

DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN DETERMINANTS IN VIETNAM'S FOREIGN POLICY

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled
"DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN DETERMINANTS IN VIETNAM'S
FOREIGN POLICY, 1976-1986" submitted by Mr. Niraj
Kumar Jha for the award of the degree of MASTER OF
PHILOSOPHY of this University has not been submitted
for the M.Phil. degree of this University or any
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We recommend that the dissertation be placed
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P R E F A C E

The aim of this study is to analyse important domestic and foreign determinants in Vietnam's foreign policy in the post 1975 era. Vietnam gave overemphasis on communist ideology and was too close to the Soviet Union during this period. It failed to maintain a balance in its relations with China and hence it had to counter the challenges of its northern neighbour. During 1976 to 1986 the declared foreign policy goals of Vietnam were commitment to world revolutionary struggle, militant solidarity with fraternal socialist countries, special relationship with Laos and Cambodia and support to non-aligned movement. However, the actual course of its foreign policy raises many questions. What were the causes of Vietnam's hostility with China, a fraternal socialist country? What were reasons for Vietnam's extraordinary dependence on the Soviet Union? Why did it take military action against the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia? Why did it keep its troops in Cambodia and in Laos despite heavy burden on its economy? Why was it so desperate to normalize relations with the U.S.A. which had perpetrated the most brutal kind of neo-colonialism in Vietnam and against which Vietnam had sought to form a global level united front? Why did it want to have good relations with the ASEAN, which had collaborated

with the USA in the second Indo-China war?

A humble attempt has been made in this dissertation to discern various factors behind the formulation of the foreign policy goals and the actual foreign policy course. In this effort due emphasis has been given to domestic determinants which are generally overlooked. In the first chapter a theoretical framework of the study has been discussed. The chapter deals with the concept of foreign policy, its determinants and how these determinants work. In this context a brief introduction of the subject matter has also been given. The second chapter takes note of Vietnam's history and culture and how they bear upon its foreign policy. Geo-political factors have been mentioned in the third chapter. Ideological, economic and security factors alongwith the role of the leadership in Vietnam's system have been discussed in the fourth chapter titled 'Socio-Economic Variables'. The fifth chapter deals with the external determinants which emanate from the international milieu to which Vietnam's foreign policy was directed. The last chapter outlines the overall findings of this study.

The significance of the period under study, i.e., from 1976 to 1986 emanates from its distinctness. Both the years were landmarks in Vietnam's history

and the period between showed uniformity in Vietnam's basic approach. In the year 1976 Vietnam was reunified in the name of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which marked the successful culmination of the forty years long revolutionary struggle against imperialist forces. Again in the year 1986, Vietnam entered into a new era of "Doi Moi" - the Vietnamese counterpart of the Soviet perestroika. The shifts in emphases were fundamental. The commitment to the global revolutionary struggle was overtaken by Vietnam's effort to find a niche in the world economy. Results were remarkable. Liberalisation replaced socialist reconstruction; economy overwhelmed ideology as well as strategy. The consequences of these changes were far-reaching. Vietnam withdrew its forces from Cambodia as the Soviet Union vacated Cam Ranh Bay. The troubled region started to move towards normalcy. The border issue was settled with China and it moved for better relations with the ASEAN. Thus, the doi-moi initiated a new phase in Vietnam's foreign policy, however, the study focuses on the period from Vietnam's reunification to the onset of 'doi-moi'.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my deep respect and gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Ganganath Jha. It was his encouragement, moral support and superb guidance which enabled me to complete my M.Phil.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Foreign policy appears to be a series of responses made by the official decision makers to the international conditions. But contrary to the appearance, it is a much complex process. Peter Calvert points to this fact by saying that policies are not simply any decisions taking place within the organized structure of state.¹ Similarly Rosenau makes it clear when he notes, " ... the foreign policy of governments is more than simply a series of responses to international stimuli".² An indepth analysis of foreign policy reveals a number of factors besides the international stimuli which contribute substantially in the making of foreign policy. Other sources, i.e., domestic sources of foreign policy are no less crucial to its content and conduct than are the international situations towards which it is directed.³

However, it is extremely difficult to establish links between the domestic sources and its outcome -

1 Peter Calvert, The Foreign Policy of New States, Sussex, Wheatsheaf Books, 1986, p. 1.

2 James N. Rosenau (ed.), Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy, New York, The Free Press, 1967, p. 2.

3 Ibid., p. 2.

foreign policy. One main reason is that their role is hardly explicit unlike the international events or the role of decision makers. However, in order to understand foreign policy of a given nation, it is equally important to comprehend the domestic determinants as it is to know the international condition. The basic problem is to understand the behaviour of a state. Why do a state behave in a particular manner? An attempt to answer this question leads one essentially to the determinants of foreign policy. However, there is a condition that the foreign policy under study is rational which means that in its formulation different determinants have been taken into account.⁴ In other words, foreign policy is not based on the mere whims and fancies of some leaders.

Here, in the present study an attempt has been made to understand the foreign policy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) from its inception in 1976 to 1986. In this endeavour, the present study focusses on some major determinants of the SRVs foreign policy upto 1986. This chapter—a general background to this study - has been discussed under four sub-headings, namely - (i) Foreign Policy: Meaning, (ii) Foreign

4 J. Bandyopadhyay, The Making of India's Foreign Policy, New Delhi, 1979, p. 28.

Policy: Determinants, (iii) Vietnam's Foreign Policy (1976-1986): A Brief Sketch, and (iv) Important Determinants of Vietnam's Foreign Policy.

Foreign Policy: Meaning

In the international arena where sovereign states interact, some sort of foreign policy becomes inevitable for a state. Feliks Gross goes on to say that even a decision to have no relations with a state is a foreign policy, which implies that even not to have a definite foreign policy is also a foreign policy.⁵ Actually it is an exercise in the choice of ends and means on the part of a nation state in an international setting.⁶ This exercise involves two plains. On the first, i.e., the national plain, the community presents the resources, opportunity and limitations for the exercise of foreign policy. Secondly, on the international plain, a state seeks the adjustment of the actions of other states in its own favour. This adjustment may be sought through change or even no change in the actions of other states. It depends on what position, change or status-quo, suits a particular state. The link between these two plains is provided by the official decision makers. They

5 Feliks Gross, Foreign Policy Analysis, New York, 1954, pp. 47-48.

6 Bandopadhyay, op. cit., p. 1.

translate the instructions of the community in actions. Actions flowing from the community to the policy makers have their significance only in relation to the community. They do not have any independent significance. That is the reason why foreign policies are considered more in terms of nations than in terms of individuals.⁷ Thus, (i) the foreign policy is decided and pursued by the official decision makers, (ii) but they work within the parameters provided by the community, and (iii) they seek to influence the foreign policy of other states in their own favour and also adjust their own foreign policy to the international environment.

Determinants of Foreign Policy

The brief description of foreign policy above makes it clear that foreign policy emanates from different sources. In the words of Rosenau, "... the external behaviour of a society stems from an extraordinarily complex of sources, each source contributing something to the behaviour and no one in itself is sufficient to determine it".⁸ These numerous factors, for example as classified by Llyod Jensen are following:⁹

7 Mahendra Kumar, Theoretical Aspects of International Politics, Delhi, 1978, pp. 321-23.

8 Rosenau, op. cit., p. 10.

9 Llyod Jensen, Explaining Foreign Policy, New Jersey, 1982, pp. 1-5.

- (i) The human dimension to foreign policy;
- (ii) Societal determinants;
- (iii) Ideology and historical traditions;
- (iv) The decision making process;
- (v) National power capabilities;
- (vi) Economic determinants; and
- (vii) External and systemic determinants.

In a more concrete manner size, geography, culture and history, economic development, technology, national capacity, social structure, public mood, political organization and the role of press besides the external factors can be said the main determinants of the foreign policy. However how and in what manner these factors determine the foreign policy of a state is difficult to decide.

The problem is that most of these determinants are not clearly indicated before the decision makers. But they exist in their sub-conscious mind. This situation has been aptly elucidated by Peter Calvert. In his words, "Though as we shall see, decisions and human beings are the product of their environment. Though, as we shall see, decisions and actions in foreign policy are not always based on full and accurate perception of the situation, they must inevitably be based on at least a superficial understanding of their state and its position in the world. Every child is

brought up with an idea of its position in the world, and the mature citizen derives from this and later socialization a feeling of national identity. This national identity, however, is no easy thing to define. National identity is determined by several variables. It evolves out of historical and geographical, ethnographic and sociological considerations, and the product of stories told to the child by its parents, by its relations and friends and both in and out of school. Out of this it sorts an overall 'reality' which may be very far indeed from the truth ... and the resultant product ... will inform its political actions, for better or for worse.

We can be sure that makers of foreign policy themselves share much of this background. They should be much informed of the facts, since they have access to sources of information not available to the ordinary citizen and should have undertaken a serious study of the capabilities, limitations and possibility of the situation in which they find themselves, including an indepth analysis of the true nature of the world".¹⁰

In this way, it may be said that different domestic as well as external determinants have bearing on the decision making in foreign policy. However,

10 Peter Calvert, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

foreign policy is never uniquely determined by any one factor or a set of factors, but is the result of the interplay of a large number of factors that affect formulation of policy in different way in different circumstances. Some of these factors are relatively stable and have to be taken as given by the makers of foreign policy, and can, therefore, be regarded as more basic or unchangeable determinants of policy than others.¹¹ Factors such as geography, economic development, political tradition, domestic milieu, international milieu, military strength and national character are considered the basic determinants. But even the basic determinants of foreign policy, however, vary in importance according to circumstances, and it is impossible to lay down any general rule regarding the relative importance of each of these factors or a scale of priorities which the decision makers must permanently adhere to in making their policy decisions.¹²

Vietnam's Foreign Policy (1976-1986)

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) came into existence in July 1976 when the two Vietnams of north and south were reunified. A National Assembly representing the whole of Vietnam was elected on April 25.

11 Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., p. 28.

12 Ibid., p. 28.

It met on June 24 in Hanoi and on July 2 proclaimed the reunification of the country. Mr. Pham Van Dong, the Prime Minister of North Vietnam, formed a government on the following day which included South Vietnam's representatives.¹³

This was the culmination of the struggle of the Communist Party in Vietnam against direct imperial rule and intervention. In the National Assembly which met in Hanoi on June 24, Mr. Le Duan, First Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party announced on the following day that "the Vietnamese revolution has moved into a new stage, the stage of socialist revolution throughout the country".¹⁴

This hard won victory was faced with the daunting task of the reconstruction of the war ravaged economy and national integration. Nevertheless the victors were enthusiastic. Le Duan viewed the international scenario marked with the ascending forces of socialism, national independence, democracy and peace and Vietnam's victory as an important contribution in this revolutionary upsurge.¹⁵ Le Duan asserted, "In the new stage

13 Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1976, p. 27917.

14 Ibid., p. 27917.

15 Documents of the 4th Congress of the Vietnam Worker's Party, Embassy of the SRV, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 113-18.

our party, state and people should make the most of the favourable international conditions so as to rapidly heal the wounds of war, restore and develop economy, develop culture, science and technology, consolidate national defence, build the material and technical basis of socialism in our country, and at the same time continue to stand shoulders to shoulders with the fraternal socialist countries and all other peoples in the world in the struggle for peace, national independence, democracy and socialism against imperialism headed by U.S. imperialism".¹⁶

On foreign policy, Le Duan listed the following aims "as the fundamental content our foreign policy":

1. To endeavour to consolidate and strengthen the militant solidarity and relation of cooperation between our country and all the fraternal socialist countries and to do everything in our power to contribute together with the other socialist countries and the international communist and workers' movement to restoring and consolidating solidarity, and promoting mutual support and assistance on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and in the spirit of proletarian internationalism, in a way conformable to both reason and sentiment,

16 Ibid., p. 119.

with a view to making the noble idea of Marxism-Leninism win ever more glorious successes.

2. To endeavour to preserve and develop the special relation between the Vietnamese people and the peoples of Laos and Kampuchea, strengthening the militant solidarity, militant trust, long-term cooperation and mutual assistance in all fields between our country and fraternal Laos and Kampuchea in accordance with the principle of complete equality, respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, respect for each other's legitimate interests, so that the three countries which have been associated with one another in the struggle for national liberation will be for ever associated with one another in the building and defence of their respective countries, for the sake of each country's independence and prosperity.
3. To fully support the just struggle of the peoples in Southeast Asia for national independence, democracy, peace and genuine neutrality, that is to say without military bases and troops of the imperialists on their territories, to be ready to establish and develop relations of friendship and cooperation with other countries in this area on the basis of respect for each other's independence

sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression and non-interference in each other's national affairs, equality, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

4. To fully support the struggle of the peoples of Asian, African and Latin American countries against imperialism and old and new colonialism, racial discrimination, for national independence, democracy and social progress; to strengthen the solidarity and friendship and the relations of cooperation, and mutual assistance in all fields between our country and the developing countries; to actively contribute to the struggle of the non-aligned countries against imperialism, policy of aggression and domination with a view to safeguarding their independence and freedom winning back the right of definitive ownership over their natural resources and establishing a new international economic order on the basis of respect for their national sovereignty.
5. To fully support the just cause of the working class and the working people in the capitalist countries.
6. To establish and expand normal relations between our country and all countries on the basis of respect for each others independence and

sovereignty, equality and mutual benefit.

7. Together with the fraternal countries and the progressive people throughout the world to resolutely carry on the joint struggle against the policy of aggression and war provocation of US led imperialism, thus making an active contribution to the safeguarding and consolidation of the world peace".¹⁷

However in practice these stated goals could not materialize. The actual course of foreign policy showed clear-cut deviations and even contradictions to these stated foreign policy goals in some cases. The objective of forming a united front against the USA was soon given up and Vietnam sought to normalize its relations with the USA initially on the basis of Paris Peace Agreement 1973¹⁸ and later unconditionally.¹⁹ In order to develop friendly relations with the USA it cooperated on issues of soldiers missing in action (MIA), childrens and wives of the US servicemen when and how it was asked for. With the Soviet Union, the relationship developed to new heights but it was not only because of historical cooperation and ideological

17 Ibid., pp. 120-21.

18 Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1976, p. 27919.

19 Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1981, p. 30811.

fraternity as was stated in Le Duan's paper but was more due to the Soviet opportunism and Vietnamese dependence.²⁰ On the contrary its relation with another giant neighbourly fraternal country, namely the Peoples Republic of China remained hostile throughout the period. The hostility heightened during the Chinese punitive campaign in February 1979 against Vietnam which the former launched after issuing clear-cut warning for Vietnam's offending postures.²¹ It also sought to diversify its relations with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)²² despite ideological differences and vivid memories of the ASEAN states providing bases to the US in the Vietnam war.²³ Initially it succeeded in improving its relations with the ASEAN but relations deteriorated sharply after the flight of refugees from Vietnam and Vietnam's involvement in Cambodia.²⁴ The latter development

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- 20 Douglas Pike, Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance, London, 1987, p. 180.
- 21 Masashi Nishihara, "The Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979", Southeast Asian Affairs, Singapore, 1980, p. 70.
- 22 Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1976, p. 27919.
- 23 Roeslan Abdulgani, Nationalism, Regionalism and Security Problems in South-East Asia, New Delhi, 1984, p. 77.
- 24 Huynh Kim Khanh, "Into the Third Indo-China War", Southeast Asian Affairs, Singapore, 1980, p. 342.

brought Vietnam at loggerheads with Thailand. In Indochina while Laos had friendly relations with Vietnam, Cambodia during 1975-78 had clear-cut hostile designs against Vietnam. This Cambodian issue along with other factors such as Chinese interests in the region forced Vietnam to go for third Indo-China war despite the daunting task of the economic reconstruction lying ahead.

Such a course of foreign policy on the part of Vietnam appears to be anomalous. People of a country who had never seen peace in their lives hoped to see a new era of peace and prosperity, found themselves again in war. They wanted a way out of the abject poverty and friendly cooperation of all other nations in this pursuit but animosity and conflicts prevailed. It wanted to be non-aligned but provided bases to the Soviet Union. It wanted to strengthen solidarity among fraternal socialist countries but had to fight against them. These deviations from the stated goals and or even conformity to them indicate to the role played by different domestic and foreign determinants.

Important Determinants of Vietnam's Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of Vietnam since its reunification was determined by several factors and each one of them was important. It is difficult to determine

one single factor which determined Vietnam's foreign policy but domestic factors in general were the predominant variables influencing the foreign policy decision-making. In fact as has already been pointed out, foreign policy is the outcome of the interaction of various factors and hence, they are inter-related. It is only for the sake of analysis that they have been separately discussed.

The factors like history, traditions, geopolitical conditions, economy, ideology, security were the important parameters for the decision-makers in formulating the foreign policies. Besides institutional factors also played an important role. The Constitution for instance had been framed with certain ideological goals in mind which ultimately led Vietnam to be pro-Soviet during 1976-86. The decision making process in which ideological moorings were paid more attention was also marked by consensus as a result of their ideological commitment. To quote Zasloff and Brown, "The Vietnamese leaders are dedicated Marxist-Leninists and committed nationalists shaped by a long revolutionary experience in which a small number of leaders have effectively resolved their differences and developed an essentially common perception of the Vietnamese national interest By all indications, the leadership remains as cohesive and unified after 1975 victory as it was

before".²⁵ Conditions remained the same upto 1986. Stephen T. Johnson notes, "Although, a factor in Vietnamese politics, factionalism was kept within strict limits. The party was led by Ho-Chi-Minh and then by Le Duan until he died in 1986".²⁶

Thus, throughout the period there was a uniformity in the approach and orientation of the leadership. Changes in the foreign policy have been owing to the changes in circumstances or reinteraction of older traditions. In subsequent chapters we will look at the historical, economic, ideological, strategic and geo-political factors determining the foreign policy of Vietnam.

25 Joseph J. Zasloff and Mac Alister Brown, Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy: Postwar Realities, Westview Press, Colorado, 1978, p. 32.

26 Joseph J. Zasloff (ed.), Postwar Indochina Old Enemies and New Allies, US Department of State, 1988, p. 4.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND CULTURE

Vietnam's past has a profound impact on its foreign policy. Its history is marked by two major trends which clearly affect its external behaviour. On the one hand it has been subjected to repeated aggressions and subjugations, however, never without resistance, and on the other, it itself subjected other areas to its domination. A brief outline of Vietnam's history reveals these two trends.

The Kingdom of Vietnam which originally was confined to the Red River delta and the northeast coastal plain was founded in 208 B.C. as an autonomous state under Chinese suzerainty and was annexed by China in 111 B.C. After frequent revolts it gained independence in 939 A.D., although it remained nominally a tributary state of China till the establishment of the French colonial rule (1859-83) in Indochina.¹ From the very beginning, the French were fiercely resisted and the resistance never ceased. In 1930 Ho Chi Minh and the newly formed Indo-Chinese Communist Party led an unsuccessful uprising. During the World War II, Indochina came under the Japanese occupation (1940-45).² Vietminh, an alliance of

1 Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1964, p. 7.

2 Ibid., p. 47.

communists, socialists and nationalists acted as a resistance movement against the Japanese with the U.S. support.³ After the surrender of Japan, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi on September 2, 1945. Although the French recognised Vietnam on March 6, 1946 as a 'free state within the French Union', they declared war on November 23 by shelling Haiphong and in 1948 set up a satellite government in Saigon headed by the ex-Emperor Bao Dai. After the French defeat of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Geneva Agreement temporarily divided Vietnam into two zones, the North being controlled by Ho Chi Minh's government and the South by the Bao Dai regime, but provided that the country should be reunited following general elections in July 1956.⁴ All North Vietnamese proposals for the holding of elections, however, were rejected by President Ngo Dinh Diem who had deposed Bao Dai in 1955 and declared South Vietnam a republic, and the country remained divided into a communist North and U.S. supported South. Local revolts against President Diem's dictatorship which began in 1958 developed into a major war. In fact the North started a protracted campaign aiding the local rebels with the aim of the

3 Ibid., p. 51.

4 William J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam, Westview Press/Boulder, Colorado, 1981, p. 163.

reintegration of the country which involved the U.S. initially indirectly and later directly. It proved to be one of the most devastating warfares in the post second world war era which claimed half a million lives of Vietnamese and of about fifty thousand Americans. The Vietnamese by their determined fighting humbled the U.S. to concede defeat. In 1973 Paris Peace Agreement was signed, however, the war ended only with the fall of Saigon and the de facto reunification of the country in April 1975.⁵

Thus, while Vietnam remained under the direct Chinese colonial rule from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D.,⁶ it also subjected other areas to domination and expanded its sphere of influence in Indo-china. Vietnam once freed from the Chinese rule in 939 A.D. started its own colonial missions and for the next 800 years it gradually expanded southwards. It absorbed the Champa Kingdom in the Central Coastal plains and the Khmer empire in the South and in the 18th century it reached Gulf of Thailand.⁷ It exercised dominating influence in the region and emerged as an intimidating power in Southeast Asia rivalling the Siamese empire.

5 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1976, p. 27917.

6 D.J.M. Tate, The Making of Modern Southeast Asia, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, p. 462.

7 Thomas Hodgkin, Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path, London, 1981, pp. 31-121.

Duiker notes down Vietnam's endeavour in this respect, "whatever the case, Vietnamese rulers were often tempted to apply the same tributary status to their neighbours that the Chinese empire habitually applied to them. In general, Southeast Asian monarchs rejected such persuasion, but by the nineteenth century weak monarchs in Laos and Cambodia had been compelled to accept tribute status with Vietnam".⁸ The pattern which emerged out of the pre colonial inter-state relations in the region, maintains Duncanson, was hierarchical - suzerainty piled on suzerainty and paramountcy on suzerainty Vietnam exercised paramountcy in turn with Siam in Indochina, however itself being under the paramountcy of China.⁹

The advent of the French, however, altered this pattern. On the one hand, the threat from China was replaced by the danger of national and cultural extinction at the hands of the West. Vietnamese nationalist leadership turned to China for assistance against the French colonial regime. Leaders of the Indochinese Communist Party, while doubtlessly harbouring some lingering suspicions about the long-term motives of their Chinese comrades, relied on the Chinese Communist

8 William J. Duiker, Nation in Revolution, Westview Press/Boulder, Colorado, 1983, p.140.

9 Dennis Duncanson, "Ideology, Tradition and Strategy in Indochina's Foreign Policy", Asian Affairs, 15(1), February 1984, p. 40.



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Party for advice and assistance against the French and later the United States.¹⁰ On the other hand, the Indochinese states were integrated into a colony. Though, the French put Cambodia and Laos on the equal footings of the divided provinces of Vietnam, the traditional Vietnamese domination was reiterated by the Vietnamese dominated colonial bureaucratic structure and on the other side by the Vietnamese dominated Indochina Communist Party, whose goal was to expel the French from Indochina. According to a resolution of the VWP's Seventh Plenum in October 1940, one of the party's goals was the establishment of an Indochinese democratic federal republic. During the second Indochina war, VWP cadres used the Indochinese Peoples Revolutionary Movement or similar terms to refer to the coordination of the movements in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. At junctures in both the first and second "resistance wars", the Vietnamese set up "united front" organizations: in 1951, the Viet Minh established the "United Front of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia", in 1970, in China, the DRV and the National United Fronts of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam held a Summit of the Indochinese peoples. These former alliances could provide, it is asserted, the structure for bringing together the three Indochina states in a union that Hanoi would dominate.¹¹

11 Joseph J. Zasloff and Mac Allister Brown, Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy: Post-War Realities, Westview Press, Colorado, 1976, p. 68.

The impact of these historical experiences along- with relations developed by the preceding forms of the Communist Party of Vietnam at the regional and international level during its struggle against imperialism is clearly manifested by Le Duan's paper at the 4th Party Congress and later developments. The past experiences of invasions and annexations and the U.S. involvement out of which they had just come out have made them extremely bitter to imperialism. Le Duan stated, " ... US led imperialism makes every effort to prepare for a new world war, ... crush the national liberation movement ... and hamper the develop- ment of socialism As regards former colonies and dependencies, imperialism, particularly U.S. imperialism, resorts to neo-colonialism through the use of both gross and sophisticated means ... it is also the basic policy of US imperialism to carry out its scheme of world hegemony In Viet - Nam, US neo colonialism has proved to be most brutal and perfidious".¹² In terms of foreign policy goals, negatively he sought to form a global anti-imperialist united front against 'the chieftain of the imperialists, namely the U.S.'¹³ Positively, he was for actively contributing to the struggle of the non-aligned countries

12 Documents of the 4th Congress of VWP, op. cit., pp. 115-16.

13 Ibid., p. 119.

against imperialism, policy of aggression and domination with a view to safeguarding their independence and freedom.¹⁴ Vietnam, however, adopted a conciliatory approach to the U.S.A. and deviated from the principled path of non-alignment. There were compulsions for such changes in approach which shall be discussed under subsequent chapters.

Another imperial power against which the Vietnamese fought bitterly was France. But relations with France are more or less friendly. One reason for this is the familiarity. The Vietnamese leaders studied in French colonial schools, speak French, and are familiar with the French approach to problems, and they still respect the French culture. Moreover as the American replaced the French as the "imperialist power", past French injustices have faded somewhat in the Vietnamese memory. De Gaulle's opposition to U.S. policy in Indochina was welcome and served to maintain relations between the French and Vietnamese communists.¹⁵ As a result, with the fading of past acrimonies, the way for good relations were facilitated.

14 Ibid., p. 121.

15 Zasloff and Brown, op. cit., p. 84.

The impact of history is, nevertheless, overwhelming on Vietnam's relations with China. At the 4th Party Congress, Le Duan expressed Vietnam's gratitude to China alongwith other socialist countries for war time cooperation and sought for militant solidarity with them.¹⁶ Relations were cordial at that time. In September 1976, the Vietnamese delegation in Peking signed important agreements providing Vietnam interest free loans, commodity exchanges, and arrangements for scientific and technical cooperation.¹⁷ But relations between these two countries soon started to deteriorate. During 1978, Vietnam began to refer to China as an international reactionary force that has joined hands with imperialism and beginning in June, Vietnam's main enemy.¹⁸ It began with border clashes and situation deteriorated to the extent of the launching of an invasion on Vietnam in February 1979 to teach it a lesson. The apparent reasons were Vietnam's inclination to the Soviet Union, an arch-rival of China since the late 50's (given the chance Vietnam always tilted in favour of the Soviet Union from the very

16 Documents of the 4th Congress of VWP, op. cit., pp. 119-20.

17 Zasloff and Brown, op. cit., p. 82.

18 Masashi Nishihara, "The Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979", Southeast Asian Affairs, Singapore, 1980, p. 67.

beginning) and after reunification even closer Hanoi-Moscow ties, Hanoi's territorial claims on borders, dispute over Spratlys and Pasacel island groups, its treatment of the ethnic Chinese residents in Vietnam and as the last straw the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, a China protege from Cambodia, which led to the Chinese invasion and its persistence on enmity with Vietnam by continuing hostilities on borders, by arming the Khmer Rouge resistance within Cambodia and by diplomatically isolating Vietnam. In fact, problem is deeprooted. Masashi Nishihara maintains, " ... the underlying nature of the rift lies in the historical animosity between the two peoples, or China's anger at the challenge of an historically weaker nation to its own traditional sphere of influence. Perhaps this has been a good illustration of China's great wall mentality. Put in historical perspective, such tension marks the norm, not the exception - the cooperative relations maintained during the thirty year war against "western imperialism" was rather an abnormal interlude".¹⁹ The Vietnamese, who lived for centuries under Chinese hegemony, remain suspicious of Chinese power. As a great Asian power that customarily

19 Ibid., p. 77.

received tribute from the lesser powers to the south, China expects respect, or, perhaps, deference. The proudly nationalist Vietnamese who still celebrate their historic struggle against Chinese control are extremely sensitive about their independence.²⁰ This contradiction in approaches inevitably causes friction in the relationship between these two countries.

Another aspect of Vietnam's history, i.e., its traditional dominance in Indochina has also its impact on its foreign policy. Its professed goal of 'special relationship' with Laos and Cambodia is said to be continuation of that tradition. China and Cambodia under Pol Pot regime alleged that Vietnam had tacit designs for forming an Indochinese federation dominated by it. For evidence, they cited statements of the Indochinese Communist Party of 1931 and 1941 on the federation issue. Vietnam however declared that the Indo-Chinese Federation was a question which had passed for ever into history.²¹ Vietnam's goal is to form this special relationship on the basis of equality and respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity but Vietnam being the most powerful in Indochina is bound to be the dominant

20 Zasloff and Brown, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

21 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1978, p. 29270.

partner in this arrangement of 'special relationship'. In this way, the special relationship clause can be said somewhat a continuum of the past.

In relation to Laos, cordial and cooperative relations are not the result of any force or machinations but are facilitated by historical linkages between the Communist parties of the respective countries. The Vietnamese communists played a decisive role in the creation of the Lao communist movement (the Pathet Lao) after the World War II and have since provided critical advice, assistance, and military force, which helped to bring it to full power. The ruling communist party of Laos, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party grew out of a Committee on Laos, established in 1936 by the Indo-chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. The ICP with almost exclusive Vietnamese membership, directed the formative years of the Lao Communist movement in the first Indochina war (1946-1954). The ICP authorised a separate Lao party in 1951, but it was not until March 1955 that the Lao People's Party was actually founded. The Lao People's Party followed the model of Vietnam's Lao Dong Party and continued to receive guidance and assistance from Vietnamese advisers.²² The close relationship continued after the communist

22 Zasloff and Brown, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

victories in Indochina. In July 1977, the Vietnamese and Lao signed a series of sweeping military and economic agreements, including a twenty-five year friendship treaty and the joint communique affirmed the special relationship between Vietnam and Laos.²³

Unlike Laos, the SRV's relations with Cambodia started in hostility. Border clashes between these two countries had been frequent since 1975. These clashes developed into serious fighting by 1977. On December 13 Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations with Vietnam and it remained adamant on hostilities despite repeated Vietnamese proposals for peace negotiations.²⁴ By early 1978, party leaders in Hanoi had evidently lost faith in the possibility of a peaceful solution to the crisis and decided to resolve the issue by force. In late December, Vietnamese troops, joined by Khmer guerrillas recruited among the thousands of refugees who had fled to Vietnam to escape the cruelties of the brutal Pol Pot regime, launched an invasion directly across the border. After a series of short but bitter battles, the Pol Pot regime was forced to abandon the capital and sought refuge in the Cardamom Mountains, where it attempted to continue national resistance.

23 Ibid., p. 24.

24 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1978, p. 29269.

In Phnom Penh, a pro-Vietnamese regime under Heng Samrin announced the overthrow of Democratic Kampuchea.²⁵ The day after the government was proclaimed in Phnom Penh, it was granted diplomatic recognition by an exchange of ambassadors on 12 June 1979. In February, a Vietnamese delegation headed by Pham Van Dong visited Phnom Penh and a twenty-five year treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation between the two countries was signed. The treaty emphasised the traditional friendship among Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese peoples. The treaty thus finally cemented Hanoi's objective of a special relationship between Vietnam and Cambodia, paralleling the relationship between Vietnam and Laos.²⁶

The initial hostilities between Vietnam and Cambodia have also historical roots. Vietnam expanded its present boundaries at the expense of the Khmer Empire, which included the bulk of Cochin China (South Vietnam). Consequently Cambodians have historically regarded the Vietnamese as imperialists who have seized Khmer territory. Furthermore the French employed Vietnamese as colonial administrators in Cambodia (and Laos) at the echelon below the French, relegating the Cambodians to inferior positions. Vietnamese also came to Cambodia

25 Duiker, op. cit., p. 143.

26 Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, Indochina since the Fall of Saigon: Red Brotherhood at War, London, 1984, pp. 176-79.

during the colonial period as merchants, sharing commercial activities with the Chinese in Phnom Penh and in the provincial towns, inspiring further resentment from an overwhelming agricultural people, who in characteristic fashion, are suspicious of foreign merchants. The ferocity of the anti-Vietnamese pogroms by the Khmer populace in 1970, under the Lon Nol regime is an indication of the hostility that many Cambodians harbour for the Vietnamese. The border issues, both in regard to the mainland, where the French drawn frontiers of the 19th century are in dispute, and to a number of offshore islands in the Gulf of Siam, have provided a source of contention out of which the frontier war erupted.²⁷

Moreover, the independent growth of the Khmer Rouge weakened the hold of Vietnam over Cambodia. Like its counterpart in Laos, the Cambodian Party grew out of the Indochina Communist Party founded by Ho Chi Minh in 1930. In 1951, when the ICP decided to establish separate parties, the Pracheachon, or Peoples Party, was founded along with the VWP in Vietnam in 1951 and the LPP in Laos in 1955. The Pracheachon's status were modelled on those of the VWP, and the Secretary-General Sien Heng had worked closely with the Viet Minh.

27 Zasloff and Brown, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

But in contrast to the situation in Laos, the Vietnamese did not nurture a Cambodian Communist Party that came to power dependent upon Vietnamese efforts. The Vietnamese communists did provide critical assistance to the Cambodian Communist Movement from the outbreak of war in Cambodia in 1970 until 1972, when Vietnamese assistance diminished and the Khmer communists with Chinese supplies operated independently, with relatively little Vietnamese advice and support. By the time the Cambodian communists, or Khmer Rouge as they were popularly called seized Phnom Penh in April 1975, they were clearly an independent revolutionary force whose relations with Vietnam were at best formally correct.²⁸ Due to these historical developments along with traditional fears Cambodia became hostile to Vietnam, particularly when the Pol Pot regime sought to undo past injustices meted to Cambodia. In this pursuit, the regime was cleverly utilized by China against Vietnam which reacted by taking military action throwing the regime.

Similarly, Vietnam's hostile relations with the ASEAN states particularly with Thailand had historical legacies. Vietnam had been rival to the Siamese empire before the colonial period. The all-round relationship with the Soviet Union has also historical background.

28 Ibid., p. 51.

This link started with Ho-Chi Minh's contact with the Comintern in 1920, which nurtured carefully the communist movement in Indochina and provided all kinds of assistance to Vietnam's struggle against imperialism.

Thus, history and culture in a very explicit manner bear upon Vietnam's relations with different states and its approach to international issues. Sometimes history has been ignored but it has surfaced now and then as especially visible in case of China. History, however, is one of factors and at times is given a backseat before other pressing needs. Nevertheless, it remains to be an important determinant in shaping the perception of decision-makers with regard to foreign policy.

Chapter III

GEO-POLITICAL FACTORS IN VIETNAM'S FOREIGN POLICY

Location, size, topography, state boundaries, population, climate, hydrology etc. constitute the geo-political setting of a country. This geo-political consideration is very fundamental to the making of foreign policy. As Rosenau maintains, geo-political factors contribute both to the psychological environment through which officials and public define their links to the external world and the operational environment out of which this dependence on other countries is fashioned.¹

Though in this age of science and technology the industrial potential and technological level of a country is given precedence over geo-political factors, in the context of Vietnam the latter consideration is undoubtedly preeminent. Vietnam's victories over far superior war-machines of France and the United States of America testify the contribution of its rugged terrain in its victorious campaigns. Similarly, Vietnam's presence in Cambodia despite the fierce resistance backed by China, the USA and Thailand speaks of its geographically advantageous position in the region.

1 James N. Rosenau, World Politics - An Introduction, New York, 1976, p. 19.

In fact, geo-political factors constitute one of the primary determinants of Vietnam's foreign policy. In this chapter, their role in its foreign policy has been outlined under following sub-headings:

- (i) Location, Land and People;
- (ii) Size;
- (iii) Mountainous Frontiers; and
- (iv) The South China Sea.

Location, Land and People

Vietnam is located at the eastern edge of the peninsula of mainland Southeast Asia. Shaped like a enormous letter 'S', it extends from the border of China in the north to the tip of Ca Mau Peninsula in the south covering a distance of slightly more than 1600 kilometers. On the east and the south it is flanked by the South China Sea. On the western side lie its Indochinese neighbours namely Laos and Cambodia, the former lying north to the latter.

About 16 per cent land of Vietnam are plain areas. In the north the crowded triangle of the Red River delta, the ancestral homeland of the Vietnamese people and in the south the flat, waterlogged delta of the Mekong River make up the plains of Vietnam. These two rich alluvial plains separated from each other by several hundred miles provide the major source of food for the

population. Here live more than two-thirds of all Vietnamese and among them the vast majority are farmers. Linking these two deltas is the narrow waist of Central Vietnam. Owing to this geographical feature, Vietnam is often described as two baskets of rice separated by a bamboo pole.² These two deltas are the core areas of Vietnam from the viewpoint of resources, population and governance - being inhabited by the ethnic Vietnamese in general and being the centres of production.

On the other hand, about 84 per cent of Vietnam's land is covered with mountains and forests. The mountain chains are spread from the Chinese border to a point less than a hundred miles north of the Mekong River. The most extensive range is located to the north and west of the Red River delta and extends southward from the southern Chinese provinces into northern Vietnam and Laos. These mountains are rugged and heavily forested and frequently reach a height of more than 9000 feet. In the south, the Annamite chain extends from the south of the Red River delta to a point 50 miles north of the city of Saigon. For most of its length, the Annamite chain forms the border between Vietnam and its western neighbours, viz. - Laos and Cambodia. At its southern

2 William J. Duiker, Nation in Revolution, Boulder/Colorado, 1983, p. 1.

expanse, the chain broadens into a high plateau known as the Central Highlands - an area of more than 20,000 square miles, lying between the Cambodian border and the South China Sea.

These mountainous regions are generally thinly populated and are inhabited mainly by mountain minorities. Living a primitive life-style, they have a distinct existence, different from the ethnic Vietnamese. They see the lowlander Vietnamese with suspicion and resist any interference in their autonomous life style.³ Inhabiting the peripheral domains of the country they have been vulnerable to outside manipulations.⁴

The ethnic Vietnamese on the other hand inhabit lowland and coastal areas. Dominant culturally and in numbers, they constitute 85 per cent of the total population. Majority of them are rice farmers. The cultivation of rice requires a relatively equitable distribution of water and this necessitates the development of a system of canals and dikes to ensure the rational distribution of water throughout the region. Societies based on the control of water to ensure an abundant

3 Ibid., pp. 2-3.

4 Lim Joo-Jock, Territorial Power Domains, Southeast Asia, and China, The Geo-Strategy of an Overasching, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984, p. 200.

harvest tend to expand to the limit of the irrigable land and tend to develop an administrative bureaucracy above the village level in order to control the distribution of water.⁵ Thus the Vietnamese form a well-organised cohesive nation.

Though, according to one estimate, there are as many as sixty different ethnic groups within the country, the ethnic Chinese inhabiting the lowland urban areas are the most significant one. Numbering about one and a half million in 1977, they dominated financial and commercial affairs and as a group hold tremendous economic power. They maintained a distinct socio-cultural milieu and some sort of even an administrative structure. A Vietnamese Communist Party journal accused them for maintaining a 'State within State'.⁶ They are often referred as 'third China' or little dragons due to the cohesion and economic relationships among themselves and in particular by their exclusiveness.⁷ In addition, their links with China and their dubious loyalty were

5 Duiker, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

6 Grant Evans and Kelnin Rowley, Indochina Since the Fall of Saigon - Red Brotherhood at War, London, 1984, p. 53.

7 Roeslan Abdulgani, Nationalism, Regionalism, And Security Problems in Southeast Asia, Banyan Publications, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 82-83.

causes of concern to Hanoi.⁸ After the reunification, the ethnic Chinese became a serious problem in the wake of hostilities on northern and western fronts with China and Cambodia respectively. The ethnic Chinese locally known as Hoas could be used effectively by China in its hostile campaign against Vietnam. Moreover, Hoas commanding the economy could hold the country at ransom in a conflictual situation. The SRV regime was left with no option but to launch a crackdown on Hoas, which was started on 24th March 1978.⁹ The repression of the ethnic Chinese which resulted in their massive exodus had severe repercussions on Vietnam's external relations. Naturally, relations with China further deteriorated and on the other hand the flight of these refugees to the ASEAN countries made the latter suspicious of some design of the 'export of revolution' by Vietnam. This seriously jeopardised the process of rapprochement in Vietnam's relations with the ASEAN states.¹⁰

Despite the presence of multiple ethnic groups and problems of mountain minorities and the ethnic Chinese, the Vietnamese remains a homogenous society

8 Evans and Rowley, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57

and this is a valuable asset for Vietnam.¹¹ Moreover, developed societal structure and a long history of struggle against foreign powers have given them edge over other Southeast Asian States. These advantages while enable Vietnam to resist domination of larger States, they also ensure its superiority in relation to the smaller States of Indochina.

Size¹²

Vietnam has a population of more than 50 million (57,610,000 - estimated in mid 1983 with an annual growth rate of 2.9 per cent). With a population ranking 16th in the world, it is the third largest communist nation in the world. Spread over 329,707 square kilometers, it is the biggest country in Indochina which makes it some sort of big brother in Indochina region. Other States of Indochina namely, Cambodia and Laos are very small in comparison to Vietnam. While Cambodia has a population of 6.3 million and an area of 181,040 square kilometers, Laos has a population of only 3.6 million inhabiting an area of 236,803 square kilometers. But on its northern side lies the giant of Asia, namely, China, population of which exceeds one billion covering

11 Joseph J. Zasloff and Mac Alister Brown, Communist Indochina and US Foreign Policy, Postwar Realities, Westview, Boulder/Colorado, 1978, p. 29.

12 All datas under this subheading has been taken from, Countries of the World and Their Leaders, Yearbook, 1986, Detroit, 1985.

an area of 9.6 million square kilometers. While Vietnam's size in relation to Indochinese States is awesome and in relation to other Southeast Asian States is impressive, its size is no match to that of China. This not only concerns Vietnam's security critically but also offsets its influence in Southeast Asia.

The Mountainous Frontiers

The mountainous frontiers which Vietnam shares with China, Laos and Cambodia are very crucial geographically. The mountain chain which stretches on the northern and the north western frontiers of Vietnam is the part of the Central mountain zone of mainland Southeast Asia. This mountain zone partitioned into the territories of different states and fringed by the power peripheries of otherwise lowland centric states is said to be central not only geopolitically in the matter of state relations in mainland Southeast Asia but also to the manner in which these relations are operated. ¹³

In this mountainous zone, uncontrolled or under-controlled peripheries of different states with ill-defined borders often leads to conflictual situations. This poses severe limitations to a state's sovereignty in these peripheral domains. The problem is particularly

severe for a weaker state. Such a condition enables a more powerful state to extend its power into another state as national boundaries are only symbolic in terms of unauthorised movement of men and materials. The north to south permeation of China's power goes beyond its southern boundary lines into the weakest parts of Vietnam and Laos. On the other hand, Vietnam's east to west power permeation clearly ignores the Laotian-Vietnamese boundary line. The post-1975 conflictual situation can be seen against the background of the meeting of the Chinese and Vietnamese zones of power permeation.¹⁴

The peripheral domains of states while substract from the power of a weaker state, it actually add in a better organised power. Vietnam according to this pattern is in advantage in its relation with Laos but at disadvantage in relation with China. This situation is very conducive to the exercise of coercive power. Offensive in this region does not require sophisticated weaponry. The peripherality of the region geographically and also ethnically makes the situation worse for a defending state. The loyalty of mountain minorities cannot be trusted. This may be the reason for the Chinese punitive campaign in 1979 was confined to the

14 Ibid., p. 209.

peripheral zones of the northern frontier and the Chinese troops did not enter the core domain of Red River delta.

The Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi bordering north Vietnam however in no terms are peripheral. China has carefully consolidated its position in these highlands. Lim Joo Jock refers these two provinces of China as a broad tounge of the Chinese core domain wedged in mainland Southeast Asia.¹⁵ The strengthened position of China with its open aspiration to establish itself as the dominant power in the region was a cause of serious concern for the independent minded Vietnamese. While in the past, China could be effectively dealt with by the French in control of Indochina, for Vietnam it was extremely difficult to counter the Chinese endeavour to reassess its dominating influence in the region which comprised once latter's vassal states. While the non-Communist countries of the Southeast Asia were able to balance Chinese influence with American influence, this course was not open to a government that had only recently defeated American military intervention. Hanoi's efforts to develop an opening to the West were frustrated by the U.S. hostility. As its options diminished, Hanoi had little choice

15 Ibid., p. 210.

but to align itself with Moscow and gird itself for a long struggle with China.¹⁶

Vietnam's ties with the Soviet Union, an arch-rival of China since 1950s was intolerable to China. It wanted an exclusive hold over the region. The advantage with China is that it is not an outside power in the region as its southern provinces just protrude in the region and the geographical setting is such that it can permeate its power domain in Vietnam and Laos easily and can launch punitive campaigns without much costs. Vietnam in order to counter this menace, besides befriending the Soviet Union, took steps to strengthen its borders areas, consolidated its position in Indochina and attempted to diversify its relations. For that purpose it tried to establish friendly relations with the U.S.A. and the ASEAN but could not succeed.

In such a situation only two courses were left open for Vietnam, viz., close ties with the Soviet Union and its consolidated position in Indochina to counter balance the Chinese threat. In fact 'the special relationship' among Indochinese states was also a geo-political necessity. Both Laos and Cambodia are vital for Vietnam's existence. Its northern core

16 Evans and Rowley, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

area is critically exposed to Laos. A hostile Laos controlled by an enemy power might pose grave danger to Vietnam's defences. The S.R.V., however, warded off any such possibility to develop by reinforcing its good relations with Laos developed during war time cooperation into a treaty of special relationship. Despite this Laos remained vulnerable to the Chinese penetration. Vietnam constructed all weather roads crossing the mountains from Vietnamese seaports to the Mekong and stationed its troops in Laos. By 1980 it was estimated that 60,000 Vietnamese troops were garrisoned in Laos.¹⁷ However, that was not a colonial situation. Laos in fact found an ally in preventing the Chinese domination and infiltration and offsetting its weakness in comparison to Thailand. Moreover it also benefitted from Vietnamese cooperation in political, economic and security fields.

Unlike that of Laos, the S.R.V.'s relations with Cambodia started in hostility. Even before the fall of Saigon there had been border clashes.¹⁸ One of the reasons for this conflictual situation was the geo-strategic proximity of the core areas of these two countries. The areas of production and main ethnic residence lie without any peripheral interference.

17 Lim Joo-Jock, op. cit., pp. 193-94.

18 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1978, p. 29269.

The cultural and life-style appear in sudden contrast in the border region. However, this reason alone is not sufficient to cause hostile relations but a hostile Cambodia makes the core area of Mekong Valley extremely vulnerable. And it was so when Pol Pot regime backed by China started open offensives on borders on the basis of traditional prejudices. This position was unaffordable by Vietnam and hence the military action of 1978 - overthrowing Pol Pot regime. A pro-Vietnam Government was formed there and Vietnamese troops were stationed there for the new regime's safety.

However, the resistance to the new regime could not be crushed. These resistance groups operated from Thailand backed by China and the USA. Any attempt by Vietnam to wipe out these close to the border bases would mean a large scale fighting, as happened during each dry season in Thai defended territory. The Thai army showed the will to repel Vietnamese incursions and to fight back Vietnamese units operating ostensibly in hot pursuit of Khmer guerrillas. Extended over relatively long supply lines often its rapid advance through Cambodia, Vietnam's military power was confronted by Thailand's forces with the advantage of being based on Thailand's own core domains.¹⁹

19 Lim Joo-Jock, op. cit., p. 192.

Vietnam having strengthened its position in Laos and having overthrown the anti-Vietnamese Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and aided by the USSR would have emerged as the most powerful state in mainland Southeast Asia but China's punitive campaign of 1979 undermined its such a position. The Chinese strategy was made possible by the adjacency of Yunnan and Guangxi provinces. Moreover the terrain of Vietnam's north western sector facilitated the Chinese advances during the punitive campaign as application of coercive power in the highland environment can be at low cost to the user.²⁰ The proximity of Yunnan and Guangxi provinces to Tonkin centres of production makes the area vulnerable. In the 1979 war, China by capturing Langron had reached very close to this northern core area of Vietnam. Threat perception aggravated with the Chinese infiltration in the northern frontier zone. The area though not peripheral in power terms but is peripheral in terms of distance from the centres of production and lowland population and ethnically as it is inhabited by mountain minorities. Vietnam admitted that the tribal frontier areas bordering China had been subject to Chinese pressure. It alleged the PRC to have launched an espionage campaign, psychological war and a war of economic sabotage.²¹

20 Ibid., pp. 195-96.

21 Ibid., p. 199.

The large scale Chinese infiltration and penetration has been made possible by cross boundary affinities on both sides of the boundary and which the PRC is accused to be utilising in its campaign against Vietnam. Despite subsequent claims of a total Vietnamese determination to expose and wipe out the Chinese reactionary elements enconced in the frontier areas, the post 1979 conditions in border lands display basic features of a strategic environment reminiscent of the unstable frontiers to be found throughout mountainous Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese complaints mirror, in microcosm, the problems of loose borders, dissent, the difficulty of detecting intruders and the border straddling ties that characterise the turbulence actual and latent in the region.²²

The same tactics were adopted in Laos by China where anti-Vietnamese activities was fomented. This provided China yet one more arena for pressurising Vietnam's already stretched resources. But to Vietnam not to have done so would have exposed their landward flank to China.

Vietnam, thus, on the land faced two main frontiers, i.e., on its north with China and on the west, with Cambodia. A third vulnerable area was Laos. It was

22 Ibid., p. 200.

China which posed direct threat to Vietnam. And the threat perception was aggravated and made potent by the geopolitical factors. In order to counter the Chinese menace, Vietnam befriended the USSR, consolidated its position in Indochina which again was facilitated by the geo-political factors. But the Chinese pressure on the north and Thailand aided by China in the West restricted Vietnam's actions in Cambodia. China also acted as a bulwark against Vietnam's full-fledged attack on Thailand as it often repeated its intention to come to Thailand's aid in case of a Vietnamese attack on Thailand. However, the regional and global environment became different with the advent of M. Gorbachev in the Soviet Union in 1985. Vietnam on its part declared its intentions to withdraw its forces from Cambodia subsequently and the process of conflict resolution was intensified in right direction.

The South China Sea

Flanking the eastern and the southern sides of Vietnam is the South China Sea. Besides being the vital naval access to Vietnam, its geo-strategic importance arises from two more reasons. First is the physical separateness of Vietnam's two core domains of the north and the south. The Red River delta and the Mekong River delta joined by a single lengthy and inadequate rail link is a strategic disadvantage for

Vietnam. In such a condition the sea-borne link through the South China Sea required its strengthened position in the sea which it ensured by allowing the USSR fleet to use the bases in Camranh Bay and Davang. The naval strength of the Soviet Union protected the political link between Vietnam's northern and southern cores.²³

Secondly, the security of its islands in the South China Sea was a major concern for Vietnam. The question of sovereignty over islands in the South China Sea has been subject of fierce contention. China claimed sovereignty over all the islands situated in the South China Sea. In order to fulfil its claims, China invaded the Paracel Island group in January 1974 and occupied them by defeating the forces of the Republic of Vietnam.²⁴ It also claimed another group of islands namely, Spratlys where Vietnam possesses islands alongwith Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and China. The distance of this group of island is about 650 kilometers east of Vietnam. Vietnam's claim over these islands is substantiated by actual possession and it is closer to these islands in terms of distance compared to that

23 Ibid., p. 196.

24 Ganganath Jha, "Vietnam-China Dispute over the Spratlys", Strategic Analysis, New Delhi, vol. XII, no. 10, January 1989, p. 1202.

of China. But the Chinese diplomats have conducted their policies astutely in such a fashion that none of the claimants feel secure about their possessions.²⁵

These resource rich islands where oil has also been discovered are highly valued. One Chinese diplomat even referred these islands as real estate. Moreover, China wants to acquire these islands to expand its influence in Southeast Asia and extend its influence in the Indian Ocean.²⁶

The Paracels and the Spratlys were formally integrated to Vietnam in 1933 and the possession of these island groups by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was affirmed by the San Francisco Treaty of 1957. In 1974, China occupied the Paracels and claimed the Spratlys. In 1975, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam confirmed its possession in Spratlys through a military action. China did not appreciate this action but did nothing to undo the Vietnamese action. However later the SRV found it extremely difficult to retain its possessions in the South China Sea as its naval forces were of no match to that of China. In such a situation, the Soviet naval forces in the Sea provided a deterrent atleast in the Sea if not on land. It was the Soviet

25 Ibid., p. 1202.

26 China again attacked these islands (Spratlys) in 1988.

presence which seems to have prevented Chinese action in the Sea against Vietnam in 1979 when it attacked the latter to teach it a lesson.

On the whole, geography and demography have made Vietnam the dominant power in Indo-China. But its influence is severely constrained by China, which can not be said an outside power as its southern provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi protrude in the region. China's geographical advantages in the region added with its open policy of converting Southeast Asia as its exclusive sphere of influence posed severe threat to Vietnam which was not ready to submit to China's domination. Latter in order to fulfil its objective pressurised Vietnam through hostilities on the north and by backing Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Vietnam also felt threatened about the safety of its islands in the Sea as China had already captured the Paracel island group in 1974 from Vietnam and claimed also the Spratlys group of islands where Vietnam possessed islands.

Vietnam in order to counter balance its threat perception consolidated its position in the region. In Cambodia it forcibly overthrew the anti-Vietnam Khmer Rouge and achieved its objective of special relationship in Indochina. In fact, the special relationship among these States became a necessity

to counter the threat from China.²⁷

The special relationship alone, however, was not a sufficient check to the Chinese menace. Vietnam developed special ties with the Soviet Union, an adversary of China, for that purpose. The Soviet friendship was thought to be a bulwark against China. Though the Soviet Union could not stop the 1979 punitive campaign, but it certainly had a deterrent effect especially in the sea. Moreover, Vietnam got valuable assistance in its struggle against China and resistance forces operating in Cambodia from the Soviet Union. In fact, the friendship with the Soviet Union became a cornerstone of Vietnam's foreign policy.

27 Abdulgani, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Chapter IV

SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIABLES

The contribution of socio-economic variables in the foreign policy making is fundamental. It is in the socio-economic background that a country formulates its foreign policy. In other words, the foreign policy pursued by a country is largely the projection of its socio-economic conditions. Validity of this proposition can be observed in Vietnam's case when its foreign policy options had been severely constrained by the cold war considerations and its own war efforts. Mc Cloud notes, "Practical considerations of continuing material support, ideological implications and traditional power and cultural positions all figured in Vietnam's calculations as did domestic power coalitions and competing ideological groups within the Lao Dong Party Politbureau."¹

However, the fall of Saigon and the resultant unification of Vietnam loosened earlier constraints. The victorious Vietnamese constituting the third largest communist state in the world emerged as a power to reckon with. Its army, high in morale, equipped with enormous U.S. weaponry which it had acquired as spoils

1 Donald G. Mc Cloud, System and Processes in Southeast Asia: The Evolution of a Region, Colorado/London, 1986, pp. 198-99.

of victory, was the most powerful in Southeast Asia.² Such a position enabled Vietnam to project its world view emanating from its own societal structure in the international affairs.

In this chapter, some important aspects of socio-economic variables are being discussed under the sub-headings - (i) the role of leadership, (ii) ideological commitments, (iii) economic conditions, and (iv) the security concern.

The Role of Leadership

In the socialist system the role of leadership is preeminent. Many factors such as public opinion, the press, interest groups, inter-ministerial wranglings which affect the decision making in other systems hardly have any role in this system. In Vietnam, like any socialist system, the decision making process was highly centralised. It was the Vietnamese Communist Party which controlled the State and also the society. The comprehensiveness of the role of Party can be gauged from this brief quote,

"The Party fixes the State's internal and external policy lines. It establishes the key policies and programmes required for the political, military, economic and

2 Joseph J. Zasloff and Mac Allister Brown, Communist Indochina and US Foreign Policy: Postwar Realities, Westview Press/Boulder, Colorado, 1978, p. 30.

ideological and cultural advance of the society Party leadership over the State is absolute and comprehensive". (3)

The Party in turn was controlled by the Politbureau, the supreme decision making body in the Party. The centralised leadership, moreover, functioned on the basis of consensus. There were differences but they seldom came over surface and never hampered the decision-making in consensus. Le Duan like Ho-Chi-Minh kept factionalism under strict check till his death in 1986.⁴ In such an arrangement, foreign policy was also a prerogative of the leadership only. Masses were only to be taught or educated about the already formulated policies. For instance, Le Duan, while concluding foreign policy goals of Vietnam in his report at the Fourth Party Congress said, "Faithful to Marxism-Leninism our Party will increasingly educate its members and our people to imbue ourselves with the pure revolutionary sentiments of President Ho-Chi-Minh, continue upholding the banner of national independence and socialism".⁵ Similarly at the Fifth Party Congress, Le Duan, emphasising the

3 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 38.

4 Joseph J. Zafloff (ed.), Postwar Indochina: Old Enemies and New Allies, U.S. Department of State, 1988, p. 4.

5 Documents of the 4th Congress of the Vietnam's Workers' Party (Now the Communist Party of Vietnam), Embassy of the SRV, New Delhi, 1977, p. 121.

importance of the Soviet-Vietnamese friendship said, "Our Party is duty-bound to educate all Vietnamese to grasp firmly this principle, this strategy"⁶ These statements make the point clear that it was not public opinion which affected the decision-making of the leadership but it was the other way round.

The primacy of leadership and its cohesiveness gave a firmness and continuity to the foreign policy. Vietnam could deal effectively with Cambodia and China and withstood all kind of pressures despite severe economic hardships mainly due to this kind of leadership. As the leadership remained unchanged till 1986, a continuity in approach is clearly visible to this point in the foreign policy.

Ideological Commitments

The Vietnamese communists were euphoric about their victory. For them it represented not only the achievement of their cherished goals (of liberating the South, unifying the nation, and establishing socialism), but more fundamentally they believed that they had helped alter the world strategic balance. They considered

6 Quoted in Douglas Pike, Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance, Westview Press, Boulder/London, 1987, p. 182.

7 Zasloff and Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

the Vietnamese revolution as an integral part of world revolution⁸ and the victory, to them, marked "a new change in the balance of forces tipping in favour of the revolution, a new development in the struggle of the world's people for peace, national independence, democracy and socialism".⁹ For the advancement of these goals, at its Fourth Congress the Communist Party of Vietnam committed itself, its members and the people of Vietnam to the ideology of Marxism and Leninism, to the pure revolutionary sentiments of Ho-Chi-Minh and to the spirit of national independence and socialism.¹⁰

These ideological commitments which formed a combination of genuine patriotism with proletarian internationalism formed the basis of Vietnam's foreign policy goals, viz. militant solidarity with fraternal socialist countries, special relationship among Indo-Chinese states, belief in non-aligned movement, support to the proletarian struggle and carrying on a joint struggle against the US led imperialism.¹¹

Though the goal of militant solidarity with fraternal socialist countries went awry in the wake of

8 Documents of the 4th Congress of the VWP, op. cit., p. 119.

9 Ibid., p. 116.

10 Ibid., p. 121.

11 Ibid., pp. 120-21.

growing Sino-Soviet rift, Vietnam and the Soviet Union developed a comprehensive all round relationship. Ideology formed the basis of this relationship. Vietnam's ideological link to the Soviet Union goes back to Ho-Chi-Minh's contact with the Comintern in 1920. Since then the Soviet Union had been playing the vital role of founding, organising and sustaining the communist movement in Indochina. After the reunification Vietnam moved closer to the Soviet Union. On November 2, 1978, they signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.¹² The treaty committed both parties to socialist solidarity and consolidation of the world socialist system. The treaty also affirmed this support for "the struggle waged by the non-aligned countries and the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism".¹³ The ties developed "in an all round relationship" which meant a mutual interaction at all levels and in all sectors. A typical expression of the concept came from Hanoi theoretician Nguyen Khac Vien, who used a railroad train as metaphor. 'The USSR is the locomotive, Vietnam one of the box cars, the entire train a single unit. No longer does the SRV solicit aid from the USSR. Now each side performs its respective share of duty in the international division

12 Douglas Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

of socialist labour. Vietnam now is a member of the socialist community and we should now integrate ourselves with it'.¹⁴

On the other hand, the socialist fraternity received a setback in relation to China. Vietnam's national pride and China's hegemonistic designs brought them at logger-heads. During early 1978, Vietnam began to refer to China as an international reactionary force that has joined hands with imperialism and beginning in June as its main enemy.¹⁵ Border skirmishes which started even before the reunification of Vietnam developed into a full-fledged invasion by China in 1979. Border clashes and diplomatic offenses did not cease even after Vietnam had been taught a lesson.

The special relationship in Indo-China was another strong manifestation of ideological solidarity. In 1975, all the victorious parties in Indochina were communists, this kind of relationship was natural to expect. Vietnam and Laos consolidated the war time cooperation between the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese communists into a treaty of friendship signed in 1977 affirming the special relationship.¹⁶ However, the

14 Ibid., p. 225.

15 Masashi Nishihara, "The Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979. Only the First Round", Southeast Asian Affairs, Singapore, 1980.

16 Zasloff and Brown, op. cit., p. 63.

special relationship with Cambodia could not be realized without a military action by Vietnam which overthrew the hostile regime of Pol Pot. The instalment of the Heng Samrin regime actuated the special relationship in Indochina. Duncanson commented on the role of ideology in these special relationships, "Marxist ideology has provided credible pretexts for pursuit of the traditional strategy of Vietnam, Leninist tactics a sure method of pursuing it, and the Constitution of the USSR a subtler and more upto-date framework for political control of the region than the Confucian world view of old".¹⁷ This is true that the ideology of Marxism-Leninism provided the base for the 'special relationship' but it was hardly a case of communist expansionism. In fact Vietnam was compelled to take action against the Pol Pot regime so that it could get rid of the Chinese threat carried on by the regime. Moreover, Vietnam's action ended the genocide perpetuated by the fanatic Khmer Rouge.

However, national interest demanded rethinking in the ideological realm itself around mid eighties. This rethinking was the product of the stagnation in

17 Dennis Duncanson, "Ideology, Tradition and Strategy in Indochina's Foreign Policy", Asian Affairs, 15(1), February 1984, p. 41.

the socialist systems in general and in Vietnam in particular where acute poverty loomed large. Vietnam's conditions became more striking in contrast to the rapid growth in the non-communist countries of Southeast Asia, namely, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore.¹⁸ For this, shortcomings in the Party's ideological, organizational and cadre work were frankly recognised.¹⁹ At the Sixth Party Congress, hence, the programme for reconstruction was launched - Doi Moi - the Vietnamese counterpart of the Soviet perestroika. This programme of 'doi moi' was the indicator of major shifts in the ideological position of Vietnam. The world view based on Marxist-Leninist beliefs that world politics is a class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie underwent a change. The Vietnamese communist regime no longer viewed the world primarily as a mortal struggle between imperialist and revolutionary camps. Now the most important reality for Vietnam was the necessity to find a niche in the world economy. Though the old world view did prevail alongwith this new world view but the shift in emphasis from struggle

18 Zasloff (ed.), op. cit., pp. XVI - XVII.

19 Nguyen Dyk Tam, "Commitment to Revolution through Practice", Problems of Peace and Socialism, 16(10), October 1988, p. 63.

against imperialism to interdependence was obvious.²⁰

In this way, Vietnam's ideological commitments as determinants of the foreign policy can be comprehended properly only when both the factors of its fundamental policy, viz. the patriotism and the proletarian internationalism are viewed together. Otherwise such contradictory developments such as normalization efforts with the U.S.A., which it had called the chieftain of imperialist forces and hostility with communist China and Pol Pot ruled Cambodia, or the commitment to the world revolution and the programme of 'doi moi' can hardly be reconciled.

Economic Conditions

Economic factors have been among the prime movers of Vietnam's foreign policy. The main concern of the SRV was not military adventures abroad but the rebuilding of its war shattered economy at the time of reunification. The need was overwhelming. Forty years of war had left Vietnam with a per capita income that was about a quarter of that of Thailand and about a thirtieth of that of the developed capitalist countries. Furthermore, the cutting of American aid to the south precipitated

20 Gareth Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World View: Two Camps to Interdependence", Contemporary Southeast Asia, 12(1), June 1990, pp. 1-3.

an immediate crisis. Colonial Vietnam had been an important exporter of rice. Years of war had destroyed this capacity, and the rapidly growing population had become increasingly dependent on outside supplies of food from the west in the south and from China in the north. The country's economy was clearly fragile and would have to be handled with care if it was to be nursed back to health.²¹ Accordingly, Le Duan's Report made it clear that the VCP leadership assigned first priority to national reconstruction and not to the international objectives. The party, people and government of Vietnam should, he said, 'make the most of the favourable international conditions so as to rapidly heal the wounds of war, restore and develop the economy, develop culture, science and technology, consolidate national defence, build the material and technical basis of socialism in our country!'²²

The second five year plan, adopted at the 4th National Congress, 1976, was intended to make the country self-sufficient in food once more by the end of 1980, besides the launching of the process of industrialisation. Overall, the planners expected a

21 Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, Indochina since the Fall of Saigon: Red Brotherhood at War, Verso Editions, London, 1984, p. 36.

22 Ibid., p. 38.

growth rate of 15% per annum in Vietnam's gross national product as the country recovered from the ravages of war. But since as Le Duan put it in announcing the plan, accumulation from internal sources was non-existent the whole strategy depended on an influx of foreign aid to finance investments.²³

In this endeavour, the new government first of all concentrated its attention on the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand). It took quick action to consolidate its relationship with ASEAN. In July the Vietnamese foreign minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh, said that his government was prepared to establish and develop relations of friendship and cooperation with other Southeast Asian countries on the basis of the following principles -

1. Respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs and peaceful co-existence.
2. Not allowing any foreign country to use one's territory as a base for direct or indirect aggression and intervention against other countries in the region.

23 Ibid., pp. 38-39.

3. Establishment of friendly and good neighbourly relations, economic cooperation and cultural exchanges on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, together with settlement of disputes through negotiations in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect.
4. Development of cooperation among the countries in the region for the building of prosperity in keeping with each country's specific conditions and for the sake of independence, peace and genuine neutrality in Southeast Asia.²⁴

Following three years of the reunification the economic conditions moved from bad to worse. Insufficient aid from East to West meant that the country's industrialisation plans had to be drastically scaled down. China had halted its wartime gift of 500,000 tonnes of rice per year and cut its supply of consumer goods. Meanwhile, agriculture suffered a series of setbacks. Lack of fertilizer, market incentive while lowered production, natural calamities created havoc to agricultural production. Food shortages intensified. Malnutrition coupled with shortages of imported drugs and medicines led to a deterioration in public health undernourished, the people were unable to maintain their working

24 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1976, p. 27919.

capacity, and labour productivity declined further.

Hanoi's first response was to intensify diplomatic attempts to breakthroughs to the West. Pham Van toured Europe early in 1977 soliciting aid and technology, while offering a liberal and flexible foreign investment code to foreign capitalists. He gained only a small aid package from France while other European countries indicated that they were reluctant to deal with Vietnam until the USA had normalized relations with Hanoi.²⁵

In the midst of this domestic crisis the Khmer Rouge launched their first full-scale attack on Vietnamese border villages causing disruption to the New Economic Zones. This Khmer hostilities coincided by hoardings by the southern capitalists, aggravating the food shortages and inflation which was 80% in 1977. Most of the southern capitalists were ethnic Chinese or Hoas. Activities of Hoas combined with the serious dislocation of the southern economy as a result of the conflict Cambodia made Vietnamese leaders fearful of Chinese inspired disruption of the country from within and without. Following Phnom Penh's refusal to respond to a substantial peace proposal from Hanoi on 5 January, 1978, Vietnam took two strategically interwind decisions,

25 Evans and Rowley, op. cit., p. 49.

the first was to find a way of toppling Pol Pot, the second was to break the back of the Chinese dominated oligarchy in the South.²⁶

The crackdown on the ethnic Chinese and the intervention in Cambodia proved disastrous for Vietnam diplomatically. Its action brought world wide condemnation except the Soviet led socialist bloc, torpedoed the favourably evolving relations with the ASEAN, invited the U.S. trade embargo and worst of all, the Chinese invasion. Though Vietnam succeeded in thwarting the Chinese punitive campaign, it found itself under more effective seize than at any time. Economy was at ruins with western aid completely cut off.²⁷ Vietnam responded to these pressures by moving further into the Soviet orbit. It had entered into a treaty of friendship and mutual cooperation with the Soviet Union in November 1978. Threatened by China and isolated by the USA and the ASEAN it had no option but to join the COMECON one month later. Following the sanctions after 1979, the economic ties between Vietnam and the Soviet bloc was further strengthened and the Soviets were granted access to Cam Ranh Bay - to the great annoyance of Peking and Washington. Economic conditions and exports

26 Ibid., p. 53.

27 Ibid., p. 292.

picked up after the 6th Plenum's decision to restrict collectivisation and to liberalise the economy and conditions improved further, after the launching of the Third Five Year Plan in 1981 and by 1983 it was clear that Sino-American attempts to bleed Vietnam into submission had failed.²⁸ However the inevitable result of the economic pressure applied to Vietnam had been to drive it more firmly into the Soviet camp. The Soviet Union became Vietnam's main trading partner. Nguyen Lan said that by mid 1981, more than two-thirds of Vietnam's imports of fuel, raw materials, food, consumer goods and machinery came from the Soviet Union and other COMECON members notably East Germany.²⁹ Vietnam's economic dependence on the Soviet bloc was critical, and their large scale assistance in Vietnam's industrial and electricity generation was vital.

Thus, the war ravaged economy of Vietnam required foreign assistance for its reconstruction. But the refugee crisis and the Cambodian imbroglio blocked all the way of foreign assistance to Vietnam. Finding no option it moved deeper and deeper in the Soviet orbit. This was due to extraordinary dependence on the USSR, as Vietnam needed the USSR for 10 to 15 per cent of its

28 Ibid., p. 167.

29 Ibid., p. 168.

staple food without which there would have been serious shortages. It relied on the USSR for all its petroleum, chemicals, fertilizers and such raw materials as its limited industrial power could use.

The Security Concern

Vietnam's socio-economic plight was also worsened on account of the security situation of the country. Having been repeatedly invaded in the past, the Vietnamese were very conscious of their security. Even after the victory in 1975 they were deprived of the much desired peace and prosperity. Threats loomed large over the northern and the western frontiers along with China and Cambodia respectively. Occurrences of border clashes had started even before the formal reunification of Vietnam.

The biggest threat to Vietnam was from China. Latter with its immense power at land and sea it wanted to establish its dominant power in Southeast Asia - and for that purpose it viewed the Soviet Union as its rival. China's drive to open diplomatic and trade relations with Southeast Asian countries met with considerable success - more so than by the parallel efforts of the Soviet Union. As an ally to which Peking had given substantial support, Vietnam was naturally expected to submit to Chinese hegemony. The pressure on Hanoi began even before the fall of Saigon with the occupation of the Spratly

Islands in 1974.³⁰ Further it claimed Paracel Islands which again threatened Vietnam's possessions. Huang Hua's statement made on July 10, 1977 made clear the designs of China. He said, "The issues in South China Sea are non-negotiable. The territory of China reaches as far as southward as the James Shoals, near Borneo of Malaysia. I remember that while I was a school boy I read about these islands in the geography books. At that time, I never had anyone say that those islands were not China's. The Vietnamese claim that the islands belong to them. Let them talk that way. They have repeatedly asked to negotiate with them on the Paracels issue; we have always declined to do so. As to the ownership of these islands, there are historical records that can be verified. There is no need for negotiations since they originally belonged to China."³¹

Vietnam, a country of proud nationalists, was not ready to submit to the Chinese hegemony. In order to withstand the Chinese pressure it tried to normalize relations with the U.S.A. and to develop friendly relations with the ASEAN, however unsuccessfully. Devoid of all options it moved closer and closer to the Soviet Union. In fact, Hanoi's public explanation for entering into the USSR-SRV Treaty of Friendship and

30 Ibid., p. 289.

31 Ibid., p. 49.

Cooperation signed on November 2, 1978 was the China threat.³² This further irritated China which held Vietnam as the Cuba of Southeast Asia.³³ Hostility between them kept on mounting owing to the disputes over the South China Sea islands, territorial claims at the northern border area, the closer on Hanoi-Moscow ties and Vietnam's treatment to the ethnic Chinese in the South. As the last straw, when Vietnam's forces overthrew the Pol Pot regime from Phnom Penh, a Chinese protege, in 1978, China attacked Vietnam in 1979 to teach it a lesson. China continued the hostilities by arming the Khmer Rouge, keeping borders tense and through diplomatic channels even after Vietnam was taught the lesson.

The ASEAN which had responded well to the Vietnamese efforts of good relations repeatedly demanded the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops during 1979-86 from Kampuchea and the holding of free elections there which would, they assured reduce Vietnam's diplomatic isolation and improve prospects for economic assistance. Vietnam which was eager to normalize relations with the ASEAN wanted guarantees against the Chinese threat. It wanted a Chinese pledge to respect for the independence of the

32 Douglas Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

33 Masashi Nishihara, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

countries of Indochina as a condition for the withdrawal of troops.

On the other side Vietnam's security concern led it to be more dependent on the Soviet Union. For the arms and armaments, war equipments and for means of transport, it wholly depended on the Soviet Union as Vietnam had no such factories³⁴ and their requirements were massive as battles hardly ceased in Cambodia or on the northern frontiers. Even for the security of coasts and possessions in the Sea, its dependence on the Soviet Union was crucial. In fact, for the first time the Soviet war vessels were seen at the Cam Ranh Bay after the Chinese punitive campaign in 1979.³⁵

Thus, Vietnam's security concern prevailed upon the much pressing needs of economic reconstruction. The question of national security did not let the Vietnamese to see peace and they were compelled to enter a long protracted warfare which added to their miseries. They were also deprived of foreign aid which they needed badly. Thus, the security concern of Vietnam was very demanding. But, as Nayan Chanda maintain, "If Vietnam was ready to pay any price to gain its independence, it

34 Douglas Pike, op. cit., pp. 195-96.

35 Evans and Rowley, op. cit., p. 268.

is ready to bear any burden to protect it. Security, in the Vietnamese view, has no price tag".³⁶

On the whole, the Vietnamese leadership having firm control over the state of affairs provided a continuity in foreign policy. Committed to the ideology of Marxism and Leninism but having worked in China they were aware of China's hegemonistic designs. For this they preferred the Soviet Union to China which suited them economically too.

At the end it can be stated that at the social level, the people were unhappy with the prevailing economic situation at the end of 1986. There were rampant corruption and dominance of the Communist Party of Vietnam. The leaders had started expressing disenchantments and pleading changes and renovation in the system. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and his Cabinet colleagues voluntarily resigned on the eve of the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in December 1986. Thus, there was the emergence of Nguyen Van Linh into power, who had been advocating reforms in the system in the past. He came out with the programme of Doi Moi

36 Zasloff (ed.), op. cit., p. XV.

to transform the stagnant economy of Vietnam.³⁷

37 For further details, see, Ganganath Jha, "The Politics of Perestroika in Vietnam, 1986-1990", International Studies, vol. 28, no. 4, 1991, pp. 373-88.

Chapter V

EXTERNAL FACTORS IN VIETNAM'S FOREIGN POLICY

External factors contributing to the determination of the foreign policy of a country emanate from the international milieu to which the foreign policy of that country is directed. Though there exists a system of international law and organizations, it is primarily the interaction of nation-states which constitute the international milieu within which a state formulates its foreign policy. A state seeks to change or maintain status quo in the behaviour of other states in its own favour as its foreign policy objectives.¹ In turn, its own policy is affected by the similar goals of other countries. In this way, external factors exercise profound impact on the foreign policy of a country. However, here it should be noted that the international milieu is not the same for all countries but differ from country to country and is dynamic in character. The milieu affecting Vietnam's foreign policy had been constituted by the cold war politics, the Sino-Soviet rift, non-aligned movement, developments in Indochina and the reactions of the ASEAN States. These factors

1 Mahendra Kumar, Theoretical Aspects of International Politics, Delhi, 1978, p. 323.

have been discussed under the following sub-headings: the non-alignment and Vietnam, the U.S. factor, the Soviet position, the Chinese ambition and the regional setting.

Non-alignment and Vietnam

Non-alignment, as a foreign policy option of newly emerged states from the clutches of colonial and imperialist forces, was based on twin objectives of independence and development. Vietnam shared these concerns more vehemently than any other.² While Hanoi passionately committed itself to diversify its relations in order to maximise its independence, it also emphasised the Bandung principles of "respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, no-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, mutual benefits and peaceful co-existence, as the basis of bilateral relations. Vietnam in this way endorsed the world view of Nehru, Nasser and Tito conceptualized concretely at the Bandung Conference of 1955. V. Suryanarayan aptly explains Vietnam's endeavour

2 Peter Calvert, The Foreign Policy of New States, Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex, 1986, pp. 3-4.

3 Joseph J. Zasloff and Mac Allister Brown, Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy: Postwar Realities, Westview Press/Boulder, Colorado, 1978, p. 74.

in this regard. "From the point of view of Vietnam, it must be pointed out that after 1975, Hanoi was keen to preserve and maintain its independence from both China and the Soviet Union and at the same time welcome aid from all quarters for the economic rehabilitation of the country ... political developments in Indochina, and the hostile policies adopted by the U.S., China and Japan pushed Hanoi closer to Moscow. The prolonged war in Cambodia and the requirement of the economic development made Hanoi rely more and more on the Soviet Union But this does not mean that Moscow has a decisive voice in Hanoi's decision-making. A country as intensely nationalist as Vietnam and a people as proud as the Vietnamese will never be subservient to any other country".⁴ Similarly, Ganganath Jha observes, "Vietnam under the leadership of Pham Van Dong is a supporter of the non-aligned movement. It has forged close links with other Indochinese states and pursued its policy for the achievement of the goals of the non-aligned movement. Though a victim of years of war against the U.S. it is not antagonistic to accepting the co-operation of the latter to accelerate developmental

4 V. Suryanarayan, "Developments in Cambodia, Evolving Relationships in Southeast Asia and India's Role in the Region", Strategic Analysis, New Delhi, vol. 12, no. 8, November 1989, pp. 856-57.

work".⁵ Thus, despite severe constraints - economic and strategic which threatened its very survival, Vietnam maintained a foreign policy aimed at multiple options in order to maximise its independence. And, despite its extraordinary dependence on the Soviet Union, it never allowed the latter to have a decisive say in the decision making.

The U.S. Factor

The U.S. debacle in Indochina brought a turn about in its attitude to the region. The U.S., Zasloff maintains, moved abruptly from obsession to amnesia with regard to this region.⁶ The U.S., which had so vigorously committed itself to the containment of communism in Indochina, showed clear signs of disinterest in the affairs of this region. Nevertheless, apprehensions of the communist expansion which implied an extension in the Soviet influence continued and so the concern for servicemen missing in action (MIA) in Indochina. The MIA issue, in fact, dominated the U.S. approach to Vietnam throughout the period. Soon after the war, when Vietnam sought to normalize relations with the U.S., on the basis of the Paris Peace Agreements

5 Ganganath Jha, South-East Asia and India: A Political Perspective, N.B.O., New Delhi, 1986, p. 109.

6 Zasloff and Mac Allister, op.cit., p. 1.

drawn up in 1973 which entailed for Vietnam the fulfilment of promises of aid worth \$ 3250 million for post war reconstruction without any political conditions, in addition to other forms of aid to be agreed on between the two parties. The U.S. did not comply to its promise and Kissinger put the U.S. terms as being - (i) accounting for servicemen missing in action (MIAs), (ii) the need for assurances of Hanoi's peaceful intentions towards neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia.⁷

The MIA issue was used by the U.S.A. to avert normalization with Vietnam despite Vietnam's assurances of full cooperation. The U.S.A. vetoed Vietnam's application in November 1976 for the United Nations' membership because of its allegedly brutal and inhumane attitude to the question of the missing men. Similarly in September, the U.S. had been the only member to vote against Vietnam's application to take over the seat of the old southern regime at the World Bank; here the U.S. had no power of veto, though it did have the power to obstruct loans. However in January 1977, when the Carter administration took over the White House, it seemed at first to be offering a more conciliatory line. Although he had no previous involvement in foreign policy, Jimmy Carter himself had

7 Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, Indochina Since the Fall of Saigon: Red Brotherhood at War, London, 1984, p. 41.

a reputation as a liberal. Accordingly the SRV was admitted to the U.N. on 20th September, 1977. On 24 March, 1978, Carter said that he would respond well to the suggestions of possible U.S. aid to Vietnam but that it would have to be viewed as normal assistance and not as reparations.⁸ Negotiations held in Paris for this purpose in December 1977 broke down because the U.S. refused to accept Vietnam's claim for reparations.⁹ But when the strained relationship with China reached a point of collision, it sought to normalize relations with the U.S. unconditionally. Mr. Phan Hien, the Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister said in Tokyo on July 10, 1978, during a visit to Japan that Vietnam was prepared to resume negotiations with the U.S. on the normalization of diplomatic relations between them without any condition attached.¹⁰ This statement was accompanied by a number of friendly gestures towards the U.S. in the summer of 1978. While visiting New York for the U.N. General Assembly session, Mr. Nguyen Co Thach had talks on September 22 and 27, 1978 with Richard Holbrooke, then the U.S. Secretary of States for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. After Nguyen Co Thach had made it clear that Vietnam had abandoned

8 Ibid., p. 42.

9 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1981, p. 30811.

10 Ibid., p. 30811.

its claim for reparations, full agreement was reached on the normalization of relations, only details remaining to be worked out. The State Department, however, made no proposals for a final meeting to conclude and sign the agreement and after waiting for sometimes Mr. Nguyen Co Thack left New York. Following the signing on November 3, 1978 of a treaty of friendship and cooperation between Vietnam and Soviet Union, the U.S. government informed Vietnam that three problems prevented the normalization of relations - the presence of Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea, the refugee question, the Vietnamese - Soviet Treaty. Nguyen Duy Trinh, the Foreign Minister commented on December 19 that although the U.S. had insisted in the past that there should be no preconditions to establishing diplomatic relations, "now they are using the refugee situation and our border problem with Kampuchea as excuses".¹¹

The real motive behind avoiding normalization of relations with Vietnam by the U.S.A. was to appease China. By the late 1970s American leadership was anxious to play the 'China card' against the Soviet Union.¹² For this purpose they extended their tacit support to the Chinese hegemonistic designs in Southeast

11 Ibid., p. 30811.

12 Evans and Rowley, op. cit., p. 290.

Asia and hence, ignored Vietnam's bid for normalization of relations. Further, ignoring the compulsions of Vietnam in taking action against the genocidal regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia and crackdown on hoas, it condemned Vietnam's action and announced an embargo on trade with the SRV.¹³

The overthrow of the Chinese client regime of Pol Pot and the establishment of the pro-Vietnamese Heng Samrin regime at Phnom Penh was another failure on the U.S. part to restrict the spread of Soviet influence.¹⁴ It fully endorsed the Chinese punitive campaign against Vietnam. In fact China launched the attack only after being assured by the U.S.A. Deng had paid a visit to the U.S.A. in 1979 before the invasion took place.¹⁵ Since then, it had been backing the anti-Vietnamese insurgents on the Thai-Cambodian border along with ASEAN States and China. On the diplomatic front also, it put maximum possible pressure on Vietnam. It prevailed upon the Western bloc not to aid or assist Vietnam with the exception of France. The American directors of the World Bank were under instruction

13 William J. Duiker, Vietnam: Nation in Revolution, Westview Press/Boulder, Colorado, 1983, p. 151.

14 Evans and Rowley, op. cit., p. 295.

15 Ibid., p. 291.

to actively oppose any loans to Vietnam until it has withdrawn its troops from Cambodia and Laos.¹⁶

The U.S. actions were, thus, guided by the cold war considerations which aimed at containing growing Soviet influence. For that purpose the U.S. played China against the Soviet Union taking the advantage of the Sino-Soviet rift. Under this strategy it backed the Chinese actions in Indo-China which, however, proved counter-productive. Devoid of all options, Vietnam moved closer and closer to the Soviet Union to counter the Chinese threat and save its deteriorating economy.

The Soviet Position

The fall of South Vietnamese and the U.S. disengagement from Southeast Asia created a new situation which provided the Soviet Union a strategic access in the region. While on the one hand, its main adversary left the region, on the other it found a reliable ally in Vietnam with whom it signed a treaty of friendship in 1978. While this was a major gain for it in its world wide competition with the U.S.A. for influence and power, this was also helpful in containing China militarily and psychologically diminishing its influence in the

16 Ibid., p. 166.

region by way of formal treaties.¹⁷ After the 1979 Chinese punitive campaign, the Soviet Union was allowed to use the port facilities and air-fields of Vietnam. This greatly advanced the Soviet Union's strategic position in the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the water of Pacific beyond, which provided it a claim of legitimacy for involvement in regional affairs and be consulted or have a voice in regional decision-making. Though, close ties with Hanoi caused problems for the USSR especially in dealing with the ASEAN countries, besides the Vietnamese dependence being a burden to the Soviet economy, Vietnam's friendship with its dominant position in Indochina provided the USSR greater leverage in the region. Vietnam, on its part, received a sense of security and economic assistance from the Soviet Union. But its close ties with Moscow was highly objectionable to China, the U.S.A. and the ASEAN, which resulted in its isolation in international arena and its increasing dependence on Soviet Union.

China's Ambition

Since the early 1960s China had been competing with the Soviet Union for the leadership of the communist

17 Douglas Pike, Vietnam and the Soviet Union, Anatomy of an Alliance, Westview Press, Boulder and London, 1987, pp. 180-81.

bloc. A second position in the hierarchy of the communist powers was not acceptable to it, which resulted in the shattering of their relationship. Each claimed the leadership of the revolutionary bloc, and in the wake of Vietnamese war of national liberation, neither wanted its competitor to be seen more devoted to the Vietnamese cause.¹⁸ Competing with the Soviet Union, China had long-term plans of dominating the Southeast Asian region. As the war was closing to its end, China started to deal with Vietnam with a new assertiveness. In 1974 it captured Spratlys Islands from the South Vietnamese possession and claimed another group of islands - Paracels.¹⁹ With the end of the war in 1975, border clashes along Vietnam's northern border clearly reflected China's assertiveness, which confirmed the long-harboured suspicion of the Vietnamese leadership of the hegemonistic designs of China in the region.

China's ambition was to establish itself as the dominant power in Southeast Asia as the American influence waned, and saw the U.S.S.R. as its main rival. China's drive to open diplomatic and trade relations with Southeast Asian nations met with considerable success, more so than the parallel efforts by the Soviet Union.

18 Zasloff and Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

19 Evans and Rowley, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

But it was communist Vietnam, to which as an ally Peking had given substantial support and which was naturally expected to submit to Chinese hegemony, put maximum resistance to Chinese ambitions.²⁰ In order to counter Chinese domination, Hanoi moved in favour of the Soviet Union, which could provide it better technology and resources for development and being a distant power, did not inspire the same anxieties. Peking unable to compete with Moscow's blandishment resorted to crudely coercive measures - threatening Hanoi, cutting off aid, and stepping up the military pressure on the Sino-Vietnamese border. At each step, Peking's influence in Hanoi shrank and by 1978, the VCP leadership declared China to be the main enemy of the Vietnamese revolution. Vietnam reacted by joining the Soviet dominated council of Mutual Economic Assistance in June 1978, the offer of joining which it had turned down earlier,²¹ and in November following the increased Chinese threat Hanoi signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Moscow. For Chinese leaders, the Soviet-Vietnamese agreement was a final confirmation that Hanoi had become Moscow's puppet, 'a small hegemonist' or an Asian Cuba that would serve

20 Ibid., p. 290.

21 V. Suryanarayan, op. cit., p. 856.

the objectives of the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia.²²

Hanoi's preference to Moscow, its territorial claims against China, and its crackdown on the ethnic Chinese who dominated the Vietnamese economy and feared to be utilized by Peking to its foreign policy objectives, while led to the fast deterioration of relations between Hanoi and Peking, the Cambodian issue led them to the disaster point.²³

The deteriorating Hanoi-Peking relations and closer Soviet-Hanoi relationships unleashed a bitter rivalry between Hanoi and Peking for influence in Indochina. Vietnam began pressing Laos and Cambodia for a special relationship that would in effect, exclude Chinese influence from the region. Laos went along with this, but in Cambodia it only inflamed the antagonism of Pol Pot's regime towards Vietnam. In non-communist Southeast Asia ties with China had already become considerable and no one wished to jeopardise them by siding with Vietnam. And Hanoi's sudden enthusiasm for excluding the influence of the great

22 Duiker, op. cit., p. 149.

23 Joseph J. Zasloff (ed.), Post War Indochina: Old Enemies and New Allies, Foreign Services Institute, U.S. Department of State, Washington, 1988, p. XVI.

power from the region was inevitably viewed with scepticism, given its growing relationship with Moscow. But in Indochina, Pol Pot's group provided China with its only diplomatic triumph. From 1975 Peking became the main foreign patron of the Pol Pot regime and used it to step up pressure on Hanoi. As the Vietnam-Cambodia war unfolded, Peking openly threw its weight behind Phnom Penh and after the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime, it invaded "Vietnam to teach it a lesson". But the invasion proved unsuccessful as Vietnam not only rebuffed the invasion but also refused to withdraw from Cambodia. However China continued to exert pressure on Vietnam by keeping the situation tense on the Sino-Vietnamese border and by backing anti-Vietnamese guerrillas operating in Cambodia. Diplomatically too, China concentrated on maximum pressure to bear on Vietnam. In this it had the backing of the USA and achieved considerable success. The Vietnamese intervention was almost universally condemned by countries outside the Soviet bloc. What western aid had been flowing into Vietnam was cut off adding to the economic disruption and the demoralization within the country.²⁴ Vietnam however did not submit to their pressure and further consolidated its position

24 Evans and Rowley, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-92.

in Indochina, developed its ties with the Soviet Union in an all-round relationship and by its internal sources and Soviet assistance it rebuffed the economic pressure to which China and the U.S. expected it to capitulate.

The Regional Setting

Although communist victory in Indochina was ultimately expected, the rapid collapse of the Saigon government in the Spring of 1975 came as a shock to the ASEAN states (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, composed of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines). Furthermore, the final victory crystallized anxieties among the Southeast Asian leaders about what posture the new Indochinese communist regimes, especially the Vietnamese, would take towards them. They saw communist Vietnam as the foremost military power on the Southeast Asian mainland, made even more powerful by the possession of weapons, vehicles and supplies provided by the U.S. to former South Vietnamese regime. Even more serious concern of the ASEAN leaders was the impact of the communist victory in Indochina upon insurgencies in Southeast Asia. Many feared that communist Vietnam flushed with victory and a self proclaimed leader of national liberation movements could not ignore calls for assistance from local communist groups which were quite active in Thailand,

Malaysia, the Philippines. Besides, Indonesia and Singapore also feared communist insurgencies.²⁵

However, these fears of the ASEAN leaders were belied by the moderate SRV postures. Propelled by their pragmatic interest in increasing trade, attracting foreign capital and importing technology, the Vietnamese concluded that normalized relations with their Southeast Asian neighbours as well as with the industrialized West serve their interest in rapid modernization and would reduce their heavy reliance upon their socialist allies.

One early signal of the Vietnamese interest accommodation came in the spring of 1976, when the new communist Governor of the National Bank of Vietnam attended a meeting of the Asian Development Bank, called for cooperation in the region and invited foreign assistance to Vietnam. Even more encouraging was the new friendly tone towards relations with Southeast Asian nations enunciated by SRV Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh after the official reunification of Vietnam in July 1976. He called for the establishment of relations of friendship and cooperation with the countries of the region and a lasting peace. Then

25 Zasloff and Brown, op. cit., pp. 72-74.

followed a goodwill tour of Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Burma by Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien during which Vietnamese friendly intensions were expressed. The ASEAN leaders responded favourably and almost all Southeast Asian states began negotiations for establishing or improving relations with Hanoi.²⁶ Since then the SRV's bilateral relations with its Southeast Asian neighbours developing positively until they were torpedoed by the twin crises over Cambodia and the boat people in 1978-79.²⁷

The Vietnamese action in Cambodia was frightening to the ASEAN states. It revived their latent suspicions concerning Vietnamese imperialistic expansionism. Despite their common distaste for the then deposed Pol Pot regime, the ASEAN states continued to recognise it as the legitimate government of Cambodia and pushed resolutions condemning Hanoi's behaviour in the United Nations. Most hostile in its response was Thailand. The military government in Bangkok viewed the Vietnamese action as confirmation that Hanoi was determined to dominate both Cambodia and Laos, thus destroying the historic buffer between Thailand and Vietnam. In response Bangkok led the ASEAN chorus

26 Ibid., pp. 74-76.

27 Evans and Rowley, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

of condemnation and provided fairly overt support for the anti-Phnom Penh activities of rebel groups along the frontier. Besides, periodic meetings of the ASEAN foreign ministers resulted in joint calls for the withdrawal of Vietnamese occupation forces from Cambodia and the holding of national elections under international supervision.

Hanoi reacted to ASEAN behaviour with a combination of belligerence and conciliation. It offered to withdraw its forces from Cambodia, but only on the condition that hostile forces supported by world imperialism stop supporting rebel activities led by Pol Pot regime and that the ASEAN states recognize the legitimacy of the Hanoi supported regime in Phnom Penh. It offered to withdraw its forces from the border and to sign a mutual non-aggression pact with Thailand on condition that the latter refrain from assisting the guerrilla units in Cambodia. Bangkok, however, would not budge from its demands for complete Vietnamese withdrawal and supervised elections in Cambodia. Hanoi asserted that the survival of the current government was non-negotiable, claiming that national elections were the affair of Phnom Penh regime. To emphasize its demands, Hanoi launched punitive raids into Thai territory to clean out the Pol Pot guerrilla sanctuaries and threatened by implication

to support insurgency activities in Thailand. It attempted to isolate Bangkok by taking a relatively conciliatory position in discussion with Thailand's more reluctant allies, Malaysia and Indonesia.

As the 1980s began, the situation had temporarily reached a stalemate. The ASEAN states, led by Thailand and supported to varying degrees by China, the United States and other foreign powers, continued to refuse to recognize the fait accompli in Cambodia and reiterated their demand for Vietnamese withdrawal and national elections. To maintain pressure on Hanoi, they provided low level assistance to rebel activities in Cambodia while they attempted to promote the formation of a united front of various political groups opposed to Vietnamese domination of the country.²⁸ Hanoi, on its part consolidated its position in Indochina through treaties of friendship and mutual cooperation and maintained troops in large scale both in Laos and Cambodia. Vietnamese troops maintained order and launched operations against rebel groups operating along the Western border, while the regime of President Heng Samrin successfully attempted to legitimize his rule and win popular support from the local population and by 1983 the regime had built up a

28 Duiker, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-45.

stable administrative structure with effective control of most of the territory and population of Cambodia.²⁹ Vietnam at this stage, now and then, partially withdrew its focus from Cambodia in order to further win international support for its position. But for the final withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia, it demanded the end of the Chinese threat and stopping the use of Thai territory against the Cambodian regime. However, these conditions remained unaccepted and the stalemate continued.

It was not only the Cambodian question which wrecked Vietnam's developing relations with the ASEAN, but even more disastrous was the boat people crisis. Following the crackdown on the southern Chinese ethnic groups, started a large scale flight of people from Vietnam often using boats through the sea. Evans and Rowley explained its implications very aptly. "The exodus of boat people probably damaged Vietnam's international image more than its invasion of Cambodia. Even in 1978 the outflow had already seriously jeopardised Vietnam's developing relations with the ASEAN states who had to bear the main burden. All of these countries had their own overseas Chinese problem and by 1979 many people in ASEAN saw Vietnam's actions as an

29 Ibid., p. 146.

attempt to de-stabilize the rest of Southeast Asia. Characteristically, this sentiment was given its most forceful exposition by Singapore's foreign minister, Rajaratnam, in July 1979 ... once you go to the causes of (the exodus) you enter the secret world of wild Vietnamese ambitions and their even wilder dreams It is a military exercise to further the ambitions which the Vietnamese have concealed from us but not from their own people or their allies Their ambitions are hegemony in Southeast Asia. In other words, each junk load of men, women and citizen sent to our shores is a bomb to destabilize, disrupt, and cause turmoil and dissension in ASEAN states. This is a preliminary invasion to pave the final invasion"

One of the most important effects of the refugee crisis was that it drove the ASEAN states to coordinate their policies towards Vietnam and Indochina and thus undermined Vietnamese diplomacy in the region which had taken full advantage of differences between the ASEAN countries. However in 1979 Vietnam restrained the exodus.³⁰

The ASEAN remained united and steadfast in their policy even after the refugee problem considerably

30 Evans and Rowley, op. cit., pp. 54-57.

mitigated, though Indonesia and Malaysia showed limited enthusiasm for this posture which expanded Chinese influence in the region. However, differences existed only in perception and not in action.

Overall the tragic irony of the situation was that by adopting a stance of unremitting hostility to Hanoi and by attempting to compel it to withdraw from Cambodia, Washington, Peking and the ASEAN states were in effect driving Hanoi further into the arms of Soviet Union, a condition that all parties fervently wished to avoid. In adopting a hardline policy towards the SRV, the Reagan administration appeared to believe that only constant pressure would compel Hanoi to withdraw from Cambodia and abandon its aggressive behaviour in the region. For its part, Peking had evidently concluded that Hanoi could not be brought to reason until the current leadership under Le Duan had been replaced by a new faction more amenable to rapproachment with China.³¹ However, such policies only proved counterproductive. Thus, threatened by China, abandoned by the USA, and suspected by ASEAN it chose to strengthen its ties with the Soviet Union and the communist bloc without abandoning its non-aligned stance.³²

31 Duiker, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

32 Roeslan Andulgani, Nationalism and Security Problems in South-East Asia, New Delhi, 1984, p. 85.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters various factors having dominant influence on Vietnam's foreign policy have been discussed. The effort has been made to discern the specific effects of a particular factor. But as the foreign policy is the outcome of these factors, therefore, they must be viewed together. In other words, for a proper understanding of the ideals and the actual course of foreign policy, it is necessary to view the interaction of various factors, i.e., domestic as well as foreign.

As a communist country in the region of Southeast Asia, Vietnam desired to prove itself a model. Therefore, it gave importance to ideological factors more than geo-political factors. It attached more importance to the Soviet Union and emulated it. On the other hand, it ignored the apprehensions and perceptions of the Chinese and the ASEAN countries. Geopolitically Vietnam is nearer to China and the ASEAN countries and ignoring their apprehensions proved costly during 1976-1986.

In addition to the ideological factor, Vietnam's economic and security requirements contributed in its close alliance with the Soviet Union. Diplomatically

isolated by China, the ASEAN, the USA, the Western countries and Japan, it critically depended on the Soviet Union for various economic needs which included even large scale supply of staple food. It also required the guarantees for its security against China and the Soviet military supplies and transportation facilities for its ongoing conflicts in Cambodia and on the northern front. Thus, historical, ideological, economic, security and international factors underlined the all round relationship with the Soviet Union.

Though China was also a communist country, but the Soviet factor proved a deterrent in developing relations. The Vietnamese had been receiving valuable aid, assistance and shelter from China since the very beginning of their struggle against colonialism and imperialism. In both the countries Marxism-Leninism emerged victorious. Nevertheless, Vietnam's relations with China took a hostile turn. The growing Sino-Soviet rift and Vietnam's preference for the latter, dispute over the South China Sea islands, the territorial dispute and Vietnam's treatment of its ethnic Chinese were factors for this. And as the last straw, Vietnam led overthrow of the Pol Pot regime, a China favourite, became unbearable to China and it launched a punitive campaign against Vietnam in 1979. Henceforth, China persisted in its hostility to Vietnam

by arming the Khmer Rouge resistance in Cambodia, confrontations at border and through diplomatic offences. Thus, Vietnam's goal of militant solidarity with fraternal socialist countries got wrecked.

The problems resulting in hostile relations between these two countries were symptoms of a much deep-rooted problem, i.e., historical mistrust. Having been subjected to direct colonial rule for one millenium and repeatedly invaded by China, the Vietnamese could hardly trust the Chinese, who continued to regard Indochina as its exclusive sphere of influence and kept on pressurising the Indochinese states for that purpose by taking the advantages of favourable geopolitical conditions. But the Vietnamese being devout nationalists carried on the history of persistent resistance to Chinese domination and aggressions. This unwillingness of Vietnam to submit to the Chinese domination and their mistrust for Chinese aggressors were the causes of continued hostilities between them despite similarities of culture and ideology. Thus in relation to China, historical and international factors (mainly the Sino-Soviet rift) prevailed over other factors such as culture, ideology and economic etc. Basically it was the question of national independence which prevailed over the concerns for economic hardships and military threats.

Vietnam ignored past experiences of war and its declared foreign policy goal of forming a united front against the chieftain of imperialist forces, namely, the United States of America while seeking for the normalization of relations with it. Reasons were economic compulsions and Chinese hostilities. It wanted American aid and technology for its economic reconstruction and its guarantees against the Chinese threat. Thus, the question of development and security were given primacy over the history and the ideology. However, Vietnam's endeavour failed. The U.S.A. towed to the Chinese and ASEAN line on Indochina which suited its policies of playing 'China card' against the USSR and supporting the ASEAN in Southeast Asia.

The foreign policy goal of Vietnam to establish special relationship among Indochinese states was temporarily realised through treaties of friendship and cooperation with Laos in 1977 and with Cambodia in 1978 respectively. The special relationship was reflected in the routine meetings of their leaders for consultation and exchange of views and in coordinating of their foreign and defence policies. Though the special relationship was theoretically based on equality, but in reality, Vietnam with its bigger size and population with its better organised armed forces, state and social structure could exercise dominant influence among Indochinese states. Such a

relationship was reminiscent of Vietnam's paramount position in the region before the arrival of the French. Even during the French rule the Vietnamese had superior position in the colonial administration and they also dominated the Indochinese communist party. The special relationship was, thus, continuation of the tradition of Vietnam's dominant position in the region. However, in the contemporary context, the special relationships had been necessitated by security concern and legitimised by the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. As its security was under severe threat from China, it was left with no option but to do away with the Khmer Rouge which playing in the hands of Chinese threatened Vietnam's security through open hostilities on borders. After overthrowing the Khmer Rouge, Vietnamese troops remained there for the continuance of the pro-Vietnamese regime at Phnom Penh. Henceforth, the special relationship acted as a counterbalance to the Chinese threat. Faced with economic isolation and military pressures, Vietnam further consolidated its hold over Indochinese states. Thus, the special relationships among Indochinese states was somewhat the continuation of the tradition of Vietnam's dominant position in the region, which was legitimized by the ideology of Marxism and Leninism. The relationship was further necessitated by strategic factors. Thus in Indochina tradition, ideology

and strategy coincided in Vietnam's foreign policy which was pursued even at the cost of heavy expenses and hostilities with China, Thailand, other ASEAN countries and diplomatic pressures from the U.S. led western bloc.

The ASEAN states remained unhappy with Vietnam during 1976-1986. The obvious point of wedge was the Cambodian issue. But the main fears of the ASEAN countries were the prevalence of the communist ideology in Indochina. In fact, the crystallisation of the ASEAN occurred in reaction to the emergence of the victorious revolutionary Vietnam. The fear was reinforced by Vietnam's traditional image of an intimidating power. Thailand had reasons to be scared of finding its traditional rival on its frontiers equipped with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. Besides, the ASEAN countries would not like the emergence of a rival economic power in the form of Vietnam, which has great potential for development due to its vast natural resources. However, Indonesia and Malaysia considered Vietnamese power as a bulwark against China. Thus, Vietnam's relations with Thailand and its ASEAN partners had largely been shaped by ideological commitments which combined with Vietnam's traditional image of an intimidating power and its great potential for development made the ASEAN states apprehensive to Vietnam.

To sum up, it can be stated that Vietnam was unable to achieve its foreign policy goals during 1976-86. Its relations with the neighbouring ASEAN countries, China and Japan deteriorated. It failed to enlist the support of the United States and other Western countries. It had to withdraw lock, stock and barrel from Cambodia with great damage to its economy and international prestige. It was because of these failures that Vietnam evolved a new course of foreign policies at the end of 1986, which was liberal, accommodative and democratic.

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