

Vietnam's Expansionism in Indochina: Strategies and Consequences on the Regional Security

By

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Summary :

The performance of Vietnam's current expansionism in Indochina is a result of its Strategic Southward Move. In the space of a few hundreds years, Vietnam had managed to built its Empire through successive annexions and new forms of colonization.

*Not only the Fundamental Rights of People annexed [Cham, Montagnards (Mien, Mnong, Koho, Jarai, Degar), Hmong and Khmer Krom] – representing in 1998-99 more than 13% of Vietnam's total population * - or placed under Vietnam's control (Cambodian and Laotian) are ignored and violated but South East Asia's security order may also be threatened by Vietnam's hegemonic ambitions. That is why this expansionism performed by this country constitutes a real danger for the regional and international security.*

Based on the Cambodian case, this paper tries to analyse the strategies implemented by Vietnam for its expansionist process and assesses its consequences on the regional and international security.

Key Words:

Annexion – Ethnic Minorities – Strategic Manipulations - Violation of Self Determination Rights – Hegemonic Ambitions – Threat for Regional Security.

* Dang Nghiem Van, Chu Thai Son and Luu Hung: Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, Culture & People, 2000.

Vietnam is considered as one of the most expansionist countries in Asia. In the space of a few hundreds years, this country has evolved from its small cradle located in the Delta of Tonkin to become a tentacular Empire. Its expansionist - annexionist process is often known under the following metaphor: "the **Long March Towards the South**". Because of this March some countries were simply transformed into a province of Vietnam and other are becoming, like Cambodia, the victim of its expansionist policy.

As mentioned above, Cambodia is not the only victim of this conquest policy. In the past, the Kingdom of Champa and Kampuchea Krom (currently South of Vietnam) were totally annexed. And Lao PDR is currently facing the same problems as Cambodia. But due to time constraint only the Cambodian case is analyzed in this communication.

The aim of this paper is to analyze Vietnam's strategies deployed in this southward expansion, and to assess the implications for the Regional Security and its international consequences.

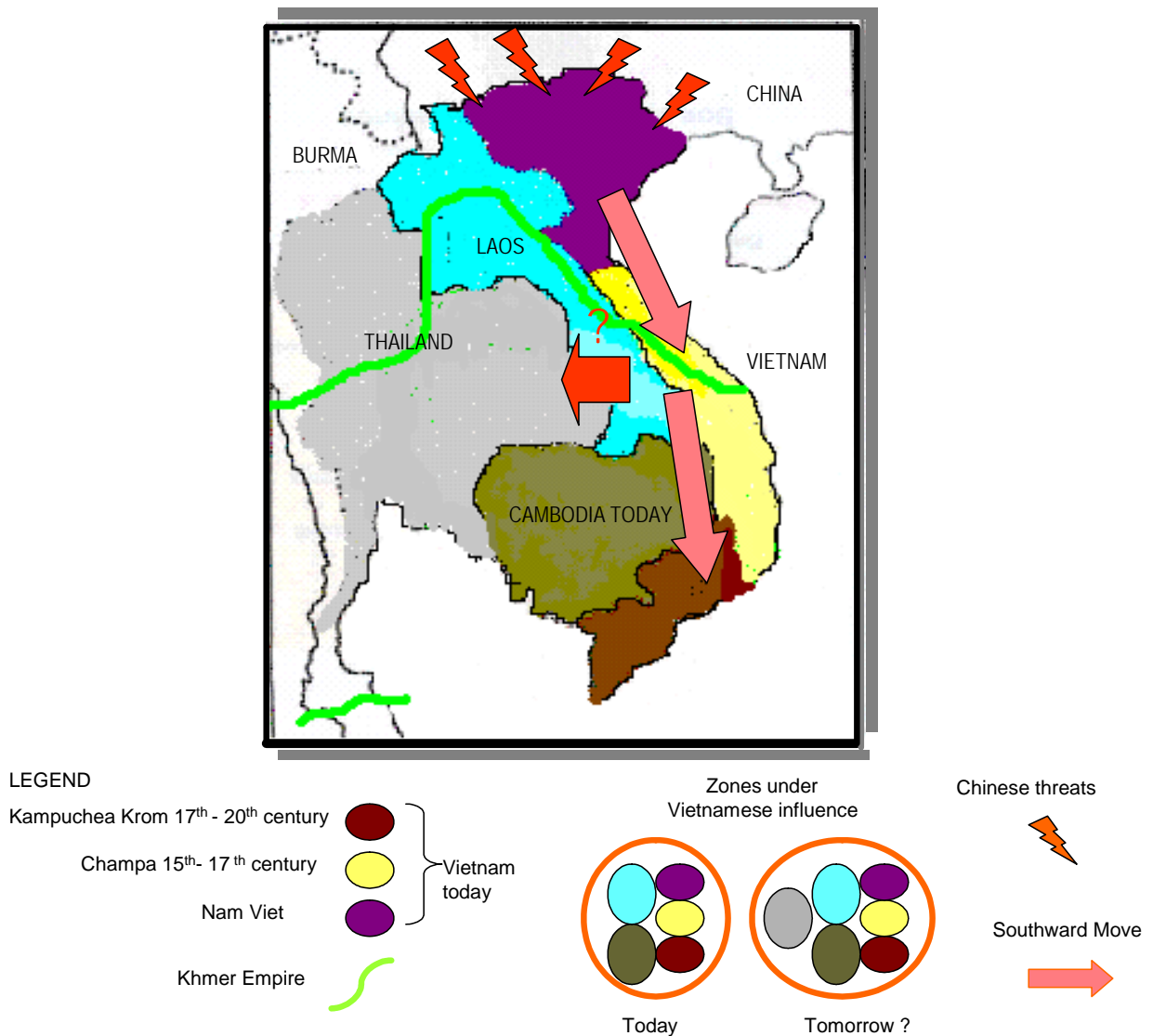
I - Southward Expansion Policy and Strategies

After breaking away from China, the cradle of the vietnamese nation in the 10th century was only the area encompassed by the Delta of Tonkin. As early in the 13th century, Vietnam began its southward expansion policy. Initially, it encroached and definitely annexed the Kingdom of Champa (currently central Vietnam) in 1693. Then in early 17th century, it began encroaching and occupying Khmer territory of Cochinchina or Kampuchea Krom (present-day South of Vietnam). Today, this invading process is accelerating in an unprecedented pace.

1) Factors behind Vietnam's Southward Expansion

a- Historical Motivations

After being placed under Chinese domination until 939, Vietnam (then known as Nam Viet) was unceasingly attacked by Mongol and Chinese armies. In order to better resist the northern threats (from China), Vietnam have begun a long march toward the South, the "**Nam Tiến**" in Vietnamese expression.

Figure 1: Long March Toward the South

In the past, this inexorable expansion gave Vietnam strategic advantages for the North to successfully resist the Chinese attacks and the South to open up wider frontiers. As one of the most densely populated country in Asia, Vietnam could also resolve, thanks to its March towards the South, the problems of its territory's tininess and grant its population resources from countries newly annexed or placed under its control.

b- Contemporary Motivations

In the contemporary period, the southward move is motivated by the will of becoming an unmissing regional power, even more, an inevitable interlocutor in Asia. At the time of the competition for the geopolitical repositioning, the control over Laos and Cambodia will enable Vietnam to gain/reinforce its position in the international scene.

Within ASEAN, Vietnam acts as one country with three potential voting rights (Vietnam+ Cambodia + Laos) and wants to do the same within other organizations like the World Trade Organization.

With the concept "One Country, Three Voting Rights", a concept the author will develop in next chapter, Vietnam hopes to become a courted country. Thanks to this concept, Vietnam holds a potential power to negotiate with some countries in any domain and will be able to diplomatically make pressure on others.

Currently, Vietnam is trying to draft an institutional framework which will promote the free mobility of population within ASEAN zone. Once passed, this institutional framework will legalize Vietnam's demographic conquests. The rate of Vietnamese settlement in South East Asia will be very high. With the redistribution of its population, Vietnam hope to extend, regardless the other countries' boundaries, the geographic and political space of its Nation.

Clearly Vietnamese Leaders want to build a "Great Vietnam" through the following expression : "*Chỗ Nào Có Người Việt, Chỗ Đó Sẽ Là Đất Nước Việt Nam*" that means "Where there are Vietnamese, there will be Vietnam". All these contemporary motivations can be resumed by the author's expression "Vietnamspansionism".

2) Strategies and Machiavellian Manoeuvres

The conquest of the south was backed by several types of strategies : mainly military attacks, demographic conquests, manipulations and strategic alliances with other Powers. These strategies were/are not exclusive at all. They were/are often combined in order to obtain a better efficiency.

a -Strategies implemented within the victim countries

Contrary to what happened in the Kingdom of Champa and Kampuchea Krom, the strategies applied by Vietnam in Cambodia are very subtle and very well camouflaged making them imperceptible on the surface. As we will see it in the figure 2, Vietnam acted and is still acting through an "invisible hand".

Vietnam essentially used violence and massacre. This method was/is very costly both in human and material terms for Vietnam. Because the physical aggression did/does not only generate, in return, violence but increased/increases patriotism on the part of the victim country or the victim peoples .

b -The conquest of the Kampuchea Krom (Cochinchina)

Just to remember what happened in Kampuchea Krom. After presenting Princess *Ngoc Van*, in 1630, to young King *Chey Chetha II*, Vietnam asked the king the permission for Vietnamese to settle in Preah Suakea (Ba Ria) and Prey Nokor (Saigon). The king *Chey Chetha II* had to accept the pressures made by his newly wed wife, *Ngoc Van*. Thanks to this "*sex and marital alliance*" tactics, which was already applied in the Kingdom of Champa with Princess *Ngoc Khao*, Vietnam managed to corrupt the soul of the khmer king and to realize its demographic conquests. Once its bases strongly consolidated, Vietnam was to commit ultra atrocious violence to repress khmers' opposition.

During the period 1813 - 1815, Vietnamese perpetrated the infamous massacre, known to every Khmer as "*Prayat Kompup Te Ong*". It was the most barbarous torture style in which the Khmer were buried alive up to their neck. Their heads were used as the stands for a wood stove to boil water for the Vietnamese masters. As they were burned and suffered, the victims shook their heads. At that moment, the Vietnamese torturers jokingly said "*Be careful, not to spill the master's tea*". Other kinds of massacre were the beheading and human collective autodafé (keeping Khmers locked up in granaries and burning them alive). Thousands of Khmers were so massacred in such a human collective autodafé. In 1841, Oknha Son Kuy (*Chauvay Kouy*), one of Khmer Krom leaders and the ancestor of defunct Son Sann, was atrociously beheaded.

In front of such barbary, Khmer people, under the command of *Sena Sous*, rose up, in 1859, against the Vietnamese first in the province of Srok Kleang (today *Soc Trang* in Vietnamese designation). After the murder of *Sena Sous* by a Vietnamese undercover agent, the revolt was pursued by two other Khmer Krom leaders *Sena Mon* and *Sena Tea*. In spite of the bravery of Khmer Krom leaders, Vietnam managed to control all Khmer Krom territory thanks to military and demographic conquests. And in June 1949, France, then colonizator of Indochina, transferred Kampuchea Krom, in spite of strong opposition from the Khmers, to Vietnam then under Bao Dai government.

c- Using stratagems and special secret operations instead of costly military confrontations

Having gone through this costly experience in the Kingdom of Champa and in Kampuchea Krom, Vietnam changed its strategies of conquest in Laos and Cambodia. These strategies became/become more subtle and far less costly in human and material terms. They became/become more effective and more destructive. A part of Cambodia is now infected from the inside. This is a result of a strategic manipulation and long term tactics.

Vietnam had elaborated very meticulous plans to push its southward expansion in Cambodia. But the French presence in Cambodia was a problem for Vietnam. As a khmer proverb says " *there can not be two lyon kings on one moutain*".

That was the reason for which Ho Chi Minh, then known as *Nguyễn Ai Quốc* ("Nguyen the Patriot") had asked, but in vain, the representatives of the great powers, particularly France, at the Versailles Peace Conference in January 1919, for Independence and Freedom.

Dissatisfied by France's refusal, Ho Chi Minh, after becoming a member of the French Communist Party, founded in 1930 the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in Hanoi. At that time, Ho Chi Minh hoped to use Marxism-Leninism in Laos and Cambodia to rally these countries to its homeland claims. In fact, **its ultimate goal was to become the sole master of Indochina. To reach that objective, perfidious and subtle strategies were implemented. Breaking social links and solidarity between the people of the victim country, manipulating leaders of influence, using divide and rule and "woman and sex" tactics were at the heart of Vietnam's strategies.**

Late in 1931, Vietnam had set up ICP cells in Cambodia -first in Phnom Penh, with others following in Kandal, Kratie and Kompong Cham (vietnamese labors in rubber plantations)- and in Laos (in Vientiane, Savannakhet and Thakhek). At that time, Vietnam had rapidly managed to make a great advance in Laos. Vietnamese communities in Laos were used as stepping stones to form a growing network of liaison bases throughout the country. The success realized in this latter country had encouraged Vietnam to set up its revolutionaries cells in northern part of Thailand (then known as *Siam*).

The little success made in Cambodia was explained by the relatively low level of Vietnamese communities in Cambodia. Another reason was that Marxism-Leninism brought nothing new for Cambodians. These latter lived already in an environment of well-woven social links and solidarity and in high belief in the monarchy/kingship.

d- Sowing the seeds of the killing fields

Despite this situation, Vietnam had never give up its ambitions over Cambodia. It continued to secretly develop its networks and had adopted a new strategic manoeuvre. This tactical manoeuvre was to be the roots of the "killing fields" in Cambodia.

The starting point of Vietnam's new strategic policy towards Cambodia was the context of decolonization. This time, Vietnam managed to federate Cambodians thanks to this new politic concept. Vietnam encouraged, in conjunction with the leftist government that ruled Thailand until 1947, the formation of "*Khmer Issarak Front*" in Cambodia. At the same time "*Lao Itsala Front*" was created in Laos too .

The *Khmer Issarak Front*, independent in apparence, was in fact under the command of its Vietnamese counterpart, "*Viet Minh Front*". Its Executive Committee was essentially consisted of Vietnamese elements.

In the country, Vietnam used this khmer organisation with its armed forces to fight the French in order to have a free field for its expansion in Cambodia. And in diplomatic realm, Ho Chi Minh suggested to the King Norodom Sihanouk to claim Independence from France. Ho Chi Minh, after asking in vain the Independence for his homeland from France in 1919 at the Versailles Peace Conferences, decided to act through the khmer king, **who was to be the victim of strategic manipulation and "woman instrumentalized tactics"**, for Vietnam's interests. His Majesty the King had helped Vietnam not only to evict France from Indochina but to win the war against the United States too.

But in this story, His Majesty the King Norodom Sihanouk harvested, as it was planned by Ho Chi Minh, a tremendous popularity within Cambodia. That is why His Majesty the King is so grateful to Ho Chi Minh. As Cambodians could see, the King often went to Ho Chi Minh's tomb in order to pay respect and express his gratitude to Uncle Ho.

Parallel to this royal manipulation, Vietnam had restructured the network of its undercover agents in Cambodia and in Laos, most of them were to be incorporated into the *Lao Itsala* and the *Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party* (KPRP), both were established after the reorganization of the ICP in 1951. The Lao and Khmer units were placed under the supervision of their Vietnamese counterpart, *Vietnam Workers' Party*. In term of organization, the Executive Committee of the KPRP was essentially assumed by ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia.

After the World War II, Cambodia became one of the targets in the fight between the Great Powers. Vietnam obtained, with the support of URSS, strong foothold through Cambodia.

In late 1950s, Vietnam attempted to propel KPRP into Cambodia political scene. Thus the *Pracheachon Party*, the legal political party of KPRP, participated in the 1955 and 1958 National Assembly Elections. The *Pracheachon* party won a very weak ballot (± 4 percent) of the vote and did not secure a seat in the legislature. Members of the *Pracheachon* could not make any progress in the National Assembly because of Sihanouk's *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*, which then monopolized all seats.

e- The Rise of a Communist Party controlled by Vietnam : the Pracheachon Party

During 1950s, there was no alternative political party as well structured as the *Pracheachon Party*. When the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum's* opposition members were subject to harassment and to arrests, they automatically rallied *KPRP-Pracheachon Party* without knowing exactly who lead this adverse party.

At that juncture, Vietnamese strategy apparently seems to pursue two contradictory goals. Because on one hand, Vietnam, after assisting the king Norodom Sihanouk in his "Royal Crusade", got closer to him. And on the other hand, Vietnam attempted, through *KPRP-Pracheachon Party*, to push the king Norodom Sihanouk out of office. The essence of this Vietnamese strategy is very deep. Vietnam's goal in this tactics was to generate dissension and hate in khmer community. This objective was to be reached with the "killing field", which was then to be revealed to the world in 1978.

f- Great Powers of the Cold War provided the enormous means to destroy Cambodia : a sideshow of the URSS, China, USA and Vietnam

In 1960s and 1970s, Vietnam had benefitted a lot from the Cold War. This country gained support from the Soviet Union and China, its allies of the moment. One of the two Great Powers, China, was to be lead by the nose by a "little player", Vietnam, by making it be alone implied in the Cambodian *killing field*. The heavy secret bombings of Cambodia in 1973 by the US president Nixon and by Kissinger had over-destroyed Cambodia and had tremendously weakened the popularity of the US ally Khmer Republic of Marshal Lon Nol and was reported to have heavy effects on the Khmer Rouges. The US bombing syndrome was later used by Vietnamese troyans to convince Pol Pot to evacuate urban populations from their cities and implemented the mass elimination policy through successive scanning of target populations. This elimination policy was disrupted during the vietnamese invasion in december 1978 and was continued afterwards by the vietnamese military occupants through secret schemes. The results were amazing : 1.5 to 2 millions of human lives eliminated and an almost national population size displacement of the cambodian people (3 to 4 millions people) and about 1.5 million of refugees.

Because Vietnam, after introducing its "Trojan Horses", like Nuon Chhea, Heng Samrin, Hun Sen, Pen Sovan, in basic posts of the Cambodian Communists Movement, helped the Khmer Rouges, as it can be read in François Bizot's "Le Portail", to take Power in 1975. Thanks to Vietnam's help and its special secret agents, Pol Pot could rule Cambodia with assisted terror. And when came the appropriate time, Vietnam decided to use its infiltrated elements (Heng Samrin, Hun Sen, Pen Sovan, etc), and ignited a few strategic tricks to oust Pol Pot. It was in that manner that Vietnam invaded Cambodia, then demographically weak and politically divided, and using its hyper powerful and well organized propaganda machinery designed itself as the "Liberator" in december 1978. In fact, Vietnam's responsibility in this horrible Killing field is obvious, but the vietnameses succeeded in destroying almost all proofs and witnesses during their occupation of Cambodia (1979-1989).

g- Empowering Hun Sen's regime to re-take the control of Cambodia after the UN 1991-1993 intervention.

Since this date, Vietnam has taken control of Cambodia through the CPP/HUN SEN regime they have created. In july 1997, Vietnam helped Hun Sen make a bloody coup-d'état allowing Hun Sen to install himself as the Prime-Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, putting an end to the system of two-prime ministers heading the government that King Norodom Sihanouk has put-up under Hun Sen's threat of country secession after the Funcinpec's victory at the first UN-supervised general elections in 1993. This coup d'état gave the opportunity to the CPP to annihilate the military capacity of the Funcinpec and to take the whole control of Cambodia. It allowed the CPP to take full control of the organization of the 1998 general elections which had, as expected, ensured the victory of the PPC. To camouflage such a comedy and show a facade of democracy and gain the international community complicity and benediction, Vietnam and the CPP organized a coalition government with Funcinpec to whom was given a few honorary ministry chairs. To keep the king under leash, the country is maintained as a kingdom with Norodom Sihanouk as a king and allocated with a fat budget. The system worked perfectly for the CPP and the same election stratagem was used in the july 2003 general elections to ensure the obtention of an election result as catered by the CPP strategists. What the CPP wants is to leave a little space to accomodate some Funcinpec elements in a coalition government under its full control. The good score of the Sam Rainsy party at this election allowed the democratic political wrangle comedy that "prevented" the formation of a "coalition government". Vietnam and the CPP organized the circus show where the international community witnessed the "Alliance of Democrats" composed of Funcinpec and Sam Rainsy party as bad democratic players since they refused to play the rule of the july 2003 elections result. Vietnam and the CPP has succeeded to "discredit" the khmer "democrats". By refusing to go to PyongYang, North Korea, at the invitation made on 12 may 2004 by King Sihanouk, Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen succeeded to "ridiculize politically" the khmer king. The khmer monarch was "destituted" of his sovereign role. The king used to have a notoriety power that can balance the power of Hun Sen. This power has now been shattered by Hun Sen and Prince Norodom Ranariddh. This later is one of King Sihanouk sons, but rumors said the king would have wanted to crown an other son as a next king of Cambodia. Would this dispute be the reason why Prince Ranariddh associates himself to Hun Sen in complete submission in order to separate his father from Hun Sen, the king maker of Cambodia? If this hypothesis turns to be true, then it confirmed the thesis which said one of the reasons of the decline of Cambodia is the priority chosen by the royal family in competing for the cambodian crown instead of defending the strategic interests of the country.

h- Towards transforming the kingdom of Cambodia into a Socialist Republic of Cambodia ?

The coalition government that Hun Sen and Norodom Ranariddh are catering will pave the road to new amendments of the 1993 Cambodian constitution preparing to a one party-state system government under the total rule of the CPP as wished by Vietnam. 10 months after the July 2003 elections Vietnam has finally cleared all the political obstacles in Cambodia. This last political success should now lead them to the total control of Cambodia after they have removed the power of the monarch by altering the 1993 Cambodian constitution. The one party-state system can then remove all the Cambodian sovereignty clauses. Cambodia will lose the legal sovereignty clauses given by the 1991 international Paris Peace Agreements and this will turn the Vietnamese dream to transform Cambodia into a province of the "Great Vietnam" into reality.

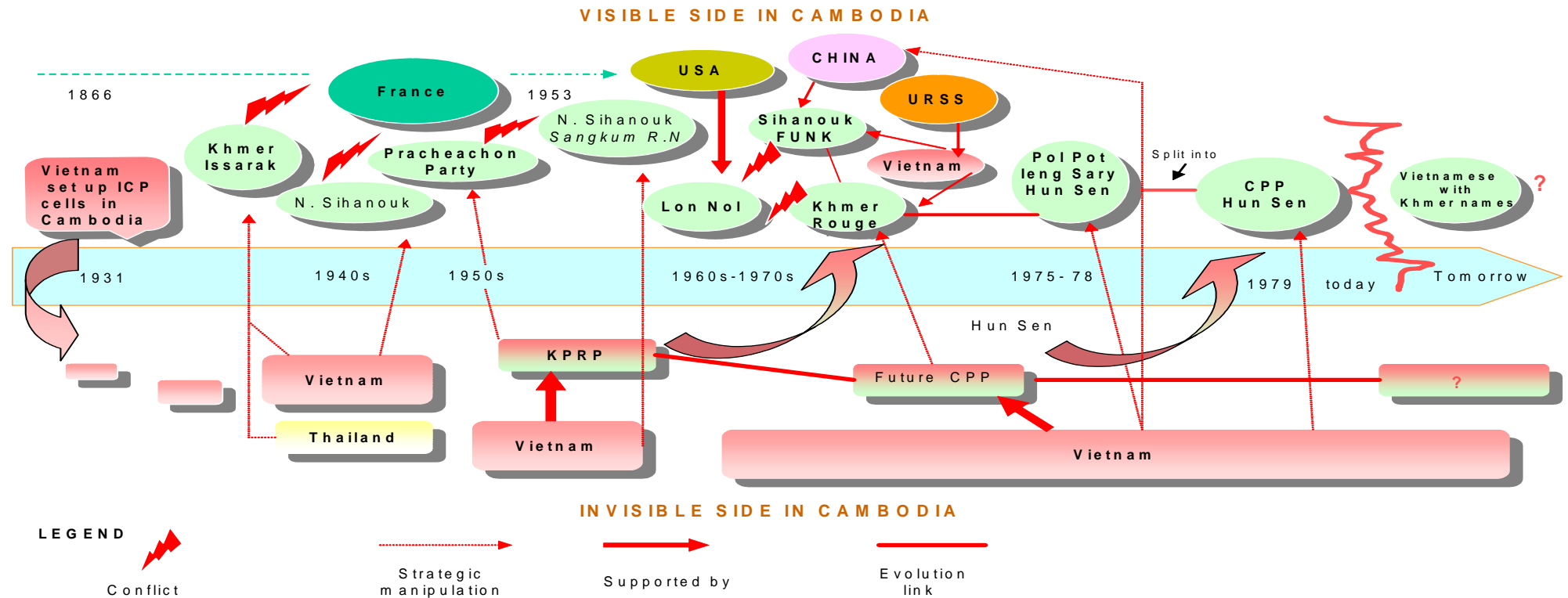
i- An Indochina Empire has emerged in an ASEAN+2 economic bloc within a geopolitically recomposed ASIA-PACIFIC zone :

Vietnam is being to complete the annexion of the former French Indochina and can now contemplate the Siamese large E-san province. The destabilization of Thailand has started since the 29th January 2003 with the burning of the Thai embassy and molesting of main Thai businesses in Phnom-Penh. Last week attack in Pattani (province south of Thailand) where about one hundred young Muslims reported as Cham people coming from Cambodia raises the troubling question : who apart Vietnam has the capacity to launch such operation ? The successful stratagem used in Champa, Cambodia and Laos is now pursuing in Thailand. The beginning of the next step has begun : **the pursuit westward of Vietnam ambitious expansionism.**

Some signs show that Vietnam contemplates the desire to change the leadership in Cambodia in order to take a new pace of development under the ASEAN+2 economic bloc. When will they replace Hun Sen and his supporters ? They did that with King Sihanouk, with the Khmer Rouge Leaders and with Pen Sovann. After the amending of the UN drafted 1993 Cambodian constitution ? Vietnamese strategists may still need the Hun Sen team to consolidate their foothold in Cambodia . Hun Sen has the required capacity to install a party-state system in Cambodia and no other CPP leader seems more capable than him. So the Hun Sen premiership employment contract may possibly continue until the celebration of the one party-state system installation in Cambodia that has been scheduled. A Republic Socialist of Cambodia after the 2008 general elections ?

The "Vietnamspansionism" towards the rest of South East Asia has begun with the enlargement of ASEAN into an ASEAN +2 within a geopolitically recomposed Asia-Pacific region.

Politics in CAMBODIA



The below topics will be developed later on :

b –Vietnam ,exploiting rivalry between Superpowers

II – Vietnamspansionism as a Threat for the Regional and international Security Order

III – Conclusive Remarks