

2016

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Roundtable Review

Volume XVII, No. 22 (2016)

2 May 2016

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

Roundtable and Web Production Editor: George Fujii

Introduction by Yafeng Xia

Xiaoming Zhang. *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4696-2124-1 (cloth, \$34.95).

URL: <http://www.tiny.cc/Roundtable-XVII-22>

Contents

Introduction by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University, Brooklyn	2
Review by June Teufel Dreyer, University of Miami	5
Review by M. Taylor Fravel, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.....	7
Review by Sophie Quinn-Judge, Temple University	12
Review by Chengyi Wang, Nanyang Technological University.....	15
Review by Qiang Zhai, Auburn University Montgomery	19
Author's Response by Xiaoming Zhang, Air War College, Alabama.....	23

© 2016 The Authors.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Introduction by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University, Brooklyn

Drawing on a wide array of Chinese sources, Xiaoming Zhang has produced an important book on China's war against Vietnam from 1979 to 1991. In the first five chapters, Zhang traces the origins of the conflict, examines how Beijing made the decision to go to war, how the People's Liberation Army (PLA) planned the battle against Vietnam, and the political and military repercussions of the war. The remaining three chapters examine the decade-long border conflicts from 1980 to 1990, and the normalization of Chinese and Vietnamese relations in the early 1990s. Four of the five reviewers speak highly of the book: "the definitive work on the subject" (June Teufel Dreyer); "the 'go to' book on the subject" (M. Taylor Fravel); "a major contribution to the scholarship on the Sino-Vietnamese War in particular and the literature on Sino-Vietnamese relations in general" (Chenyi Wang); and a "well-researched and clearly-written study fills a gap in our knowledge about China's preparation and execution of the Third Indochina War" (Qiang Zhai). Fravel, in particular, highlights three strengths of the book: the use of "a wealth of Chinese-language sources that other scholars have not used," situating "China's 1979 invasion within the broader context of Vietnamese-Chinese relations over roughly a forty-year period from the 1960s to the 1990s," and clarifying "the scope of Chinese casualties in the 1979 war."

The reviewers also raise some issues for further examination and discussion. Fravel questions Zhang's proposition that "Deng sought to use the war to improve his position in the ongoing power struggle inside the leadership of the CCP." But Zhang never makes it clear "who still opposed Deng in late 1978." Fravel also faults Zhang's assessment of China's decision to attack Vietnam. He contends that "the 1979 invasion did not teach Vietnam the lesson China had hoped it would learn" and thus "Deng failed to achieve an objective that he offered in his March 1979 speech justifying the conflict." Sophie Quinn-Judge has "questions regarding Zhang's Sino-centric view of how the tensions between Vietnam and China unraveled in the late 1980s." She argues that "[t]he idea that a major change in policy occurred immediately after Le Duan's death is not supported by any hard evidence." She agrees with Qiang Zhai that the book's "coverage of the international dimension of the conflict is weak and under-developed." She notes, "There is almost no discussion of the Khmer Rouge-Vietnam relationship and the part that China played in exacerbating tensions." Zhai points out that Vietnam and Laos had special relations, but the book does not discuss the Laotian factor. Contrary to Zhang's assertion that "the war did not produce significant international consequences for China" (121), Zhai shows that "disapproval and criticism of the Chinese actions in Vietnam emerged in many parts of the Third World." Chenyi Wang notes, "[T]he 1979 War triggered the reintroduction of military ranking system into the PLA, which finally materialized in 1988." While summing up the lessons the PLA learned in the course of the war, Zhang fails to mention the important lesson of the problem of the PLA without a military ranking system. According to Wang, Zhang also fails to include Kosal Path's two important "articles on Sino-Vietnamese territorial disputes and the Chinese economic assistance," which are premised on "newly declassified Vietnamese sources."

In sum, this is a 'must-read' for military historians, diplomatic historians, political scientists, and scholars of Chinese politics and foreign policy. Hopefully, a comparable analysis of the war from the Vietnamese side will be published in English in the near future.

Participants:

Xiaoming Zhang is professor in the Department of Strategy at the Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. He earned his Doctorate of Philosophy in history from The University of Iowa in 1994. He is the author of *Red Wings over the Yalu: China, the Soviet Union and the Air War in Korea* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2002) and *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). He is currently doing research on the South China Sea disputes from a historical perspective.

Yafeng Xia received a Ph.D. in modern diplomatic history from the University of Maryland at College Park in 2003. He has been professor of history at Long Island University, Brooklyn since 2003. He is also guest professor at Center for Cold War International History Studies, East China Normal University in Shanghai. He was a research fellow (September 2011-June 2012) and Public Policy Scholar (June-August 2010) at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington D.C. He is the author of *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-72* (2006), coauthor of *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945-1959: A New History* (2015), and *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1960-1973: A New History* (forthcoming in 2016). He is at work on a book project with Shen Zhihua, tentatively entitled, *Friendship in Name Only: Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976*.

June Teufel Dreyer is professor of political science at the University of Miami. Prior to that, she served as Senior Far East Specialist at the Library of Congress. She received her Ph.D. from Harvard, and has been a member of the advisory panel of the Chief of Naval Operations and a commissioner of the congressionally-established United States-China Economic and Security Commission. Dr. Dreyer's *The Chinese Political System* is currently in its ninth edition; her *Middle Kingdom and Empire of the Rising Sun: Sino-Japanese Relations in Historical Perspective* is scheduled to be published by Oxford University Press in 2016.

M. Taylor Fravel is Associate Professor of Political Science and Member of the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He studies international relations, with a focus on international security and China. He is the author of *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, 2008) and is completing a second book entitled *Active Defense: Explaining the Evolution of China's Military Strategy*.

Sophie Quinn-Judge received her PhD in History from the University of London (SOAS). Before that she worked for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* covering Soviet-Asian relations, based in Moscow. Her dissertation was published as *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years* in 2002 by Christopher Hurst/University of California. She is the co-editor of *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79*, (Routledge, 2006). She is currently completing her manuscript, *A New History of the Vietnam War: The Search for Peace and a Third Solution*, to be published by I.B. Tauris. Dr. Quinn-Judge is a Fellow of the Center for Vietnamese Philosophy, Culture and Society at Temple University.

Chenyi Wang is a Ph.D. candidate in the History Program at Nanyang Technological University, and last year was a junior scholar at the Wilson Center. Wang is working on a dissertation on China's relations with Vietnam from 1973 to 1979.

Qiang Zhai is Professor of history at Auburn University at Montgomery. He is the author of *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000). His recent publications include

“China’s Emerging Role on the World Stage, 1953-1956,” in Lorenz Lüthi, ed., *The Regional Cold Wars in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East: Crucial Periods and Turning Points* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2015).

Review by June Teufel Dreyer, University of Miami

Xiaoming Zhang points out that, in contrast to the other major war the People's Republic of China (PRC) has fought since 1949, in Korea, the war with Vietnam has been all but forgotten. He attributes this to the government's ongoing sensitivity regarding the conflict, which indeed was not the most glorious page in the history of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Moreover, it involved an attack against a country that the Chinese media had only a few years before referred to as a 'fraternal socialist ally,' 'China's back door,' and 'as close as the lips and the teeth: if the lips are removed, the teeth will grow cold.'

In contrast to earlier studies that have emphasized the deficiencies of the Chinese incursion, Zhang presents a more positive assessment. He has gained access to numerous internally circulated documents that include memoirs by high-ranking military officers, leadership speeches, after-action reports by PLA units that participated in the invasion, and a collection of reports published by the military's General Political Department (GPD) as a two-volume anthology. Zhang is aware that the desire for personal glory and success as well as to create a positive image for propaganda purposes are operative; the GPD is, after all, the PLA's propaganda unit. Thus he advises caution pending the availability of new information since the archives of classified records on the war are unavailable on both the Chinese and Vietnamese sides.

The book's eight chapters are arranged chronologically beginning with the historical origins of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, the development of cracks in relations between Beijing and Hanoi, and the discord engendered by the differing relationships of each with the Soviet Union. Given this litany, the book's opening statement that the world was shocked by the PLA's invasion of 17 February 1979 is surprising. In the words of an ancient Chinese proverb cited by Zhang in another context, it takes more than one cold day for the river to freeze three feet deep. There were multiple signs that an attack was coming, including unusually strident rhetoric from Beijing and large troop movements from Fujian to the Vietnam border.

Surely Vietnam could not have been completely unaware of troop movements so large; an interesting but at least at this point unanswerable question is how much Soviet intelligence was conveyed to Hanoi. Those in the U.S. intelligence community noted anti-tank trench digging occurring on the PRC's border with the USSR in preparation for a Soviet effort to defend its Vietnamese ally. Bets were taken, not on whether the Chinese incursion would begin, but when. This reviewer guessed Valentine's Day and lost.

That said, China's decision to intervene, ostensibly to force Vietnam to withdraw from China's ally, Cambodia, was risky. The PLA had not fought since the Korean War nearly three full decades before, whereas the Vietnamese army was battle-hardened from the nation's recent confrontation with the American military. There were morale problems: Zhang notes that some soldiers wondered why they were being asked to fight a socialist country (67), and others why they were fighting in another country ostensibly to defend China's borders (164). Residents of provinces near Vietnam were concerned that a war would negatively impact their livelihoods (85).

Additionally, the Cultural Revolution's emphasis on ideological rectitude at the expense of training and modern armaments had degraded weapons quality: sailors complained that their small and antiquated guns would only "scratch the rust off" Soviet-made ships (83). Given these concerns, Zhang's statement that the PLA soldiers as a group feared neither hardship nor death (131) is somewhat puzzling. The author's statement that there were strong expressions of patriotism from the inhabitants of the two military regions (MRs), who served as stretcher-bearers, security guards, porters, and road construction workers, (138) is

curious in light of the above-mentioned reluctance of the civilian population to get involved. Presumably it indicates that the authorities managed to create a successful mobilization effort in a very short time.

In addition to eroding the PLA's fighting capabilities, the Cultural Revolution had included attacks on most members of the military's high command. After the violence of the Cultural Revolution abated and its chief architect Chairman Mao Zedong had passed away, a counter purge of radicals began. As Zhang points out, at the time that the preparations for the war were taking place, the purge was still going on in the Guangdong Military Region, one of the two military regions which border Vietnam. Four days after the invasion began, a key leader of the other, the Kunming MR, was rushed to the hospital with serious stomach bleeding. In the absence of evidence that the two MRs coordinated, Zhang considers it likely that they carried out their attacks independently.

Zhang concludes that in the end the PLA pulled through to victory, though at a significant cost (131). In the process, it learned valuable lessons: deficiencies in reconnaissance, battlefield situational awareness, and intelligence; command and control; combined arms operations; logistics; and of the difficulties of applying the principles of Maoist People's War to a conflict beyond the PRC's borders. Although Zhang does not say so, there was speculation at the time that an important motive for Deng Xiaoping in deciding on war was to convince reluctant PLA leaders that the need for military reform was critical.

The most violent stage of the fighting soon settled into a decade-long enervating conflict. Although Zhang states that for China battlefield costs were fractional at a time of economic prosperity (168), his own findings of the hardships that occurred at local levels (170-175) seem to belie this conclusion. In Guangxi, 27,000 border residents had to be removed from their homes; both there and in Yunnan local governments were hard pressed to supply the PLA's need for food and other necessities. It is unlikely that any amount of patriotic propaganda could have convinced citizens of the wisdom of the government's food policy of "military first, civilian after" (173). Moreover, after the war, which saw a one-time twenty-percent increase in the PLA's budget, allocations were spartan for an entire decade, with the current practice of double-digit increases beginning only in 1989. The war also dealt a setback to Deng Xiaoping's ambitious Four Modernizations program: several important large-scale projects that included infrastructure enhancements and the massive Baoshan steel complex were postponed or cancelled. This in turn created bad feeling with the investors of foreign countries whose contracts were affected. To be sure, the PRC recovered within a few years, soon becoming the economic success story of Asia.

The depth of Zhang's research is impressive, as is his effort to analyze the many facets of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. Hopefully some scholar is working on a comparable analysis from the Vietnamese side, and that the archives of both countries will soon be open. In the meantime, Zhang's book will be the definitive work on the subject.

Review by M. Taylor Fravel, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

China's war with Vietnam in 1979 is perhaps the most difficult armed conflict in the history of the People's Republic to study. When China and Vietnam normalized relations in the early 1990s, the communist parties in both countries agreed not to discuss past periods of tension and confrontation, especially the war in 1979 as well as the border conflicts in the 1980s. As a result, very few documentary sources from China are available for studying China's role in the war. Although the Peoples Liberation Army's (PLA) Academy of Military Science has published official histories of China's involvement in the Korean War and its 1962 war with India, no similar history has been published on China's 1979 invasion of Vietnam. Despite these evidentiary obstacles, Zhang Xiaoming has written an important and pathbreaking book on the history of Chinese-Vietnamese relations that will be read for many years to come. The book should appeal to diverse audiences, including military historians, diplomatic historians, political scientists, and scholars of Chinese politics and foreign policy.

At the highest level of abstraction, the book's most significant contribution is to provide a much-needed Chinese perspective on all aspects of the 1979 conflict with Vietnam. Since China launched the invasion, which resulted in tens of thousands of casualties on the battlefield on both sides, detailed knowledge of China's perspective is critical to creating a more complete understanding of the conflict.

The book has three definite strengths that deserve to be highlighted. First, despite the evidentiary challenges outlined above, the author has uncovered a wealth of Chinese-language sources that other scholars have not used. These sources include internal PLA documents written immediately after the 1979 invasion; official biographies and chronologies of key leaders; collections of official documents and provincial gazetteers; memoirs and reminiscences of officers and soldiers involved in the conflict; and documents from provincial archives in China. Zhang was also able to identify internal speeches by Deng Xiaoping and Wang Shangrong immediately after the end of hostilities on 16 March 1979 that have not previously been published. Likewise, Zhang mines a fascinating military-enthusiast website that was active in the mid-2000s but is now unavailable, "my memorandum" (*wo de beiwanglu*). The site hosted a subsection on the 1979 war that collected an array of source materials, including accounts of particular units involved in various aspects of combat operations. Although online sources such must always be treated with some skepticism and caution, Zhang skillfully uses them in conjunction with other sources to provide a much more complete account of the conflict from China's perspective. Although sources on the conflict remain incomplete, especially regarding decision-making by China's top leaders in November and December 1978, Zhang's research is impressive and unlike any other scholarly work on the 1979 war.¹ The details that Zhang has uncovered through these sources appear throughout the book, especially in the chapters on combat operations in 1979, the ongoing border clashes throughout the 1980s, and the broader impact of the war on China, especially in Yunnan and Guangxi provinces adjacent to Vietnam. He is also careful to note the bias inherent in these sources and the

¹ My only reservation regarding the sources concerns the lack of Chinese-language titles in some parts of the bibliography itself. Because some sections of the bibliography contain only English translations for the titles of Chinese sources, interested scholars (like myself) cannot quickly determine the original Chinese title, given the various ways in which the English could be translated back into Chinese. I suspect this reflects the editorial preferences of the press and its desire to publish an accessible book. Nevertheless, this comes at a cost for scholars interested in identifying and learning from the sources that Zhang has identified.

limitations on sources from Vietnam that are necessary to further evaluate elements of the war covered in the book.

A second strength of the book is that Zhang situates China's 1979 invasion within the broader context of Vietnamese-Chinese relations over roughly a forty-year period from the 1960s to the 1990s. One of Zhang's core arguments is that the past interactions between Vietnam and China, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, created such resentment in Beijing that a large-scale conflict involving half a million Chinese soldiers was necessary to teach Hanoi 'the lesson' Beijing believed that it deserved. Zhang, however, does not stop by simply situating the 1979 invasion within the immediate past of Chinese-Vietnamese relations. He goes further, demonstrating how the conflict cast a long shadow over Vietnamese-Chinese relations in the 1980s and the 1990s. Perhaps the most original and interesting chapter in the book examines the border clashes that occurred throughout the 1980s, especially in 1984. These clashes are not well known in Western scholarship on Chinese foreign policy and, with the partial exception of Edward O'Dowd's 2007 book, no detailed and thorough examination of these clashes exists, especially regarding their scale and the intensity of the military operations.² As Zhang demonstrates, the various operations along the border over a nine-year period involved more than 180,000 Chinese soldiers (161), more than half the number of troops that China had sent to assist North Vietnam in its struggle against the United States over a similar timeframe from the mid-1960s to early 1970s. In other words, China's effort was substantial and sustained. Moreover, significant casualties on both sides occurred during this period. In the 1984 Laoshan campaign, online sources indicate that just under one thousand Chinese soldiers and militia were killed in the campaign, along with a higher number of Vietnamese. According to the way in which international-relations scholars identify interstate wars, the 1984 conflict should be viewed not just as a border clash but a second war between the two countries. Casualties in 1984 alone were at least double those of the Kargil War between India and Pakistan in 1999, a conflict that has garnered much more attention. The ongoing conflicts on the border in the 1980s also help to explain why China attacked Vietnamese forces on Johnson Reef in the South China Sea while occupying six reefs part of the Spratly Islands in March 1988.

Third, Zhang clarifies the scope of Chinese casualties in the 1979 war. As he notes, ever since 1979, studies of the conflict have relied on casualty figures from Western media sources or Vietnam. Since a state has incentives to inflate the number of opposing forces killed in battle, these estimates have not been reliable (especially since Vietnamese forces lost ground in most cases). Zhang's analysis suggests that Chinese casualties in the 1979 war were approximately 31,213, including 7,915 killed and 23,298 wounded (119). This is much lower than Vietnamese claims at the time and about fifty percent higher than the Chinese figure of 20,000 casualties attributed to General Wu Xiuquan after the war (119). Although lower than many previous estimates, these numbers demonstrate the very high costs of just a month of combat operations and underscore the author's and other scholars' claims about the PLA's poor military effectiveness. Given the PLA's vast numerical superiority over Vietnamese forces in the theater of operations (between five and six to one), the PLA sustained heavy losses relative to the advantages it should have possessed on the battlefield. Chinese estimates of Vietnamese casualties are probably unreliable for the same reason. But when combined with China's losses, this brief conflict was exceptionally bloody.

In reading the book, several questions arose that merit further discussion. One question surrounds parsing the various motivations for China's decision to invade Vietnam in late 1978. Throughout the book, Zhang

² Edward O'Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

highlights China's anger towards Vietnam and the comprehensive nature of the threat that the Soviet Union posed to China directly, including Moscow's increasingly close ties and security cooperation with Hanoi that culminated in the treaty signed in November 1978. These motives are consistent with past accounts of the war, but Zhang offers much more detail about China's reasoning, using new sources such as Deng Xiaoping's March 1979 speech, among others, to demonstrate how China viewed the Soviet threat and why Deng, for this reason, believed that war was necessary.

Zhang also mentions other reasons for launching the invasion, including domestic objectives that Deng pursued in the war. Although Zhang describes them as secondary, I am less convinced about their role in the decision to take China to war for two reasons. The first is that the source materials to explain these decisions, especially the decisions of the General Staff Department and Central Military Commission in November and December 1978, remain limited. Although Deng's March 1979 speech is an important document, it should be viewed a justification of the war immediately after it had occurred, given that it was delivered to a meeting of senior party leaders on the war. Deng's reasoning before the war started remains largely inaccessible. The second reason is that that arguments about domestic motives may suffer from a functionalist fallacy whereby a possible (or actual) benefit of a course of action is viewed as evidence for explaining the decision to pursue such measures.

First, Zhang suggests that Deng sought to use the war to improve his position in the ongoing power struggle inside the leadership of the CCP. Yet the degree to which this remained a serious problem for Deng before the war is hard to determine. Through a concerted effort of political maneuvering from the spring of 1978, Deng had already greatly strengthened his position within the party before the decision to attack was made, along with the decisions taken at the Third Plenum. In fact, if Deng had not moved much earlier in 1978 to consolidate his power within the party, he might have been unable to take the country to war. His ability to make such a decision, through his position in and his authority over the PLA, would no doubt signal his strength within the party to those who might oppose him. But Zhang never describes in detail who still opposed him in late 1978, the strength of that opposition, and why a short war would help Deng to improve further an already improved position.

Second, Zhang suggests that that Deng sought to use the war to overcome factionalism in the PLA and to demonstrate the imperative for the PLA to reform itself in order to improve its military effectiveness. Again, however, the extent of factionalism within the PLA is hard to know, and it is not described in detail by the author. One piece of evidence that Zhang cites is a brief description of an acrimonious meeting of the CMC in late 1978 that appears in a book by Zhang Sheng, who is the son of Zhang Aiping, a senior military officer at the time.³ The topic of discussion included the rehabilitation of officers who had been persecuted during the Cultural Revolution as well as the implementation of various reforms that had been agreed to at previous meetings and the decisions taken at the Third Plenum. Needless to say, within the PLA or any other part of the party, discussions of cadre rehabilitation were prone to acrimony and discord. Nevertheless, the top leadership of the PLA appeared to be relatively stable during this period and not riven with factionalism, at least at the highest levels.⁴ After all, as Zhang shows in the book, the General Staff and CMC acted to

³ Zhang Sheng states it was an enlarged meeting of the CMC (*kuoda huiyi*), while Deng Xiaoping's official chronology states it was a seminar (*zuotan hui*), indicating a less formal discussion.

⁴ At the lower levels within the PLA, factionalism might have been greater, but it is also not clear how a short war with Vietnam would remove this problem. On factionalism at lower levels in the late 1970s and early 1980s, see

mobilize the PLA for the invasion in November and December. The composition of the CMC and other leading bodies in the PLA remained the same before and after the war. Substantial changes in PLA leadership itself were made only later, in 1980 and 1982, as part of a much larger effort to appoint younger leaders within the PLA as well as the CCP. Yang Dezhi, for example, commander of Chinese forces in the western sector of the war, was promoted to Chief of the General Staff to replace Deng Xiaoping.

Likewise, the PLA's high command was well aware of the difficulties facing the PLA as a military organization at the end of the 1970s. In 1978 and early 1979, for example, General Su Yu lectured widely on the need for change and appeared to reflect the views of many in senior leadership positions given the reception that his lectures received. Moreover, General Su Yu had been pushing for changes since the early 1970s and delivering reports on these topics to senior party and military leaders.⁵ If underscoring the shortcomings of the PLA was an important reason for fighting, China did not need to wage such a large-scale campaign with 500,000 soldiers. A smaller operation against any of the towns targeted in the first phase of the invasion would likely have been sufficient for that purpose. Likewise, Deng's comments in March 1979 about the PLA lacking experience and benefiting from fighting appear to have been more of a rationalization after the fact, especially given the PLA's losses, than an important reason for fighting. In 1975, for example, Deng had emphasized the strategic importance of training when he returned to the General Staff Department, but he did not suggest that it needed to occur on the battlefield. Finally, as Zhang shows, PLA generals at the time were well aware of the PLA's poor level of readiness, which delayed the launching of the offensive. That the CMC authorized the invasion even though many units were not at full strength or had only begun to integrate new recruits suggests that the external motives for war were much more important than the internal ones.

All of these domestic factors suggest that Deng may have perceived additional domestic benefits of fighting Vietnam in early 1979. At the same time, it is hard to envision any of these factors independently or together as having been sufficient for China to decide to launch such a massive invasion of a neighbor. Unfortunately, sources on internal Chinese deliberations in November and December are limited. Better insight into these deliberations may help to determine the salience of these domestic factors and how a war with Vietnam might have overcome them. Nevertheless, the two critical decisions appear to be linked closely with Vietnamese actions and perceptions of the Soviet threat. The central leadership's decision on November 6 decision to "inflict severe punishments on Vietnam" (43) was made just days after the Soviet Union and Vietnam signed their Friendship Treaty. The Central Military Commission's decision on December 8 to invade on January 10, 1979 (51) was likely a response to clear indications that a Vietnamese attack on Cambodia was imminent.

A second question that arose while reading the book is how to evaluate critically China's decision to attack Vietnam. If war is the extension of politics by other means, and Deng pursued varied external and even internal political objectives, did the war help China achieve those objectives? This, of course, is not an easy

Joseph Torigian, *Communist Coups: Authoritarianism and the Fate of Three Revolutions*, Ph. D. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in progress.

⁵ This draws on M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: Explaining the Evolution of China's Military Strategy* (under advance contract with Princeton University Press)

question to answer. But given the high costs of this short war, and the conflicts in the 1980s, critical evaluation is necessary.

Through the war, China certainly signaled a willingness to defend itself and its interests against Soviet threats. In this way, the war may have deterred the Soviet Union or its allies from further aggression against China in the region. At the same time, however, the Soviet Union would soon get bogged down in Afghanistan and face a renewed effort by the United States to compete militarily, keeping Moscow focused on the West and not the East. Moreover, based on intelligence provided by the United States, Deng knew that Soviet forces on China's northern border were understrength and perhaps did not pose the threat that the number of divisions itself might have indicated. Indeed, one reason China attacked Vietnam despite its alliance with the Soviet Union was because China's leaders assessed that the potential for a large conflict on China's northern border was small (50-51).

Likewise, the punitive nature of the war was intended to teach Vietnam 'a lesson.' Yet did Vietnam learn the lesson that Deng wanted to teach? After China's invasion, Vietnam continued with the policies that China opposed in Southeast Asia. Vietnam's ties with the Soviet Union deepened, as Soviet military and economic aid increased, especially in the early 1980s. Vietnam remained committed to its occupation of Cambodia, continuing operations after the war with China in 1979 and keeping 100,000 soldiers in the country for most of the 1980s while installing a friendly government (that remains in power today). Likewise, Vietnam offered no concessions in border negotiations that started in the summer of 1979, which quickly stalled and only resumed after normalization. Even the fighting over Laoshan in 1984 did not seem significantly to impact Vietnam's own military operations in Cambodia in 1984 and 1985. In fact, as Zhang claims, Deng used the border conflicts in the 1980s to punish Vietnam and place pressure on Hanoi, which itself indicates that the 1979 invasion did not teach Vietnam the lesson China had hoped it would learn. Deng stated in March 1979 that the main reason for fighting was to stabilize the border with Vietnam. Yet the border with Vietnam remained anything but tranquil for more than a decade. Although the simmering conflict and ongoing operations did not prevent China from pursuing broader reforms of the economy, it does indicate that Deng failed to achieve an objective that he offered in his March 1979 speech justifying the conflict.

If Deng did indeed pursue domestic goals such as defeating internal foes or reducing factionalism within the PLA, did he succeed? His March 1979 speech is feisty and defensive, suggesting either continued disagreement over the merits of the war or disappointment among top party leaders with the outcome in terms of the human cost to China. Regardless, the PLA's performance in the war may have raised more doubts about Deng's leadership than if he had not pursued the conflict. Furthermore, recent research indicates that Deng continued to work to consolidate his position within the party throughout 1979.⁶ Although it is hard to know how domestic Chinese politics would have evolved if the war had not occurred, it is not clear that the war itself strengthened Deng's domestic position.

These questions aside, Zhang Xiaoming's book offers an important and long overdue contribution to an understudied period in China's foreign relations, security policy, and military history. It is based on extensive and detailed research, uncovering and exploiting new sources that have not previously been used. *Deng Xiaoping's Long War* fills an important gap in the literature and will be the 'go to' book on the subject.

⁶ Torigian, *Communist Coups*.

Review by Sophie Quinn-Judge, Temple University

In this book Xiaoming Zhang examines the forces and thinking that led China to stage a brief but destructive incursion into Vietnam in February 1979. He then goes on to explore the planning and execution of this campaign that lasted from February 17 until March 16. Finally, he looks at the long standoff between the two states that dragged on until 1992, when the neighbors reconciled, in the face of a crumbling communist bloc.

Zhang's detailed account of the actual invasion reminds us that this was a costly episode for both countries. In just one month of fierce fighting the People's Liberation Army (PLA) lost 12,192 soldiers, now buried in cemeteries in Guangxi and Yunnan. Although these casualties may someday be remembered with more honor and publicity, for the time being the Chinese government prefers to forget this part of its military history. As Zhang comments, "Once popular literary works on the self-defense counterattack against Vietnam have never been reprinted; official media never show movies that at one time were widely distributed. From Beijing's perspective, the Sino-Vietnamese conflict has turned into a political taboo, and any discussion of the conflict is perceived as having an unhealthy influence on today's Sino-Vietnamese relations" (192).

This is a book whose sources are heavily weighted towards the Chinese point of view, by an author who has access to a rich store of Chinese studies, official documents, and memoirs, in particular those related to the border war. Zhang is clear that although the PLA could claim to have achieved its objectives in killing large numbers of Vietnamese soldiers and destroying provincial towns on the border, in particular Lang Son only 135 kilometers from Hanoi, overall the army did not perform well. The attacks on the provincial capitals Cao Bang and Lang Son took longer to complete than planned, while the losses of men and equipment were far higher than anticipated. Overall, "a further assessment of the PLA's experience in 1979 is needed to address the questions of why the PLA did so poorly and how this poor performance actually served the Chinese leadership's strategic intent" 9 (114). On the latter issue there is widespread agreement among China watchers that Deng Xiaoping successfully used the experience of the 1979 war to begin the modernization of the PLA, a force that had not fought a war in thirty years. There is no consensus on how well the Vietnamese defended themselves against what was apparently a far larger attack than they had bargained for. Vietnamese casualty figures have not been made public, but as the war was fought on Vietnam's own territory, they clearly suffered heavy military and civilian losses, as well as large numbers of local militia members, who bore the brunt of the early fighting.

Zhang is persuasive when he discusses the strategic success of the war for China. The war was part of an extended war of attrition against Vietnam that China could ramp up when it wanted to increase pressure on its neighbor to bend to its will: "For almost the entire 1980s, the PLA engaged in occasional intense artillery shelling and major border battles," he writes (121). The war brought no real reprisals from Vietnam's Soviet allies, nor did it "produce significant international consequences for China" (121). Indeed, China appeared to be rewarded by the U.S. in July 1979, when a trade agreement gave Beijing most favored nation status as a U.S. partner. Deng had believed from the outset that by joining a struggle against Soviet 'hegemony,' China could demonstrate its strategic value and importance to the West. He had received some support for this belief during his pre-war visit to the U.S., from National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski's eagerness to establish a strategic partnership. In a note citing James Mann, Zhang reminds us that "during China's invasion of Vietnam, Brzezinski met with Chinese ambassador Chai Zemin every night, turning over American intelligence on Soviet military deployments on their Chinese border" (p. 63, n. 141).

Zhang's study inspires less confidence in its analysis of the international political background to the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. There is almost no discussion of the Khmer Rouge-Vietnam relationship and the part that China played in exacerbating tensions. Painting China as a state that had ended the foolishness of the Cultural Revolution in 1975, while advocating for a neutral Southeast Asia (36), amounts to historical amnesia. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping may have been publicly promoting this policy in 1975, but after his temporary fall from power in 1976, China continued its support for communist parties in Southeast Asia until the winter of 1978-9, following the Vietnamese toppling of Pol Pot. Chinese military and economic support for Democratic Kampuchea increased in 1977, as the Chinese leadership continued to cut its assistance to Vietnam. While the Vietnamese had hoped for a change of heart in Beijing after the fall of the Gang of Four in late 1976, this never occurred.

I also have questions regarding Zhang's Sino-centric view of how the tensions between Vietnam and China unraveled in the late 1980s. He portrays the Vietnamese as having recanted their anti-Chinese views in 1990 and traces the change in policy to the death of Party General Secretary Le Duan in 1986. It should be pointed out, however, that the Vietnamese had achieved the greater part of their objectives in occupying Cambodia by 1986-7, pushing the Khmer Rouge out of most of their redoubts near the Thai border and establishing a government in Phnom Penh that gradually began to receive aid from UN organizations and a number of NGOs. The ASEAN states, in particular Indonesia and Malaysia, were by then beginning to support a negotiated end to the conflict, especially after the Vietnamese troop pullout in 1989.

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in Moscow in 1985, Le Duan and the Vietnamese leadership clearly got the message that the Soviet Union was interested in winding up the Cambodia conflict and restoring normal relations with China. That summer, as Zhang writes, the Vietnamese declared that they would withdraw their forces from Cambodia by 1990, without conditions (199). The idea that a major change in policy occurred immediately after Le Duan's death is not supported by any hard evidence. On the contrary, Le Duan had long been a frustrated advocate of technological modernization and reforms in agriculture that began to be implemented well before his demise. Nguyen Van Linh, who took power at the end of 1986, was similarly a supporter of reforms, who embraced some of Gorbachev's policies, in particular aspects of glasnost in public life and literature.

It is likewise untrue that in 1987 "Hanoi ... embarked on a new foreign policy course, departing from an almost exclusive dependence on the Soviet Union to a new strategy of 'making friends with all countries of the world'" (199). The latter course had been Le Duan's clear preference in 1975-77, but it turned out to be a policy he was unable to implement, due in part to China's insistence that Hanoi renounce its aid from the USSR.¹ The Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Treaty was not signed until the autumn of 1978, we should recall. Finally, to claim that Nguyen Co Thach, who continued to serve as Vietnam's Foreign Minister, was a holdout for a tough line on the Cambodia issue while Nguyen Van Linh and other leaders supposedly were ready to approve the return of the Khmer Rouge as participants in a coalition government, is doubtful (see 200). The removal of the Khmer Rouge as a threat to Vietnam was the reason the Vietnamese went into Cambodia; to allow them to return to power after their military defeat was not something the Vietnamese leadership could countenance.

¹ On Hanoi's hopes for economic liberalization with the US, see Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War After the War*. New York: Collier Books, 1986, 142-158.

The change in Vietnam's policy towards China accelerated in 1989-92, as its European communist allies were overthrown and the Soviet Union disintegrated. Nguyen Van Linh's policies underwent a radical change in 1989-90 but it is hard to say how much of this change was due to pressure he came under within his own party, especially as he had been an enthusiastic supporter of Gorbachev's reforms. The Chinese-Vietnamese conference in Chengdu in 1990 was clearly a watershed, but what exactly happened in the lead up to that meeting within the Vietnamese party leadership is not known. Some recent Vietnamese accounts have portrayed Nguyen Van Linh as extremely shaken by the developments in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

But it is instructive to compare the way that Brantley Womack interprets the Chengdu conference in his 2006 book, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* with Zhang's account, taken from Chinese sources. In the months after the Tiananmen massacre of June 1989, China had lost a great deal of its international prestige. According to Womack, after the U.S. backed off its support for a Cambodian coalition government including the Khmer Rouge in July 1990, China "reconsidered its position for the first time since 1979".² In this version of events, the Chinese also had to make concessions. The Chengdu Conference, in the eyes of Australian expert Carlyle Thayer, "marked China's abandonment of its 'bleed Vietnam white policy' and the start of Sino-Vietnamese normalization."³ It might be said that the Vietnamese and Chinese communist holdouts both needed normalization of relations at this juncture, as U.S.-Soviet relations were rapidly improving and their own populations were questioning the idea of the communist party's monopoly on power.

² Brantley Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 208.

³ Ibid, 208.

Review by Chengyi Wang, Nanyang Technological University

The 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War is an inadequately studied topic, more so in comparison with another major war China fought---the Korean War, on which many volumes of scholarship have been published. Based on two previously published journal articles,¹ Xiaoming Zhang finally presents readers with a full book on the China's war against Vietnam from 1979 to 1991. Drawing primarily on Chinese official history, internet sources, and in particular those internally published and circulated sources by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) since 1979 to record the operations and summarize the war lessons, and some translated Vietnamese sources, this book unveils an unknown picture of the decision-making process, the planning and preparation, the operations of the 1979 War, the subsequent decade-long border conflict and finally the road to the normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations.

Zhang's book starts with a discussion of the roots of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, which is basically a review of literature on Sino-Vietnamese relations from 1950 to 1978.² In comparison with the relatively abundant primary sources on Sino-Vietnamese relations during the First and the Second Indochina Wars³ when China and Vietnam enjoyed a honeymoon despite the fact that cracks had already emerged and enlarged, sources on those years leading to the Third Indochina War are extremely limited. Therefore, Zhang's evaluation on the era from Chairman Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping covering the years 1973-1978, which must hold the key to exploring the deeper exacerbation of Sino-Vietnamese relations after the Vietnam War, is extremely simple. Questions remained unanswered. What was China's policy of dealing with the Sino-Vietnamese border issues arising from 1974 and assistance to Vietnam? How did the top Chinese leaders (Mao Zedong, Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping in sequence) view the Vietnamese-Cambodian conflicts and Beijing's relationship with the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communist Party?

In Chapters 2, Zhang places Deng Xiaoping in the limelight, arguing that "he played the dominant role in China's national strategy, especially in China's decision to attack Vietnam" (40). As the book's title indicates, this is "Deng Xiaoping Long War." Despite Zhang's exhaustive gathering of the available Chinese sources, the study sheds little light on the decision-making deliberations on war at the highest level---the Politburo and the Central Military Committee due to insufficient sources, and Zhang admits this shortage (12). Thus his arguments that "all of these policymakers were reduced to the second rank at best compared to the increasingly powerful and dominant Deng" and "the decision to go to war was largely his alone" (54) are in

¹ Xiaoming Zhang, "China's 1979 war with Vietnam: A Reassessment," *The China Quarterly*, No. 184 (Dec., 2005): 851-874; "Deng Xiaoping and China's decision to go to war with Vietnam," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 12:3 (Summer 2010): 3-29.

² However, Zhang fails to examine Kosal Path's recently published articles on Sino-Vietnamese territorial disputes and the Chinese economic assistance by utilizing newly declassified Vietnamese sources. See Kosal Path, "China's Economic Sanctions against Vietnam, 1975-1978," *The China Quarterly*, 212 (2012): 1040-1058; "The economic factor in the Sino-Vietnamese split, 1972-75: An analysis of Vietnamese archival sources," *Cold War History*, 11:4 (2011): 519-555.

³ For example, the widely quoted *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977*, Working Paper 22 edited by Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tønnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung and James G. Hershberg, *CWIHP*, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, 1998.
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ACFB39.pdf>

doubt. To be sure, Deng's replacement of Hua Guofeng was incremental, which culminated in the twelfth CPC Congress in 1982 when Hua was robbed of all his previous positions. Even afterwards Deng was still counterbalanced by other top leaders throughout the 1980s. What is more, Deng admitted in his prewar report addressing high officials on February 16th 1979 that 'to conduct this fight the Central Committee made the determination only after two-month back-and-forth (*fanfan fufu*) pondering.' Although Deng did not elaborate, this indicates that the decision-making process on the top was not smooth at least. Deng later said in the same report, 'there are debates among our cadre whether to teach the Vietnamese aggressors a lesson. Some agree, but others are concerned.'⁴ Thus how did Deng push his agenda through the top leadership by persuading those with suspicion or even opposition? Zhang's argument that Vietnam historically "had never challenged Chinese territorial claims" (41) is obviously not correct. To be sure, in history Vietnam never played such an innocent and passive role in the centuries of Sino-Vietnamese entanglements. Besides, Zhang's analysis of Marshal Xu Xiangqian's attitude towards the war is problematic. It is true that Xu was opposed to Mao's "one horizontal-line strategy," but does this necessarily mean that Xu was against the 1979 War? In Xu's biography, Xu's opposition to the "one horizontal-line strategy" and his involvement in the War as Defense Minister are in two sections.⁵ However, by weaving these two points together Zhang's book could give readers the impression that Marshall Xu was against making the War (54).

As opposed to traditional wisdom, the book offers quite a few fresh findings in Chapter 2. First, "the border issue was the logical starting point for the PLA to begin contemplating an attack on Vietnam" (42) and "the September PLA General Staff meeting that produced recommendations for remedying deteriorating relations with Vietnam provided the starting point for a major military operations" (65). Second, Zhang argues that "the fact that the CMC and the PLA General Staff were planning a major military campaign even before the Vietnamese forces crossed the Mekong suggests at least initially, the war was intended to force Vietnam to accommodate China's demands regarding border disputes and the expulsion of ethnic Chinese" (43). Third, the Chinese leaders intended to normalize Sino-American relations not only because of the fact that since "the United States was now deemed the main source of advanced ideas and technology and the most favorable model for modernization" (45) China decided to reform and open up after the Third Plenum, but also since "the PLA's preparations for an invasion of Vietnam certainly required a favorable relationship with America" (53) to counter the Soviet threat with the newly signed Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 discuss how the PLA planned, prepared and conducted its military operations, and Zhang's assessment of the 1979 War. The PLA in 1979 was still dominated by Mao Zedong's military thinking (68-70) that the political indoctrination and mobilization of society were indispensable (80, 89). The PLA was badly damaged during the Cultural Revolution with poor training and insufficient preparations on the eve of the War which explained why the action was deferred to gain more time for intense training (59, 78-79). Zhang argues that political mobilization compensated for the PLA soldiers' poor education, lack of understanding of the war against Vietnam, and helped build their confidence. (80-85). Zhang estimates that the PLA attacking forces consisted of "more than half a million combatants" (90) of "twenty-seven army divisions" (114) while their Vietnamese counterparts "were filled with new recruits and were distracted from

⁴ Deng's report is addressed to high officials precisely before the war. This source came from the internet but the link is no longer available.

⁵ See Zhang Lin, *Xu Xiangqian Zhuan* [Biography of Xu Xiangqian] (Beijing: Contemporary China Publishing House, 1993), 549, 553-554.

combat by their long-term engagement in the country's economic reconstruction" with most elite units "involved in the invasion of Cambodia (90-91). With overwhelming forces in hand, the Chinese commanders devised an attacking plan "known as *niudao shaji* (using a butcher's knife to kill a chicken)" (71) to crush the outnumbered Vietnamese troops. By utilizing Chinese sources, Zhang presents a detailed description of the various stages of the PLA's two-pronged operations which were conducted by the Kunming Military Region from Yunnan and Guangzhou Military Region from Guangxi (91-108, 112-114). The military operations were greatly affected by Chinese top leaders' strategic considerations, especially the fear of a Soviet attack from the north.

In assessing the War, the author argues that "for [Deng], China's victory was determined by the overall strategic situation" (119) and that Deng believed that China's victory not only "boosted China's prestige and influence in the world" but also "served China's domestic interests" (120, 122). Zhang suggests that although the military campaign exposed the PLA's many deficiencies, China mastered the strategic initiative from the beginning to end: "Beijing surprised Hanoi not only by waging massive attacks but also by its quick withdrawal without becoming bogged down" (120). Zhang further analyzes China's failure to use air power, operational characteristics and the political work on the battlefield (123-131). Regarding the lessons the PLA learned from the War, Zhang highlights the problems in PLA's intelligence collection, estimation of the enemy forces, combined operations, command and control, logistics and application of "people's war" (134-138). However, Zhang fails to mention another very important lesson that the PLA had learned. The PLA had been without the military ranking system since 1965 and the officers wore the same uniforms without badges. The 1979 battlefield showed that once one officer died, he could not be promptly replaced by another without the ranking system. Thus the 1979 War triggered the reintroduction of military ranking system into the PLA, which finally materialized in 1988.⁶

Chapters 6,7 and 8 examine the decade-long border conflicts from 1980 to 1990 divided in four stages (142) and how it ended. Viewing the conflict "as an extension of the political and diplomatic struggle," China "engineered the border conflict to coerce Hanoi to withdraw from Cambodia" while Vietnam "adopted tit-for-tat approach in response" (141). Zhang argues that "for China, battlefield costs were fractional at a time of economic prosperity" while "the conflict encumbered the country (Vietnam)'s economy for a long period of time." (168) Zhang also explores how the border conflicts exerted influence on the PLA's military reform in the 1980s (175-180). China exploited the chance to propagandize and rebuild the PLA, whose image had been damaged during the Cultural Revolution, and produced much literature, movies and songs. In contrast, today the war is "forgotten history" in China (180-191). In comparison with the relatively abundant history of military operations, Chapter 8 on the diplomatic history of Sino-Vietnamese entanglements and how the two parties evolved from confrontation to normalization is much thinner.

In the concluding chapter Zhang returns to a discussion of Deng Xiaoping's role, but again without solid evidence. Thus his argument that "the 1979 war was probably unavoidable, primarily because of Deng's dictatorial leadership style, which prevented any serious high-level discussion or debate about going to war," (p. 215) is questionable.

For all the strengths and weaknesses of the book, Zhang has made use of the available sources as much as possible. To be sure, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War* is a major contribution to the scholarship on Sino-Vietnamese

⁶ *Essence of the PLA History* [Junshi Jiyao] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1997), pp. 469-471.

War in particular and the literature on Sino-Vietnamese relations in general. We can only hope that the unknown stories-like how did the Sino-Vietnamese conflicts evolve from 1974 to 1978? How did the Khmer Rouge contribute to the intensification of Sino-Vietnamese relations? How did the post-Mao political struggles on the top impact on the decision-making to wage war against Vietnam?- will gradually be unveiled when more sources are available.

Review by Qiang Zhai, Auburn University Montgomery

On 3 September 2015, China commemorated its World War II victory over Japan 70 years earlier with a massive military parade. Tanks, missiles, and soldiers in lockstep filed past the iconic Tiananmen Square in front of Chinese leaders, foreign dignitaries, and tens of thousands of ordinary on-lookers. The weapons and aircraft on display represented the Chinese military's cutting-edge technology. We can trace the beginning of Chinese military modernization to the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War when the dismal performance of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) firmed up Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's determination to revamp the Chinese military. But the 1979 war has remained a forgotten conflict in China primarily because it is a highly sensitive topic in Sino-Vietnamese relations and its discussion will invariably expose Beijing's association with the genocidal regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia.¹ Xiaoming Zhang's well-researched and clearly-written study fills a gap in our knowledge about China's preparation and execution of the Third Indochina War.

This eagerly-awaited book provides a sophisticated and compelling analysis of Beijing's decision to launch a military strike against Vietnam in 1979. Zhang displays a solid grasp of Chinese sources and a familiarity with the secondary literature on the subject. Echoing the findings of John Wilson Lewis and Litai Xue,² Zhang calls China's conflict with Vietnam "Deng Xiaoping's war." This Deng-centered approach is very persuasive. As the paramount leader in China at the time, Deng was dominant in both domestic and foreign policy making. Zhang marshals newly available documents from China to reconstruct how and why Deng decided to go to war with Vietnam in 1979. Zhang is right in identifying the fear of the Soviet threat as the primary reason behind Deng's decision. Deng and his associates considered Hanoi's anti-Chinese measures, the conclusion of the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance, and Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia "as a proxy for Soviet expansion" (47). Branding Vietnam as the "Cuba of Asia," the Chinese leaders drew a connection between the Soviet-backed Cuban intervention in the Angola civil war and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, implying that Hanoi's expansion represented the extension of Moscow-sponsored military adventurism in the Third World.

¹ Nearly a decade ago, Odd Arne Westad noted: "The Chinese and Vietnamese historical literature is still very weak on the Third Indochina War." Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, eds. *The third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79* (London: Routledge, 2006), 10. Today the situation has not improved much. As opposed to the availability of documents about China's role in the First and Second Indochina Wars, the release of materials on the Third Indochina War has been extremely limited. Very few Chinese officials and PLA commanders, who were involved in the planning and implementation of the Chinese military operations in the Third Indochina War, have published their memoirs or recollections on the conflict, a sharp contrast with the numerous memoirs published by Beijing's Korean War generals. The available official biographies of the military commanders who played a role in the Third Indochina War often include extensive accounts of their performance and contribution in other military engagements like the Anti-Japanese War (World War II), the Civil War, and the Korean War, but only make brief mention of their involvement and experiences in the 1979 fighting.

² Assessing Deng Xiaoping's role in the 1979 war, John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai concluded in 2006 that "In every sense, the strategic thinking behind the assault was his as was the determination of the war's objectives and scale. He chose his top warriors as the field commanders, mobilized the relevant provinces to support the fighting, approved the details of the operation, and gave the order to launch the attack. This was Deng's war." John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *Imagined Enemies: China Prepares for Uncertain War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 127.

Zhang usefully reminds us that in initiating the attack on Vietnam, Deng intended to accomplish several policy objectives. Aside from advancing his primary goal of containing Soviet global expansionism, Deng also hoped to use his Vietnam strike to improve China's relations with the United States and facilitate economic reform (including military modernization) at home. By "teaching Vietnam a lesson," Deng intended to send a message to Washington that China was a reliable and credible partner in the common opposition to Soviet power. And since Deng believed that his economic development plan depended on Western technology and investment, a close relationship with the Western world led by the United States would be highly beneficial to China.

Deng Xiaoping's role in the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations in the second half of the 1970s has been a subject of debate among scholars. Ezra Vogel surmises that if Deng had not been purged in 1975, "he might have been able to patch over the long history of Vietnamese hostility toward China and the current differences" and "he might have been able to avoid the complete break between China and Vietnam."³ But Xiaoming Zhang's emphasis on the continuity of Chinese foreign policy in the 1970s and on the consistency of Deng's view of the Vietnamese is more convincing to me. The Chinese leaders in the second half of the 1970s, whether Deng, or the Gang of Four, or Hua Guofeng, all shared Mao Zedong's perception of the Soviet Union as posing the greatest danger to China and viewed Hanoi's efforts to increase cooperation with Moscow with suspicion and alarm. Zhang is correct to point out that unlike earlier Chinese leaders (Mao and Zhou Enlai), who kept close personal ties with their Vietnamese colleagues, Deng had no deep personal connection with the Vietnamese and that as early as the mid-1960s Deng had registered his misgivings against Hanoi's anti-Chinese conduct and ingratitude for China's support. My research into the United Nations Archives confirms Zhang's assessment about the intensity of Deng's hostile attitude toward the Vietnamese. For example, in his talk with United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim in Beijing in May 1979, Deng vehemently dismissed the Vietnamese as being "perfidious" and with "swollen heads," condemning them for pushing the Soviet plans for the establishment of an Asian collective security system.⁴ In my opinion, Vogel underestimates Deng's distrust of and displeasure against the Vietnamese.

While Zhang's volume is strong and insightful in its dissection of the rationale behind Beijing's policy making and the operational aspects of Chinese war execution, his coverage of the international dimension of the conflict is weak and under-developed. Establishing an anti-Vietnamese united front with Southeast Asian countries constituted an important aspect of Deng's strategy to isolate and weaken Hanoi in 1978-1979. Throughout 1978, Chinese leaders conducted an active and well-coordinated diplomatic offensive in Southeast Asia to drum up support for China's policy toward Vietnam. Zhang discusses Deng Xiaoping's important journey to Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore in November 1978, but ignores Vice Premier Li Xiannian's equally important trip to the Philippines in March that year. Li told Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos that "the Vietnamese-Cambodian conflict is not a simple issue of border dispute because behind the border dispute there is great power intervention. The Soviet Union has intervened in the conflict." Furthermore, Li warned, "Vietnam wants to create an Indochinese Federation and our Cambodian friends oppose that idea." Demanding that Vietnamese officials should "calm down" in seeking a resolution of their

³ Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 273-274.

⁴ "Notes on a Meeting held during the Secretary-General's Visit to Peking, 1 May 1979," United Nations Archives.

dispute with the Cambodians, Li insisted that the issue should not be “internationalized.”⁵ Given Vietnam’s prolonged isolation in Southeast Asia in the wake of its invasion of Cambodia,⁶ China’s anti-Vietnamese diplomatic gambit in 1978 appears to have been effective.

There is no discussion of the Laotian factor in Zhang’s book. During the Sino-Vietnamese war, the Laotian government complained that China occupied a part of Laos. When Waldheim visited Beijing in the spring of 1979, he conveyed Vientiane’s complaint to Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua.⁷ Was the Laotian protest a Hanoi-orchestrated move to increase international pressure on Beijing, given the special bond between Vietnam and Laos at the time?

Waldheim’s trip to China in the midst of the war highlighted the efforts of the United Nations to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. In fact, both Beijing and Hanoi paid great attention to the importance of the United Nations in shaping their respective images in the world. Both attempted to use the platform of the international organization to defend their respective positions in front of the world audience.⁸ When Waldheim visited Beijing in April-May 1979, Deng, Premier Hua Guofeng, and Foreign Minister Huang Hua met him on separate occasions, all trying to explain and justify China’s handling of Vietnam.⁹ The United Nations became a crucial diplomatic battlefield between China and Vietnam to win international sympathy and endorsement. But this important United Nations aspect of the Sino-Vietnamese war is regrettably missing in Zhang’s account.

In evaluating the response of the world community, Zhang asserts that “the war did not produce significant international consequences for China” (121). As examples of negative international reactions, Zhang only mentions the attitudes of Indonesia and Malaysia, pointing out that China’s “use of military force against Vietnam raised suspicions in Indonesia and Malaysia, always wary of China’s influence in the region” (121). In fact, disapproval and criticism of the Chinese actions in Vietnam emerged in many parts of the Third World. For example, when Deng Xiaoping unleashed his forces on Vietnam, Indian Foreign Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was visiting Beijing in an effort to improve relations with China. But the war put him in a very awkward position because he had not been forewarned either by the Chinese or by Indian intelligence.

⁵ 《李先念传》编写组编(The compiling team of “Li Xiannian biography”, ed): 《李先念传, 1949-1992》(Li Xiannian Biography, 1949-1992) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2009), Vol. 2, 949-951.

⁶ Calling the Vietnamese the “Prussians of Southeast Asia,” Lee Kuan Yew, former prime minister of Singapore, wrote in his memoirs that he was “thankful that Deng Xiaoping had punished the Vietnamese.” Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965-2000* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 314. On ASEAN’s response to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, see Ang Cheng Guan, *Singapore, ASEAN and the Cambodian Conflict, 1978-1991* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2013). Ang’s study is based on exclusive access to the records of the Singapore Foreign Ministry Archives.

⁷ “Notes on a Meeting in the Great People’s Palace in Peking on 30 April 1979 at 9 A.M.,” United Nations Archives.

⁸ The United Nations Archives contain numerous communications from Chinese and Vietnamese representatives to the United Nations regarding various contentious issues between the two countries.

⁹ The transcripts of these meetings are available in the United Nations Archives.

India had long condemned the U.S. intervention in Vietnam and could only regard the Chinese operation in a negative light. Furthermore, the Chinese arrogant claim of “teaching Vietnam a lesson” reminded the Indians of the same Chinese rhetoric in the 1962 Chinese-Indian war. As a result, Vajpayee cut short his visit to China.¹⁰ The African National Congress (ANC) accused China of committing a “naked aggression” and of trying to recruit the ANC into “a reactionary front” against the Soviet Union.”¹¹ The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) similarly described China’s invasion of Vietnam as “aggression.”¹² In sum, the unfavorable international backlash to China’s attack on Vietnam was more serious and widespread than Zhang allows. Although the war strengthened Sino-American ties, it poisoned China’s relations with a number of Afro-Asian countries.

Despite these criticisms, Zhang’s study remains an impressive achievement. It is a welcome addition to a growing historiography that recalibrates our understanding of Deng Xiaoping’s role in the Third Indochina War and broadens our knowledge about Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War.

¹⁰ George Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 217.

¹¹ Scott Thomas, *The Diplomacy of Liberation: The Foreign Relations of the African National Congress since 1960* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 167-168.

¹² Lillian Craig Harris, *China Considers the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 230.

Author's Response by Xiaoming Zhang, Air War College, Alabama

I would like to thank Professors Thomas Maddux and Xia Yafeng, who arranged this H-Diplo roundtable discussion of my latest book, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991*. I am also grateful to the five reviewers who spent their precious time in this roundtable discussion. The book attempts to address several questions regarding military conflict between China and Vietnam during the last decade of the Cold War. One key and substantial question is why Deng Xiaoping, preeminent leader of China, decided to attack Vietnam in 1979 after China and Vietnam had been 'comrades plus brothers' for almost thirty years. Since Chinese archives are not available, I am confident that the book, which took me almost ten years to research and get published, is the best one to tackle this question and other related questions from a Chinese perspective. The reviewers in this roundtable come from different academic disciplines and backgrounds. As a result, the questions they raise and their comments are varied. I will respond to the comments that I disagree with one by one.

I appreciate the fact Wang Chengyi's thorough review. He, does not, however, seem to recognize that the book is about the military conflict between China and Vietnam during the last decade of the Cold War, and not about Sino-Vietnamese relations from 1974 to 1978. The military conflict took place in the unique circumstances of the Cold War when the United States was pulling back from Asia, and while the Soviet Union was expanding in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. There was a combination of causes, ranging from Deng's perception of a Soviet threat to his newly adopted economic reform policy that prompted the Chinese leadership's decision to attack Vietnam in early 1979. A detailed analysis of Sino-Vietnamese relations from 1974-1978 may strengthen the argument of the book on why Vietnam's anti-China policy played a role in Beijing's calculation of the Soviet threat to China at the time,¹ but it will not change the essence of the story of how Deng Xiaoping decided to launch the war against Vietnam when the Chinese leader believed that Soviet hegemony was the major threat to the world peace in general, China specifically, and that an alliance with the United States and other Western countries would enable Beijing to gain support for China's economic reforms. Deng's paramount political status and strength of personality were the factors that enabled him to be at the core of China's war decision-making.

Although it is difficult to have full access to the top Chinese leadership's decision-making records, my book sheds light on how Chinese leaders, especially Deng, made the decision to attack Vietnam at the time when China was experiencing a new round of power struggle between those who rose up from the Cultural Revolution and those who had just returned from the purge during the Cultural Revolution. Deng returned to the center of the Party leadership with status on par with that of Mao Zedong, perhaps even beyond that at the Third Plenum, while Hua Guofeng, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and his supporters were badly disgraced. Deng, though only one of six Vice Chairs of the CCP under Hua after the Third Plenum in 1978, became the real leader of the Party and the state, and was respected and accepted by other revolutionary oligarchs. More importantly, Deng himself believed that he was the de facto leader of China, and acted accordingly. Whether Hua's positions were incrementally taken away or not, Deng did not care and never seemingly wanted to be the Chairman of the CCP and the Premier of the State Council. To be sure, Deng played the leadership role of the Party and the state throughout the 1980s without these titles. He did take over the position of the Chair of the Central Military Commission (CMC) from Hua in 1982.

¹ See Kosal Path, "The Sino-Vietnamese Dispute over Territorial Claims, 1974-1978: Vietnamese Nationalism and Its Consequences," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 8:2 (2011): 189-220.

The rank-and-file of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), however, accepted him as their commander-in-chief as soon as he became the vice chair of the CMC in 1978. With such political status, Deng did not "need to push his agenda through the top leadership," instead, he acted above the Party and state bureaucratic institutions. He, as the chief of the General Staff Department, directed the General Staff to prepare for military action against Vietnam in late September 1978. Thereafter, the General Staff convened several staff meetings to craft and recraft its war plan. Without bringing the matter to the Politburo first, Deng called a CMC meeting in November 1978, at which a general consensus on the war decision was reached. He then called a CMC meeting on December 7, ordering the mobilization of PLA troops for invasion of Vietnam. A Politburo meeting was finally held on New Year's Eve of 1979, with several more meetings at various leadership levels prior to the attack on 17 February. Evidently, Deng did not make his war decision through the normal decision-making process. There was no evidence suggesting any 'debates' among party leaders about Deng's war decision. Wang mistranslates Deng's own words, using "debates" (*bianlun*) for "talks" (*yilun*) or "discussions" (*tanlun*). These words in Chinese are different from the English words because the former does not contain the meaning of "debate," but the latter do.

Deng, however, did ponder his war decision 'back and forth' because there were 'concerns' among party and military leaders about whether a military attack on Vietnam would serve China's national interests. Deng offered those who had concerns (not those who opposed the decision) three reasons why China should use force against Vietnam (54-55). The book provides sufficient evidence on Deng's role in China's war against Vietnam, including his perception of Vietnam, his consideration of the Soviet threat, his motive for normalizing Sino-U.S. relations, his assessment of the global strategic environment, and the consequence of war for China's economic reform. All these discussions focus on one key question the book addresses, that is, why China attacked Vietnam in 1979, or in other words, what was the cause of the war? There are no references to war theory literature in Wang's review, which thus offers no answer to this key question. The review instead questions my evidence on Deng's role in the war. Deng's perception of the Soviet threat was the factor shaping his war decision. The perceived threat might not have been real, but when this perception combined with other considerations, such as the border issue with Vietnam, Hanoi's anti-China policy, and for improving China's own strategic environment, Deng's decision to go to war with Vietnam was inevitable. Deng's case is the same as George W. Bush's 2003 decision to invade Iraq. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as we all learned later, but President Bush believed that Iraq's WMD threat was real and ordered the invasion of Iraq accordingly.

In my research, I would not use non-PLA sources to discredit the lessons the PLA learned from the 1979 war on account of its own records. The PLA never regarded the lack of the military ranking system as a lesson learned from the battlefield. This problem was widely cited in Western journalistic reports and scholarly studies; as Wang Chengyi notes, "once one officer died, he could not be promptly replaced by another without the ranking system." In fact, the PLA had its own way to deal with such a problem. One major approach was the emphasis on cadres and party members to play an exemplary role in the battlefield (129-130). The common practice was that there were prewar arrangements for designated individuals to be the replacements of commanding officers in a company or a battalion level, and so on. If all the officers and their replacements were killed and badly wounded, then a squad leader or a veteran soldier (based on years in the military service) was expected to take over the leadership of the company or a platoon. In a chaotic battlefield situation, dispersed soldiers from different units once gathered together would reveal their ranks first, and then the person having highest rank would assume the leadership role. The PLA attributed such a practice to the success of political work. The lack of a military ranking system was not a lesson learned from the 1979 war and it was not a reason for the reintroduction of military ranking system into the PLA in 1988.

Also, I am not sure to what extent my account of China's war with Vietnam will be changed substantially by "exploring the deeper exacerbation of Sino-Vietnamese relations after the Vietnam War" and by addressing such questions extensively as to how China dealt with the Sino-Vietnamese border problems during in the 1970s, and how Chinese leaders perceived the Vietnamese-Cambodian conflicts, and China's relations with the Khmer Rouge. Nevertheless, these questions raised by Wang are legitimate questions for a new and different book on China's relations with Vietnam from 1974-1978 and its impact on China's war with Vietnam. I am looking forward to more Chinese sources being available in the near future, and will be very interested to see how new sources and future interpretations will change my story of why and how the war was fought between China and Vietnam.

Sophie Quinn-Judge's review is relatively balanced. While appreciating my research in Chinese sources, she, a scholar of Vietnamese history, criticizes my account of military conflict between China and Vietnam from a Chinese perspective. From a Vietnamese perspective, China's 1979 attack on Vietnam was largely attributed to the strained relationship between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam and Vietnam's invasion of Democratic Kampuchea. I am convinced that it was the Soviet threat that made Vietnam's policy toward the Khmer Rouge a China's security problem. Throughout of the 1970s, first Mao and then Deng became more and more concerned that the Soviet Union was China's primary threat. Even if Indochinese communist nations -- Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia -- would not side with China against the Soviet Union, Chinese leaders definitely wanted them to be neutral. This attitude was reflected in China's pursuit of a neutral Southeast Asia beginning in the late 1970s. Chinese leaders were displeased to see the military conflict explode between the armies of Vietnam and Cambodia in 1977, and made desperate efforts to mediate the deteriorating relations between the two countries (36-37). Was China responsible for "exacerbating" the "tensions" and how did the "increasing Chinese military and economic support for the Khmer Rouge in 1977 play such a role? These questions appear beyond my enquiry in this book. Moreover, it requires access to Vietnamese and Cambodian records. My study aims at unraveling the factors that affected China's decision to attack Vietnam. Cambodia was an important but not the primary factor that affected China's decision-making since the PLA prepared for military action against Vietnam several months prior to the crossing of Vietnamese forces of the Mekong River into Cambodia. Cambodia could only make more sense to China in the context of the Soviet threat, which was looming large according to Deng's view.

Quinn-Judge labels my analysis of what Vietnam actually achieved from its invasion of Cambodia from a Chinese perspective as "Sino-centric." Vietnam could claim that it had accomplished its mission in Cambodia, as Quinn-Judge argues in her review. However, we must remember that Vietnam was in fact very much isolated from the international community, with friends only in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Its economy was struggling, and miserable. All these were largely attributed to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. Vietnam could claim that its military adventure was successful. How could this victory claim be evaluated in 1989 from a strategic perspective? If Hanoi's political goal at the time was to continue the so-called Le Duan economic reforms and normalize relationships with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and China, Cambodia remained the major roadblock for the Vietnamese leadership to rejoining to the world community even after "the removal of the Khmer Rouge as a threat to Vietnam." For China, Vietnam's military pullout from Cambodia in 1989 had never been enough to resolve the Cambodia problem at the negotiation table unless Vietnam would accept China's terms—including the joining of the Khmer Rouge as part of the Cambodian Transitional Authority under the leadership of Prince Sihanouk. In the meantime, China steadfastly held its position of not normalizing its relationship with Vietnam until the Cambodia issue was resolved. The fact is that Vietnam capitulated at the end even though

it could not “countenance” the Khmer Rouge’s returning to power after their military defeat. The Vietnamese leadership failed to understand that military victory without favorable political outcomes is sterile.

From a Vietnamese perspective, one could argue that China was responsible for preventing the late Vietnamese leader Le Duan from implementing his preferred policy of emphasizing economic reform. The late Vietnamese leader did, for many reasons, pursue a policy that exclusively depended on the Soviet Union. My story about Hanoi’s changes to a new foreign policy, not a change of Le Duan’s preferred policy, is based on the interpretation of Lien-Hang T. Nguyen’s 2012 book, *Hanoi’s War*,² and the memoirs of Chinese diplomats (201-204). I prefer these to scholarly interpretations made in 1986. However, what I do not understand is that why the policy pursued by the new Vietnamese leader Nguyen Van Linh was not a change from the preferred policy that Le Duan had failed to implement from 1977 to 1986. Although Vietnam’s economic reform was initiated in the early 1980s, real substantial steps were taken at the [6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam](#) in December 1986. Even so, scholars still debate about the impact of those reforms on Vietnam’s economy in the 1980s. No one seems to question that the takeoff of Vietnam’s economic reforms did not begin until the Cambodia issue was resolved. Within months of the signing of the 1991 Paris Agreements, Vietnam established diplomatic relations with ASEAN countries and also with most countries of [Western Europe](#) and normalized relations with China. It is beyond the inquiry of the book as to why Le Duan failed to do so but the leaders after him succeeded.

My analysis of the change in Vietnam's policy towards China since 1988 is based on the recollections of Chinese diplomats. Chinese diplomats learned about the divergent views between Nguyen Van Linh and his Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach on how to resolve the Cambodia issue based in their conversations with the Vietnamese leader himself. The information about the talks between Chinese and Vietnamese leaders at the 1990 Chengdu meeting is drawn from the recollections of those who attended the meeting (204-205, 209). The Chinese accounts do provide an insight into how the leaders of two countries exchanged their views at the meeting. Whether Nguyen Van Linh was paranoid about “the developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union” or not, he did represent his party and country in admitting to Chinese leaders that Vietnam pursued the wrong policy since 1978. I welcome any challenges to these Chinese accounts based on solid Vietnamese sources. Until then, I will stick to my analysis that the new Vietnamese leaders went to China for reconciliation in 1990 because they recognized that their policy mistakes placed “their country in a much weaker position than it had previously occupied” (210).

No doubt China’s international prestige suffered a great deal after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. However, the Chinese government used the Paris Peace Conference as an opportunity for a restoration of its diplomacy with the West. According to Qian Qichen, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chinese delegates played an active role at the Paris Peace Conference, persuading all participants to accept the formula for the new Cambodian government headed by Prince Sihanouk with all four political parties involved. The Khmer Rouge became an illegal political organization later because it refused to participate in the 1993 election.³ There is no evidence suggesting that normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1991 was affected by the

² Nguyen Lien-Hang T., *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 300-304.

³ Qian Qichen, *Waijiao shiji* (Records of Ten Diplomatic Events), (Hong Kong: Sanlian shuju, 2004), 45-54.

“rapidly improving” U.S.-Soviet relations and the Vietnamese/Chinese questioning of “the idea of communist party’s monopoly on power.”

Three well-known scholars in Chinese studies, June Teufel Dreyer, Zhai Qiang, and Taylor Fravel, offer very comprehensive reviews of the book. The questions raised by Fravel deserve long answers. His first question is whether domestic considerations were the real motive for Deng’s decision to attack Vietnam in 1979 because we still know little about how the General Staff and Central Military Commission (CMC) made the decision in November and December 1978. As explained above, as well as in the book, the General Staff and CMC did not act as the decision-making institutions, they rather played advisory roles for the central leadership, during Deng’s reign. Concerns about whether China should go to war with Vietnam were raised at the General Staff and CMC meetings. It was the top leadership, particularly Deng, who would have found answers to address these concerns and then make the decision.

Fravel believes that Deng’s March 1979 speech “should be viewed as a justification of the war” document. In other words, it should not be treated as evidence for Deng’s reasons to launch the war against Vietnam. The evidence he offers to downplay the importance of Deng’s March 1979 speech is that it was delivered on the last day of China’s invasion, but not before. Treating Deng’s speech as equivalent to a literary memoir composed several years later, Fravel believes that the speech was more about Deng’s “justification of the war” than his reasons for going to war. Although the records concerning Deng’s pre-war deliberations remain inaccessible, the available Chinese document, i.e. the political order for the counterattacks in self-defense against Vietnam by the General Political Department, contains the same reasons why China should go to war with Vietnam. In addition, many secondary Chinese sources provide information about Deng’s role at the 1978 Central Work Conference and the Third Plenum, and his visits to the United States, Japan, and several Southeast Asian countries from October 1978 to early February 1979. Deng presented his views on both the international and the domestic problems that China was facing. More importantly, Deng did not prepare to give a speech at the meeting on 16 March 1979. He, nevertheless, spoke off the cuff about the reasons why China should attack Vietnam. This means that Deng had pondered his three reasons and the benefits of his decision for a period of time before, as well as throughout, the war. I disagree with Fravel’s functionalist fallacy comment. The calculation of the possible (or actual) benefits out of war by leaders should, I think, be treated as “evidence for explaining the decision to pursue such measures.”

There appears to be some confusion as to the nature of power struggle inside the leadership of the CCP in late 1978 and my interpretation of its correlation with Deng’s decision to go to war with Vietnam. Deng became the leader of China at the Third Plenum. However, he was concerned about those who had advanced to the leadership positions at state and local levels during the Cultural Revolution as potential opponents to his reform policy. In the meantime, the internal unity and coherence of the PLA was seriously deteriorating due to factionalism. The problem that Deng faced was the result of the Cultural Revolution, which continued to divide the party, the government, and the military, rather than, the PLA getting out of control. There is no evidence suggesting that Deng intentionally used the war with Vietnam to consolidate his power and address the problem of domestic disunity. However, there is plenty of evidence that Deng talked extensively about his concerns that China’s ongoing economic development could be distracted and even hampered by the internal disunity problem. Many Chinese believe⁴ that the 1979 war with Vietnam played a role in stopping

⁴ In June 2007, I had a meeting with a group of Chinese scholars, at which I learned of this view.

the factional fighting within the PLA.⁵ After receiving the CMC's war order on December 9, 1978, military leaders at all levels were required to lay aside their grievances and differences, and to concentrate their attention on war preparations.⁶ Although there was no major change of military leadership in connection with the war with Vietnam, Deng did not trust all senior military leaders, especially those who supported Mao's purge activities during the Cultural Revolution. He took some necessary measures before the war, i.e. the replacement of Wang Bicheng, commander of Kunming Military Region, with Yang Dezhi; sending Liu Changyi to the Guangzhou Military Region as Xu Shiyou's top deputy, the designation of Yang Yong as his top aide in the General Staff Department, and suspension of Liu Zhong's commandship in the midst of the invasion. Except for Liu Zhong, all these generals were longtime associates of Deng during their military careers. Indeed, Deng's solid control of the central leadership did not come until Zhao Ziyang and Peng Zhen became Politburo members in 1979. In early 1980, Hu Yaobang and Zhao became Politburo Standing Committee members. It was at this point that Deng was able to remove Hau Guofeng and his supporters from the central leadership. In 1983, Deng finally launched a movement to clear out (*qingli sanzhongren*) those who were the beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution from the leadership positions at all levels of the party, government, and military because he believed that they were opposed to his reform policy.⁷

Even so, I do not regard the power struggle and Deng's concerns about economic and military reforms as the primary motive for Deng's decision to use force against Vietnam. That is why I treat the Soviet threat and Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia that extended the former's threat to China from the south as the primary motivations for Deng's decision to go to war with Vietnam. The book makes clear that the domestic issues were secondary, only making Deng even more convinced that the war against Vietnam was necessary and that his decision was rational. Nevertheless, these secondary factors alone were not sufficient to motivate Deng to decide to go to war with Vietnam. Fravel's criticism seems to suggest that I am wrong to make the domestic issues Deng's primary motivations since he does not believe "any of these factors independently or together as having been sufficient for China to decide to launch such a massive invasion of a neighbor."

Fravel goes on to question my evaluation of the extent to which the war was worth fighting. His key points are that (1) it is difficult to determine whether the war with Vietnam actually deterred the Soviet threat, and (2) the costs of such a short war were too high. He seems question the importance of the Soviet threat, and even though this threat was real, he argues that other factors such as Moscow's quagmire in Afghanistan and the U.S. renewed effort to engage in military competition with the Soviet Union, played a much more important role in diminishing the Soviet threat to China. This line of argument cannot, in my opinion, be used to dismiss the objectives that Deng set for China by launching the war against Vietnam. The Chinese

⁵ After consulting several official sources, I believe that the CMC meeting at the end of 1978 was not an enlarged meeting, and was a seminar. Zhang Sheng could be wrong on this. See Leng Rong and Wang Zuoling, chief eds., *Deng Xiaoping nianpu* (Chronicle of Deng Xiaoping's Life), vol. 1, (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 2004), 459-60; Liu Zhi and Zhang Lin, eds., *Xu Xiangqian zhuan* (Biography of Xu Xiangqian), (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo, 1997), 549-50.

⁶ Zhang Jinghua, commander of the 14th Army, wrote a recollection about the 1979 war, entitled "Fighting for My Country," in *Bingqi zhishi* (Ordnance Knowledge), No. 1, 2010. I did not include the article in my research for the book.

⁷ No matter how many lectures General Su Yu gave in the late 1970s, his influence on the PLA was limited. It was Deng Xiaoping who did not want to rehabilitate General Su Yu from his purge in the mid-1950s.

leader wanted to improve China's strategic position by forming a quasi-alliance relationship with the United States and other Western countries against Soviet expansion. He also anticipated financial and technological support from the West to make China stronger and put it in a better position to confront the Soviet threat. In addition, Deng did not calculate that there would be an imminent Soviet invasion of China from the north. Instead, he perceived the Soviet threat from a long geopolitical perspective. Likewise, Deng did not expect any immediate result or impact on Hanoi from teaching Vietnam "a lesson." He could wait while continuing a policy of "bleeding Vietnam white." It is debatable whether this was a successful policy or not. It was in fact the Vietnamese leaders who came to Chengdu who admitted that they made mistakes in pursuing a policy against China since 1978. The successful story of China's economic reform and a close security relationship with the United States in the 1980s are the evidence to suggest that Deng achieved his strategic objectives that he laid out in his March 1979 speech.

There were many downsides of China's war with Vietnam, including those concurrent negative international responses to China's invasion. However, these negativities were disproportionately less significant. For Deng, China did not demand any economic and technological support from those countries which condemned China's invasion, and therefore, there would not be any consequences that could prevent China from achieving its war objectives. The Chinese leader was also convinced that Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and threat to Thailand could offset Southeast Asian countries' concerns about China's invasion of Vietnam. It was equally true that China had a better strategic position in the late 1980s than in the 1970s, along with its domestic economic conditions. By comparison, the costs of the border war with Vietnam was minimum.

While doing my best to answer the questions raised by the reviewers, I concluded that the major interpretative differences between my work and that of Sophie Quinn-Judge and Taylor Fravel, including their reviews, are due to our different perspectives. My book attempts to provide insights on the military conflict between China and Vietnam from 1979 to 1991 from a Chinese perspective. As a result, my interpretation is unlikely to satisfy those who explore this history from a Vietnamese or a Western perspective just as theirs are unlikely to satisfy me. Once again, I appreciate the roundtable for offering us an opportunity to debate these issues.