

## Indochina 25 Years Later: Leaving Colonialism Behind

by Gail G. Billington

This spring has seen an outpouring of interest in Indochina, timed to coincide with the silver anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam on April 30, 1975. Inevitably, attention also focussed on the war itself, which dealt a blow to all France's former Indochina colonies—Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—from which they have not yet recovered, and on the horrendous genocide which followed the April 1975 seizure of power by the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Mixed into the reminiscences has been only the smallest hint of what should be done today—and most of that is the ludicrous perspective of how to spread the “new economy” of cell phones and computers to the impoverished people of the region.

*EIR* undertook this current study from the standpoint of our own active involvement in the policies involving the region over these same 25 years. While the war was basically over when *EIR* was founded, we put heavy emphasis from the mid-1970s on, to the requirements for lasting economic development in the region, which were first formally presented in Lyndon LaRouche's 1983 “A Fifty-Year Development Policy for the Indian-Pacific Oceans Basin,” a policy paper which encompassed the Indochina peninsula, and which was updated in recent years. Also during the 1970s, *EIR* was among the first Western journals to cover the 1979 trials *in absentia* of the Pol Pot genocidal crew, who launched a campaign of “purification” that led to the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians, perhaps up to 3.3 million, in little more than three years and eight months. In addition, we exposed the source of this evil as located in the Western existentialist cults of the Sorbonne in Paris, which were dedi-

cated explicitly to destroying human civilization.

But, perhaps most importantly, *EIR* and its founder Lyndon LaRouche have devoted this same period to uncovering the source of the evils imposed on Indochina, in the tradition of imperial oligarchism, which has been the mortal enemy of the American republic, and in seeking to revive the American anti-imperial tradition as represented by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This work brought us to understand, in depth, the source of the evil policies represented by, for example, Henry Kissinger, a self-professed British agent and enemy of the “idealism” of FDR; and of Robert Strange McNamara, who turned out to be a fanatical adherent of the same Malthusian cult now headed by Britain's Prince Philip.

Today, the opportunity for Indochina to finally achieve economic development still depends upon resolving this battle between FDR's anti-colonial outlook (abandoned by his successors), and the British imperial yoke represented primarily by the International Monetary Fund, in favor of FDR. As our interviews and economic studies show, many of the prerequisites—in planning and political good will—already exist. The successful defeat of colonialism, however, will depend heavily upon Americans acting to make the necessary policy changes, changes which this *Feature* should make crystal clear.

### The Roosevelt Legacy

U.S. involvement in Indochina in the post-Franklin Roosevelt decades of the Cold War makes no sense, outside the context of the battle for, or against, that unique mission defined for the United States in the Preamble to the Constitution



*President Franklin Roosevelt (above, left) and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, at Yalta, February 1945, and Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh (left), 1954. Ho backed the Allies, and the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence quoted from the U.S. Declaration of Independence, in anticipation of FDR's intention to end colonialism. After FDR's death, his postwar intentions, and U.S. and Southeast Asia's interests, were betrayed to the British.*

and the Declaration of Independence, a mission—to promote the General Welfare, in a community of principle among sovereign nation-states—intended to be shared as the universal patrimony of the truly sovereign, independent nation-state. Against that purpose, aided and abetted by assassination of too many American Presidents, have been repeated efforts to subvert that mission, to use the United States as the muscle to defend an oligarchical political and economic order that treats 10% as humans, and the rest as something far less. Since its founding in the mid-1970s, *EIR* has a track record of examining that historical conflict in U.S. policymaking.

In the twentieth century, U.S. contact with two prominent Asian leaders most succinctly captures the paradoxical relationship that landed the United States in the quagmire of a land war in Southeast Asia, a war that Gen. Douglas MacArthur strongly advised President John Kennedy against: China's Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh. In reviewing how the European colonial powers drew China into World War I against Germany, Dr. Sun Yat-sen outlined a plan for the international development of China, warning that failure to carry out his major infrastructure projects would surely lead to another world war. Dr. Sun's plan drew on the tradition of the nation-builders associated with President Abraham Lincoln's infrastructure building, such as the continental railway, a tradition which was shared also with Dmitri Mendeleev of Russia, and Japan's Meiji reformers.

Dr. Sun's plan is a precursor of a proposal that LaRouche and his associates have campaigned for since the founding of *EIR*, outlined in a series of "great projects" for each continent,

and linking the whole together. For Asia, in 1983, *EIR* issued its report, "A Fifty-Year Development Policy for the Indian and Pacific Oceans Basin," which identified five major water-management projects: canal projects for the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers in India; the Mekong River Basin; the Kra Canal in Thailand; the proposed Hangzhou-Peking (Beijing) canal in China; and a second Panama Canal.

In January 1997, *EIR* released its "Eurasian Land-Bridge" report, consolidating work over the previous two decades into a global great infrastructure program. **Figure 1** shows the priority intercontinental routes, as identified in the "Eurasian Land-Bridge" report. **Figure 2** shows the principal nations of the Southeast Asian peninsula, and the Mekong River Basin; and **Figure 3** presents in detail, proposed development corridors and links.

Both Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Ho Chi Minh sought U.S. support, over decades, to liberate their countries from colonial occupation, and to participate in developing those nations to their full potential. Dr. Sun Yat-sen was rebuffed when he came to the United States. President Woodrow Wilson, the President who resuscitated the Ku Klux Klan with Hollywood's help, had no time to meet with Ho Chi Minh on the sidelines of the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference after World War I. Following that "war to end all wars," Versailles was an orgy of the victors, who reimposed their right to carve up China and other colonial territories, crushing hope around the world that the colonial yoke would be lifted, and imposing a war reparations debt burden on Germany that ensured the outbreak of a new war. The betrayal of that hope in the Ver-

FIGURE 1

### Topographical Map of Eurasia, with Some Main Development Corridors

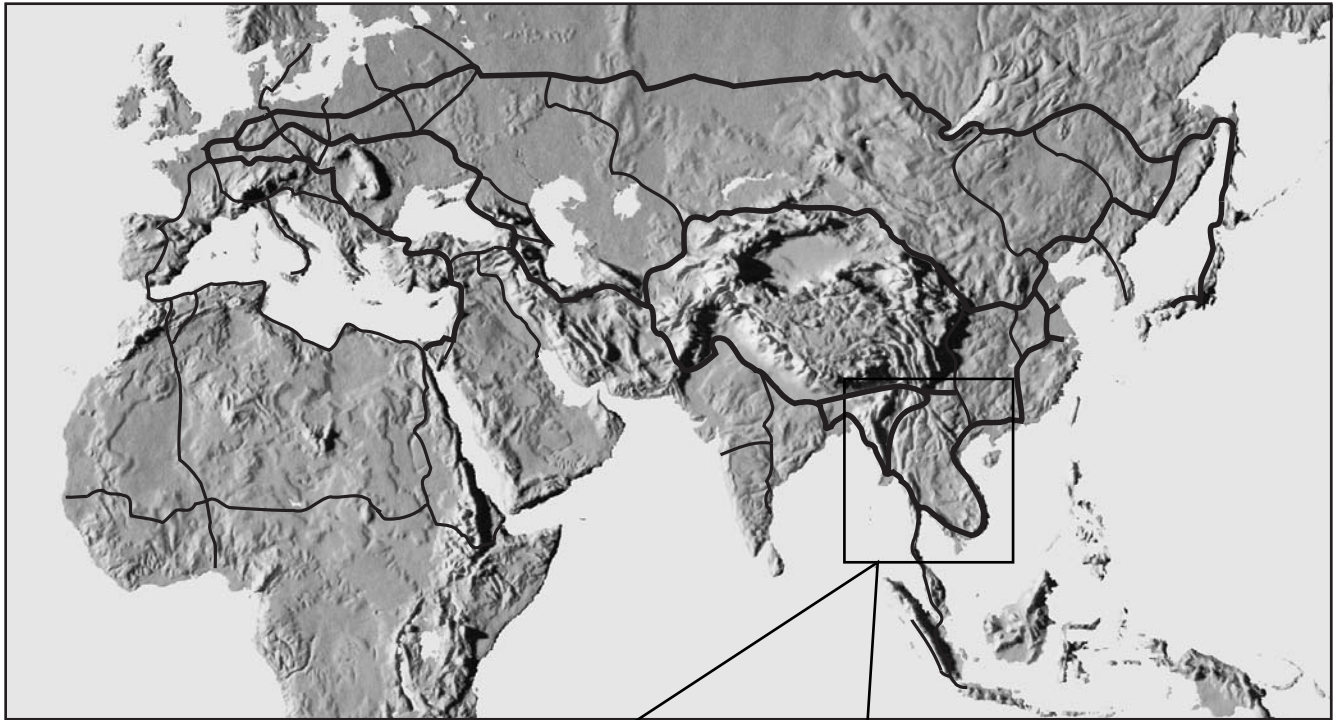


FIGURE 2

### Mekong River Basin and Nations of the Greater Mekong Subregion Development

*Figure 1* is a relief map of Eurasia, with priority “Land-Bridge” routes shown, indicating important development corridors to link nations all across the intercontinental expanse. There are key links to Southeast Asia for modern rail routes, both around the peninsular coastline, and importantly, across the highlands near Kunming, China. □ □

□ *Figure 2* shows in more detail, a principal physical geographic feature of the Southeast Asian peninsula—the Mekong River Basin. The Mekong is over 4,000 kilometers long, ranking 16th in length, and is also among the top 10 in volume of discharge, among the world’s rivers. □

□ Along its course, the Mekong drains a total catchment area of 795,000 square kilometers—well over twice the land area of Japan. In its lower region, an area of over 609,000 square kilometers, its drainage basin comprises almost the whole of Laos and Cambodia, one-third of Thailand, and one-fifth of Vietnam.

FIGURE 3

### Railways, and Kra Canal, in South Asia



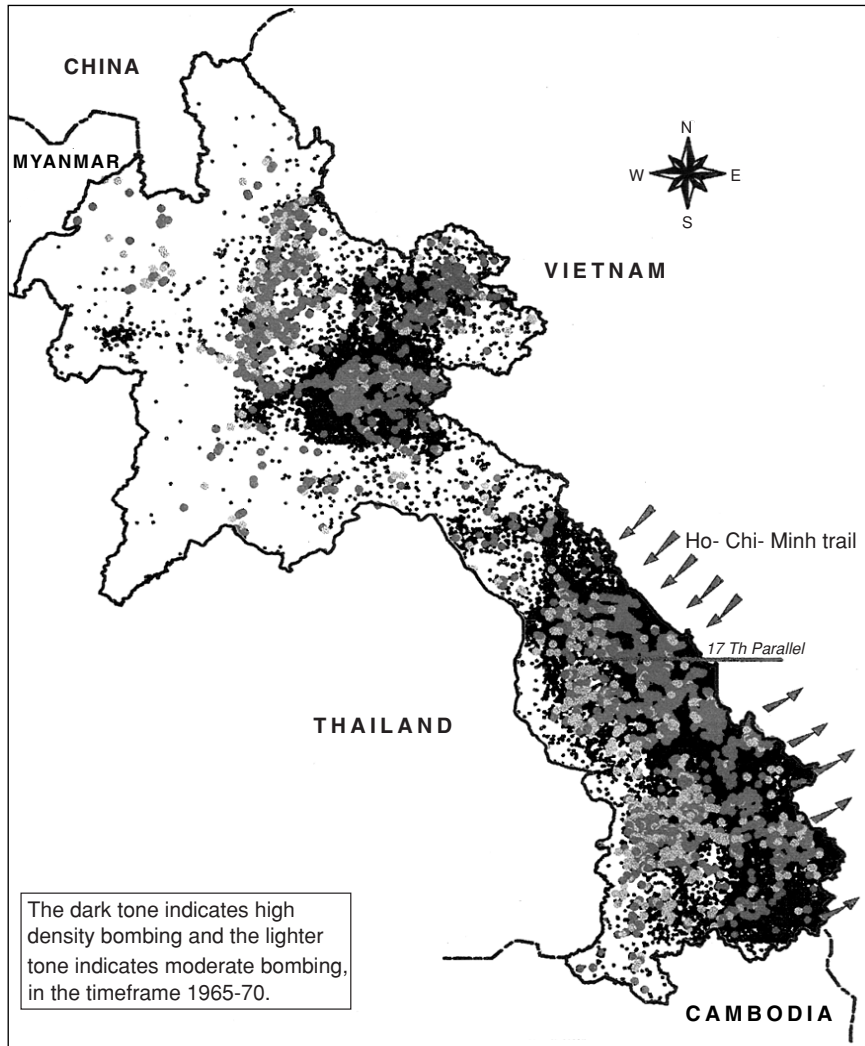
sailles “peace” did more to recruit into the ranks of Communist and Socialist parties than any other single event up to that point. Many leaders of the Communist Party of China, including Zhou En-lai and others, joined only after the crushing defeat at Versailles. Ho Chi Minh joined the Communist Party in Paris in 1920, insisting later that “it was patriotism and not communism that originally inspired me.” Ho Chi Minh wrote repeatedly to U.S. leaders, seeking support for

Vietnam’s aspirations to independence.

Ho Chi Minh specifically sought “trusteeship” for Vietnam, the formula Franklin Delano Roosevelt proposed in 1933 for the Philippines, shortly after his election, which allowed for an interval to learn how to govern, knowledge not shared by the colonial powers. Roosevelt’s announcement of “trusteeship” for the Philippines was an early warning to the European colonial powers of his intent to *end* colonialism,

FIGURE 4

**Unexploded Ordnance in Lao P.D.R.**



Source: 1998 Annual Report, Lao National UXO Programme.

which he later made explicit to Britain’s wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, declaring that the United States did not fight World War II to see the colonial empires reestablished.

Ho Chi Minh’s contact with American officers of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), initially in Kunming, China and later in Vietnam, was mentioned in one Agence France Presse wire in the anniversary coverage. The full story remains to be told, but OSS officer Archimedes Patti, in his autobiographical book *Why Vietnam?*, recounted his mission’s contact with Ho and Ho’s incorporation into his proclamation of Vietnam’s independence on Sept. 2, 1945 the following: “All men are created equal. They are endowed by

their Creator with certain unalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

**Neo-Colonialism Takes Over**

Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, four months before Vietnam’s August Revolution, when Ho Chi Minh and associates wrested control of the north of Vietnam. In the vacuum following Roosevelt’s death, British forces rushed to restore French colonial control of southern Vietnam, while Anglophile elements of the U.S. political and financial establishment, epitomized by Harry Truman and Allen and John Foster Dulles, brought U.S. foreign policy into line in support of, and, eventually, in place of, colonial France in Indochina.

Twenty-five years after the Indochina wars, new material is being declassified that will surely unleash controversy. More attention is being paid to the Eisenhower Administration’s—specifically, John Foster Dulles’s—consideration of giving tactical nuclear weapons to French forces desperately trying to hold on to Dien Bien Phu. The tragedy is, that anyone could have failed to recognize that the French were already self-defeated at Dien Bien Phu, based on decades of colonial abuse, not the least as a consequence of the official French Opium Monopoly’s repeated cheating of local hill tribes on the price of their opium crops. By the time of the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, France’s colonial military presence depended on the military’s control of that

opium trafficking, and U.S. aid. Where the French believed the hill tribes to be their allies, the latter were instead guiding the Viet Minh to destroy the French forces. France paid a heavy price for that war: 90,000 dead, 114,000 wounded, another 21,600 French or indigenous persons missing. There is no estimate of the Viet Minh losses, except that it was several times that of France.

Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (P.D.R.), and Vietnam emerged from their respective wars with economies that not only remained unchanged since colonial days, but what little infrastructure had existed was damaged or destroyed by saturation bombing, the laying of millions of landmines, and the effects, more than a genera-

tion later, of herbicides to clear away the cover of the tropical rainforest.

An estimated 500,000 Cambodians were killed in the U.S. bombings that preceded the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975. The bombings themselves contributed to rapid recruitment to the Khmer Rouge, swelling its ranks from 3,000 to 50-60,000 by 1975. There is still no final tally on the bomb tonnage dropped on Cambodia by U.S. B-52 raids, but author William Shawcross, in *Sideshow*, reported that "in 1971, a single B-52 squadron still dropped in one year half the tonnage dropped by U.S. planes in the entire Pacific Theater in World War Two." Total tonnage dropped of other ordnance, as reported in the April 14-27, 2000 *Phnom Penh Post*, is far too long to include here. When the Khmer Rouge were finally driven out of Phnom Penh (in less than three weeks) in January 1979, an estimated 10 million landmines were left behind, roughly one per person, much of it in the richest rice-growing province of Battambang.

In Laos, during 1965-75, an estimated 2-3 million tons of ordnance were dropped on a population of 3 million, equal to one planeload of bombs dropped every eight minutes for nine years. And, in Vietnam, the combination of bombings and landmines contributed to the deaths of an estimated 1 million soldiers and 2 million civilians, with 300,000 missing in action. Herbicide spraying, estimated at 20 million gallons, killed or injured 400,000 directly, and is believed to have contributed to severe deformities in another half-million children born to North Vietnamese soldiers who fought in the South. To this day, the rate of deformities in children of these soldiers is still far higher (5%) than normal, and is attributed by one leading Vietnamese doctor to contamination of the food chain, in particular, consumption of fish contaminated by dioxin residues in water. Fish makes up about 70% of protein intake in Vietnam.

The United States lost 58,000 personnel, with 250,000 wounded or maimed, and 2,029 missing in action (MIAs). The United States continues to hold full trade relations with Vietnam hostage to progress on recovery of these MIAs, while little, if any, assistance is available for recovery of Vietnam's MIAs.

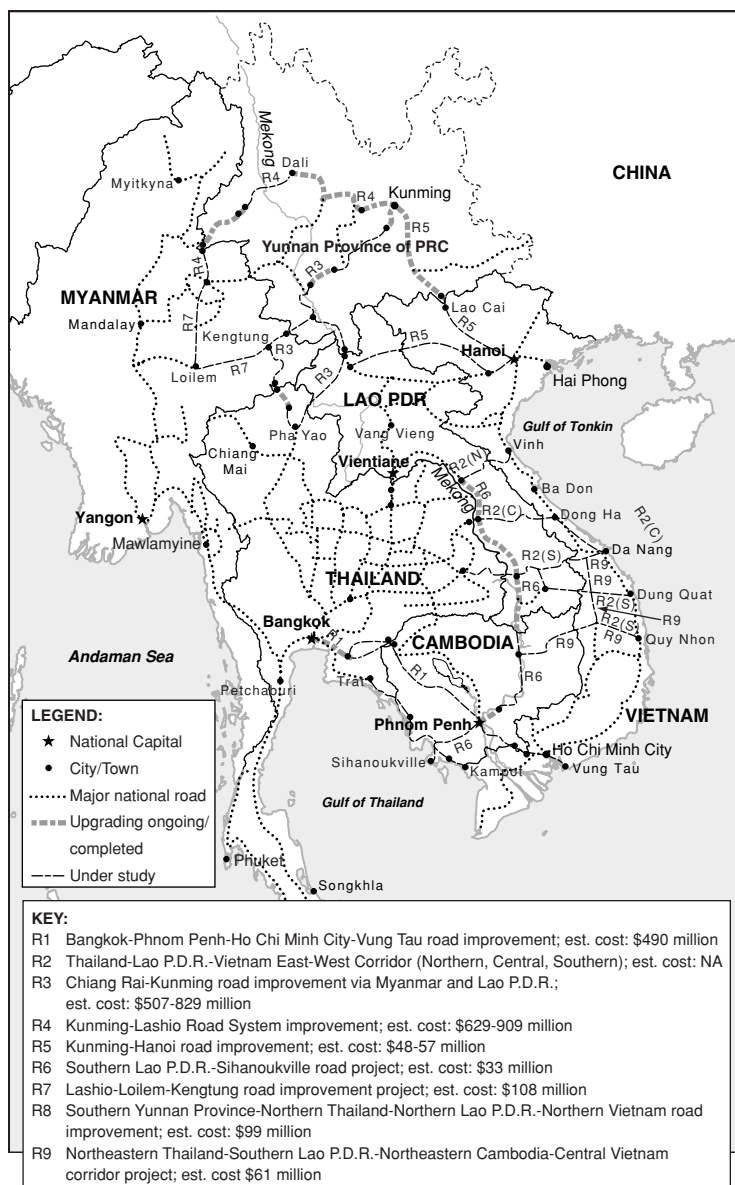
Data on the bombing of Vietnam are anecdotal; however, **Figure 4**, showing the density of bombings along the Ho Chi Minh trail on the Laotian side of the Lao-Vietnam border, gives some idea. In Quang Tri province, site of some of the worst fighting near the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam, there are as many as 5 million unexploded cluster bombs and 58,000 landmines. The local government

abandoned its mine-clearing operation 15 years ago because of the \$20 million cost of de-mining.

After the wars, all three countries were subjected to political and economic isolation by major Western powers, and nearer neighbors within Asia, into the early 1990s. Today they rank among the poorest countries in the world:

Cambodia: 10.5 million people; annual per-capita in-

FIGURE 5  
Greater Mekong Subregion Road Projects  
(as of February 1999)



Source: Asian Development Bank

FIGURE 6

**Greater Mekong Subregion Rail Projects (as of February 1999)**



Source: Asian Development Bank.

come, \$300; 40% of the population estimated never to have attended school; 36% live below the national poverty line; 38% of children under 5 are malnourished; life expectancy, 54 years.

Lao P.D.R.: 4.8 million people; annual per-capita income,

\$400; 46% live below national poverty line; 40% of children under 5 are malnourished; life expectancy, 53.

Vietnam: 76.7 million people—soon to be the 13th most populated country in the world; annual per-capita income, \$310; 37% below the national poverty line; 45% of children under 5 malnourished; life expectancy, 68.

All three face a further challenge: The number of people under age 19 is close to 50% of the total population, presenting a heavy burden on development plans.

**A Development Perspective**

In the following package, *EIR* presents an initial reflection on these three countries after the wars, with two questions in mind: Where should these countries be 25 years from now? And, if the United States paid an estimated \$150 billion to wage these wars, and lose, what are we prepared to pay to win the peace?

To begin to answer these questions, we review the Asian Development Bank's prospectus for the Greater Mekong Subregional development, a project that includes Cambodia, Lao P.D.R., Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and Yunnan Province, China, and which *EIR* considers a subset of the Eurasian Land-Bridge as a whole (Figures 5-8). The next article, with maps adapted from the Asian Development Bank map series, gives locations of transportation and communications projects. Included are outlines of projects of special urgency for this region, in particular large-scale water-management projects, and also nuclear power development. This perspective is conspicuously absent altogether from the Asian Development Bank approach.

The ADB's \$40 billion Greater Mekong Subregional project was established in 1992, but was stalled by the Asian financial crisis that erupted in 1997. Moreover, the ADB's projection is that half of the \$40 billion would be funded by private-sector financing, a highly dubious assumption given current global financial and monetary conditions. Moreover, nowhere factored into these figures are the added costs of clean-up after the wars.

We include interviews with His Excellency Vang Rattanavong, Ambassador of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to Washington, D.C.;

His Excellency Ouch Borith, Permanent Representative of the Royal Cambodian Government to the UN; and Loung Ung, National Spokesperson for the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation's Nobel Prize-winning Campaign for a Landmine Free World and author of *First They Killed My*

*Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers.*

We also include excerpts from a 1984 memorandum by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. on the five-year plan of the Communist Party of Vietnam, in which LaRouche analyzed the peculiar problems of developing a previously colonial economy under current global strategic and economic conditions, the historical and cultural roots of the conflict in U.S. foreign policymaking, and the shared interest of the United States and the nations of Asia in fulfilling the mission of truly sovereign nation-states, as defined in the Preamble to the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

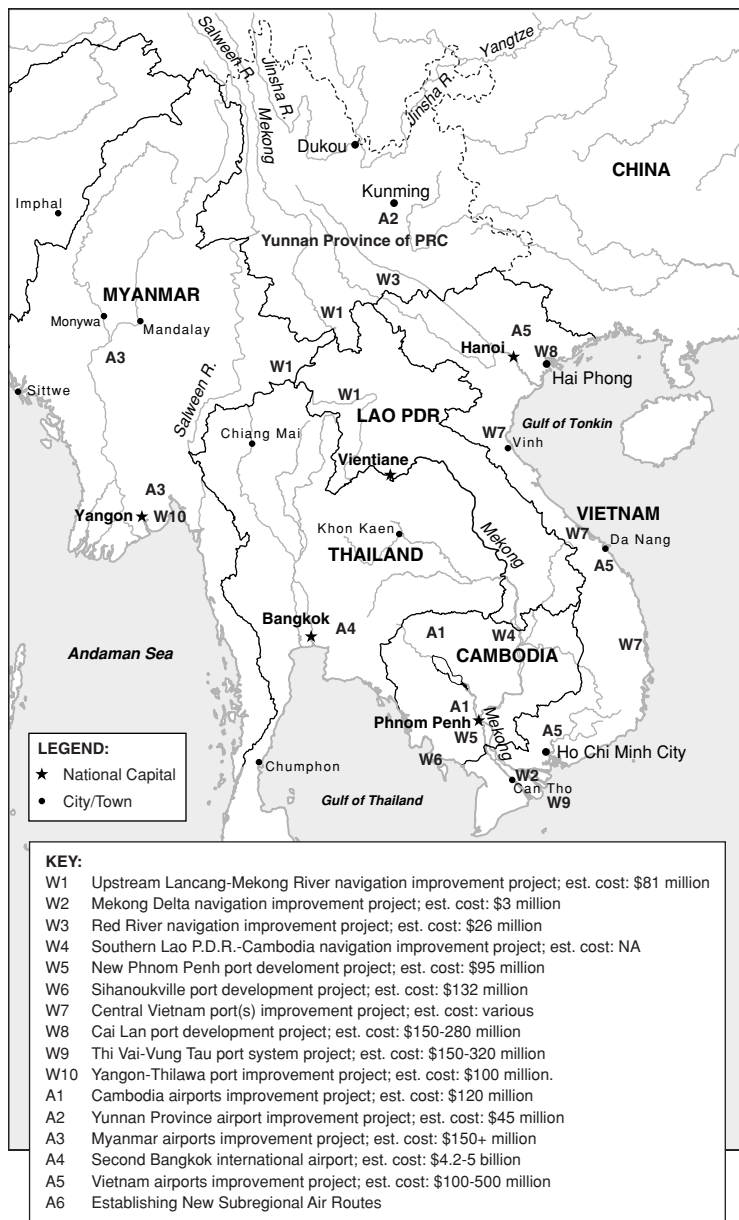
Thus, the picture that emerges, leads to the inescapable conclusion that, at best, the ADB's plan for the Greater Mekong Subregion is only a first approximation of what is required, and even to accomplish that goal, will require both the determined commitment of a core group of nations to launch a *New Bretton Woods* global financial reorganization, and what LaRouche defines in his memorandum as the emergence of new political forces to ensure its success.

Not by accident, the legacy of Dr. Sun Yat-sen lives on in this conclusion. At the 1944 Bretton Woods conference, Dr. Sun's brother-in-law, then China's Finance Minister T.V. Kung, motivated support for the post-World War II Bretton Woods accord by calling for a crash program to carry out Sun Yat-sen's 1920s war-avoidance program for the industrial development of China, years before the Nationalist government fled to Taiwan.

Twenty-five years after the Indochina wars, the ideological divide of the Cold War is giving way. Cambodia, Lao P.D.R., and Vietnam have joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and are beginning to enjoy unprecedented collaboration also with ASEAN's dialogue partners, China, Japan, and South Korea. (See LaRouche commentary on the new Asian Monetary Fund, p. 6.)

Nowhere is this shift more telling than in recent remarks by Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad. In his April 11, speech to the ASEAN Business Summit 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, Dr. Mahathir spoke of the threat of a "new imperialism" emerging under the guise of market globalization and liberalization. He said: "Let us not forget what one of the great leaders of ASEAN, Ho Chi Minh, said a long time ago: nothing is more precious than freedom and independence." In his May 1 column in Japan's *Mainichi Shimbun*, commenting on the Group of 77 meeting in April in Havana, Cuba, Dr. Mahathir said: "Ideologies are no longer important to these countries. They all want their nations to be

FIGURE 7  
**Greater Mekong Subregion Water Navigation and Air Transport Projects (as of February 1999)**



Source: Asian Development Bank.

more prosperous.”

In so recognizing our common interest in building for the next 25 years and beyond, may we, at long last, write the last chapter on these Indochina wars, and bring peace to the living and the dead, while fulfilling our aspiration for a brighter future.