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Article — Digitized Version

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Intereconomics

Suggested Citation: Höping, Hubert (1973) : Peace in Vietnam?, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 08, Iss. 3, pp. 67-, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02927542>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/138788>

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Peace in Vietnam?

The Vietnam War has been the longest and possibly most cruel one of our century. France started it as a colonial war in 1946, and eight years later it had to admit its final defeat. Soon the Americans took over and continued the combat as part of the cold war. Now they are withdrawing, too, and Vietnam has not been obliterated from the map, despite a quarter of a century of unceasing battles and the most intense aerial bombardment in history. Ten years ago such an American retreat might have had fatal consequences to the Asian countries adjoining the Pacific. Those were the days of the Domino-Theory, according to which the whole of Asia would turn communist following a defeat in South Vietnam. Due to the deep rift between the two giant communist powers, Russia and China, this theory has, however, lost much of its credibility.

Contrary to first impressions the armistice seems to have at least a chance to lead to a peaceful settlement of sorts. The tables are turned, and the former American enemy finds himself in the convenient position of a mediator between the former allies — Russia, China and North Vietnam — which distrust each other deeply because of their differing political objectives. For Hanoi a united communist Indochina under its leadership has still highest priority. Peking, on the other hand, is very much interested to prevent just this, for a pro-soviet bloc in its flank would be a success of the Russian encircling policy. Therefore China advocates the existence of a number of independent states in this area.

Dr Kissinger's trips to Hanoi and Peking — contacts with Moscow will certainly follow soon — were serving two purposes mainly: First the North-Vietnamese, Chinese and Soviets must be convinced that Washington has the firm intention of exercising its still great influence when the political pattern of this area is being reshaped in a tug-of-war between Moscow, Peking, Tokio and Washington. Second, to improve the still fragile chances for a peace settlement the United States must make it clear that it will accept, together with other industrial nations, the responsibility for postwar rehabilitation and economic development of the devastated area.

Reconstruction aid to Vietnam is therefore another central point in Dr Kissinger's negotiations. The Americans have done their best to deprive North

Vietnam of the sinews of war. To recover from the effects of the heavy bombing the country as well as South Vietnam now require modern factories, industrial equipment, earthmoving machinery to rebuild dams and roads, means to restore bridges, ports and railway lines, agricultural inputs and lots of other resources.

First steps have been already taken. Apart from immediate humanitarian aid, as e.g. by the Federal Republic to the amount of DM 40 mn in addition to DM 100 mn development aid for 1973, comprehensive aid measures are being prepared by the European Communities. At Luxemburg the European Parliament passed a resolution asking the EEC members and authorities to contribute to a rehabilitation programme for Vietnam. The USA and North Vietnam, according to a communiqué published after Dr Kissinger's visit to Hanoi, agreed on establishing a common economic commission. This body is to establish economic links between the USA and Hanoi and to discuss North Vietnam's rehabilitation.

The US Administration proposed to provide \$ 7.5 bn for the reconstruction of the whole of Indochina during the next five years. Moreover, for a long time already it has been assumed that the USA will let Japan play an important role in Vietnam's rehabilitation. Japan's private industry quarters are prepared to invest \$ 7.5 bn in the construction of roads, railways, bridges, industrial plant, etc. Japanese planning offices are working on super-projects as e.g. the regulation of the Mekong-river in order to provide the whole of Vietnam with food and electricity.

By offering to finance the reconstruction of post-war Vietnam, Washington and Tokio have compelled Moscow and Peking to display their own generosity, too, although this will be a considerable drain on their own scarce resources. But it is in everyone's interest that longer-term rehabilitation and development be a responsibility shared among the great economic and political powers. The forthcoming Paris peace-conference will offer the opportunity to start planning multilateral aid with the USA, Japan, China, Russia and the United Nations participating. And if, for once, the gods of this tortured country are on the side of reason, an as yet fragile armistice might become some kind of a stable settlement, if not even peace.

Hubert Höping