

A
FILE SUBJ
9/10 SUB-CAT

NIHON KEIZAI (Full)

Sept. 8, 1970

Prospects for Indochina Peace

Panel discussion by Akira OKADA, Consul General in Hongkong, Yoshito SHIMODA, Ambassador to Laos, Kenjiro CHIKARAISHI, Ambassador to Cambodia, and Hideo KITAHARA, Ambassador to South Vietnam. From the paper: Foreign News Editor NAGATA and Political News Editor OCHI.

-- First, we would like you to analyze the Indochina situation in general as seen from your respective posts.

KITAHARA: I think we can say clearly that the big current is heading toward de-escalation or reduction in fighting. I think that infiltration from North Vietnam this year will be 30 to 40 per cent of that last year. In this sense, I think we can safely say that the Indochina war passed its peak and has entered the stage of gradual settlement.

One big uncertain factor is the future of Cambodia, but I think it is an unknown quantity of such a minor scale as will not escalate the Indochina war drastically again. In the South, America's so-called Vietnam-ization policy has made considerable progress militarily. If such a state continues for two years, the South Vietnamese forces will reach a considerable level.

On the other hand, America has to carry out its troop withdrawal by all means. This is for various reasons, such as America's internal political requirements and the Presidential election in 1972. I think America's present idea is to carry on its Vietnam-ization policy as a trump card to induce the North to a conference table, showing that Vietnam-ization in parallel with troop withdrawal will make South Vietnam stronger.

The North will try to build up the greatest possible military high point to show off its power and jolt the South politically. But it is entering a state, where to mount a large-scale offensive is practically impossible for it. There is no knowing what will happen in the future to the question of flying sorties from Okinawa in connection with (reversion) of Okinawa in 1972, but my feeling is that under the present situation, we will not have to worry ourselves so much.

CHIKARAISHI: In Cambodia, the situation was once such that concern over Pnompenh was aroused. But judging from the later developments of fighting -- this is partly due to the start of the rainy season on a full scale -- I think North Vietnam's and the Viet Cong's attempt to crush the Lon Nol Government and form a pro-communist government has failed. At the initial stage, Cambodia's military power consisted of about 35,000 men, of whom one half were unarmed. At present, it has as many as 130,000 to 140,000 armed troops. On the other hand, the number of the other side's forces has remained unincreased.

The distance between Hanoi and Pnompenh roughly equals that between Tokyo and Nagasaki. Such a war as to cover that distance by trucks and elephants and depend on human shoulders and bicycles for supply transportation cannot last long. In Cambodia, too, the view is that the situation will probably de-escalate.

Of course, a great danger exists, but those who fear the overthrow of the Lon Nol Government are very few. Perhaps, the present situation will last at least until the next dry season. Isn't it that even if they want to start a great offensive after that, they will be unable to do so because of the great obstacle called the logistics question? For instance, they will no longer consider capturing Pnompenh but will make efforts in

the direction of orientating farmers more steadily. So, I think a state as at present will continue for some while.

SHIMODA: History since 700 or 800 years ago reveals that Laos was a considerably big country but that it suffered a succession of invasions by other countries such as Burma, Cambodia, Siam (Thailand) and Annam (Vietnam). Historically speaking, the Laotians are against the entry of Vietnamese people into their country, as their frank sentiment. Inasmuch as North Vietnam, with a population of 13 millions, has sent as many as 50,000 to 60,000 troops to Laos, Laos, which has no munitions factory, cannot but seek America's aid to defend itself, in case its request for help is rejected by the Soviet Union.

Laos is now receiving arms aid from America, but it has a great fear that America's pullout will lead the Vietnamese to keep staying on.

The recent situation is like this: The Pathet Lao, a minority, and the North Vietnamese forces, a majority, greatly influenced by the outbreak of the Cambodian incident, felt the need to secure the HO Chi Minh Trail in the south. As a result, they captured Savaranne and Attoupeu in the south, making the situation unfavorable to the South. But the situation has been very quiet after those places were secured to some degree.

In my outlook, it is certain that peace talks will be started at Khan Khay while Premier PHOUMA is visiting Africa, Europe and America for two months to come. Will talks make steady progress and settle the Laotian question? No. But at least, it will be a partial ceasefire. This is because the matter depends on what idea North Vietnam has for settling the three Indochina countries. As Ambassador KITAHARA has said, the date of US troop withdrawal will be compared with the progress of Vietnam-ization, and talks will make little progress at least until the plan to withdraw 150,000 troops by April next year has been materialized. On the whole, however, the situation in the Indochina peninsula as seen from Laos is that it has entered a state of de-escalation and is at the stage of settlement.

OKADA: Its situation as seen from the Chinese side is quite different. The Soviet Union was overwhelmingly strong in the communist bloc's influence on the Indochina question in the 1960's, but after the death of President HO Chi Minh, China's interest in the Indochina question has quickly mounted. As far as the political influence is concerned, I think China outweighs the Soviet Union at the present stage.

In the CHOU En-lai-PHAM Van Dong Joint Communique of October 25, last year, the North Vietnamese Premier stated that the Vietnam side thinks it will eventually win victory without fail, if it continues struggles on the military, political and diplomatic fronts. On the other hand, the Chinese side said in the last paragraph that it believes that final victory will be won, if the drawn-out war, independence and autonomy and self-rehabilitation are continued. Thus, two expressions were used.

After this Joint Communique, a political change broke out in Cambodia. On April 25 and 26, the communist leaders of the three Indochina countries held a meeting and issued a joint statement. On May 20, a MAO Tse-tung statement was issued. From around that time, a delicate change has appeared in North Vietnam's and others' attitude toward the way of fighting the Vietnam war. A typical example is that Premier Pham Van Dong said on September 1 that the US forces' invasion of Cambodia caused a new development in the war situation and that the three countries decided to carry out liberation struggles in concert.

September 1 was the 25th anniversary of North Vietnam's winning of its independence. If you read carefully the telegraphs sent by MAO, LIN and CHOU to North Vietnam on that occasion, you will notice that they were different, in contents, from what China had been saying. The telegrams

said that if the three countries continue the protracted war, maintaining their mutual aid and mutual solidarity, they will win without fail and that China will discharge its international duty toward the three countries. In other words, the question of the three countries as seen from the Chinese side has no solution but a settlement in a package at the present stage. I feel from this that the direction of seeing no solution to the Indochina war except by reaching an agreement with China has appeared.

-- It is said that the communist forces may start a large-scale offensive in Cambodia in the near future...

KITAHARA: With regard to the personnel factor, North Vietnam does not have enough reserve forces newly trained. Therefore, the question is how far into Cambodia it will be able to send troops by the HO Chi Minh Trail when the dry season sets in. Even if the North Vietnam forces reduce Pnompehn by taking the lead in attacks, how will they be able to rule Pnompehn when the coasts are all blockaded? Isn't it that North Vietnam will not do such a thing? The observation is that North Vietnam will place the Red Khmer forces at the head and that North Vietnamese forces carrying SIHANOUK's insignia and the North Vietnamese people in SIHANOUK's uniforms will follow them. In this regard, isn't North Vietnam too thoughtful to start a clumsy offensive? Rather, isn't it that North Vietnam will make all-out efforts to keep the northeastern and northern districts under its political control so as to lay the foundation for continuing the liberation war for five or even ten years? That is the observation in Saigon.

In the event a great offensive is started, what will they do? South Vietnamese forces will go to the aid (of Cambodia). In the case of a pinch, what will America do? Isn't it that America will be compelled to take some relief measures? The sole possibility on the Vietnam front is whether or not 21 North Vietnamese regiments, now pegged in the vicinity of the Demilitarized Zone, will swoop down southward, breaking through the Demilitarized Zone. If they do, they will be pounded by the US Air Force. That will be a decisive battle. If North Vietnam ventures that, it will lose one half of its forces. So, the question is whether or not it will do such a thing.

CHIKARAISHI: Pnompenh was once felt to be in danger. Pnompenh, surrounded by water on three sides, suffered floods in July. It is open in the southwestern direction, but no troops are deployed there. In a word, it is in no such state as to move large forces and start fighting. North Vietnamese forces are said to have fired three trench mortar shots in the immediate neighborhood of Pnompehn. Not a single day passes without hearing the boom of guns, but moving about are only small units of forces. At the present moment, isn't it that there is no great danger? Compared with some time ago, the feeling of crisis in the city has decreased, we can say.

-- What about the present situation of the HO Chi Minh Trail and its relations with Laos?

SHIMODA: We may think that the HO Chi Minh Trail has been improved. This is for the following reason: The Sekong River flowing into the Mekong River in Cambodia has never been used on a full scale as an appendix to the HO Chi Minh Trail. By the Cambodian operations the North's bases were crushed. It was a great success for those who crushed them and a hard blow for those who suffered destruction. I assume that their judgment is that in the absence of supply routes from the south, they have no alternative but to increase supplies from the north.

Tactically speaking, isn't it impossible under the present situation to start a large-scale operation in Cambodia via Laos or in the south of South Vietnam? Isn't it correct to assess that barring China's aid with great air-lift power, all that they can do with their logistics capacity is to maintain their present strength, as long as they continue their present method?

-- In view of the off-year election scheduled for November, the NIXON Administration may naturally be anxious to promote prospects for peace. In connection with various factors such as the start of talks with new Delegate BRUCE arriving in Paris and Delegate Xuan THUY returning to his Paris post, please tell us whether or not there will be dramatic moves this autumn.

KITAHARA: A common-sense observation is that the North may start something in Cambodia or elsewhere in the dry season next year, but a great directional change cannot be expected, can it? In a word, the peace question solely depends on the North's intentions.

As for the question of whether North Vietnam will thoroughly remain at the mercy of China or it will be unable to take action independently and autonomously, my view is that it will eventually make a decision on its own judgment. But isn't a change difficult at present, when it is taking the position of faithfully observing HO Chi Minh's will? Considering America's off-year election, North Vietnam's internal politics and many other things, North Vietnam may show some moves, but we may safely assume that it will not take drastic action for a few years.

As for future problems, the greatest factor for peace will be the Presidential election in South Vietnam in the autumn next year, if the North has something up its sleeve about it. A political offensive entangled with it will become a great factor.

-- What about the rumor that North Vietnam's political leaders are divided into hawks and doves over the Vietnam and Indochina questions and that they are pitted against each other?

OKADA: Some speeches delivered by political leaders emphasize whether or not to stage protracted hostilities, while others emphasize the three pillars involving diplomatic, political and military affairs, but I do not think that this has developed into a power struggle or an intra-Government conflict and threatens to affect the peace question.

-- What do you think about the stability of the Government?

KITAHARA: That the An Quang group ran in the Senate election is a new move in South Vietnam's political history. In South Vietnam, a coup d'etat has been the sole means of changing government. Therefore, it is natural that one who schemes to take power next should take a more extreme opposition position. That the An Quang group ran in the Senate election under the Constitution means that it fought as the Opposition under constitutionality and that the framework of the Constitution has been recognized. This is certainly a new fact.

It is very good that the election was free from crackdown and that the An Quang group placed first. In this sense, it can be said that a bud of the foundation of democratic government has appeared in South Vietnam.

Concerning the Presidential election next year, things are not so simple as will enable the prediction that the An Quang Temple Group or Duong Van Minh will win. Because of South Vietnam's complex political problems, I cannot say anything definite.

As for relations between THIEU and KY, I must remain non-committal because of my official duties, but generally speaking, I think it possible to say that the present Government is bringing the whole of administration under its control to some degree. The Pacification Program is going very well. Local provincial council elections were held recently. Hundreds of council members were called to Saigon to hear the central Government's explanations on its way of administration. In this sense, local administration is kept under the control of the central Government. Those elected may include secret leftists considerably, but the fact that they came to the central capital to listen to the Central's administrative and guidance policies means that the present system is being consolidated.

CHIKARAISHI: The Lon Nol Government is strongly supported by the intellectual and student and youth classes as well as by priests. Unlike the Vietnamese, the Cambodians do not widely vary in opinions. It is a country of few political feuds. Because the political party is only one, we cannot find forces, which are likely to overthrow the Lon Nol Government. Prince SIHANOUK is still strongly respected and loved among farmers, especially the aged, but isn't it that they are unable to grow into an organized political force? I think, therefore, that the Cambodians will be contented with the Lon Nol Government, so long as it does not lose the war.

-- Under the present situation, where China's leadership has become considerably strong and the Soviet Union's influence has dwindled relatively, isn't it that the prospects for peace are considerably pessimistic?

OKADA: Referring to the epochal question in Sino-Soviet relations -- the question of whether or not global war is avoidable, about which China and the Soviet Union disputed --, Chairman MAO Tse-tung's statement of May 20 judged that the danger of global war still exists and that at the present moment, political moves in the world are not of a war but a revolution age. It continued that the three Indochina countries, small countries as they are, will be able to defeat a big country, if they maintain their unity. Quoting the philosophy of Laotze and Chungtze, the statement further said that those who have found the way will have many helpers and that those who have lost the way will have few helpers. My impression is that in case the war is being waged by revolutionary methods against the background of such a philosophy, to realize peace by talks will be difficult.

-- Please talk about inter-relations between the date of reversion of Okinawa in 1972 and the Vietnam war and the role Japan should play, that is, the role Japan should play from the present toward the post-Vietnam days.

KITAHARA: After all, that depends on the prospect. Generally speaking, however, I see the strong possibility that a formal peace will not be realized in Vietnam for a few years to come despite every possible effort by well-meaning countries in the world. Then, as a countermeasure against the Vietnam war, isn't it good to begin, from now, doing what is feasible for the direction of rehabilitation and reconstruction rather than war and destruction, while exhausting every well-meant effort for peace? When the time comes, when to do this for North Vietnam, too, becomes possible, won't it be good to do this for North Vietnam, too? In order to make it possible to do such things for North Vietnam in the future, some are against doing such things for South Vietnam now. But in view of Japan's present international position, that is, it is an economic big power in Asia, its exports to Vietnam amount to 200 million dollars a year and it accounts for nearly 70% of America's special procurement orders, and in view of Japan's relations with its friendly countries, should Japan remain an on-looker to both sides, it will be distrusted and forsaken by both sides and will become a literal economic animal, won't it?

CHIKARAISHI: The same applies to Cambodia, too. But I think that North Vietnam, having lost its good leader, HO Chi Minh, has become unable to make such a drastic decision as shift to peace. Naturally, isn't it that the war will last for a few more years? In that case, if a relatively weak country like Cambodia suffers clear aggression and its independence is threatened, Japan will be compelled to oppose that. Cambodia and Laos are two different countries. Isn't it what Japan should do first to eliminate foreign forces' threat of aggression against them and to help them maintain their independence? This is not to take military action. Isn't it necessary to take every opportunity to pursue that direction patiently?

SHIMODA: My view is nearly the same. In that sense, Laos is most quiet now. Japan's co-operation on the way to peace and to economic development has made great progress. The quiet situation in Laos, coupled with co-operation by Japan and many other countries, will lead Laos to a good direction. Japan, for one, will enlarge the scale of its economic co-operation and will continue its aid. Politically, great expectations are pinned on Japan. So, efforts should be continued to take the direction of settling such Asian problems as Japan tackled at the Djakarta Conference, by talks among Asians.

OKADA: I think that Asian political relations, which were centered on US-China-Soviet trilateral relations in the 1960's, are shifting to Japan-China-US-Soviet quadrilateral relations in the 1970's. Therefore, unless these four countries conduct frank talks fully, to ease tension and maintain peace in Asia will be difficult. Especially China and Japan have various problems between them. Their relations are cold because of misunderstanding and distrust between them. Japan, with a definite idea as to how to cope with quadrilateral relations in the 1970's, has to conduct frank talks with America first and then streamline its relations with China gradually, thus to materialize the easing of tension.

For this purpose, it must have as many friendly countries as possible in Southeast Asia. Of course, the countries there are friendly toward us, but I mean the countries, which will co-operate with Japan from the bottom of their hearts. There are various measures to be taken in the fields of the economic co-operation and cultural policies. By taking those measures in parallel, we will make friendly countries, in the real sense, out of them. I wonder if it isn't necessary to take some measures in our relations with China and make efforts to remove mutual misunderstanding and distrust.

KK

15