khmer Rouge is to pressure Vietnam to withdraw from Kampuchea. So, what is China's intention in supporting Pol Pot?

Thach: I think the policy of ASEAN countries is based on the one hand on the condition between the U.S. and China, and on the other hand on the conflict between the Soviet Union and China, and China and Vietnam. Now, I think the ASEAN group would like to exploit this, to take advantage of this. And, what is the policy of China? China would always like to oppose one against the other. They oppose NATO against the Warsaw Pact. They oppose the U.S. against the Soviet Union. They oppose Pakistan against India.

This is their trick. I don't think they will stop supporting Pol Pot, because China always uses many cards at the same time. They never drop their cards. As far as India, they use Mizos, they use the Maoists, they stimulate dissident elements. At the same time, they have very friendly relations with India, normalization, and so on. They are very tricky. You must read the epoch story "Three Kingdoms."

EIR: Concerning U.S.-Vietnam relations, could you reiterate your government's position?

Thach: Now, the relations between the United States and Vietnam is bad. But this is much better than before, during the war. War is much worse. And now, we always are ready to have normalization with the United States, but it seems to me that the U.S. is more interested to have a China Card, than to have relations with Vietnam.

EIR: Let me ask you one last question. Recently, there was a delegation of American Vietnam veterans in Hanoi. Was the visit successful, and does it provide any light at the end of the tunnel?

Thach: No, I don't think so. But the trip was not part of U.S. government policy. It was a visit of private organizations. I have not seen any good sign, or signal, from the U.S. government.

EIR: Just one last question.

Thach: The second last question. . . .

EIR: Yes, the second last. This is a journalist's old trick.

There is lots of speculation that the Sino-Soviet talks may result in some kind of pressure on Vietnam for a solution to the Kampuchea issue. What do you say about this speculation?

Thach: This is the hope of the speculators, but it is not real, not true. Vietnam welcomes these talks. We are for the normalization of relations between China and the Soviet Union, and between China and Vietnam. And China has criticized the Soviet Union for not talking about third country problems. So, things are very clear.