

# **“Nation—Building In Vietnam. 1975-1985”**

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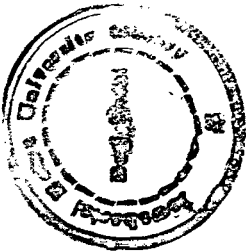
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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled "Nation-Building in Vietnam: 1975-1985" submitted by Ms. Dakshita Das is in partial fulfillment of six credits out of a total requirement of twenty-four credits for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for the M.Phil. degree of this University or any other University. This is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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TO MY PARENTS FOR WHAT THEY ARE

and

TO MOUINA, THAT SHE MAY LEARN FROM THEM

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## **PREFACE**

## PREFACE

The story of Vietnam is an interesting study of the indomitable will of a country to survive against all odds. What caught my eye in the pursuit of this country's history was not as much the brave struggle of its people to re-establish a united nation but their struggles in the later period, i.e. after unification had been achieved. In Vietnam, the revolution did not conclude with the initial triumph over the Saigon regime. The period that followed has been one of severe challenge. Politically, power had to be consolidated and the lingering forces of the previous regime destroyed. Society had to be transformed from a wartime to a peacetime footing, and the population persuaded to accept the revolutionary leadership and its programme for the future. With the U.S. presence removed, South Vietnam had to learn to wean itself from chronic reliance on foreign aid. Refugees had to be rehabilitated and jobs found for the millions of urban unemployed persons.

Beyond such immediate concerns lay more complex long-range problems of ideological remoulding and

unification with the North. South Vietnam had to be transformed from a feudal and semi-capitalist economic structure to a socialist one. The industrial and commercial sectors had to be brought under state control and the rural economy placed under collective leadership. The weeds of the bourgeois ideology had to be rooted out and the seeds of a new socialist culture planted. In sum, preparations had to be made for the assimilation of the South with the DRV so that finally the two regions could advance forward into communism.

Some processes of this nation-building were accomplished with ease and others became, and continue as problems. Indeed, portents soon appeared that the building of a prosperous and peaceful socialist Vietnam would be as complicated as, and present perhaps even more intractable problems than the struggle to seize power.

My efforts have been very humble and my understanding very simplistic. It would have been more so had I not had such a sympathetic and tireless guide in Professor Parimal Kumar Das. My heartfelt thanks to

him. I would also like to thank Dr. B.D. Arora and Dr. Ganganath Jha for all their assistance and help. Special credit is also due to the staff of the Centre and to Smt. Jaya R. Aiyer to have typed this dissertation.

My family, in particular, my parents deserve special mention for all their encouragement which helped this dissertation bear fruit. My thanks are also due to Sudhā for all his help and lastly to Swarna for the use of her typewriter and many other kind of assistance.

*Dakshita Das.*

- DAKSHITA DAS



## CHAPTER ONE

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

While offering a synthesis of Vietnamese history, a scholar had once suggested that as a nation, Vietnam has been established three times: once during the prehistoric age, culminating in the Dong-son civilization; in the tenth century when the Chinese influence was removed from Vietnam; and now, again, in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> It is with the establishment of Vietnam as a nation in the twentieth century that we concern ourselves, in particular, the years and efforts of nation-building, after 1975, of united Vietnam.

The starting point of national reconstruction at this point of time were the efforts to wield back the country into a single political unit and thereby remove the artificial divide created by the Geneva Agreement. "The goal of unification, one Vietnam, became an objective as soon as it became a problem

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1 Keith Weller Taylor, The Birth of Vietnam (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983), p.1.

at the 1954 Geneva Conference. Not liberation of the South, nor a revolution in the society there but unification alone was the undeviating purpose until it was achieved nearly twenty years later".<sup>2</sup>

In considering the Vietnamese idea of unification, it is necessary to distinguish between ethnic identification and national unity. The Party's drive for unification was not in the modern political meaning of say, Italy or Germany in the nineteenth century or in another sense, the American Civil War, but was a promodern expression of a single identity.<sup>3</sup>

Deriving from this in the Vietnamese context it becomes necessary to distinguish between nation-making and nation-building. We must understand that Vietnam as a nation existed since the very evolution of the country, ethnically, it is a homogenous society comprising in the main of the Vietnamese who form 85 per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup> This ethnic cohesiveness

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2 Douglas Pike, History of Vietnamese Communism: 1925-1976 (Stanford, California, 1978), p.117.

3 Douglas, Pike., Ibid.

4 See, William J. Duiker, Vietnam: A Nation in Revolution, (Boulder, Colorado, 1983), p.4. He also states that the Vietnamese are a lowland people who inhabit the major river deltas and the coastal plain.

contributed to the national oneness of the peoples of this country. "The sense of national identity led to various resistance movements, at first against the Chinese<sup>5</sup> and then against the French".<sup>6</sup> The artificial boundaries which sought to create two nations out of one was thus hardly acceptable to this small, wiry people who took it upon themselves to undo this wrong wrought on them and their nation.

The Vietnamese therefore, did not carve out a nation and thus, their struggle from the 1940s cannot be regarded as that involving nation-making. On the other hand, nation-building involves the entire endeavour of development and construction within the pre-existing boundaries of an existing nation. This has been, and is the ongoing effort in this country.

How then, if Vietnam is a nation, did a divide come about of the country? To answer this, the clock must be turned back by a century to that point of

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5 See Sardesai, D.R., Southeast Asia: Past and Present (Vikas Publishing House, Sahibabad, 1985), p.286; E.J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina (Stanford, 1959), pp.52-55; D.G.E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia (London, 1981), p.218.

6 Sardesai, n.5, p.288; D.G.M. Tate, The Making of Modern Southeast Asia (London, 1971), pp.436-455; John T. MacAlister, Jr., Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution (New York, 1969), pp.55-56.

time when seeking to be a world power, France began to expand its overseas colonial possessions in the age of New Imperialism.<sup>7</sup> In this pursuit, Saigon fell prey in 1859 and not before long, Vietnam became a French colony divided into Tonking in the North and Cochin China in the South. By the turn of the century, the colonial edifice was firmly established in Indochina.

From the very beginning the French had made it clear that their intentions in the region were mainly economic.<sup>8</sup> Exploitation of Vietnam was the hallmark of the period. The resultant was that discontent with the colonial rule assumed disturbing proportions. To the ranks of the disgruntled peasantry, erstwhile nobility and those who lost out with the coming of the French were added the educated Vietnamese ready to give leadership and a direction to this discontent. The discontent fanned itself out in two directions. On the one it was overtly anti-colonial, "a demand for the ending of

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7 Inaugurated in 1870. See David Thompson, Europe Since Napoleon (Middlesex, 1977), pp.489-508.

8 Ibid., Hall, n.5, p.826. Thomas E. Ennis, French Policy and Developments in Indochina (New York, 1973), p.112.

that political dependence, racial inequality, and economic subservience which were the substance of later nineteenth century imperialism".<sup>9</sup>

The other direction which the colonial revolution took was much more than a mere dismissal of the alien rulers - it looked deeper into the ailing Vietnamese society and wanted its reform. Inevitably then, this stream of nationalism was anti-feudal and anti-tradition in character, working for towards a "revolution" to effect a reform of Vietnamese society. As Duiker points out:-

The emotional and intellectual outlet for the frustration and the aspirations of the Vietnamese youth was on a new and heightened sense of nationhood based on the vision of a democratic and economically advanced society.<sup>10</sup>

The Communist movement combined in it both these streams of thought. Fathered by the young and brilliant

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9 Thompson, n.7~~8~~, p.852.

10 Duiker, n.4, p.35; see also, Paul Berman, Revolutionary Organisation (London, 1974), pp.1-3.

patriot Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh),<sup>11</sup> the movement operated from its base in South China as the sheer opposition and repressive action by the French to any nationalist movements within Vietnam prevented it from flowering therein.

The VNQDD (Viet Nam Quoc-Dan Dang) was the other prominent secret organisation modelled on the Kuomintang of Sun Yet-Sen.

The years following the Great Depression witnessed the unleashing of a series of urban and rural movements by both the organisations. Both the ICP and the VNQDD found their apparatus being crushed by the French crack-down. The French tried to combat the rising resistance by a shift in their colonial policy. This was a move

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11 Sardesai, n. 5, p. 291, writes: Nguyen Ai Quoc was born in 1890 in a modest mandarin family. He left Vietnam as a cabin boy on a merchant vessel and after many odd jobs in England and France, established his reputation as a good pamphleteer in leftist circles in Paris. He appeared in 1918 outside the Versailles Conference waving placards asking for the right of self-determination for his country. Active in the French Socialist Party, he attended the Congress in 1920. In 1923, he visited Moscow as the Party's delegate to the Peasant International and stayed on to study communism. He formed the Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth. Over a period of two years, he trained about 250 men in Marxist techniques. In 1930 he fused the three prominent Communist groups in Vietnam into a single party and significantly named it Indochina Communist Party (ICP).

from 'assimilation' to 'association'.<sup>12</sup> Thus in 1932, Bao Dai was brought back to head a reformed monarchy. But this shift was more in theory than in practice for France had strong economic interests with her overseas territories...she was drawing nearly one third of her imports from her own colonies and sending nearly one-third of her exports to them.<sup>13</sup> In the circumstances, it was hardly expected of her to permit a opposition developing which would endanger its interests in the long run.

The Pacific War was of great significance in this regard as it removed the French presence from the region and precipitated colonial revolts by allowing nationalist governments to rule the roost. With the collapse of the French in 1940, under the Japanese onslaught a puppet administration was established over there under Bao Dai. At this point of time, Ho was able to foresee the day of his country's independence. In 1941, therefore, the ICP reframed its strategy, giving primary focus to the struggle for independence

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12 David Thompson, n.40, p.856; Milton Osborne, Region of Revolt: Focus on Southeast Asia (Harmondsworth, 1971), p.63.

13 Ibid., Hall, n.5, p.829; Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (London, 1968), p.43.



over the policy of reform of the Vietnamese socio-economic system. He wrote in 1944:

Zero hour is near. Germany is almost beaten and her defeat will lead to Japan's. Then the Americans and the Chinese will move into Indochina while the Gaullists rise against the Japs. The latter may well topple the French Fascists before this and set up a military government....Indochina will be reduced to anarchy. We shall not need even to seize power, for there will be no power... our impending uprising will be carried out in highly favourable conditions, without a parallel in the history of our country.<sup>14</sup>

The centre piece of Ho's crystal gazing was the establishment of a new united front, the Vietminh.<sup>15</sup> Salvation Associations were to be organised throughout the country for popular participation in politics. Supplementing this was a new military strategy master-minded by General Giap.

The Vietminh had built up a substantial base when the Japanese surrendered in 1945 to the allies.

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14 From a Viet Minh pamphlet by Jean Lacouture, Ho Chi Minh, A Political Biography (New York, 1968), p.88.

15 Pledged "to fight both Japan and the Vichy for the victory of the allied forces and the independence of a democratic Vietnam". Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina (California, 1954), pp. 95-96.

It seized this opportunity to bring under its control most of the rural villages and the cities in the North and the Centre. On 2 September, 1945, Ho proclaimed the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The Allies refused to recognize this new republic<sup>16</sup> and decided to establish the status quo ante by asking Chinese Nationalist forces to occupy the area north of the sixteenth parallel and British troops to recover the region south of it. The Commander of the British troops disarmed the Vietminh and turned power over to the French. In the North, the Vietminh could retain control by Ho agreeing to the formation of a coalition government. In effect, within three months of the end of the war, Vietnam had been divided into two hostile zones - a Communist North and a French South. The ultimate shape of a generation of conflict had begun to take form.

Efforts to avoid war broke down and resulted in the first Indochina war (1946-54). French hopes of victory were dashed by the Communist revolution in

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16 D.G.E. Hall, A History of South East Asia (London, 1981), p.885.

China for thereafter Ho could rely on Chinese support.<sup>17</sup> The coming of the Cold War and the western policy of containment<sup>18</sup> turned the war, in the eyes of the world, into an issue wider than merely that of French imperialism. The main concern of the powers, as of the new French premier Pierre Mendes, was to seek an end to the war which would prevent the whole of Indochina from falling under Communist control. The dramatic fall of the French at Dien Bien Phu settled the matter. By the ceasefire agreement of Geneva (July 1954) they withdrew from Vietnam north of the Seventeenth parallel of latitude, leaving to the Viet Minh the areas of Tonking and Annam. Vietnam was thus provisionally partitioned, pending general elections to bring about the unification of the country. These elections were never held, but in a referendum, the South proclaimed itself a Republic with Ngo Dinh Diem as the president and its capitol at Saigon.

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17 Ibid., p.890.

18 David Robertson, Penguin Dictionary of Politics (Great Britain, 1986), p.68. "Containment was the official US foreign policy doctrine on how the US should react to the expansion of international communist influence from 1947 onwards. It became an aggressive policy when, as a result of a belief that communism had a natural tendency to spread over borders and infect neighbouring countries, the Americans invested military support in protecting South Vietnam from internal and external communist pressure".

The success of the Geneva Agreements was dependent on a number of factors -- Most of all the cooperation of the major powers. Sardesai points out that where the big powers were helpful, there they achieved success as in the case of the emergence of Cambodia and the integration of Laos.<sup>19</sup> In Vietnam's case, the success of the work of the Commission was dependent in the cooperation given by the two zones, rather, the Great Britain and Soviet Russia as the co-chairmen of the Commission, the Soviet Union and China as major Communist powers ensuring Hanoi's compliance with the Agreements and the United States which, along with South Vietnam, had failed to endorse the settlement.<sup>20</sup>

In the coming two years the US proved more than once that in its paranoia to contain Communism it could go to any lengths, in particular, the Manila Pact and the subsequent formation of the South East Asian Treaty Organization, a military alliance in the region to 'contain' communism.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, its operations

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19 Sardesai, n.5, p.399.

20 Ibid., W.J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power (Boulder, Colorado) 1981, pp.164-166.

21 Ibid., p.400.

in the South which prevented the logical union of the two Vietnams and simply prolonged the struggle to achieve the same. As a critic points out:

In these two years (1954-56) can be found the root of the critical political and military situation as it has existed in Vietnam since 1960. In 1954 and 1955 the United States could still have charted a different course. But once it chose the direction it did in 1954 and proceeded in that direction through 1956, it became a captive of its policy and committed to its continuation.<sup>22</sup>

While the US took it upon itself to fight the forces of Communism, it was Diem's lot to create a strong and stable South, responsive to the collective aspirations of its people. To help Diem out in the task of administration, the US sent its advisors to the South. In a letter to Diem, President Eisenhower clearly outlined the US commitment to him i.e., "in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting subversion or aggression through military means".<sup>23</sup>

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22 Victor Baton, Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy (New York, 1965), p.172.

23 Quoted in Duiker, n.4, p.51.

In spite of this assistance, or because of it, Diem failed to live up to the challenge facing him. Sardesai analyses why. Although a man of personal integrity and decency, Diem was intolerant of criticism and his fear of communism led to a heavy-handed crackdown on all resistance movements. This resulted in his widespread alienation. Southerners resented alleged domination over their society by northern and central Vietnamese. The sects and the mountain minorities resented Saigon's efforts to place their areas under the administrative control of the central government. The overseas Chinese resented the attempts to compel them to adopt Vietnamese citizenship. Saigon intellectuals disapproved of the regime's suppression of free speech. Peasants were antagonised by false promises of the land reform programme. Buddhists resented Diem's policy of favouring the minority Catholic population. In effect, Diem's potential base of support was gradually eroded.<sup>24</sup>

By 1960, it became more than apparent that in the North the DRV had full control of Vietnam headed

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24 Sardesai, n.5, pp.402-403.

by the legendary nationalists here Ho, by now popularly addressed as Uncle Ho, and treating and ruling the nation as his family.<sup>25</sup> Ho was well supported by an able and dedicated cabinet and well organised cadres. The communists also had popular backing of the people as they had endeared themselves to the masses by their dedication to the country's re-unification. The Party had by now also framed a clear strategy of building socialism in the North and liberation in the South, reiterated categorically in its Sixth Plenum in 1954.<sup>26</sup> The period from 1954 to 1975 is encompassed in the long sweep of various doctrinal stages designed to yield unification. An armed 'dau tranh' (struggle) was means to achieve a 'khai nghia' and thence, liberation.<sup>27</sup> Pike divides the entire revolutionary struggle into four operational phases. To begin with, the period till 1959 when it was hoped that the Diem regime would disintegrate in the South because of its own weakness.

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25 Ibid.

26 Pike, n.2, p.118.

27 Ibid.

The second phase can be said to have been launched in the Fifteenth plenum of the Party in 1959 occasioned by a more active approach arising out of the first rumblings of the Sino-Soviet dispute leading to China's decision to oust Soviet aid from its land.<sup>28</sup> This was the revolutionary guerilla phase where unification was sought by means of a mix of armed struggle, in the form of revolutionary guerilla war, and political struggle through the instrument of the National Liberation Front established in December 1960 in the South. Earlier in the year, in September at the Third Congress of the Party, Secretary Le Duan had pointed that there was no other way out except by overthrowing Diem to attain the liberation of the South.

However, much of the impulse in the Southern movement came from the Southerners themselves and it is a misnomer to regard the struggle through the NLF as one directed purely by the North. The Southerners manner the movement themselves with assistance from the DRV in terms of military training, arms, supplies and later, manpower. According to George Meturnan and John Lewis:

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28 Sardesai, n.5, p.406.



The insurrection in the South is rooted; it arose at Southern initiative in response to Southern demands....Contrary to US policy assumptions, all available evidence shows that the revival of the civil war in the South in 1958 was undertaken by Southerners at their own - not Hanoi's - initiative.<sup>29</sup>

The DRV stepped up its assistance after 1964 in direct correlation to American commitment of men, money and material.<sup>30</sup> This launched the third phase of the struggle, the employment of regular-force strategy - the big-unit phase. Diem<sup>31</sup> fell in 1963 and a series of short-lived military regimes followed. Political instability worsened as the US commitment increased - "socio-economic reforms were subordinated to the immediate task of liquidating the subversion."<sup>32</sup> However, in April 1964, the US Department of Defence estimated that the South Vietnamese Government controlled only thirty-four per cent of the villages as against the NLF's control of forty-two. As the US believed that the Hanoi government was the main culprit

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29 George M. Kahin and John W. Lewis, The United States in Vietnam (New York, 1967), p.110.

30 Sardesai, n.5, p.407.

31 Ibid. "Ironically, Diem's fall was brought about by non-communist elements in South Vietnam...led by Buddhist monks and nuns".

32 Ibid., p.410.

behind this deteriorating situation, it decided that the invasion of the North was the only remedy.

This march of events led to the Gulf of Tonkin incident.<sup>33</sup> The tempo of warfare rose steadily as the US began large-scale bombing of the North. In the final analysis,<sup>34</sup> this bombing had very little effect on the war as for one, the North offered very few targets, it being a largely agrarian economy and second, because, as stated earlier, the NLF was being master-minded from the South itself and it could procure its supplies by capturing the American bases within the region. There were severe losses on both sides but no let up in the situation and by 1967 the US Defence Secretary concluded:

"I was convinced that the military course we were pursuing was not only endless but hopeless. A further substantial increase in American forces could only increase the devastation and the Americanisation of the war, and thus leave us even further from our goal of a peace that would permit the people of South Vietnam to fashion their own political and economic institutions".<sup>35</sup>

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33 Ibid.

34 For details, see John Galloway, The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, (New Jersey, 1970), pp.36-37.

35 Clark Clifford, A Vietnam Reappraisal, Foreign Affairs (July, 1969), p.612.

The discordant voices in the American administration were preceded by a nation wide student concern. Politically, it created a severe rift in the ranks of the Democratic Party. Economically after the initial benefits of the war to the US economy, deterioration had set in in the form of recession, growing unemployment and the declining dollar. Worse still, as McNamara pointed out in a memo to the US President:

The picture of the world's greatest super power killing or seriously injuring 1,000 non-combatants a week while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one.<sup>36</sup>

The Tet Offensive was significant in this regard as it led to the US resolve to "disengage with honour" from Vietnam. This also inaugurated Pike's fourth phase of struggle, the talk-fight period.<sup>37</sup> For the coming years, the US was to follow the "Two Tracks Plan" of Henry Kissinger which involved the negotiation of a military settlement between the US and DRV on the one hand and the striking of a political solution between the Saigon government and NLF on the other.<sup>38</sup>

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36 Quoted in Sardesai, n.5, p.415.

37 Pike, n.2, 119.

38 John G. Stoessinger, Henry Kissinger: The Anquish of Power (New York, 1976), pp.51-52.

Yet the US withdrawal from the region was hardly peaceful. Efforts to make the operation compatible with the achievement of "peace with honour" involved more bombing of Vietnam, both in the North and the South. Kampuchea became involved in the second Indochina war when the US decided to invade the country to rid it of the Vietnamese communists, in 1970. The anti-communist government of Lon Nol was threatened by the communist Khmer Rouge headed by Sihanouk. It was alleged by the US government that the COS UN was the communist base of operations. Once captured, it would twist Hanoi's arm for talks. The resultant was a civil war in the country.

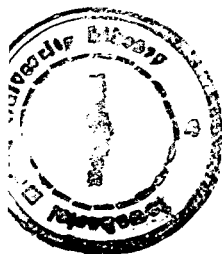
Laotian neutrality was impinged upon due to events in Vietnam. Its politics were factionalized between the rightists, the neutralists and the Pathet Lao. It was thus dragged into the war. Laos was embroiled in the conflict by the escalations of the "clandestine war" in the country. From 1970 to 1973, the Vietnamese conflict became a Indochinese war. Peace was sought to be brought to the region by the Paris Accords of 1973 signed by the four parties concerned - the DRV, PRG, the Thieu government and the US. According to

the Accord, cease-fire was declared in Indochina, American troops were withdrawn from the region without an insistence on the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from the South. A democratic solution for the south was envisaged. The PRG and the Thieu government were to resolve their conflicts through mutual consultations.

A Council of Reconciliation and Concord was to be established for organising elections in the South. Thereafter, a tri-partite coalition government of Thieu, the FRG, and the neutralists would be established. Reunification of Vietnam was to come about through a series of talks between the North and the South. As for Laos and Kampuchea, the Paris Accords confirmed the provisions of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962. However, these Accords hardly brought peace to the region. Alastair Buchan analysed thus:

(The Paris Peace) cease-fire agreement could by no means be regarded as the basis of an enduring peace. For one thing it did not cover the future of Laos and Cambodia, to be resolved by internal conflict. For another it left unclear whether the signatories had in mind a unified or a divided Vietnam, in either the short or the long-term...Nothing

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in the negotiations of the subsequent developments suggests that North Vietnam has abandoned its objective of taking over the South or exercising a dominant influence in Laos and Cambodia. In that sense, she has won the war and the United States lost it.<sup>39</sup>

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The DRV was allowed to station about 140,000 troops in the South until a more lasting agreement was arrived at. South Vietnam had pockets of PRG rule. Lastly, the US presence had been reduced. In that sense, all the three signatories to the Accord "viewed the agreement as a temporary truce, giving time to each other to prepare for the final phase of the conflict."<sup>40</sup> The talks between the two governments failed to proceed smoothly and eventually broke off in April 1974. A meticulously planned campaign was launched by the forces of the North. Raymond Cohen summarising the last days of the war wrote:

"The final stages of the war followed an incremental strategy whose final objective was the defeat of the South Vietnam and the introduction of the Communist regime. This had certainly been determined from the

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39 Alastair Buchan, The End of the Post-War Era: A New Balance of World Power (London, 1974), pp.65-66.

40 Sardesai, n.5, p.428.

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outset. Nevertheless, by deciding on a step-by-step approach to widening of the war as opposed to a classic all-out invasion on the lines of North Korea, North Vietnam assured for herself certain advantages; the option of regulating the extent and rate of her involvement in conformity with the observed reactions of other interested parties, especially the US.<sup>41</sup>

The DRV's decision to launch a major offensive in March 1975 yielded Saigon to it. Their gamble paid off in the light of the military weakness of the Thieu government and the fact that Washington could do little as it was entangled amidst insurmountable internal and international obstacles, divisions among the leadership, Watergate, the economic crisis. Ford could do hardly more than protest as his hands were tied by Congressional ban on US military activity in or near Indochina.<sup>42</sup>

After three decades of bitter struggle, the long Vietnamese conflict had at last come to an end. Once again, history was to witness the success of the patient philosophy of a prolonged shifting people's developed at first by Mao<sup>43</sup> and modified by Vo Nguyen

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41 Raymond Cohen, International Politics, the rules of the Game (Longman, London, 1982), p.136.

42 Van Tien Dung, Le Monde, Paris, 30th April 1976.

43 Raymond Cohen, n.44, p.136.

Giap who had shown remarkable foresight in 1954 when he had outlined the Party's strategy towards the South:

We came to the conclusion that we could not secure success if we struck swiftly. In consequence, we resolutely chose the other tactic: to strike and advance steadily. In taking this correct decision we strictly followed this fundamental principle of the conduct of a revolutionary war: strike to run, strike only when success is certain; if not then do not strike.<sup>44</sup>

The Communist victory has been ascribed to various causes - the strategic and organisational genius of the Communists, the weakness and factionalism of their rivals, the military and political misadjustments of the French and the Americans - all of which played a significant role in the final outcome. But most of all, it is important to realize that the results of the war were conditioned by the political, social, cultural realities within Vietnam and by the American non-comprehension of them.

Sardesai points out that the US debacle in Vietnam can be attributed primarily to the incorrect diagnosis

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44 V.N. Giap, People's War People's Army (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, 1974), pp.191-2.



of the reasons for the "insurrection". The conflict there was not so much "pro-communist as it was anti-Diem and later anti-Ky and Thieu because of their failure to initiate and implement the much-needed political and socio-economic reforms. The movement began with the Southern initiative and was primarily manned and supported by Southerners and not by Hanoi, as Washington wrongly perceived. The conflict had to have a political, not a military solution, possibly satisfying a widespread urge to reunify the country. Apart from the large-scale infusion of military aid, which had the effect of fuelling the inflation, much of the limited economic aid, as much as forty per cent was swallowed by corrupt contractors, high administrators, generals, business intermediaries and government officials".<sup>45</sup>

Other scholars<sup>46</sup> are also agreed on the fact that only "a more vigorous US effort to transform the South Vietnamese society would have resulted in the emergence of a stronger sense of local commitment to a separate,

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45 Sardesai, n.5, pp.429-430; Duiker, n.20, pp.322-328.

46 Duiker, n.7, p.7.

non-communist Vietnam. Diem's failure to take the initiative when present was as much his fault as it was the fault of the US. In the process, the momentum was lost. It was never regained for by then the Southerners had themselves realized that the US was an alien force and thus, the anti-colonial and nationalist sentiment was revived". Thus, just as the First Indochina conflict was a nationalist uprising against the French so was the Second conflict a manifestation of nationalist sentiments against the US.

Unification achieved, the country now faced the problem of nation-building. Live differences existed between the two, so severe that even after ten odd years of trying to eliminate them, the policy planners in Vietnam find them as pulsating, live thorns in their sides. In 1975, a Conference was held on the Reunification of Vietnam. In this, representatives admitted to the existing differences between the two Vietnams. One, the fundamental difference in lifestyles, "the people's attitudes and ways of life are completely different in the North and the South". Another, the contrasting political systems for whereas the North was building socialism...the South was carry-

ing out the people's national democratic revolution in all these years. Economically, the North mainly has two components - the state-run economy and the collective economy - and the individual economy has embraces only a small number of people...in the South, socialist ownership over means of production and socialist relations have only been initially established".<sup>47</sup>

The task facing the Vietnamese was daunting to say the least, in particular since the disparities between the North and the South were so glaring. Officially it was stated:

National reunification means that unification must be achieved between the two zones in terms of the political and social systems, specifically in terms of the economic structure, the relations of production, social strata, the organization of the state, the constitution, and the law, culture and thinking, and so forth.<sup>48</sup>

To compound the problem, the cost of the war had been high. To achieve their chimera-like goal, the

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47 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXI, 1975, p.27446.

48 Ibid., p.27497.

Northerners had lost 600,000 men,<sup>49</sup> which worked out to nearly one out of every seventeen male North Vietnamese, a daunting figure for the total population of the area worked out to between sixteen to twenty-five million. Material loss in the North was probably around \$400 million, glaringly enormous considering that the GNP of the country worked out to \$1.7 billion during the war years.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, having put all of its resources into the war, Vietnam faced the problem of fifteen years of non-investment. The result was a country with the most stagnant, poverty-ridden and backward economy in Asia. "The psychic loss-- imposition of the most intrusive pretorian society anywhere on earth is incalculable. These were only the costs to the North. In lives and materials, the toll extracted from the South probably was double."<sup>51</sup>

Pike<sup>52</sup> outlines the problems that the leaders of the SRV would have to face as also the determinants of their success as rules thus:

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49 Douglas Pike, n.2, p.133.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., p.151.

The first task would be economic, central to which is development of a rational agricultural system with vastly increased productivity; this against the stark prevailing statistic. 85 per cent of the labour force was engaged in feeding the total population, yet 20 per cent of the rice eaten had to be imported.

The second problem would be internal security, mainly in connection with incorporating the South into the system in a manner that did not drive the Southerners into desperate widespread resistance.

Third would be foreign relations, working out some new formula for dealing with the USSR, the probably troublesome Chinese, the other indochinese countries, the Southeast Asian countries, and finally, the rest of the world.

Finally, the problem of ideology. A terrible centrifugal force would be at work with which the leadership would have to cope.

By all accounts thus, nation-building was not going to be easy process. Elliott pointed out in 1978, that it is not so much that the gravity of the challenge is any more serious than in the critical turning points in the escalation of the First and Second Indochina conflicts, but rather, the novelty of the problems, the complexity of the solutions, and the difficulties in mobilizing a politically fragmented and psychologically weary population are greater than before. In some ways, this represents the delayed

reaction and hidden cost of the war, clearly anticipated by Henry Kissinger's celebrated essay on negotiations on which he noted that "a prolonged, even if ultimately victorious war might leave Vietnam so exhausted as to jeopardise the purposes of decades of struggle". Kissinger also remarked that "Hanoi's weaknesses are that superior planning can substitute material resources only upto a point", beyond which, "differences of scale are bound to become significant and a continuation of the war will require a degree of foreign assistance which may threaten the "autonomy that Hanoi has jealously safeguarded until now".<sup>53</sup>

In retrospect, the observations has much significance to it. History has borne out that much of the optimism with which the SRV launched into the challenges of nation-building was misplaced. Their eventual success was to be conditioned not by their endeavours and planning alone but also by the threats which they would face and over which they would have no control.

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53 David Elliott, Institutional Development in a Crisis, Southeast Asian Affairs, 1981, Singapore, p.349.

Whatever much their efforts, however great their enthusiasm, the Vietnamese have found out that the path towards nation-building is strewn more with thorns than the proverbial roses. Without commenting on the reasons thereof at this juncture, one can but conclude that "there seems to be an iron law regulating events in Indochina: that nothing ever is simple, and that things can always get worse".<sup>54</sup>

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54 David W.P. Elliott, ed., The Third Indochina Conflict (Colorado, 1981), p.1.

**CHAPTER TWO**



## Chapter Two

### ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION

The 1975 communist victories in the region of Indochina signalled a change in the Asian strategic setting. In particular they brought a Southeast Asian revolutionary developmental model to the regional scene - a model which could serve as an alternative to the more international-market, export-led growth approaches to development of the non-communist states.<sup>1</sup> Indochina now possessed a rival developmental process to that of authoritarian political systems with capitalist economies.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter deals first with the historical context of the Vietnamese economy, in particular under colonial rule. Independent developments in the two Vietnams will be studied next. And finally, the efforts at reconciling the differences between them within the goal of reunification.

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1 Bernard K. Gordon, "Asian Perspectives on Security: The ASEAN Region", Asian Forum 8, no.4 (Autumn 1976), pp.62-63.

2 Sheldon W. Simon, ed., The Military and Security in the Third World: Domestic and International Impacts (Boulder, Colorado, 1978), p.289.

Vietnam has been a predominantly agrarian society since its emergence from colonial rule. The immensely fertile Tongking and Mekong deltas and the South monsoons contributed to making the foundations of the agrarian society even more secure. Furthermore, for the Vietnamese, agriculture almost by definition implies the cultivation of rice.<sup>3</sup> The monsoon being erratic they had devised means of and become advanced practitioners of irrigation in agriculture. Largely, thus, historians share a general consensus that the hydraulic character of Vietnamese civilisation has had a significant impact on its economy. To quote Duiker:

"...(this hydraulic character) has shaped the value system of its inhabitants and led them to emphasise the importance of agriculture in the overall scheme of human activities and to denigrate commerce and manufacturing as subordinate and even vulgar occupations".<sup>4</sup>

This is not to deny that there existed a secondary sector of the economy with regard to carpentry, weaving

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3 Recent archaeological evidence suggests that the Vietnamese have been one amongst the first peoples in Asia to master the art of cultivating rice. Gordon Luce, "Rice and Religion: A Study of Old Non-Khmer Evolution & Culture", JSS 111, 2 July 1965, p.141, W.J. Duiker, Vietnam: A Nation in Revolution, (Boulder, Colorado, 1983), p.97.

4 Ibid., p.97.

and metal crafts. Taxes were paid in silver, gold, pearls and perfumed wood. Trade flourished as did domestic industries in laquerware and silk-weaving. Yet, commerce remained subordinate to agriculture.<sup>5</sup> Much of this attitude prevailed till very recent times accounting for the slow manner in which modernisation was to occur.<sup>6</sup>

Into this scenario entered the French. Economic conditions of Europe now began dominating the turn of events in Vietnam, in fact dictating them. The Industrial Revolution was well under way in France and subject countries supplied raw materials and provided markets in order to keep its momentum. Initially, Vietnam escaped because its primary products held little attraction for Europe. The commercial potential of rubber and rice was realized and exploited only at a later stage, after 1870s. Then onwards, efforts were made to further production - new lands

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5 D.G.E. Hall, A History of South-East Asia (London, 1981), pp.236-243.

6 As Vietnam was not affected by the trade network of Southeast Asia, trade was relegated to the background. Subsequently, traders were regarded as corrupt and low-class. Duiker, n.2, p.98.

were opened in the coastal provinces of the Lower Mekong, marshlands in the plains of Reeds were drained and a vast irrigation network developed.<sup>7</sup>

Some sort of an industrial sector slowly began to emerge. It developed in industries as sugar refining, food processing, assembly of bicycles and small appliances, textiles and pharmaceuticals. Some new industrial areas sprang up as well. Telecommunications and railroads were introduced.

Yet, the economic effects of French rule were hardly conducive to growth. Social services remained low.<sup>8</sup> The effect of modernisation was limited and it never crossed the point where it could pose as a threat to the colonial master. Unique to Vietnam was the growth of a non-Vietnamese dominated bourgeoisie comprising in the main of Chinese or Indian moneylenders. In the agrarian sphere, the French administration hardly initiated policies conducive to raising the standards of living. Instead rising population and spiralling exports were to offset any gains which may have been possible due to expansion of agriculture.

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7 Thomas E. Ennis, French Policy & Developments in Indo-China, (New York, 1973), p.112.

8 Hall, n.5, p.826, and Rupert Emerson, From Empire to Nation (Cambridge, 1959), p.72.

Through all this the basic nature of the agrarian Vietnam remained unchanged. Meanwhile, once the colonial power was removed in 1954, the Geneva Conference divided the country into two. In the South, Diem faced a great deal of problems which eventually resulted in increasing dependence on the United States. Both in industry and agriculture, the base to expand was limited.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, as the domestic industry could not meet the demand of an increasing population, the country became increasingly dependent on imports. With exports limited, Saigon's balance of payments was highly unfavourable, and the economy was sustained only by rising assistance from the United States. By the 1960s, the South Vietnamese economy had become totally dependent on U.S. aid. Imports of U.S. consumer goods were financed by the country's Commercial Import Program. Several hundred thousand Vietnamese worked for U.S. agencies in South Vietnam or otherwise served the needs of the large foreign population. Food imports from the United States made up for the chronic shortages of production in the countryside. An affluent middle class thrived amid a swelling urban population of poor

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9 Duiker, n.3, p.100.

workers, beggars, and refugees flooding into refugee camps in the suburbs.

In the North as well, the problem was of equally intimidating proportions. The DRV embarked upon its promised agrarian reform of redistribution of land in the already congested and overfragmented Red River Delta, where agriculture had suffered drastically in the final phase of the fighting immediately before the Geneva settlement. Imminent famine conditions could not be relieved by imports of food grains because of lack of foreign exchange. At the instance of the United States government, the French managers had removed the American-made installations from the coal mines which had been North Vietnam's principal earners of foreign exchange. All this led to a massive influx of refugees from the North to the South.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, neither the north nor the South were in an enviable position. Add to this the overwhelming burden of the war as well as the devastation caused by

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10 Other factors contributed to this refugee problem - the use of forced labour for constructing roads and railroads leading to China; the Catholic cry that since god had moved to the South, so must they and finally the land reform programme initiated in 1956 which was used "as a weapon against old enemies or to gain material advantages" by the party cadres, Frances Fitzgerald, Fire in the Lake (New York, 1972), p.300.

it. To quote Sardesai:

"The losses due to bombing and use of defoliants<sup>11</sup> were, indeed, staggering. The United States mission visiting Vietnam in 1976 reported that the entire North Vietnamese economic infrastructure had been blasted out of existence. Railroads had been blown out of commission for long stretches of several miles on various lines as most of the bridges on the Hanoi-Lang Son and Hanoi-Vinh lines had been blown up. Tongking's dyke system, built over two millenia had suffered grievously as 183 dams and canal areas and 884 water installations had been damaged. Twenty-nine of the thirty provisional capitals were damaged and nine of them completely destroyed."<sup>12</sup>

War was to affect the South in a more damaging manner. The ecological imbalances created in a bid to wipe out scores of forest cover which was the hiding place of the Guerillas. Almost 1.4 million hectares was sprayed by Agent orange one or more time.<sup>13</sup> In total, the loss of forest cover was estimated at a staggering 5.4 million acres and that of farmland at

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- 11 Defoliants such as Agent Orange have now become household words due to their extensive use in the Vietnam war. The 17th parallel bears silent testimony to this almost 14 per cent of the area around it was thus wiped out. Elizabeth Kempf, "Fences give way to Trees in Vietnam", Times of India (New Delhi), 20th June, 1986, p.6.
- 12 Sardesai, South-East Asia: Past and Present (Vikas, 1985), p.432.
- 13 Kempf, n.11.

one-fifth of the total cultivable land. Classic of the shortsighted US policy was the creation of the McNamara's fence stretching over the 100 km. demilitarised area from where trees were removed and farmers forced moved out. The net result has been that only 23 per cent of the forest cover remains, 40 per cent of the country is now wasteland and looming large still is the threat of virtually no forest cover by the turn of the century.<sup>14</sup> To add to this devastation of the forest cover was the problem arising out of bomb craters, undetonated land mines, war debris such as sharpnel, abandoned tanks etc. As Le Anh Tu points out, "South Vietnam's timber supply for the next three decades has been wiped out..."<sup>15</sup>

Stemming from the problem of economic depravation, was the issue of reconstruction at all levels; economic, social, political, ideological. Professor Huynh Kim Kaanh notes:

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14 Ibid.

15 In Huynh KimKanh's "Year One of Post-Colonial Vietnam", Southeast Asian Affairs, 1977, Singapore, 1977, p.290.



The legacy of the US-Thieu regime was an economic and social malaise of unknown proportion; an economy that was on the verge of bankruptcy; a threatening famine in the northern provinces of Central Vietnam; more than three million unemployed people, excluding an army of a half-million prostitutes about to be out of work; six to seven million refugees who had been forced by wartime activities to flee their native villages into the cities, etc.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, once the SRV was established, it inherited in the South an economy more than 50 per cent of which was dependent on a service sector drawing its base from a US funded war-remove this and there was bankruptcy. The industry was 85 per cent dependent on foreign countries for raw materials and one hundred per cent dependent on foreign machines and fuel.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, fleeing officials and bankers had stolen most of the country's foreign exchange reserves.<sup>18</sup> The new government also had to do something about an estimated 1.1 million ARVN troops and an additional

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16 Ibid., p.294.

17 Le Hoang Trong, "Survival and Self-Reliance: A Vietnamese Viewpoint", Asian Survey, XV, 3 (March, 1975), pp.209-18.

18 Sardesai, n.12, p.433.

one million including police (125,000), militia (500,000) and civil service officials (350,000), only some of whom could be relied upon for their loyalties to the communist regime.<sup>19</sup> Given the ideological context, reconstruction in the South meant for the PRG and Hanoi not only rehabilitation but relocation and 're-education' of several million employees of the erstwhile US-Thieu regime, practically one-third to one-half the population of South Vietnam.<sup>20</sup> Another important consideration in relocation would be a large number of handicapped out of an estimated 2.2 million war casualties, some of whom could not be expected to contribute to the rebuilding of the economy at full strength and who, in fact, might need state assistance of some kind or the other for periods of time.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond such immediate economic problems lay an issue of compelling long-term significance. How long should the new Vietnam remain divided into two separate economic systems, one capitalist, the other socialist? The problem was approached with caution. A Vietnamese spokesman pointed out;

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19 Ibid., p.433.

20 Far Eastern Economic Review, May 14, 1976.

21 Sardesai, n.12, p.434.

The two zones have dissimilarities which must be gradually eliminated in the revolutionary process. Economically, the North mainly has two components--the state-run economy and the collective economy - the individual economy embraces only a small number of people. The South has five economic components: private economy, the state-run economy, the collective economy, the private capitalist economy and the individual economy....At present Northern society has the working class, the collective peasantry, and the socialist intellectuals. In the South there are the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie and the comprador bourgeoisie...<sup>22</sup>

A step by step policy was initiated to implement reform.<sup>23</sup> To prevent currency speculations, all banking activities were suspended, all businesses were directed to remain in operation and were guaranteed a profit, banks were nationalised.<sup>24</sup> Some utilities, firms etc., were also nationalised, the property of wealthy entrepreneurs was confiscated, and so on.

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- 22 M. Truong Chinh's address to the Conference on the Reunification of Vietnam. Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.xxi, 1975, p.27946.
- 23 The new regime could be said to be enjoying some advantages at the point of time; a good rice harvest, adequate supply of grains at hand, foreign exchange holdings amounting to \$130,000,000. Ibid., p.27494.
- 24 By a series of measures undertaken on the 5th of July, the 29th of August and the 22nd of September. Ibid., pp.27494-27496.

The government's ultimate objective was however to restore the South to its original position as the breadbasket for the entire country and this was not possible until the rural areas were re-populated. A series of land reform programmes were announced. New Economic Area (NEAs) were created. Under this it was estimated that another one million people would be employed in agriculture as well as more than half a million hectares of fallow land would be brought under cultivation in the Mekong Delta. The new slogan in the mid-1970s was thus: "Break with the past, return to the countryside to work for production".<sup>25</sup>

Also known as the New Economic Zones, these merit a discussion on their own. They were extensive plots of unused land in selected area of the country and scheduled for reclamation and resettlement by the government as model agro-industrial units. Refugees from the cities as from the densely populated areas of the Red River Delta were to be relocated over here. Some 82 such areas were established by 1978. These would also serve as centres for light industries, helping to produce articles for consumption not only for the

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25 Sardesai, n.12, p.434.

domestic population long starved of consumer goods but also to boost up the export scenario.<sup>26</sup>

Officially this programme was a success. There were complaints however that force was used in the resettlement process and that the amenities in these zones were far below the expected levels.<sup>27</sup>

In areas already under cultivation, caution was exercised: Old cultivators were allowed to continue and their lands not seized. The authorities did take some steps however to ensure controlling of prices and distribution of grain by setting up an agency for the supply and purchase of grain and by directing the retailers to obtain license from the government to continue their operations.

The approach was thus a combination of haste and caution, former with regard to urban re-employment and agricultural and caution in matters related to any

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26 As in post-revolutionary China, the new programme had its sadistic overtones in compelling the city-bred, soft-lived intellectuals, civil servants and vast numbers of army officials of the former government "to work with their hands like the rest of the proletariat" in a re-education programme. Ibid., p.434.

27 Duiker, n.3, p.107.

sweeping reforms. What had actually been attempted was a 'triple revolution'<sup>28</sup> - collectivisation of agriculture and industry, ideological transformation and a scientific and technological revolution. Sardesai points out that "the new Vietnam gave the impression of being flexible, not bound by ideological purity as it welcomed outside investment of finance and technology on a joint venture basis...To prove its bonafides, Vietnam enthusiastically joined the IMF unlike most communist countries..."<sup>29</sup> In keeping with the urgent need to introduce economic reforms, in the December of 1976, Vietnam adopted a Five year plan with an outlay of 7.5 billion dollars, at least half of which had to come from outside donors.<sup>30</sup> The plan combined major agricultural and industrial projects with large-scale demographic changes. To quote the Prime Minister Pham Van Dong:

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28 Sardesai, n.12, p.434; Duiker, n.3, p.109.

29 Ibid., p.435.

30 The Soviet Union promised \$2.6 billion and East European countries 700 million. Ibid.

"The main content of the 1976-80 five year plan comprises two parts closely related to each other. One has a basic role, namely agriculture together with forestry, fisheries, and consumer goods industry. The other has a leading role, namely heavy industry, first of all engineering and other heavy industries. The more we want to push the basic branches ahead, the more we must promote the leading role of heavy industry... Of the total outlay of 30,000/dong for /million investment in the 1976-80 period, we shall devote almost 30 per cent to agriculture and 35 per cent to industry".<sup>31</sup>

There was an emphasis on science and technology as it was felt that for an overall growth it was essential to promote this in order to alleviate the backward state of the national economy. Industry and commerce were technologically primitive and characterised by small scale and labour intensive methods. It was admitted however, that any improvement would take time and was beyond the scope of a single five year plan.

It was also decided that there was no point in delaying a socialist transformation of the South and therefore this was to be initiated and basically achieved during the plan period.

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31 Excerpt from his Presentation of Report on Five Year Plan on December 16. He also called for in this speech 'mobilisation of all people of working age to take part in economic construction and production development'. Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXIII, 1977, p.28277.

So we see that Vietnam began on an ambitious note.<sup>32</sup> Yet, a crisis emerged on the economic front resulting in an almost negative growth period. Part of the problem arose from inadequate financing. Hanoi had hoped for funds not only from its allies but also from the European continent and the US. Such expectations only turned out to be grossly misplaced. Soviet Russia's aid was below the expected level grossing at only one million annually. China decided to curtail aid in face of domestic priorities and later due to escalating tensions between the two countries.<sup>33</sup> A major source of aid could have been the US, but the Carter regime refused to honour the promise of aid made by the Nixon government.<sup>34</sup>

Aid from Private sources was also limited.<sup>35</sup>

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32 Targets were; an increase of 8 per cent in overall agricultural targets; GNP to grow at an average of 18 per cent; 17 per cent increase in food production (rice by 14 per cent); an 81 per cent increase in land reclamation; 109 per cent increase in afforestation; 10 per cent increase in consumer industry; 22 per cent in overall industry. Exports were to increase by 55 per cent of which light industry and handicrafts were to account for 45 per cent, agricultural products for 25 per cent, and marine products for 16 per cent. Ibid., p.28278.

33 Duiker, n.3, p.110.

34 Turned down by the Congress, on grounds that the US was under no obligation to give aid to Vietnam, Ibid., p.110.

35 Ibid., p.110.



Officially it was conceded that economic problems arose out of a combination of factors. One, the Vietnam faced the 'harshesht climatic conditions experienced for 50 years which led to a major food crisis. A long and exceptionally cold winter was followed by a heat wave and prolonged drought, while the rainy season was short. To add to this were a series of devastating typhoons.<sup>36</sup>

Other than the strain on the economy due to distress rice purchases from the West, the general economic scenario worsened. Regarding this the government admitted that it had failed to take adequate steps with regard to agricultural policy, in particular with respect to the rapid collectivisation of agriculture in the South.<sup>37</sup>

An official spokesman declared that shortfalls in heavy industry targets arose out of "the organisation

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36 Quoted from a official broadcast on October 6, 1978; it said that water levels dropped by 20-30 per cent over 300,000 hectares of land was laid bare by the drought. Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXIV, 1978, p.28909.

37 Ibid., p.28909.

of economic management and leadership. Some sectors tended to depend on and wait for aid from overseas and higher echelons. The state economic management apparatus was cumbersome, the system of responsibility was unclear and discipline was flagging and a vigorous change in thoughts as well as action was needed".<sup>38</sup>

All this apart, lack of infrastructure or its improper use resulted in poor management of whatever scarce resource available. Transportation of goods was a problem, equipment was missing, expertise was scarce, the transition from a wartime to a peacetime situation was proving difficult in the cadres. In the South, the problem was even more unique where the economy had to make do by hopping on 'two legs', one socialist and the other capitalist.

"What was required" as Huyn Kim Khanh points out was not a "modification of the objectives set forth in the second five year plan but a resolution implementations of the stated revolutionary and developmental

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38 Le Thanh Nghi, *ibid.*, p.28910.

strategy."<sup>39</sup>

As a derivative, one thing was sure i.e. 'that', to quote Kanh again; "the party had committed the sin of 'right deviation' in dealing with the problems of the South. It'd been too lenient and soft on the Southern 'bourgeois capitalists' and too lenient on their collaborator 'puppets'. Consequently, the 'capitalist traders' of the South were permitted to sabotage the economic plan while their corrupting influence deformed the character and sullied the good name of the party".<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in late 1977 the decision was taken to ensure that: "In Southern Vietnam the socialist transformation would be stepped up; the socialist sectors would be widened; while the non-socialist economic sectors would be narrowed down. In North Vietnam, the socialist relations of production will be strengthened and perfected".<sup>41</sup> The first stage in this would be the abolition of private trade and manufacturing.

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39 Article, "Vietnam, Neither Peace nor War", Southeast Asian Affairs, 1979, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Heinemann Educational Books.

40 Ibid.

41 Radio Hanoi, 20 December. Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXIV, 1977, p.28900.

Most of the remaining private enterprise was in the South - in addition to this there existed a small sector of private enterprise in the North in the hands of the Overseas Chinese. Once this step was completed,<sup>42</sup> the second stage of collectivising of the countryside in the South could begin.

The regime made the move on March 23, 1978. All major industrial and commercial enterprises remaining in private hands were declared nationalized, and their goods confiscated. Only small firms were permitted to stay in private hands. In order to avoid the hoarding and speculation which had occurred in 1975, the move came without warning. "Youth Squads" were sent out to private businesses during the previous night to confiscate all goods on the premises and prevent the traders from attempting to evade the provisions of the new regulations. Compensation was announced for all goods seized but the amount of money which could be retained for private use for limited by a new regulation. Subsequently, the old currency was

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42 Leading to the problem of the 'Boat People' and Chinese annoyance and subsequent resultant on the foreign policy: "In 1978 the Vietnamese authorities decided to shift "bourgeois" tradesmen to production...The authorities in Beijing, however showed their displeasure by cancelling four aid projects....Parimal Kumar Das, "Vietnamese Perception of Non-Alignment", Vikas Publishing, Sahibabad, 1980, p.296.

withdrawn and a new united currency introduced.<sup>43</sup>

Collectivisation of agriculture was implemented later, in 1978, at first gradually, and then in a speedier fashion. Caution was exercised and cadres duly instructed in order that no major discontent be the resultant.<sup>44</sup> Following the manner of the Chinese, in the first stage the peasant retained his land but formed teams in which contracts were made with the government for production goals. In the meantime, private cooperatives were set up where peasants were responsive to the idea, or where the concept of private property was not very firmly established. Throughout the remaining part of the decade, the peasants in the South were enrolled gradually into cooperatives.<sup>45</sup>

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43 All amounts in excess of this was to be deposited in the bank in savings accounts and could be withdrawn only via an application to the authorities, Duiker, n.3, p.112.

44 David Elliott, "Institutional Development in Crisis", South East Asian Affairs, 1981, pp.352-354.

45. By and large, the whole process met with little resistance, save in the Mekong Delta where private property was firmly established or in areas where the cadres took their job very seriously and with excess zeal. The Nan Dhan of October 13 warned against such misguided 'revolutionary enthusiasm'. Duiker, n.3, p.113.

"Both the decisions to rapidly transform the commercial sector of the Vietnamese economy and to accelerate co-operationization, points Elliott, "were probably measures to prevent a bad situation from getting worse rather than a plan concocted by droclinaire lements...This transformation would have eventually occurred in any case...But the timing and the swiftness of these moves was clearly influenced by factors lying beyond the control of the party leadership the external pressures from China and the potential vulnerability of Vietnamese economy to actions taken by the "overseas Chinese" and the urgency of breaking out of the many developmental dilemmas that Vietnam faces".<sup>46</sup>

While all this was going on, the economic situation deteriorated from bad to worse. Again, the reason was not one but a combination of circumstances - natural,<sup>47</sup>

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46 Elliott, n.44, pp.354-355.

47 Severe floods ravaged the country and the graining harvests of 1978 and 1979 fell far short of targets. Nan Dhan of October 9th said that "the daily diet has decreased and the supply of food-grains and foodstuffs is insufficient". Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXVII, 1981, p.30806.

war,<sup>48</sup> management.

In November 1979, the Sixth Plenum of the Party's Central Committee in tacit recognition of the seriousness of the crisis, moderated the efforts to force the Southern population into a Socialist mould. The sale of goods at open markets was permitted and limited private commerce and manufacturing were again tolerated. To persuade farmers to increase food production, various incentives were instituted. The official purchase price was raised and farmers were encouraged to grow crops on private land for sale in the open markets.<sup>49</sup>

In sum this may be regarded as the beginning of the process of liberalisation.<sup>50</sup>

Before a discussion on this is undertaken one would need to comprehend the internal economic situation

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48 The Chinese invasion in February 1978 which resulted in large scale devastation. Ibid., p.30806.

49 The resolution emphasised that there had been 'insufficient encouragement to individual production' and that correct use must be made 'of the capacities of bourgeois capitalists who have understood the development of socialist transformation. Ibid., p.30806.

50 Initiated around the same time in the Soviet Russia and China, Duiker, n.3, p.114.

of Vietnam can best be understood in terms of its international isolation--bereft of all support save that of Russia. Hanoi's Kampuchean occupation had proved to be a running sore. In its isolation, Vietnam has lost out greatly on external financial help.

In 1981, Vietnam's total debt to the Soviet Russia stood at more than \$1750 million.<sup>51</sup> Notwithstanding this, Russia had Vietnam sign another protocol for increased aid and cooperation in development.<sup>52</sup> Amongst all this, Vietnam announced its third five-year plan to cover the years 1981-1985. Primary emphasis in this was to be placed on increasing food production, and the output of consumer goods. Socialist transformation was to be completed by the 1980s.

There was some gain arising out of the policy of liberalisation, in particular in agriculture -- rice harvests had grown annually (16,260,000 tonnes) as against the estimates of 16,000,000 tonnes) in the years 1981-82. There was enough grain procurement in order

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51 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXVIII, 1981, p.31592.

52 Ibid., p.31592.



that official estimates optimistically targetted for stopping import of foodgrains. The GNP rose in 1983 by 25 per cent over 1978, while exports rose by 17 per cent over 1982. The Pha Lai power station came into operation in November 1983, providing electricity to the area around Ho Chi Minh city and helping ease the power problems considerably.<sup>53</sup>

Yet, this growth was insufficient in relation with the spiralling population.<sup>54</sup> Only the minimum requirements of the country could be met with this increase. Industrial production had been hampered by the shortage of power, raw materials, especially that of the state owned industry which was reportedly running at half its capacity.<sup>55</sup> The main area of growth were the small scale industries and handicrafts, but the production of consumer goods was still far from satisfactory and barely sufficient to meet the demands of the people.

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53 Ibid., vol.XXX, 1984, p.32673.

54 Population growth in 1983 was reported to be 2.6 per cent, representing an annual increase of 1,000,000 people. Ibid., p.32673.

55 Acknowledged by Vo Van Kiet, Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers in a report presented to the Assembly in December 1983. Ibid., p.32673.

To accelerate the economic growth, a tighter control over resources, their fuller exploitation and speeding of the socialist transformation of trade, industry, and agriculture was visualised, in the 1984 socio-economic plan. Another problem which existed was that of the flourishing free market, in control of 70 per cent of all goods. Corruption was the root cause of this -- corruption arising out of the decentralization of the administration. The Nhan Dan of June 27, 1983 assessed the reason for this to be "that their (the party cadres, members and government officials) work did not allow them to share the incentives and bonuses of the contract system..."<sup>56</sup> The phenomenon was more rampant in the South than in the North. It is interesting to note what foreign observers felt and noted in the erstwhile city of Saigon, "...Ho Chi Minh city, today repainted, smart, full of crowded cafes, and as mischievous, wayward and even as wicked as ever. The black market is still as flourishing as ever offering the latest gadgets from Japan..."<sup>57</sup>

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56 Ibid., vol.XXX, 1984, p.32673.

57 Derek Wilson, "The Dividing Line", The Times of India, 1986, 20th July, p.17. Wilson further notes the continued American influences of consumerism in the South and regards it as the American 'timebomb'.

The regime sought to counter this problem by re-orienting the tax system, by attacking the leadership of the Ho Chi Minh city and by intensified ideological supervision.

In the year 1985, several far-reaching solutions were implemented. Food subsidies for state and party workers, members of the armed forces and pensioners were abolished. Economic planning by central administrative order was to be replaced by a system of pricing determined by 'socialist economic accounting and business', and of wage levels determined by productivity and by the cost of living. In the plenum's final communique', these reforms were described as "a turning point of decisive significance" which were necessary "if we are to increase production and business".<sup>58</sup>

Whatever the efforts, at the close of the time frame within which this study is based, Vietnam ranked as one amongst the forty-nine low income poorest countries in the world.<sup>59</sup>

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58 Radio Hanoi of June same year, thought that these reflected "a drastic and far-reaching reorientation in our party's position and policies", Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXXII, 1986, p.32673.

59 Encyclopaedia of the Third World, ed., G.T. Kurien, London, 1982, p.183.

Other gains arose out of the liberalisation of controls in the economy. A typical case study is that of Nguyen Thi Thi, who fought for decades against French and the Americans in Vietnam, and today runs one of the country's largest and most successful state businesses: the Food Corporation of the Ho Chi Minh City. Thi said that she first got permission to try capitalist-style business techniques from Nguyen Van Linh, the city's former Communist Party Chief, who was elected to head the national party in December 1986. Today, Thi grosses 8-9 billion Dong a month and exports goods worth nearly \$20 million in 1985-86.<sup>60</sup>

Yet it will be a long way before the authorities can control the galloping inflation which has been increasing prices at the rate of almost 1000 per cent.<sup>61</sup> This has drastically reduced the purchasing power of the Dong. Population rise has exacerbated the problem.

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60 Thi's success story is but one amongst several others. Murray Hiebert in the Business World, August 17-30, 1987, pp.77-80.

61 Ibid., p.78.

Further liberalization of regulations may be on the cards but the downward spiralling can be contained only by concerted efforts stretched over four to five years.

To conclude, what led the Vietnamese economy to this state of affairs? One, the price of freedom and the need of the newly independent country to spend on defence. Another, the result of the Cambodian invasion. But most important of all the problems encountered by the leadership in trying to build socialism in a country not yet free from the yoke of feudalism.

Ideological rigidity will not do at this point of time in Vietnam's history. With the winds of change that are sweeping through the Communist world, Vietnam is also attempting to reform. What the country needs to do at present is to be tough but flexible, determined but realistic - a timeworn approach which led to Vietnam's independence. Can such an approach succeed in the post war period as it succeeded in time of war? Only time will tell.

**CHAPTER THREE**

## Chapter Three

### POLITICAL REORGANISATION

Success to the Vietnamese has come only by sheer dint of planning and the conviction to achieve. It was this which got them through three war weary decades - more so, their faith in the Communist form of state by which they sought to transform the traditional Vietnamese society into a new political, economic and social order.

To that extent, the struggle till the Second Indochina war was a Revolution -- not a dramatic collapse of the old order but a gradual and deliberate strategy to gain control in order to create a new political order.<sup>1</sup> This revolution wanted to create a new order, for other than attempting to displace the old leaders, it sought a change affecting the social structure, norms and values, patterns of economic and political activity, and the way the individuals thought of their society, of nature and of themselves.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the change

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1 Paul Berman, Revolutionary Organisation (London, 1974), p.1.

2 Ibid., p.2.

sought was of an enduring kind. To that extent, following Samuel Huntington's<sup>3</sup> definition of a successful revolution we can conclude that Vietnam revolution was successful as on the one hand it destroyed the existing ways of life and on the other replaced them with new and enduring institutions.

The traditional political order of Vietnamese society co-existed at two levels.<sup>4</sup> At the base were the villages, each of which was a self-contained, highly integrated unit following its own independent governance. The traditional Vietnamese dynastic state with its mandarin bureaucracy served as a political superstructure connecting and coordinating the otherwise autonomous villages for such purposes as public works, village functions, military recruitment and so on. The village rather than the individual had collective responsibility to the state.<sup>5</sup> A Council of Notables represented the

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3 Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (Yale, 1968), p.264.

4 John T. McAlister, Jr., and Paul Mus, The Vietnamese and Their Revolution (New York, 1970), p.56.

5 Paul Berman, n.1, p.2.



village as a whole. MacAlister and Mus suggest that there existed in sum, "a skillful division of labour. The state--from the military, judicial, and religious point<sup>o</sup>of view was centralised and authoritarian. No villager could have defied it with impunity. But because of the distribution of administrative duties between it and the villages, especially in economic matters, the State weighed lightly.<sup>6</sup> In short, peasants were linked loosely to the state structure while remaining firmly rooted to the village life. The institutional bonds holding this system together stemmed on the one from common interests and on the other from a common belief in the Confucian tradition.

Vietnamese political institutions had evolved over two years of contact with the Chinese culture. This contact grew in a variety of ways, in fact from the very founding of the Vietnamese nation.<sup>7</sup> It grew in leaps and bounds as floods of refugees swarmed into the region in the first century from China. They were

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6 MacAlister and Mus, n.4, p.56.

7 The theory that Vietnam was carved out by Trieu Da, a Chinese general commanding the Kwantung and Kwangsi provinces. He brought the Red River Delta under his jurisdiction and carved out the independent kingdom of Nam Viet or Nan-yeuh. D.R. Sardesai, South East Asia: Past & Present (Sahibabad, 1985), p.38.

not needy peasants but the literati of China, its scholars and officials who disagreed with the successors of the Han dynasty. The result was the large-scale sinicisation of Vietnam and the resultant of this was the growth of a polity not unlike that of the Chinese.

Confucianism was in sum and substance the Chinese polity. It stood for a clear distinction between the realms of state and politics.<sup>8</sup> Denying the ruler the divine right, it advocated that he was a mortal who ruled by divine right. There was, of course, a magical or religious quality about the Confucian ruler that helped him to establish and maintain a charismatic form of authority over the subjects. But he was expected to adhere to sets of established rules of behaviour, the Tao. Inherent in this was the assumption that if the ruler failed to live up to expectations, revolution was permitted.

Vietnam virtually adopted the Confucian form of governance. It became the official doctrine, and

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8 I.W. Mabbett, "Devaraja", Journal of Southeast Asian History, X (September 1959), p.208.

a new legal system, the Hong Duc Code was promulgated to regularize laws and regulations on the Chinese basis. The system had much of good and equally much of bad in it. The latter became more than apparent when the French conquered Vietnam. Like the Chinese experience, the court proved to be ineffective in dealing with crisis confronting it and buckled under the French onslaught. So decayed was the old system that it became a stooge of the new masters of Vietnam.

Being a colonial power wanting to derive the maximum benefit from the subject country, it was hardly expected from the French that they would be the precursors of Western style democratic institutional change in their colony. In fact, they let the court continue in all the areas save the Cochín China region. Here too the reluctance to introduce democratic institutions was apparent and after all inevitable because they could hardly introduce a system whereby their interests would be at stake.<sup>9</sup>

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9 William J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power (Boulder, Colorado, 1981), p.10.

One thing the French had not accounted for was the spread of democratic ideas in Vietnam through the channels of education.<sup>10</sup> Inevitably, there grew a generation of the native population educated on the ideas of liberalism, rationalism, democracy, and so on. They began to pester the French for a more representative government. A great debate was generated at this point of time regarding the suitability or otherwise of democracy as a replacement to the French rule.<sup>11</sup> A prominent school of thought which began to gain acceptance over democratic ideas was marxism - the modern vehicle of change in almost all developing societies. What led to the particular success of the doctrine in this case was its belief in the subordination of the individual to the overall needs of the community, a view familiar to the Confucian mind. Where liberal democracy is gradualist in orientation and stresses the decentralisation of power, Marxism provides a dynamic approach to the problems of social change and

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10 Alexander Woodside, "Problems of Education in the Chinese and Vietnamese Revolution", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver), vol.49, 1976-77, p.644.

11 Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indochina (London, 1961), p.613; Thomas Hodgkin, Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path (London, 1981) pp.155-56.

stresses the need for popular mobilisation, centralized leadership, and a coherent ideology, all features attractive to radical intellectuals who had lost their faith in the Confucian world view. In effect, Marxism served not only as a developmental ideology but also as a form of political religion, providing an explanation of history, a doctrine of good and evil, and the promise of a future paradise on earth.<sup>12</sup>

Marxism entered Vietnam in the 1910s.<sup>13</sup> It first gained root as an ideology of the intelligentsia. It was Ho Chi Minh and his Revolutionary Youth League at first and the ICP later who took it upon themselves to spread the gospel from its limited base of the petit bourgeoisie to the urban proletariat<sup>14</sup> at first and the agricultural classes<sup>15</sup> later.

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12 Duiker, W.J., Vietnam: A Nation in Revolution (Boulder: Colorado, 1983), p.76.

13 Duiker, n.9, p.157.

14 Ibid., p.157.

15 James Scott and Ber Kerkvliet, "The Politics of Survival: Peasant Response to Progress in South East Asia", Journal of South East Asian Studies (Singapore), vol.4, no.2, September 1973, p.252.

However, neither the democracy seeking nationalists nor the communists could flourish in face of such strong French intransigence.<sup>16</sup> The result was that neither movement could achieve much in real terms until the Second World War. However, uprisings organised by both the VNQDD and the ICP had a tremendous impact on the Vietnamese.<sup>17</sup> It also affected the public opinion in France resulting in Prince Bao Dai being brought back to head a reformed monarchy. Moderate nationalists tried to utilise this chance to push forth the reformist movement. Once again, however, this hope in face of the apparent French immobility to change resulted only in frustrated hopes.

Another trend established during the period before the French success was the communist movement gaining a headstart over the non-Marxist movement. Several reasons may be cited, prime amongst them the fact that the ICP was able to reach out to a wider cross-section of the Vietnamese society, namely the peasants by its programme

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16 Robert F. Turner, Vietnamese Communism: Its Origins and Developments (Stanford, 1975), p.17.

17 John T. McAlister Jr., Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution (London, 1969), p.99; T. Hodgkin, Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path (London, 1981), p.257.

of reform through which it sought to exploit the prevalent peasant discontent brought on by successive crop failures.

There were other reasons for this discontent. Prime amongst them was the penetration by the French rule into the political superstructure and the villages.<sup>18</sup> The moral ties of legitimacy linking peasant to the state had been severed. Though the French administration penetrated into village life,<sup>19</sup> French reforms simultaneously eroded the traditional leadership and internal cohesion of the village. In the Mekong Delta, this deterioration took a particularly perverse form with the establishment of wealthy landowners and a tenancy system that, in some areas, replaced many of the customary village functions and relationships.<sup>20</sup>

Another contributory factor was the French destruction of the VNQDD leadership which accounted for the lack of strong and effective non-communist leadership

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18 Berman, n.1, p.2.

19 MacAlister and MuS, n.4, pp.57-59.

20 Berman, n.1, p.2

among the Vietnamese in the post-1930 period, opening immediate opportunity for the communists and virtually guaranteeing their ultimate control of the movement.<sup>21</sup>

A lot of credit for the eventual success of the communists goes to the superb organisation and party discipline as actualised by Ho Chi Minh. It was because of this that inspite of the French crackdown in the 1930s, the ICP was able to reassemble its party machinery. The development of the popular front government in France (1936-39) was also beneficial to the communists as it witnessed the release of all political prisoners.<sup>22</sup> Once again, while the other Vietnamese parties emerged without a coherent programme or organisation, the ICP took advantage of the political situation to organise a broad Democratic National Front under the leadership of Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap aimed at uniting all social classes and political groups.<sup>23</sup>

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21 Sardesai, n.7, p.292.

22 Frank N. Trager, ed., Marxism in Southeast Asia (California, 1960), p.141; Robert F. Turner, n.16, p.25. Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism (New Delhi, 1964), pp.43-44.

23 Sardesai, n.7, p.293.



During the years of the Japanese occupation, the ICP launched a new organisation, the Viet Minh or the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, the Vietnam Independence League, to "unite all patriots without the distinction of wealth, age, sex, religion or political outlook so that they may work together for the liberation of our people and the salvation of our nation".<sup>24</sup> Backed by a military force organised by Giap and with the via media of Salvation Associations (Cuu Quoc), the Viet Minh gained control over the three mountainous provinces of Cao Bang, Lang Son and Bac Kan. Meanwhile, while the Japanese established a government under Tran Traong Kim, the Viet Minh spread its bases on the North.

The Japanese surrender to the allies and the institution by Ho of a National Liberation Committee eventually led to the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2, 1945. Prior to that, Ho had declared a ten-point programme which was more a

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24 Ibid., p.244; Douglas Pike, Viet Cong (New Delhi, 1966), p.11; Huynh Kin Khanh, Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945 (London, 1982), p.256; MacAlister, h.17, p.138; Hoang, n.22, p.47.

'nationalist than a communist programme' containing in it no major agrarian reforms or nationalisation of property".<sup>25</sup> The Republic was a communist victory in as much as ten members out of the fifteen in the new cabinet (constituted to govern the DRV) were communists.<sup>26</sup>

The new Republic was not recognised by any country. In any case, France had other plans for Vietnam in the direction of reassertion of their authority in the region. The allies asked Nationalist China to occupy the northern area and Britain the area to the South. This prevented the Communists from establishing themselves in the North. By sheer dint of courage they held on the regions of the central and southeast suburbs as the Chinese troops occupied the northeastern parts. The nationalist feeling was at its peak at this point of time. Bao Dai sent an impassionate appeal to General de Gaulle:

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25 Sardesai, n.7, p.295.

26 Ibid, D.G.E. Hall, History of Southeast Asia (London, 1981), p.889

"Even if you come to re-establish a French administration here, it will no longer be obeyed: each village will be a nest of resistance, each former collaborator an enemy, and your officials and colonists will themselves ask to leave this atmosphere which they will be unable to breathe".<sup>27</sup>

Once again the strategic genius of Ho came into play accounting thereby for the eventual success of the Communists in Vietnam. In a bid to rid the North of the presence of the Chinese as well as to break the power of the VNQDD and the Dong Minh Hoi, he agreed to the return of the French troops to Hanoi.<sup>28</sup>

The first Indochina war broke out soon what with the French reneged on most of its assurances. The DRV leadership and its army of 40,000 trained troops took to the countryside. The French had to face the Vietminh troops from all the sides. This intransigence on their part led to further popularity of the Communists. The

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27 Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina (Stanford, 1954), p.102.

28 Who had rampaged the countryside in a campaign of loot, plunder and rape. The idea was that Ho felt it would be easier to oust the French from the region than the Chinese. He confided to a friend that "It is better to sniff the French dung for a while than to eat China's all our lives. David Halberstam, Ho (New York, 1971), pp.84-85.

latter definitely served as a better alternative to the "French-backed, largely self-serving and servile nationalist coalition".<sup>29</sup>

With the war still on, the Cold War entered Indochina in March 1949 with the French announcing the birth of the Republic of Vietnam as an Associated State within the French union and America and Great Britain recognising it.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Russia and China retaliated by recognising the DRV. France was however, literally fighting a 'dirty war' which it was bound to lose. General Giap proved a better military commander than the French. He additionally had the support of the large mass of the populace as:

Convinced of the value of their (the communists') cause, they worked with a population which after decades of disorientation, was predisposed to change. The old values which had been personified in the emperor Hue and through him in the traditional mandarin state, had been shattered...The French had once represented unassailable power, but the impression of invincibility had passed. Into this situation came men of their own race and culture who were prepared to work with the peasants and who promised at the same time the alleviation of problems which had pressed upon the rural population for generations...<sup>31</sup>

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29 Sardesai, n.7, p.297.

30 David Thompson, Europe Since Napoleon (Middlesex, 1976), p.865.

31 Milton Osborne, Region of Revolt, Focus on South-east Asia (New South Wales, 1970), p.100.

What the communists were seeking at this point of time was to effect a revolution in the North.<sup>32</sup> In the process they evolved their Party apparatus which was used to mobilize the masses of peasants so that they participated in the Resistance. This comprised of the Party, the military and a network of civilian associations within the villages. By means of parallel hierarchies, of command and control, the members were integrated into a centralized political structure.<sup>33</sup> This central authority began to replace the traditional superstructure with its loose links to the autonomous villages. A network of organisation with the villages as their operating base was established. New patterns of authority were instituted that linked village and villager to the centralised political order. In sum, as Huntington points out, what was done was "mating the mobilization of new groups into politics to the creation and institutionalizing of new political organizations".<sup>34</sup>

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32 Berman, n.1, p.3.

33 MacAlister, n.17, p.140.

34 Huntington, n.3, p.335.

This Viet Minh expansion of territorial control was more successful in the North than in the South. Though guerilla forces in the South were sporadically effective, areas fully under Viet Minh control were limited to the narrow central portion of Vietnam and to such regions as the Ca Mau peninsula and the territory surrounding the Plain of Reeds in the Mekong Delta.

The Viet Minh won the war in the North and with the seige of the Dien Bien Phu and the signing of the Geneva Agreements, Vietnam was divided along the 17th parallel. Part of the reason for the Viet Minh's reasons for agreeing to this accord was the pressure put on it by its communist allies, the Russians and the Chinese as they were pursuing, at that point of time, a policy of "peaceful co-existence with capitalism".<sup>35</sup> From its standpoint therefore, the "revolution" was incomplete.<sup>36</sup>

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35 Sardesai, n.7, p.299. Sardesai further adds that "China could have a special reason of its own, its historical policy being not to encourage a political consolidation among its neighbouring countries".

36 Berman, n.1, p.3.

From 1954, the South experimented with the facade of a liberal democratic model of the West drawing support from the political elite composed of moderate nationalists, an affluent urban middle class, landed elements in rural areas and the civilian and military bureaucracy. South Vietnam was declared a Republic in October 1955. Diem a nationalist sanctioned by the US proclaimed himself as the President of the Republic. Diem till now had been busy consolidating his position by removing from the South all extra-legal challenges to his authority-namely, the three religio-military sects of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and the Binh Xuyen. On the twenty-sixth itself he announced his plans for a unilateral election of a "national assembly on 4 March 1956 which would draw up a constitution for the new republic. Though the Republic of Vietnam controlled urban areas and, with the help of U.S. aid, maintained a substantial military force, it was little more than an "attenuated French colonial regime".<sup>37</sup>

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37 Francis Fitzgerald, Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam (Boston, 1972), p.92.

The leadership of Diem failed the problem being that Diem was unable to grasp the essentials of the pluralistic society of which he was in command. Also, "under the veneer of his commitment to republican institutions, Diem was at heart a traditional figure, more comfortable in the world of Confucian hierarchy and enlightened despotism than in the rough-and-tumble arena of democratic politics."<sup>38</sup> Diem ruled, literally, in an aloof and paternalistic manner, withdrawing himself within the walls of the "Forbidden Palace" and depending for information and guidance on a close coterie of "court sycophants and members of his extended family.

Over the years Diem turned autocratic in his bid to wipe out communism from the South. Instead of liberalising the system and allowing freedom he unleashed a "mopping up"<sup>39</sup> programme in 1957 to mop up the communists. His principal sources of power at that time were the United States, members of his own extended family and Catholics, constituting a ten per cent

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38 Duiker, n.12, p.78.

39 Jean Lacouture, Vietnam Between Two Truces (New York, 1966), pp.67-68.



minority largely refugees from the North, who were hated by most of the Southern Buddhist population because of their religion and their northern origins.<sup>40</sup> So paranoid became Diem that any dissident nationalist was branded as a communist and put behind bars. By 1957, Diem's state had become a "police state".<sup>41</sup>

Diem's fall was brought on by movements led by Buddhist monks and nuns who felt threatened by Diem's pro-catholic policies.

The role of US policy makers is not blameless in Diem turning autocratic. As the limited US perception could see no more beyond a conflict between forces of freedom and communist totalitarianism, they never prompted Diem to introduce reforms on the socio-economic front. Instead, seventy-five per cent of the aid provided to Vietnam was used to bolster the country's military budget.<sup>42</sup> As Duiker points out:

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40 Sardesai, n.7, p.404.

41 William Henderson, "South Vietnam finds Itself", Foreign Affairs, XXXV, 2 (January 1957), p.285.

42 By 1957, the United States paid half the government budget, including the full payroll of the armed forces. Anthony Bouscaren, The Last of the Mandarins (Pittsburgh, 1965), p.65.

Washington's persistent emphasis on the overriding importance of the survival of an anti-communist regime in Saigon undoubtedly led U.S. policy makers to give priority to military and security issues over democratic practices.<sup>43</sup>

This attitude of the U.S. was to influence the successive leaders of the South after Diem. His ouster in any case inaugurated an era of musical chairs with every successive military regime that followed being more dependent on the U.S. for support. After 1966, a half-hearted process of democratisation was initiated with the trappings of elections, a new constitution, a president with a four year term, an independent judiciary and so on. But with the emphasis on the war effort<sup>44</sup> being the over-riding consideration and the failure to strike roots in the grass-root levels, democracy was bound to be a failure in the South.<sup>45</sup>

Meantime, while politicians in Saigon were groping with the challenges of social development and civil

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43 Duiker, n.9, p.78.

44 That the US could perceive the conflict in South Vietnam mainly in terms of aggression by North Vietnam is clearly stated in the white paper entitled A Threat to the Peace (Washington, D.C., 1961), p.iii.

45 Berman, n.1, p.4.

strife, the Communists were attempting, under Ho Chi Minh to apply their alternative in the North.

The Communists had been at the helm of affairs since 1945. However, it was only after the Geneva Conference that the party began to consolidate its position in the North by inaugurating a people's democratic dictatorship. The party was renamed The Vietnam Workers Party with Ho Chi Minh as the President. During the 50s, the efforts of the leaders was to build an elective base and to establish popular support. According to the 1960 constitution, the only source of power was the National Assembly, elected after every Four years. Its members were elected by universal suffrage on the basis of one deputy for every 10,000 voters on urban areas and one per 30,000 in the countryside. In theory the Assembly was the sovereign body in the State. In practise however, it served as no more than a rubber stamp of the President who was given over-riding powers by the new constitution.<sup>46</sup>

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46 Douglas Pike, A History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1976 (Stanford, California, 1978), p.128.

Political power was concentrated in the hands of the Politbureau which was a "closed corporation"<sup>47</sup> bound by the "wealth of shared revolutionary experience".<sup>48</sup>

Through an efficiently organised cadre system, the DRV managed to control of the North. These common cadres were well known for their dedication to the country's achievement of socio-economic goals. Operating through the mass associations, in Vietnam they were the vital link between the party and the population as a whole, they were arranged on a vertical basis with branches at the local level linked to higher echelons upto the central organisation.

Eventually, the Communist party may be regarded as the leading force in Vietnamese politics, inner cohesion in the ranks of which were maintained by a process of democratic centralism according to which the party makes its decisions by a democratic process but enforces absolute obedience throughout all echelons

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47 Thai Quang Trung, Collective Leadership & Factionalism (Singapore, 1985), p.2.

48 David W.P. Elliott, "North Vietnam Since Ho", Problems of Communism, XXIV (July-August, 1975) p.43.

of the party once a final decision was made. Decisions are made at committee meetings by majority vote and individual Party members must then obey. The minority obeys the decision of the majority. The lower echelons obey the decisions of the upper echelons. All elements obey the Central Committee...one shout and a thousand echoes".<sup>49</sup>

The role of the Party was of significance as, since 1930, the party has viewed itself as the leading forces in the Vietnamese revolution. A key component in the party's ability to retain its dominant political role within the D.R.V. lay in its capacity to maintain inner cohesion and centralization of purpose and authority. The direction of the party is in the hands of a small number of top leaders concentrated in the Politburo. Their leadership has shown tremendous stability in the communist world. The current leadership first began to take shape just before and during World War-I when party leadership was in the hands of Ho Chi Minh, and a number of his younger colleagues including Pham Van Dong, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Truong Chinh. During

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49 Douglas Pike, n.46, p.136.

the years that followed the end of the war, that inner party elite was gradually expanded to include Nguyen Chi Thanh, Pham Hung, and Le Duan. Throughout the Vietnam war, this group retained control over the party. After Ho's death, the new rising star, Le Duan gained command of the Party. Some scholars maintain that within the party there existed factions arrayed as the pro-Moscow and the pro-Peking groups.<sup>50</sup> However, in face of the common danger, the party managed to maintain a united facade and the cracks, if at all present, never became visible.

The Party had its apparatus in the South as well. This was originally an integral part of the ICP and then of the Dang Lao Dong. It assumed a somewhat separate status after 1954 as the Southern Branch and in January 1962 the branch was officially converted into the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP). In the circumstances, the objective of this was to achieve national liberation while postponing for the time being the socialist revolution in the South.<sup>51</sup> After victory, the PRP

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50 Thai Quang Trung, n.47, pp.1-5.

51 Zasloff, J.J., & Brown, M., Communism in Indochina (New York, 1975), p.53.

quietly died, officially so with the creation of the Vietnam Communist Party in December 1976. Douglas Pike points out the three fold task of the party in the South. They were: (1) To eliminate all potentially hostile elements from the villages; (2) The effort in the South be as self-supporting as possible; and (3) To build up a uniform revolutionary thought and feeling among the masses.<sup>52</sup>

Unification brought on the concomittant problem of ideological remoulding and unification of the North and the South. The decision to hold elections for a single Vietnamese National Assembly was taken on the 21st of November 1975 when a communique stated:

It is necessary to complete national reunification on the basis of national independence and socialism...the key point at present is to achieve national reunification on the state plane...it is necessary to organize soon general elections throughout the territory of Vietnam to elect a common National Assembly for the whole country....<sup>53</sup>

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52 Pike, n.46, p.127.

53 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXI, 1975, p.27497.

This assembly was to have the powers of electing the leading state organs and of working out a new constitution for the United Vietnam. The elections would be on the basis of strict observance of the democratic principles of universal, equal, direct and secret ballot.<sup>54</sup> Reunification was finally effected in the summer of 1976 and the first Congress of the Vietnamese Workers Party to be held since 1960 was opened in Hanoi on 14 December, 1976. Le Duan stated in this Congress that united Vietnam was to be a "state of the people" and was to be characterized by the "collective mastery" of the people. Yet, in all this, the "party leads all activities of society in the conditions of proletarian dictatorship. The party leadership is the supreme guarantee of the system of collective mastery of the working people, for the existence and activity of the socialist state."<sup>55</sup>

Not surprisingly, the decision to govern two regions with disparate political, social and economic problems with an institutional structure that was evolved to meet other problems in a very different context was

54 Ibid.

55 Report of Le Duan, First Secretary of the Party, 14 December 1976, Keesings Contemporary Archives, p.28277.



bound to result in problems. "Not surprisingly", notes Elliott, "the old institutional structure is undergoing a wrenching period of transformation as it attempts to adjust to new circumstances. The problems which pose the greatest challenge to the process of developing an effective institutional structure are the continuing economic crisis and the difficulties of integrating the South into a set of institutions that reflect a different level and stage of socialist transformation. Add to this the strain of military mobilization in response to the crisis in relation with China and Kampuchea and it is clear why the SRV's existing institutional structure has not measured upto the heavy demands placed on it".<sup>56</sup>

The SRV leadership tried to tackle this challenge with the readjustment of many of the methods tried by it earlier. Prime amongst these was the faith in the party cadres and units to spread the revolutionary gospel. Another means adopted was to send potential forces of revolt, the soldiers and officials of the

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David W.P. Elliott,  
<sup>56</sup>Vietnam, Institutional Developments in Crisis, Southeast Asian Affairs, Singapore, 1981, p.349.

ex-regime for re-education. There was relatively little open resistance to the new administration. However, with the new regime declaring that "backward, unscientific, superstitious customs must be changed" and that there must be a "complete eradication of all differences in economic and cultural knowledge between the ethnic minority and the majority people",<sup>57</sup> a segment of the population began to feel threatened in particular in the Central Highlands and the 1960s organization such as the FILRO were revived. Though posing no threat in themselves to the Communist regime, these movements were a sign that of popular discontent. A lot of this discontent arose out of the weaknesses which had crept into the Party over the war years.

Till unification, the State had been characterized by a "topheavy and overcentralized structure"<sup>58</sup> and the local administration had been in the care of the cadres. The party had utilised the local institutions in a major way to implement reform and change. After

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57 Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1977, vol.XXIII, p.28277.

58 David Elliott, n.<sup>56</sup>~~48~~, p.350.

1975, the mission had changed from war to economic construction.<sup>59</sup> Tackling this was the essential structure of the Party - the Central Committee with the Politbureau at the pinnacle, the intermediate committee in the middle serving to rewriting directives from the centre to make them relevant locally; and then the basic level committees to localize further and implement the directives from higher headquarters.<sup>60</sup> In December 1976, the Party in its all-encompassing form represented 3.22 per cent of the total Vietnamese population.<sup>61</sup> Of these only 1.3 per cent were representative of the Southern population.<sup>62</sup> Thus there was a tremendous shortage of Party members in the South.

The Southern Party's weakness is due to depletion of ranks during the war years as also because of the general post-war problems which have affected those who have survived.<sup>63</sup> One area of weakness is those

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59 David Elliott, n.56, p.350.

60 Douglas Pike, n.46, p.139.

61 Ibid., p.139.

62 David Elliott, n.56, p.358.

63 Ibid. For instance one village in the Tien Giang province whose current Party Secretary is the sixth in the last ten years -- all previous incumbents were killed.

regions which have always had a weak party structure, such as the Phu My village of Hau Giang province. Popular associations, the institutional vehicles of socio-economic change, are thus weak resulting in a loss of democracy<sup>64</sup> as the village party and the government feel obliged to do everything themselves. Attitudinal problems have also arisen which serve to lessen the effectiveness of cadres. For instance the Mekong Delta area where since almost all rural party members and cadres come from peasantry, have families living in an individual oriented economic system, and thus it is really difficult to avoid having this economic system influence their daily life style and way of thinking.<sup>65</sup>

A solution to this problem was sought by introducing Party members from the North to the South. However, other than the fact that they themselves were much needed in the North and that their status as peoples from another community creates problems of

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64 Ibid., from the Nhan Dan of 5 June, 1978.

65 Ibid., from the Nhan Dan of 14 June 1978.

local integration.<sup>66</sup> It was found that many, accustomed to the "personal privations and the puritanical lifestyle in the North, were seduced by the relatively affluent and hedonistic conditions in the South".<sup>67</sup> Any currently recruited membership was noticed to have posed the greatest problems of corruption and abuse of power.<sup>68</sup> The issue of recruiting new members thus remains unresolved. Additionally, a problem of recruiting new members from amongst the Southern youth arises as the SRV has calculated that only 30-50 per cent of them can be recruited, only their families being clear of any association in the past with either the Saigon or the United States.<sup>69</sup>

By the late 1970s a purge of the impure elements had become more than necessary in order to rid the organization of any such members who had indulged in serious errors such as corruption, favouritism and oppression of the masses.<sup>70</sup> At the Fifth Congress of

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66 David Elliott, n.56, p.359.

67 Duiker, n.12, p.42.

68 David Elliott, for instance, the "30/5" cadres recruited on the day of the revolutionary victory in the South, n.56, p.359.

69 Ibid.

70 Duiker, n.12, p.92.

Congress of the Party in 1982, it was announced that 86,000 members of the Party had been expelled.<sup>71</sup> The total membership stood at 1,727,784 of whom over 370,000 had been recruited in the last five years, a vast majority of them belonging to the under thirty age group.<sup>72</sup>

Troubles within the ranks of the party did not leave the top unscathed for once the commonly accepted goal of unification was achieved, the problems of maintaining internal unity rose.<sup>73</sup> In December 1976, at the Fourth Party Congress, several party members, in particular the Politbureau member Hoanag Van Hoan were deprived of their posts. Hoan later defected to China, revealing the open rift between the pro-Moscow and the pro-Beijing groups. Another defection was of Truong Nhu Tang in 1979. Hoan later testified that under the control of Le Duan "Vietnam is no longer today an independent and sovereign country but one subservient to a foreign power economically, politically, militarily and diplomatically."<sup>74</sup>

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71 Ibid.

72 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXVIII, 1982, p.31592.

73 Trung, n.47, pp.1-15.

74 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXV, 1979 p.29876.

Some changes also occurred in the Party as several members were dropped at the Fifth Party Congress in 1982 for instance when veteran members of the Politbureau Nguyen Lam, Hoang Anh and Vo Chi Cong were dropped and replaced by younger men. The top leadership of Le Duan, Pham Van Dong and Truong Chinh remained unaltered. Since 1980, a series of changes have occurred in the government as well. In early 1980, a total of nineteen cabinet posts changed hands. The veteran Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh was replaced by his Deputy Nguyen Ho Tach on the grounds that he had "failed to assess China's intention towards Vietnam".<sup>75</sup> General Giap was replaced by General Van Tien Dung for failing to "reorganize the armies as well as for incorrectly assessing Chinese military capabilities".<sup>76</sup> Trung defines these changes as the development of a campaign against former pro-China figures as also the moderates in the Politbureau.<sup>77</sup>

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75 Trung, n.50, p.80.

76 Pike, n.46, p.130.

77 Duiker, n.12, p.93.

The SRV leadership was to face another crisis in the issue of political succession. The leadership in 1978 was old, the average age being sixty-six years.<sup>78</sup> There was thus "a generation-gap between the leaders and the ranks and file".<sup>79</sup> In 1981, the average of the twelve senior members of the Politbureau was over seventy years. A growing gulf between the young and the old was thus inevitable in the situation, described by some as a "demand by young cadres to liberate the Party from old Guardism".<sup>80</sup> However, until 1985 the two high-ranked positions of Premier Dong, now in his 80s and of President Chinh also 80, remained unaltered.

Correspondingly, on 18 December 1980, the Vietnamese National Assembly adopted a new constitution to replace the North Vietnamese Constitution of 1959, which had been in force throughout the country since the reunification of Vietnam's in 1976.<sup>81</sup> The new charter was designed to advance Vietnam "directly from a society

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78 Pike, n.46. p.130.

79 Ibid., p.5.

80 Ibid.

81 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXVII, 1981, p.30805.



in which small-scale production dominates to socialism, bypassing the stage of capitalist development".<sup>82</sup> A Council of State was instituted to serve as a collective chief of state and elected by the National Assembly from amongst its ranks. This replaced the Head of the State. This allowed apparently for a balance of power between the Party and the State.<sup>83</sup>

However, inspite of all these changes, it becomes apparent that as yet the leadership dilemma in the STV has not been resolved. Despite this, a solid front is maintained in face of all dangers.

Another institutional change which has been effected is the promulgation of "legal codes and regulations which set clear standards of expected behaviour and penalties and rewards for meeting them."<sup>84</sup> These replaced the till-now prevalent "rule of virtue". They did away with the decentralised system of functioning of the wartime. The introduction of these new administrative regulations "diminished the authority of party members

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82 Ibid., p.30805.

83 Thai Quang Trung, n.50, p.91.

84 David Elliott, n.56, p.360.

and cadres since they were now forced to watch their own conduct more carefully and their prominent role as custodians and interpreters of the rules and regulations governing wide sectors of life in Vietnam was circumscribed".<sup>85</sup>

One of the major problems faced by the SRV is that an entire generation has grown up under a legal code that was not widely accepted as legitimate and was therefore capriciously enforced. The SRV has felt it necessary, in the circumstances to point out the "differences between having law abiding under the old system and under the new regime".<sup>86</sup> According to a report in the Thanh Nien of 1979, "If in the old society the virtue of the people was in opposition to the law, in the new society, the people's virtue is entirely compatible to it; it complements the law and popular opinion and individual conscience systematically protect the law".<sup>87</sup> In the long-run, this has proven to be more a statement of aspiration than of

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85 Ibid., p.361.

86 David Elliott, n.56, p.361.

87 Thanh Nien, no.4, 1978.

fact especially since the SRV has thought it necessary to establish a more effective inspectorate to see that the new overhauled legal and administrative codes are not violated.<sup>88</sup>

In sum, the going, from a war-time state and government to a peace-time one with a shift in focus to the developmental tasks had not been easy at all. The SRV has sought to combat the problems by organisational and administrative remedies. But the problem continues, may be because of factionalism and the old leadership, may be because of the paucity of funds but most of all because of the people themselves since even the most "dedicated cadres may waver in the face of gearing up for new challenges just as they catch their breath from the staggering efforts that they have expended in winning the war".<sup>89</sup> There are other problems as well, in particular those arising from the anti-Communists in the SRV.

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88 Nhan Dan, Hanoi, 25 January, 1978 carried an announcement that the national Assembly had voted to grant additional powers to the Special Peoples Council in Ho Chi Minh City to try especially serious crimes against social order there, indicating that this is a serious problem.

89 David Elliott, n.56, p.361.

In the final analysis, Vietnam has not yet countered all the problems it faced after unification.

Pike, writing in 1978 had noted that:

For two traumatic decades, Communist Vietnam curiously escaped the winds of change that buffeted the rest of the world. Events were frozen in the war. Now, it is clear, the clock has begun to run again in Vietnam. Time has started moving in its erosive, mysterious way. Change is about to assault the society and the party. Time and change are what Vietnam will now be all about.<sup>90</sup>

And time and change is what Vietnam continues to be about.

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90 Pike, n.46, p.152.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

## Chapter Four

### SOCIETY AND CULTURE

"The two essential elements that contributed to the moulding of the early Vietnamese social organisation have been the struggle with nature and with the neighbour to the north".<sup>1</sup>

"The more they (the Vietnamese) absorbed of the skills, customs, and ideas of the Chinese, the smaller grew the likelihood of their ever becoming part of the Chinese. In fact, it was during the centuries of intensive efforts to turn them into Chinese that the Vietnamese came into their own as a separate people, with political and cultural aspects of their own".<sup>2</sup>

"....Incredibly, General Westmoreland believed he was conferring a boon on the Vietnamese when, having demolished their cities and temples and devastated their countryside, he provided them with

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1 D.R. Sardesai, Southeast Asia Past and Present (New Delhi, 1985), p.38.

2 Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam, A Political History (New York, 1968), p.29.

eight airfields, 11 million square feet of covered storage space and 2.5 million cubic feet of cold storage. "In a short time", he wrote, "South Vietnam acquired facilities possessed by few other nations other than the most highly developed. What it lost, he does not say and appears not even to comprehend".<sup>3</sup>

It has been alleged that though in Southeast Asia, the culture of Vietnam is more of the Eastern world led by its neighbour in the North, China. The argument becomes persuasive, especially in the light of the fact that for several years Vietnam was under direct Chinese rule and that till today there exists between the two a similarity with regard to literature, language, architecture, religious beliefs and art. In fact to quote one Vietnamese scholar:

"Our nation has been influenced by China in all regards, with regard to politics, society, ethics, religion, and customs. As far as literature is concerned, we studied Chinese characters, practised Confucianism, and gradually assimilated the thought and art of China. The scholars of our country studied Chinese classics and histories, read Chinese poetry and prose, and also used Chinese characters when

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3 Geoffrey Barraclough, *Turning Points in World History* (Norfolk, Thames and Hudson, 1979), p.83.

reciting and composing. Even in literary works written in Vietnamese, authors could not escape the influence of Chinese literature. Some of the literary forms were distinctly ours, but most were borrowed from China-Nom characters-were made up of elements of Chinese characters".<sup>4</sup>

At another level is the influence of the Indian culture since traditionally, Vietnam, along with the Indochinese region has been a zone of contact between India and China. The degree of Chinese influence exists but should not be stressed upon. As Duiker points out:

...as the civilisation of the United States can be described only as a result of the interaction between foreign cultures brought by immigrants and the indigenous environments, so Vietnamese culture represents, in broad terms, the product of a similar interaction between Sinitic institutions and values and the native environment in Southeast Asia..."<sup>5</sup>

Although our knowledge about the Vietnamese civilization in its early stages is inadequate, there is enough evidence to conclude that there existed a

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4 Duong Quang Ham, Vietnam Van Hoc Su Yeu (An outline history of Vietnamese literature), cited in Truong Chinh, "The Long Struggle to Defend Our National Culture", Communist Review, March 1979, p.62.

5 W.J. Duiker, Vietnam: A Nation in Revolution (Boulder: Colorado, 1983), p.117.



fair level of development in the Vietnamese society prior to the Chinese conquest in the second century. Scholars have unearthed a relatively well fostered level of civilization, the Dong-son, in the Tongking Delta for instance.<sup>6</sup> It was a Bronze Age farming community which was aware of irrigation, had knowledge of the seas, of astronomy, etc.

On this had worked the influence of Chinese culture. How far and to what level is a matter of investigation since in a society there exists a culture of the elite and one of the rural folk - a popular culture, based on the indigenous elements which ruled existence at that level.<sup>7</sup>

Finally it must be pointed out that there was on all this the influence of the West. How was this received? Geoffrey Barraclough points:

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6 Further details can be got from studies made by B. Kalgren and O.T. Janse. These findings lay to rest popular fallacies that most civilising influences such as the introduction of iron and of bronze was the resultant of Chinese and Indian influences. Sardesai, n.1, p.13; D.G. Hall, A History of South East Asia (London, 1981), p.8.

7 A dichotomy between these two levels of society and culture is the prevailing trend in the study of histories of most countries. In Vietnam, Hue Tanhotai, Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam (London, 1983).

"It is no accident that the dichotomy between modern technological civilization and traditional cultural values is felt most strongly in Asia and Africa. In the West, modern society grew by fairly regular stages out of traditional society; there were many uncomfortable moments, but there was no sudden break, no direct confrontation. In Asia and Africa the West forced its values, often at gunpoint, on peoples who had no desire to adopt them".<sup>8</sup>

This was true of Vietnam as well. Yet inspite of all resistance to Western conquest, there did develop in the country a social strata Western in orientation, outlook and thought.<sup>9</sup> In the years after unification, it became a formidable task to integrate these people into the general mainstream of society.

But first let us examine this amalgam of Sino-Vietnamese culture and the changes wrought in it at first by the French and then the marked difference which emerged between the North and South Vietnams in the years of American occupation be examined.

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8 Geoffrey Barraclough, n.3, p.78.

9 This culture was more than apparent in the cities: for Saigon, Alfred Viscount Northcliffe in My Journey Round the World commented, "My little party was amazed to discover that we were in a miniature Paris..."; for Hanoi James Cameron remarked in the Evening Standard that the French had created there "colonies of boulevards and brothels". Peter Yap, The Travellers Dictionary of Quotations (London, 1983), p.978.

As stated earlier, there existed two levels of culture. It was probably only the elite and the court,<sup>10</sup> which adopted the mandarin style bureaucracy and Confucian ethics.<sup>11</sup> The masses retained their language, customs and religious beliefs rooted in animism and ancestor-worship.<sup>12</sup> Thus Confucianism by its very nature had a limited appeal and was restricted to the elite. Buddhism, because it could reach to the masses spread to the villages and even supplemented popular religion at the grass-root level.<sup>13</sup> Confucianism was to ultimately triumph in Vietnam, and with it developed a rigid formalism in the social system, characterised by a framework of hierarchical and inflexible relationships and the low position of women in society. On this worked the marauding zeal of Western culture whether by force or by the efforts of Christian missionaries or indirectly through French colonial trades, administration

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10 The Chinese mandarin system with its Confucian values helped the elite to erect a wall of authority, according to Jean Chesneaux, Contribution a l'Histoire de la Nation Vietnamiennne, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1962, pp.26-27.

11 EllenJHammer, The Struggle for Indo-China (Stanford, 1959), p.52.

12 Sardesai, n.1, p.40.

13 Duiker, n.5, p.118.

and the new educational system.<sup>14</sup>

The influence of this was not uniform for whereas Cochin China as a colony under direct French rule was to be affected most, it was weakest in Annam where Colonial rule was perpetuated through the trappings of the traditional court.<sup>15</sup> The most effective medium for the spread of Western values was the introduction of modern education. As David Thompson points out:

"The colonial revolution of the twentieth century was much more than a colonial revolt. One of its roots was the growth of population, wealth, literacy and national awareness among the peoples of the colonial territories: a demand for the ending of that political dependence, racial inequality, and economic subservience which were the substance of latter nineteenth century imperialism. This demand grew with the spread of westernization itself, and it was nourished by the liberal ideas of freedom, equality, and self-determination as well as, by the spread of education..."<sup>16</sup>

This is to emphasise just one point which is that due to the spread of modern education, Sino-

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14 Frank Trager, Why Vietnam (New York, 1966), p.30.

15 John T. McAlister, Jr., Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution (New York, 1969), p.20.

16 David Thompson, Europe Since Napoleon (Middlesex, 1977), p.852.

Vietnamese educational traditions gradually gave way to a Franco-Vietnamese one. The latter operated on a two track basis, with an advanced system based on French language and culture and culminating in the University of Hanoi opened in 1908 for the Vietnamese elite, and a system of popular education at the elementary level, based on the Vietnamese language, for the masses.<sup>17</sup>

A dramatic change was wrought with the introduction of this Western culture. To a certain extent, the impact was corrosive as it sought to assimilate the elite Vietnamese into the French culture.<sup>18</sup> In particular it was apparent in the growth of a Westernised middle-class.<sup>19</sup> Western impact was however slower in reaching the villages which remained tradition bound to the end and were unaffected, unlike the cities.

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17 McAlister, n.15, p.42; Hall, n.6, pp.800-2.

18 Thomas E. Ennis, French Policy and Developments in Indochina (New York, 1973), p.64.

19 Affluent Vietnamese in Saigon for instance aped French eating habits and dresses, entered western occupations, lived in Western style houses, spoke French and later, even adopted French citizenship. For them, the Confucian heritage appeared but a mere shadow of its glorious past, inadequate to meet the challenges of the new century. Duiker, n.5, p.126.

Reflections of the Western influence were also found in the fields of art and cultural activities. It was apparent most in the burgeoning literature which even began calling for a change in the value system of Vietnamese society and the incorporation in it of Western traditions.<sup>20</sup>

In a sense, however, the French administration did penetrate into the peasant's civilization, which had persisted in a relatively uninterrupted fashion during the last two thousand years.<sup>21</sup> The French substituted elections for cooperation of council members, instituted regular registration of births and deaths resulting in more accurate tax polls, etc. The elections returned Western educated individuals which was the first step towards the dissemination of Western culture as these were men uneducated in the traditional Vietnamese thought. In a sense, to agree with Sardesai:

"...., the French sought to create a new type of Vietnamese a brown gentleman who would willingly accept French beliefs,

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- 20 Nguyen Van Vinh's Dong Duong Tap Chi, for example, advocating modern western ways, socio-cultural reform and betterment of the position of women. Duiker, n.5, p.126.
- 21 Christine White, "Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (Massachusetts), vol.10, no.3, 1978, p.36.

standards of behaviour and values."<sup>22</sup>

But the dichotomy between the rural and the urban was increasingly enhanced. On this worked the influence of the American occupation, further enhancing the disparities. In fact the builders of a reunited Vietnam were to openly acknowledge this fact and to stress on reunification "in terms of the political and social system, specifically in terms of...social strata, culture and thinking, and so forth."<sup>23</sup>

At this point it would only be apt to analyse the nature and extent of American influence on South Vietnam. The two regions were a study in paradox for while the North was marching ahead with the banner of socialism using all vehicles to spread the ideology, the South was under the rule of U.S. neo-colonialism giving full reign to a capitalist culture with the remotest links to the furthering of a welfare society.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Sardesai, n.1, p.288.

23 M. Truong Chinh's address to the Joint Conference on the Reunification of Vietnam on 15 November 1975. Kessings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXI, 1975, p.27997.

24 Duiker, n.5, p.127.

An interesting study in these contrasts is in the realm of education: While the North gave the eradication of illiteracy its first priority and achieved almost cent percent literacy the South gave it no more than a fleeting thought and thereby the old form of education continued, elitist and scarce.<sup>25</sup>

It was almost as though a new civilisation was taking root in the South. As Duiker points out for two decades the social and cultural environment in South Vietnam reflected an uneasy amalgam of Vietnamese, French and American themes. American influence penetrated South Vietnamese society through a variety of means. U.S. economic and technological assistance stimulated the rise of an affluent middle-class increasingly influenced by social and cultural trends in the United States. The educational system was remodelled on the pattern of the U.S. system....In the creative arts, a subtle intermingling of indigenous and Western currents took place. In literature the influence of U.S. individualist culture produced a rush of novels and short stories laced with

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25 Ibid., p.127.



satire, romanticism, and sexual love themes. Many dealt with issues raised by the war but others were frankly escapist and somewhat reminiscent of the bitter sweet era of the 1920s. Popular music, too, reflected influences from the West. Popular tunes mingled indigenous themes with the rock beat of the contemporary West, and aided by the presence of half a million U.S. servicemen, the cultural heroes of the 1960s and early 1970s in the West achieved similar popularity in South Vietnam.<sup>26</sup>

While the model of cultural development in the South was American, in the North it was socialist in orientation and thus under the Soviet influence by virtue of Soviet Union being the first state to put into practice the ideals of a society which reflect "the essential ideas of equality and the effective abolition of private property, combined with the need for social protection against the chances of fate."<sup>27</sup> The strategy for a new cultural programme was drafted as early as in 1943 by

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26 Duiker, n.5, p.12.

27 David Robertson, Dictionary of Politics (Middlesex, 1985), p.304.

General Truong Chinh calling for a new society based on the themes of national independence, people's democracy and socialism.<sup>28</sup> This evolved from Ho Chi Minh's own ideas which had visualised the creation of a new society non-feudal in content. To promulgate this new culture, cadres were created of dedicated communists. The popularity of these men was tremendous as they had the following advantages which Milton Osborne points out:

"Convinced of the value of their own cause, they (the cadres) worked with a population which, after decades of disorientation, was predisposed to change. The old values which had been personified on the emperor at Hue, and through him in the traditional mandarin state, had been shattered. The French had once represented unassailable power, but the impression of invincibility had passed. Into this situation came men of their own race and culture who were prepared to work with the peasants and who promised at the same time the alleviation of problems which had pressed upon the rural population for generations."<sup>29</sup>

Similarly literature and education were also pressed into action to promulgate the new culture the ethos of which was to link the world of culture with economic realities and the political situation and

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28 Duiker, n.5, p.129.

29 Milton Osborne, Region of Revolt: Focus on South-east Asia (New South Wales, 1970), p.100.

thereby popularise the ideal of the communist man. Ho Chi Minh noted in a brief address to artists in 1951: "With regard to your creative work, you must understand, get in close touch with and go deeply into the people's life. Only by doing so will you be able to depict the heroism and determination of our soldiers and people and to contribute to the development and heightening of these qualities".<sup>30</sup>

The response to this was mixed: partly successful and partly not. While significant successes were achieved in the realm of education, in wiping out the Western influence by putting curbs on the activities of the Church, and in creating the sense of nationalism, the response towards producing a new society, socialist in content, were not heartening.<sup>31</sup> To understand this, we must go into the very psyche of the ordinary man who inadvertently in the name of progress was being eroded of his inherited culture which was giving way to the spreading tentacles of a uniform, standardised

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30 Cited in "To the Artists on the Occasion of the 1951 painting Exhibition" in Ho Chi Minh, Selected Writings (Hanoi, 1977), pp.133-134.

31 Duiker, n.5, p.130. He points out that "the stubborn resistance of the Vietnamese peasant to the collective mentality - like that of his counterpart in China and the Soviet Union - was difficult to break.

civilization, underpinned by values and assumptions which he obviously did not share - but natural since the change being initiated was from above and not a mass movement from below. The people of North Vietnam were thus the victims of progress and this not very surprisingly led to movements and uprisings by the minorities asserting their autonomy, demanding decentralization and devolution, and struggling to preserve their identity...<sup>32</sup>

In the rural society the resistance to change came from the tradition of dominant feudalism. In the cities it was spearheaded by the till-now allies of the revolution i.e., the intelligentsia.

Nevertheless, there existed a marked difference in attitudes and behavioural patterns between the two regions of the North and the South with one being a markedly socialist society and the other a bourgeois one. How to resolve this issue was a moot problem. In fact, the preceding years war can be summed up as a

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32 Barraclough, n.3, p.83.

fight over the nature of Vietnamese society and the issue now was to transform the south into a new social order.<sup>33</sup>

A PRG spokesman was to himself admit the magnitude of the problem when he said that socialism would take time to come to the South as the "Saigonese have been corrupted for decades by the French and the Americans" and also because "the peoples attitudes and way of life are completely different in the north and the south".<sup>34</sup> Yet these differences had to be countered if the holistic union of Vietnam was desired particularly if it has to maintain the new order, "loyalty to... immediate social groupings is subordinated to loyalty to the state."<sup>35</sup> The first stage of the revolution had been completed; the second stage, viz., of a socialistic society was an immediate and yet a delicate task for there existed the risk of affronting minority groups, dissidents and the likes and thus initiating a resistance movement.

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33 Paul Berman, Revolutionary Organisation (London, 1974), p.1.

34 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXI, 1975, p.27496.

35 Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (Yale, 1974), p.30.

The new revolutionary authorities therefore moved cautiously--yet forcefully with the intent of unifying the two Vietnams into one Socialist mainstream.

Amongst the first moves was the all out attempts to eradicate the last influences of the erstwhile American era from the urban areas. As one of its first acts, the new revolutionary government attempted to close the bars and drive the prostitutes, beggars, drug pushers and juvenile gangs off the streets. For effecting this transition of Vietnam from a traditional society into a nation-state, the communist revolutionary leadership had developed an organisation, capable of integrating individuals into a national order, under an effective central authority and thereby promoting legitimacy.<sup>36</sup> The regime instructed the cadres not to be overzealous in carrying out the policy, however, and on a few occasions, cadres were reprimanded for harrassing local youths for their long hair or Western

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36 Samuel P. Huntington, n.35, p.15.

clothing.<sup>37</sup> Training centres were established to provide re-education for addicts, delinquents, and streetwalkers and orphanages for the homeless as also of the soldiers and officials of the erstwhile regime.<sup>38</sup>

However, in 1976, according to reports by foreign journalists, the residue of the American era had not been entirely removed and in Saigon Ho Chi Minh city was still Saigon in disguise.<sup>39</sup> Signs of the old culture still persisted. As a report of the Time magazine put it: "Good food and excellent French wines were still available at the Hotel Caraville, a favourite hangout of foreigners in the old days. Lissome Saigonese women wore hip-hugging jeans and colourful ao-dais; although the PRG frowns on prostitution, streetwalkers and bar girls were still hawking their charms. American popsongs blarred out from the jukeboxes of cafes and bars, and the old Thieves Market on Bac Si Calumette Street was jammed with TV sets, cameras and transistor radios taken from abandoned American PXs".<sup>40</sup>

37 Duiker, n.5, p.132.

38 Keesings Contemporary Archives, n.34, p.27494.

39 Duiker, n.5, p.132.

40 Time Magazine (New York, 16 February, 1976) p.31.

Another approach tried to spread the socialist word was to reorient the education system by removing all signs of American teaching. Marxist school books replaced those which had been in use in the Saigon regime. All the schools were shut down and the teachers sent to re-education camps for retraining. An elaborate campaign was launched to confidicate books, tapes, and records reflecting the Western bourgeois decadence. Even the old newspapers were shut, all except the moderately critical Tin Sang.<sup>41</sup>

The task was not easy and thus the results were far from satisfactory for it is indeed difficult to break habits formed over a period of twenty years. Moreover, the initiative for change in a society has to come from within and cannot be imposed from above. The task became all the more difficult since the support to these efforts from the urban populace was minimal. In fact five years later foreigners were to observe that the old habits had really not died out. Even an official report written in 1980 noted:

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41 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXVIII, 1982, p.31590.



"Some of the youths who are influenced by neo-colonialism and the old social system have been infected with such bad habits as laziness, selfishness, parasitism, vagabondism, pursuing a good time, etc."<sup>42</sup>

Indeed the task of establishing the revolutionary cult of socialism was proving to be far from easy. Another official bemoaned that the youth in the South "shirk obligations, detach themselves from reality, turn their backs on our people's life of labour and combat, regret the past and idolize imperialism".<sup>43</sup>

Official proclamations stated otherwise.<sup>44</sup> However it was becoming apparent that to replace the erstwhile easy going lifestyle by revolutionary puritanism and self-sacrifice would not be all that easy. Far worse, the Southern culture began to corrupt the Northerners who were sent to the South to spread the revolution.<sup>45</sup> According to press accounts, cadres

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42 Nhan Dan, September 5, 1979, p.3.

43 Radio Hanoi, May 10, 1981.

44 Of course official press releases stated otherwise. For instance the Vietnam Courier (No.3/1980) said: In 1975, we liberated the country and began to reconstruct it to our own choice. Since then... the SRV has achieved many great successes. The revolutionary power has been rapidly established in the South. The social order and security all over the country has become stable. The efforts... of transforming socialistically the economy in the South and building material and technical foundation for socialism have borne initial fruit...

45 David W.P. Elliott, "Institutional Development in Crisis Southeast Asian Affairs (Singapore, 1981), pp.358-359.

from the North - many housed in the old Hotel Continental, now renamed the Hotel of the People's Insurrection - were too often seduced by the glittering temptations of city life in Saigon.<sup>46</sup> Bribery, embezzlement, and the shirking of obligations by officials stationed in the South became a common occurrence. Through the ranks, it began to spread to the North as well, and by 1980s became an established fact, so much so that a campaign was launched by the regime to purge the 'decadent influences' in Vietnamese culture. The Ministry of Culture announced a series of measures to achieve the same.<sup>47</sup> New standards of socialist idealism were laid down and conferences were arranged to acquaint the cadres with them. A series of harsh measures also included the dismissal of senior officials on grounds of corruption.<sup>48</sup>

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46 Duiker, n.5, p.133.

47 On the 31st of July, the government announced its intentions of mounting a campaign against decadence, corruption, and black market. This campaign, according to official reports came within the overall intentions of bringing the conditions in the country's southern province into line with the socialist precepts as already in application in the North. The new measures included the banning of 'bad books and noxious music', limitations on the operation of cafes, and the closure of the city's independent newspaper Tin Sang. Ibid., p.133.

48 Mr. Huyunh Cong Hoa, the Deputy Minister of Maritime Products on the 31st of July on grounds of a corruption case at the state fisheries in Ho Chi Minh city where he had formerly been director of supplies. Keesings Contemporary Archives, n.40, p.31590.

The authorities were soon to discover, however, that such standards were not easy to apply. For example, an article written by the minister of culture and published in the Nhan Dan conceded that it was often difficult to make the proper classification of musical works.<sup>49</sup> The move to reform literature met with severe resistance from within. An article in the March 1980 issue of the Communist Review noted that some 'artistic creators' had become "confused" about official policies and were inclined to blame deficiencies on the general line of the party than the faulty implementation at the lower levels.<sup>50</sup>

What then is the measure of success with regard to the social and cultural unification of Vietnam?

Several of the goals were achieved. Education for one, with Vietnam now having one of the highest literacy rates in Asia.<sup>51</sup> The Vietnam Courier's claim in an 1980 issue that 'medical care is rendered free of

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49 Duiker, n.5, p.133.

50 Ibid., p.133.

51 Ibid., p.133.

charge" is true and has also seen a remarkable improvement over colonial standards.<sup>52</sup> Many of the Socio-economic inequities of the old regime have been eliminated. Progress has been made with regard to the spread of racial and sexual equality -- the hill people in particular are being slowly integrated into the general mainstream of life. Women, who till now played a subsidiary role, have come into their own and have begun occupying important posts.


But it has to be conceded that the effort have made a progress slower than anticipated. The official explanation for this was because "all our enemies, old and new, hastily connived with one another to limit our victory, seeking to encircle and isolate Vietnam in an attempt to weaken and conquer it".<sup>53</sup>

Possibly true for to a marginal extent the effort at nation-building in Vietnam had to take a back seat to the more immediate challenge of national defence and security. That apart, other issues were also at stake

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52 Vietnam Courier (Hanoi), vol.1, no.10, 1980, p.4.

53 Ibid., p.5.



largely the fact that to invoke such an overwhelming change two operative factors are essential: One, the necessary will of the people and two the factor of time. While as yet not giving much precedence to factor two, it will not be irrelevant to discuss the first. Acknowledgedly, there were stark differences between the development levels of the north and the south. Moreover the process of building a socialist society had been initiated much before the north which had less exposure to the West. In contrast, while trying to unify culture and society in the south, it was only inevitable that the efforts would meet with a great deal of resistance. For instance, the detainees in the re-education centres were now held for a longer period as a response to the increased guerilla activity by insurgent tribesmen in league with former members of the South Vietnamese armed forces.<sup>54</sup> That apart, in any feudal society it is difficult to implement such a change unless there exists an overwhelming support for it.

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54 Keesings Contemporary Archives, n.10, p.31590.

Other problems impeded the development process as well -- shortage of infrastructure for the spread of education, health facilities, etc. A serious series of famines have created food shortage of a tremendous magnitude in the country, thereby encouraging black-marketing and corruption. Poverty has not been eliminated but has been disbursed instead, with more of the poor and the elimination of the affluent middle class. Even attitudes towards women have changed only after having met with severe resistance.

"In summary", to quote Dwiker, "the struggle to build a prosperous and technologically advanced society continued to face severe challenges. And while the socialist system adopted by the Communist party presents certain advances in this effort, notably in social discipline, mobilization of effort, and long-term planning, there are also heavy costs to pay in ideological rigidity and loss of individual initiative. What makes the situation worse is the presence of more than 20 million southerners, many of whom are as yet unconvinced of the superiority of the socialist system. Truly, for the Communists, the problems of peacetime are as challenging as, and perhaps even more complex than, those of war".<sup>55</sup>

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55 Duiker, n.5, p.135.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

## Chapter Five

### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

With the entry of the DRV troops into Saigon in April 1975 the era of civil strife was thought to have come to an end in Vietnam. Unification, it was hoped, would usher in a period of peace and development.

Few had visualised that by 1978, Vietnam would once again be at war, this time with its neighbours to the North and the West. As D.R. Sardesai points out:

With dramatic communist victory in South Vietnam and Kampuchea in Spring 1975 and the 'Silent Revolution' that pushed Laos fully into communist orbit in December of that year, the strategic-politico balance seemed suddenly to have improved in favour of the communist world. It was generally assumed at that time that the communists would regard the three victories as the culmination of the 'liberation' movements in the Indochinese Peninsula and devote themselves to the task of domestic reconstruction. Even those anti-communists who believed in the 'domino theory'<sup>1</sup> and saw its practical fulfilment in the 'fall' of the three capitals in rapid succession of each other, regarded

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1 William J. Duiker, Vietnam: A Nation in Revolution (Boulder, Colorado, 1983), pp.140-142.



the phenomenon as peculiarly applicable only to the states of the Indochinese Peninsula because of their common history of French rule. After the immediate panic and grave apprehension among the ASEAN states, for example, there followed a sigh of relief that there would be more than a 'breathing spell' before the new communist states would be ready or willing actively to assist the fraternal communist movements in the other states of Southeast Asia. Hardly anyone, not even in the non-communist world, expected at that time such fissures to develop amongst the new communist states as would provoke large-scale warfare culminating in the Vietnamese 'blitzkrieg' into Kampuchea...and the Chinese march...<sup>2</sup>

Vietnam was once again at war through which it would discover that "peace in the region depended upon the convergence of security interests and mutually gainful initiatives and responses in interstate relations".<sup>3</sup> In the post-unification phase, one reason for the Party's inability to resolve domestic problems was the sad fact that the end of the war did not bring lasting peace to Vietnam. To a great extent nation-building was a matter of planning and administration but, factors existed beyond the

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2 D.R. Sardesai, South East Asia: Past and Present (New Delhi, 1985), p.432.

3 Parimal Kumar Das, (ed.), The Troubled Region: Issues of Peace and Development in Southeast Asia (New Delhi, 1987), p.114.

control of the Vietnamese which were external to them. Vietnam thus got involved in a war for which it paid and continues to pay heavy costs. Foreign relations worked against the development process and from a country viewed optimistically by economic observers as having a development rate only three to five times behind that of China,<sup>4</sup> Vietnam has slipped down into the ranks of the forty-nine poorest nations on the world.<sup>5</sup>

One issue which led to this state of affairs was the exacerbation of relations with China. Until his death, Ho Chi Minh had managed to hold together the pro-Peking and the pro-Moscow elements in his party.<sup>6</sup> In spite of the publically known Sino-Soviet differences, Hanoi had managed to walk a diplomatic tightrope avoiding taking sides with either Moscow or Peking. In fact, till 1978, the Hanoi authorities, benefitted from the major feud of international communism".

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4 Douglas Pike, A History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1976 (California, 1978), p.114.

5 Encyclopaedia of the Third World, ed., G.T. Kurien (London, 1982), p.1923.

6 Thai Quong Trung, Collective Leadership and Factionalism (Singapore, 1985), p.3.

Moreover, till 1975, the party leaders could avoid a commitment either way by maintaining that Vietnam held centre-stage in the global conflict in the communist and capitalist camps and was therefore entitled to the support of both the communist parties".<sup>7</sup>

Their delicate balance was shattered once the South was liberated. Hanoi was no longer allowed the luxury of sitting on the fence. The Chinese leadership began pressing the Hanoi authorities to make a choice. As it was, ties between the two had become increasingly strained during the final years of the Vietnam war. The Vietnamese had "resented China's limited support for their struggle in the South, as well as Peking's decision in the early 1970s to seek a rapprochement with the US".<sup>8</sup> In turn, China had disapproved of Vietnam's willingness to strengthen its ties with Moscow. Relations at the end of the war were "correct but cool".<sup>9</sup> The first

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7 W.S. Turley, World Encyclopaedia of Political Systems, ed., G.E. Dubry (New York, 1983), p.1124.

8 W.J. Duiker, Communist Road to Power in Vietnam (Boulder, Colorado, 1981), p.338.

9 Ibid., p.338.

sign of increased tension took concrete form when in October 1975, the Peking government told the visiting Vietnamese delegation under Le Duan, the Secretary General of the Vietnamese Lao Dong Party that any further aid would be forthcoming conditional to Vietnam's open condemnation of the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the year 1978 was of crucial significance for the Vietnamese state of affairs. Within the broader deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations (the reasons for which shall be examined later), there was the growing rapprochement between China and the US and the increasing tension with the Kampuchean neighbour. We shall examine these on an issue-wise basis. But first, what has history to tell us about Vietnam?

Largely that the concern for national survival is its dominant theme. No nation can be said to have developed such a tenacious sense of national identity as the Vietnamese.<sup>11</sup> Apparent in its embryonic form

10 D.R. Sardesai, n.2, p.437.

11 In the third century B.C., the Chinese armies had defeated Nam Viet and incorporated it into the growing empire of Han. A policy of Sinification of Vietnam was thereby launched. In 39 A.D., the Trung sisters led the revolt against the Chinese.

form when they fought against Chinese hegemonism in the 9th century A.D., it gradually gained strength. Alongside, the Vietnamese developed a sense of cultural superiority vis-a-vis their neighbour in the South and the West.<sup>12</sup> A combination of military prowess and belief in the superiority of the Confucian culture led them to establish a hegemony over Laos and Cambodia, thereby reducing them to the status of 'vassal states'. There is no denying that the motivation in all this was also of securing one's borders. But then, this was the situation--China regarding Vietnam as its natural vassal, subordinate to all its commands. Vietnam thinking the same of Laos and Cambodia.

The nineteenth century witnessed a temporary shelving of these considerations as both Indochina and China were concentrating to get rid of the colonial

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Resistance to Chinese efforts to incorporate Vietnam within the world of Chinese culture gathered momentum. In the end, Sinification failed to strike roots and this is a matter of intense pride to the Vietnamese. Eventually, the Chinese were driven out of Vietnam and independence restored under the leadership of the Ly dynasty. Le Thanh Koi, Vietnam, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1955, details the historical development of Vietnam. See, Sardesai, n.2, p.41.

12 Duiker, n.1, p.140.

yoke. From Vietnam's point of view, the fight against colonialism assumed greater importance than the struggle for national survival vis-a-vis the Chinese. China and Vietnam even became uneasy bedfellows with the latter drawing a fair amount of sustenance from the Chinese communist movement and even operating its own communist base from Chinese soil. Through all this however, the importance of Laos and Cambodia was never understated in the Vietnamese scheme of affairs. Though the Vietnam Workers Party denied any intention of creating an Indochinese federation, secret documents reveal otherwise.<sup>13</sup> The long years of the struggle against the Americans revealed to the Vietnam the importance of its neighbours, as it launched resistance movements in the South from the eastern regions of both these countries, along the so-called "Ho Chi Minh" trails in the areas immediately adjoining South Vietnam.<sup>14</sup>

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13 These show that while conceding a separate existence to its Laotian and Cambodian counterparts, the VWP reserved the possibility of a single Vietnam-Laos-Khmer Federation at a later date. Duker, n.1, p.141. Douglas Pike, n.4, p.148 states the same.

14 Zasloff, J.J. & MacAlister Brown, Communism in Indochina (Massachusetts, 1975), p.120.

Alongside, the Vietnamese helped their neighbours launch their own insurgency movements by supporting the Pathet Lao leaders and the FUNK with arms aid assistance. Duiker sums up the situation succinctly:

There is some evidence that Hanoi was careful to guarantee that the needs of the revolutionary struggle in Vietnam took precedence over those in neighbouring Cambodia and Laos. Soon after the common victory in all three countries in 1975, the Pol Pot regime asserted with considerable bitterness during the 1950s and the 1960s the VWP leadership had prohibited the Khmer Rouge from launching armed struggle against the Sihanouk regime in order to avoid provoking Sihanouk into striking at Vietnamese sanctuaries along the border and cooperating with the US to wipe them out. Captured documents confirm that Vietnamese strategists sought to prevent the insurgency in Cambodia from interfering with the course of war efforts in South Vietnam. Although, Laotian communists have registered no public complaints along these lines, it is likely that Hanoi took equal pains to ensure that the pace of insurgency in Laos did not cause difficulties for the primary battlefield in South Vietnam...<sup>15</sup>

For Vietnam the idea of regional security had become closely entwined with the security of its neighbours. Under no circumstances would it let any such regime flower in Indochina detrimental to its

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15 Duiker, n.1, p.141.

interests and opposed to it. In 1982, Le Duan had categorically stated that the "special relationship between Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea is an evolutionary law of the revolution in the three countries".<sup>16</sup> He had also said, that "Vietnam does not intend giving up its special relations with Laos and with Kampuchea as these relations "to be preserved from generation to generation are vital for the destinies of the three people".<sup>17</sup>

Vietnamese military might suitably support its aspirations in Indochina. At the time of unification, Vietnam possessed the fourth largest military in the world, with 615,000 in the People's Army of Vietnam and 1.5 million in the militia.<sup>18</sup> At the end of the war, the SRV had benefitted additionally by capturing \$5 billion worth of US military equipments. In effect, Vietnamese military capabilities now exceeded those of the non-communist countries in the region -- this

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16 Nhan Dan, 29 March 1982.

17 Ibid.

18 Sheldon W. Simon, ed., The Military and Security in the Third World: Domestic and International Impacts (Colorado, 1978), p.288.



is the 'dominant feature' in the strategic environment in Southeast Asia.<sup>19</sup> In Asia, Vietnam is the third largest military powers after China and India.<sup>20</sup>

The event which led to the present state of affairs was the invasion of Kampuchea in 1978. Troubles with the new revolutionary government of Democratic Kampuchea had appeared before the end of the war. These had developed considerable irritation in Cambodian revolutionary circles over Vietnamese strategy of directing and suppressing the national movements in the country. In the early 1960s, the Cambodian communist movement had split over the issue and the anti-Vietnam Khmer group headed by Pol Pot had come to power. By the 1970s this had begun intensifying efforts to get the Vietnamese to vacate the decade-old sanctuaries from which it was operating as a base in the South. Hanoi retaliated by introducing in Cambodia several hundred party members trained by it. Vietnam seriously began considering a proposal to overthrow Pol Pot and

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19 Das, n.3, p.36.

20 Parimal Kumar Das, "Vietnamese Perception of Non-Alignment" in K.P. Misra, ed., Non-Alignment Frontiers and Dynamics (New Delhi, 1982), p.71.

replace him with a leader more sympathetic to Hanoi.<sup>21</sup>  
It also viewed the pro-Chinese Pol Pot with distaste  
as this was a direct threat to it especially since  
Peking was giving full support to Kampuchea in its  
border clashes with Vietnam.<sup>22</sup>

The conflict came into the open when in 1975  
Vietnam opened an old sore by claiming some islands  
in the Gulf of Thailand and questioned the entire mari-  
time boundary with Kampuchea as settled in 1938 by  
the Brevie Line. Seeking to eliminate the threat, in  
1978 Vietnam used force to drive out Pol Pot from  
Kampuchea with assistance from the Khmer guerillas.  
Under Heng Samrin, the Democratic People's Republic  
of Kampuchea was established. Within weeks, the new  
regime had signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation  
with Vietnam. Laos having signed the previous year,  
Hanoi had now achieved its "special relations" with  
its neighbours.

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21 Duiker, n.8, p.336.

22 S.S. Bhattacharya, "Big Powers Interest in  
Southeast Asia", Das, n.3, p.161.

On the debit side Vietnam was to pay dearly for this peace on the frontiers. In spite of the fact that "the horrors of the Pol Pot regime made any aggression by an external power to terminate the horrible conditions in Kampuchea less culpable than otherwise",<sup>23</sup> the great body of world opinion reacted sharply against this move. In concrete terms Vietnam lost out on aid from the Western world and antagonised neighbours of the ASEAN. Thailand began offering overt support to the rebels against what it regarded as a move to demolish the traditional buffer between it and Vietnam. In the long-run, the result was the "east-west schism in Southeast Asia assuming the dimensions of a north-south schism evidenced in the conflictual relationship between the ASEAN and the Indochinese states."<sup>24</sup> The Kampuchean tangle also gave the US policy-makers reason to focus their attention again on Southeast Asia. The difference lay in that the US approach now was "...not a policy but a comfortable holding operation. The US in effect days to the ASEAN states and China: You lead and we

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23 Sardesai, n.2, p.434.

24 Parimal Kumar Das, "Indo-China, ASEAN and Thailand: The Changing Perspectives Since 1975", Problems of Non-Alignment (New Delhi, 1984), p.269.

follow; any policy mutually acceptable to you is acceptable to us".<sup>25</sup> Vietnam's economic dependence on its ally in Moscow increased. The implications of this situation were soon realized and acted upon as Vietnam became a signatory to the Soviet-directed Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, in 1978. Lastly, the Kampuchean adventure escalated war with China.

In effect nation-building suffered the most.

Turning to the neighbour in the North, "the end of the war in South Vietnam and the reunification of Vietnam were not events which made China happy".<sup>26</sup> The geo-political exigencies of the area had made China view Vietnam as a competitor. Vietnam's relations with China had deteriorated considerably in the final phase of the conflict.

The first sign of increasing tension took the form of territorial disagreements. Peking and Hanoi registered conflicting claims over ownership of the Paracel Islands and the Spratley group of islands in

25 Douglas Pike, "Southeast Asia and the Super Powers: The Dust Settles", Current History, vol.82, no.483, April 1983, pp.146-147.

26 Sardesai, n.2, p.436.

the South China Sea. These form the maritime artery of the area. "Even as the Vietnamese were nearing victory in 1975, China occupied the Paracel islands which Vietnam claims as their own. After liberation, Vietnam occupied Spratly which the Chinese were claiming as theirs".<sup>27</sup>

While border skirmishes were intensifying, the Vietnamese government came down heavily on the Chinese community--their assets were frozen, their businesses clamped down and their special status removed. Hanoi claimed that the move was in keeping with their "ideological considerations" China reacted sharply against what it felt was a deliberate effort to eliminate the Chinese from the country. "Interestingly, now the Chinese rulers chose to become the zealous protectors of their kith and kin in Vietnam, rather than of socialism".<sup>28</sup>

Chinese anger resulted in it cancelling all remaining aid projects in Vietnam, withdrawal of its

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27     Bhattacharya, n.22, p.160.

28     Das, n.20, p.75.

advisors and technicians and support to the Democratic Kampuchea. But, "if Peking's actions were motivated by a desire to persuade Hanoi to change the course of its foreign policy, the gambit failed."<sup>29</sup> During 1978, Vietnam moved closer to confrontation with Phnom Penh and an open military alliance with the Soviet Union. Vietnam's choice fell on Russia for a variety of reasons. For one, in its ability to assist in reconstruction and development,<sup>30</sup> for another, it wanted to "play a dominant role in Indochina as is necessary for its security needs", and was thus "determined to act independently from China in Asia, as well as, the world".<sup>31</sup>

On the third of November, 1978, Vietnam signed a twenty-five year treaty of friendship with Russia. The treaty had distinct military overtones--clause 6 stated that "in case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the two parties signatory to the Treaty shall immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating the threat..."<sup>32</sup>

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29 Duiker, n.8, p.338.

30 Sheldon W. Simon, n.18, p.288; Turley, n.7, p.1126.

31 Das, n.20, p.69.

32 Clause-VI of Appendix A, P.

Chinese annoyance resulted in invading Vietnam in February 1979--a statement declared that "driven beyond forbearance, Chinese frontier troops have been forced to rise in counter attack".<sup>33</sup> Vietnam retaliated because it saw "no alternative but to exercise their legitimate right to self-defence and resolutely fight back against the aggressors".<sup>34</sup>

The third Indochina war, and the invasion by China of Vietnam was condemned strongly by the Soviet bloc, India and Albania. The Southeast Asian countries and the Western bloc generally linked appeals for the withdrawal of the Chinese troops with similar appeals for the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea.<sup>35</sup>

Within Vietnam, there was a unified public opinion against the invaders. Indeed, one official source contends that party leaders had found it easier to mobilize public resistance to Vietnam's historic enemy to the North, than to the United States during the previous conflict in South Vietnam.<sup>36</sup>

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33 Keesings Contemporary Archives, vol.XXV, 1979, p.29871.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Duiker, n.1, p.150.

As Peking had declared that its aims were limited, it announced retreat within three weeks of fighting.<sup>37</sup> Peace talks failed to proceed since it became clear that the issues that had led to the war had not been resolved. While Vietnam and China accused each other of hegemonism, the broader issues of withdrawal from Kampuchea, border disputes and the alliance with Russia remain unresolved.

The resultant has been that Hanoi's dependence on Russia has increased. Ninety-seven per cent of its military aid comes from here in the form of helicopters, MiG-17, MiG-19, MiG-21 and MiG-23 fighters, SAMs, frigates and so on.<sup>38</sup> Soviet Russia gains in turn as it has the run of former US bases in the South as the Cam Ranh Bay which, by 1983, became a fully operational base for the Soviet Pacific Fleet.<sup>39</sup>

The economic role of Russia is to the tune of 50 per cent of total aid, at estimated figures. In the period spanning the years 1976-80, out of \$5613 million

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37 Keesings Contemporary Archives, n.33, p.29873.

38 Das, n.3, p.36.

39 Duiker, n.1, p.152.



aid, \$2500 million came from the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> Joint collaborations have been undertaken in several fields ranging from exploration and exploitation of natural gases and oil to education. The two have signed a protocol for the co-ordination of their economic plans for the period 1975-80. Continuing aid to Vietnam included a long-term loan to the tune of US\$120,000,000.<sup>41</sup>

Other than having allies in the East European countries, Vietnam is also a member of the nonaligned movement. However, the overwhelming dependence on the USSR has greatly limited Vietnam's power role in the region, particularly since aid is not forthcoming from other quarters which restricts solutions to the economic quagmire in which the nation finds itself. Any programmes of economic aid are blocked in the UN by Chinese and Western opposition. The potential chances of change in this situation lie in the thawing of relations between Moscow and China.

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40 Jayashekhar, "Soviet Economic Policy in Southeast Asia: Constraints and Prospects", Das, n.3, p.193.

41 Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1984, vol.XXX, p.32675.

Meanwhile, the conflict has ramifications on the Party striking at its carefully preserved unity. There have been defections of former ministers to China. In the 1980s there were a series of shake-ups which have been viewed as a campaign against the former pro-China figures as also the moderate figures of the Politbureau.<sup>42</sup>

In the situation the rôle of the US cannot be overlooked. Though overtly not, the US is a party to the events in the region particularly since it is fuelling aid to the anti-Vietnamese guerilla factions in Kampuchea. Encouraged by the US and China the Thai's are pursuing a policy of 'offensive defense' against Vietnamese soldiers along the Thai-Kampuchean border.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, there is also a move by the US to encourage Japan to contain what it considers as the Soviet-Vietnam involvement in Southeast Asia. The two have a plan to protect sea-lanes extended upto 1000 nautical miles from the southern shores of Japan so that Japan may become an 'unsinkable aircraft

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42 Thai Quong Trung, n.6, p.80.

43 The Bangkok Post, 22 March 1985.

carrier' against possible Soviet attacks.<sup>44</sup>

In recent years, with the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea since 1982, there is some evidence of the thawing of relations with the ASEAN as well. The new approach was reflected in the statement of the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN on 21 September, 1983. This statement talked of "the total withdrawal of foreign forces" from Kampuchea had called upon Vietnam "to join them in intensifying efforts to achieve a just solution for Kampuchea."<sup>45</sup>

However, until the following issues are not resolved, there can be no hope for change in the situation:

1. Promotion of the complex Sino-Vietnamese differences (without which an overall reduction in tensions in the area are unlikely).
2. The linked issue of the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea, part of which has been initiated since 1982.
3. A reduction of Hanoi's dependence upon Moscow, itself dependent upon (1) and (2), as also a more open attitude on the part of the western countries.
4. ASEAN and Vietnam to develop a more compromising attitude and to evolve a policy of regional cooperation with each other.

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44 S.S. Bhattacharya, n.22, p.165.

45 Das, n.20, p.85.

## **CONCLUSION**

## CONCLUSION

In 1975 Vietnam was faced with the task of nation-building after the liberation of the South through a protracted struggle, and the reunification of the country.

In a nutshell, the attempt since then has been to create a socialist, modern, united and strong nation. The problem which the Vietnamese faced in this effort was the prevalent culture in the South, diametrically opposed to the goal ahead. At that point of time, the most cruel impact on united Vietnam arising out of the long and intensified conflict with the United States was an increase in the ranks of the opponents of the revolution, large scale economic devastation and an artificially propped up consumer economy which had resulted in the growth of a largely non-productive middle-class. Other than this, the Party would now face internal organisational problems temporarily shelved until the national goal of unification had been achieved. Culturally, the problem was of integrating the societies of both the North and South into the socialist mainstream.

The SRV leadership took the plunge to inaugurate a new phase in the history of Vietnam by undertaking massive steps towards developing both the regions in a coordinated manner. Planning was thereby stressed upon as the vehicle of change and nation-building in this difficult and uncertain period of transition. It was hoped that just as well planned strategies in the battle-field had won the Vietnamese their successes against the French and the Americans, so they would help them achieve the goals of development and progress.

In this scheme, no one could have predicted the curious turn of events which would draw Vietnam into yet another war and tie down its hands in terms of international allies which it was badly in need of. No one could have foreseen that nature would just then chose to turn hostile and that devastating floods and famines would not only throw offgear the targets meticulously laid out in the plans but also set back by several years the gains of the preceeding decades. Furthermore, no one had understood that Vietnam's problem was not strictly a Vietnamese one. It was conditioned instead by the behaviour and attitudes of a number of other societies, in particular, the United

States, China and the Soviet Russia.

Nation-building therefore did not proceed smoothly. In the field of economy there exists a lag in growth. Backwardness is the state of affairs arising out of problems - some internal to the country and others external as the Kampuchean crisis which has resulted in hostility in the neighbourhood and virtual international isolation. The problems of inflation, black-marketing, hoarding, speculation and corruption persist in the South. Worse still is the failure of the state sector to compete with the private trade sector. The result is a weak Vietnam. This inspite of it possessing one of the best battle-trained armies in the world and a military strength of no mean consequence. Consequently, the power role of Vietnam in the region has been restricted.

Vietnam needs allies which are difficult to find - China and Vietnam have become adversaries, the latter having thwarted China's power ambitions in the Indochina region. The US continues to repulse Vietnam, while the ASEAN views it with degrees of emotions ranging from indifference to hostility. In the bargain, Vietnam's

dependence on the Soviet Union has increased. Some fifty per cent of its total and ninety seven per cent of its military aid comes from here. Vietnam's independence has thus been toned down. The solution to the situation lies partly in the resolution of the Kampuchean imbroglio to the satisfaction of the parties concerned. Other issues which stand to alter the scheme of events in the country are the growing Sino-Soviet rapprochement and the future reactions of US.

In the realm of polity, the SRV till very recently had one of the most experienced and astute leaderships in Asia with a long tradition of unity. This leadership has shown its ability to realistically assess its problems and change course when necessary -- a more recent instance being the initiation of economic liberalisation overriding commitments to ideological rigidity. However, one problem faced in the recent years has been the increasing infirmities in this leadership especially as an entire generation of leaders has become old or died out and not yet been replaced. Another problem which has emerged is in the ranks of the party in particular, malfunctions in the cadre structure. How to resolve the corruption, apathy and lack of dedication



amongst party members has become a basic problem.

Regarding socio-cultural integration of the North and the South, this too has not borne the desired results as it has not been easy to spread the creed of the socialist man. Part of the resistance to this comes from the populace itself. Part of the blame can be laid at the door-step of the cadre-members who, after decades of sacrifice and deferred gratification have wavered in the face of gearing up for new challenges just as they catch their breath from the staggering efforts that they have expanded in winning the war. Further, the problem of eliminating the 'Decadent bourgeois' culture still remains.

Thus, in all realms of nation-building it appears as though Vietnam has reached a developmental stalemate. One conclusion that can be drawn from Vietnam's experience is that superior planning and meticulous detailing can hardly replace the paucity of resources. Yet another is that development is possible only if there exists in the populace a desire and capacity to achieve national goals -- if not, then there will always be a developmental lag between political institutions and socio-economic change.

Some harsh decisions are needed which may imply variance from ideological rigidity. Evidence of this is there in increased measure from 1979 onwards when the policy to enforce complete collectivisation and state control was withheld in face of resource crunch and the general state of affairs. A new phase has been entered into, which reveals the flexibility of the leadership as it announces a package of measures intended to boost the production and improve upon the economic scenario. These wide-ranging measures include the abandoning of the Soviet-style centralised planning which gives way to increased individual initiative. This may in turn result in the contradiction between the political and economic goals of the SRV for while as a socialist government, Vietnam would like to incorporate its population into a centralised state system, for reasons of economic productivity it has had to introduce decentralisation. Whether this will weaken the bonds between the peasant and the state is a matter of speculation.

The period of 1975-1985 marks the end of one phase of development and the inauguration of another one. As

the second phase starts the challenge of nation-  
building remains. Only time will tell if the desired  
results are achieved in the coming years. As this  
change in policy comes, another chapter is closed in  
the history of Vietnam spanning this decade of trial  
and turbulence.

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**APPENDIX**



APPENDIX-A

Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation Between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Proceeding from the close cooperation in all fields in a fraternal spirit, from the unshakable friendship and solidarity between the two countries on the basis of principles of Marxism-Leninism and Socialist Internationalism; Firmly convinced that the endeavour to consolidate the solidarity and friendship between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is in conformity with the basic interest of the two peoples and in the interest of the consolidation of the fraternal friendship and one-mindedness among the countries in the Socialist community; In keeping with the principles and objectives of the Socialist foreign policy and the desire to ensure the most favourable international conditions for the building of socialism and communism; Affirming that the signatories to the Treaty acknowledge their international obligation to assist each other in the consolidation and preservation of the Socialist achievements recorded by the two peoples through their heroic efforts and selfless labour; Determined to work for

the unity of all forces struggling for peace, national independence, democracy and social progress; expressing their iron-like determination to contribute to the consolidation of peace in Asia and throughout the world, and to the development of good relations and mutually beneficial cooperation among countries with different social systems; hoping to further develop and perfect the all round cooperation between the two countries; Attaching importance to the continued development and consolidation of the basis of the Treaty governing the bilateral relations; In keeping with the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter:

Have resolved to sign this Treaty of Friendship and cooperation and have agreed as follows:

Article-1:

In keeping with the Principles of Socialist internationalism, the two parties signatory to present Treaty shall continue to consolidate the unshakable friendship and solidarity and assist each other in a fraternal spirit the two parties shall unceasingly develop political relations and aspirations in all fields and endeavour to assist each other's national independence and sovereignty, equality and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

Article-2:

The two parties signatory to the present Treaty shall join efforts to consolidate and broaden the mutually beneficial cooperation in the economic, technological and scientific fields in order to push forward the building of socialism and communism and to constantly raise the material, cultural and living standards of the two peoples.

The two parties shall continue to coordinate the long-term national economic plans, agree upon long-term measures aimed at developing the most important sectors of the economy, science and technology and exchange knowledge and experience accumulated in the building of socio-commn.

Article-3:

The two parties signatory to the Treaty shall promote cooperation between their bodies and mass organisations and develop broad relations in the fields of Science and Culture, education, literature and arts, press, broadcasting and television, health service, environmental protection, tourism, sports and physical

training and others. The two parties shall, encourage the development of contacts between the working people of the two countries.

Article-4:

The two parties signatory to the treaty shall consistently strive to further consolidate their fraternal relations, and to strengthen the solidarity and one-mindedness among the socialist countries on the basis of Marxist-Leninist and socialist internationalism. The two parties shall do their utmost to consolidate the world socialist system and actively contribute to the development and defence of the socialist gains.

Article-5:

The two parties signatory to the Treaty shall continue doing their utmost to contribute to defending world peace and the security of all nations, they shall actively oppose all the schemes and manoeuvres of imperialism and reactionary forces, support the just struggle for the complete eradication of all forms and colours of colonialism and racism, support the struggle waged by the nonaligned countries and the people of Asian, African and Latin American countries against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, for the consolidation

of independence and the defence of sovereignty, for mastery over their natural resources, and for the establishment of a new world economic relationship with no inequity, oppression and exploitation, and support the aspirations of the South East Asian peoples for peace, independence and cooperation among countries in this region.

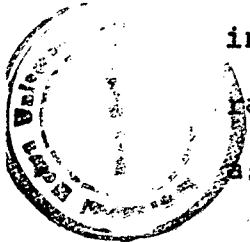
The two parties shall strive to develop the relations between countries with different social systems on the basis of the principles of peaceful co-existence, for the purpose of broadening and consolidating the process of causing tension on international relations and radically eliminating aggressions and wars of aggression from the life of all nations, for the sake of peace, national independence, democracy and socialism.

Article-6:

The two parties signatory to the Treaty shall exchange views on all important international questions relating to the interests of the two countries. In case either party is attacked or threatened with an attack, the two parties signatory to the Treaty shall immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating that threat, and shall take appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and security of the two countries.

Article-7:

The present Treaty does not concern the two parties rights and obligations stemming from the bilateral or multilateral agreements to which they are signatories and is not intended to oppose any third country.

Article-8:

The present Treaty shall be ratified and shall enter into force on the date of the exchange of instruments of ratification, which shall take place in Hanoi as early as possible.

Article-9:

The present Treaty shall remain in force for twenty-five years thereafter shall be automatically extended for a period of ten years if neither signatory party declares its desire to terminate the present Treaty by informing the other party twelve months before the Treaty expires. Done in duplicate in the Vietnamese and Russian languages both texts being equally authentic, in Moscow, this third day of November 1978.

For the Socialist Republic of  
Vietnam Signed

LE DUAN  
PHAM VAN DONG

For the Union of Soviet  
Socialist Republics signed

L. BREZHNEV  
A. KOSYGIN