leaders. As is often the case, the evidence here raises more questions than it answers. The available documents do not reveal what the Soviet strategy in Spain was, or even whether there was such a strategy. Some of the policy directives issued by Moscow—such as the order to the Spanish Communists to abandon the government in 1938 (pp. 71–73)—contradicted the views of Palmiro Togliatti, the Italian Communist leader, who was the special Comintern emissary in Spain from 1937 to 1939. The editors attribute this to Stalin’s scant understanding of the Spanish situation despite the abundance of information he had been receiving, including reports sent by Togliatti himself (p. 61).

The relationship between Moscow and the Chinese Communists appears even more discordant. From 1936 to 1941 the Comintern frequently called for an alliance with Chiang Kai-shek and denounced the insubordination of Mao Zedong. Stalin’s role in these directives can be documented very clearly (see pp. 106 ff.).

Stalin’s interventions were of decisive importance in two other key events: when he compelled all of the Communist parties to endorse the Soviet alliance with Nazi Germany after August 1939, and when he dissolved the Comintern in May 1943 to mollify the Western powers with which the Soviet Union was allied. In the first case Stalin himself forced Dimitrov to abandon the anti-Fascist line and to replace it entirely with “anti-imperialist” propaganda—a turn of events that for two months caused confusion and bewilderment among the Communist parties (docs. 28 and 29, pp. 153 ff.). In the second case Stalin began as early as April 1941 to plan for the dissolution of the Comintern. Two years later he formally dissolved the organization, arguing that it was necessary to facilitate the “national” development of the individual Communist parties (pp. 226 ff.).

The documents in this volume yield ambiguous conclusions. Although the letters generally confirm that the Comintern was completely subordinated to Stalin’s will, they also reveal that the decision-making process in Moscow was often turbulent and inconducive to coherent policies. The editors are justified in arguing that Soviet strategy was characterized mainly “by dilemmas and ambiguities in decision making” (p. xx).


Reviewed by Robert F. Turner, *University of Virginia School of Law*

Like many veterans of the Indochina conflict, I returned to the United States with a great deal of emotional baggage and a belief that a world that can send people to the moon ought to be able to find a way to resolve international differences without slaughtering one another. Unlike most other veterans, I have had the great fortune of
being able to spend much of the ensuing three decades searching for explanations and alternatives to such behavior—including the great honor of serving for two years as the first president of the U.S. Institute of Peace in the mid-1980s.

For several years I have co-taught an advanced interdisciplinary seminar at the University of Virginia on “New Thinking About War and Peace,” which has focused special attention on what has become known as the “democratic peace” thesis. Among the most impressive work on this subject in recent years is that of my colleague, John Norton Moore, who has drawn heavily on the scholarship of Bruce Russett, R. J. Rummel, and others, and has added a second crucial element from deterrence theory (validated in part by the brilliant historical work of Donald Kagan) in proposing a far broader, new paradigm about government behavior and incentive structures. I was therefore eager to see how the Indochina conflict of 1978–1979 conformed to the Moore paradigm.

Because my first book, a 500-page study titled Vietnamese Communism (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), was published long ago, I was all the more delighted to receive an invitation to review Stephen Morris’s Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia. I am pleased to report that it is a truly superb piece of scholarship. Morris has done his homework well, his analysis is rigorous and persuasive, and he has presented his views in a tight and highly readable package. The volume is must reading for anyone who wishes to understand not only the 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, but also the character of the Communist regimes that struggled for—and in April 1975 achieved—power in those two countries at the height of the Cold War.

As Morris observes, standard explanations of international politics suggest that this conflict should never have occurred. Realists and balance-of-power advocates predict that states will pursue their rational self-interest to achieve goals like wealth and power and that they will resort to force only when they perceive a clear benefit. Yet, in Indochina, Cambodia repeatedly initiated the use of force against a regime that had long been seen as its benefactor—and a regime of far superior military resources and experience. The resulting struggle is the only extended armed conflict between two Communist states.

Vietnam had a numerical superiority in ground forces of nearly nine to one (not to mention superior equipment, including nearly one thousand tanks and hundreds of combat aircraft) and a population advantage of more than seven to one, which was accentuated by the fact that most Cambodians were, as the author notes, “in a state of total physical and mental exhaustion as a result of hunger and disease” by 1978 (p. 103). The author argues persuasively that the paranoia characteristic of chiliastic regimes provides a good part of the explanation (p. 13). A substantial degree of racism on both sides was also clearly at play.

The “fanatical ideological zeal” (p. 59) of the Cambodian Communist leaders was evidenced by their decision—in the wake of U.S. congressional action in May 1973 outlawing the use of funds for combat operations in Indochina after mid-August 1973—to launch a major offensive against Phnom Penh in July. If the Khmer Rouge
had waited a few more weeks, Morris notes, they would have been spared the massive casualties they suffered when the Americans responded to their offensive with ferocious air strikes.

Morris terms the ideology of Pol Pot and his comrades “hyperMaoism” (p. 17) and provides useful insights into the slaughter that immediately followed the “liberation” of Cambodia. Former soldiers and government officials and even their infant children were executed. “[I]nspired by the domestic policies of Mao Zedong in China,” Morris writes, Cambodia became a “slave society” under Pol Pot’s rule (p. 70).

The book includes a very useful history of Vietnamese Communism and Vietnamese attitudes toward Cambodia. Morris provides an account of Ho Chi Minh’s service in the 1920s and 1930s as a “full-time functionary of the Comintern” (p. 27)—a point that has been admitted by Hanoi for decades but continues to shock many American academics who grew up believing that “Uncle Ho” was a nationalist disciple of Thomas Jefferson. Morris does a good, if brief, job of discussing Hanoi’s early commitment to world revolution and its long-standing opposition to nationalism, and he observes that the loyalty of Ho and his Vietnamese expatriates in the USSR during Josif Stalin’s reign of terror in the 1930s was such that not one of them was apparently even arrested. Morris notes that long after Stalin’s death and Nikita Khruschev’s “secret speech” denouncing Stalin, “the Vietnamese party continued to express reverence for Stalin” (pp. 120–122).

The book also challenges the popular view of American academics that Ho Chi Minh would have been an “Asian Tito” if he had been allowed to come to power. Morris points out that six months after the latest Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia in December 1962 Ho Chi Minh declared that Yugoslavia was not a part of the “international communist movement” and was in fact “a danger to it” (p. 132). Morris concludes: “Vietnamese communism was never a maverick ‘national communist’ movement on the Titoist model. It was, rather, an integral part of an international movement that was headed by the Soviet Union” (p. 140). The book also provides a useful account of early Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh, including the decisive role of Chinese aid in the 1954 defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu (p. 125).

Having spent considerable time trying to analyze Hanoi’s position in the Sino-Soviet struggle, I found Morris’s analysis of that issue to be particularly enlightening. He refers to my own work, as well as that of other scholars, when he observes that “prior to 1978 no Western academic specialist had perceived any Vietnamese communist alignment with the Soviet Union” (p. 143). He then uses his enviably superior access to information—including months in Moscow going through Soviet Communist Party archives, as well as personal interviews with senior players like Prince Norodom Sihanouk—to demonstrate quite conclusively that those of us who went before him were mistaken. Mea culpa. But I did take some satisfaction in learning that Soviet experts were no closer to the truth than I was. While I was at Stanford writing Vietnamese Communism, Soviet diplomats in Hanoi were sending cables to Moscow “expressing their dissatisfaction with the alleged Vietnam Workers’ Party pol-
icy of maintaining equally friendly relations with the USSR and the PRC” (pp. 204–206).

For those of us who watched in frustration as American “peace” initiatives, including bombing halts and Robert McNamara’s policy of gradualism, convinced Hanoi that the United States lacked the will to prevail, there is some irony in Morris’s observation that Hanoi’s moderate response to Khmer Rouge incursions into Vietnam—such as halting a January 1978 offensive into the famous “Parrot’s Beak” nearly twenty-five miles from Phnom Penh, even though the Vietnamese troops easily could have captured the city—had the unexpected effect of hardening the Cambodian position. Comparing the Khmer Rouge’s “victory” over Vietnam as being equal in historical significance to the “defeat of the U.S. imperialists,” the undeterred Cambodian leaders continued to launch attacks into Vietnam (pp. 102–103). Vietnam finally launched an all-out offensive on Christmas Day in 1978 and captured Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979.

Morris concludes by attributing the Vietnamese decision to invade Cambodia to a combination of long-standing imperial ambitions and a need to put an end to Cambodian military attacks into Vietnam (p. 229). These were certainly very important factors. But one might add that the totalitarian nature of both regimes also contributed to bringing the conflict about, as it permitted the political elites on both sides to externalize key costs that might well have deterred a democratic state. But that may be the subject of a different essay.


Reviewed by Mark A. Lawrence, University of Texas-Austin

More than twenty-five years after the fall of Saigon, diplomatic historians have lost none of their zeal for writing about the Vietnam wars of the twentieth century. Most scholars continue to focus on how the United States and other Western governments responded to the revolutionary challenge in Indochina. Over the past few years, however, a small but intrepid band of linguistically skilled historians has begun exploring uncharted territory. Taking advantage of newly accessible archival materials in Russia, China, and Vietnam, authors such as Ilya Gaiduk, Chen Jian, and Robert Brigham have written pioneering studies of decision making on the “other side.” From such work a truly international understanding of the Vietnam wars is finally beginning to emerge.

Qiang Zhai’s *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* is a momentous addition to this new scholarship. Sweeping in scope and rich in detail, the book provides the most authoritative account yet published of Chinese policymaking and the ever-changing relationship between Beijing and Hanoi during the period of U.S. entangle-