

Chapter - IV

THE METAMORPHOSED FOREIGN RELATIONS

That Vietnam emerged from the first and second Indochina wars which had lasted for thirty years (1945-1975), is historically evident, but its emergence in flying colours in so far as the realization of its two chief objectives viz., achievement of independence and reunification of Vietnam as a Marxist-Leninist state were concerned, was handicapped, as its luck would have it, by its international isolation and a deplorable state of economy, marred as it was, by grinding poverty, depressing growth rates and a lack of adequate capital and infrastructural facilities. The appallingly impoverished state of economy impelled Vietnam's leaders into a new struggle which to their knowledge, was "as difficult as the last." The Vietnamese leadership also took cognizance of the fact that in an interdependent world, the national economic emancipation demanded "widespread diplomatic recognition" and diversified associations with various other countries which would serve as sources of economic aid. Besides the economic factor, the unified Vietnam's newly acquired stature in Asia and in the third world as a whole, demanded Vietnam to get its foreign policy reoriented enough to accommodate the required diversification of its relations with all other countries befitting its independence and sovereignty. Vietnam bestowed its focused attention especially on the United States whose economic embargo had cost Vietnam dearly, China, the largest neighbour and a long time adversary, and the countries of the Southeast Asian grouping, namely, the Association of

Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which have been geographically proximate. However, the implementation of Vietnam's well-judged foreign policy was impeded by the Cambodian crisis in which Hanoi was deeply embroiled, following its military intervention in December 1978. Nonetheless, Vietnam began to pursue its renovated foreign policy following the 6th Congress of the Vietnam Community Party held in 1986 and in particular after the implosion of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Therefore, in this chapter, an attempt is made to trace the circumstances compelling Vietnam to seek 'renovation' of its foreign policy and the impediments to the implementation of its redesigned foreign policy with particular focus on its relationships with the US, China and the ASEAN nations.

Before exploring Vietnam's foreign policy as such it is imperative to gain an insight into the Vietnamese Communist Party's (VCP) pursuit of Marxist-Leninist ideology which provided "a clear framework" for the foreign policy pursuit of Vietnam. For five and a half decades since its inception in 1930, until mid-1980s when Vietnam's foreign policy was subjected to a major reappraisal, the VCP's view of the world was shaped by the assumption that the world was divided into two distinct blocs - Capitalist and Socialist - following the emergence of the Soviet Union. In the struggle between the capitalist system and socialist system, while "the deep contradictions of imperialism are growing more and more acute," the balance of forces is tipping more and more in favour of socialism" and so, "the complete triumph of socialism is certain."¹ The Vietnamese, therefore, hailed the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 as "the historic victory of the 600 million people in China" as a result of which "another important portion (besides the Soviet Union) of the world

capitalist system" was taken over and "the socialist system has been extended and consolidated" while "the capitalist system has shrunk and weakened" proportionately. ² The Vietnamese communists expressed their solidarity with China, a major socialist state which, according to them, was targeted by "the US interventionists." To quote Truong Chinh, the long-time General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, : "The war-seeking imperialists are trying to stick to Vietnam in order to prepare bases for attacking China. The war of aggression against Vietnam is part of their scheme to prepare for a third World War." ³

After the Second World War and following the birth of the DRVN in September 1945, Vietnamese leadership perceived four major contradictions by which "the world is being violently shaken", namely, "the contradictions between the working people and monopoly capitalism, between the colonial and semi-colonial peoples and oppressive imperialism, between the socialist and people's democratic countries on the one side and imperialist countries on the other side and also among rival imperialists themselves." While the VCP viewed that with the August Revolution (which resulted in the establishment of the DRVN) "the colonial system of imperialism was breached at its weakest link in Southeast Asia," the Vietnamese claimed that following the victory of resistance against the French colonialists, "North Vietnam advanced to the stage of socialist revolution, and the DRVN became the firm outpost of the socialist camp in Southeast Asia." ⁴ The Vietnamese described the policy of US imperialism as "the policy of world hegemony" which was "very brutal and also very

² Truong Chinh, *Selected Writings*, (Hanoi, 1994), p.283.

³ *Ibid.*, p.354.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.553-54.

cunning."⁵ They pointed out that though the British imperialists and capitalist firms in the "Marshallized" countries "are in conflict with the US imperialism, they temporarily accepted the authority of the US, not without resentment" because of the "ever-growing democratic and socialist movement".⁶ In order to "ward off another crisis" because of "the uneven development of capitalism," Vietnamese believed that "the imperialists are actively preparing for a new world war, either by attacking the Soviet Union, China and other People's democracies, or by waging war among themselves to re-divide the world market."⁷

Besides the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the other prime mover of the Vietnamese foreign policy has been nationalism which was reflected in the Vietnamese heroic struggle against France and the US for independence and reunification. No wonder in the euphoria of their victory in the South in 1975, the Vietnamese leaders viewed their victory not only as the culmination of a century-old struggle for national reunification, but also as a crucial stage in the evolving struggle between the capitalist and socialist camps in the global arena.⁸ A section of the government-controlled press even went to the extent of claiming that the Vietnamese Revolution heralded the collapse of the forces of global imperialism throughout the world. A discerning observer of Vietnam would notice that following the reunification and establishment of the SRV in 1976, the Vietnamese leadership saw to it that the national interest took precedence of ideology.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.285.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.285.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ William J. Duiker, *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition*, (Colorado, 1995), p.197.

Goaded by the pressing need to put on rails, the economy ravaged by 30 years of war, Vietnam sought to reach out to the third world countries including ASEAN countries with which it had hostile relations earlier. Significantly, Vietnam also called for economic relations with developed capitalist countries⁹ without giving up Marxist-Leninist ideology and without sacrificing dictatorship of the party. Yet, Vietnam displayed its proclivity to rely on "loans and grant aid (from the Soviet Union and the PRC) rather than increasing foreign investment and exports to the world market as the motor of growth."¹⁰ However, factors like the growing foreign debt largely to the Soviet Union and mounting trade deficits, forced Vietnam to realize the need for the enhancement of the export of its products not only to the countries of the communist bloc but also to the capitalist bloc nations. In other words, Hanoi "accepted the need for Vietnam to participate actively in the global capitalist-dominated division of labour as well as the division of labour within COMECON."¹¹ The Vietnamese new thinking of world economy was articulated by the General Secretary Le Duan in his address to the Sixth Central Committee Plenum on July 3, 1984. He highlighted the fact that Vietnam was building socialism in a "new world situation" whose three major characteristics were: a division of labour that was being achieved within the 'socialist world system' on an "ever growing scale"; a single world market, in which socialist and capitalist economies were becoming increasingly "interdependent" to "have an increasingly direct effect on one another"; and the global scientific and technological revolution which was

⁹ *Asia 1977 Yearbook*, p.329.

¹⁰ Gareth Porter, "The Transformation of Vietnam World View," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, June 1990, p.4.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.4-5.

making it possible for the developing countries to take relatively short paths to economic modernization.¹² Reflecting the new thinking about Vietnam's external economic relations, the Sixth Central Committee Plenum of July 1984 adopted a resolution proclaiming that the task of "expansion of exports" was of "paramount importance" to the nation.¹³ Vietnam's changing perception of World economy led to the diversification of its external political relations and also its sources of economic aid.

Vietnam's Policy towards Cambodia

In February 1930, when the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) was founded by the merging of various communist groups in Vietnam, the Vietnamese nationalists were least concerned about Cambodia to their west, for two reasons: there was no communist movement in Cambodia worth the name; Ho Chi Minh chose the name, the CPV, believing that, by carrying nationalist sentiment, it would attract into its fold, people of different lines. In October 1930, the CPV was rechristened as Indochina Communist Party (ICP) at the instance of the Soviet Union because, Comintern strategists believed that revolutions embracing an area larger in terms of extent and population had better prospects of success against powerful European colonial regimes.¹⁴ This strategy of uniting Indochinese people to fight French colonialism was in sharp contrast to the French strategy of keeping the peoples of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam "divided" and exacerbating the hatred among them so as to get the French

¹² *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ William J. Duiker, *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition*, p.20; also see *An Outline History of the Vietnam Workers' Party (1930-1975)*, (Hanoi, 1976), p.15.

Colonialism perpetuated.¹⁵ The change of nomenclature did not help the Indochina Communist Party to take deep roots in Cambodia. Nayan Chanda, a Southeast Asia specialist par excellence, noted:

*Apart from the fact that the Vietnamese did not see much revolutionary potential in the Lao and Cambodian backwaters, they had a low opinion of these peoples' abilities. The ICP was a Vietnamese Party in all but name, and even in Laos and Cambodia migrant Vietnamese formed the bulk of the ICP cells.*¹⁶

With the passage of time and progress of the anti-colonial movement against the French, the ICP gradually started taking deep roots in Cambodia and Laos as well, thus making it a movement embracing the entire Indochina region. Bringing out the strategic significance of Laos and Cambodia to Vietnam and vice-versa, General Vo Nguyen Giap observed:

*Indochina is a single strategic unit, a single battlefield. For this reason and especially because of the strategic terrain, we cannot consider Vietnam to be independent as long as Cambodia and Laos are under imperialist domination, just as we cannot consider Cambodia and Laos to be independent as long as Vietnam is under imperialist rule.*¹⁷

The subsequent events culminating in the victory of Vietnam in the Second Indochina War in 1975, vindicated the significance of Indochina unity. Even though ICP was supplanted by the parties founded in each of the Indochinese states in 1950, respecting the national sentiment, Indochinese unity remained in tact. After the 1975 victory, the Communist leadership of Vietnam wished to nurture the Indochinese unity which in

¹⁵ Nguyen Khac Vien, *Vietnam'80*, (Vietnam Courier, Hanoi, 1980), p.46.

¹⁶ Nayan Chanda, *Bother Enemy: The War After the War*, (New York, 1986), p.119.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.120.

their view was essential for their peace and prosperity. In his Political Report to the Fourth National Congress in December 1976, the Secretary General of the CPV, Le Duan, stated that one of the cardinal principles of Vietnam's foreign policy was,

*To endeavour to preserve and develop the special relationship between the Vietnamese people and the peoples of Laos and Kampuchea, strengthen the militant solidarity, mutual trust, long-term cooperation and mutual assistance in all fields between our country and the two fraternal countries ... so that the three countries which have been associated with one another in the struggle for national liberation will be associated with one another for ever in the building and defence of their respective countries, in the interests of each country's independence and prosperity.*¹⁸

Pursuing this policy Vietnam went ahead with the process of cementing relations with Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic (LPDR). In 1977, Vietnam and LPDR signed a 25 year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation designed "to strengthen the privileged links between the two countries - which provided for cooperation in all fields" including defence cooperation which apparently legalized Hanoi's military presence in Laos.¹⁹ The number of Vietnamese forces stationed in Laos which stood at 30,000 in 1977, rose to 50,000 in 1979. Besides, there were 6000 civilian Vietnamese officials including 1000 directly attached to the ministries in Vientiane.²⁰ A similar agreement was concluded between Vietnam and Cambodia two years later, i.e. in 1979.

¹⁸ *Communist Party of Viet Nam: 4th National Congress, Documents*, (Hanoi, 1977), p.15.

¹⁹ *Asia 1978 Yearbook*, pp.232 and 332.

²⁰ John McBeth, "Laos: The government under guard," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (hereafter *FEER*), August 24, 1979, p.10.

Ever since its inception in April 1975, the DK government distanced itself from Vietnam and pursued a hostile policy towards Hanoi because of "longstanding suspicion and hostility" which "triggered intense conflict, a major series of clashes". Citing Vietnam's annexation of Cochinchina (from the Angkor Empire) which now forms the southern part of Vietnam, the DK charged that Hanoi was bent upon integrating Kampuchea with Vietnam-dominated Indochina federation as was done in the case of Laos. A Cambodian diplomat in Hanoi said in 1978: "You know Vietnamese policy. They want to force us into an Indochina federation dominated by them". Pointing to the Vietnamese military presence in Laos and that country's "political domination", the diplomat noted: "We don't want to become another Laos." He further said, that while Vietnam kept insisting on "a special relationship with Laos and Cambodia, Phnom Penh wanted only a "normal relationship" between the two equal countries. But Vietnam did not see anything strange about "special relationship". A Vietnamese official said in April 1978: "We insist on a special relationship because there is not another example in history of such a relationship where the two people shared each grain of rice, every bullet, suffering and victory."²¹ Kampuchea for its part, also went on to say emphatically that it would "resolutely preclude any foreign country from stationing its forces on its soil or using its territory as a base."²²

The Khmer Rouge suspicions of Vietnam were fuelled by the raw deal meted out to Cambodia at the 1954 Geneva Conference and at the 1973 Paris Peace Conference. At the 1954 Geneva Conference, the Soviet Union and China pressed the Cambodian communists to dissolve their

²¹ Nayan Chanda, "The Bhooley Border", *FEER*, 21 April 1978, p.17.

²² Nayan Chanda, "Anatomy of the Conflict," *FEER*, 13 January 1978, p.12.

movement and accept the rule of the then King Norodom Sihanouk. In a speech in September 1977, Pol Pot revealed as to how even that still rankled in the Cambodian mind: "This revolutionary struggle of our people and the war booty that was subsequently captured, dissolved into thin air through the 1954 Geneva Agreements."²³

The net result of the subsequent public dissolution of the Cambodian resistance movement was that the leadership of the Cambodian communist movement passed into the hands of the Paris-trained ultra-nationalists whom Sihanouk called Red Khmers (Khmer Rouges). It was these people who accused the Vietnamese of sacrificing the interests of Cambodia in 1954. Hanoi refuted this charge, citing instances of expression of solidarity. Hoang Tung, a CPV stalwart, said that in the post-Geneva Conference period when several hundred members of Cambodian Communist People's Revolutionary Party came to Hanoi "to avoid repression at home", several Cambodian comrades lived in North Vietnam between 1954-1965. Pol Pot himself spent a few months in Hanoi in 1965 en route to Peking.²⁴ In the wake of the signing of Paris Peace Agreement in January 1973, the Vietnamese advised the Khmer Rouge to negotiate with Lon Nol so as to establish peace in the entire Indochina. Failure to do so provoked the Americans to use B-52s "to pulverize Cambodia for 5½ months."²⁵ Pointing out the impact of the development, Nayan Chanda wrote: "Whatever the truth, 1973 marked the virtual end of the three-year old alliance between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese

²³ For Geneva 1954 Documents see John Norton Moore, *Law and the Indo-China War*, (New Jersey, 1972), pp.657-710.

²⁴ Nayan Chanda, "Insight on Hanoi's War Aims," *FEER*, 21 April 1978, p.19.

²⁵ See Nayan Chanda, "The Bloody Border," *FEER*, 21 April 1978, p.17; Nayan Chanda, "Anatomy of the Conflict," p.14.

Communists."²⁶ The clashes that started between the Cambodian and the Vietnamese forces in 1974, flared into major battles following the fall of Saigon in April 1975 when they fought over islands in the Gulf of Thailand.²⁷

The Cambodian forces indulged in rape and massacre of women and children. As Hoang Tung, told Nayan Chanda in April 1978, Vietnamese forces were "strong enough" so that "it takes only a few hours to go to Phnom Penh from Saigon"; yet "we restrained ourselves" and remained "patient to find a means to negotiate."²⁸ **Nhan Dan** claimed that "people of conscience abroad are also of the opinion that we have been unduly patient."²⁹ Vietnam's patience ran out following the Khmer attacks near Chau Doc in April and on the Xa Mat area in September 1977 which caused heavy civilian casualties. From the perspective of Vietnam – which was fretting and fuming about Cambodia's refusal to accept "special relationship" and its pursuit of what Hanoi considered "a brutal and infantile egalitarianism," – the intensified Khmer Rouge attacks across the Vietnamese border,³⁰ the persecution of the long-time Vietnamese settlers in Cambodia and the consequent refugee influx into Vietnam formed the last straw.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Nayan Chanda, "Insight on Hanoi's War Aims," *FEER*, 21 April 1978, p.18.

²⁹ David Bonavia, "The Climax of a bad dream," *FEER*, 13 January 1978, p.15.

³⁰ See Marian Kirsch Leighton, "Perspectives on the Vietnam-Cambodia Border Conflict," *Asian Survey*, May 1978, pp.448-449.

In the developing situation, Vietnam was left with three options to choose from: (1) to wait for the change of policy in Cambodia, (2) to develop a resistance group within Cambodia to remove Pol Pot from power; and (3) to invade Kampuchea and install a pro-Vietnamese government.³¹ Vietnam finally decided to take military action and accordingly launched the invasion of Kampuchea on December 25, 1978. Following the capture of Phnom Penh from the Khmer Rouge in January 1979, Vietnam concluded in February a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the newly created pro-Vietnam government, namely, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) headed by Heng Samrin,³² which marked the completion of the process of establishment of a "special relationship" among the Indochinese countries. Thus, Vietnam not only assumed the role of "protector" of LPDR and the PRK, but also served as a link between its Indochina allies and Moscow by virtue of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that Vietnam concluded with the USSR, a month before its invasion of Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge, though defeated and pushed into the jungles on the Thai-Cambodian border, set up an exile government with the moral and material support of China and the political backing of ASEAN and the western world.

Vietnam's disengagement from Cambodia

Vietnam realized its objective of getting rid of the Khmer Rouge threat with ease so that the non-communist Southeast Asian countries were thoroughly alarmed at the dreadful prospect of Vietnam's aggrandizement spilling over into their countries. But, as it turned out,

³¹ Nayan Chanda, "The timetable for a takeover," *FEER*, 23 February 1979, pp.33- 34.

³² For text of "Vietnam-Kampuchea Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation" see *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, May 1979, pp.106-108.

the cost of the war was not so much as the consequences which were disastrous. To overcome its adversity, Vietnam was left with a last resort, namely, to extricate itself from the Cambodian quagmire.

Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia was dictated by the need to ensure national security which was perceived as a prerequisite of reconstruction and economic development. The threat from the western neighbour receded beyond doubt, but far from creating the supportive environment, Hanoi's military action landed Vietnam in a serious economic crisis.³³ In April 1977, during his official visit to Paris, the then Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, had asserted in the euphoria of victory, that Vietnam would set an example to the Third World not only in the military field but also in the economic field.³⁴ After ten years, the moribund economic landscape of Socialist Vietnam began starting the Vietnamese leaders in the face. A western journalist aptly pointed out: "The Vietnamese Communists are by now widely recognized in Asia as the region's premier example of how not to run a country."³⁵ The inflation soared up to 700 per cent.³⁶ The people were subjected to trying economic hardships. Admitting candidly the "serious shortcomings and errors" in the economic management, Truong Chinh, the Secretary-General of the CPV,

³³ Paul M. Evans, "Vietnam in the Changing System of Economic and Security Relations in East Asia," in Richard Stubbs, (comp.) *Vietnam: Facing the 1990s*, (University of Toronto-York University, Toronto, 1989, pp.43-60.

³⁴ Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, (Singapore, 1992), p.229.

³⁵ *Asian Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 1988, cited in *Ibid*, p.229.

³⁶ *Asiaweek*, 13 January 1989, p.6; Also see, Nayan Chanda, "Back to Basics Vietnam's leaders admit their policies have failed," *FEER*, 13 November 1986, pp.108; 110.

observed in his Political Report to the Sixth Congress on December 15, 1986:

The people's life is beset with many difficulties. Millions of working people are unemployed or are not fully employed. Many legitimate and material and cultural necessities of life of the people are not met. Workers and state employees have to cope with many difficulties in life. There is a great shortage of common consumer goods and medicines in the countryside. Housing, hygienic conditions and cultural life in some areas still leave much to be desired.

Negative manifestations in society have increased. Social justice has been violated. Law and discipline are not strictly observed. Abuse of power and corruption committed by a number of cadres and state employees have not yet been severely punished in time; neither have been the activities by those who engage in illicit trade or business.

Summing up the whole situation, he remarked:

*We have not yet achieved the objective set by the fifth Party Congress, namely, stabilising in the main the socio-economic situation and the people's life.*³⁷

This was corroborated by the alarm raised by Premier Do Muoi in December 1988: "If we let the (economic) situation continue as it did in recent years, we will encounter a more difficult situation and will lag even farther behind neighbouring countries with regard to growth rate, national income, and people's average standard of living".³⁸

As Huynh Kim Khanh has pointed out, what hurt the Vietnamese was that, while Vietnam was caught in a downward spiral, the

³⁷ For text of the Political Report to the Sixth Vietnamese Party Congress by General Secretary Truong Chinh see *Summary of World Broadcasts* (hereafter *SWB*), FE/8447/C1/1-54, December 20, 1986. For similar comments by Chinh earlier at the Tenth Congress of the Hanoi Party branch held in October 1986, see *Vietnam Courier*, No.12, 1986, pp.4-5.

³⁸ *Nhan Dan*, 23 December 1988 cited in Tri, n. 34, p.231.

neighbouring countries including, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, were experiencing rapid economic growth.³⁹

Vietnam was subjected to further pressure by the sanctions imposed by the ASEAN countries, the PRC and the United States which, being supported by many other countries, effectively isolated Vietnam from non-communist trade, aid and investment.⁴⁰ Vietnam's economic plight was heightened by the demise of the socialist regimes in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern-Europe which were the principal sources of economic assistance up to 1990. The economic partnership between Moscow and Hanoi came under strain, following the advent of Gorbachev and the '*Perestroika*', he had launched. Moscow not only revised its policies concerning loans and subsidies offered to Vietnam, but also turned out to be tough on the goods supplied by Vietnam which were not anywhere near international standards. Moscow had almost doubled the price of goods it delivered to Vietnam. In other words, Moscow wanted Vietnam – Soviet Union economic partnership to be conditioned not by solidarity but by international market forces. This dramatic change in the Soviet policy towards Vietnam was occasioned by the fact that in addition to feeling the pinch of its support for Vietnam's military adventure in Cambodia, Moscow became alive to the need to expand commerce with all countries, keeping ideological inhibitions at bay. The members of the CMEA were far more tough in 1987 and 1988, when they demanded the repayment of old loans and prompt fulfillment of the commercial contracts and steeply raised prices of their manufactured goods.⁴¹ Factors such as

³⁹ Huynh Kim Khanh, "Vietnam's Reforms: "Renewal or Death," *Indochina Issues*, No.84, September 1988.

⁴⁰ Paul M. Evans, "Vietnam in the Changing System of Economic and Security Relations in East Asia," p.44.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.45.

accelerated economic difficulties triggered by international isolation, Hanoi's relations with its major ally coming under increasing strain, awesome changes in the internal and external outlook of the countries of the socialist bloc, the lure of the broadened and deepened economic interaction with the non-communist world and its own growing desire to integrate its economy with that of the world so as to reap rich dividends - had all urged Vietnam to tread the path of 'Renovation' (*doi moi*) meaning reform. But the undertaking of major reorientation demanded as a prerequisite to Vietnam's detaching itself from the Cambodian imbroglio posed certain "critical dilemmas" for Vietnam's foreign relations. Yet the Vietnamese leadership prudently opted for pursuing the reform course rather than adhering on to Cambodia which would aggravate the domestic economic crisis.

Withdrawal from Cambodia

The signs of transformation of Vietnam's policy toward Cambodia were noticed in August 1985 when the Joint Communique issued at the end of eleventh Conference of the Foreign Ministers of Indochina held in Phnom Penh stated in public for the first time, that the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia would be completed by 1990.⁴² This announcement was significant because Vietnam which has been carrying out partial withdrawal of its troops since 1982 from Cambodia, for the first time offered time frame for pulling out its troops completely. Further, since the issue of Vietnamese troops stationed in Cambodia remained an obstacle to the peaceful settlement of the Cambodian problem, Vietnam addressed this issue in a forthright manner displaying its earnestness in the early settlement of the Cambodian issue. Again, in January 1989, on

⁴² For the text of the Joint Communique issued at the end of the eleventh Conference of the Indochinese Foreign Ministers held in Phnom Penh on 15-16 August 1985, see SWB/FE/8032/A3/2-4, August 17, 1985.

the occasion of the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' Conference, Heng Samrin, the President of the PRK, announced that Vietnam would complete the withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia before September 1989 provided a political solution was reached by then.⁴³ In April 1989 Hanoi stated that it would pull out its troops before September 1989 regardless of the attainment of a political solution by then.⁴⁴ Reasons behind unconditional withdrawal were: (1) Vietnam was quite confident that Khmer Rouge would not stage a comeback to power; (2) The World Community is to be informed of its genuine interest in getting the peace rested in Cambodia; and (3) a growing desire to put an end to its international isolation and to participate actively in the "integrated world market."⁴⁵ In any case, the completion of Vietnamese troop withdrawal as promised, set the stage for a flurry of diplomatic activity that ended with the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements in October 1991. Earlier on 18 October 1991, a few days before the Paris Peace Agreements were concluded, an Extraordinary Congress of the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (PRPK) decided to (1) rechristen the PRPK as Cambodian People's Party (CPP); (2) to embrace multiparty system; and (3) to give up Marxism-Leninism.⁴⁶ These changes ruled out the continuation of high-profile "special relationship" set up between Vietnam and Cambodia in 1979. Vietnam therefore, pursued a "low-profile" policy, towards its

⁴³ Indochinese Foreign Ministers Issue Communique on Talks, *SWB*, FE/0389/A3/5, 20 February 1989.

⁴⁴ Joint Statement on Vietnamese Troop Withdrawal from Cambodia, *SWB*, FE/0427/A3/1-2.

⁴⁵ Seki Tomoda, "Detaching from Cambodia," in James W. Merley and Masashi Nishihara (eds.), *Vietnam Joins the World*, (New York, 1997), pp.143-144.

⁴⁶ "Cambodia Party Drops Communism, backs Democracy," *International Herald Tribune* (hereafter *IHT*), 19-20 October 1991; Also see *Asia 1992 Yearbook*, p.96.

western neighbour. The salient features of this new policy outlined by the then Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach were: (1) to keep to the letter of the Paris Agreement; (2) to honour the independence and sovereignty of Cambodia; (3) to oppose intervention in Cambodia by any foreign power and (4) to maintain amicable relations with Cambodia.⁴⁷ Hanoi pursued sincerely this well-judged policy designed to win the trust and confidence of the international community with which Vietnam wanted to establish diversified relations. In fact, there were issues – like border row between Vietnam and Cambodia, and harassment of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia – which provoked Vietnam to deviate from this low-profile policy, but Hanoi remained calm and collected.

Renewal of ties between Vietnam and China

In spite of the deep-seated animosity it had harboured towards China, Vietnam volunteered to move close to the former, thanks to the ideological affinity, that both the countries fancied to hail their new relationship "as close as lips and teeth". This period of honeymoon which lasted well over three decades, yielded to a period of estrangement which came to a climax when they fought with each other on the issue of Cambodia. Giving an incisive insight into the historical hostility that characterized Sino-Vietnam relations, historian William J. Duiker noted:

*On the Asian political landscape the dispute over Cambodia has been the most visible manifestation of a deep and jagged fault running between China and Vietnam. Ties between the two have long been characterized by conflicting territorial claims, ideological discord, and differing interpretations of their "correct relationship". The root of the problem, a legacy of mutual suspicion and periodic conflict, goes back 2000 years to the first emergence of direct ties between organized governments in the two countries.*⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Seki Tomoda, "Detaching from Cambodia," p.146.

⁴⁸ William J. Duiker, "Looking Beyond Cambodia: China and Vietnam," *Indochina Issues*, No.88, June 1989.

Vietnam is the only country in Southeast Asia to be brought under the Chinese cultural orbit. This cultural affinity did not ensure the peace and security of Vietnam. Vietnam which was annexed to the Chinese empire, wrenched itself free in the first century A.D. after a bitter struggle that lasted over one thousand years. The bitter past continued to exert its impact on the attitude and policy of the posterity. It was only after the advent of the French colonialism that the threat from the north effectively dissipated and the border between China and Vietnam was clearly defined and demarcated.

Despite the lingering traditional animosity, the communist movement forged bonds of friendship between China and Vietnam since 1930. Even though the DRVN was set up in 1945 under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, it received crucial help from China during its struggle with the French,⁴⁹ The Vietnamese would not forgive Beijing for its acceptance of the division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel at the 1954 Geneva Conference so as to prevent a unified Vietnam emerging into independence under the aegis of the VCP.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, for strategic reasons, China continued to offer critical help during the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Beijing's assistance to Hanoi tapered off, following China's détente with the United States in 1972 when Vietnam was getting ready for a large scale military assault against the American-backed forces in South Vietnam. Vietnam, which did not take sides in the Sino-Soviet dispute that came into the open as far back as in 1960, discarded the middle path

⁴⁹ China claimed that over the years, it provided the DRVN with economic assistance of more than US \$ 20 billion and sent more than 20,000 advisers and 300,000 soldiers. Tatsume Okabe, "Coping with China," in Jacques Morley and Masashi Nishihara (eds.) *Vietnam Joins the World*, (New York, 1997), p.117.

⁵⁰ See Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, (New York, 1986), pp.126-127.

to align itself with the Soviet Union which offered generously the military aid needed for its final assault on the South. The Soviet-Vietnam alliance was cemented following Hanoi's joining the Soviet-led CMEA, on 28 June 1978 and the conclusion of Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in November 1978. Hostilities between Vietnam and China were fuelled by the perceived threat to the economic and cultural interests of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam from the ongoing process of Vietnamization socialist transformation and the exodus of ethnic Chinese. China accused Vietnam of premeditation in "ostracizing, persecuting and expelling" the Chinese in open violation of the 1955 agreement.⁵¹ On 10 June 1978, the **People's Daily** commentator spelled out the charge that the Soviet Union was "the behind-the-scenes" provocateur and supporter of Vietnamese authorities in ostracizing Chinese residents and attacking China.⁵² Outraged China denounced Vietnam as a "second Cuba", carrying out Moscow's designs. On 3 July, China announced the suspension of economic and technical assistance to Vietnam; on 11 July, Peking sealed its border with Vietnam and on 12 July, Peking for the first time directly assailed Vietnam's policies toward Kampuchea.⁵³ The Sino-Vietnamese relations which were under severe strain plummeted, following Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia on 25 December 1978 that resulted in the replacement of government of the Democratic Kampuchea (DK), which was fully backed by China, by a pro-Vietnamese government, namely, the PRK in January 1979. The overthrow of the friendly DK government dealt a tremendous blow to the power and prestige of China.

⁵¹ Pao-min Chang, *The Sino-Vietnamese Territorial Dispute*, (New York, 1986), p.5.

⁵² Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, *Vietnam's Future Policies and Role in Southeast Asia*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1982), p.44.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

China, which had repeatedly said of "the need to teach Vietnam a lesson", now felt the time had come to translate its words into action and launched a "self-defensive counterattack" along the land border with Vietnam on 17 February 1979 and withdrew behind the borders on 5 March, claiming that it had succeeded in achieving the expected results i.e. punishing Vietnam for "not only violating the international code of nonaggression, but also for expelling the pro-China Khmer Rouge regime from Phnom Penh."⁵⁴ But Vietnam retained its military presence in Cambodia as long as ten years.

In order to bring Hanoi around, China sought to subject Vietnam to increasing pressure by way of international isolation besides its military threats. Vietnam, which managed to stick to its own agenda without yielding to China for most of the 1980s, finally climbed down to "do a bit of kowtowing to the Chinese,"⁵⁵ thanks to the continuous and consistent pressure from its "patron" and major ally, the Soviet Union.

Leonid Brezhnev, the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) made a public declaration in his Tashkent speech in March 1982, three years after Chinese invasion of Vietnam, that for the first time, Moscow was willing to get its relations with China, normalized.⁵⁶ Soviet pressure on Vietnam was intensified following the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985. In June 1985, Gorbachev along with his counterpart, Le Duan, issued a joint communiqué in which they recognized "the need for the

⁵⁴ Tatsumi Okabe, "Coping with China," pp.120-121.

⁵⁵ Duiker, William J. Duiker, "Looking Beyond Cambodia: China and Vietnam."

⁵⁶ Seki Tomoda, "Detaching from Cambodia," pp.138-139.

normalization of relations with the PRC for the sake of peace in Asia and the world." ⁵⁷ At the Sixth National Congress of VCP in December 1986, the Soviet delegate, Yegor Ligachev asked his hosts to seek an early settlement of the Cambodian issue and to promote friendly ties with China:

An important positive influence on improving the situation in Asia and the international climate as a whole would be exerted by the normalization of Vietnam's relations with China. It is our firm opinion that a solution to this task is fully attainable on the basis of dialogue

We confirm our support for the holding of a Sino-Vietnamese dialogue which aims to remove unnecessary suspicions and mistrust. ⁵⁸

Two days later on 17 December 1986, addressing a Press conference in Hanoi, Ligachev emphasized the need for the development of good relations between the neighbouring socialist states:

Well, I wanted to stress firstly the relations that are developing now... between the Soviet Union and China. They will to a certain degree promote also the normalization of relations, and we hope, in the near future between China and Vietnam also...

I can also say that if the PRC ... wishes to establish relations with Vietnam, let it get in touch with the SRV. I should also like to stress again that we are optimists, and we are sure that in the end normal relations would be established between China and Vietnam. Why? Because there are two socialist states, and there are fundamental contradictions between them. Both China and Vietnam are building socialist society, and one must believe that peaceful good-neighbourly relations with all states are necessary for both of them. ⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ **SWB**, FE/844/C1/7-8, 17 October 1986.

⁵⁹ **SWB**, FE/4446/C1/6, 19 December 1986.

Taking cue from its major ally, Vietnam too initiated changes in its China policy which found expression in the Political Report of the Sixth Congress of the CPV:

We support the Soviet Union policy of normalising relations with China... We hold that the time has come for the two sides to enter into negotiations to solve both immediate and long-term problems in the relations between two countries. Once again we officially declare that Vietnam is ready to negotiate with China at any time, at any level and in any place in order to normalize the relations between the two countries We fully support the PRK's readiness to negotiate with opposition individuals and groups to realize national concord on the basis of excluding the Pol Pot clique of genocidal criminals. We stand for the continued withdrawal of Vietnamese volunteers from Kampuchea and at the same time are ready to cooperate with all parties concerned so as to proceed towards a correct political solution on Kampuchea.⁶⁰

The shift in Vietnam's China policy was largely due to pressure from the Soviet Union which in turn was under intense pressure from the PRC and this was evident from the statement made by the Special Envoy of the Foreign Ministry of the SRV, Vo Dong Giang, at a Press Conference on 16 December 1986 on the occasion of the Sixth Congress:

Regretfully, China continues to pursue a hostile policy toward Vietnam, even at present. We, the Vietnamese side, have always cherished the long-standing friendly relations between the Chinese people and the Vietnamese people.... The political report made at this congress once again reaffirming that Vietnam is ready to negotiate with China at any time, at any level and in a any place, in order to normalize relations between the two countries. However, China has not yet actively responded.... In fact China seeks exert pressure on Vietnam through the improvement of Soviet-China relations.⁶¹

⁶⁰ **SWB**, FE/8447/C1/39-40, 20 December 1986.

⁶¹ **SWB**, FE/8445/C/5, 18 December 1986.

The Chinese disinclination to normalize relations with Vietnam was not unexpected because Vietnam had not yet completed its troop withdrawals from Cambodia. As a Japanese analyst had pointed out when the foreign ministerial dialogue resumed in January 1985 for the first time between the two countries, after China's 1979 invasion of Vietnam, "the Chinese limited the discussions to the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, refusing to deal with normalization."⁶² However, compelled by the challenging domestic economic crisis, heightened by the drying up of the only major source of external financial support – the Soviet Union and the East European allies – Vietnam felt the need to develop relations with China. Hence Vietnam made certain positive gestures to propitiate China. In June 1988, the Vietnam National Assembly deleted any hostile reference to China, namely "Chinese hegemonists", from the preamble of the 1980 Constitution of the country.⁶³ At the Seventh Party Congress on 24-26 June 1991, initiatives were taken to strip pro-West Nguyen Co Thach of all positions in the party and government including that of Foreign Minister.⁶⁴ Satisfied with Vietnam's addressing of its major demand, namely, the withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia in September 1989, China, which was also "suffering from the international isolation imposed after the Tiananmen incident in June 1989," welcomed détente.⁶⁵ The changing trend in Sino-Vietnam relations was characterized by a series of increasing exchanges of official and unofficial visits and an enhanced border trade. A significant step in the direction of normalization of relations between the two, was taken in September 1990 when a secret

⁶² Seki Tomoda, "Detaching from Cambodia," p.143.

⁶³ *Asia 1989 Yearbook*, p.251.

⁶⁴ Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam: Coping with China," *Southeast Asian Affairs 1994*, p.354.

⁶⁵ Tatsumi Okabe, "Coping with China," p.122.

summit meeting was held in Chengdu in Southern China where President Jiang Zemin met VCP Chief Nguyen Van Linh, Premier Do Muoi and former Premier Pham Van Dong. Though the summit did not produce any tangible results, the very meeting of top leaders from both the sides was viewed as a major event because it symbolized the mutual accommodation. Thoroughly pleased with the growing positive trend in Sino-Vietnamese relations, Premier Li Peng said on the occasion of the Chinese National Day on 1 October 1990, that progress had been made in reaching a political settlement in Cambodia and that Beijing was ready to improve its ties with Vietnam.⁶⁶ The two communist neighbours were drawn closer following covert visit of Gen. Le Duc Anh, the then No.2 in the Vietnamese politburo, to China in July 1991 in response to a surprise invitation to Hanoi to send an envoy to report on Vietnam's Seventh Party Congress.⁶⁷

Finally, the Sino-Vietnamese relations were normalized on 5 November 1991, when the CPV General Secretary Do Muoi, Premier Vo Van Kiet, Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Li Peng issued a joint statement to that effect after their closed-door meeting in the Great Hall of the People. The announcement which came less than two weeks after the Cambodian peace agreement was signed in Paris, ended what **Washington Post** called "one of the last rifts in the shrunken communist world."⁶⁸ Hailing the event, Jiang Zemin remarked: "This meeting closes the past, opens up the future and shows that the two countries have normalized relations."⁶⁹ In a written

⁶⁶ *Asia 1991 Yearbook*, p.237.

⁶⁷ *Asia 1992 Yearbook*, p.213.

⁶⁸ *The Washington Post*, 6 November 1991.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

statement, Do Muoi said that the normalization was "of great historic significance" and would make positive exchanges in cultural, scientific, economic and other spheres.⁷⁰ Hailing the event, the State-owned journal **Vietnam Courier** observed:

*This event has opened a new stage in the relations between the two countries, at the same time, its is a positive factor with regard to the diversification of the external relations of both countries with other countries of the world for the purpose of contributing to the building of a new order in the region and in the world in the interests of peace and development in each country and of the whole mankind.*⁷¹

In an eleven-point communiqué issued after the visit, both the countries affirmed that they "would not seek hegemony in any form" and that they were "opposed to any attempt to establish such hegemony". They also arrived at an understanding: "No country should impose its own ideology, values or mode of development upon other countries."⁷² The formal normalization did not mean that the contentious issues between the two, namely, "the question concerning their nationals residing in each other's country" and the "territorial and border problems," were resolved. Normalization also did not mean, as Jiang Zemin has pointed out, the "return to the status of the 1950s and 1960s" when China gave full support to the Vietnamese people fighting against the French and the Americans until the liberation of South Vietnam and the reunification of the whole country.⁷³

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ **Vietnam Courier**, No.25, December 1991, p.3.

⁷² See **Appendix - III** for the text of the Sino-Vietnamese Joint Communiqué issued after the summit meeting that ended on 10 November 1991, **Beijing Review**, Nov 18-24, 1991, pp.9-10.

⁷³ **The Washington Post**, 6 November 1991; also see Chen Jiabao, "A New Era Begins in Sino-Vietnamese Relations," **Beijing Review**, 18-24 November 1991, p.4.

Taking forward the process of normalization of relations, China and Vietnam took further steps. On November 30 – December 4, 1992 Premier Li Peng paid an official visit to Vietnam. In the course of his visit, Li Peng said: "China stands for the settlement of disputes between countries through peaceful negotiations without resort to force." Sharing Li's sentiments, Premier Vo Van Kiet said: "All these problems left by history will be solved through negotiations."⁷⁴ Expressing satisfaction about his visit, Li stated that his visit had brought the two countries closer together. In turn, Kiet said that the visit, "would create a more favourable environment for friendly relations between our two countries."⁷⁵ But for the expression of the formal friendly sentiments by the leaders of both the countries, Li's visit did not yield concrete results. The only significance of the visit was that it came to be regarded as the first by a Chinese Prime Minister in 21 years. Yet another important step taken by China and Vietnam was, the conclusion of an 'Agreement of Fundamental Principles on Territorial Conflicts' in 1993 in order to find an amicable solution to border disputes in the Gulf of Tonkin.⁷⁶ In order to boost cross-border trade, Mon Cai – Dong Xing bridge connecting both countries, was opened in April 1994.

The growing relations between the two was highlighted by the Four-day "official goodwill visit" of President Jiang Zemin to Vietnam on 19-22 November 1994. During the visit of Jiang who led a 150-member Chinese delegation, three economic and trade accords and agreements were signed. Leaders of both the sides agreed to improve bilateral ties.

⁷⁴ *The Daily Yomiuri*, 1 December 1992.

⁷⁵ *International Herald Tribune*, 4 December 1992.

⁷⁶ *Asia 1994 Yearbook*, p.222.

They took a decision to form a group to negotiate rival claims to the Spratly Islands which straddle major supply lines and fishing grounds in the South China Sea. The communiqué issued at the end of Jiang's visit read: "The leaders of the two sides have expressed the hope that through negotiations, these problems will be gradually resolved."⁷⁷ While Hanoi took initiatives to establish diversified relations with Beijing, the fear of Chinese security threat and economic domination lurked in the bosom of the Vietnamese.⁷⁸

A Gradual thaw in the US – Vietnam Relations

In the aftermath of the implosion of the Soviet Union, Vietnam felt the urgency to normalize relations with China and the US. In so far as China was concerned, despite initial hiccup, the process of normalization picked up momentum and ended hardly two weeks after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on Cambodia. In contrast, was the process of reconciliation and the development of normal relationship with the US. America's long wait was indeed an exception to its own "policy of quick resolution after a war."⁷⁹ The shining examples are the United States help in rebuilding Japan and Germany in the post-World War II period. But following the termination of the Vietnam War, America not only declined to come to terms with Vietnam, but also imposed a trade embargo on

⁷⁷ For reports on Jiang's visit to Vietnam, see, *Indochina Digest*, 25 November 1994; *International Herald Tribune*, 23 November 1994; *The Daily Yomiuri*, 23 November 1994.

⁷⁸ For a reliable account of Vietnam-China Relations, see Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnam-China Relations Since The End of the Cold War*, (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, November 1998). <http://www.ntu.edu.sg/idss/WorkingPapers/WP01.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Porter Olsen, "Vietnam: The Evolution of Post-war Relations with the United States," *Political Science* 170, MWF11:00, Dr. Carl H. Yaeger, <http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/1848/Vietnam.html>.

Vietnam. The reason for this difference, as an American analyst has pointed out, "is simple; we lost".⁸⁰ Henry Kissinger, the onetime U.S. Secretary of State who played a role in the drama of estrangement between the US and Vietnam, put the problem into a right perspective when he said during the pre-normalisation period:

"Vietnam is still with us. It has created doubts about American judgement, about American credibility, about American power--not only at home, but throughout the world. It has poisoned our domestic debate. So we paid an exorbitant price for the decisions that were made in good faith and for good purpose."

Describing the deep impact of the Vietnam War on America's foreign policy, Professor Herring wrote:

*The war destroyed the consensus that had existed since the late 1940s, leaving Americans confused and deeply divided on the goals to be pursued and the methods used. From the Angolan crisis in the mid-1970s, to Central America in the 1980s to the Persian Gulf in 1990, foreign policy issues were viewed through the prism of Vietnam and debated in its context. Popular divisions on the gulf crisis derived to a large extent from the Vietnam experience, and the Gulf War was fought on the basis of its perceived lessons.*⁸¹

Giving a graphic account of the enduring effect of the Vietnam War on the Americans, Prof. Herring further said in 1991:

*The War's deep wounds still fester among some of its 2.7 million veterans, for whom victory in the Gulf reinforced rather than erased bitter memories. The persisting popularity of Vietnam novels, television shows and films suggest the extent to which the war is still etched in the nation's consciousness and will probably continue to be so despite the Persian Gulf.*⁸²

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ George C. Herring, "America and Vietnam: The Unending War," *Foreign Affairs*, (New York), Vol.70, No.5, Winter 1991, p.117.

⁸² *Ibid.*

The US conditions for normalisation such as attainment of a comprehensive solution to the Cambodian conflict and the resolution of the POW/MIA issue at best served as instruments to prolong the issue until the trauma of defeat waned.

The US embargo which was first imposed against parts of Vietnam while the country was still under French colonial domination, was extended in 1975, following the fall of Saigon to cover the entire country.⁸³ With a view to "healing the Vietnam War scars" in the U.S. and moving to a positive bilateral relationship with Vietnam, Carter administration made the first ever attempt in 1977. The Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher said in June 1977:

*we have moved as rapidly as we could to put the tragedies of the past behind us. Vietnam, united, is a powerful nation of over 50 million people, which we trust, will live peacefully with its neighbours in Southeast Asia. We want to have normal and mutually beneficial relations with that important nation.*⁸⁴

But various developments that took place in 1978 in quick succession dimmed the prospects of normalization. While the Carter administration proposed the establishment of diplomatic relations without any conditions, Vietnam insisted on the payment of reparations amounting to \$ 3.25 billion which was promised by President Nixon in the past. This demand which "made the U.S. feel like the war criminal instead of the liberating hero, opened old wounds for the American People." The enraged Congress

⁸³ Frederick Z. Brown, "U.S.-Vietnam Normalization -- Past, Present, Future," in James W. Morley and Masashi Nishihara (eds.) *Vietnam Joins the World*, (New York, 1997), p.203.

⁸⁴ Congressional Research Service Library of Congress, *Vietnam's Future Policies and Role in Southeast Asia*, Washington, 1982, p.64

shot down Carter's move in flames.⁸⁵ Vietnam's entry into COMECON in June 1978, and the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in November 1978 which pushed Hanoi into the deeper embrace of Moscow, widened the chasm between the US and Vietnam.

The Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in December 1978, brought the matters to a head as it killed the U.S. interest in the improved ties. Vietnam invaded Cambodia to save the Cambodians from the cruel genocidal regime of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge government was dislodged, its leaders and their followers were pushed into the jungles before establishing a pro-Vietnamese government in Phnom Penh, the PRK. As an American analyst has remarked, Vietnam's military action "put an end to the mass slaughters of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, but it was a major undertaking by a country not prepared to deal with the repercussions of an invasion."⁸⁶ The non-communist governments in the region and the western countries particularly the US, viewed Vietnam's invasion as a "proof of Hanoi's aggressive intentions " in the region. Describing the American startled reaction, Keith Richburg, the columnist of **The Washington Post**, observed: "Flush from its victory over the American forces, Vietnam was seen as a 'rogue elephant' about to go stampeding across Southeast Asia, encompassing not only Cambodia but also Thailand and the Malaysian peninsula."⁸⁷ Any major American fresh military commitment was ruled out. Cyrus Vance the then Secretary of

⁸⁵ Porter Olsen, "Vietnam: The Evolution of Post-war Relations with the United States."

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Keith Richburg, "Back to Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs* (New York), Vol.70, No.4, 1991, p.113.

State, said: "It was only a few years after the Vietnam War had terminated. Some thought it would be a mistake to get involved again. I thought it would be a mistake."⁸⁸ The United States perceived the Cambodian conflict not only as an "aggression by the Vietnamese communism" but also as "a proxy war between China and the Soviet Union." Since Vietnam was bankrolled by the Soviet Union, the Cambodian conflict became yet another "facet of the US-Soviet strategic rivalry in the Pacific and a key element of the "strategic relationship" between Beijing and Washington in confronting the Soviet Union and its client Vietnam."⁸⁹ Therefore, the American leaders had "strongly condemned" Vietnam's "aggression" against Kampuchea, reaffirmed support "to Thailand and joined China and the ASEAN states in order to shore up resistance to Vietnam and its backer, the Soviet Union.

The Reagan administration started supplying non-lethal aid of US \$ 5 million to the guerrillas. Pointing out that the US assistance was relatively tiny, Richburg commented in 1991:

In comparison with its support for the insurgencies in Nicaragua and Afghanistan, White House backing for the Cambodian non-communists was surprisingly modest. This reflected the timidity at getting too deeply involved in a potentially controversial entanglement in a dangerous region as well as fear that an overly independent course might antagonize China ... This policy would later become a source of anger for the non-communists, who would complain that Washington never gave them the massive backing needed to turn their fledgling forces into an effective anti-Vietnamese resistance.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.114.

⁸⁹ Frederick Z. Brown, "U.S.-Vietnam Normalization -- Past, Present, Future," p.205.

⁹⁰ Keith Richburg, "Back to Vietnam," p.116.

The trade embargo imposed by the US in 1975, was supported by the Western European countries and other non-communist Asian countries. Thus, Vietnam was prevented from being benefited by the much needed foreign investments to get its otherwise moribund economy refurbished. The embargo also inhibited Vietnam's access to advanced technology such as aircraft and oil drilling equipment besides loans from the IMF/ World Bank and the ADB.⁹¹

Yet another issue which influenced America's Vietnam policy, was the resolution of the Missing in Action (MIA) issue which the US government regarded as a "matter of the highest priority." Before the Cambodian issue surfaced, America's only precondition for normalisation of relations was the resolution, of the problem of MIAs, in particular, the resolution of the "discrepancy cases" of American servicemen known to have been alive when captured though Vietnam as the US felt, should have commanded some knowledge of their subsequent fate. To start with, Vietnam remained "indifferent" to the fate of the American servicemen, missing in action. The issue came under sharp focus during the Reagan administration period when Vietnam was accused of holding American POWs/MIAs in prison camps style. Hollywood movies such as 'Rambo' convinced the American public that American servicemen, who were still held captive, were being tortured by the "cruel Vietnamese captors." In spite of the efforts to whip up the passions of the American Public on the sentimental MIA issue, a section of the American society who viewed the issue objectively, concluded that the pursuit of MIA issue was an exercise in vain. In fact, there were many who had sounded a seething attack President Reagan's hard- line stance on MIAs. One such critic Terry H. Anderson Wrote:

⁹¹ Frank Frost, *Vietnam's Foreign Relations: Dynamics of Change*, (Singapore, 1993), pp.41-42.

Technically, it is impossible for any Vietnamese government to find all recoverable remains under fifteen years of jungle growth... Also MIA's are not just an American problem. The French still have 20,000 MIA's from their war in Indochina and the Vietnamese list over 200,000. Furthermore, the United States still has 80,000 MIA's from World War II and 8,000 from the Korean War, figures that represent 20 and 15 per cent, respectively, of the confirmed dead in those conflicts, the percentage is 4 per cent for the Vietnam War.... The real 'noble cause' for (the Reagan) administration is not the former war but its emotional and impossible crusade to retrieve all recoverable remains.⁹²

Similar sentiments were aired by a former U.S. Officer who fought in Vietnam:

Only the obsessed, David H. Hackworth, the profiteers and some of the unfortunate and manipulated MIA families are convinced POWs still remain. It is doubtful that Americans could survive decades of Asian-style imprisonment - disease, malnutrition and insanity would have killed them long ago.⁹³

Endorsing Hackworth's views, his Vietnamese counterpart Bay Cao said: "Why should we keep POWs? We'd have to feed them." Elaborating further, Cao said that in 1970, he captured three American reporters, but released them after a month: "One alone ate the ration of 10 of my soldiers."⁹⁴

To defuse the MIA issue, President Reagan appointed retired General John Vessey as Washington's chief negotiator on the matter. The result was that the number of joint searches of wartime crash sites

⁹² Porter Olsen, "Vietnam: The Evolution of Post-war Relations with the United States."

⁹³ David H. Hackworth, "To Bind up the Nations' Wounds," *Newsweek*, 22 November 1993, p.29.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

increased. The net result of these moves by the Reagan administration was that the latter had to revise its stand on MIA issue. Richard Childress, Reagan's National Security Council staff assistant for Asian Affairs, stated in his technical report to the Congress on the day Bush assumed office, that there was no truth in the belief that Americans were still alive in Indochina. Yet the MIA issue retained its "emotional and political resonance" in the U.S. and remained an obstacle to normalization of relations between the U.S. and Vietnam.⁹⁶

As long as Vietnam was financially supported by the Soviet Union, Hanoi did not feel the pinch of the U.S. economic embargo. After Mikhail Gorbachev's Soviet Union had drastically cut its aid to Hanoi, Vietnam found itself under intense economic pressure. Hunger and poverty had been staring the Vietnamese in their face. Thirty years of conflict and continued high military expenditure, and the government's ill-conceived moves to force industrialization and collectivize agriculture mauled the economy. The economic growth rate of 2 per cent and the per capita income of about \$ 100 made the sorry state of affairs, explicit. Vietnam, in dire need of financial help from the U.S. and its allies and friends, sought to propitiate them, by effecting serious changes in both domestic and foreign policies. It was under these compelling circumstances that Vietnam completed the withdrawal of its forces from Cambodia by September 1989 and sought to know what Washington wanted as a *quid pro quo* for lifting the embargo and for getting the relations, normalized.

⁹⁶ Keith Richburg, "Back to Vietnam," p.120.

Roadmap to Normalization of Relations

On 9 April 1991, Richard Solomon the Assistant Secretary of State, presented to the Ambassador Trinh Xuan Lang, in New York, Vietnam's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, a four-phase 'roadmap' to, what Solomon himself called the "political and economic normalization that could, in relatively short order, end the trade embargo and our opposition to lending to Vietnam by the international financial institutions as our concerns for a Cambodian settlement and POW/MIA accounting are resolved."⁹⁶ Explaining the reasons for making normalization of relations conditional to the resolution of the Cambodian problem as well as the issue of MIAs, Solomon said:

*A genuine and durable reconciliation will require conflict resolution and stability in Southeast Asia and domestic support here at home. For reasons of returning peace and stability to the region, the United States has premised normalization of US-Vietnamese relations since Vietnam invaded Cambodia in late 1978 on the withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops and advisers from Cambodia and self-determination for the Cambodian people. For reasons of domestic concern, we have long held that the pace and scope of normalization ... should be commensurate with Vietnam's cooperation on the POW/MIA issue and other humanitarian concerns.*⁹⁷

The U.S. also hoped that the phased process of normalization would preempt any serious setback to the engagement of Washington and Hanoi, in a process of "trust and confidence-building."

⁹⁶ Richard H. Solomon, "Vietnam: The Road Ahead," (Statement before the subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 25 April 1991) *US Department of State Dispatch*, 6 May 1991, p.330. For an analysis of the 'Roadmap' See Susumu Awanochara and Murraray Hiebert, "Open door in dispute," *FEER*, 25 April 1991, pp.10-11.

⁹⁷ Richard H. Solomon, "Vietnam: The Road Ahead," p.330.

In the first phase, after Vietnam and the State of Cambodia signed an international peace accord on Cambodia, the U.S. would allow its business and the Veterans groups to travel to Vietnam and ease restrictions on travel by Vietnamese diplomats to New York city to attend the meetings of the UN.

In phase two, as soon as the UN officials arrived in Cambodia and arranged a cease-fire, the U.S. would start lifting trade embargo against Vietnam. Depending upon the level of Vietnamese Cooperation on the MIA issue, the U.S. businesses could begin certain activities.

In phase three, six months after the peace accord had been in operation and after all the Vietnamese troops and advisers had been pulled out of Cambodia, the U.S. would end its trade embargo and would begin withdrawing U.S. opposition to loans by international financial institutions. The U.S. would also consider the establishment of diplomatic offices in Washington and Hanoi.

Phase four which would commence after the establishment of a new National Assembly in Phnom Penh following free elections, would witness the U.S. getting the diplomatic and economic relations with Vietnam and Cambodia normalized fully. The U.S. would extend not only Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment but also its full support to lending by international financial institutions, to both Vietnam and Cambodia.

Hanoi did not reject the four-part proposal outright, but it did express its displeasure. Speaking to reporters after meeting with Solomon, Ambassador Long said: "The fact that Vietnam and the USA still have not normalized relations with the war having been over for 16 years is abnormal and not in conformity with the interests of the two countries, or

the interest of peace and stability in Southeast Asia.⁹⁸ In a swift reaction, a Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesman said in Hanoi, that it was not fair to make Cambodian settlement a precondition for normalizing US-Vietnam relations. Prompt restoration of the relations between Washington and Hanoi to normalcy, would be the best way to end the war in Cambodia and thus bring stability to Southeast Asia and to help resolve the outstanding issues between the two countries.⁹⁹

The reaction of the Voice of Vietnam, Hanoi's external source in English, had been subdued: "Vietnam acknowledges the positive attitude of the USA. In reality, in recent times, Vietnam has done a great deal towards that goal" (of normalization).¹⁰⁰

The 'roadmap' came in for severe criticism within the U.S. Expressing his disapproval of the 'roadmap', George C. Harring, Professor of History at the University of Kentucky, commented thus:

The U.S. position seems unnecessarily rigid. The number of unresolved MIA cases - 2,273 - is small compared to the usual wartime percentage of MIAs to casualties. With each year, it becomes harder to locate and identify remains, and it seems unreasonable to demand that the Vietnamese use their limited resources to address American concerns when their country is an economic basket case and they claim to have hundreds of thousands of MIAs of their own. A Cambodian settlement appears imminent, but it will be fragile and vulnerable to attack from numerous angles and to make normalization contingent on forces the Vietnamese cannot control seems unreasonable. Perhaps never in the

⁹⁸ SWB, FE/1044, A1/3, 12 April 1991.

⁹⁹ *Asia 1992 Yearbook*, p.213.

¹⁰⁰ SWB, FE/1047/A1/2, 16 April 1991.

*history of warfare has the loser been able to impose such harsh terms on the ostensible winner.*¹⁰¹

Keith Richburg, *The Washington Post* journalist, took exception to the linking of Cambodian settlement to the normalization:

*The notion of linking U.S.-Vietnamese relations to the signing of a Cambodian accord this summer, and then timing full diplomatic relations to come only after the establishment of an elected government in Phnom Penh, seems to ignore the reality of the stalemate in Cambodia and the deep-seated animosities of the four Cambodian factions. Even if an accord is signed – and the four sides took a significant step in that direction with their latest truce accord reached in Pattaya – the Cambodian problem is likely never to be fully resolved. If America wants to pursue its interests in normalizing ties with Hanoi, it should begin to decouple the two issues.*¹⁰²

An analysis of the responses – for and against – to the 'roadmap', would prompt any sane and sensible person to remark, that the U.S. policy towards Vietnam suffered from sluggishness. However, it was fervently hoped that the fast changing regional and international scenario in the late 1980s and the early 1990s and the arguments in favour of normalization would prod the U.S. administration to give up its masterly ambivalence and keep the process of normalization on fast-track. Massive Soviet cut back on its military and economic profile in Vietnam, opened up new opportunities for Washington to establish diplomatic ties with and to exert influence, on Hanoi. It was argued that this was a strategic imperative in the light of the impending closure of American bases in the Philippines which would make hard the American job of identifying and nullifying the possible regional flashpoints. Normalization would also offer the U.S. an opportunity to allay the fears of the non-communist

¹⁰¹ George C. Herring, "America and Vietnam: The Unending War," pp.118-119.

¹⁰² Keith Richburg, "Back to Vietnam," p.126.

Southeast Asia, of the threat from Vietnam following the U.S. military withdrawal from the region which contributes to "integrating Vietnam into a stable and prosperous Southeast Asia".¹⁰³

America's positive policy also would benefit American business interests which were adversely affected by economic embargo. In April 1990, the Asia Pacific Council of American Chambers of Commerce adopted a resolution at its meeting in Jakarta, calling on the U.S. administration to do away with the restrictions on the U.S. trade and investment in Vietnam. Subsequently, in a press communiqué, the group said that the American policies "severely impact (on) American competitiveness in the region."¹⁰⁴ There were also indications in June 1991, that the U.S. firms which were forced to remain silent spectators as Indian, European, Japanese and Australian investors were grabbing potentially lucrative contracts, would ignore the U.S. sanctions. The international financial institutions such as IMF, also brought pressure on the U.S. to end its senseless embargo against Vietnam which had been carrying out serious economic reforms since the late 1980s, to deserve an IMF funding by all means.¹⁰⁵

Normalization would also create a supportive environment to resolve long pending bilateral issues across the table and also to address humanitarian issues such as Indochinese "boat people," the root cause of which was a widespread deprivation, caused by the long spells of war besides the MIA issue itself. **International Herald Tribune** editorially

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp.127-128.

¹⁰⁴ *Australian Financial Review*, 3 May 1990; cited in Frank Frost, *Vietnam's Foreign Relations: Dynamics of Change*, p.42.

¹⁰⁵ Susumu Awanohara & Murray Hiebert, "Open door in dispute," p.10.

said: "In fact there is no good solution for the 'boat people' as long as Vietnam is at once a police state and an economic sinkhole." ¹⁰⁶ The proponents of political pluralism argued that it was better to encourage political transformation through economic and cultural interaction rather than strangling the regime through sanctions.

Vietnam veteran and former congressional aide Henry J. Kenny, noted in the Summer 1982 issue of the Aspen Institute's Quarterly, that the policy then pursued by the US govt. had outlived its utility for various reasons: "First it delays entry into Vietnam not just of diplomats but of American citizens who could live there to conduct business. Information on MIAs, as on any other issue, cannot be damaged by an increased US presence. Second, postponing normalization deprives Hanoi of an incentive to cooperate in what has become a clear linkage between political relations and MIA gestures. Finally, the continued isolation of Vietnam (delays) inevitable political change, which could lead not only for the fullest possible MIA account but also to increased freedoms for which the MIAs paid such a clear price." ¹⁰⁷

Some voices argued that by improving relations with Vietnam, America could help itself to improve its "leadership profile in Asia" and also help the entire region to rid itself of regional tensions. ¹⁰⁸

In 1970's, America's blossoming relations with China served as a disincentive to the normalization of ties with Vietnam. As China and most

¹⁰⁶ Editorial "Keep Vietnam Along," *IHT*, 23 October 1991.

¹⁰⁷ *Indochina Digest*, 4 September 1992.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

of the countries in the region began establishing diplomatic relations with Hanoi in the wake of the signing of Paris Peace Accords in October 1991, Washington had no reason to attempt to stonewall the normalization process any longer. On the other hand, given the downtrend in its relations with China following the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, and China's sales of advanced weapons systems and nuclear technology in the Middle East and other areas of the Third World, it was all the more necessary to improve ties with Vietnam so as to send a message across, that Washington would respond appropriately to China's aggressive postures.¹⁰⁹

Shortly after the liberation of Kuwait from Iraq by the U.S.-led ground troops, President Bush declared: "The specter of Vietnam has been buried forever in the desert sands of the Arabian peninsula." If the U.S. remains true to that declaration, the issue of normalization of relations with Vietnam should be given top priority in the American foreign policy agenda so as to "close out the final chapter of America's long and wrenching Indochina involvement, and truly allow Americans to put the Vietnam era behind them."¹¹⁰

Neither the supportive international environment nor the convincing arguments seemed to have significantly influenced the American administration to move fast to normalize relations with Vietnam. On the other hand, Washington held fast to the 'roadmap' which dictated the time-consuming normalization process. Finding no compelling need to normalize relations with Vietnam, the U.S. was not in a hurry to establish diplomatic relations with Hanoi. On the other hand,

¹⁰⁹ Don Oberdorfer and Lena H. Sun, "Chinese Offer No Word Yet on Baker Proposals," *The Washington Post*, 17 November 1991.

¹¹⁰ Keith Richburg, "Back to Vietnam," p.131.

successive American administrators were convinced, that restoring ties with Vietnam before the fullest possible accounting of MIAs was a "needless risk". They were mortally afraid of the political backlash spinning out of the MIA lobbying groups which were highly vocal in their opposition to normalization of relations until and unless Vietnam cooperated in achieving the fullest possible accounting for the MIAs. On the contrary, normalization was critically important to Vietnam as it would end Hanoi's international isolation which was essential for salvaging its sagging economy and saving the common man from the economic plight. For Hanoi, normalization would serve yet another purpose, namely, balancing "China's increasingly aggressive policy towards Vietnam."¹¹¹ There were instances of Chinese border guards intruding into and occupying Vietnam-claimed territory. China signed an agreement on 8 May 1992, allowing Crestone Energy Corporation, an American oil company, to explore in the disputed Spratly Islands off the coast of Vietnam. China even promised Crestone officials a full protection.¹¹² Vietnam, for fear of running the gauntlet, of hostility from the U.S. and seeking for aid and investments, gingered up its interactions with the U.S. By signing the Paris Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict on 23 October 1991,¹¹³ Vietnam made headway in meeting one of the principal conditions of the 'roadmap'.

¹¹¹ Susumu Awanohara & Jonathan Friedland, "Back to the World," *FEER*, 5 November 1992, p.10.

¹¹² *Indochina Digest*, 26 June 1992.

¹¹³ For the text of Paris Peace Accords on Cambodia, see United Nations, *Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict*, Paris, 23 October 1991, DPI/1180-92077, Department of Public Information, UNO, New York, January 1992.

Reacting on expected lines, Secretary Baker averred: "Today, finally, I am convinced we can begin writing the last chapter of the Vietnam War."¹¹⁴ In his remarks at a press conference, Baker however, said that the "scope and pace" of discussions on "issues and modalities that would be involved in normalizing relations with Vietnam" would be governed by the degree to which Vietnam continued to cooperate with the United States on the "very important issue of our prisoners of war and our missing in action."¹¹⁵ Even though the Deputy Foreign Minister Le Mai restated Vietnam's reservations about the linking of MIA issue which was a "purely humanitarian question, to political matters," he gave a categorical assurance about the continued cooperation of Vietnam which itself had 300,000 of its own MIA cases to resolve: "we state clearly and definitively that we will continue to resolve the MIA problem in the best and most complete way, regardless of the normalization process and even in the absence of normalization."¹¹⁶

Following the conclusion of Paris Peace Accords in 1991, Vietnam pursued a hands-off policy which satisfied the "regional objectives of the United States, ASEAN and China."¹¹⁷ The holding of national elections successfully in Cambodia in May 1993, satisfied the roadmap's principal condition for restoring diplomatic ties and for lifting an embargo. Meanwhile, Vietnam also extended an enhanced cooperation on resolving MIA issue. After spending 15 months and nearly US \$ 2 million, the

¹¹⁴ Susumu Awanohara & Jonathan Friedland, "Back to the World," p.9.

¹¹⁵ US Department of State, *Dispatch*, 28 October 1991, Vol2, No.43, p.791.

¹¹⁶ *IHT*, 25 October 1991.

¹¹⁷ Frederick Z. Brown, "U.S.-Vietnam Normalization - Past, Present, Future," p.202.

Congressional Committee that was formed to determine the POW/MIA issues reported on 13 January 1993: "There is no compelling evidence that proves that any American remains alive in captivity today."¹¹⁸ Pleased with Vietnam's sincerity in resolving the MIA issue, on 14 December 1992, President Bush took a "short step" – a move which was described by observers as the beginning of the end of U.S. embargo – by which U.S. firms were allowed to establish offices in Vietnam to negotiate and to "sign contracts" to be executed only after the embargo was completely lifted. In short, **Indochina Digest** remarked, "US companies were now permitted to spend more, in Vietnam but not yet to make money."¹¹⁹

After Clinton assumed the office of the President, it was hoped in some quarters that the process of normalization would get a much-needed fillip. This did not happen for two reasons: First, Clinton was "politically vulnerable" on the MIA issue because he evaded military service during the Vietnam War and Second, Veterans groups mounted pressure on Clinton to maintain *status quo* with regard to lifting of the embargo. Normalization process received a set back when an unconfirmed Russian document found in January 1993, but made available to U.S. government on 8 April 1993 raised MIA concerns. According to this Russian document, Vietnam had failed to release 614 American POWs at the time of the Paris Peace Accords signed in 1973. Disregarding the Russian document, a Congressional delegation which returned from Hanoi on 1 July 1993, however, wrote to President Clinton to relax the economic sanctions on Vietnam: "If Vietnam is not given a signal by our government

¹¹⁸ **Indochina Digest**, 15 January 1992.

¹¹⁹ **Indochina Digest**, 18 December 1992; See also, Thomas W. Lippman, "Bush Opens Door Open to Vietnam," **The Washington Post**, 15 December 1992.

that it recognizes the significant contributions it is making, it may very well discontinue its efforts ... This is also the belief of (American MIA experts) on the ground in Vietnam."¹²⁰

Acting on this recommendation, Clinton announced on 2 July 1993 that the U.S. would no longer oppose International Financial institutions loans to Vietnam, though the embargo still continued.¹²¹ Following this change, it was widely believed that President Clinton would be under increasing pressure particularly from US firms, to lift the embargo. One diplomat said: "I see that as automatic. He has to lift the embargo. It would be absolutely pointless for him to allow the IMF and World Bank to come in with big project loans and let the work go to others."¹²² But against these expectations, Clinton, holding on to hard line, renewed the embargo on 13 September 1993.¹²³ Nonetheless, normalization process inched forward in December 1993 when President Clinton eased the embargo by permitting the U.S. companies to bid on International Finance Institutions -financed projects "pending a lifting of the embargo."¹²⁴ With this, there remained, not an iota of doubt about the normalization in the near future. Accordingly on 3 February 1994, President Clinton announced the lifting of the trade embargo against Vietnam. Defending

¹²⁰ *Indochina Digest*, 2 July 1993.

¹²¹ For text of President Clinton's Statement released on 2 July 1993 see, U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch*, 12 July 1993, Vol.4, No.28, pp.499-500.

¹²² *Indochina Digest*, 2 July 1993.

¹²³ For statement released by the White House on 13 September 1993, see U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch*, 20 September 1993, Vol.4, No.38, pp.645-646.

¹²⁴ Frederick Z. Brown, "U.S.-Vietnam Normalization - Past, Present, Future," p.211.

his action he said: "I am absolutely convinced it offers the best way to resolve the fates of those who remain missing and about whom we are not sure." President Clinton also announced his decision "to establish a liaison office in Vietnam to provide services for Americans there and to help us pursue a human rights dialogue with the Vietnamese government."¹²⁵ At last, Vietnam realized what it was looking for in the last 19 years. In a statement issued, Vietnam's Foreign Ministry said: "This is a positive and significant decision, which contributes to opening a new page in US-Vietnam relations."¹²⁶ Opening of Liaison offices in both the capitals indicated the exchange of embassies in near future.

On 11 July 1995, President Clinton announced that the United States normalized diplomatic relations with Vietnam.¹²⁷ It is interesting to note though the White House believed that recognition would gain a few votes and could lose many,¹²⁸ that this belief was disproved when Clinton won a resounding victory in the 1996 Presidential election for a second term. This meant that President Clinton's move to normalize relations with Vietnam had mustered the support of the entire America.

¹²⁵ For the text of statement see U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch*, 14 February 1994, Vol.5, No.7, pp.76-77.

¹²⁶ *Indochina Digest*, 4 February 1994.

¹²⁷ For text of President Clinton's statement on 11 July 1995, U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch*, 10 July 1995, Vol.6, No.28, pp.551-552; see **Appendix-IV**, also see Robert S. Greenberger, "Clinton Opens Full Relations with Vietnam," *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, 12 July 1995.

¹²⁸ Frederick Z. Brown, "U.S.-Vietnam Normalization -- Past, Present, Future," p.200.

With the normalization of relations decks were cleared for a free flow of money and for the blossoming of trade which Vietnam hankered after to get its economic growth accelerated through a paradigm shift to what it called a mixed economy (though not in conformity with ideology) in which the state ownership as well as the central planning were wedded to the private enterprise, free markets and a global engagement.

Vietnam's admission into ASEAN

One of the spectacular developments of the post-Second World War period, was the growth of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Fear of outside powers stepping in for political gains in the wake of the exit of the colonial powers and the absence of the spirit of working together in a joint effort, the otherwise baneful effects of the colonial rule which discouraged any form of intraregional contact,¹²⁹ prodded the Southeast Asian countries to come closer in some form of cooperative grouping for promoting peace and stability in the region and to work for their mutual benefit. The first two efforts in this direction, the establishment of Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) in 1961 by Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, and MAPHILINDO, two years later, by Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia, ran into difficulties no sooner than they saw the light of the day because of disputes among the member states. Eventually, the efforts at founding a viable regional organization resulted in the establishment of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Bangkok on 8 August 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The Bangkok Declaration of 8 August 1967

¹²⁹ Michael Wesley (ed.) *The Regional Organizations of the Asia-Pacific: Exploring Institutional Change*, (Hampshire, 2003), p.40.

which gave birth to ASEAN, proclaimed that "the countries of Southeast Asia share a primary responsibility for strengthening the economic and social stability of the region and ensuring their peaceful and progressive national Development."¹³⁰

Ever since the inception of ASEAN, the founding members kept the doors of ASEAN open for other Southeast Asian countries to join them and make the regional grouping an association encompassing all the ten countries of Southeast Asia. In fact, at the time of the inception of ASEAN, all the countries in Southeast Asia were invited to join but Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam demurred.¹³¹ Subsequently, South Vietnam not only expressed its desire to join ASEAN but also "lobbied hard to join and sent observers to meetings."¹³² The ASEAN leadership, though it acknowledged that "communism of the Maoist or Vietminh variety is the chief challenge to stability in the region," was not prepared to admit South Vietnam "under a too blatantly anti-communist flag", but remained "non-aligned in emotional sympathy."¹³³ However, ASEAN hoped to include Vietnam once peace was restored to that nation.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ For the text of Bangkok Declaration see *ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN: The First 20 Years*, Jakarta, 1987, pp. 52-53. Also see "Overview: Association of Southeast Asian Nations," <http://www.aseansec.org/147.htm>.

¹³¹ http://www.worldsci_books.com/economiceltextbook/4689/4689chapi4.pdf

¹³² Dick Wilson, "Young Organization faces test of seriousness," *The Time* (London), 8 August 1972.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

Vietnam-ASEAN Relations, 1967-1978

ASEAN was born at a time when Vietnam remained divided into pro-American South Vietnam and Communist North Vietnam, (Democratic Republic of Vietnam, DRVN) supported by the Soviet Union and the PRC. While South Vietnam tried in vain to join ASEAN, the DRVN pursued a hostile policy. The one and the only ASEAN country with which Hanoi maintained diplomatic relations, was Indonesia because of shared colonial past. Commenting on this, Prof. Zagoria said: "Of all ten Southeast Asian countries, only Indonesia and Vietnam had to fight for their independence. This has left a bond of sympathy between the two countries."¹³⁵ In stark contrast were the relations of Vietnam with Thailand and the Philippines which not only sent troops in support of South Vietnam and the U.S. during the Vietnam War, but also offered military bases to the U.S. The DRVN was hostile towards the ASEAN grouping and its individual members. In December 1971, the state-owned daily in Vietnamese **Nhan Dan**, while describing ASEAN as "a product of U.S. aggressive and interventionist policy," stated, that true peace and neutralization in the region could be realized only when all the U.S. intervention ended and all the U.S. and "satellite" forces were withdrawn from Vietnam. In 1972, **Nhan Dan** charged that Thailand had become "a great American reserve of mercenaries, playing a strategic role in the Nixon doctrine." No wonder, the DRVN rejected outright, the ASEAN's offer of an observer status at the meetings of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Donald S. Zagoria, "Joining ASEAN," in Jacques Morley and Masashi Nishihara (eds.) *Vietnam Joins the World*, (New York, 1997), p.164.

¹³⁶ J. Van Der Kroef, "Hanoi and ASEAN: A new confrontation in Asia," *Asia Quarterly*, No.4, (1976), pp.245-269; *The Age* (Melbourne), 21 January 1972, cited in Frank Frost, *Vietnam's Foreign Relations: Dynamics of Change*, p.59.

After its reunification in 1975, Vietnam continued to have reservations about ASEAN perceiving it, as being anti-communist. Brimming out with the revolutionary fervour in the wake of the fall of Saigon to Communists, Vietnam offered "full support" to the communist movements in the ASEAN states. In response to the first ever ASEAN summit meeting held in Bali in May 1976, Hanoi denounced ASEAN as "a Washington-baked scheme of intervention and aggression against Communist governments in Southeast Asia."¹³⁷

At the annual conference of Non-aligned nations in Colombo in August 1976, Vietnam, supported by other pro-Soviet sates, torpedoed Malaysia's proposal seeking the endorsement of the 1971 ASEAN proposal for a Southeast Asian Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). Vietnamese delegates insinuated that ASEAN was an American operated grouping.¹³⁸ By contrast, ASEAN remained conciliatory towards Vietnam and welcomed the unification of Vietnam in 1976. Even though Hanoi turned down ASEAN invitation to send an observer to the second ASEAN Summit at Kuala Lumpur in August 1977, the ASEAN Heads of Government "emphasized the desire of ASEAN countries to develop peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with all countries in the region, including Kampuchea, Laos and Vietnam." They also "welcomed" the decision of the U.N. Security Council to admit Vietnam as a member of the organization.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Congressional Research Service Library of Congress, *Vietnam's Future Policies and Role in Southeast Asia*, Washington, 1982, p.53.

¹³⁸ Denzil Peiris, "Battle over ASEAN's Peace Zone," *FEER*, 3 September 1976, pp.13-14.

¹³⁹ See the text of final communiqué of summit meeting of ASEAN Heads of Government in Kuala Lumpur on August 4-5, 1977, in R. Nagi, *ASEAN: 20 Years*, New Delhi, 1989, pp174-185.

Even though Vietnam remained hostile towards the Southeast Asian regional grouping, Hanoi chose to establish "discreet contacts" with several ASEAN governments as a part of its strategy of diversifying its overall foreign relations to develop profitable economic ties. Soon after the Vietnam War in 1975, Hanoi established diplomatic relations with the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand. In August 1976, Vietnam's deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien said in an interview: "Since the end of the war in Indochina a new situation exists in Southeast Asia. Why should we be absorbed into an already existing organization whose past is known?"¹⁴⁰ Deteriorating relations with China and Pol Pot's Kampuchea pushed Vietnam to step up its efforts to integrate itself with ASEAN states. While Vietnam's Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh toured in December 1977 four ASEAN nations like Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, in July 1978, Vietnam's deputy foreign minister visited ASEAN countries as a prelude to the Prime Minister Pham Van Dong's tour of all the ASEAN capitals in September-October 1978. During his whirlwind tour, Dong not only made an explicit pledge that Vietnam would refrain from extending direct or indirect support to the communist parties in ASEAN countries, but also offered to enter into treaties of friendship with each ASEAN country.¹⁴¹

ASEAN - Vietnam Relations during the Cambodian crisis

Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia in December 1978, led to the replacement of the Kampuchean government led by Pol Pot with a

¹⁴⁰ For a text of interview of FEER's Paris correspondent with Pham Hien, see "Pham Hien on Cooperation," *FEER*, 24 June 1977, p.19.

¹⁴¹ For a good account of Dong's visit to ASEAN region, see Rodney Tasker, "Rivals for ASEAN's Hand," *FEER*, 15 September 1978, p.19-23; Rodney Tasker, "A courteous Rebut for Dong's Diplomacy," *FEER*, 29 September 1978, pp.8-9; Justus M. Van der Kroef, "Hanoi and ASEAN: Is Co-existence Possible," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, September 1979, pp.164-178.

pro-Vietnamese government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), in January 1979. Hanoi's blitzkrieg revived ASEAN's "latent suspicions" of future Vietnamese expansionism.¹⁴² Perceiving immediate threat to Thailand, the alarmed ASEAN designed a policy by which it demanded the immediate withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea; refused to recognize the new government in Phnom Penh under Heng Samrin; and extended tacit support to Thailand which in collusion with the PRC abetted Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and other Khmer resistance factors.¹⁴³ In order to bring political, diplomatic and military pressure on the Vietnamese, ASEAN, backed by the U.S. and the PRC, played a central role in the creation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in June 1982, and extended diplomatic support to it so that a seat was offered to it in the UN which adopted resolutions every year demanding the pull out of foreign forces from Kampuchea.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² ASEAN countries unwilling to enter into confrontation with Vietnam deeply "deplored" Vietnam's action (For Statement by the Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee on the 'Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict,' 'ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement on Vietnam's Action in Kampuchea' and 'ASEAN Chairman's Statement on Indochina Conflict' see *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, December 1979, pp.290-292. See also Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "ASEAN: Meeting and Failing the Vietnamese Challenge," *Indochina Issues*, No.76, November 1987.

¹⁴³ Evelyn Colbert, "Changing Relationships in Southeast Asia: ASEAN, Indochina, and the Great Powers," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, June 1982, pp.76-85.

¹⁴⁴ Roger Kershaw, "The Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea: A Personal View," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, December 1982, pp. 405-09; Michael Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, (London 1995), p.87; Jacques Bekaert, "Kampuchea's 'Loose Coalition': A Shot gun wedding," *Indochina Issues*, No.22, December 1981. Jacques Bekaert, "The Khmer Coalition: Who Wins, Who Loses?," *Indochina Issues*, No.28, September 1982; Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, "A Study of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front and the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, December 1990, pp.172-185; "Vietnam: Foreign Relations," (U.S. Library of Congress) <http://countrystudies.us/vn/63.htm>.

Taking a hard line stance, Vietnam defended its troops deployed to extend a security cover to the PRK. Hanoi, however, agreed to withdraw its troops if the prospect of Chinese threat to Laos and Cambodia receded. While fighting ASEAN's Cambodia policy tooth and nail, Vietnam sought to maintain a channel of dialogue with the ASEAN states in order to win them over. Joined by Laos and the PRK, Vietnam made a plethora of proposals aimed at resolving the Cambodian impasse and improving relations between the Indochinese countries and the ASEAN nations.¹⁴⁵

Mending fences, 1986-1991

The relations between Vietnam and ASEAN which remained frosty in early 1980s, showed signs of steady improvement during the second half of the 1980s, chiefly due to the pressure of the worsening domestic economic scenario and the impact of '*perestroika*' (new thinking) in the Soviet Union. The Cambodian Peace Process gained momentum following the decision of the Sixth Party Congress in December 1986, to adopt a new economic strategy anchored in a new foreign policy with an emphasis on ending the self-imposed international isolation, created supportive environment for the Cambodian peace process to gain momentum.¹⁴⁶

A major breakthrough in the negotiations on the Cambodian conflict, was noticed in 1987 when Vietnam agreed to participate in the informal discussions with ASEAN states and Laos, besides the four Cambodian warring factions. As Duiker has pointed out this was the first

¹⁴⁵ Gareth Porter, Vietnam in Kampuchea: Aims and Options," *Indochina Issues*, No.16, May 1981.

¹⁴⁶ For an account of Vietnam's efforts to attract foreign investments to strengthen its economy, see Indochina Project Staff, "Vietnam's Quest for Foreign Investment - A Bold Move," *Indochina Issues*, No.80, March 1988.

time that Vietnam had agreed to become directly involved in the Cambodian peace talks.¹⁴⁷ This process of face-to-face talks and negotiation manifested itself in the first and second Jakarta Informal Meetings (JIM) in July 1988 and in February 1989 respectively. By facilitating *tête-à-têtes* between the rival factions, the JIM process "paved the way for the eventual settlement of the Cambodian Problem."¹⁴⁸ The change of guard in Thailand in 1988 augured well for the settlement of the Cambodian problem. Thailand, whose traditional rivalry with Vietnam was fuelled during the Cold War, particularly after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, under its new Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, got its foreign policy reoriented towards Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Chatichai's 'New Look Diplomacy' focused on "turning the Indochina battlefield into a market place."¹⁴⁹

Vietnam, which felt the need of improving relations with ASEAN countries in the early 1980s but could not make headway as the "time was not ripe for such a major shift in foreign policy,"¹⁵⁰ perceived the urgency to break out of its international isolation and ginger up its relations with the ASEAN states. Hanoi's completion of pullout of its troops from

¹⁴⁷ William J. Duiker, *Vietnam: Revolution in Transition*, pp.214-215.

¹⁴⁸ For an excellent account of JIM Talks see, M. Nagendra Prasad, *Indonesia's Role in the Resolution of the Cambodian Problem*, (Aldershot, 2001), pp.99-132.

¹⁴⁹ For a survey of Thai initiatives in Cambodia, see Katharaya Un, "Thailand and the Dynamics of Economics and Security Complex in Southeast Asia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, December 1991, pp.251-253.

¹⁵⁰ Ramses Amer, "Vietnam and ASEAN: A Case Study of Regional Integration and Conflict Management," www.fesspove.org/pdf/D+C%201-2004/3Amer.PDF.

Kampuchea in September 1989 as promised in January 1989, resolved one of the "great obstacles" to the improvement of relations.

Vietnam and ASEAN moved closer when they supported the comprehensive political settlement drafted by the Five Permanent Members of the UNSC on 28 August 1990 which was subsequently endorsed by the UNSC on 20 September 1990 and by the UN General Assembly on 15 October 1990¹⁵¹ and adopted by the Paris Peace Conference on 23 October 1991.¹⁵²

Vietnam's Integration into ASEAN

The Cambodian settlement removed the last major hurdle in the growth of Vietnam's ties with ASEAN and the individual members of ASEAN which in turn paved the way for Vietnam's entry into ASEAN as a full member. With Vietnam's admission ASEAN inched forward to fulfill its "founders' vision of an association encompassing all the countries of Southeast Asia".¹⁵³ Vietnam's accession into ASEAN was viewed by Hanoi and ASEAN as a promoter of mutually beneficial economic, political and strategic interests.

Political Factor

Like the ASEAN six, Vietnam too felt in the larger interests of the region, the need for creating what Malaysian strategic analyst Noordin Sopice has called "a single Southeast Asian community" or "ASEAN

¹⁵¹ See Document 5 in United Nations, *The United Nations and Cambodia 1991-95*, The United Nations Blue Books Series, Vol.II, New York, 1995, pp.95-96.

¹⁵² For text of agreements signed in Paris on 23 October 1991, see Document 19, *Ibid*, pp.132-148.

¹⁵³ ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN at 30*, Jakarta, 1997, p.77.

family". In his article "Southeast Asia as one" in *The Nation* of 26 May 1997, Sopice pointed out "that the reasons for the creation of ASEAN Family" were political and strategic that is to make a family of friends and an empowered family of friends which would facilitate the transformation of a region in turmoil and instability into a region of peace and tranquility. The primary purpose of ASEAN has been to transform a region of strangers and enemies into a region of friends and collaborators. He also noted that the very fact that Southeast Asia would be united for the first time in history to form ASEAN, was itself a symbol of progress.¹⁵⁴ The Vietnamese participation in ASEAN, therefore, would mark the end of its unfriendly relations with ASEAN-6 and herald a new era of friendship and cooperation between them. Deputy Foreign Minister of Vietnam, Vu Khoan, said thus:

*Vietnam's ASEAN membership has made an important contribution to consolidating the tendency for peace and cooperation in the region, creating a favourable international environment for the cause of renovation and economic construction of Vietnam. This has also brought to an end a Southeast Asia divided into hostile groupings in the Cold War period and ushered in the prospect of united Southeast Asia of 10 nations.*¹⁵⁵

Vietnam was confident that its ASEAN membership would offer Hanoi regional and international recognition since ASEAN was a dynamic regional grouping commanding high prestige on the international arena, and maintaining dialogue and consultative relationship with all major countries of the world. It had also established ASEAN Regional Forum

¹⁵⁴ Noordin Sopice, "Southeast Asia as One," *The Nation* (Bangkok), 26 May 1997, A.9.

¹⁵⁵ For text of Speech by Deputy Foreign Minister Vu Khoan at International Symposium "ASEAN Today and Tomorrow" Hanoi, September 17-18, 1997, see National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities (NCSSH), *ASEAN: Today and Tomorrow*, Hanoi, 1998, p.19.

(ARF) and took initiative to launch yet another forum called Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Membership of such a potential grouping would end Vietnam's international isolation besides facilitating the diversification of its political and economic relations directly with key external actors including the US, Japan and the EU through the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, and participation in multilateral foras such as APEC and WTO and access to foreign donors and international institutions. Kim Ninh, a Vietnamese analyst has observed: "Politically, due to ASEAN's high international prestige, ASEAN membership would enhance Vietnam's diplomatic standing and integrate Vietnam's security with the security of the whole of Southeast Asia, thus creating an external environment favourable for economic development."¹⁶⁶ Vietnam also would be freed "from its intense preoccupation with big powers, particularly China, to a more balanced position in which regional cooperation with other Southeast Asian states plays a significant role."¹⁶⁷

Vietnam was also impressed by ASEAN's way for a peaceful resolution of the problems through mechanisms such as dialogue and consultation, self-restraint and consensus-building for conflict management and adherence to the lofty principles such as respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states which were enshrined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) signed by the ASEAN states in 1976. Thu My, a Vietnamese specialist of Southeast Asian affairs, hence noted:

¹⁶⁶ Hoang Anh Tuan, "Why Hasn't Vietnam Gained ASEAN Membership," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, December 1993, p.283, cited in Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam and ASEAN: A First Anniversary Assessment," *Southeast Asian Affairs 1997*, p.367.

¹⁶⁷ Kim Ninh, "Vietnam Struggle and Cooperation," in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Practice: Material and International Influences*, Stanford University Press, 1988, p.454.

*Regional integration through ASEAN has taken place not just on the basis of members' mutual interest in achieving peace, stability, cooperation and development; it has also engendered the principles which lay a foundation for peaceful and friendly relations among members: non-interference in each other's internal affairs, peaceful resolution of disputes, and respect for each other's independence and territorial integrity.*¹⁵⁸

Vietnam also looked forward to some ASEAN-style solidarity on such issues as facing down the West's allegations that its human rights record fell short and that it lacked political pluralism. A Vietnamese political analyst said, "We'll be quite happy to hide behind" Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad and Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew who defended vigorously the Asian values.¹⁵⁹ Vietnam also expected that its participation in ASEAN would help resolve Vietnam's bilateral problems with the states of the region. As Prof. Zagoria has pointed "Thailand views Vietnam not China, as its traditional rival for influence on the Indochina peninsula."¹⁶⁰ At a time when Washington was demanding the democratization of Vietnam as one of the conditions for normalization of its relations with Hanoi, the absence of a similar demand by ASEAN for admission, enthused Vietnam to seek admission into ASEAN.¹⁶¹

Vietnam was further encouraged to join ASEAN by the intense desire displayed by the ASEAN members through their high level visits to Hanoi. There was a sharp rise in the ministerial visits between Vietnam

¹⁵⁸ Dr.Thu My, "From ASEAN to ASEAN 10: Opportunities and Challenges," *ASEAN: Today and Tomorrow*, p.91.

¹⁵⁹ Adam Schwarz, "Joining the Fold," *FEER*, 16 March 1995, p.21.

¹⁶⁰ Donald S. Zagoria, "Joining ASEAN," p.157.

¹⁶¹ Ramses Amer, "Vietnam and ASEAN: A Case Study of Regional Integration and Conflict Management."

and ASEAN states which had started even before the Cambodian settlement, following the conclusion of Paris Peace Agreements in October 1991. The Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet visited all the ASEAN states in late 1991 and early 1992 to gather support for its admission into the Association.¹⁶² In November 1990, Indonesia's President Suharto visited Vietnam which was the first by the head of a state of an ASEAN country since 1975. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad and Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore visited Vietnam in April 1992. Though Thai leaders did not follow their counterparts in ASEAN region to pay high level visits to Vietnam, Thai Premier Chuan Likphai joined ASEAN leaders in calling for 'greater ASEAN' at the July 1994 AMM in Bangkok.¹⁶³

Economic Factor

From the perspective of ASEAN-10, one of the potential factors that favoured Vietnam's admission, was the trade and investment opportunities Vietnam had offered. Even before Vietnam joined ASEAN as a full member, Malaysia's state-owned oil company, Petronas had secured 20 percent stake in the development of the offshore Dai Hung Oil field. Singapore set its eyes on Vietnam's infrastructure development. In 1993, the bilateral trade between Singapore and Vietnam accounted for 25 per cent of Vietnam's total foreign trade.¹⁶⁴

After the demise of the Soviet Union, Vietnam which had earlier depended on the Soviet Union and its East European satellites for 80 per cent of its two-way trade partners, was attracted by the economic

¹⁶² See *Vietnam Courier*, March 1992, p.1.

¹⁶³ Donald S. Zagoria, "Joining ASEAN," p.168.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.162.

potentials of the countries in its neighbourhood while searching for new trading and investment. Vietnam also felt the urgency to catch up with its neighbours. Addressing the National Assembly on 20 October 1994, Premier Vo Van Kiet said:

*(Even if) we can reach the target of US \$ 450 per capita in 2000, the development gap between our country and most of the other regional countries will still be widening. It is a matter of life and death to find a way and immediately prepare for higher and stable development to gradually narrow the development gap after 2000.*¹⁶⁵

On the strength of its ASEAN membership, Vietnam hoped to benefit by joining ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the WTO.

Nguyen Quoc Dzung, director of the economics department at the Foreign Ministry, said in early 1995. "If we are in Asean, we are in a better position to draw in investment and trade both from the region and the West, because the world will consider Vietnam as similar to Asean countries. Otherwise, we are considered as different".¹⁶⁶ Echoing Hanoi's foreign policy goal, he added: "Once an Asean member, it is natural that we move to join the WTO."¹⁶⁷

Security factor

In the membership of ASEAN, Vietnam saw an opportunity to advance its national security interests. Seen with the backdrop of Cold War scenario, Vietnam's security had two dimensions – first, security from neighbouring countries and second, security from its northern neighbour

¹⁶⁵ *Indochina Digest*, 21 October 1994.

¹⁶⁶ Adam Schwarz, "Joining the Fold," p.21.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

which represented a perennial security threat. The threat perceptions and animosity that characterized the relations between ASEAN and Vietnam during the Cold War, lost their relevance in the context of improved relations between China and the Soviet Union and the US, and Vietnam normalized its relations and expanded cooperation with its erstwhile regional adversaries. Vietnam's acceptance and accession – much before its entry into ASEAN – to the TAC of 1976 which defined the code of conduct for inter-state relations so as to create a new regional order, served the purpose of insulating Vietnam from threats within the region.

Vietnam perceived its membership of ASEAN as critically important in the context of its tension-ridden relations with its historical rival, China. In an interview in Hanoi in early June 1992, deputy Foreign Minister Tran Quang Co said: "It's not good for a middle-sized country like Vietnam to live beside a big power without other friendly countries. It's good for us to have only one Southeast Asia."¹⁶⁸ Pointing out that Vietnam's joining ASEAN would serve as a major disincentive to China to pursue an aggressive policy towards Vietnam, a Vietnamese Foreign Ministry official said in 1992: "Sino-Vietnamese relations will be meshed within the much larger regional network of interlocking economic and political interests. It is an arrangement whereby anybody wanting to violate Vietnam's sovereignty would be violating the interest of other countries as well. This is the ideal strategic option for Vietnam. It is also the most practical."¹⁶⁹ While sharing the views of the Vietnamese, a

¹⁶⁸ Henry Kamn, "Vietnam, on Its Own at last, Jostles for place in New Asia," *IHT*, 20-21 June 1992.

¹⁶⁹ David Wurfel, "Between China and ASEAN: The Dialectics of Recent Vietnamese Foreign Policy," in Carlyle A. Thayer & Ramses Amer (eds.) *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition*, (Singapore, 1999), p.153.

Japanese scholar underlined the strategic significance of Vietnam's membership of ASEAN in the context of Sino-Vietnamese spat over the Spratly Islands: "Convinced that the China threat is real, but anxious to avoid hostilities, Vietnam is ... trying to draw closer to ASEAN, which shares Vietnam's concerns about ambitions in the Spratly Islands. China, it is argued, would hesitate to attack the islands of an ASEAN-related Vietnam, since such an attack would antagonize the other countries of ASEAN, which China looks on ... as potential allies in its struggle with big countries in the Asia-Pacific region."¹⁷⁰ The China threat was one of the major factors that pushed Vietnam to sign the TAC in July 1992. Vietnam's search for more friends against China propelled Hanoi to normalize its ties with Washington.¹⁷¹ When the AMM in Manila announced in response to China's "provocative" actions, the "ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea" on 22 July 1992, calling for peaceful settlement of the issue of Spratly Islands,¹⁷² Vietnam's Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam who attended the AMM, endorsed it.

Vietnam's friendly disposition to ASEAN and its deep interest in ASEAN membership, created a supportive environment for Vietnam to join ASEAN. On 22 July 1992, with the accession of Vietnam to the TAC which was a prerequisite to gain ASEAN Membership, Vietnam was accorded an 'observer' status in ASEAN. Vietnam participated in the 26th and 27 AMMs in 1993 and 1994 respectively as an 'observer'. Vietnam formally applied for full membership of ASEAN on 17 October 1994. At

¹⁷⁰ Tatsumi Okabe, "Coping with China," p.129.

¹⁷¹ Nayan Chanda, "War and Peace" *FEER*, 4 May 1995, p.24.

¹⁷² For text of "ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea" see ASEAN, *Handbook on Selected ASEAN Political Documents*, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, 1998, pp.35-38.

the 28th AMM in Brunei on 28 July 1995, Vietnam joined ASEAN as the seventh member. Commenting on Vietnam's entry into ASEAN, a Western analyst said, that in the history of ASEAN "a giant step was made in 1995 when one-time pariah state Vietnam became a member."¹⁷³ Speaking on the occasion of Vietnam's admission into ASEAN, Vietnam's Foreign Minister, Nguyen Man Cam said:

*Vietnam's accession into ASEAN, to be followed by eventual enlargement of our Association including all ten Southeast Asian countries, marks a qualitative change in the condition of our region 50 years after the end of World War II. This is an eloquent testimony to the ever growing trends of regionalism and globalization in the increasingly interdependent world.*¹⁷⁴

Elated Indonesian Foreign Minister of Indonesia Ali Alatas, described Vietnam a "very important country" and said: "we are very happy that only a few years after we were at loggerheads, they are now one of us."¹⁷⁵

Ever since Vietnam emerged as reunified independent and sovereign nation in 1975, Hanoi pursued socialist economy characterized by state ownership and Central planning, perceiving that it was the surest way to prosperity. Failure of the socialist economic management system to deliver goods, compelled Hanoi to take a decision at its Sixth Party Congress in 1986 to encourage private enterprise, free markets and global engagement without giving up socialism. This occasioned the radical transformation of Vietnam's world view from the one, based entirely on the struggle between "socialism and capitalism" to the one based on "global

¹⁷³ See, "ASEAN is Floundering," <http://www.edi.org/asia/fa120100.wm#top>. For Vietnam's admission into ASEAN see **Appendix-V**.

¹⁷⁴ **ASEAN at 30**, (Jakarta, 1997), pp.46-47.

¹⁷⁵ **Vietnam News**, 28 July 1995.

economic interdependence". This transformation required Vietnam to pursue a "multi-directional foreign policy" which was facilitated by Soviet Union's pursuit of détente with the US and China and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Vietnam, hence, normalized relations with China and the US. Vietnam also undertook the programme of diversification of its foreign relations in accordance with which Hanoi developed relations rapidly with Western nations and the countries of East and Southeast Asia. This all-embracing foreign policy was designed to achieve rapid strides in the sphere of domestic economy as well as to promote its strategic interests including those in South China Sea where it has been involved in a contest with China for the ownership of Paracels and Spratlys islands. Vietnam's entry into ASEAN marked the culmination of its blossoming foreign relations.