

**THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF VIETNAM-  
U.S. RELATIONS, 1995-2011**

*Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**2012**



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**DECLARATION**

I declare that the dissertation entitled "THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF VIETNAM-U.S. RELATIONS, 1995-2011," submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First of all, I extend my profound gratitude to my **Supervisor** as well as the **Chairperson, Prof. G.V.C. Naidu, CSCSEASWPS, SIS, JNU, New Delhi**, for his extreme guidance, motivation and care enabling me to complete this dissertation on time. He has been instrumental in ensuring my academic, professional and moral well-being.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank **Prof. Ganganath Jha, Prof. Man Mohini Kaul** and **Prof. Shankari Sundaram** who have guided me all through the years in the University.

Then I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of the **J.N.U Library and Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi**, for allowing me to obtain information and materials imperative to my dissertation.

I am deeply thankful to my parents, sister and friends, for their moral support and patience which has borne fruit through the completion of this dissertation. It would not have been possible for me to finish this work without their help, valuable suggestions and encouragement and for providing me a friendly atmosphere throughout.

Finally if there is any inadvertent error, they are mine only.

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# CONTENTS

<i>Abbreviations</i>	ii-iii
 <b><u>Chapter I:</u></b>	
Introduction	1-15
 <b><u>Chapter II :</u></b>	
Vietnam-U.S. Relations: The path to Normalization	16-36
 <b><u>Chapter III :</u></b>	
Vietnam- U.S. Relations and Regional Security	37-57
 <b><u>Chapter IV :</u></b>	
Vietnam-U.S. Relations: Constraints and Limitations	58-78
 <b><u>Chapter V :</u></b>	
Conclusion	79-86
 <b><u>References</u></b>	 87-98

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADMM Plus	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus
APEC	Asia- Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BTA	Bilateral Trade Agreement
CPC	Country of Particular Concern
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
DOC	Declaration on the Conduct of Parties
EAS	East Asia Summit
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IMET	International Military Education Training
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRAF	International Traffic in Arms Regulation
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
MIA	Missing in Action
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
NGO	Non- Governmental Organization
NME	Non-Market Economy
ODP	Orderly Departure Programme
OSS	Office of Foreign Service
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PNTR	Permanent Normal Trade Relations
POW	Prisoners of War

PRC	People’s Republic of China
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
TPP	Transnational Pacific Partnership
TWEA	Trading with the Enemy Act
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USCIRF	U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
VAVA	Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
WTO	World Trade Organization

**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a backdrop to the topic under discussion by sketching out the way Vietnam and the U.S. have fashioned their relations in particular since the American direct military intervention in the mid-1950s until the emergence of the Cambodian conflict. It is well known that one of the bitterest and brutal wars ever fought was between the Vietnamese who were struggling for freedom under the leadership of the communist party and the Americans who were convinced that allowing Vietnam go communist will have such a domino effect that the rest of Southeast Asia will go communist.

Vietnam had come in contact with the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. In 1873, the Nguyen dynasty had requested diplomatic recognition from the U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant (Tuan 2010: 344). After having remained, under the Chinese rule for over a thousand years, Vietnam in the Seventeenth century came in contact with the French through missionaries and traders. In 1845, the French obtained commercial concessions from the Chinese Emperor. A year later the French colonial rule started over the Indochina after a treaty between the French and the Chinese. For a short while from 1941-1945, Vietnam came under the control of Japanese when the latter took control over the entire Southeast Asia. The treatment meted out to them by the Japanese aroused national consciousness among them. As a result they cooperated with their former colonial masters to throw the Japanese out. By the time the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the Vietminh already had a sort of control over seven provinces and a reserve army of ten thousand men with expertise in guerrilla warfare. They were successful in creating the image that they were the true exponent of the nationalist cause (Kaushik 1972). The French wanted to gain back their control on Vietnam. The French thus decided to launch an attack on Vietnam. China being a communist country had sent aid to Vietnam. The U.S. as a result got tensed over the fact that if Vietnam becomes communist, then the entire Southeast Asia would turn to communism. This fear was a result of the domino theory which was propagated by the U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The communist take-over of China, the Korean War and the communist victory over the French in Vietnam - all led many Americans

to fear that the communists wanted to spread communism and as a result they had to be stopped. Thus, the U.S. got involved in the conflict more so because it would not allow any power or a group of powers hostile to its interests to control the region (Fifield 1973).

Interestingly, during the Second World War Vietnam and the U.S. were on the side of the Allies and fought against fascism. Ho Chi Minh had led the communist Vietminh party which had worked with the U.S. to defeat Japan. He had hoped to maintain the friendship in the future as well. That did not happen. The main problem was that the Vietminh was communist and since the Second World War days, the U.S. considered its primary goal to end the spread of communism (Gitlin and Wyatt 2010: 17). As a result when Vietnam was fighting for its independence against the French, they expected that the U.S. would help them in their struggle. Ho Chi Minh who led the Vietnamese struggle, in 1945 had asked for the U.S. support in the war against the French. Ho Chi Minh went ahead and wrote a letter to the U.S. President Truman for assistance in gaining freedom. The letter was prevented by Allan Dulles, Director of Office of Foreign Service (OSS) to reach the president. Truman on the other hand decided to support the French in Indochina in return for the latter's support for the U.S. policies in post -War Europe (Tuan 2010: 344). The Vietnamese had the notion that since the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1776 had emphasised on the fact that 'all men are equal and hence have a right to be free', so it would definitely support the Vietnamese cause for freedom (Lan 2001:2). Initially the Americans completely ignored Vietnam's request and wanted to follow a policy of non-involvement. It remained disinterested and did not oppose nor assist France in its effort for retaining control on Vietnam. But developments taking place during the late 1940s made the U.S. change its stand on the Indochina war. After the emergence of People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, it thought that if Vietnam became victorious in their struggle, then it may also become communist and then this would negatively impact the U.S. interest. Thus, in order to contain the spread of communism in Southeast Asia and the Soviet Union's influence, the U.S. decided to support the French in their war against the Vietnamese. As a result of absence of any response from the U.S., Ho Chi Minh had to finally turn to the Communists for help. This made the Vietnamese certain that the U.S. in reality did not believe in the ideals mentioned in its Declaration of Independence. It did not take into deliberation the



interest of a small nation like Vietnam. Thus, the Vietnamese leaders grew doubtful about the U.S. intentions towards Vietnam (Tuan 2010: 344).

After China went under the Communist rule and the Korean War, the American policy shifted its attention to China and its policies with regard to Southeast Asia in general and Vietnam in particular. Western countries, including the United States, feared communism and they had the notion that non-Western people would not be able to govern themselves and could not be handed important resources and geographic regions. Thus, they thought it to be necessary to keep the economically and militarily strategic locations under their control. Some scholars believe that if the United States or France had supported Ho Chi Minh and Vietnam's right to self determination from the beginning, then Vietnam would never have adopted Communism. They believe that the Vietnamese got attracted to communists mainly due to the fact that they were the only ones who were supporting Vietnam's goal of independence. In 1954, the French finally got defeated and a peace treaty was signed. The fear of domino theory made the U.S. to stop the national elections in Vietnam. When the U.S. saw that the French were about to lose the war then the U.S. set up a puppet government headed by Ngo Dinh Diem. From the year 1954, the U.S. began its direct confrontation with Vietnam which lasted until 1975 resulting in the victory of Vietnam and the defeat of America. The Americans had replaced the French government in the South Vietnam and the latter became totally depended on the U.S. This was so because the South Vietnamese were straight away brought under the Americans just as the French left. They did not get a chance to run the administration on their own. The Americans had behaved in a very imperialistic manner which eventually led to their failure. This also made its withdrawal from the Vietnam War a complexity (Statler 2007:281).

The War was getting bloodier as the days passed. The famous Tet Offensive was planned by Ho Chi Minh and his followers to finish the long ongoing war by hoping to achieve success over the U.S. The Tet was a time of holiday and officially a time for peace between the North Vietnamese and the U.S. forces. As a result of these attacks, the U.S. believed that they were wrong in assessing the strength of the former. They were able to attack those areas even though there was heavy U.S. troop presence. In the first and second phase the North Vietnamese were able to gain an

upper hand over the U.S. forces. But in the last phase the U.S. forces were able to take back those areas which were earlier under their control. In this Tet Offensive both sides had suffered huge losses in terms of casualties and as well as monetary terms. This had a negative impact on the Johnson administration as back home they lost the support of their people. This also made it clear to the Americans that their victory in the War was not possible. This changed the public opinion regarding the War. As a result, protests started within the U.S. regarding its involvement in the War. This Tet Offensive made the people realize that the War was far from over. Not only the ordinary citizens, but the U.S. government including the Secretary of Defence Clark Clifford was also very concerned about the situation. He had suggested to the U.S. President Lyndon Johnson that they needed to change the War tactics. The anti-War movements had also intensified. But still the U.S. continued the War because of its obligation to end the spread of communism anywhere in the world (Gitlin and Wyatt 2010: 12). The impact of the long lasting war on the Vietnamese and the Americans can be felt even today.

In 1967 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech called "Beyond Vietnam", in which he stated:

They must see Americans as strange liberators. The Vietnamese people proclaimed their own independence -- in 1945 -- after a combined French and Japanese occupation and before the communist revolution in China. They were led by Ho Chi Minh. Even though they quoted the American Declaration of Independence in their own document of freedom, we refused to recognize them. Instead, we decided to support France in its reconquest of her former colony. Our government felt then that the Vietnamese people were not ready for independence, and we again fell victim to the deadly Western arrogance that has poisoned the international atmosphere for so long. With that tragic decision we rejected a revolutionary government seeking self-determination and a government that had been established not by China -- for whom the Vietnamese have no great love -- but by clearly indigenous forces that included some communists. For the peasants this new government meant real land reform, one of the most important needs in their lives (Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge 1998: 267).

Cold war policies like the idea of geo-political area of the U.S. influence, restraint to withhold a constant threat of communist power, and the huge military-industrial power needed to attain this, developed logically as the US-Vietnam conflict progressed. The Pentagon Papers, a huge collection of documents outlining the steps by which the U.S. became caught up in Vietnam, show clearly that since 1949, when

the PRC was formed, the U.S. foreign policy was set to act as a wedge to prevent the further spread of communism in Asia, even by the threat of arms (Shivakumar 1996: 21). The Americans strongly doubted that Vietnam was committed to conducting an alternative war directed by Moscow and Beijing with the aim of expanding communism throughout Southeast Asia. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the U.S. clung to the idea that the alliance between Vietnam and the Soviet Union was unshakeable, and that Vietnam's relations with the PRC would remain burdened with antagonism and distrust. However, signs of a split in the Vietnamese- Soviet relationship began to appear during the second half of the 1980s when Vietnamese leaders did not want to adapt the Soviet- style perestroika<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, relations with China improved gradually after Vietnam withdrew its troops from Cambodia, thus making way for the normalization of Sino- Vietnamese relations in 1991 (Tuan 2010:346).

The Americans had to face a despair condition in the Vietnam War. It was a shameful defeat in the hands of what the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had once mentioned "fourth rate power" (Sitikoff 1999). The financial condition of the U.S. after the War was totally in shambles. Though the U.S. intention behind joining the War was to contain communism, but in the process they also suppressed the nationalistic feelings of the Vietnamese. The U.S. never understood the Vietnamese feeling of self determination. This made the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam a difficulty. The U.S. joined the War by declaring that it wanted to establish democracy there. But as we could see it set up a puppet government which was dictatorial in nature in South Vietnam. The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War was basically a Cold War move. Both the superpowers during the Cold War period wanted to increase their sphere of influence and prevent the other from increasing their influence. In Vietnam, both the superpowers basically carried out their Cold War rivalries. The U.S. stepped in Vietnam when the former felt that the French was losing ground there. The U.S. imperialism in Vietnam was totally disliked by the former. The U.S. had used so many bombs to hit Vietnam that the numbers were more when compared to the number of bombs used by the former during the Second World War. The U.S. had committed huge atrocities against the Vietnamese people. As a result there was a

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<sup>1</sup> Perestroika means restructuring the economy which was adopted by the Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev as a part of his reforms during the 1980s

tremendous reaction from all over the world against the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Thus, the Vietnam War presented a very hard situation for the U.S. and the way to exit from the War became a tough task for the latter.

After the War ended, efforts were taken by both the sides to normalize the relations. But reservations were still there in the minds of both Vietnam and the U.S. Vietnam believed that even after the War ended, Southeast Asia still remained a priority in the U.S. foreign policy. But by that time the U.S. had moved on. The U.S. in the 1970s was busy trying to normalize its relations with PRC. It gave diplomatic recognition to the PRC in 1979 in order to balance the Soviet Union's influence in Southeast Asia. This misinterpretation prevented Vietnam from taking steps to normalize its relations with the U.S. during the 1970s (Tuan 2010: 345).

Vietnam's occupation of the Cambodia in 1978 further prevented the normalization process. According to some scholars Vietnam attacked Cambodia because of its fear for its own defence and to protect its national interest due to the Chinese presence. The attack helped them deal with the Chinese fears successfully (Mohan 1981:121). Vietnam's close relations with Moscow also stood in the path of normalizing its relations with the U.S. The U.S. had strongly laid two conditions in front of Vietnam in order to normalize relations. Firstly, the Vietnam should withdraw from Cambodia and secondly Vietnam needed to move away from the Soviet's sphere of influence. But Vietnam could not accept these conditions due to the Cold War politics. The U.S. along with the Western powers had completely isolated the former and the only way out was by siding with the Soviet Union. The recognition of the PRC by the U.S. added to the tensions between Vietnam and the U.S. As the Cold War came to an end, the U.S. began to show an interest in Vietnam. Economic and geopolitical interests mainly guided the U.S. in the initial years to develop relations with Vietnam. Vietnam thought that the U.S. was trying to increase its influence in Southeast Asia. This would check other major powers from expanding their influence in Southeast Asia. It would also serve the U.S. interest of "promoting market economy, individual freedom, human rights and democracy in Vietnam which was a part of the plan of Clinton's National Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement" (Tuan 2010: 345).

Starting with the late 1980s, a lot of opportunities came for both the countries to normalize their relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union provided Vietnam with an

opportunity to diversify its foreign relations and develop relations with other nations. With the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, it was left with no other choice, but to withdraw from Cambodia. China increased the military attack on Vietnam. The Soviet backing of Vietnam also reduced due to the former's own economic problems. The successful resolution of the Cambodia problem provided the U.S. an opportunity to normalize its relations with Vietnam. The Prisoners of the War / Missing in Action (POW/MIA) issue became the main source of communication for them. Under President Carter, the Vietnam issue was given precedence over other issues, but his successors pushed this issue behind and it was discussed only when the U.S. discussed its relations with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and PRC. President Reagan was not in support of normalizing relations with Vietnam because of the latter's occupation of Cambodia (Brown 2010: 320). Meanwhile negotiations continued regarding POW/ MIA and a discussion on legacy issues like "emigration of Amerasian (mixed blood) children, and the Orderly Departure Programme (ODP) for the lawful exit of former inmates of Vietnamese re-education camps began" (Solomon 2000: 82).

It was only under President Clinton that the full -fledged normalization process began. During the last period of his presidency, he also made a historic visit to Vietnam where he received a very warm welcome by the Vietnamese. Vietnam also saw that it was in its benefit to open up to the U.S. as its economy was in shatters in the post - War period. It was by normalizing relations with the U.S. that the embargo was lifted. This was followed by the aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Vietnam thus adopted a multidimensional foreign policy in 1988 and also took steps to come out of the Cambodia mess created. This was the first step taken by Vietnam to improve its image in front of the U.S. and thus reduce the tensions between them. As a result, both the countries began cooperating on the issue of POW/MIA.

#### **RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The rapprochement between the Vietnam and the U.S. is one of the most important events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On one hand it will enable the U.S. to expand its influence in Vietnam and prevent other major powers from getting a strong hold in the region. On the other hand, developing cordial relations with the U.S. would enable Vietnam

to increase its strategic options. This will also lead to regional stability, peace and development with the involvement of the U.S. in the Southeast Asia region. The normalization process is in the initial stage and a lot of effort is required on the behalf of both the governments so that this process of normalization continues. The present study attempts to investigate the current state of bilateral relation between both the countries since the period of normalization began in 1995.

This is a macro-level study and would focus on current bilateral issues between Vietnam and the U.S., their various contours and their progress since the restoration of diplomatic relations in 1995. This period acquires enormous significance since Vietnam- U.S. relations have undergone an unprecedented transformation from being wary of each other to being best of friends. An attempt will be made to analyze how the relationship has changed in the following years from complete confrontation to cooperation. What are the issues of convergence and of difference and how a burgeoning relationship between them will impact on regional security will be examined.

The research questions that have been dealt in this study have been mentioned below.

### **RESTORATION OF VIETNAM- U.S. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS**

This deals with the fact that the end of the Vietnam War marked the end of diplomatic relations between them. But over the years they have realized the importance of establishing diplomatic relations. The changing environment thus prompted them to change their relation from confrontation to cooperation. The successful resolution of the dispute finally paved the way for them to normalize relations.

The Chinese fears made Vietnam attack its neighbouring country- Cambodia. In the mid- 1960s, differences started to come up between the two communist countries, i.e., China and the Soviet Union. As a result the Indochina countries after getting independence had to choose sides. Vietnam decided to side with the Soviet Union while Cambodia decided to side with China. As a result China set up the Khmer regime in Cambodia. They started harassing the Vietnamese by attacking its borders. Vietnam thought that behind the Khmer government, it was actually the Chinese who were attacking Vietnam. So it decided to attack Cambodia. The international community protested against this step taken by Vietnam. As a result the entire

ASEAN countries along with the Western nations completely isolated Vietnam. The latter had not expected such kind of reaction from the international community. This was so because the Khmer government was committing huge atrocities against its people. So it thought that the Vietnamese backed Heng Samrin government would be welcomed by the international community.

The Soviet Union also by that time had to deal with its own internal problems. So with the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Vietnam was left with no ally to back it, finally had to normalize its relations with its former enemy, the U.S. The issue that acted as an ice breaker was that of POW/MIA. This initially provided them with an opportunity to communicate while they still remain suspicious about each other's intentions. Thus, Vietnam finally decided to withdraw its forces from Cambodia. As a result this removed a huge obstacle from the path of normalization of relations between Vietnam and the U.S. The initial cooperation began when both the countries decided to cooperate for searching the POW/MIA. The U.S. also declared that they would provide aid to Vietnam only if they cooperated on the issue of POW/MIA. Thus, the changing international surroundings made them realize that it is better to normalize relations. There was pressure from different sections in both the countries to normalize relations. Vietnam also started introducing reforms (Doi Moi) to modernize its economy. Vietnam wanted to transform its image from a war-torn nation to that of a stable, peaceful and modern nation. One of the ways of doing so was normalizing relations with the U.S. Normalizing relations with its former foe changed the perception of other countries towards Vietnam. The U.S. also wanted to normalize relations with Vietnam because of the former's strategic location. Vietnam is one of the populous countries in Southeast Asia and it is also an emerging economy. Moreover, its immediate neighbour is China. All these factors make Vietnam important to the U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. realized the importance of establishing diplomatic relations with Vietnam. So the U.S. removed the sanctions that were imposed on Vietnam during the Cambodia problem and thus paved the way for rapprochement between them.

## **PRINCIPAL DRIVERS OF RELATIONS IN THE FIRST DECADE SINCE 1995**

It points to the factors that made it necessary for them to normalize relations. Factors like economics and geo-politics ultimately brought about normalization of relations. The reforms introduced by Vietnam helped it to transform its economy. As a result the business class in the U.S. wanted to take advantage of the economic opportunities there. They also saw a huge market for American goods there. As a result they put pressure on the government to fasten the normalization process. The U.S. Congress and the Vietnamese American community played an important part in persuading the government to normalize relations with Vietnam. On the other hand, Vietnam also thought that the normalizing relation with the U.S. would serve its interest of getting the membership of World Trade Organization (WTO). Normalizing relations with the U.S. would help Vietnam to diversify its foreign relations. As many countries would also start investing in Vietnam which would help it to develop its war-torn economy.

Apart from the economic factors, the geo-political factors also played their part in bringing them closer. Vietnam realized that the presence of a big power like the U.S. would prevent its neighbouring countries from taking any aggressive steps against it. Vietnam is especially concerned about the Chinese presence in the region. China and Vietnam have been at loggerheads since many centuries. As a result to contain China, Vietnam wanted to make use of its friendship with the U.S. The U.S. presence would definitely deter China from taking any hostile measures which might lead to outright armed conflict. It would also prevent Vietnam from unnecessarily being depended on China. The Southeast Asian countries also welcome the U.S. re-engagement in the region. They believe that the latter's presence would help the region to maintain a balance rather than being dominated by China. A stable and peaceful environment is desired by all. This would help Vietnam concentrate on its economic development and not waste resources only in developing arms. Thus, they are in favour of the growing ties between Vietnam and the U.S.

The U.S. also realized that in the coming years, importance of the Asian countries would increase. As a result they needed to re-engage in this region. After the end of the Cold War, the Americans had left Southeast Asia. They had removed all their troops from the bases they had in Vietnam as well as in the Philippines. So they needed an opportunity to enter the region again. The rapprochement with Vietnam



gave them that chance to re-engage in this region. Further the U.S. is also interested in maintaining peace and stability in the region since it does not want to engage into any more wars. So it wants to balance the Chinese presence there. The U.S. is also concerned about maintaining the freedom of navigation in South China Sea. Since the South China Sea is rich in oil and natural gas, so the U.S. does not want China to dominate the entire region. Thus, these factors ultimately made these countries to cosy up to each other.

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF NORMALIZATION PROCESS**

This question deals with the fact that how much success has been achieved by them since the time of normalization of relations. On this basis it can be judged whether the normalization has been beneficial to both of them. Though the formal establishment of diplomatic relations took place only in 1995, but the efforts for it had started a long time back. Over the years, these countries have achieved significant success from being able to change their relationship from confrontation to cooperation. It has been indeed a huge task and both the countries deserve appreciation for this huge task. During the Cold War days these two countries were on the opposite sides. They fought a long war which ultimately resulted in the U.S. defeat. Thus, from that time to the present these countries have covered a long way to finally normalize their relations. There have been stumbling blocks in their path, but they have successfully been able to overcome those hurdles.

These countries have expanded their cooperation to new areas. Earlier they didn't used to discuss those issues which were sensitive like human rights and religious freedom. But in the recent times they have developed enough maturity to handle these issues. They now tactfully deal these issues so as not to affect the ongoing pace of their relationship. They have come to accept the fact that they have different political systems. As a result they have come to acknowledge that they will have difference of opinion on various issues like governance, human rights. The U.S. has promised that their partnership is based on equality and the former will not dominate Vietnam. They had overcome the initial hurdles. There have been regular high- level visits between these two countries. There are still some challenges that are yet to be overcome. But every relationship has problems. So there is nothing to worry as these

obstacles will slowly be overcome by them since they have already normalized their political, economic and diplomatic relations.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF CLOSE RELATIONS**

It deals with the new areas where in both the countries have decided to cooperate which would finally lead them to become establish strategic partnership. Over the years they have developed economic, political and economic relations. In the recent times they have expanded their cooperation to new areas such as defence and nuclear cooperation.

The U.S. has also formed the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) to provide help to Vietnam. These countries have increased their defence cooperation. There had been regular visits by the U.S. ships to Vietnamese ports. There have been visits by top level officials from both sides who meet regularly to discuss the security issues. The U.S. is also providing training to the Vietnamese navy to effectively handle the Chinese threat in the South China Sea. They train the Vietnamese navy for search and rescue operations and also train them in disaster management. They have also started cooperating on the issue of terrorism. They exchange information regarding this issue and the U.S. trains the Vietnamese to counter the terrorist attacks. Vietnam has also asked for military aid from the U.S. The latter has linked the aid to the condition of progress in Vietnam's human rights record. The Vietnam also persuaded the U.S. to get involved in the South China Sea issue. As a result the U.S. declared that in the South China Sea there should be freedom of navigation. The U.S. supported the Vietnamese position in this regard. This led to goodwill between these two countries. The common strategic interests have led them to expand cooperation in newer areas. The China threat has definitely succeeded in bringing these two countries closer. The success achieved by them over the years would act as a positive force to take forward the relationship. They are still in a very initial stage and have a long way to go. They have developed a better understanding of each other's situation. They have a common strategic interest of a peaceful and stable Southeast Asia. To achieve this goal they have expanded their cooperation in different areas. The U.S. has now turned its attention to Southeast Asia after its withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. The former has declared that Vietnam is one of its strategic partners in the region. As a result, Vietnam now can take advantage of the U.S. renewed interest in the region.

## **HURDLES IN THE RELATIONSHIP**

This question points to the fact that though fifteen years has passed since they established diplomatic relations, but still obstacles remain. It deals with the fact that how can the hurdles be removed in order to take forward the bilateral relation. The main obstacle that stands in the way of smooth normalization process is the human rights issue. They have different political system that is the main reason behind the different views on the human rights issue. The U.S. from the very beginning has been criticizing the human rights record in Vietnam. Vietnam on the other hand claims that the U.S. is trying to interfere in its internal affairs on the pretext of normalization. Many Vietnamese are of the opinion that the main intention behind the normalization is that the U.S. wants a regime change. The U.S. being a democratic country does not support a political system where there is no political opposition. While on the other hand, in Vietnam any kind of political opposition to the communist party is not tolerated. The U.S. has openly mentioned that it wants to spread democracy wherever it goes. So Vietnam is suspicious about the U.S. intentions. Any kind of dissent is strictly dealt with in Vietnam. The condition of the minorities in Vietnam is pitiable. Though due to the U.S. pressure, the Vietnamese government has taken steps to protect them. Some kind of religious freedom has been made available to the minorities there. But cases of torture meted out to them are still reported.

There are also constraints in the trade relations which disrupt the economic cooperation between them. The U.S. trade policies affect Vietnamese goods. The U.S. on its part assured the latter that it would change its trade and investment policies, but still the situation has not improved much. The legacies of the Vietnam War also pose a hurdle in the relation. For a long time the U.S. denied its responsibility for the after effects of the Agent Orange. The Vietnamese government also did not bring this issue to the negotiating table for a long time. This was because of the fact that it would lead to uneasiness in their relationship. It was only in the recent times that both governments realised their responsibilities towards the victims of the Agent Orange. The condition of the Vietnamese Americans also acted as an obstacle. In the initial years just after the Vietnam War got over, they were not given their due respect. They were transported to the U.S. and there were no laws to protect them against discrimination there. But after the normalization process started the U.S. government

took steps to improve their condition. They realized that in the normalization process, the Vietnamese Americans could play a very vital role. They could play a constructive role in bringing the two countries to the negotiating table. As a result over the years this community has organized themselves and convinced the U.S. government to normalize relations with Vietnam.

The issue of POW/MIA also acted as an obstacle in their relationship. The U.S. from the beginning has given importance to the issue of accounting for the missing Americans in the War and it has been claiming that the Vietnamese have not taken much effort to find the missing people. The Vietnamese also complained that the U.S. did not provide them much help in their mission to search for the POW/MIA. The difference in the economic system also affects the normalization process. The Vietnamese also has the fear that the American priorities may change in the future. The U.S. foreign policy is giving importance to Vietnam now, but in the future this may change. This might affect the relations between them. Though these obstacles have not been able to prevent the positive drive in the relation, but still there is a need to address these issues. In the recent years there have been allegations by the international organizations that the U.S. in order to take forward its ties with Vietnam has been neglecting the latter's human rights record. Over the years they have understood the way to deal such sensitive issue in a manner so as not to affect the pace of the growing ties.

This study deals with the fact that the common security concerns and economic interests have made both the countries aware of the benefits of normalization of relations. Voices in favour of normalization began to increase especially from the business class as they found huge economic opportunities in Vietnam's reforming economy. The U.S. also had a strategic interest in normalizing relations with Vietnam, a populous country and an emerging economy. Vietnam was also trying to assert itself on the regional platform.

It is in China's interest that Vietnam remains weak since a strong and independent Vietnam would create problems for it. Vietnam believes that China has expansionist tendencies that is evident from the latter's activities in the South China Sea. Vietnam claim undisputed sovereignty in the South China Sea while China has declared that it would not give up its claims in the South China Sea. Apart from the territorial

disputes, Vietnam also faces economic competition from the former. As a result it is cosyng up to the U.S. in order to avoid over dependence on China. They are both interested to check the influence of China in the region.

Vietnam being a non- democratic country is continuously troubled by the fear that the power of the VCP would be eroded in the process of normalizing relations with the U.S. Vietnam is also cautious of developing close relations with the U.S. because of the ideological reasons. The U.S. by promoting peaceful evolution wants to promote democracy there. Though Vietnam's perception about the U.S. has changed from that of an aggressor to a partner in maintaining regional security, but still there remains a number of humanitarian, political and trade issues that need to be addressed in order to take their relation forward (Goh 2005: 21). The legacy of the War also limits the bilateral relation to move forward. For many years this issue had been ignored in order to take up other issues which were important to developing closer ties. But in the recent years this issue has cropped up again and thus making it necessary for them to discuss it. The common concerns and national interests would help them expand their relations, despite the hurdles. Vietnam is conscious of the reality that the U.S. being the only superpower has a huge military strength and huge economic leverage. Vietnam wants to take advantage of these opportunities for its development. Its association with the U.S. would promote growth in trade, investment and technology sector. They have become matured enough not to let the obstacles hamper the positive thrust in the relation.

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## CHAPTER 2

### VIETNAM-U.S. RELATIONS: THE PATH TO NORMALIZATION

The U.S. has been successful in its attempt at isolating Vietnam from the rest of the world for almost ten years. The economic embargo imposed by the U.S. after Vietnam invaded Cambodia which in turn led to the lack of access to the world markets has been responsible for the miserable economic condition of Vietnam. Three events basically helped the rapprochement between the countries- the end of the cold war, the resolution of the Kampuchea problem and the reforms brought about in the economic system by Vietnam. Due to its huge economic significance and great influence, the United States has been an important consideration for Vietnam not only while forming its foreign policies, but also in domestic considerations.

The rapidly changing global environment had also helped the process of normalization. The relationship between the two Cold War enemies- the U.S. and Soviet Union and between Soviet Union and China had changed. They had reconciled with each other and the Soviet Union was undergoing reforms. The internal conditions in Vietnam also became a driving force for the normalization process. Though Vietnam had adopted economic reforms in the late 1980s, but it had to face difficulties on the domestic economic front. As a result establishing relations with the U.S. would help Vietnam to open up to the world. There were a number of reasons which propelled Vietnam to normalize its relations with the U.S. Many policy makers in Vietnam cite the reason that it was primarily to counter balance China in Southeast Asia. Others feel that Vietnam in order to become an industrialized nation needs a stable international environment for which the support of the U.S. was critical. Immediately in the post war period, the U.S. had imposed a trade embargo against Vietnam. This resulted in tense relations between them and the U.S. President Ford refused aid to Vietnam promised under the Paris Peace Agreements of 1973. He further mentioned that unless Vietnam fully accounted for the American soldiers who were MIA and POW, aid would not be offered.

## **EARLY YEARS: - RELATIONS SINCE 1975**

There have been attempts to normalize relations by both the countries, but these attempts failed because of continued suspicion and hostility. This was mainly because of different opinions on the issue of normalizing relations with Vietnam in the U.S. The then National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brezinski was of the view that the issue of normalizing relations with Vietnam should not be given much significance. While on the other hand Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was of the opinion that this would help increase America's influence in the region (Chanda 1988:151). The United States in 1975 had imposed a comprehensive trade embargo against Vietnam under the authority of the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917 (TWEA) (Trong 1997:1586). This resulted in tensions between the two nations. The U.S. also refused aid to Vietnam promised under the 1973 Paris Peace Agreement because of Vietnam's insensitivity in dealing with the issue of MIA and POW. After this a series of actions by Vietnam in 1978 in particular, had a long-term negative effect on Vietnam- U.S. relations. Vietnam aligned itself economically and militarily with the Soviet Union and invaded Cambodia, installing a government backed by a large number of Vietnamese troops. The Cambodia crisis arose out of a struggle between the Vietnamese and the Khmer Rouge who were the Cambodian Communists. The Khmer Rouge government in Cambodia was supported by China and it began to attack Vietnam's territory. Vietnam considered these attacks to be a part of Chinese aggression. As a result Vietnam attacked Cambodia in December 1978 and set up a puppet government headed by Heng Samrin. While the U.S. was very critical about the violence committed by the Khmer Rouge government, but still opposed the Heng Samrin government set up by Vietnam. The occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam posed problem for the U.S. foreign policy in the Southeast Asia. The U.S. had to follow a policy which would serve its interests in the face of Soviet involvement in Vietnam. Hence, the U.S. opposed the Heng Samrin government and supported the equally bloody rule by Khmer Rouge. The U.S. did not get directly drawn in the Cambodia problem because of the past bitter experience in the Vietnam War which had resulted in draining of huge resources, dividing the public and ultimately a defeat. Vietnam was not at all willing to withdraw from Cambodia or agree to any kind of settlement proposed by the United Nations (Mahbubani 1983:410). The Carter government in retaliation cut off all contacts with the Vietnamese government and

thus preventing any normalization of relations between them. The U.S. had also imposed sanctions on Vietnam which included ban on commercial and financial transactions and private investments in Vietnam and the Vietnamese assets in U.S. were also frozen. Due to the trade sanctions imposed on Vietnam, financial and business related activities could not be conducted with the Vietnamese (Lan 2001:4).

As relations between Vietnam and China worsened, relations between the U.S. and China began to improve following the recognition of the PRC by the U.S. in 1979. This further increased the level of hostility between Vietnam and the U.S. The normalization process got disrupted because of America's efforts to develop close relations with China in the backdrop of deteriorating Sino- Soviet relations (Tuan 2010:345). The Chinese, on the other hand, in order to punish the Vietnamese launched an attack in 1979. Vietnamese had miscalculated that they would have to face the international community's wrath. The international community's stand had a huge impact on the Vietnamese economy. The Vietnamese economy, which was already affected by the continuous conflict going on for decades, had to now face the sanctions imposed by the U.S. Moreover, the U.S. influenced other countries as well as the major international organizations like the IMF, the Asian Developmental Bank and the World Bank to stop from giving economic aid to Vietnam unless it retreated back from Cambodia (Lan 2001: 4). Apart from the external pressure coming from the international community, the economy of Vietnam was in shambles. Huge expenditure by the Vietnamese government had to be incurred on the military campaign in Cambodia. The average per capita income fell drastically and the industries also suffered because of certain policies. International isolation and the economic hardships made it very difficult to continue with their military campaign in Cambodia. By the late 1980s the Soviet Union, which was the main ally of Vietnam, was undergoing reforms, so it began to pressurize Vietnam to resolve the Cambodia problem as soon as possible. The former also reduced its aid to Vietnam because of its own economic problems. The image of Vietnam further changed as the Soviet Union announced that it would reduce its presence from the Cam Ranh Bay. This helped in removing the suspicions from the minds of the Western powers about Vietnam's intentions. This made the U.S. believe that Vietnam no longer had the intention to sponsor communist government in Southeast Asia.



As a result Vietnam began to introduce reforms to deal with the economic challenges it was facing. In 1986, at the sixth party Congress Vietnam introduced Doi Moi (renovation) to fix the shattered economic condition. Along with that they realized that for Doi Moi to be successful there had to be changes in the foreign policy as well. So resolutions were passed in 1987 which aimed at diversifying Vietnam's foreign relations. It would help Vietnam to convince other countries to remove the sanctions imposed by them on the former. It was eager to establish relations with the non-communist countries. It helped Vietnam not to view the U.S. as a long-term enemy. The presence of Vietnamese military forces in Cambodia had acted as an obstacle to normalize relations with the U.S. With the end of the Cold War, the Soviet aid was no longer available. As a result it began to restore relations with other countries to get economic benefits which would help deal with the post Cold War economic challenges. Initially the Sixth Congress did not pay much attention to the issue of developing its relations with the U.S. Still the reports of the Congress stated that Vietnam was continuing to hold talks with the U.S. on humanitarian issues and expressed a readiness in improving relations. "The policy of more friends and less enemies regardless of ideology was adopted by Vietnam" (ibid). The main obstacle in the path to normalization of relations was the U.S. insistence on the return of the POW/MIA and the Vietnamese demands that the U.S. should provide them aid which they claimed had been promised by the former U.S. President Nixon. The embargo originally was intended to isolate Vietnam from Western economic trade, aid, and investment, but in later years, the embargo became a means to maintain bargaining power over the Vietnamese in an effort to resolve the issue of American MIAs (Trong 1997: 1588).

Developments in the late 1980s set the stage for the rapid normalization of ties in the following decade. The normalization process between Vietnam and the U.S. took place gradually. At first attention was paid to resolve the legacy issues left over from the Vietnam War. The then U.S. President Ronald Reagan did not want to establish relations with Vietnam unless and until there was complete withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. But later he altered his stand in the face of a comprehensive settlement. The process started with the visit of General John Vessey, a special envoy President Reagan in 1987 to Vietnam with the aim of discussing the issue of MIA/POW. Since General Vessey's visit, the Vietnamese have increased

cooperation on all the humanitarian issues which he had raised with his Vietnamese counterpart, Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach (Manyin 2011:6). The Vietnamese had conducted unilateral investigations to search for the missing Americans and had sent them to the U.S. The U.S. had refused normalization citing the fact that Vietnam's lack of progress on the issue of POW/MIA (Lan 2001:4).

Cooperation by Vietnam on this issue brought positive changes in the relation between the two countries. In 1991 the U.S. President George .H. W. Bush presented Vietnam a plan, a road map which contained a four- stage process of mutual confidence building which would give Vietnam both political and economic benefits in return for cooperation on the United Nations sponsored peace settlement in Cambodia. The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Solomon drew out the four phase proposal. This road map was linked to the issue of cooperation regarding the POW/MIA (ibid. pp.5). In the first phase, after Vietnam and Cambodia had signed the peace treaty, Vietnam should take steps to resolve the MIA issue and allow those Vietnamese who were initially with the U.S. and were still under detention to depart under the Orderly Departure Programme (ODP), then the U.S. would allow the businessmen to Vietnam and the restrictions on travel by the Vietnamese diplomat at the United Nations in New York would be erased. After this in the second phase, the U.N. officials will arrive in Cambodia and arrange a ceasefire and then the U.S. would lift the trade embargo first in Cambodia. Then with Vietnamese help on the issue of MIA, the U.S. business would begin some activities. In the third phase, after a gap of six months from the time the peace accord would be put to effect and after all the Vietnamese troops and advisers have finally left Cambodia, then the U.S. would also in turn lift its trade embargo and remove the U.S. restrictions on loans by the international financial institutions to Vietnam. In the final phase, after free elections and establishment of National Assembly in Cambodia, the U.S. would normalize relations with Vietnam (Mayall and Cain 1990: 8).

Vietnam had never officially accepted nor discarded the U.S. road map, but there were signs that Vietnam opposed the way it was offered and thought that it was a kind of ultimatum given by the U.S. This recommendation was followed by the U.S. with another step towards normalization. When Vietnam's Foreign Minister met General Vessey in 1991 to discuss the issue of POW/MIA, he expressed his doubts regarding

the road map and claimed that it was a mistake to impose conditions on Vietnam for normalization of relations and wanted that the U.S. should put aside the road map. A proposal was made that an office would be opened by the U.S. in Hanoi to work on the issue of MIA. The aim of the road map was to ensure that Vietnam follows the Cambodia peace agreement. Vietnam had made it very clear that its sovereignty would remain paramount in its dealings with the U.S. Vietnam agreed to set up a U.S. office in Hanoi to deal with the POW/MIA issues and the U.S. promised humanitarian aid (Stromseth 2003: 7). The Vietnamese withdrawal of troops from Cambodia came about not only because of the intense international pressure especially by the U.S. but because by then the objectives for which the intervention was undertaken were achieved and Cambodia did not pose a threat to Vietnam since the Khmer Rouge had virtually been ended by then. The aid was finally transferred to Vietnam in 1991. This was the first time that the U.S. had offered anything in return for Vietnamese assistance in accounting for MIA and hence this was an important step towards an eventual reconciliation between the countries. In the following years, the U.S. aid was generally limited to the areas of disaster assistance and humanitarian programmes. The Vietnamese government allowed the U.S. investigators to pursue their search for the POW/MIA. Humanitarian issues were also dealt under the Bush administration like the issue of the Vietnamese immigrants. Efforts were taken to reduce the effect of the sanctions imposed by U.S. The reforms implemented by Vietnam in the mid 1980s thus attracted foreign investors who began to take advantage of the economic opportunities offered by the U.S.

This made the American investors realize their inability to participate and thus they began pressurizing the U.S. government to lift the embargo. Thus, diplomatic and economic relations between both the countries which were almost insignificant for over fifteen years began to be re-established again in the 1990s. An agreement was made between them to set up a U.S. government office in Hanoi to deal with the issues of MIA people. The U.S. also increased economic assistance to Vietnam. The Reagan and Bush Administrations concerned themselves with humanitarian issues. ODP was initiated under the auspices of the United Nations in the late 1980s to deal with the Vietnamese political refugees. An agreement was also signed regarding this matter in 1990 by which people working under the former South Vietnamese Government and the army were allowed to immigrate to the U.S. Thus, one of the

irritants in their relationship was resolved to the satisfaction of both the countries (Brown 2010: 320).

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1991 started providing assistance to help the disabled in Vietnam. In the same year, the U.S. office for MIA was opened in Hanoi after a long gap since 1975. In October 1991, Vietnam finally agreed to a United Nations sponsored peace settlement to the Kampuchea problem and hence clearing the way for normalization of relations. This paved the way for the U.S. Information Agency to exchange programmes with Vietnam. Thus, gradually political, economic and cultural ties were revived by the mid 1990s (U.S. GAO Report to Congressional Committees, 1995). The progress made by Vietnam towards the settlement process in Cambodia fulfilled one of the U.S. preconditions for the normalization process. This signalled the end of the phase one in the road map. During the signing of the settlement agreement on Cambodia, the U.S. decided to discuss with Vietnam about their normalization of relations. The Vietnamese officials also welcomed this decision, but they also highlighted the fact that the road map presented by the U.S. was not in tune with changing international scenario.

The domestic conditions in Vietnam also influenced its policy towards the U.S. The miserable condition throughout Vietnam put pressure to open up its economy to the outside world. Economic reforms were not possible without changes in the political sphere as well. As a result adjustments were made in the National security policy and thus planned the withdrawal from Cambodia. The Vietnamese Government tried to get the U.S. Congress and American businessmen, who were interested in the Vietnamese market, to put pressure on the Bush Administration to lift the economic embargo (Brown 2010: 331).

## **NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS**

During the tenure of President William Jefferson Clinton, the bilateral relations moved further in the positive direction. It was Clinton who took the decisive steps in the process of reconciliation. Despite the benefits to the American business, the process of normalization was not at all easy because of the opposition by the war veterans. They wanted that Vietnam should make more effort towards the POW/MIA situation. Changes were made in the road map presented by the U.S. Formal

diplomatic relations was established between them in 1995. Under his administration, international organizations like IMF and World Bank resumed lending to Vietnam to rebuild its infrastructure. He announced the removal of the restrictions on the American nongovernmental organizations working in Vietnam in 1992. As a result they cooperated with their Vietnamese counterparts to deal with problems such as poverty alleviation, education, trafficking of women and children. The U.S. aid programme gradually expanded through the 1990s keeping in pace with the normalization process. This marked the end of the second phase in the road map. The U.S. trade embargo was finally lifted in 1994 after a vote from the Senate and efforts were taken in the direction of establishment of liaison office. While this trade embargo was being lifted, President Clinton mentioned it very clearly that it was only due to progress made by Vietnam on the issue of MIA/POW which provided the necessary thrust to lift the embargo. This resulted in the increase in the flow of foreign investments in Vietnam as well as the end of the Phase three of the road map. Thus, the media confirmed that Vietnam has ultimately 'opened up' to the West (Espiritu 2006:331).

The normalization of relations between the countries took almost fifteen years. The U.S. President Bill Clinton had mentioned that normalization of relations with Vietnam was not the end of their effort, but merely the next step. The main obstacle in the path was the defeat that the Americans had to face in their war against the Vietnamese. This was the first time that a developing country like Vietnam with no sophisticated weapons had won a war against a superpower like the U.S. This was a very humiliating experience for the U.S. and continues to haunt the national psyche. The legacy of the Vietnam War was still looming high in the minds of the Americans (Babson 2002:9)

Many U.S. corporations like Boeing, General Electric, Caterpillar, and Microsoft have supported the process of normalization. Vietnam's population is almost 80 million which makes it the twelfth most populous country and the second most populous country in Southeast Asia. To these companies Vietnam represented a huge market for their products. So they were very much interested in the normalization process and they lobbied in favour of correcting the estranged relation with Vietnam. But there was opposition coming from the families of MIA and American prisoners in Vietnam.

In the end, voices in support for the normalization of relations were far greater than those against it (Brown 2010:321).

In Vietnam also there were initial opposition to restoration of relations with the U.S. The national trauma caused by the U.S. failure had prevented the Americans from dealing with the Vietnamese. The Americans wanted to punish the Vietnamese through the peace treaties. The impact of the War still lingered in the minds of the Vietnamese. The conservatives in Vietnam were also very critical about re-engagement with the U.S. They were of the opinion that in this entire process, the main intention of the U.S. would be to basically try to increase their control over the Vietnamese economy. This would in turn pose a threat to the advantages provided to the state owned enterprises (ibid. pp. 322). But at the same time the Vietnamese had realized that reviving relations with the U.S. would help them enhance their image in the world. This would attract foreign investors to invest in Vietnam. They realized that they have a common aim that is a peaceful and stable environment in Southeast Asia. This would enable Vietnam to deal with its internal problems and not concentrate their resources in dealing with an unstable environment.

## **INITIAL AREAS OF COOPERATION**

### ***Diplomatic Ties:***

Over the next few years, diplomatic structures were established to bring the countries closer. As a signal of deepening political ties, the two countries signed an agreement which would pave the way for exchange of high- level officials and signify the normalization of diplomatic relations. Several high level visits followed starting with the visit of U.S. Secretary of State William Christopher to Vietnam in August 1995, Secretary of Treasury Robert Rubin in April 1997, and then the U.S. Secretary of State M. Albright in June 1997. From the Vietnamese side, Minister of Agriculture Nguyen Cong Tan, Minister of Finance Nguyen Sinh Hung, Minister of Planning and Investment Tran Xuan Gia visited the US. Both the countries then exchanged their Ambassadors for the very first time in 1997 (Lan 2001:6). The Clinton Administration appeared to use these top-level meetings to promote economic and political reforms inside Vietnam. On January 25<sup>th</sup> 1995, the U.S. and Vietnam settled bilateral diplomatic and property claims and opened liaison offices in Washington and Hanoi

on February 1<sup>st</sup> and February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1995 respectively (Manyin 2008:9). In November 1995, Robert McNamara, who was the U.S. former State Secretary of defence visited Vietnam. He had a warm welcome there. “The main motive behind the visit was the promotion of a bilateral conference for exchange of information about Vietnam War strategy and to examine the reasons behind the failure of the earlier peace initiatives” (Shivakumar 1996:21). For this purpose he met some of the high-ranking party and defence officials of Vietnam including General Vo Nguyen Giap, leader of the Viet Cong who successfully plotted the defeat of the US and its allies. Giap and government officials welcomed the proposed conference on the US-Vietnam conflict, but did not mention clearly as to what extent Vietnam would participate. Despite extending a warm reception to McNamara, Vietnamese newspapers and electronic media commented little about the purpose of his visit, perhaps because the party leaders did not know how to explain it to their veterans who felt ignored in the new drive for economic development, educational and cultural exchanges between both the countries. The visit of the U.S. President Bill Clinton to Vietnam was a watershed in their relationship. Before him, the U.S. President Nixon had visited South Vietnam and the result was that he announced his policy of ‘Vietnamization’ (Pham 2006: 409). By this, he wanted that the South Vietnamese should take more responsibility for the War. This would ultimately help in the successful withdrawal of all the soldiers from Vietnam.

Clinton’s visit was marked by joint agreements in a number of areas like Agent Orange research, humanitarian demining, and other technical issues. In the educational sphere, the U.S. provided assistance under the Fulbright educational exchange programme. Another improvement which took place after Clinton’s visit was that the USAID started to function in Vietnam formally (ibid). The USAID normally provided aid to help Vietnam to make the shift to a market economy, to help the HIV/AIDS patients to have access to suitable health services. Also, Vietnam had been declared as a focus country as a result of which it received huge aid under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to deal with the problem. In order to advance trade, it has further launched a Vietnam Competitiveness Initiative to help Vietnam’s private sector. It also advises the Vietnamese government on administrative and economic issues which would help their entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO) as well as the signing of the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).

Based on the advice received Vietnam undertook reforms in the business sector which would help them meet the conditions of WTO membership. It has over the years become the largest development operations that the U.S. has undertaken in Asia. In the year 2009, the total aid received by Vietnam from USAID was one hundred and three million U.S. dollars. It also provided technical help to the National Assembly, Supreme People's Court, Ministry of Justice and the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Brown 2010: 327).

The Vietnam Education Foundation also funds educational exchanges between the countries. Private organizations like the Ford Foundation were also set up to encourage the Vietnamese students to apply to American Universities for higher education (Stromseth 2003:8).

When President George. W. Bush came to power in 2001 he also decided to follow Bill Clinton's policy of economic liberalization with Vietnam and take forward the diplomatic relations to a new level. The first thing he did after taking charge was re-appointing Pete Peterson as the Ambassador to Vietnam who had played a very crucial role at the time of negotiation of the bilateral trade agreement. Though president was a Republican, but still he realized the benefits in taking forward the process of normalization of relations with Vietnam. Regular high- level meeting have been held by both the countries which has helped in enhancing mutual understanding and trust and this has helped them in defining clear directions for future development in their bilateral relation.

The Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai in 2005 visited the U.S. marking the tenth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. He received a warm welcome in the U.S. The last time a Vietnamese head of state had visited the U.S. was Ngo Dinh Diem, the outcome of which was the prolonged U.S. participation in the Vietnam War. The leaders decided on the new areas of cooperation. The purpose following the visit was to advance economic cooperation. As a result he visited many firms like Boeing and Microsoft which have been on the forefront to normalize relations with Vietnam. The U.S. President announced that he would be visiting Vietnam to attend the APEC meeting. He also made an assurance to support Vietnam's entry to the WTO (Pham 2006: 407). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to the effects of globalization which has led to interdependence no country can afford to remain



isolated. They have realized this and have given importance to their common interests which have helped take forward their relation.

The visit resulted in a joint statement where they declared that the relationship between them would be of equality and mutual respect. This was done actually to silence the critics of the normalization process who believed that this was an unequal partnership. The critics of the normalization process had the opinion that since the U.S. being a powerful state would dominate the relation and hence would impose its views on the latter. The former would also put limitations on the relation citing human rights violations. To pacify them the U.S. softened their stand on the human rights violations in Vietnam. The latter also praised the efforts taken by the Vietnamese government to provide religious freedom. “Thus the growing relation between them signals that the U.S. is both an apologizer and forgiver” (Shivakumar 2005:3375). This visit was followed by a visit from the Vietnamese Prime Minister Nan Tung to the U.S. in 2008. This visit was significant as both the U.S. government reaffirmed its commitment towards maintaining Vietnam’s national sovereignty, territorial integrity and security.

***Economic Ties:***

Vietnam wanted to have access to the U.S. markets and its support for admission to international organizations like the WTO and APEC. Vietnam’s membership in APEC in 1998 furthered strengthened their cooperation. But the progress in this direction was slowed down in the late 1990s. This was mainly because of the Asian Financial Crisis which specially affected the economic relations. The value of Vietnamese currency fell which in turn had a negative impact and the investors became reluctant to invest in Vietnam. This affected the process of economic normalization. But things began to move in the positive direction from 2000. In the second stage both the countries decided to build a strong trade and investment relation. Economic relations steadily enhanced over the next several years, resulting in the signing of a bilateral trade agreement in 2000. The trade agreement boosted the trade and investment ties between the countries and also served as a stepping stone for Vietnam in its process to liberalize its economy. The trade agreement framed by them was a very comprehensive document. The trade agreement contained not only trade in goods and services, but also investment and property rights. This provided a solid

foundation to Vietnam-U.S. relations. This agreement acted as a stepping stone for Vietnam to its membership in the WTO (Lan 2001:7). This agreement led to an increase in imports from Vietnam to the U.S. This agreement brought to an end all the legal restrictions on commercial transactions and most forms of economic assistance to Vietnam. The signing of the bilateral trade agreement was followed by a breakthrough event in the relation. The U.S. President Bill Clinton visited Vietnam in November 2000 after a long gap since the last time when U.S. President Richard Nixon had visited Saigon in 1969. This visit by the U.S. President highlighted the fact that both the countries were ready to put their past aggression behind and works jointly to take forward their relation. Development in relations with Vietnam also presented a chance to the U.S. to a greater engagement in Southeast Asia. In announcing his decision to extend diplomatic recognition to the government in Hanoi, President Clinton made his own hopes clear “I believe normalization and increased contact between Americans and Vietnamese will advance the cause of freedom in Vietnam, just as it did in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union” (Goodman 1996:421).

The visit of the U.S. President enhanced Vietnam’s image in the eyes of other nations. It helped change the image of Vietnam from a war torn country to a country that is opening up to the outside world. Normalizing relations with a superpower would make it easier for Vietnam to establish itself as a modern and industrialized country with the help of technology, capital, investment and market provided by the U.S. Vietnam also realized that it could take benefit of the U.S.’s influence in international financial institutions like the IMF, World Bank and WTO. The entry of Vietnam in the ASEAN furthered proved the point that Vietnam has effectively been able to integrate itself into the region over the past few years. The issue of POW/MIA had given a chance for channel of communication and it figured very high during the visit of the U.S. President. Accounting for these people would be the main concern in its dealings with the Vietnamese government. Other issues which featured highly in the agenda of President Clinton were business and economic issues and human rights issue. The visit of the U.S. President was a huge success and he was highly praised by everyone in Vietnam. The common interests shared by both the countries in the economic, humanitarian and political field have been the main reason for such a fast progress in restoration of relations. The U.S. Department of Commerce had regarded

Vietnam as one of the emerging markets and it is strategically located to serve as a check to China's ambitions. Thus, normalizing relations with Vietnam would serve its own security interests in the region.

Many Americans were against this visit by the U.S. President to Vietnam. Mostly the people who had lost their families in the war were angered by the U.S. President actions of removing the economic embargo on Vietnam and restoring diplomatic relations with Vietnam. The War had a deep impact on the Americans and the American defeat is still fresh in their minds.

After establishing trade relations, they now concentrated on the common strategic interests. Before 2003, many actors in both the countries were opposed to closer ties. The Vietnamese Prime Minister Khai's visit in 2005 took place when the trade relations were on a high. The Vietnamese had realized that the goods manufactured in the U.S. were needed by them. The goods that were mainly exported by the Vietnamese were rice, coffee, footwear and shrimps (Shivakumar 2006: 3375). Many bilateral agreements were signed between the two countries like the Counternarcotics Letter of Agreement which was in 2006, then a Civil Aviation Agreement and a Textile Agreement.

The United States and Vietnam are two of nine countries negotiating a Transnational Pacific Partnership (TPP) regional Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The U.S. believes that this TPP is the best mechanism for economic integration in the Asia-Pacific. The U.S. supports Vietnam's membership on the premise that it offers huge market for the U.S. investors and thus in turn also encourages fast economic reforms in Vietnam (Manyin 2011).

In November 2006, the State Department declared that because of many constructive steps taken by the Vietnamese government since 2004, the country was no longer a ruthless violator of religious freedom and was removed from the CPC list (Manyin 2008: 16). President George W. Bush visited Vietnam in November 2006 which was followed by the visit of Vietnam's President Triet's visit to Washington in 2007 and then followed by the visit of Vietnam's Prime Minister Dung's visit in 2008 (U.S. Embassy, 5 January 2012). In 2006 December, the U.S. Congress finally accepted for the Permanent Normal Trading Relations (PNTR) for Vietnam. In return Vietnam also

agreed to introduce trade liberalization measures and market oriented reforms. In the following year, the U.S. and Vietnam inaugurated annual politico- military talks and policy planning talks to discuss regional security and strategic issues. Bilateral and regional diplomatic engagement has expanded between the two countries at ASEAN which Vietnam had chaired in the year 2010. Since 2002, overlapping strategic and economic interests have led the United States and Vietnam to improve relations across a wide spectrum of issues. In 2010, the trade figures between these countries was U.S. dollars 18.6 billion. Trade in that year had grown more than 20 percent for both countries (U.S.A Embassy, 6 September 2011).

***Military Ties:***

In the late 2000s, the United States and Vietnam began considerably promoting their military-to military relationship, motivated in large measure by Vietnam's increased concerns about China and enabled by over a decade of smaller, trust-building programmes between the two military bureaucracies. In November 2003, USS Vandegrift was the first U.S. Navy vessel to make port call in Ho Chi Minh City since 1975, initiating a regular schedule of US Navy calls at Vietnamese ports (Timeline, December 2010). They upgraded their military ties by participating in the Defence Policy Dialogue which was established in 2010 for the purpose of direct high- level military exchanges. In the initial years these countries did not have any separate mechanism and hence it was discussed in the U.S. -Vietnam Security Dialogue on Political, Security and Defence Issues. In the same year, Vietnam and the U.S. navies participated in their first joint naval engagement which involved noncombat training. Vietnam further strengthened the relations by repairing for the first time two U.S. Military Sealift Command ships (Manyin 2011:19).

Vietnam and the U.S. had signed an agreement in 2005 concerning the training of the Vietnamese officers in English. "In 2007 they modified an agreement- International Traffic in Arms Regulation (IRAF) whereby licenses were given for trading certain non lethal weapons to Vietnam" (ibid.pp.20). In 2009, for the first time the U.S. provided military aid to Vietnam. Both their militaries have also cooperated on the issue of POW/MIA. They had access to each other's records which helped them in their mission. The Vietnamese government has long wanted U.S. assistance in locating and identifying remains of the Vietnamese soldiers who remain MIA from

the Vietnam War period. In November 2010, the USAID and Vietnam's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLISA) reached an agreement on a two-year, U.S.dollar 1 million programme of technical assistance to help Vietnam with its MIAs. They have set up joint narcotic training programme and in recent times the U.S. vessels regularly visit Vietnam's port. Thus, over the time the military relations have deepened between Vietnam and the U.S. (Manyin 2011:20).

They have extended their defence cooperation in 2011 with the main purpose to further their strategic interests. They have been cooperating on focusing the two militaries on capability building efforts and on opportunities for service-specific activities; and expanding the boundaries of acceptable military-to-military engagement in gradual and measured ways aimed at meeting contemporary security challenges (Strat for Global Intelligence, 17 May 2012).

#### ***Nuclear Ties:***

To try to compete with other countries Vietnam also decided to construct nuclear power plants to meet its energy needs. The U.S. as known is far superior to Vietnam in this regard, provided training to the latter concerning non- proliferation and nuclear safety measures. It also helped the latter to draft its Atomic Energy Law in 2008. They also signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding cooperation in civil nuclear area. In 2010, the Vietnamese Prime Minister attended the nuclear security summit where he pointed out Vietnam's commitment to fight nuclear terrorism by planning to join the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (U.S. Embassy Hanoi, 8 December 2010).

#### ***The Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI):***

The U.S. is trying to involve Vietnam in multilateral forums like the LMI which was formed in 2009 by the U.S. along with Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. This forum was created essentially to deal with issues such as climate change, infectious diseases, education and exchange of information regarding the river management. Through this forum these countries also try to deal with the issue of construction of dams including those being built by China which adversely affects these countries. The U.S. administration had also promised aid in areas of education, environment and health. (Bellacqua 2012:19).

### *Educational and Cultural Ties:*

As a result of the normalization of relations, the number of Vietnamese students, doctors, teachers participating in the exchange programme to the U.S. universities has increased over the years. The cooperation between the countries in other areas like education, science and technology has led to positive progress. Agreement signed by both the countries regarding science and technology in 2001 has led to the exchange of delegations which has further led to better cooperation in this field. The U.S. provides assistance in educational field like the Fulbright Scholarship. The Vietnam Education Foundation also provides facilities for educational exchanges. To have a better understanding of the Vietnamese culture, the U.S. has started organizing exhibitions demonstrating the modern Vietnamese culture (Stromseth 2003:8).

They are also cooperating on climate change and rising sea level caused by global warming and the issue of clearing of the mines and bombs leftover at the time of the war and handling the consequences of the Agent Orange. They have also set up an institute named the DRAGON institute to deal with these issues. The U.S. aid for environment management, dealing with flood victims and people with disabilities has increased over the years. President Bush had also appreciated Vietnam's efforts to deal with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic.

### **VIETNAM'S INTERESTS BEHIND THE NORMALIZATION**

Since the Doi Moi in 1986, Vietnam had given importance to achieve economic growth through market reforms. The U.S. being an economic giant would help Vietnam to accomplish this goal. By establishing bilateral relations with the U.S., Vietnam is trying to change its image from a war torn country to that of a modern nation. This helps Vietnam to have access to a favourable trading environment. This bilateral relation with the U.S. also serves Vietnam's strategic interests. By establishing good relations with the U.S., Vietnam is trying to oppose the growing Chinese influence in this region (Manyin 2011:4). Thus, due to the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, the regional stability would be maintained. This is very important for Vietnam in order for it to become an industrialized nation. Also, the Vietnamese over the time have forgotten about the War and have thus welcomed the U.S. presence in their country. For Vietnam it has created opportunities for its economy, trade,

education and science and technology (Bellacqua 2012:8). Vietnam knew that normalization of relations would enable the U.S. to balance and prevent the influence of other major powers in Vietnam.

### **U.S. INTERESTS BEHIND THE NORMALIZATION**

The main interest of the U.S. behind the normalization of relations with Vietnam seems to be trade and investment. The huge Vietnamese American community had played a very important role behind this normalization of relations. Within the Southeast Asia, Vietnam is the most populated country and has the fastest growing economy. The U.S. wants to take advantage of the economic opportunities in Vietnam. It also wants to fulfil its purpose of spreading democracy in Vietnam. This would allow the U.S. to influence the reforms in the Vietnamese economy and expand individual freedom, human rights and democracy which would be beneficial to the U.S. interest of promoting democracy in other nations. It also wants to counter the Chinese presence in the region. By establishing relations with Vietnam it would find a pretext to remain engaged in the region. Vietnam's stable environment has benefitted the American investors. Thus, it is in the U.S. interest to help Vietnam to become industrialized which would in turn be beneficial to American traders and investors (Manyin 2011:4).

### **IMPACT OF THE ASEAN MEMBERSHIP ON BILATERAL RELATIONS**

Vietnam had wanted the membership of ASEAN to advance its relations with the U.S. Initially when Vietnam had applied for its membership in 1994, the country was still facing the trade embargo. Vietnam thought that by joining ASEAN it would be able to change the image that the U.S. had in its mind. The enthusiasm of Vietnam to change its economy to a market –oriented one would change the minds of the decision makers in the U.S.

The membership in ASEAN presented before Vietnam a golden chance to improve its position vis-a-vis the U.S. It is now in a better position to bargain with the latter. Its membership in the ASEAN has made it more strategically important to the U.S. which led to rapid improvement in their relations. The ASEAN membership took Vietnam closer to its objective of getting Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status from the U.S. This in turn helped in betterment of trade and investment relations between

them. This enables Vietnam to compete with goods from other countries by reducing the tariff rates on the goods coming from Vietnam. The MFN status from the U.S. helped Vietnam to be a step nearer to joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Trong 1997:1585). The ASEAN's membership also provides protection against the U.S. demands for human rights and democracy. Over the years, "Vietnam" had become an adjective for most Americans, usually affixed to pejorative words like "war," "debacle," or "syndrome" (Lawrence 2001:1). Clinton's trip, in the words of famous journalist Stanley Karnow, helped "exorcize that ghost" (Wright and Lamb: 2000). They have expanded cooperation both in traditional security issues as well as non-traditional security issues like combating epidemics and dealing with drug trafficking. In 2004, the U.S. officials on drug control visited Vietnam and held joint training sessions there. The U.S. on its part has formed two congressional caucuses—one giving attention to the human rights situation in Vietnam and the other dealing with the bilateral relations (Manyin 2005:9).

The normalizing of relations took more than two decades to happen because of the humiliation suffered by the Americans still affect the bilateral relation. Vietnam has been successful in pressurizing the U.S. to address some of the problems like the effects of the Agent Orange. The search for the missing American servicemen in Vietnam remains an active part of the U.S. agenda in Vietnam. The deepening of the Vietnam –U.S. relations would ensure a continued expansion of the U.S. aid programme in Vietnam. Thus, the pattern of relation has changed from confrontation to cooperation in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Vietnam which was earlier associated with death, suffering and humiliation. But today it has emerged from the War impressively. The two nations have identified many common interests like cooperation in military, trade, education, environment protection and public health. The relation between the two countries has changed dramatically since the time they normalized their relations in 1995. Trade has boomed and diplomatic and military ties have also strengthened. With the U.S. help and support, Vietnam finally got membership in WTO in 2007.

Fifteen years ago in July 1995, the U.S. President Bill Clinton and Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet declared the normalization of relation and thus opened a new chapter in the history of the special relation. Within such a short period they could



overcome the brutal war and deep ideological differences. Both the countries actively maintained diplomatic and political relations. The depth of their relation is really impressive. Both the countries have moved forward in many fields leaving behind the past and have been successful in forging a new relation. Vietnam is working hard on taking its relation with the U.S. beyond trade. The main reason behind the normalization of relations was that the U.S. President Bill Clinton thought that the lifting up the embargo would provide an opportunity to account for the missing U.S. service men from the war. Vietnam cooperated with the U.S. in their efforts to recover those who were missing in action. They have come to accept each other as potential partners rather than former enemies. As a result, over the years they have increased cooperation in areas like health, human rights, energy, security, defence and trade (U.S. Department of State, 22 July 2010).

These countries have come a long way in healing the wounds of the war and has thus build a strong basis for stable and lasting relation. The achievements have been possible because of the will and determination of both the countries to develop a bilateral relation. Both the countries have issued three joint statements in 2005, 2006 and 2007 by which they have pledged to abide by the principles of mutual respect, equality and benefit in their partnership. The normalization of relations has benefitted the people in both the countries. The realization by both the countries that they share common interests have led to greater interaction between them and thus helped them overcome the initial strategic misunderstandings. While the U.S. has not really erased the memories of the War, the Vietnamese who had suffered more had embraced the former. Though Vietnam and the U.S. have differences on the issues of governance and foreign affairs, but still there are certain bilateral and regional issues regarding which they share common interests. Vietnam has successful transformed itself from a troublemaker to a responsible actor in the international community. Though Vietnam's main priority is economic development, but the underlying reason behind the rapprochement with the U.S. is security.

The relationship between Vietnam and the US is entering a new era and the former adversaries have revised their approaches, given new developments in the region and the world alike. The US has recognised the fact that Vietnam is one of the most dynamic countries in the world and the new generation of Vietnamese is eager to

move forward and leave the past behind. Vietnam is slowly abandoning the notion of a state-planned economy, replacing it with market-based policies and incentives for foreign investment. The US has argued that the way to get socialist nations to open up politically is to engage with them economically and this is indeed apparently taking place. The U.S. believes that the greater presence of American technology, investment and culture would have a positive influence on the former socialist countries. The cooperation of the Vietnamese government in their efforts to recover those MIA has paved the way to normalization of relations that is highlighted by their trade relations. Vietnam and the U.S. are no longer involved militarily in Cold War animosities and after the lifting of the U.S. trade embargo, the bilateral political and economic relations have improved considerably.

The Vietnam Syndrome had such a huge impact on the U.S. that they confirmed that there will be no more Vietnams. This term was introduced by the U.S. President Nixon. It pointed to the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War and the huge negative image which the U.S. got as a result of the violence committed there (Herring 1981: 594). They have covered a long road to achieve political and economic normalization. The overlapping strategic interests have helped them come a long way. In the recent years terrorism has emerged as a common threat to both the countries. Vietnam on its part has cooperated with the U.S. in this regard. It has given its support to the U.S. - ASEAN Declaration in July 2002. It allowed the U.S. military planes over-flight rights. It also checks on suspected terrorists and their organizations. Thus, it provides an opportunity to them to collaborate their efforts to deal with the danger (Brandon 2004:11). They can boast of the huge potential which has helped them develop a healthy relationship. With Obama coming to power in the U.S. in 2009, the relation has tended to grow even faster.

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### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **VIETNAM-U.S RELATIONS AND REGIONAL SECURITY**

This chapter follows from the earlier chapter and tries to elaborate on the points that have been mentioned earlier. The questions that have been posited are as follows: How the rapidly changing security environment in Southeast Asia in the wake of rise of China and the declining influence of the U.S. has become instrumental in driving Vietnam-U.S. relations? How the territorial and the maritime disputes have become an important variable in influencing Vietnam- U.S. relations? The basic premise of the chapter is to find out how regional security has influenced relations between Vietnam and the U.S. The main aim of the chapter is to explain the ‘China Factor’ influencing Vietnam- U.S. relations. The rapprochement between Vietnam and the U.S. is tilted in favour of Vietnam because of the presence of China and its rising economic power. Vietnam has always been wary of China due to the latter’s proximity, size, economic strength and also because of two thousand years of bitter history and countless violent skirmishes. Vietnamese are keen to develop their security relations with the U.S. to counter balance a rising China. Thus, we can see that the sovereignty disputes over the South China Sea has emerged as a major point of convergence for both the countries as they try to counter balance the growing military strength of China and its assertive behaviour in the region.

The rapidly changing security in Southeast Asia with the rise of China and the relative decline in the influence of the U.S. along with the territorial and maritime boundary disputes emerge as major security challenges which in turn also help in driving Vietnam –U.S. relations forward. The unresolved territorial and maritime disputes between Vietnam and China have always remained a source of tension. China’s increasing power projection in the South China Sea has pushed Vietnam towards the U.S. to bring in stability in the region. Even though Vietnam and the U.S. had complicated relations in the past, the China factor has emerged as an important variable influencing their bilateral relations. In the post -Cold War period, China is trying to fill in the vacuum which was created after the withdrawal of the U.S. and Soviet Union from this region.

In the past few years, the American involvement in Iraq and especially after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks; in the war on terror in Afghanistan and attempts by certain states to acquire weapons of mass destruction, etc., have resulted in U.S. not being able to focus on the Southeast Asia region (Goh 2005: 7).

So, China could take advantage of the situation and turn the balance of power in its favour. While on the other hand an assertive position by the U.S. may prove counterproductive and may raise China's suspicions. Vietnam is aware of the fact that its relations with China are very important, but the aggressive policy followed by the latter has forced the former to tilt towards the U.S. The rise of China has made the Southeast Asian nations realize that the presence of the U.S. in the region has become a necessity.

The involvement of the U.S. in the region with regard to regional security at Vietnam's proposal has been welcomed by the other Southeast Asian nations as well. The Southeast Asian nations are very much anxious about the stability of the region. Since the Cold War days the U.S. has been considered the guarantor of regional stability in the Southeast Asian region and the Southeast Asian nations want the U.S. to carry on its role in future as well. The Southeast Asian countries want the U.S. to cooperate with them on the issue of counter-terrorism which has emerged as a major security threat in the wake of the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks. The Southeast Asian nations have always considered the U.S. as a natural balancer in the region. During the Cold War period they viewed the U.S. presence in the region as to counter the communist threat. In the post- Cold War period too, the U.S. is seen by them as a sort of bulwark against China. The Southeast Asian nations are applying the tactic of soft balancing against possible Chinese aggression or disruption of the status quo. For this they wanted the participation of the U.S. as a counter weight to Chinese power (ibid. pp. 2).

## **HISTORY OF VIETNAM- CHINA TERRITORIAL DISPUTES**

Geographically Vietnam is a very small country with a big power like China hovering over it. China naturally wants to spread its influence over Vietnam which in turn resists being controlled by a bigger power. "Vietnam has always been cautious of China due to the latter's proximity, size, economic strength and also because of two thousand years of bitter history and countless violent skirmishes" (Brown 2010:335). The relation between Vietnam and China has experienced both ups and downs.

Vietnam shares a border with China that had led to centuries of invasions and armed conflicts between the two nations. History has time and again provided enough indication to Vietnam not to entirely trust China which in turn has affected their bilateral relations. Vietnam had the most violent historical relations with its northern neighbour. Before the French colonized Vietnam in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was under the Chinese rule until the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Since both the countries have been driven by communist ideologies and had a common enemy-Western World, so both the countries had shared mutual trust. China had supported Vietnam during the Indochina War.

The relations began to worsen during the Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in the late 1978. In fact, misunderstandings from 1964 to 1974 became the starting point for a fast deterioration of relations in 1975, following the unification of Vietnam (Lawson 1981: 691). This incident was followed by China launching an attack on Vietnam in 1979. China had claimed that the Vietnamese had increased its atrocities and they had begun to harass overseas Chinese as well. The latter as a result had even gone ahead and signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in 1978. According to the treaty, Vietnam would get help from the Soviet in case the former was attacked. Thus, the relationship transformed from mutual trust in the initial phase to that of antagonism and distrust. Vietnam's attack on Cambodia had a negative impact on the Chinese position among the non- communist Southeast Asian nations (Tretiak 1979: 742). But after the Vietnamese started to move out of Cambodia, the relation slowly started to improve between them. The restoration of the diplomatic relations started in 1991 and there was rapid improvement in the bilateral relationship. As bilateral relations were established between them, Vietnam took steps to deepen the relationship and reduce tensions between them. Though both the countries started re-engaging and renewed their friendship, but in the later part of the period Vietnam grew conscious about China's rise and its policies of projecting power in Southeast Asia. China also began to assert its power in the South China Sea and thus create tensions for the Vietnamese.

But the fact remains that Vietnam shares many interests with China. Both countries discard multi- party system and they consider that authoritarian system would eventually lead to stability. They also have intimate party relations even though both

governments are at loggerheads (Brown 2010: 335). China has always been a permanent problem to Vietnam. Vietnam has always alleged that China never wanted an independent and strong Vietnam. The active bilateral territorial disputes between these two countries are over sea borders in the Gulf of Tonkin, and rival claims to the Paracel and Spratly islands in the South China Sea. Hanoi and Beijing have been able to reach agreements regarding the disputes over land and sea borders, but it is the dispute over the Spratly Island that continues to affect the bilateral relationship (Goh 2005:20).

South China Sea is very strategically located and is rich in resources like fishery and more importantly oil and energy resources and has maritime passages which are contested by the various littoral states<sup>2</sup>. It has around 50 billion tonnes of oil reserves and thus it is considered the second Persian Gulf (Li 2010:51). From the beginning jurisdiction over the South China Sea has been claimed by China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and the Philippines. The dispute has gained importance in the recent times due to rise of China and the U.S. involvement in the region. But China's interests goes further beyond as it is more concerned in having a sea-based nuclear deterrent that is important for China's military strategy. China is trying to stop Vietnam from preserving its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Spratly and the Paracel chains are the most prominent of the islands because of the oil and natural gas which are found in their waters and as well as the important shipping lanes through which the energy resources are sent into East Asia and beyond. China has been aggressively trying to claim sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly islands in the South China Sea which Vietnam had been exploiting for over a thousand years. Since 2008, China has started accelerating its naval build up in the South China Sea and at the same time, Chinese websites had begun to publish invasion plans against Vietnam. When Vietnam was under the U.S. occupation, China had claimed the Paracels in 1974. Since the U.S. was involved in conflicts in other parts of Asia, it did not want to further complicate the situation by confronting China over the issue of jurisdiction over the South China Sea. But it emphasized on following the 1982 United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Declaration with regard to maritime activity in the South China Sea. Due to estranged relations with the U.S., Vietnam could not restrict Chinese actions. At that time U.S. did not want itself to be

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<sup>2</sup> Littoral states refers to states which have a coast

embroiled in territorial disputes. China has also claimed almost 80 percent of the South China Sea. It also arrested Vietnamese fishermen by establishing a fishing moratorium in the South China Sea in 2009. This has resulted in Vietnam having the notion that a big neighbour is trying to boss over a small neighbour. This has fuelled Vietnam's suspicions about China. In order to challenge Chinese policies, Vietnam encouraged its fishing vessels to continue fishing in disputed parts and building up its defences against any possible Chinese attack. These activities by both the countries have in turn disturbed the regional stability. This highlights the fact that China is interested in dominating the region. This made Vietnam realize the importance of developing relations with the Western countries especially the U.S. Vietnam views China's actions in the South China Sea as a continuation of its traditional animosity with the former. China from the very beginning has acted aggressively against Vietnam to consolidate its position in the South China Sea. There have been many incidents where Vietnam and China had been involved in confrontation over the South China Sea. Vietnam lags behind China in terms of naval power, which the latter uses to strengthen its position over the former. Despite China's attempts to prevent the internationalizing of the South China Sea dispute, Vietnam has tried to multilateralizing the issue and has sought the participation of other countries in the resolution of the dispute. Vietnam through multilateral approach tries to achieve its national objectives and thus prevent China from engaging with it on a bilateral basis. Vietnam has become alarmed at Chinese aggression which it has been displaying in the disputed parts of the South China Sea. Vietnam's own troubled history with China and conflicting claims over territory and sovereign rights in the South China Sea are clearly considerations in Hanoi's calculations about its ties to Washington.

#### **U.S. INTERESTS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**

This region provides huge opportunities to the U.S. The U.S. can make these opportunities favourable to its interests if the Southeast Asian nations are democratic and have open markets. The main aim behind the U.S. involvement in this region is to promote open markets. The U.S. has increased its naval presence in the region which has been welcomed by Vietnam. The U.S. warships – USS George Washington and the USS John S. McCain visited the Da Nang port in Vietnam in the latter half of 2010. The U.S. navy has cooperated with that of Vietnam in areas of training,

exercises and search and rescue operations (Brown 2010:334). The U.S. from the starting had made its position apparent that it has a national interest in freedom of navigation, freedom of access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international maritime law in South China Sea and resolving this dispute was pivotal to regional security. The U.S. has given its support for "a collaborative, diplomatic process by all claimants for resolving the various territorial disputes without coercion" (Forbes, 28th July 2010). These activities further create tensions between them and China over the South China Sea. The U.S. and Vietnam had together called for freedom of navigation and discarded the use of force in the South China Sea, in the midst of growing tensions between Beijing and its neighbours. The U.S. would not favour conflicts in the South China Sea region as it would affect maritime transportation and regional peace (Li 2010:57). At Vietnam's initiative, the U.S. got involved in this dispute. It has expressed its views which stand contrary to Chinese excessive territorial claims. The U.S. itself has its own interests of having a share in the rich resources of the South China Sea and thus it wants to guarantee full access to the sea lanes and thus make it safe for commerce. Thus, U.S. interest comes in conflict with those of the Chinese who is a major player in the region.

The U.S. from the cold war days has made attempts to contain China. It was only in the late 1960s that the U.S. thought of negotiation with the communist country. The fall out between the Soviet Union and the PRC in the late 1960s and a conflict over the Ussuri river crisis gave them an opportunity to build ties with China. So the U.S. President Nixon decided to engage with China. The U.S. promised to provide aid in case of a Soviet attack to China and in return the latter promised to help the U.S. to move out of the Vietnam War respectfully. The Shanghai Communiqué was signed between Nixon and Zhou Enlai in 1972. Finally, in 1979 under the Joint Communiqué under the Carter administration the U.S. gave formal diplomatic recognition to the PRC. The rising Chinese power in the recent times has presented a hindrance in the path of the U.S. goal of spreading its influence in Southeast Asia (Ness 1998: 156).

Earlier the Americans had ignored this region because of its pre-occupation with its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the rise of China has made it realize the significance of this region in the recent years. As a result it increased its diplomatic and economic military presence in Southeast Asia. It also joined every ASEAN-



related institution. A large number of U.S. Cabinet ministers have also started visiting Southeast Asia on a regular basis. The U.S. also signed the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2009. The two former war foes said that "the maintenance of peace, stability, safety and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea is in the common interests of the international community" (Defense News, 18 June 2011). The Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in July 2010 on a visit to Vietnam mentioned that the United States had a vital national interest in freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. The U.S. considers the South China Sea as very strategic to its national interests and thus it wants China to agree for a free passage and to accept a resolution acceptable to all the parties to the dispute (Foreign Policy, November 2011).

Even though the U.S. has no direct interest in the South China Sea issue, but still it takes an active interest in this issue. This is because of the fact that it wants to maintain a balance in the region. To fund its activities in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. had to spend much of its resources and so it could not further afford to divert its resources to fund a war in Southeast Asia. It is not beneficial for the U.S. to start a war in this region. The memory of its defeat in the Vietnam War is still fresh. Along with Vietnam it wants to maintain a balance in this region that is thus in turn beneficial to the U.S. interests.

The United States has long had a vital interest in maintaining stability, freedom of navigation, and the right to lawful commercial activity in East Asia's waterways. For decades, active U.S. engagement in East Asia, including the forward-deployed presence of U.S. forces, has been a central factor in keeping the peace and preserving those interests. That continues to be true today. Through diplomacy, commerce, and our military presence, we have protected vital U.S. interests. Our relationships with our allies remain strong, the region is at peace, and – as you know well -- the U.S. Navy continues to carry out the full range of missions necessary to protect our country and preserve our interests. (Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, US Department of State before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Washington, DC, 15 July 2009)

In July 2009, the US administration announced its policies towards maritime issues in the South China Sea. Two officials, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scot Marciel and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence Robert Scher, were dispatched to Capitol

Hill to give testimony to the Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Deputy Assistant Secretary Marciel downright rejected Chinese claims to territorial waters and maritime zones in the South China Sea that did not derive from a land territory. “Such maritime claims are not consistent with international law”, he asserted (Thayer 2010: 79).

Marciel also noted that the United States has “a vital interest in maintaining stability, freedom of navigation, and the right to lawful commercial activity in East Asia’s waterways”. And after reviewing the cases of Chinese intimidation against American oil and gas companies working with Vietnamese partners, Marciel stated, “We object to any effort to intimidate US companies” (Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, US Department of State before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Washington, DC, 15 July 2009).

The rise of China and maintaining the balance of power in Asia Pacific region have become one of the considerations behind the re-engagement between Vietnam and the U.S. The Vietnam- U.S. relation has been openly formulated both in Hanoi and Washington while keeping in mind the China factor.

Professor Fred Brown writes that “ in the shadow of a ‘rising China’, it seems reasonable to believe that the determination on both sides to compromise during the crucial year of 2006 was driven by the broader agenda of regional security issues”(Limaye 2010:315).

## **THE CHINA QUESTION**

China has always considered Vietnam to be of secondary importance except in case of the latter’s claims to the South China Sea. China had attacked Vietnam to “teach it a lesson” after Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia in 1978 (Goh 2005:8). China from the 1980s had engaged in confrontation with Vietnam over the Spratly islands. As we know China considers the natural resources of the South China Sea-oil and energy to be very important to its national economy. China has always refrained from internationalizing the South China Sea issue. It had built structures on the reefs claimed by Vietnam in 1990s which created tensions between the countries. Since then Vietnam has been very cautious about Chinese moves in the region. China from

the very beginning has been very forceful when it comes to its position in the South China Sea. It believes that it is the legitimate claimant of the South China Sea. To justify its stand, China has made use of its media to show China's historical claims of exploration in the region. It has also taken the help of history to assert its territorial claims. China in 1947 had published a map which had shown a U- shaped line map which acknowledged China's claim to sovereignty. China had moreover, asserted that at that time none of the other countries had protested against the Chinese position. They have also claimed that many countries at that time had published maps which recognized China's eleven dotted lines (Li 2011). The Chinese scholars have further argued that it was the first country to discover and use the resources of the South China Sea. They have a complete record of the navigation routes and names of the islands, islets in the South China Sea. Its naval modernization over the years has helped it to maintain its position in the South China Sea. In 2010, the Chinese navy conducted three major exercises as an indication of its assertiveness. The first exercise was held in early April which was followed by the second one in early July and finally the last one later that month (Thayer 2012:4).

In the recent years, China has come to acknowledge the importance of Vietnam. It has realized the latter's resources and size has made it a dominant power in the region. Vietnam's long coastline of 3,300 km long has increased its significance to China. Vietnam would also be useful to the latter in trying to prevent the spread of U.S. influence in the region. The close relations between Vietnam and the U.S. are not favourable to the Chinese interests. As a result it has started cooperation with Vietnam to prevent it from tilting towards the U.S.

China was very worried about the U.S. re-engagement on the region after almost a decade since it was engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the mid- 1990s, China tried to resolve this issue through multilateral initiatives fearing the entry of the U.S. in the region. China wanted to project itself as a nation favouring discussion and peaceful settlement of dispute. By doing so China thought that it would be able to transform its image as an aggressor to a friendly neighbour in the minds of the Vietnamese and thus lessen the significance of the U.S. to the latter. China understood that it had to deal with the U.S. presence in the region and a heavy handedness would push Vietnam more towards the latter (Li 2010: 58). As a result, in the early 2000 China changed its

policy and suddenly started to pursue “smile diplomacy” to reduce the fear in the minds of the Southeast Asian nations regarding its rising military power (Weitz 2011:7).

But in the recent years there have been incidents which have indicated China’s assertiveness in the region. This has been mainly because of the Chinese perception about the forceful action of Vietnam towards the former’s fishermen. It also disapproves Vietnam’s decision of taking the help of the ASEAN to put pressure on China. It believes that this goes against China’s interests. As a result in 2011 China increased its naval activities in the South China Sea to assert its sovereignty claims. It began attacking the commercial operations of oil exploration ships in waters claimed by Vietnam. It also imposed an annual fishing ban during the months of May and August on Vietnam to protect the fish stocks during the spawning season. China felt that this would save the Chinese fishermen and prevent illegal fishing. But this ban affected the Vietnamese fishermen because the months of May and July are the main months of fishing season (Thayer 2009:76). These activities affected the security condition in the South China Sea. This led to worsening of relations between Vietnam and China. China has shown its frustration against U.S. access to its Exclusive Economic Zone in the South China Sea. China does not like the presence of the U.S. in the region especially as the latter has threatened the former for free access to the entire South China Sea.

To enforce the ban the China dispatched eight modern fishing vessels in 2009. These vessels took away the catches of the Vietnamese fishing vessels and drove away other Vietnamese fishing vessels outside that area. The Chinese were acting aggressively this time to enforce the ban. China also detained Vietnamese boats and crew members near the Paracel islands. These activities of China led to the Vietnamese government lodging a complaint to the Chinese embassy demanding the release of the latter’s fishermen (Thayer 2010:76).

In the following year China again launched a ban on the waters of South China Sea. China again send fishing vessel to ensure that Vietnam obey the ban imposed and also to help the Chinese fishermen who were harassed by the Vietnamese authorities. Vietnam also sent its own vessels to prevent the movement of the Chinese vessels.

The Vietnamese further protested against this by saying “China’s unilateral execution of a fishing ban in the East Sea is a violation of Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Hoang Sa [Paracel] archipelago, as well as the country’s sovereignty and jurisdiction over its Exclusive Economic Zone and continental shelf” (The Voice of Vietnam, 14 May 2011). The Vietnamese fishermen did not pay any heed to the ban and as a result of this; the Chinese government announced that it would attack Vietnamese shipping vessel sailing near Spratly islands. The Chinese further showed their strength by beating the captain of a Vietnam fishing vessel and threatening its crew and finally making the boat leave the waters near the Paracel islands.

The intensity of confrontation between Vietnam and China increased in 2011 with three incidents taking place that year. In the first incident on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, three China Maritime Surveillance ships and the Vietnamese seismic survey ship, Binh Minh 02 operating well within Vietnam’s Exclusive Economic Zone confronted with each other. The Vietnamese lodged a complaint with the Chinese ambassador that the latter had infringed upon Vietnam’s sovereignty and claimed compensation for the loss caused (Vietnamnet Bridge, 28 May 2011). China on the other hand claimed that it was a part of their maritime law enforcement and surveillance activities in Chinese jurisdictional area. In the second incident, the Chinese vessels interfered with the activities of Vietnamese Viking II seismic survey ship. Vietnam realized that China through all these incidents wanted to prove their historical claim to be a reality. The Chinese authorities completely denied it and claimed that the Vietnamese ships had chased the Chinese one and had put in danger the lives of the Chinese fishermen. The third incident of confrontation did not receive much publicity (Thayer 2011:17).

China had acted totally against its position of declaring itself as a soft power. It has made this South China Sea issue to be of utmost importance and has diverted its resources to build a strong navy to maintain its position in the South China Sea. The factor responsible for this is the China’s rapid economic growth which in turn has intensified the demand for energy. These two reasons have made China to guarantee that the vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) remain safe and protected (Thayer 2009: 70). These activities in turn have made the involvement of the U.S. a necessity to ensure peace and stability in the region.

China became an oil importer in 1993 and since then the energy needs for China has been increasing steadily. During the 1990s it publicly declared that the entire South China Sea to be its territorial waters and also took steps to enforce its claims. China thus is not in favour of the fact that other countries like Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines claim a share of the energy resources in the South China Sea. China further claims that Vietnam has been trying to deal with this issue not only through political, diplomatic means, but also by military means. So China also has to maintain its own security. “China believes that from the 1980s other claimant countries have taken advantage of Chinese weakness in technology and shortage of funding and stepped up their efforts in drilling for energy resources in the area” (Li 2010:51). Chinese observers continuously protest that other competing states have set up more than one thousand oil wells in the South China Sea, and that the quantity of oil and gas they have produced from those projects has been many times more than that of Chinese production in the offshore areas (ibid).

In a response to China’s aggressive patrols, the Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi stated that “China, being a big country, also has it legitimate concerns. Is this expression of one’s legitimate concerns coercion? That is not logical” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 26 July 2010). “China further claims that the skirmishes between the fishermen and the patrol boats in the South China Sea to be illegal activities on its waters and thus it responded accordingly under the provisions of its maritime laws” (Pham 2010.156). The tension in the South China Sea has escalated in the recent years and China has been responsible for this to quite an extent. China is obviously the biggest and the most powerful claimant in the South China Sea and thus it is in a position to challenge the international law.

South China Sea is also strategically important to China. According to the Chinese analysts South China Sea provides protection to the former from the south. It is also important because of the important flight routes and sea lanes of communication. If China maintains a strong position in the South China Sea, then it would provide a hinterland<sup>3</sup> to China which has huge security implications for China. This would also help them to compete with the U.S. who also sought to maintain a strong military presence in the South China Sea (Li 2010:52).

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<sup>3</sup>Hinterland refers to the remote areas of a country away from the coast

China is completely against the involvement of the U.S. in this region. The Chinese scholars condemn the U.S. policy of active neutrality in the South China Sea. The naval exercises between Vietnam and the U.S. further reinforce Chinese suspicions about the U.S. role in this region. China is also very much worried about the growing military relations between the two countries. The Chinese analysts believe that the United States is getting more involved in the South China Sea dispute, and especially against China. Many Chinese analysts conclude that the United States has continued to follow a strategy of military predominance in the South China Sea area and has become more active in the dispute as part of the U.S. strategy to contain China's rise. In March, Chinese officials supposedly told their American counterparts that China would not stand any external interference in the South China Sea as that is part of China's national core interest. It was the first time the Chinese included the South China Sea issue as a core national interest along with the issues of Taiwan and Tibet (ibid). Thus, China changed its earlier policy of soft diplomacy in March 2010. Later that year the Ministry of Defence spokesman Senior Colonel Geng Yansheng commented that, "China has indisputable sovereignty of the South China Sea, and China has sufficient historical and legal backing" (Weitz 2011:7). To enforce its claim it is developing a strong navy. China believes that having a strong navy would deter the U.S. to increase its presence in the region. Thus, we can very well see that China has been taking steps to forcefully resolve this dispute.

Vietnam and China also clashes over the issue of dams built over the Mekong River. China states that this river has great hydropower potential and thus wants to build dams to harness this energy. But Vietnam on the other hand believes that this would have adverse effect on the fertile river delta. It would affect the agriculture and the fishing industry in Vietnam. While on one hand the Vietnamese scientists argue that the dam on the Mekong River reduces the fertility of the soil on the other the Chinese scientists in their defence argue that low rainfall rather than the dams constructed are responsible for reducing the fertility of the soil (Bellacqua 2012:18).

The defence cooperation between them is heavily influenced by the political considerations. Vietnam suffers from the tyranny of geography as it is located next to China and has the most unstable bilateral relations with it. As a result Vietnam is gradually developing its defence relations with the U.S. to counter China. Thus, the

Chinese aggressiveness in the region has contributed to the convergence of their security interests (Thayer 2010: 393).

Vietnam's growing diplomatic, security and military relations with the U.S. thus has created new tensions in the relations between Vietnam and China. The fact that Vietnam and the U.S. have started warming up to each other has not got well down with China. China's main fears are that the U.S. is basically trying to contain China by playing the Vietnam card. And, by doing this it is creating obstruction to the Chinese objectives in the Southeast Asian region. Also, by using Vietnam, the U.S. justifies its presence in the region that is a danger to China.

### **THE CHINA FACTOR AND VIETNAM-U.S. COOPERATION**

The breakup of the Soviet Union has significantly distorted the power equation in the South China Sea. Vietnam has lost its primary source of economic and military assistance and its chief ally against China. The rise in tension between Vietnam and China has led the former to step up its defence ties with the U.S. By doing so Vietnam has taken resort to an age old tradition of relying on larger external power to help balance China's superior position. Earlier also Vietnam has followed this practice by siding with the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Vietnam has extensive and beneficial economic ties with China which the former does not want to disrupt by directly confronting with the latter over its maritime claims. Thus, it wanted an external balancer like the U.S. to assume that role. As a result Vietnamese Prime Minister Nyugen Tan Dung visited the then U.S. President George W. Bush in June 2008. This visit by the Vietnamese Prime Minister to Pentagon was the first one since 1975. Both heads decided to hold regular talks on strategic and security issues. This was followed by both the U.S. President as well as the U.S. Defence Secretary warning China not to hamper the commercial activities of the U.S. companies in Vietnam's gas and oil sector located in the South China Sea.

Some analysts state that Vietnam's traditional antagonism with China and its sensitivity to Chinese infringement make Vietnam the country most resistant to Chinese influence, and thus the most potential target for an American counter-offensive in soft power competition. This cooperation with the U.S. also helps in maintaining the balance in the region (Vuving 2006: 818). In a cover story for the



magazine *Foreign Policy*, Hillary Clinton declared that ‘one of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will ... be to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic and otherwise—in the Asia-Pacific region ... We are prepared to lead’ (*Foreign Policy: The American issue*, November 2011).

The Vietnam from the very beginning has been engaged in containing Chinese influence in the region. The conflict between them over the Spratly islands both the times in 1974 as well as 1988 had a huge impact on Vietnam. It needs a stable environment to work for its economic development. The close relations with the U.S. to a certain extent serve this purpose of maintaining regional stability. The rising Chinese military power and its claim on the South China Sea have made the Southeast Asian countries welcome the U.S. presence in the region. It was only because of the pressure put by the U.S. on China that the latter could be brought to the negotiating table. Vietnam has specifically made it clear that the military cooperation with the U.S. does not mean that the latter will develop their military bases there. The U.S. also has assured the Southeast Asian nations about its commitment to maintain stability and counter the Chinese influence effectively in the region. It has further reassured them that it has no intention to re-occupy its former bases in Southeast Asia. The U.S. has not taken the Chinese threat lightly as this region is economically as well as strategically important to it. For this purpose the U.S. has requested Vietnam to allow it to return to the Vietnamese port which it had used during the Vietnam War. This access is of immense strategic importance in the U.S. policy towards countering the Chinese influence. This indicates that the U.S. has shifted its focus to the Pacific region and thus it is expanding ties with the Southeast Asian nations. President Lyndon Johnson who visited Cam Ranh Bay in 1966 said that it was like the “jewel of warm water ports in Southeast Asia” (*Defense News*, 3 June 2012).

The conclusion of the implementation guidelines for the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in 2002 was perceived as a positive development. China’s decision to sign the guidelines with ASEAN as a whole instead of signing with the disputant states only was regarded as a Chinese compromise. Finally, Beijing’s diplomatic offensive highlighting China’s willingness to cooperate

in the South China Sea during the ARF in July to some extent reassured regional states of China's moderation in the dispute (The Diplomat, 18 July 2011).

At Vietnam's insistence, the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the ARF meeting in July 2010 held in Hanoi offered to help begin the multilateral talks on the disputed South China Sea territories within the ASEAN framework. She further confirmed the U.S. opposition to the use of coercion or threat of force to settle the various conflicting claims. She pointed that the U.S. would support "a collaborative diplomatic process for resolving various territorial disputes without coercion and the U.S. believes in legitimate claims to maritime space in the South China Sea should be derived solely from legitimate claims to land features" (Office of the Spokesman, Vietnam, 23 July 2010). U.S. Admiral Robert Willard further confirmed the American commitment to guarantee free navigation in the South China Sea (Weitz 2011:7). These statements thus prove the American eagerness to prevent the region from becoming an unchallenged sphere of influence. The U.S. has always maintained a neutral position in East Asian disputes, but at Vietnam's insistence as well as the aggressive policies undertaken by China has made the U.S. to take a more active stand on the issue. The Chinese did not like this and thus warned both Vietnam and the U.S. not to make any kind of statements on the South China Sea issue when the U.S. President met the ASEAN leaders on the sidelines of the annual opening of the UN General Assembly in New York. In the same year, the U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates called the South China Sea "not only vital to those directly bordering it but to all nations with economic and security interests in Asia" (Weitz 2011:11). The Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi had also warned the other Southeast Asian nations about the consequences of confronting Beijing.

This ARF meeting was a highpoint in the Vietnam-U.S. relations. This was so because both the countries decided to cooperate on South China Sea dispute in which both the countries had an interest. The internationalizing of the dispute helped bring China to the discussion table. This also showed that the other Southeast Asian countries no longer wanted China to dominate the region and thus welcomed the presence of the U.S. Vietnam as ASEAN chairman achieved a masterstroke last year, when U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reportedly with Vietnamese initiation stressed at an ARF meeting in Hanoi that the U.S. had an interest in freedom of

navigation in the disputed South China Sea, and would help internationalize settlement of the issue.

At the ARF's meeting held in Bali in 2011, the ASEAN member countries and China accepted the draft agreement to resolve the South China Sea dispute peacefully. But the key issues like the issue of overlapping territorial claims have not been discussed in the draft and this makes the dispute more complex and thus it remains far from being resolved. This in turn ensured the increased involvement of the U.S. to counter China's dominance in the region. Even after agreeing to peaceful resolution of the dispute, China has continued to act unilaterally on this issue. These actions diminish China's reliability as a responsible power.

The U.S. is also cooperating with Vietnam on the issue of Mekong River. In 2009 the U.S. along with Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand set up LMI. The U.S. also allocated funds to help these countries regarding environment, health and education. The U.S. also committed itself to provide assistance to these countries regarding the construction of upriver dams. The U.S. thus helped Vietnam to deal with various ecological, social and infrastructural issues through the LMI. China troubled Vietnam by damming of the upper Mekong River which caused drought and other damages to the former's environment. Thus, both Vietnam and the U.S. are cooperating to counter the Chinese influence on the region (Bellacqua 2012:19).

Many scholars criticize the U.S. presence in the region. One such scholar Joseph Nye says, "security is like oxygen; you don't notice it until you don't have it." He had underscored the American contribution to the Asia-Pacific stability through its security presence and forward deployment (The Global Think Tank, 19 September 2011). Thus, scholars like him are of the opinion that the region has its own internal stability which does not need the presence of the U.S. The countries in the region are matured enough to deal with instability without any interference by the U.S.

#### **VIETNAM- U.S. SECURITY COOPERATION**

The close cooperation between Vietnam and the U.S. in the economic field has been accompanied by close cooperation in the strategic areas as well. This can be seen from the regular visits of the top Vietnamese and U.S. officials to each other capital cities. The American Navy warships have made port calls at Ho Chi Minh City, Hai

Phong, and Da Nang. In 2009, Vietnam and the U.S. held their first joint naval exercises since the Vietnam War ended. The USS John McCain along with the Vietnamese People's Navy conducted training drills for search and rescue, damage control, maintenance, emergency repair and fire control. The nuclear powered USS George Washington aircraft carrier which marked the fifteenth anniversary of the normalization of Vietnam and the U.S. relations hosted along with the Vietnamese civilian-military delegation while sailing in the disputed South China Sea off the Vietnamese port of Da Nang. Vietnam has allowed visits by the U.S. naval ships and flew its own officials to U.S. carriers out in the South China Sea. Hanoi has also opened up its Cam Ranh Bay naval base to foreign navies including the U.S. Navy (Weitz 2011:7).

Vietnam has claimed that these naval exercises with the U.S. are a part of the fifteenth anniversary celebrations. It has openly denied that it is strengthening its alliance with the U.S. to combat the China threat. It has pointed out that it is also engaged in defence cooperation with China as well. The fact remains that in the present regional security conditions, improving security ties with the U.S. offers the safest and the most effective way to deal with China's growing power.

China is a geopolitical challenge which Vietnam has to deal with. Thus, Vietnam has accorded a vital role to the U.S. in ensuring the regional security. Vietnam believes that the U.S., as the remaining world superpower, has a huge impact on Asian security issues simply due to its military might and power projection capabilities and because of its massive global economic leverage. Vietnam wanted to warn China by cooperating with the superior power, i.e., the U.S. that any hostile action from its side would be met by same kind of action from the U.S. side as well. Vietnam has developed the strategy of engaging the U.S. in multilateral institutions through which it wants to engage China. China has the constant fear that the U.S. has the goal of countering as can be seen from the priority given to the Asia Pacific region by the U.S. foreign policy makers. "Vietnam can subtly signal to China that assertiveness on Beijing's part will result in an incremental stepping up of relations with the U.S.," says Professor Carl Thayer (Thayer 2011:2).

During the Vietnam War, both Vietnam and China had a common interest to drive out the Americans and hence they had developed a firm friendship. But in the past few

decades their interests have come to vary. China believes the fact that strong and unified Vietnam would be a potential threat. The flourishing of Vietnam and the U.S. relations would act as a barricade against Chinese influence in the region and thus present a model for security partnership in Southeast Asia.

The joint military exercises between Vietnam and the U.S. in South China Sea has created suspicions in the minds of the Chinese. But both the countries have declared that it was only a part of friendly exercises to mark the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their diplomatic relations. Both the countries have realized the fact that the safety of navigation in the South China Sea is of utmost importance to the international community as a whole. China on the other hand views this as a step towards containment of China's right to rise peacefully in the region and in turn increases the U.S. influence in the region. Both Vietnam and the U.S. firmly hold the view that maritime disputes should be solved in accordance to the UNCLOS.

China in the recent years has started to treat this issue as a very sensitive issue and is not in favour of a multilateral resolution to it. China claims indisputable sovereignty over the entire South China Sea. Vietnam has also realized the inability of ASEAN to take a united stand against Chinese aggressive actions. There is a lack of unity among the Southeast Asian nations to stand up against the rising power of China. This leads to the participation of outside powers like the U.S. to counter the Chinese presence. As a result of the Chinese actions in the South China Sea, anti-Chinese sentiments have emerged in Vietnam. China wants to resolve the dispute bilaterally and is completely against the involvement of the U.S. "I believe the individual countries are actually playing with fire," Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai said "and I hope the fire will not be drawn to the United States. Such alarming words make it clear why the United States needs to exert its power" (The Washington Post, 27 June 2011). To reduce the suspicions from China's mind, the U.S. has not taken any steps to further annoy the former. China generally has an upper hand in the region because of the geographical distance and also because of the similar kinds of government, i.e., authoritarian type, in most of the countries in the Southeast Asia. The U.S. also has its support coming from the poor and suppressed people who see the latter as a champion of human rights (Grinter 2006: 448).

China has discarded a U.S. Senate resolution criticizing China for its "use of force" during confrontations with other countries on the South China Sea, insisting that the disputes are solely between countries in the region and are not the business of the U.S. (The Christian Science Monitor, 28 June 2011). The Spratly Island dispute – both China and Vietnam claim the resource-rich islands, which are also home to important shipping lanes – is creating hurdles in the relation between the former Communist allies and pushing Vietnam toward the U.S. Hillary Clinton has advised that the United States could play a role in promoting multilateral discussions on the South China Sea and Washington should press China to sign a code of conduct with Southeast Asian nations for resolving territorial disputes. In accordance with its neutrality on territorial disputes, the Obama administration could point out the ways in which China's claims are at odds with United Nations conventions (The Washington Post, 27 June 2011). In May 2011, Vietnamese officials accused China of damaging an oil exploration vessel as part of a campaign of harassment to assert its claim to the entire South China Sea. As a result protests against China started. China's rise leads to uncertainty in the minds of the Southeast Asian countries who wants a balance in the region. The U. S. maintains the position that all disputes should be settled peacefully, in compliance with international law, and that freedom of navigation be protected. "The U.S. presence provides the oxygen, allows them to breathe, have a central role, knowing that China has to take into account the fact that the U.S. is engaged in the region", according to Carl Thayer, a Southeast Asian analyst. Vietnam believes that China's domination of Vietnam as well as the South China Sea will not be in the interest of the U.S. Vietnam wants that the U.S. should act as a balancer and stabilizer in the region. This is so because Vietnam believes that an effective ASEAN opposition against the Chinese expansionism is not possible without the U.S. backing. The restoration of normal relations between Vietnam and the U.S. has definitely strengthened its position in the South China Sea vis-a-vis China.

The United States is dismayed about China's ever-increasing geo-economic might which may well be transformed into a military and political clout. This is why Washington is trying to resuscitate its Cold War-era dominance in the Pacific, something that is designed to contain China. By doing so, the United States hopes to implement its strategy on containing communism on the whole, Andrei Volodin of Russian foreign ministry's diplomatic academy says. (The Voice of Russia, 26 June 2012).

Both Vietnam and the U.S. have realized the importance of resolving the South China Sea issue by participating in regional organizations like the ASEAN, ADMM+, EAS, ARF, and LMI. They further reaffirmed their commitment that the maintenance of the stability and the freedom of navigation are of common interest of all nations (U.S.A Embassy, 17 June 2011). Thus it can be said that the U.S. presence in the region in the near future would be stronger as can be seen from its growing involvement in the region.

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **VIETNAM-U.S. RELATIONS: CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS**

In this chapter the main question that has been dealt here is that whereas on face of it, it appears these two countries are forging close relations politically, militarily and economically, nonetheless there are various constraints that may impose their limitations. While there has been rapid progress in many fronts still there are challenges that need to be overcome. Many U.S. officials consider Vietnam as their strategic partner in the Southeast Asia region. Vietnam-U.S. ties have blossomed since diplomatic relations were established sixteen years ago and steps to resolve issues left over from the war have formed a cornerstone of progress. While we know that Vietnam has a huge potential for growth, but still there is uncertainty in the future. While noting positive aspects in Vietnam, the U.S. points out that the country is still plagued by problems that developed during decades of war and the communist economic policies. The relation is further affected by factors such as the U.S. concerns about Vietnamese human rights record; Vietnam's suspicions regarding the U.S. goal to end the monopoly of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) through peaceful evolution; and also Vietnam's concern about upsetting its immediate neighbour China. U.S. foreign policy interest includes the promotion of human rights and democracy in Vietnam. The U.S. is very much concerned about the human rights standard in Vietnam. Vietnam is also very much opposed to the U.S. action of imposing its own values on countries with different political systems. The U.S. President Bill Clinton had clearly mentioned that "...normalization and increased contact between Americans and Vietnamese will advance the cause of freedom in Vietnam, just as it did in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union." This greatly affects the relations between both the countries (The New York Times, 12 July 1995).

Vietnam is also concerned about the changing priorities of the U.S. foreign policy. The global priorities of the U.S. keep on changing creating uncertainty in the minds of the Vietnamese. The conservative elements in the Vietnamese society still view the U.S. with suspicion. They consider that all the educational exchanges that are taking place between both the countries would undermine the socialist regime. They are



further not in favour of the fact that Vietnam and the U.S. are cosyng towards one another as this might affect its relations with their northern neighbour China. Some of the constraints which tend to disrupt the pace of the relations have been discussed in details below.

### **THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE**

Every country is very sensitive toward human rights issue and no country has a perfect record. As we know that both Vietnam and the U.S. hold different views regarding the human rights issue, religious freedom and the question of governance. The Vietnamese government's stand on the issue of human rights acts as a huge burden on the Vietnam-U.S. relations. The two countries in particular remain apart on the issue of human rights and freedom of expression for political and religious purposes. The dichotomy is due to the fact that the political systems in both the countries are different. Vietnam being a one-party authoritarian state views the human rights issue from a different perspective from that of the U.S. On the other hand, the U.S. being a democratic country believes that the spread of democracy would ultimately pave the way to global peace. Vietnam has claimed that it is trying to adjust to democracy within its one party system. But many scholars have commented that it is very unrealistic and unsustainable. Human rights issue still remain a point of contention between the two countries. Vietnam's crackdown upon political dissent remains the biggest block to establish strategic relations with the U.S. The U.S. has the goal to promote human rights standard and democracy in other countries. As a result it had urged Vietnam to remove the restrictions on fundamental freedoms and introduce political reforms.

The U.S. Government focuses on five main areas of human rights: promotion and protection of individual human rights as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including immediately releasing political prisoners; freedom of all religious denominations to practice their faith; growth of civil society, including promoting a free press, viable and independent legal institutions, and a vibrant NGO sector; and promoting respect for internationally recognized worker rights, particularly freedom of association and countering trafficking in people (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

The U.S. government has made it very clear that a development in their bilateral relations is related to the improvements made by Vietnam in human rights condition. The U.S. on its part is trying its best to promote human rights in Vietnam. The U.S.

government gets an overview of the situation through its interaction with the religious leaders in Vietnam.

The U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had said that the Vietnam's poor human rights records are an obstacle to closer ties between the two nations. Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman were explicit when they visited Hanoi in February: Vietnam "has a long laundry list of defence items it desires, [but] . . . it's not going to happen unless they improve their human rights record" (Brown 2012). Many American officials have emphasized the fact that Vietnam should take efforts to improve the human rights condition in the country only then the U.S. would consider selling it hardware. In his first major speech after assuming his post in 2005, the U.S. Ambassador Michael Marine said that there must be "tangible progress from Vietnam in the areas of human rights and religious freedom...if relations between our two countries are to continue to blossom" (Manyin 2005: 12).

The VCP has started to loosen its control and as a result they have allowed some form of personal and religious expressions. Since the time Vietnam adopted the Doi Moi reforms in 1986, Vietnam has allowed for religious freedom to its people. The Vietnamese could now follow religious practises according to their own choice. The human rights condition has also improved since the economic reforms adopted by Vietnam. In the two areas where there have been concerns regarding the minority population in the Central Highland and Northwest Highland regions, the situation has improved. The Vietnamese Prime Minister Khai had ordered the local authorities to provide normal religious facilities to the Protestant organizations that were not granted legal status until then.

But still there are incidents of human rights abuses in Vietnam. Article 69 in the Vietnamese Constitution says, "The citizen shall enjoy freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of the press and the right to be informed, and the right to assembly, form associations, hold demonstrations in accordance with the provisions of the law" (Brown 2010:328). The application of the law has been faulty. This article has been used in a way by the VCP which empowers them rather than provide protection to the citizens. The Vietnamese are denied the most basic freedoms--freedoms of speech, the press, religion, expression and assembly. The religious intolerance of the Vietnamese government could very well be seen from the large number of persecution of religious

leaders. In 2001, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Vietnam Human Rights Act. According to this act, the U.S. should stop giving non humanitarian aid to Vietnam unless the latter made concrete progress in human rights. The Vietnamese did not take this lightly. They alleged that the U.S. should not interfere in their internal matters (Stromseth 2003:9).

According to numerous accounts, the government's atrocities had increased in 2010. This was mainly because the VCP's January 2011 Party Congress was to be held. The Vietnamese government targeted specific individuals and organizations that are in favour of the institution of democratic reforms and publicly criticize government policy on sensitive issues, such as policy toward China. The number of dissident groups began to increase since the beginning of 2006. Though it is unclear whether these groups and their various goals are supported by the general Vietnamese public (Manyin 2011:14).

The U.S. had passed an act in 1998 - the International Religious Freedom Act by which it promotes religious freedom in other countries and oppose any kind of harassment on religious grounds in other countries. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) was formed whose basic duty was to monitor the religious activities in different countries and then report to the State government which in turn would then decide which countries should be included in the list of Country of Particular Concern (CPC) (Writenet Report, 2006). This Commission monitored the human rights and religious freedom situation in the country since 2001. As a result of the reports submitted by them, the State Department included Vietnam in the CPC list, mainly because of reports of worsening harassment of certain ethnic minority Protestants and Buddhists in 2004 (Manyin 2008:17). The U.S. through this basically wanted to warn Vietnam. The Vietnamese foreign minister Nyugen Dy Nien criticised the decision by saying that their decision was based on wrong information. He further wrote to the Secretary of State Collin Powell that this step would affect the bilateral relations. This hurt the self- respect of the Vietnamese and thus acted as a hurdle to the efforts taken to build a stable relation. As a result of the pressure from the U.S. government, the Vietnamese government promised to improve the human rights condition in the country especially in the Central Highlands.

In the following year an agreement was signed between both the countries with regard to religion. In accordance with the agreement, a special directive on Protestantism was issued. This allowed the Protestants to set up churches in minority areas provided that they are affiliated with registered churches. Many churches in those areas which were earlier closed down were re-opened. Vietnam freed a number of religious prisoners and also provision of registering new faiths with the government and issuing directives which prohibit forced renunciation of faith (Manyin 2005:13).

Yet the Vietnamese government still has the right to decide which religious organization and their activities are legal. Vietnam complained that even after taking efforts to improve the situation, it still remained in the CPC list in 2005. As a result, the U.S. government in 2006 declared that the human rights condition in the country has improved and thus it was removed from the CPC list. Following this declaration by the then U.S. President Bush, many religious prisoners were released and new laws were formulated which recognized the organization of different religious groups. During the Bush presidency many dissidents were released who were identified as prisoners of concern. The USCIRF, among others, has disputed the Administration's basis for the decision to remove Vietnam from the CPC list, arguing that abuses continue and that lifting the CPC label removes an incentive for Vietnam to make further improvements.

The Vietnamese believe that introducing democracy in their country would have disastrous results. They believe that stability could be brought about only through authoritarian rule while democracy may lead to chaos. They consider any form of challenge to the supremacy of the party to be illegal. This was mentioned by the Vietnamese Prime Minister Dung in his speech in 2010 where he specifically told the police "not to allow political opposition parties to be established to oppose our government and condemn the plots of outside forces" (Brown 2010:329). Since the time of Doi Moi, the press was allowed to function freely and criticise the government actions regarding issues like corruption, economic policy, nature conservation, and environmental pollution. In 2004 and 2005 Vietnam promised to abolish the forced conversion of religious faith of the people in the Central Highlands. Though the state religion in Vietnam is Buddhism, but still the Catholics and Protestants are allowed to practise their religion provided that their religion is registered under the terms of the "Legal Framework of Religion" (ibid).

But in recent times since 2008, this freedom has been curtailed. After its accession in APEC and WTO, Vietnam again started its suppression of dissidents. Many journalists who were found criticising the government actions were arrested. Later the human rights activists and religious freedom activists were put behind the bars. Strict action was taken against those in favour of political liberalization. In 2009, authorities allegedly banned anti-government remarks on blogs, a number of prominent bloggers were arrested, and several blogs with political comments reportedly were hacked and criticized by official news outlets (Open Source Center Report, 2009). Those found to support the banned Vietnamese Democracy party and other such organizations such as the Viet Tan Party were meted out with harsh treatment. Vietnam further alleged the U.S. of supporting these banned groups from outside. Since then the government control has been placed on the use of internet and other forms of electronic communication. In June 2009, Vietnamese authorities arrested human rights lawyer Le Cong Dinh, reportedly for violating article 88 of Vietnam's criminal code, "conducting propaganda against the government," which carries a sentence of upto 20 years (Manyin 2011: 14).

The Vietnamese government has meted out harsh treatment especially to those individuals and organisations that criticised the government's policy towards China. Thus, we can see that the government's tolerance for criticism has decreased over the years and there has been a marked increase in the suppression of the dissidents. With regard to religious freedom, the Vietnamese government regulates the activities of the various religious groups. The main complaint which the U.S. has is that Vietnam has still not taken much effort in implementing the revised legal system. The country has still a one-party system and any kind of opposition to the superior position of the party is not tolerated. The U.S. government on many occasions has criticised the Vietnamese government for its unnecessary interference in the religious freedom of its citizens and thus causes human rights violations. Moreover, the VCP enjoys huge support from the people because of the fact that this party played a major role behind Vietnam getting its independence. Vietnam has been in the hit list of the U.S. with regard to the issue of religious freedom.

Both the countries have tried to resolve this issue through Vietnam-U.S. annual dialogue on the issue of human rights. The annual dialogue on political and security

issues which were started in 1999 has helped better understanding between the two countries with regard to human rights situation in Vietnam. The U.S. has published annual reports on the human rights situation in Vietnam. Three reports have been published by the state government and one by the Commission on International Religious Freedom. Vietnam totally rejects the reports published by the U.S. The latter believes the report has not reported at all the achievements by the Vietnamese government in the past few years. The report is totally anti-Vietnamese and hence it creates tension and animosity between the two countries and affects the progress achieved by them. Thus, these efforts by the U.S. to promote human rights in Vietnam have actually backfired and had created an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. It is unfair and inhumane to impose sanctions on the Vietnamese people, who, although still suffering the effects of wars, are working closely and effectively with the United States in dealing with bilateral as well as global issues, and striving to become an active partner in the world community (Embassy of Vietnam, Information Bureau, 2002). The U.S. tries to seek all opportunities and make use of all avenues to persuade, cajole and compel Vietnam to improve its human rights record and to end its campaign of religious persecution. But the U.S. is also aware of the fact that putting too much pressure on Vietnam to improve its human rights record may backfire and Vietnam may get closer to China.

The annual human rights dialogue did not take place during 2003 and 2004 due to the lack of efforts on the part of the Vietnamese government to improve the human rights record. The U.S. House of Representatives passed by a vote of 410 to 1 the Vietnam Human Rights Act (H.R. 2833), to do away with any increase in non-humanitarian aid if the president did not show that the country was making “substantial progress” on human rights. It was not implemented, but it created tension between the countries (Pham 2006:410). Vietnam reacted by claiming that the U.S. was trying to infringe upon its sovereignty. The Vietnam asserted that the U.S. by linking aid with the human rights situation was creating a problem in the normalization process. The Vietnamese government asserted that they were taking steps to address the situation and they have also agreed to the fact of discussing the issue with the U.S. unlike its earlier stance on the issue. But the pressure by the U.S. has alienated many Vietnamese. They become suspicious of the U.S. intentions behind giving them aid.

The Vietnamese government has suppressed all efforts to form trade unions and has arrested the trade union leaders. But supporters of the VCP has claimed that since the time of Doi Moi, the workers in the country have been provided with more rights even though they do not have the right to organize unions. They further assert the fact, that despite this many illegal labour associations have emerged over the years. The government also very diplomatically accepted their flaws with regard to the enforcement of the labour laws. But they mention that the government is trying its best to improve the situation and it is also very sensitive towards both women and men workers. The U.S. also is trying to best to encourage the Vietnamese government to abide by the international labour standards. It is also cooperating with the latter on issues such as the freedom of association and collective bargaining, labour inspection and enforcement. The U.S. also brought up the labour issue during the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement talks in 2009.

The Vietnamese in the U.S. and in other countries have protested against the government's human rights policies. The Vietnamese American community have been trying to pressurize the U.S. government for change in Vietnam. But the results have not been impressive as the Vietnamese government has been ignoring these protests. The U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton mentioned that Vietnam and the United States have differences in the area of human rights. She has expressed her "concern about [the] arrest and conviction of people for peaceful dissent, attacks on religious groups and curbs on Internet freedom," and said that in order that the U.S. and Vietnam develop a strategic partnership then "Vietnam must do more to respect and protect its citizens' rights" (The Diplomatist, 23 May 2012).

The fact that the communist regime is going to show more tolerance for people who advocate multiparty democracy or who insist on the right to establish religious, professional or labour organizations unsanctioned by the state is minimal. These are the basic principles of the regime (Brown 2012). The Vietnamese leaders believe that it is very important to maintain the monopoly of the VCP which actually leads to stability in the country. The Communist party in Vietnam until now has shown no sign of relaxing its political hold and is very quick in suppressing any overt political criticism.

The USCIRF mentioned that Vietnam should be again included in the list of CPC. The U.S. State Department had included the country from 2004 till 2006. The Commission in its report in 2011 mentions that Vietnam still continues to detain and imprison individuals for advocacy of religious freedom. Thus, Vietnam should be labelled as the world's worst violators of human rights. Though Vietnam and the U.S. have started developing closer ties, but still the U.S. should put the condition of concrete improvements in the human rights situation and religious freedom in Vietnam.

Thus, too much pressure from the U.S. side to improve the human rights condition raises suspicions among the Vietnamese. These actions by the U.S. make them believe that the U.S. is basically interested in overthrowing the VCP from power. This creates mistrust and uncertainty in the minds of the Vietnamese about the U.S. intentions behind the normalization process.

#### **TRADE CONSTRAINTS**

There are also economic constraints in their relations. With the expansion of the economic relation, the trade disputes have also expanded between the two countries. Vietnam believes that the anti-dumping and anti-subsidy taxes on the Vietnamese goods affect its trade relations with the U.S. The main areas of dispute are clothing trade, catfish, the U.S. designation of Vietnam as a non-market economy (NME), and Vietnam's record on protecting intellectual rights, and concerns over Vietnam's currency policies (Manyin 2011:16). The U.S. on its part has offered help with regard to trade and investment. But this does not help Vietnam much since there is a lack of transparency in the decision making. In the following year, the U.S. government had imposed anti- dumping duties on the catfish exported from Vietnam. In 2001, this catfish issue dispute came up, even though they had signed the bilateral trade agreement. A bill passed by the U.S. included a provision that required only the American ictaluridae species be called catfish. This bill forced the Vietnamese to sell their catfish product as tra and basa. A domestic association, the Catfish Farmers of America, then filed an anti-dumping petition before U.S. government agencies alleging that certain Vietnamese enterprises were dumping frozen catfish fillets in the U.S. market. During that time Vietnam was declared a non-market economy. The U.S. Department of Commerce agreed with the petitioners and found that the frozen



Vietnamese catfish fillets had been dumped in the U.S. market. Thus, the U.S. International Trade Commission admitted that the dumped catfish fillets caused harm to the domestic industry. As a result, the Department of Commerce has imposed anti-dumping duties on these products ranging from 37 to 64 percent. This made the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers to declare that the U.S. wanted to basically impose economic embargo on Vietnam (Stromseth 2003:9). Vietnam on the other hand believes that the U.S. government is trying to protect its own catfish producers from competition. Vietnam also believes that the U.S. anti-dumping measure on Vietnamese shrimps is a part of its protectionist policies. The U.S. on the other hand, defends itself by claiming that these measures are necessary to protect their business and people from the dangerous business practises of the Vietnamese (Cohen and Hiebert 2003: 22).

Catfish has been a source of tension between both the countries for the past decade. Vietnam is a major exporter of fishes- basa and tra. The export of these catfishes to the U.S. has increased. But the U.S. government has raised objections regarding the export of the catfish. In 2002, the U.S. government prohibited the labelling of basa and tra as catfish. This badly affected the Vietnamese fishing industry.

There are disputes between these countries in the area of garment and textile industry. An agreement had been signed by the countries in 2001 with regard to garment and textile. According to this agreement, in the initial years 38 categories of garment and textiles would be subjected to quotas. In the latter years, the quotas would increase by seven percent for cotton products and two percent on woollen products. But due to the implementation of such policies Vietnam's domestic garment industry would be badly affected. The U.S. argued that it was necessary to protect its own garment industry (Stromseth 2003:9).

These difficulties need to be addressed so that the bilateral relations could take place smoothly. There are chances that disputes may arise over other products like footwear, furniture and electrical machinery as well (Martin 2011:1). While bilateral trade disputes have been irritants, but fortunately they have not spilled over to affect the course of bilateral relations. Also, since Vietnam has now become a member of the WTO, it has to abide by the latter's rules and thus these trade problems could be solved by the WTO legal mechanisms.

## **HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Vietnam is both a source and a victim of this problem. The two main reasons for which people are trafficked are for sexual exploitation and forced labour. Many Vietnamese are sent abroad for the purpose of working from where many are kidnapped and thus become victims of abuses and exploitation. In June 2009, the State Department issued its 9<sup>th</sup> annual report on human trafficking, Trafficking in Persons Report. The report criticised the Vietnamese government lack in its efforts to control the human trafficking and safeguards for protection of the victims. (Manyin 2011:18)

## **REFUGEE PROBLEM**

In 2001, many Montagnards living in the Central Highlands in Vietnam had started to leave the country and settle in neighbouring country Cambodia due to political unrest in the country. Most of the refugees have been resettled in the U.S, Canada, Finland and Vietnam as a result of an agreement between these countries and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2005. Earlier Vietnam did not accept the condition that the UNHCR should be allowed to visit the country to oversee the well- being of the people resettled in the country. Later it allowed the UNHCR people to enter their country and carry on with their work of monitoring the condition of the refugees (ibid.pp.19).

## **AMERICANS OF VIETNAMESE ORIGIN**

The condition of the Vietnamese Americans also posed a constraint in the path of normalization. The Vietnamese Americans generally refer to those whose fathers are American and mother Vietnamese. They started migrating in huge numbers to the U.S. after the end of the Vietnam War. This was because they were ill -treated in their own country. At that time the U.S. was considered an enemy. So they were looked down upon in Vietnam. In the U.S., they had to struggle between the two cultures, i.e., whether to follow the Vietnamese traditions or the American. They had to face the pressure of assimilation with the American culture. They also faced a problem of adjustment. They did not speak English and found the American culture to be very different from the Vietnamese. They generally faced discrimination as well by other communities in the U.S. They were scattered throughout the country. Their financial

condition also made them a victim of exploitation. As a result the school dropout rates were very high among them. This in the long run affected their employment situation as well. But over the years their position has started improving (Nyugen and Organista 2008: 79). The U.S. was very much bothered about the fact that whether these people would be able to assimilate with the American culture.

Under the ODP which was established in 1979 with the UN support to safely help these people to make it to the U.S. and other neighbouring countries mainly Cambodia. As the normalization process started, the procedures started improving. The U.S. began to realize that it was their responsibility to oversee the fact that they were properly re-settled there. Aid was made available so that they could become economically self-sufficient (ibid.pp.83). The relation between Vietnam and the U.S. from the very beginning was very important to them. They have been closely following the normalization process very closely. Some of them especially the older generation are against this normalization process. This was so because of the treatment meted out to them by the Vietnamese government. They thought that by normalizing the relations it would mean that the U.S. was indirectly supporting the communist government there. The newer generation has moved on and they now represent a successful story of immigration. They have now become important players in the American politics as well as in the economy. They now have a voice in the matters relating to the normalization of relations with Vietnam.

### **AMERICAN PRIORITIES**

There always remains a risk that Vietnam being a very small country might be neglected by the U.S. because of the latter's regional and global priorities. This might affect their bilateral relations. Since the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks, top priority is given by the U.S. foreign policy to the issue of war on terrorism and the counter proliferation efforts. Thus, Vietnam stands much lower in the U.S. foreign policy list. Also, in the U.S. Asia policy, Vietnam comes much later after China, Japan and South Korea. Among Southeast Asian countries, the U.S. gives more importance to Indonesia compared to Vietnam (Te 2010). Vietnam's significance is limited to the U.S. calculations regarding China. Thus Vietnam believes that once the U.S. concerns regarding China shifts then the Vietnam –U.S. relation may also suffer. So Vietnam

also avoids too much reliance on the U.S and thus wants to maintain a balance between the two superpowers- China and the U.S. (Lan 2001:11).

Since the time of the War, Vietnam has diversified its foreign policy. As a result of this Vietnam and U.S. have been able to establish relations with each other. But this has also acted as a barrier in their relation. This is so because Vietnam has always claimed that their military ties with the U.S. is a part of their effort to establish military ties with other countries like India, Russia and China. In a 2010 speech talking about the Vietnamese defence policy at an international gathering in Singapore, Vietnamese Defence Minister Phung Quang Thanh stated that Vietnam “does not advocate joining any military alliances, taking sides with one country against another, or giving permission to any foreign countries to have military bases in Vietnam” (Bellacqua 2012:27).

#### **WAR LEGACY ISSUES**

Since the time of the Vietnam War the legacy issues have haunted the normalization process. The Vietnam War has created divisions in the American society which still creates a block in the minds of the Americans towards the Vietnamese. The American defeat has created a trauma in their minds as a result of which they are very apprehensive towards the Vietnamese. On the other hand, the impact on the War on the Vietnamese has been greater when compared to the Americans. The number of casualties on Vietnamese side had far exceeded that of the American side. The War led to the emergence of the huge refugee problem in the country which still exists.

The Vietnam-U.S. relations have been affected by the legacy of the Vietnam War which was one of the bloodiest wars of the last century. Though both countries have moved on, but still the past haunts their relations and thus it might pose a problem for them in the future. There are still many Americans who are against the normalization of relations with Vietnam. It had a profound effect on the American psyche and the people. There are still traces of mutual suspicions between them. Thus, it requires much more effort from both the countries to take the relationship forward.

One of the issues that act as a major obstacle is the issue of Agent Orange. This issue has been a very sensitive issue for both the countries. More than thirty years have passed, but still relations between the two countries are affected by the U.S.’s use of

the chemical Agent Orange. For the last 30 years, this issue has generally been pushed to the background of bilateral discussions as other issues are considered to be more important by the United States and Vietnam. This has been because of the trade opportunities which Vietnam saw coming from engaging with the U.S.

During the Vietnam War between 1962- 1971, the U.S. government through the method of aerial spraying, sprayed herbicides on almost five million acres of forest and also destroyed the crops. These herbicides were in fact very poisonous and which causes cancer, diabetes, nerve and heart diseases in people who are directly exposed to it as well it can be transferred through them to the next generation. An estimated 4.5 million Vietnamese and a portion of US military personnel who served in Vietnam were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides (Brown 2010: 328). The U.S. government has for many years asserted that the chemicals used by them were completely harmless and they further argued that Agent Orange helped save many Americans by removing the forest cover and thus denying the opportunity to the North Vietnamese to attack ruthlessly. A court in New York had rejected the case brought by the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin (VAVA) against US chemical corporations. According to the judge, the U.S. enterprises cannot be held responsible for the spraying of herbicides by the US government. As a result, the effects of the US army's chemical weapons in Vietnam are still not being dealt properly. Washington rejected complete support or assistance to solve these special problems. The impact of the spraying missions has been completely ignored for a long time (Waibel and Matthias 2005). Lack of initiative taken by the Vietnamese government had put the issue of Agent Orange to the backyard. As a result for a long time the issue of paying compensation and providing legal help to the victims did not come up (Palmer 2004:4). But in the recent times as a result of the pressures put by the NGOs, the Vietnamese government has come forward and given the long due recognition and compensation to the victims. Yet, there are many affected people who have not received the benefits of the compensation programme (Palmer 2003:274).

As the relationship has improved and matured, and with most other wartime legacy issues presently resolved, the issue of Agent Orange has been taken up for bilateral discussions. In the recent years, the people of Vietnam and the Vietnamese government have become increasingly concerned about the issue of Agent Orange. A

lack of political determination on the part of governments and accessible judicial forums for individuals has resulted in limited legal action by the government as well as the individuals for the compensation of victims (ibid. pp.268).

According to various estimates, the U.S. military sprayed approximately 11 million-12 million gallons of Agent Orange over nearly 10% of then-South Vietnam between 1961 and 1971. One scientific study estimated that between 2.1 million and 4.8 million Vietnamese were directly exposed to Agent Orange. Vietnamese advocacy groups claim that there are over three million Vietnamese suffering from serious health problems caused by exposure to the dioxin in Agent Orange (Manyin 2011:21).

During the presidency of George W. Bush, the government became more tolerant towards the problem compared to the previous government. President Bush's November 2006 meeting with then President Nguyen Minh Triet, the two governments issued a joint statement that included the sentence, "The United States and Vietnam also agreed that further joint efforts to address the environmental contamination near former dioxin storage facilities would make a valuable contribution to the continued development of their bilateral relations" (Martin 2009:2). The joint statement signalled that Vietnam was appreciating the U.S. Government's efforts to increase development assistance to it and urged the latter to increase humanitarian assistance through cooperation and continued assistance to Vietnamese with disabilities (ibid).

The U.S. government has shown a great enthusiasm to assist on some aspects of the issue. However, the Vietnamese government and people would like to see the United States to take more effort to remove dioxin from their country and provide help for victims of Agent Orange. Many Vietnamese claim that there are over three million Vietnamese that are suffering from numerous health problems due to exposure to Agent Orange. They claim that this chemical has caused numerous genetic disorders in the areas sprayed. In the recent years various Vietnamese NGOs are pressurizing the government to pay heed to the victims of the Agent Orange. Their demand is that the government should take steps to remove the harmful dioxin from the environment and thus provide better medical facilities to deal with the victims. On the other hand, the Vietnamese government is very apprehensive in taking up the issue as it might affect the pace of their bilateral relation with the U.S. which would in turn affect the Vietnamese economy that is heavily depended on the U.S. The Vietnamese

government has for a long time wanted American assistance. Though the US has provided much scientific and technical support in the past, but it has also continued to reject any legal liability to provide assistance. It has also often questioned Vietnam's assertions concerning the environmental and health problems due to Agent Orange and dioxin (Jha 2009:4). This results in a growing possibility of friction between the two governments over this issue. Even during the visit of Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet to US in 2007, the issue was brought up for discussion. Some Americans in Vietnam fear that the legacy of Agent Orange is overshadowing the new friendship between the two countries (Martin 2009).

Agent Orange has long been a sensitive issue for both countries and we have differed over the lasting impact of the defoliant on Vietnam. I am pleased to say that we are now engaged in practical, constructive cooperation. Both the United States and Vietnam agree that the health of the Vietnamese people and the safety of its environment will be vital for Vietnam's future. With the support of additional funds approved by Congress in FY 2007 and FY 2009, we are moving ahead with collaborative efforts to help Vietnam address environmental contamination and related health concerns, says U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel (Testimony of US Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel before the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment Committee on Foreign Affairs, June 4, 2009).

Vietnamese academics like Professor Nguyen Trong Nhan have criticized the fact that the efforts are too late and too little.

He states, Vietnam can't solve the problem on its own. Hanoi helped the US military to track down remains of MIAs (US servicemen missing in action), and we asked them to reciprocate with humanitarian aid for victims of Agent Orange.... American victims of Agent Orange will get up to \$1500 a month. However most Vietnamese families affected receive around 80,000 Dong a month (just over \$5 dollars) in government support for each disabled child (Cohn 2009).

Even some of the western scholars are in favour of the Vietnamese on the issue of Agent Orange.

One such professor, Prof. Marjorie Cohn states, that Several treaties the United States has ratified require an effective remedy for violations of human rights. It is time to make good on Nixon's promise and remedy the terrible wrong the U.S. government perpetrated on the people of Vietnam. Congress must pass legislation to compensate the Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange as it did for the U.S. Vietnam veteran victims. Our government must know that it cannot continue to use weapons that target and harm civilians. Indeed,

the U.S military is using depleted uranium in Iraq and Afghanistan, which will poison those countries for incalculable decades (Palmer 2007: 172).

The areas which are of greater concern are the sites which were the former base of the U.S. during the war and these were later re-inhabited by local people. Many families have been relocated from those areas, but U.S. charge d'affaires Virginia Palmer said "I think it's fair to say that dioxin contamination and Agent Orange was one of the single most neuralgic issues in the US-Vietnam relationship" (BBC News, 17 June 2011). Finally, after so many years since the Vietnam War, the U.S. has admitted that the chemicals used by them were toxic substances. As a result of this both the countries have now taken up the issue of clearing up the sites. The U.S. government for this purpose had allotted around three million dollar in 2007 and this amount have been increased in the following years. Thus, both the countries have adopted collaborative approach to address the environment and health-related issues in Vietnam since 2001. They have taken the collaboration beyond the regular government level talks. A U.S.-Vietnam dialogue group on Agent Orange has been set up. Along with that a U.S. - Vietnam joint advisory committee has been set up.

But still despite all the efforts taken by both the countries, this issue can adversely affect their relations in the near future. This issue in the recent years has emerged as one of the top concerns among the Vietnamese. The U.S. should carry on its role of trying to help Vietnam to reduce the effects of Agent Orange. Otherwise, it would negatively affect the U.S. relations with Vietnam and also its image as a soft power in the region. The fear that the war legacy issues would disrupt the ongoing engagement between the two countries has been replaced by the mutual trade benefits that both the countries enjoy. But the risk that neglecting these issues might disrupt the pace of the cooperation remains. The constraint has somewhat been removed with the U.S. accepting to take responsibility for the effects of Agent Orange and giving assistance to Vietnam as well. The Vietnamese government also on its part has welcomed this move of the U.S. government. As a result of this, the image of the U.S. as an aggressor is changing in the minds of the Vietnamese people.



## **POW/MIA ISSUE**

This issue acts as a huge hurdle which needs to be overcome in order to ensure the normalization in their relations. Even after more than fifteen years of their establishment of relations, there are more than two thousand Americans who had participated in the Indochina War are missing. As for the Vietnamese, thousands of them are still missing. From the time the War was over the U.S. government has been pressurizing the latter to account for the POW/MIA. Normalization of relations also started when Vietnam decided to cooperate with the former on the issue of MIA/POW. For this the Vietnamese government has allowed the U.S. access to the records and archives. The U.S. also reciprocated by allowing access to their records related to the POW/MIA issue. But still the U.S. complains that the Vietnamese government needs to be more cooperative. On the other hand, the Vietnamese government also complain about the help received from the U.S. side. Some of the Americans allege that the Vietnamese have not done much with regard to this issue. They are also very doubtful about the quality of the reports presented by the Vietnamese even though most of them are more or less accurate. In 2010 both governments came to an agreement that the U.S. would provide one million dollar to Vietnam which would be used to locate the missing Vietnamese in the Vietnam War (Manyin 2011:22). While on the other hand the Vietnamese accuse the American MIA activists of creating misunderstanding between both the countries. Some of the Americans are of the opinion that there are hardly any living POWs from the Indochina War. But the MIA families still believe that there is hope. But over the years both the countries have come to appreciate each other's efforts. Even though they formally established relations in 1995, but their cooperation on POW/MIA issue had started much earlier. In fact, they claim that this issue has been the base of the establishment of normal relations. But still these legacies of the War can act as a hurdle and slow down the pace of their bilateral relations.

Other than these constraints there are other obstacles as well. There is a huge gap between the economic conditions of both the countries. This also acts as a hurdle in the path to normalization. Vietnam is trying to adjust economic liberalization with political authoritarianism. But still it has a long way to go. The huge economic gap may have adverse impact on their economic cooperation. The differences in their

political system also create tensions in the relations. The U.S. has always very clear about its goal of spreading democracy and American values in other countries including Vietnam. This has not been liked by the Vietnamese who still holds on the concept of one party rule (Lan 2001:10).

In the bilateral relation, the U.S. has from the very beginning given importance to the issue of accounting for the missing Americans in the War. The U.S. is basically interested to re-engage itself in the Asia- Pacific region. Thus, normalizing relations with Vietnam would serve this purpose. But on the other hand, the Vietnamese are more interested in the economic cooperation. They want to become a modern and industrializing nation and for that they require help from the U.S. (ibid.pp. 11)

The normalization of relations between them has not brought about desired changes in the human rights situation and religious freedom in Vietnam. In fact, the situation is becoming worse day by day. There are still cases of individual being arrested for practising independent religious practises. The communities who are mostly targeted are the United Buddhist Church of Vietnam, independent Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai groups; ethnic minority Protestants in the Central Highlands and northwest provinces; and the ethnic Khmer Buddhists in the Mekong Delta (The Diplomatist, 23 May 2012). The human rights issue acts as a constraint to the normalization process, but it is also a decisive issue that they have to deal with. The Congress along with the Vietnamese Americans has been from the very beginning criticising Vietnam's human rights record. As a result of which they have linked aid to the improvement of human rights record there. Vietnam defends itself by declaring that these reports by the U.S. are based on incorrect information about the situation in the country. It further claimed that both the countries share a mutual concern regarding human rights. Though it's been a long time since the Vietnam War ended yet its impression is still fresh in the minds of those who lived in that period.

Holding on to the past does not serve any purpose. The once war torn country Vietnam is making huge strides to leave behind its troubled past. Even though the U.S. wants to take the relation to the next step, but Vietnam is generally avoiding too much dependence on the former. As long as these hurdles remain, these countries will find it difficult to take their relationship forward. The normalization between them took a long time as there were a lot of complications involved. The U.S. was defeated

for the first time and that too at the hands of a small developing nation that did not possess modern weapons as well. The Americans had a hard time in accepting the reality. Vietnam also on the other hand, considered the former to be an enemy of the communist government. They had overcome a lot of obstacles to re-establish the relationship. In the future also there is hope that they would in a similar manner be able to resolve whatever disputes that remain. The leadership in both the countries have become matured enough to handle the sensitive issues in such a way that they do not affect the relationship. They give more emphasis on those areas where there are less complications and very subtly dealt with the sensitive issues. They have been able to move beyond the suspicions towards each other. The U.S. in order to re-enter the region has made many concessions with regard to Vietnam. But in the recent time, due to the pressure from the Congress, the U.S. has started giving attention to Vietnam's human rights record.

The outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam had made it very clear that any progress in the military ties would definitely depend on an improvement in Vietnam's human rights situation. The U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other top level U.S. officials have time and again mentioned that the progress in human rights is very necessary to build closer bilateral relations. Agent Orange has been described as one of the last hurdles in the Vietnam- U.S. relations is now worth over almost 15 billion U.S. dollar in two way trade. The current leaders in both the countries do not want to make this issue a hurdle in the bilateral relation. But there is a huge pressure from the NGOs and the media. But the situation is not entirely gloomy. The U.S. government in 2007 had allotted around three million dollars for the purpose of clean up in badly affected areas. Professor Thayer says that "there is a potential unspoken linkage between the U.S. addressing the issue of Agent Orange and a gradual improved security defence ties with Vietnam. The Agent Orange issue gives the U.S. a possible avenue on the Vietnamese political system and society at large" (Inter Press Service News Agency, 23 March 2009).

The human rights activists are of the opinion that since Vietnam and the U.S. are getting closer, so the latter is not doing enough to highlight the free speech violations in Vietnam. They believe that the U.S. should put more pressure on Vietnam which would result in the latter freeing its political prisoners and respect the freedom of

speech and expression. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) report Vietnam arrests anyone who questions the government's policies or raises their voice for democratic opposition to one party rule. According to HRW 2012 report, writers Nyugen Van Hai, Phan Thanh Hai and Ta Phong Tan were arrested on charges for propaganda against the state (Human Rights Watch World Report 2012). This incident highlights the pitiable condition of the Vietnamese. Thus, they are in favour of the U.S. putting pressure on Vietnam to bring about reforms.

But one thing can be said that hurdles and obstacles are there and will remain in any relations. These obstacles have not been able to do away with the positive drive in the bilateral relationship. It is now upon them to make more effort to overcome these hurdles and move forward with their relation. The relationship is still in the initial stage and through mutual trust and confidence these countries will be able to take forward this relation. There are a lot of opportunities lying ahead which would help them to cooperate. The motivation of both the countries also is an indication of the fact that there is a chance of further growth in their relationship. While the Americans want that there should be substantial progress on the human rights issue, even Vietnam had declared that it wanted to build "a strong and prosperous country and a just, democratic and civilized society" (Thayer 2010).

The very first thing to need to do is to develop mutual understanding. It was due to the lack of understanding on the part of the U.S. that Vietnam sided with the Soviet Union and China against the former led to the War. They misunderstood the nationalist spirit of the Vietnamese. It is very important that both these countries be aware of and be appreciative of their culture, history and political system. It would help them understand each other's views regarding the human rights situation or the legacies of the War. The U.S. should also try not to interfere in the internal affairs of Vietnam. This would help remove the suspicions from the minds of the Vietnamese about the U.S. intentions. The relationship is now on a positive track. So the need to discuss the obstacles is required so that in the future they do not become a stumbling block in the path of normalization.

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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Since 1975, these countries have taken every initiative they can to rapprochement. A detailed discussion has been made of the different areas where cooperation has taken place be it – diplomatic, economic, military, educational and cultural ties. An examination of the history of the Vietnam –U.S. engagement reveals that three major incidents had helped develop the relation along positive lines -the end of Cold War, resolution of the Kampuchea problem and the economic reforms adopted by Vietnam. The geo-strategic considerations played a very important role in the transition of the relationship from confrontation to cooperation. Once the Cold War ended, Vietnam stopped getting aid from its principal ally, i.e., Soviet Union. Vietnam also had to face the economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. due to intervention in Cambodia by the former. Thus, in those circumstances Vietnam had no other options left, but to withdraw from Cambodia. But thaw was not achieved immediately. The U.S. stressed on the issue of POW/MIA and even linked it to the normalization of relation. The U.S. declared that Vietnam was not taking much initiative to find out about the missing people. This delayed the normalization process. The reforms undertaken by Vietnam to bring about the economic transformation changed the U.S. perception towards it. The business community in the U.S. put pressure on the government to normalize relations with Vietnam. The latter also thought it would benefit them to establish diplomatic relations as it would change its image of a failed state to that of a modern state interested in cooperating with other states. Thus, they signed the BTA in 2001. This was followed by the historic visit of the U.S. President Bill Clinton to Vietnam.

The normalization process served Vietnam's purpose of saving its economy as the U.S. became a saviour to its war torn economy. It gained access to the former's markets, technology, services. This in turn helped in the modernization of Vietnam. Moreover, the ASEAN membership of Vietnam in 1995 basically strengthened its position to bargain with the U.S. It acts as a shield to Vietnam from the U.S. condemnation of its human rights record. The U.S. on the other hand benefits from

the fact that Vietnam provides a huge market for its goods. It used the pretext of normalizing relations with Vietnam to re-engage in the region and counter the Chinese presence there.

Positive changes have taken place in the different areas of cooperation. These countries in the recent years have taken their cooperation to new areas like aviation. The Civil Aviation Authority of Vietnam and the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam have been holding several meetings to establish a working group for bilateral aviation cooperation. This would provide opportunities and further encourage trade relations through bilateral agreements. The U.S. has promised to provide Vietnam with aviation technology and infrastructure. There has been a considerable warming up of relations this year as is evident from the defence exchanges, nuclear cooperation between them. They have expanded their cooperation in areas such as human rights, environment protection, health, education, non- proliferation and counter-terrorism. Multilaterally they have a common strategic interest of maintaining peace and stability in the region. The U.S. is assisting the Vietnamese to modernize its military by helping it to improve the infrastructure. They have successfully been able to remove the reservations in military relations.

They have a common interest that of peaceful environment in the Southeast Asia. It would help Vietnam to concentrate on its domestic front. The rapport which the Southeast Asian nations share with the U.S. differs, but they are united in welcoming America's engagement in the region to maintain regional stability. The maritime Southeast Asian nations especially are cautious regarding the increasing Chinese naval power. Vietnam's military cooperation with the U.S. is mainly propelled by the intention of both the countries to negate the Chinese domination in the South China Sea. China has been for the past few years trying to dominate the South China Sea which apart from being a very vital sea route is also rich in oil. The U.S. as well as the Southeast Asian nations has the same aim to keep the South China Sea open to all nations. Thus, it can be seen that both Vietnam and the U.S. are trying to diplomatically deal with China.

There are some hurdles that are yet to be overcome. Whereas it seems that these countries are forging close relations politically, militarily and economically nonetheless there are various constraints that impose their limitation. The U.S.

criticises Vietnam's human rights condition and Vietnam has reservation regarding the U.S. intention for a regime change in Vietnam. The U.S. has finally taken the responsibility for the damage done by the Agent Orange. The differences over trade relations have also been discussed. The issue of POW/MIA also remains a hurdle in the path of normalization. The growing ties between them have also raised the concern of many human rights activists. They fear that the U.S. might neglect Vietnam's worsening human rights record in order to take forward the relation. Though Vietnam was placed in the list of the CPC in 2004, but soon it was removed from the list to ease out the tension before the visit of the U.S. President Bush to Vietnam to attend the APEC meeting in 2006. The U.S. has always spoken about democracy, open society and open economy. At the same time it neglects the crackdown against political dissent in Vietnam. Thus, they are ignoring the issue of human rights violations due to their larger concern about the Chinese assertiveness. Although putting Vietnam back again to the CPC list is not a solution. This would actually give advantage to those who are against the normalization process. The Obama administration now has to address the issue of human rights abuses. It has to adjust its policies of democracy promotion with that of normalizing relations with Vietnam. These two can sometimes become contradictory to each other. How the war legacy issues act as a hurdle in the relationship has been analyzed. In fact the whole research brings out the need to address these remaining hurdles. Vietnam is concerned about the U.S. condition of not selling military hardwares until it does not improve its human rights condition. They believe that the U.S. by putting pressure on human rights poses a threat to internal security. But Vietnam cannot prohibit the U.S. from doing so as it might affect the ongoing progress in bilateral relations. It has understood the need to discuss these issues with the U.S. and sort out the differences.

The study began with the research on two hypotheses. Firstly, the geo- strategic considerations have been the principal drivers of remarkable shift behind the Vietnam- U.S. relations. Secondly, strong Vietnam- U.S. relations will greatly impact on regional security. In the preceding chapters, while dealing with various aspects of Vietnam –U.S. relations, the hypotheses have been successfully proved.

The first chapter proves the first hypothesis. Vietnam because of its geographical position was of huge importance to the U.S. During the Cold War period, the

importance of the latter to the U.S. had reduced. This was so because of the importance given to China which had helped the former against the Soviet Union. But in the recent years the relation between China and the U.S. has become somewhat adversarial, and the importance of Vietnam has renewed to the U.S. strategic calculations. Vietnam has thus become an important factor in the U.S. strategy. The importance that is given to the security cooperation by both the countries as compared to the other areas of cooperation indicates to the fact that the geo-strategic considerations are the driving force in their relation.

The U.S. removed its forces completely from the Southeast Asian region after the Cold War ended. Since that time there was pressure on the government to take efforts to normalize relations with Vietnam. It realized that Vietnam was taking steps to reform its out dated socialistic economy. So it thought it was the right time to normalize its relations with Vietnam.

Vietnam also started realizing that it needed to undergo reforms which in turn would help it to establish relations with the Western countries. As a result the Sixth National Party Congress of Vietnam adopted Doi Moi through which efforts were made to modernize the economy. It realized that the normalization of relations with the U.S. helped it to diversify its foreign relations. The neighbouring countries started to take notice of Vietnam. They also showed interest to establish relations with it. Thus, rapprochement with the U.S. helped to change its image to an emerging modern nation. As a result foreign investments started pouring in. Vietnam needed the foreign investments to develop its new economy. The normalization of relations with the U.S. helped Vietnam to develop relations with the other Western countries. As a result Vietnam was able to expand its foreign relations with other countries apart from the communist countries with which it had relations from the time it became independent.

The whole research draws light to the fact that these countries have moved on successfully from the past hostilities. After the U.S. President Clinton visited Vietnam in 2001, it was followed by the regular visit of heads of the state in office from both the countries. Apart from it, there have also been regular visits by high- level official to discuss security, economic and other important issues. This has helped in better understanding of each other's stand on various issues. The people in both the countries also have welcomed the normalization of relations as they have come to see



the positive aspects associated with it. There is a huge demand for the U.S. goods in Vietnam. The U.S. has been taking effort to understand the Vietnamese culture which helps them deal with the Vietnamese Americans in a better way. Over the years the Vietnamese American community has organized themselves and they take an active interest in the normalization process. The U.S. Congress and the Vietnamese Americans respectively have thus played their role in convincing the government about the advantages in re-engagement with the U.S. Both the countries realized that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is tendency of interdependence among the countries. The isolationist policy of the World War period was of no use now. Thus, these countries thought that there was no point in taking forward the animosity.

The U.S. has realized the growing importance of Southeast Asia in the future. So the rapprochement with Vietnam provided it with an opportunity to maintain its presence in the region. It had withdrawn its forces from the region after the end of Cold War. So it needed an opportunity to re-engage in this region. The strategic importance of Vietnam has increased over the years. It became a member of WTO in 2007 with the U.S. backing. Its membership in APEC and ASEAN has increased its importance significantly. Vietnam also has the chairmanship of ASEAN. These forums have given it an opportunity to assert its position in the international sphere. The Vietnamese economy has also been rising over the years. The U.S. also has a huge strategic interest in normalizing relations with Vietnam that is one of the populous countries in the region.

The second chapter proves the second hypothesis i.e., strong Vietnam- U.S. relations will greatly impact on regional security. The maritime dispute in the region has brought the two countries closer. The U.S. presence in the region brings about regional stability. The normalization of relations with Vietnam has given the former an opportunity to stay in the region. The Southeast Asian nations thought that in the beginning of the new century, the U.S. had put this region to the back burner in their foreign policy list. But things began to change with the normalization of relations with Vietnam. Vietnam with the help of the U.S. counter balances the Chinese influence in the region to protect its strategic interest in the South China Sea. The U.S. is also interested in maintaining the free passage here. Thus, the sovereignty disputes over the South China Sea has emerged as a major point of convergence for both the

countries as they try to counter balance the growing military strength of China and its assertive behaviour in the region.

The rise of China has made it necessary for the U.S. to increase its soft power in the region. For this it has to assure Vietnam of its commitment towards the region. It also has to stop forcing upon its views on Vietnam. They have started coordinating their activities and increased their government to government interaction over the years. Vietnam has undergone huge transformation over the years especially economic development and this has increased the importance of Vietnam. There is a new momentum in the relation which these countries should maintain. The U.S. participation in the region with regard to maintaining regional security at Vietnam's initiative has been welcomed by the other Southeast Asian nations as well. The U.S. also on its part has promised them of its commitment towards the regional stability. As a result the Southeast Asian nations are in favour of growing ties between Vietnam and the U.S. Thus, Vietnam-U.S. relations have a positive effect on the regional security. It has led to the increase in the defence cooperation to counter the Chinese presence in the region. There have been several high level visits between them to discuss the security issues in the region. The U.S. navy has been providing training to their Vietnamese counterpart. They have been cooperating on various multilateral forums to resolve the South China Sea problem. The U.S. pressure brought China to resolve the problem multilaterally. The efforts made by the U.S. to resolve the problem creates goodwill in the minds of Vietnamese. It thus helps remove the suspicions from their mind. It is very clear from the Chinese actions that it is interested to dominate the region. Vietnam has realized that its friendship with the U.S. is the most effective way to resolve the regional security issues. Thus, the growing ties between Vietnam and the U.S. definitely influence the regional security.

The Southeast Asian region is a very dynamic region and is surrounded by China in the north, India on the west and Japan and Korea near its doorstep. So it has to face the challenge of safeguarding its sovereignty and independence. The U.S. also has an interest in ensuring that these countries remain independent and are not dominated by their neighbouring nation, China. The Southeast Asian nations consider Vietnam as the key player who can increase the U.S. presence in the region and help maintain a distance between China and Southeast Asia.

In the past few years, the focus has shifted to Asia especially with the rise of China. Thus, the U.S. wanted to re-enter this region and strengthen its position there. The U.S. maintains its presence in the region to prevent the Southeast Asian nations to tilt towards the Chinese sphere of influence. China is an existential problem for Vietnam. China does not favour close relations between Vietnam and the U.S. On the other hand, it is in the strategic interest of the U.S. that Vietnam becomes independent. The constant changes in government and political instability affects the U.S. interests in the region. Vietnam is suspicious about China's intentions and thus uses its close relations with the U.S. to counterbalance the former's domination. The U.S. favours Vietnam over China as the former does not pose any threat to its security. China has the potential to challenge the U.S. global position.

The study establishes that it is in the interest of Southeast Asian countries that the Vietnam-U.S. relations keep on strengthening. This would keep the U.S. hooked to this region which would help maintain the regional stability. This serves the U.S. interest as well. The U.S. does not want China to dominate the region as this region has important sea lanes. The U.S. presence definitely prevents China from taking any outright threatening position there. Thus, the Southeast Asian countries have the guarantee that both powers would balance each other. As a result of which confrontation can be avoided. So they are in favour of the expanding cooperation between Vietnam and the U.S.

Vietnam should contribute to the strengthening of the ASEAN which would enable them to counter the growing Chinese power. Vietnam is well equipped to lead the ASEAN with regard to the China challenge. Since ancient times it has been fighting the Chinese invasion and repelling off the Sino threat has given it an advantage over the other countries in the ASEAN. The U.S. also wants that Vietnam cooperates with other neighbouring nations like Japan, India, Australia and South Korea to counter China. The Southeast Asian countries also are in favour of the growing ties between them. Vietnam has over the years shown its commitment towards the regional stability and its capacity for leadership.

The rapprochement between Vietnam and the U.S. is on a positive direction. They celebrated their fifteenth anniversary of normalization of relations in 2010. Changes in their political structures have been made so that it does not pose any obstacle in the

path of normalization of relations. They have successfully been able to make the transition from confrontation to cooperation. They have also overcome the ideological differences between them. Convergence of interests have further provided them with an opportunity to forget about their past and focus on their present relationship. This indicates that they have come a long way since the time of the Vietnam War. The bilateral relations are in a favourable position with the U.S. being Vietnam's largest export market and third largest trade partner.

But the U.S. needs to handle the fact that the Vietnamese are still not convinced about the former's commitment to the region. They still believe that the U.S. considers this region to be of low priority. The location of Vietnam and the role that it has played in the global and regional matters especially during its term as a non- permanent member in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2008-09 clearly indicates that it deserves high priority in the U.S. foreign policy.

At last the study sums up the work by stressing on the fact that both Vietnam and the U.S. have come a long way from the time of being suspicious about each other. They have achieved considerable success in a short span of time. The common strategic interests have so far have been the principal driving force behind the rapid development of Vietnam- U.S. relations in the recent times. The issue of human rights, legacies of the War and other such constraints will remain to pose difficulty in their relation. Neglecting the human rights condition in Vietnam by the U.S. would in the long run affect the relationship. The postponement of addressing the hurdles might affect the relationship in the future. The tactful handling of the obstacles will further lead to a more comprehensive relationship. The China factor will continue to bring these two countries closer. The Southeast Asian nations want the U.S. to continue to play its role of a regional balancer.

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