

Theme III: The Cold War and Southeast Asia

Topic: Manifestations of the Cold War in Southeast Asia

The Third Indochina War (1978-1991)

INQUIRY QUESTION: WHO OR WHAT CAUSED THE OUTBREAK OF THE THIRD INDOCHINA WAR?

INQUIRY QUESTION: HOW AND WHY DID THE THIRD INDOCHINA WAR DEVELOP?

- Factors shaping the Third Indochina War (1978–1991)

1978 marked Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, while 1991 marked the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements.

1. Historical animosities and Cold War developments

- Historical animosities: between Khmer and Vietnamese ethnicities; past Vietnamese exploitation and territorial expansion (e.g., Emperor Minh Mang's aggressive policies towards Cambodia, Cambodia's perceived loss of Kampuchea Krom)
- Cold War developments: détente and renewed confrontation between superpowers; Sino-Soviet rivalry and rapprochement; ending of the Cold War in late 1980s

2. Role of Vietnam and Cambodia

- Vietnam: Vietnam's alliance with the USSR; political competition with Khmer Rouge for influence and dominance; Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978; gradual withdrawal of troops from Cambodia; military and diplomatic efforts to resolve conflict; its changing relations with the USSR and China
- Cambodia: Khmer Rouge's alliance with China; political competition with Vietnam for influence and dominance; military and diplomatic efforts to resolve conflict (e.g.; formation of Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in 1982, its eight-point proposal); the Khmer Rouge's changing relations with China

3. Role of China, the USSR and the USA

- China: provision of military, economic and diplomatic support to Khmer Rouge due to Sino-Soviet rivalry and Sino-American rapprochement [e.g., Sino-Vietnamese War (1979)]; pressure on Khmer Rouge to resolve conflict due to decrease in Cold War tensions
- The USSR: provision of military, economic and diplomatic support to Vietnam due to Sino-Soviet rivalry and Sino-American rapprochement; pressure on Vietnam to resolve conflict due to decrease in Cold War tensions
- The USA: preference for minimal involvement due to Sino-American rapprochement and Cold War developments in Europe; economic sanctions against Vietnam; support for Cambodian resolution at the United Nations