Vietnam's Communist Revolution

The Power and Limits of Ideology

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dogmatic belief in the Stalinist model created a severe and prolonged economic crisis. The collapse of the Soviet bloc offered Vietnam an escape from Cold War entanglements, but Hanoi failed to take that route. In retrospect, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the deaths of the first generation of Vietnamese leaders, and the implementation of market reform in Vietnam effectively meant the end of the Vietnamese revolution. In response to the collapse of world communism, the hardliners in Hanoi led by Nguyen Van Linh blocked political reform and suppressed popular demands for political liberalization. Yet their policy was a rearguard move to defend the regime, not an act to sustain the revolution, their denials otherwise.

This revolution came to an end, not by conscious choice nor marked by a big bang, but by the quiet abandonment of its goals and by the gradual disintegration of revolutionary values and institutions. As the quasi-capitalist economy took hold, many children of revolutionaries have morphed into corrupt bureaucrats and red capitalists who grab lands from farmers, sell national resources to foreign investors, and pocket the profits. Nevertheless, the legacies of ideology remain significant, as will be seen in the Chapter 9.

9

Legacies of Ideology, 1991–2010

The Vietnamese Communist Party turned sixty in 1990. The young and daring men and women who were its first members were now in their seventies and eighties. Four of the most senior Party leaders died in the late 1980s (Le Duan, Le Duc Tho, Truong Chinh, and Pham Hung). Nguyen Van Linh, the incumbent General Secretary, was seventy-five. The oldest member of the Politburo (Vo Chi Cong) was seventy-nine, and its youngest (Dao Duy Tung) was sixty-seven. The revolution may have prevailed against the cruel French, the odious Americans, the chauvinist Chinese, and the traitorous Khmer Rouge, but now was slowly succumbing to the Grim Reaper.

Just three years earlier, the Party had issued a call for foreign direct investment. Next was the allocation of collectivized land to farming households who could now grow and sell their own crops freely after having paid a certain amount of taxes in kind or cash. In the cities, prices were gradually liberalized while rations were abolished. The government now tolerated private enterprises and private trade instead of persecuting them. However, just when the market economy was welcome back and Stalinist institutions were dismantled, political turmoil first threatened China and Eastern Europe, and then spread to the Soviet Union. When a group of Soviet leaders launched a coup to depose Gorbachev in August 1991, Hanoi quickly voiced support for it. Vietnamese leaders then watched helplessly as Russian President Boris Yeltsin turned the tide and engineered the implosion of the Soviet Union. By all indications the Vietnamese revolution effectively ended then, with the first generation of revolutionaries dying in droves, with the substitution of dysfunctional central planning and unpopular collective farms by a market

economy, and with the stunning disintegration of the mighty Soviet camp. Nevertheless, the revolutionary ideology would take years to fade and is still influential in Vietnam today through complex mechanisms.

In a vastly different postrevolutionary world landscape, ideological concepts still guided the thinking of Vietnamese leaders throughout the 1990s, while elements of liberal or realist worldviews were tolerated (but not incorporated). By the early 2000s, Party documents and military writings in fact indicated a revival of the Marxist-Leninist worldview. Loyalists to this worldview were concerned about American interventions in southern Europe and the Middle East. They were encouraged by rising global criticism of and opposition to those American policies. Up to the mid-2000s the Vietnamese People's Army (PAVN) still considered the United States as Vietnam's strategic enemy despite the normalization of relations between the two countries in 1995 and the signing of a bilateral trade agreement in 2001.

Even though Marxism-Leninism no longer governs the daily management of the Vietnamese state, it retains its influences on the overall orientations of Vietnam's foreign relations through political culture and institutional and informal mechanisms. Ideological reflexes are creating a schizophrenic state in Vietnam as shown in its policy toward the United States and China. The rising of China as a regional hegemon and global power is confronting Hanoi leaders with an existential dilemma and deeply uncertain future.

"A FRIEND OF ALL NATIONS"?

After the Chengdu trip in 1990, Sino-Vietnamese relations were placed on the path to normalization even though Beijing turned down Hanoi's invitation to form an alliance to rescue world socialism. At the same time, Washington had partially relaxed its embargo on Vietnam when Hanoi cooperated on finding American GIs missing in action and on other issues. In June 1991, the Party held its Seventh Party Congress at which a new Program was approved. Nguyen Van Linh's Political Report read at the Congress called for continuing market reform while affirming the Party's unwavering loyalty to the socialist path.[1] Linh stepped down at the Congress and was replaced by Do Muoi, who was only two years

[1] "Tiep tuc dua su nghiep doi moi tien len theo con duong Xa hoi chu nghia" [Continue to advance the achievements of reform along the Socialist path]. *Tap Chi Cong San* 7 (1991), 16–17.

younger. Muoi was, according to his official biography, from a peasant household and had worked as a house painter before joining the revolution in 1940.[2] He is known as the Party's henchman for his role in the earlier campaigns to expropriate capitalist enterprises in North Vietnam in the 1950s and again in the South in the 1970s.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991 shook the new leadership team in Hanoi. An editorial on the Party journal reviewed the history of world and Vietnamese communism since Marx to show that setbacks and challenges had not been rare and had always been overcome.[3] The crucial thing, the editorial argued, was "to firmly keep our faith, [because] if we lose our property and even our honor, we can still earn them back. If we lose our faith, we'll lose everything."

According to the editorial, there were five reasons for maintaining the belief in socialism. First, socialism had emerged in human history following "objective laws" and could not be easily destroyed. Back in the 1920s, the Soviet Union had survived for decades as the only socialist country despite being "encircled by capitalism." The implication was that socialist Vietnam could survive standing alone even as the rest of the communist camp went capitalist. Second, Vietnam had rich natural resources and a large population still loyal to the Party. Third, the Party had realized its earlier mistakes and embarked on reforming the economy and building a more effective organization. Fourth, the government had been making progress toward improving governance and "democracy" while curbing corruption. Finally, Vietnam's foreign relations had expanded, resulting in growing exports and foreign investment.

Those "objective conditions" formed the basis for the editorial to predict that the coming years would be exciting ones for the Vietnamese revolution. Ironically, economic reform, improved governance, and growing foreign investment were anything but revolutionary. The emphasis of the editorial was in fact not on any particular policies but on faith in revolutionary ideals. This turn away from revolution was just as evident in the Party Program approved at the Seventh Party Congress. The Program did not trumpet the march to socialism but highlighted the need to first combat poverty and backwardness.[4] It was admitted that Vietnam had not

[2] Huy Duc, *Ben thang cuoc*, v. 2, 257–259.

[3] "Giu vung niem tin di con duong da chon" [Keeping faith in the path that we have chosen], *Tap chi Cong san* 10 (1991), 2–4.

[4] "Cuong linh xay dung dat nuoc trong thoi ky qua do len Chu nghia xa hoi" [Party Program to build the country during the transition period to socialism], *Tap chi Cong san* 7 (1991), 31–34.

yet recovered from the general socioeconomic crisis of the mid-1980s, despite encouraging initial results of market reform.

In public, Hanoi now pledged to be friends of all countries in the world. Vietnam's foreign relations expanded greatly in the early 1990s as a result.[5] Internally, Vietnamese leaders still evaluated foreign relations through an ideological lens. At the special midterm Party Congress in 1994, the Politburo offered the following remarks in response to comments from the Central Committee on its Draft Political Report to be read at the Congress:

> In international relations, [our policy] "to be friends of all nations in the world community" is designed to take advantage of shared interests in concrete issues and concrete policy areas with other nations [in this] and other regions, within the framework of "collaborating while struggling."
>
> For the sake of our mission to develop socialism and defend our fatherland, we place friends in different categories, with some closer and others far. By their nature, our long-term allies are the socialist forces (or countries), the communist and worker parties, and movements for national independence and revolutionary and progressive causes. We affirm solidarity and mutual support with those forces and movements through clever and adaptive [*linh hoat*] measures that are suitable to objective conditions and to our own and our friends' subjective capacity.[6]

It is clear from this high-level internal communication that the Politburo still took ideology seriously as a criterion to evaluate who were true friends. In the short term, interests might need to be attended to, but in the long term, ideology defined interests.

Ideological commitments were combined with practical interests in the way Party leaders perceived existential threats to Vietnam. Spelled out at the midterm Congress in 1994 was the formula of "four threats" [*bon nguy co*] to the regime. These included, in this order, economic backwardness, the loss of socialist orientations, corruption, and "peaceful

[5] Carlyle Thayer, "Upholding state sovereignty through global integration: Remaking Vietnamese National Security," paper presented at the Workshop, "Vietnam, East Asia, and Beyond," at the Southeast Asia Research Center, City University of Hong Kong, December 2008.

[6] "Y kien cua Bo Chinh tri so 154/TLHN ngay 30/11/1993 ve mot so van de cua Du thao Bao cao chinh tri qua thao luan cua Trung uong" [The Politburo's opinion no. 154/TLHN on November 30, 1993 about some issues in the Draft Political Report raised in the Central Committee discussion]. Photocopy of document is found in Nguyen Dinh Thuc, "Chu truong cua Dang Cong san Viet nam ve quan he doi ngoai voi ASEAN (1967–1995)" [The VCP's policy on Vietnam's relations with ASEAN], unpublished PhD dissertation, Hoc Vien Chinh Tri Quoc Gia [National Institute of Politics] (Ho Chi Minh City, 2001), Appendix 7, 264–265. Available at the Vietnam National Library, Hanoi, call number L7924.

evolution." Of the four, peaceful evolution had been considered a threat at least since the 1970s. Essentially, this term referred to a strategy of the imperialist camp to engineer revolt or regime change in the socialist countries by propaganda and by cultural, economic, and political tactics instead of by military means. As such, peaceful evolution was simply a variation of the two-camp doctrine, a continuation of the Cold War by peaceful means. The formula of "four threats" was a compromise: whereas the first and third represented practical interests, the second and fourth affirmed ideological loyalty. The method of compromise was to add and not to integrate different elements into a unified conceptual framework. This failure to integrate the new into the old (or to replace the old entirely with the new) indicated ideological incongruence and conflict. New concepts were introduced but old ones based on an opposing worldview refused to disappear.[7]

"PARTNERS FOR COOPERATION AND OBJECTS OF STRUGGLE"

By the early 2000s, Vietnam had experienced a decade of gradual economic opening and stunning turnaround. Policy texts from the Eighth Party Congress in 1996 through the Ninth Party Congress in 2001 and the Eighth Central Committee Plenum in 2003 suggested marked changes in Party worldview in response to new developments.[8] Ideological filters played an important role in the way Party leaders interpreted the changes, however. Two examples that follow are sufficient to demonstrate the point.

The resolutions of the Ninth Party Congress and the Eighth Central Committee Plenum discussed extensively two new concepts – namely,

[7] For a similar view, see Carlyle Thayer, "Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution." In Thayer and Amer, eds., *Vietnam's Foreign Policy*, 2–3; Chu Van Chuc, "Qua trinh doi moi tu duy doi ngoai," *Nghien Cuu Quoc Te* 58 (September 2005), 6.

[8] Dang Cong San Viet Nam, *Van Kien Dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu VIII* [Documents of the Eighth Party Congress] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 1996); Dang Cong San Viet Nam, *Cac Nghi quyet cua Trung uong Dang 1996–1999* [Central Committee Resolutions during 1996–1999] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2000); Ban Tu Tuong-Van Hoa Trung Uong, *Tai lieu huong dan nghien cuu can van kien (du thao) trinh Dai Hoi Dang toan quoc lan thu IX cua Dang* [Materials to guide the study of draft documents presented at the Ninth Party Congress] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2000); Ban Tu Tuong-Van Hoa Trung Uong, *Tai lieu hoc tap Nghi quyet Hoi nghi lan thu tam Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang khoa IX* [Materials for the study of the Eighth Central Committee Plenum] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2004). The Eighth Central Plenum in 2003 was devoted specifically to strategic international issues facing Vietnam and set long-term directions of Vietnam's foreign and defense policy.

the "knowledge economy" [*kinh te tri thuc*] and "globalization" [*toan cau hoa*]. Party theorists believed that the new knowledge economy was a double-edged sword.[9] On the one hand, this economy might enable Vietnam to catch up with the industrialized countries in less time. It was noted that it took England 100 years, the United States and Germany 60 years, and the newly industrialized countries 30 to 40 years to industrialize. Vietnam could industrialize even faster if it knew how to develop the knowledge economy.[10] On the other hand, Party theorists cautioned that "developed capitalist countries and transnational corporations" dominated scientific fields. As a result, scientific achievements might further impoverish and enslave rather than assist developing countries.

The same reservation was displayed in the case of globalization. Party theorists viewed globalization as fostering an integrated world offering many opportunities for countries to collaborate and develop. At the same time, perhaps borrowing some ideas from the antiglobalization movement, they warned about the danger of big "capitalist countries" to dominate developing ones.[11] They also were concerned about the future division of the world into two camps of developed/rich and underdeveloped/poor countries, as a result of globalization.

United States interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq in the early 2000s reanimated the declining belief in Marxism-Leninism in Vietnam. Hanoi condemned American acts as violating other nations' sovereignty and right to self-determination.[12] It accused the United States of harboring the ambition to be the world's hegemon [*doc ton lanh dao the gioi*] and intervening everywhere to fulfill that ambition to the extent of inciting secessionism and religious and ethnic conflicts around the world. To demonstrate that it meant business, the Vietnamese government canceled meetings earlier scheduled for the US Ambassador. A protest was organized in front of the American Embassy in Hanoi for the same purpose.[13] Deputy Foreign Minister Le Van Bang told the US Ambassador that some Vietnam War veterans, now in senior positions, even vowed to go to Iraq to fight for Saddam Hussein.

[9] Ban Tu Tuong-Van Hoa Trung Uong, *Tai lieu huong dan*, 13.
[10] Ibid., 131.
[11] The document cited the debates at a conference coorganized by the World Bank and the Panos Institute in May 2000 that discussed the negative aspects of globalization (Ibid., 15).
[12] Ban Tu Tuong-Van Hoa Trung Uong, *Tai lieu huong dan*, 18–19; Ban Tu Tuong-Van Hoa Trung Uong, *Tai lieu hoc tap*, 29, 39.
[13] http://wikileaks.org/cable/2003/03/03HANOI785.html

As widespread anti-American protests erupted around the world, Vietnamese theorists revived the 1960s concept of the "world people movement" [*phong trao nhan dan the gioi*]. Lumped together within this movement were "the struggle for peace and national independence," "the movement against globalization," and the protests and insurgencies in US-occupied Afghanistan and Iraq.[14] The rise of the world people movement appeared to give the Party greater optimism in the future of socialism. Unlike the early 1990s when Party leaders lamented about "the waning of world socialism," they now saw in the current situation an opportunity for socialism to renew itself.[15]

Hanoi was less sanguine about regional security, however, noting several "agents of instability," including the rise of terrorism and ethnic conflicts in Southeast Asia, rivalries among "big countries" in the region, and increased US military presence there. Party strategists were worried that "bilateral and multilateral agreements were allowing the United States to intervene more deeply into the region, to incite secessionism, [and] to pull Southeast Asia into its orbit." It was further projected that "outside forces" might be tempted to intervene more blatantly into Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to promote "peaceful evolution" and "to sabotage our revolution."

In response to a tense world situation, the Eighth Central Committee Plenum resolution of 2003 proposed a new principle for foreign relations:

> Anyone who respects our independence [and] sovereignty and wishes to establish friendly, equally cooperative, and mutually beneficial relationships with Vietnam is our partner for cooperation [*doi tac*]. Any group that conspires to frustrate our goals of building and defending our country is an object of our struggle [*doi tuong dau tranh*]. On the other hand, in the current changing and complicated situation, we need to have a dialectic view of this issue. With the objects of struggle there may be areas for cooperation; with the partners, there may exist areas where their interests are contradictory to ours."[16]

Some have argued that these concepts of partners for cooperation and objects of struggles reflected more pragmatic and less dogmatic thinking.[17] On a closer look, the new principle still echoed the sentiments of the 1970s vanguard internationalism. Back then Hanoi leaders had imagined themselves leading world revolution and having the leverage

[14] Ban Tu Tuong-Van Hoa Trung Uong, *Tai lieu hoc tap*, 40.
[15] Ibid., 42.
[16] Ibid., 46–47.
[17] Carlyle Thayer, "Security Relations and Prospects for Strategic Dialogue between the United States and Vietnam," unpublished paper, 9.

to impose preconditions on the superpowers for doing business with Vietnam. The new principle sounded as if preconditions existed for foreign countries to be Vietnam's partners. The imagination of hostile forces ganging up against Vietnam similarly betrayed an exaggerated sense of self-importance bordering on self-delusion and paranoia.[18] Although the Party called for flexibility in dealing with both partners and objects of struggle, the fundamental and conceptual separation between the two groups remained.

Witnessing the apparent revival of leftist movements around the world, Party leaders now desired to strengthen "friendly and cooperative traditional relationships" [*quan he truyen thong*] with socialist countries and the "Indochinese brothers."[19] Not only would those traditional relationships express Vietnam's "selfless internationalism and clear affirmation of proletarian values," but they also would help to consolidate socialist countries and to advance the "world revolutionary movement."[20] At the same time, the Plenum resolution restated existing policy that "Vietnam wishes to be a friend and trustful partner of other countries in the international community, striving for peace, independence, and development."[21] This time, the new phrase "trustful partner" [*doi tac tin cay*] was added, and it was explained that this phrase was to express more clearly Vietnam's wish to "actively" establish "long-term and effective" relationships with other countries, especially in the economic realm.

As the worldview of Vietnamese leaders evolved in response to developments in the post-Soviet era, Marxism-Leninism continued to influence their thinking to a great extent. While the Party was willing to accept elements of other worldviews, these were held subordinate to long-held views. Old ideological assumptions still acted as filters for new ideas. Next, we will turn to Vietnamese military thinking, which further demonstrates how Marxism-Leninism still wields its influence in a key state institution with the power to shape Vietnam's foreign relations.[22]

[18] This Vietnamese attitude is best treated in Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*.

[19] "Cuong linh xay dung dat nuoc trong thoi ky qua do len Chu nghia xa hoi" [Party Program to build the country during the transition period to socialism], in Dang Cong San Viet Nam, *Cac Nghi quyet cua Trung uong Dang 1996–1999*, 308.

[20] Ban Tu Tuong-Van Hoa Trung Uong, *Tai lieu huong dan*, 271.

[21] Ibid., 266.

[22] On the role of the military in Vietnam's political system, see Carlyle Thayer and Gerard Hervouet, "The Army as a Political and Economic Actor in Vietnam," in Christopher Goscha and Benoit de Treglode, eds., *Naissance d'un Etat-Parti – Le Viet Nam depuis 1945; The Birth of a Party-State – Vietnam since 1945* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004), 355–381.

MILITARY PERCEPTION OF THREATS

We saw earlier how Hanoi's attitude toward the Soviet Union and China was reversed during 1989–1990. Gorbachev changed from a trusted comrade to a despicable traitor, and Deng Xiaoping traveled in the opposite direction. Military thinking in Vietnam underwent a similarly significant change in the same period. The Tiananmen event, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and the US invasion of Panama combined to force the People's Army (PAVN) to reevaluate its strategic thinking. The imperialist/American conspiracy to generate peaceful evolution and regime change in socialist countries now became a new major threat. Calling for "a new thinking," a Vietnamese general in fact restated old concepts in a new context:

> [The deep cause of war] in recent decades is the selfish class interests of monopolistic capitalism, the defense-industry complex, international weapon dealers and primarily American imperialism ... Our own experience with cruel and cunning American imperialism tells us that we should hold absolutely no illusion of persuading American monopolistic capitalists to solve international problems by civilized and humane means.[23]

In 1993, the military intelligence agency sponsored the translation of a Chinese book that presented the history of the Cold War since 1945 as the history of American imperialism adjusting its anticommunist strategy from containment to peaceful evolution.[24] Although containment had failed, this book argued that "peaceful evolution" had succeeded in destroying the Soviet bloc. This master narrative helped Vietnamese military leaders to update and consolidate their Marxist-Leninist worldview. The "historical evidence" collected by the Chinese, which included quotes by George Kennan, Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, and Bill Clinton, provided the "scientific basis" for the claim that nothing had changed since the height of the Cold War in the 1950s. The world remained deeply divided into two camps.

As the world greeted a new millennium, the PAVN's fear of "peaceful evolution" intensified as a result of US attacks in Kosovo, Iraq, and

[23] Maj. Gen. Prof. Le Hong Quang, "Chien tranh va chinh tri – tu duy moi" [War and politics – new thinking], *Tap Chi Quoc Phong Toan Dan* [All-People Defense Review, hereafter *TCQPTD*], 3: (1990), 41. This is the theoretical journal of the PAVN.

[24] Tong Cuc II [General Department II], *Chien luoc dien bien hoa binh cua My* [The US strategy of peaceful evolution] (Hanoi: Tong Cuc II, 1993). See also, *Ban ve van de chong dien bien hoa binh* [On the problem of battling peaceful evolution] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 1993).

Afghanistan. There was broad and clear consensus within military circles that the greatest external adversaries were the United States and overseas Vietnamese, whereas internal enemies comprised a broader array of forces, including the market economy and Western values and ideologies. As one colonel analyzed, the security threats posed by the market economy and industrialization were threefold.[25] First, industrialization provided the capacity to modernize the military but also promoted the worship of technology [*tu tuong ky tri*], which he viewed as being "foreign to Vietnam's military art." Military professionalism could lead to mistaken personnel policy based on academic degrees and not along class lines. The modernization of the army could also generate contempt for *political* cadres and tasks as opposed to *military* ones. Second, abundant economic opportunities in a market economy could breed "utilitarianism" [*tu tuong thuc dung*], making it difficult for the military to retain its officers or to indoctrinate them in political values. Rising social inequality and a revival of religions might be reflected within the military and eventually weaken solidarity. Finally, the global integration of the Vietnamese economy was viewed as having blurred the distinction between socialism and capitalism in the minds of officers and soldiers. In the case of a global economic downturn, subsequent recession in Vietnam, and an enemy attack, the military could lose control over its men and women to the allure of capitalism.

The key strategy to cope with the negative impacts of the market economy on the military was the strengthening of class-based recruitment and personnel policy together with indoctrination. As Senior General Le Van Dung, the PAVN's Chief of Staff, instructed, "We should not implement 'classism' but also should not neglect the class line in our personnel management."[26] "Classism" alluded to the rigid application of class-based quotas during the Land Reform of the 1950s that led to the killing of thousands of "rich peasants" and "middle peasants" wrongly classified as "landlords." In addition, General Dung advised that each unit analyze the social backgrounds of their soldiers and find out the social class composition of the locality where the unit was stationed. This was to devise

[25] Col. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Hoi, "May suy nghi ve tang cuong su lanh dao cua Dang doi voi Quan doi truoc nhung bien doi kinh te-xa hoi hien nay" [Thoughts on strengthening Party leadership over the military in response to current socio-economic changes], *TCQPTD* 7 (2002), 71–73.

[26] Sen. Gen. Le Van Dung, *Xay dung Quan Doi Nhan Dan Viet Nam ve chinh tri* [Building the political character of the PAVN] (Hanoi: Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 2004), 188–193.

appropriate measures in thought control and in personnel management to prevent the unit from being negatively impacted by local conditions.

Military leaders were especially wary about calls from overseas for the "depoliticization" of the military or the PAVN's breaking away from Party control. Most professional militaries elsewhere make pledges to be loyal first and foremost to their nations, but for the PAVN, devotion to the Communist Party preceded its loyalty to the Vietnamese nation. PAVN leaders viewed those calls for depoliticization as part of a "plot for peaceful evolution." To preempt such a process, they called for increased Party leadership over the military and, as a first step, to increase the number of Party members in the armed forces. Toward this goal, one division commander proposed that promotion be tied to willingness to join the Party, if other political conditions for Party membership were also met.[27] In his division, for example, soldiers were eligible to join the Party in their second year in the service. Career soldiers and graduates of officers' training schools were not to be promoted or eligible for pay raises if they did not seek membership in the Party in their second or third year.

Military commentators were vitriolic with regard to criticisms of the Marxist-Leninist ideology; they defended the faith as if it were their bunker. Coordinated counterattacks against "hostile views" were launched almost daily in the military newspaper, *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* [People's Army Daily]. Examples of those views were postings on the websites of overseas Vietnamese that demanded multiparty democracy for Vietnam and blamed Marxism-Leninism for Vietnam's backwardness; and *samizdat* materials written and circulated by dissidents that called for the Party to abandon socialism.

As recently as 2005, Vietnam's military strategists appeared to regard the United States as the chief strategic enemy. General Pham Van Tra, a Politburo member and Minister of Defense, wrote in 2004 that "in our future war to defend our Fatherland, the primary enemy would be imperialist armed forces and their allies and lackeys. This enemy would attack us with advanced means and hi-tech weapons."[28] Although the United States was not named, it was clear what "imperialist armed forces" the general was referring to. Based on Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, it was

[27] Party Secretary, Deputy Division Commander Col. Mai Quang Phan, "Cong tac to chuc, cong tac can bo o Su doan Quan Tien Phong" [The personnel tasks at the Quan Tien Phong division], *TCQPTD* 7: (2002), 43–46.

[28] Pham Van Tra, *60 Nam Quan Doi Nhan Dan Viet Nam* [The PAVN at sixty years] (Hanoi: Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 2004), 204, 212.

further imagined that an American invasion of Vietnam would follow the scenario below:

> [In the case of war,] it is certain that the enemy would attack us first from the air on a large scale, with guided missiles and advanced aircrafts armed with smart bombs with high destructive capacity. Unlike their previous bombing of our Northern region [during the Vietnam War], the enemy would not increase the intensity of the bombing gradually but would ... strike on a large scale at all targets – first at air defense systems, airports ... then at economic and political targets all over the country, leading to the paralysis of our economy and political instability. Taking advantage of this situation, domestic counterrevolutionary forces would launch an uprising and seize our local governments in strategic locations. The enemy could then move their rapid reactionary forces in to help those domestic rebels to declare a government [*dung ngon co*] and set up a base, then call for international support to overthrow our regime.[29]

The debate at this point on the pages of the PAVN defense journal was not about who the enemy was, but about the appropriate strategy of defense: whether to try to resist the initial attack as much as possible to defend the large population centers, or to withdraw into base areas in the uplands waiting for the opportunity to counterattack.[30] Vietnam had had contradicting experiences in this matter. On the one hand, its experience during the Vietnam War suggested the strategy of people's war using the countryside to surround the cities. On the other hand, its experience in the Sino-Vietnamese war demonstrated its capacity to resist even a strong enemy blitzkrieg.[31] On the one hand, the losses of major population and economic centers could be too much to accept. On the other hand, US forces would be armed with far more advanced weapons than Chinese ones – it would be too risky to engage the Americans on their first strikes. By around 2005, there was no clear consensus yet beyond building up a

[29] Col. Pham Trang, "Nang cao trinh do, kha nang hiep dong tac chien giua cac binh doan chu luc va khu vuc phong thu trong chien tranh bao ve to quoc" [Raising the skills and coordinating capacity for main forces corps and defense zones in war to defend our country], *TCQPTD* 9: (2002), 74–76.

[30] Lt. Gen. Assoc. Prof. Khieu Anh Lan, "May van de ve quan diem phong ngu chien thuat trong chien tranh bao ve to quoc" [On the viewpoints related to tactical defense in war to defend our country], *TCQPTD* 3: (1994), 30–32; Col. Pham Trang, "Xay dung the tran quoc phong toan dan" [Building the battle plan for all-people defense], *TCQPTD* 4: (2002), 35–37.

[31] Maj. Le Thanh, "May suy nghi ve to chuc luc luong va nghe thuat quan su chuan bi cho chien tranh bao ve to quoc" [Thoughts on the organization of forces and on military art in preparation for war to defend our country], *TCQPTD* 11: (1988), 43–47; Lt. Gen. Prof. Pham Hong Son, "Ve cach danh bao ve To quoc" [On the tactics to defend our country], *TCQPTD* 12: (1988), 37–45.

general preparedness in all regions. General Tra apparently supported a compromise, which was the avoidance of the enemy's concentrated strategic attacks in the initial phase of such a war while a limited counterattack by Vietnamese main forces was attempted.[32]

Strategic debates in Vietnamese military circles indicated that the old Marxist-Leninist ideology still dominated military thinking and planning. PAVN leaders were ambivalent about market reform and they were, just as ever, prepared to engage Yankee imperialism in combat. Some observers have characterized Vietnam's security behavior in recent years as "hedging": It avoids alliances and seeks friendly relationships with all the major powers.[33] This characterization underestimates how seriously Vietnamese military leaders perceived the United States as a security threat, as recently as 2005.[34]

THE SCHIZOPHRENIC STATE

The PAVN is no doubt one of the most loyalist institutions in the Vietnamese state today. It was founded as a revolutionary army and throughout its early life was led directly by revolutionaries, some of whom have doubled as professional soldiers. Other loyalist institutions include the Ministry of Public Security and Party agencies involved in political organization, mass mobilization, and propaganda. Because these institutions are overrepresented in the Politburo,[35] the highest policy-making body of the state, and because they control all the media and coercive means, ideology still wields significant power in the public sphere. Even if few people today, including perhaps most Party leaders and members, truly believe in Marxism-Leninism, it would be politically suicidal for

[32] Pham Van Tra, *60 Nam Quan Doi Nhan Dan Viet Nam*, 207.

[33] Evelyn Goh, *Meeting the China Challenge: The US in Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies* (Washington: East-West Center, 2005).

[34] For an astute analysis of US-Vietnamese defense relations from the American perspective, see William Jordan, Lewis Stern and Walter Lohman, "US-Vietnam Defense Relations: Investing in Strategic Alignment," *Backgrounder* 2707(July 18, 2012). Available at http://report.heritage.org/bg2707.

[35] In the 14-member Politburo elected for 2011-2016, for example, representatives from the military, public security, and Party organization and propaganda account for half its membership (Nguyen Phu Trong, Le Hong Anh, Tran Dai Quang, Phung Quang Thanh, To Huy Rua, Ngo Van Du, and Dinh The Huynh). In the incumbent Politburo of 19 members (term 2016-2021), their proportion increased to about two-thirds (Nguyen Phu Trong, Tran Dai Quang, Truong Hoa Binh, Pham Minh Chinh, Dinh The Huynh, Ngo Xuan Lich, To Lam, Truong Thi Mai, Nguyen Thien Nhan, Tong Thi Phong, Vo Van Thuong, and Tran Quoc Vuong).

them to challenge the doctrine on which the Party was founded and which is still revered as the quasi-official religion.

Countering those loyalist institutions are state agencies involved in foreign affairs, trade, economic planning, and other technical fields. In these branches of the state, thinking is governed by realist and liberal worldviews that build on concepts such as national interests and global interdependence. Many younger officials of these ministries have been trained in the West and hardly differ from their counterparts in other countries.[36] Even older officials no longer speak in Marxist-Leninist terms.[37] Unlike the United States, where the Secretary of State is one of the two or three most powerful members of the cabinet, Vietnamese foreign ministers have often been excluded from the Politburo. Some ministers have been made members of that powerful body in the past, but they have not played any significant or active role in shaping foreign policy (and were likely to have been appointed for that very reason).[38] Ministers of economic and technical ministries are in even worse positions – they have never made it to the Politburo level.

The influence of Marxism-Leninism on foreign policy is channeled not only through loyalist institutions but also through Party elders who no longer hold formal power but remain influential. This ex-institutional influence can be observed in the removal of General Secretary Le Kha Phieu from power in 2001 by three "senior advisors" of the VCP. These advisors were Do Muoi, Le Duc Anh, and Vo Van Kiet, who had been the Party's general secretary, state president, and prime minister, respectively, from 1991 to 1998.[39] Given that their entire careers were spent battling

[36] For example, see the analyses in Pham Binh Minh, ed. *Dinh huong chien luoc doi ngoai Viet Nam den 2020* [Guiding Vietnam's foreign strategy] (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2010). A son of former Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach whom we have met in Chapter 8, Minh was trained at Tufts University and is currently minister of foreign affairs.

[37] See articles written by Le Cong Phung, "Tinh chat, xu huong thoi dai hien nay" [The nature and trends of the current era], in Hoi Dong Ly Luan Trung Uong [Central Council on Theory], *Nhung van de ly luan va thuc tien moi dat ra trong tinh hinh hien nay* [Emerging theoretical and practical issues in the current situation] (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2011), 11–63; and by Duong Van Quang, "Nhung dac diem va xu the cua the gioi" [The characteristics and trends of the world], in Hoi Dong Ly Luan Trung Uong [Central Council on Theory], *Nhung van de ly luan va thuc tien moi dat ra trong tinh hinh hien nay* [Emerging theoretical and practical issues in the current situation] (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2011),108–189. Phung is a former Ambassador to the United States and Quang former Ambassador to Singapore and director of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

[38] Examples are Nguyen Manh Cam and Pham Gia Khiem.

[39] Huy Duc, *Ben Thang Cuoc*, v. 2, ch. 20.

imperialism, most Party elders are likely to be loyalists. Among the three aforementioned men, for example, Kiet was the only one open to alternative worldviews. Muoi and Anh have sometimes supported pragmatic policies but ideologically they are not known as being "soft."[40]

Marxist-Leninist loyalists such as Muoi and Anh, whether retired or in power, hold enormous influence in contemporary Vietnam in part because of the political culture of the Party that upholds strict loyalty to the doctrine. Throughout the history of the Party, as Vo Van Kiet bitterly noted in a confidential essay written in 2006, leaders who committed serious "left-leaning mistakes" had at most been criticized, and in some cases not even criticized.[41] All they needed to do was to quietly clean up the mess. Even if they lost or retired from their formal positions, they did not lose their authority in the Party because they were considered "loyal to the revolutionary worldview" [*kien dinh lap truong cach mang*]. In contrast, those who embraced new ideas and reform have been particularly vulnerable to accusations such as "having weak loyalty" [*mat lap truong*], "deviating from socialism" [*chech huong, xa roi Chu nghia Xa hoi*], and "having bitten capitalist baits" [*an phai ba tu ban*]. The political career of someone so labeled was often doomed. Kiet, who is known as a reformist leader and who engineered the normalization of Vietnam's relations with the United States in the 1990s, must have spoken from his personal experience.

Institutional, ex-institutional, and cultural factors have resulted in schizophrenic behavior as the case of the US-Vietnamese bilateral trade agreement (BTA) attested. After Vietnam normalized relations with the United States in 1995, then-Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet wanted to start immediate negotiations for a trade agreement with the United States. That agreement would open up access to the huge American market for Vietnamese goods – a path to wealth that Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, and more recently even China had trodden. The deal was estimated by the World Bank to bring Vietnam $1.5 billion from

[40] All three came from very similar social backgrounds, however. All were from poor peasant families and learned how to read and write but did not go to school. Prior to their assumption of central leadership positions, Muoi had been deputy prime minister. Kiet had been the Party secretary of Ho Chi Minh City and Anh had been a general of the PAVN and minister of defense. Ibid., 109–111, 261–262.

[41] Vo Van Kiet, "Dong gop y kien vao Bao cao tong ket ly luan va thuc tien hai muoi nam doi moi" [Comments on the Review of theory and practice during twenty years of reform]. This essay conveyed Kiet's comments on the Party's review of reform and strategy for the future. The essay was leaked and published online at http://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/vietnam/2015/08/150809_vo_van_kiet_gui_bo_chinh_tri.

exports to the US market alone, and would also ease Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The practical benefits to Vietnam were abundantly clear but the deal met significant opposition from loyalist institutions and leaders who at one point nearly succeeded in thwarting it.

At the initial discussion in the Politburo about the agreement, then-General Secretary Do Muoi reportedly said, "We have reformed our economy successfully [and] our living standards have improved. Why do we need the Americans now?"[42] Muoi feared that Vietnam would be "crushed" if it signed the BTA and joined the WTO because Vietnam was still poor and its industries weak. Both Muoi and Kiet retired in late 1997 to be replaced by Le Kha Phieu and Phan Van Khai, but their disagreement over the trade deal continued in their role as senior advisors afterward. By mid-1999, bilateral negotiations had successfully cleared most differences between the two countries, and Washington was ready to conclude the deal. American officials proposed to have the agreement signed at the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC) meeting in Auckland, New Zealand, in September 1999, when President Clinton and Vietnamese Prime Minister Khai would both be present. Clinton wanted to have the deal concluded before his planned visit to Vietnam in December 1999 – the first for a sitting American president since the end of the Vietnam War.

What occurred next on the Vietnamese side was revealed only recently. In early September 1999, a Politburo meeting presided over by General Secretary Le Kha Phieu approved the BTA as recommended by Khai. The next day, Phieu met visiting US Secretary of State Madeline Albright who had met Khai and received the news from him about the Politburo's approval of the trade deal. Albright would later be blamed for the collapse of the deal when she asked Phieu bluntly at their meeting, "The world now has only four socialist countries remaining. Do you think [you] can hold on?"[43] Of course, Phieu assured her in no uncertain terms that socialism would win in the end, but Albright's question must have raised Phieu's suspicions of US ulterior motives behind the trade deal.[44] Prior to assuming his position as general secretary of the Party,

[42] My account of this event is based entirely on Huy Duc, *Ben Thang Cuoc*, v. 2, 345–354. Huy Duc conducted interviews with many key participants, including former Prime Ministers Kiet and Phan Van Khai, General Secretary Phieu, and former Ministers and their advisers.

[43] Ibid., esp. 348–349.

[44] This is the opinion of Nguyen Dinh Luong who was the chief Vietnamese negotiator of the BTA.

Phieu had been senior general and political commissar of the PAVN. The man is known for being loyalist to the core. A few days later when Khai was about to leave Hanoi for Auckland, Senior Advisor Do Muoi told him that he would oppose signing the deal. Khai and his entourage left for the APEC gathering while the fate of the trade agreement hung in the air.

It is not known what role Albright's question played in the subsequent Politburo meeting to reconsider the issue. Muoi reportedly argued against the agreement just as he had said. Former State President and now Senior Advisor Le Duc Anh, who wanted Vietnam to sign the border agreement with China first, before concluding the trade deal with the United States, joined Muoi. At the same time, the military intelligence agency under the control of Anh's protégés in the PAVN supplied the intelligence that China would strongly oppose Vietnam's concluding a trade deal with the United States. Casting another "nay" vote was Nguyen Duc Binh, the head of the Party's Central Council on Theory and former professor and director of Ho Chi Minh Academy whom we met in Chapter 8. Binh dismissed the trade deal as likely to bring only poverty and hunger to Vietnam. He reportedly declared that, "We do not oppose globalization, but we should participate only in globalization led by the proletariat, not globalization led by the capitalist class like the current one." Nguyen Phu Trong, another Politburo member, then head of the Party's Central Propaganda Commission, and former editor-in-chief of the Party journal *Tap Chi Cong San*, warned others about the dangers of "peaceful evolution." (Trong would rise to become general secretary of the Party since 2011). In the absence of Kiet and Khai, the chief advocates of the BTA, the Politburo voted no. The agreement would be approved and signed only in late 2001, after Beijing's accession to the WTO early that year had perhaps been reassuring to the loyalists in Hanoi.

The drama around the BTA exhibited clear symptoms of a schizophrenic state. The Politburo's reversal of its own, earlier decision, apparently in reaction to a blunt but random question from Albright, suggests the complex and obscure mechanisms by which ideology wields its influence in Vietnamese politics today. Loyalty to Marxist-Leninist thinking still constrains the Vietnamese state in its conduct of foreign affairs through institutional, ex-institutional, and cultural factors. This explains why Vietnam has thus far maintained close relations with Beijing while only cautiously and half-heartedly expanding relations with Washington.

Unlike what the Politburo had feared, the BTA proved to be a great boost to Vietnam's economy. By 2010, the United States had become

Vietnam's largest trading partner and one of its largest aid providers and investors. By that time, Vietnam's trade with China had risen to rival its trade with the United States in value. However, if Vietnam has annually enjoyed billions of dollars in trade surplus with the United States, it has suffered from an equally large trade deficit with China.

RADICAL PAST, UNCERTAIN FUTURE

In January 2005, members of the Chinese Coast Guard operating in the Gulf of Tonkin shot nine Vietnamese fishermen to death and took eight others into custody.[45] Arrests of foreign fishermen for violating territorial waters are common affairs in this contested area, but such bloodshed had been rare. The Vietnamese government was silent about what happened. Five days later, when a local newspaper leaked the news and aroused angry denunciations by many Vietnamese, Hanoi made an official announcement of the killings.[46] Another three days were to pass before Vietnam sent a diplomatic message to China to protest the killings.[47]

At the time, few would have predicted that this tragic event would have lasting significance. It would become clearer later that China had shifted toward an aggressive approach in solving territorial disputes with its neighbors, including Vietnam. Since the Chengdu meeting in 1990, Hanoi has made sincere efforts to build a strong relationship with Beijing. The preamble of Vietnam's Constitution was changed in 1992 to remove those sentences that denounced China for its past hostilities toward Vietnam. No negative mentions of contemporary China were allowed in the press. Public signs and records that reminded the public of the Sino-Vietnamese war between 1979 and 1989 were systematically destroyed. History textbooks, commissioned by the Ministry of Education for use as the sole texts for high school students, contained less than ten lines on that war.[48] Although victories against France and the United States were

[45] "Mot tau danh ca cua ngu dan xa Hoa Loc bi Trung Quoc bat giu" [A fishing boat of Hoa Loc commune fishermen is arrested by China], *Tuoi Tre* January 12, 2005; "Tau Trung Quoc tan cong giet hai ngu dan Viet Nam" [Chinese ship attacks and kills Vietnamese fishermen], *Thanh Nien*, January 14, 2005.

[46] "Ve viec tau Trung Quoc tan cong ngu dan Viet Nam: Yeu cau Trung Quoc giai quyet moi hau qua" [On the attack on Vietnamese fishermen by Chinese ship: Request for China to deal with the consequences], *Tuoi Tre*, January 17, 2005.

[47] "Canh sat bien Trung Quoc vi pham nghiem trong luat phap quoc te" [Chinese Coast Guard seriously violated international law], *Tuoi Tre*, January 20, 2005.

[48] "Cuoc chien bao ve bien gioi 1979: nen dua day du vao su sach," *Tuoi Tre*, February 20, 2013. Available at http://tuoitre.vn/Ban-doc/534517/cuoc-chien-bao-ve-bien-gioi-1979-nen-dua-day-du-vao-su-sach.html#ad-image-0.

majestically celebrated almost every year, the war against China was not commemorated. We saw earlier how openly critical of the United States the PAVN's defense journal was. Much ink was spent on planning for future wars with "imperialist armies," whereas no mention can be found of potential security threats from China.

Until 2005, China had seemed to reciprocate Vietnam's good will. Throughout the 1990s, China developed increasingly closer party-to-party, state-to-state, and military-to-military relations with Vietnam.[49] On Le Kha Phieu's visit to Beijing in 1999, Chinese President Jiang Zemin proposed a new formula for Sino-Vietnamese relationship. This was nicely packaged as "Four Goods" (good neighbors, good friends, good comrades, and good partners) and "Sixteen Golden Words" (neighborly friendship, comprehensive cooperation, durable stability, and focus on the future).[50] During Phieu's visit, China and Vietnam successfully concluded a comprehensive land border agreement, which many believe to have benefited China at Vietnam's expense. As mentioned earlier, Phieu was ousted in 2001 by the triumvirate Muoi, Anh, and Kiet. One of the accusations he faced was a secret meeting he had with Jiang during the 1999 trip when, at the Chinese leader's insistence, the Vietnamese foreign minister and another Politburo member accompanying Phieu on the trip were not allowed to sit in while discussion on the land border agreement was conducted.[51]

The events since 2005 have strained Sino-Vietnamese relations. China continues to forcefully assert its sovereignty over contested territorial waters in the South China Sea against claims made by Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. In late 2007, China announced that it would make a new administrative district out of the Paracel and Spratly archipelagoes that were partly occupied and claimed by Vietnam. Subsequently China imposed a ban on fishing in the area surrounding those archipelagoes that had traditionally been exploited by Vietnamese fishermen. In 2011 Chinese ships allegedly cut the cables of Vietnamese

[49] See Carlyle Thayer, "The Structure of Vietnam-China Relations, 1991–2008," paper presented at the Third International Conference on Vietnamese Studies, Hanoi, December 4–7, 2008; and Carlyle Thayer, "Background Brief: Vietnam's Military Diplomacy – China and the United States," unpublished paper, March 2010; Alexander Vuving, "Strategy and Evolution of Vietnam's China Policy: A Changing Mixture of Pathways," *Asian Survey* 46: 6 (2006), 805–824.

[50] In Vietnamese, "lang gieng huu nghi, hop tac toan dien, on dinh lau dai, huong toi tuong lai." See Huy Duc, *Ben Thang Cuoc*, v. 2, 335–344.

[51] Ibid., 355–356. General Nguyen Chi Vinh who was deputy chief of the military intelligence agency was allowed to accompany Phieu at the meeting.

vessels conducting seismic tests in the area within Vietnam's 200-nautical mile zone.

Hanoi seemed to have been overtaken by those events. At the VCP's Fourth Central Committee Plenum in early 2007, the Party issued the first ever document on an ocean strategy to better exploit and defend ocean resources and ocean access.[52] Following this Plenum, articles on threats to Vietnam's sovereignty over its territorial waters began to appear in the PAVN's defense journal – for the first time since the late 1980s.[53] Nevertheless, negative coverage of China was still banned in the press (until around 2014). If a Chinese ship attacked Vietnamese fishermen, Vietnamese newspapers would be prohibited from mentioning that the ship belonged to China. The PAVN has publicized its recent purchases of submarines and other ships from Russia while denying that Vietnam is engaged in an arms race. Vietnam has upgraded diplomatic relations to strategic partnerships with regional rivals of China, including India and Japan. Hanoi also has warmed up to Washington, offering more port calls for American ships and more frequent exchange of visits by military leaders of both countries. However, Vietnam still maintains the three-no's policy – namely, no participation in any military pact, no alliance with a foreign country against another, and no acceptance of foreign military bases in Vietnam.[54] A main rationale of these three no's is to appease China. Vietnam's relations with China remain cozy, at least in public.

With the boom of online social media in Vietnam since 2006, the Vietnamese state has encountered great difficulties in controlling information and maintaining public order. Spontaneous anti-China protests erupted for the first time ever in communist Vietnam in 2007. The government immediately suppressed these protests and sent some protesters to jail; yet it failed to prevent another wave of protests in Hanoi in the summer of 2011 that lasted for twelve weeks. This wave was remarkable

[52] Ban Tu Tuong-Van Hoa Trung Uong, *Tai lieu nghien cuu cac Nghi quyet Hoi nghi lan thu tu Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang khoa X* [Materials for the study of the Fourth Central Committee Plenum] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2007).

[53] For example, see Senior General Nguyen Huy Hieu, "Chien luoc bien Viet Nam – mot van de trong yeu trong su nghiep xay dung va bao ve to quoc hien nay" [Vietnam's Ocean strategy – A critical issue in the construction and defense of our fatherland], *TCQPTD* 5 (2007), 5–8; Colonel Nguyen Manh Dung, "Xay dung hoat dong cua dan quan tu ve bien – thuc trang va giai phap" [Developing activities for self-defense militias for the sea – current issues and solutions], *TCQPTD* 9 (2007), 73–75.

[54] "Chinh sach ba khong cua quoc phong Viet Nam" [The three-no's policy of Vietnam's defense ministry], August 26, 2010. Available http://vietbao.vn/The-gioi/Chinh-sach-ba-khong-cua-quoc-phong-Viet-Nam/11178409/159/.

for attracting hundreds who made the protests into a weekly ritual despite the government's heavy crackdown. Through street chanting and blog postings, protesters charged the government of cozying up to China at the expense of Vietnam's long-term national interests.[55] Despite government repression, this new nationalist movement has continued to expand and now connects many groups with demands for democracy, human rights, and the right to own property.

As with the case of the US-Vietnam bilateral trade agreement, Hanoi has displayed schizophrenic symptoms in reaction to the looming conflict with China. An example of such symptoms is the conflicting and confusing messages emanating from Party leaders, sometimes from the same official who may say one thing one day to foreigners and an opposite thing another day to Vietnamese. Consider the case of Nguyen Duy Chien, a Vietnamese diplomat who is the vice chair of the Vietnamese government's Borders Commission. Although Chien is by no means a top-level official, his behavior appears to represent a broader pattern.

In a recent interview by *The Atlantic*'s national correspondent Robert Kaplan, the journalist described that Chien filled the hour-long meeting "with a relentlessly detailed PowerPoint presentation that attacks the Chinese position from every conceivable point of view."[56] However, Chien displayed quite a different face in his lecture at about the same time at a local university in front of a selective Vietnamese audience. The lecture was ostensibly to provide Vietnamese educators with information about a recent incident involving Chinese ships cutting seismic cables of Vietnamese vessels in an area claimed by Vietnam. Photographing and recording of the lecture were specifically prohibited, but according to an unauthorized report of the lecture published online, Chien reminded the audience that Vietnam and China shared the same ideology, and that the Vietnamese should not overreact to the incident. To the shock of many in the audience, he portrayed the Sino-Vietnamese tension as one within the family and likened Chinese aggressive acts toward Vietnam to a father's tough love for his child.[57]

[55] Tuong Vu, "The Party v. the People: Anti-China Nationalism in Contemporary Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 9:4 (Fall 2014).

[56] Robert Kaplan, "The Vietnam solution: How a former enemy became a crucial US ally in balancing China's rise." *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2012. Available at http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/06/the-vietnam-solution/308969/?single_page=true.

[57] Nguoi Quan Sat [a pseudonym], "Mot cuoc thuyet giang cho tri thuc – Vu cat cap tau Binh Minh 2: Yeu con cho don cho vot'" [A lecture for intellectuals on the incident involving the ship Binh Minh 2: A father's tough love for his child], November 17, 2011. Available at http://boxitvn.blogspot.com/2011/11/nguoi-quan-sat-xin-hay-oc-bai-nay-e.html.

Chien's lecture was not an isolated event. In response to rising popular demand for Hanoi to be more assertive on issues of territorial conflict with Beijing, PAVN Colonel Tran Dang Thanh gave another lecture to university administrators and professors on the issue. This time the lecture was secretly recorded and later posted online, in which we can hear the colonel's exact words that, "with respect to the Chinese we cannot forget that they have invaded our country in the past but that they have also shared with us their food and their clothes [during wartime]. We cannot be ungrateful to them... [In contrast,] the Americans have never been kind to us; their [war] crimes are not to be forgiven by heaven and earth."[58]

The contradictory messages by officials like Chien and Thanh are puzzling. Self-conflicting and pathetic government officials exist everywhere, but this case seemed different because all the lectures in front of Vietnamese audiences were delivered in a restricted and closed format, whereas the interviews given to foreign correspondents were also carefully scripted but allowed to be broadcast. The officials' evocation of the father-son relationship between China and Vietnam was striking and went beyond the need to calm public opinion. The massive amount of resources the government has devoted to suppress popular expressions of anti-China sentiments similarly betrays an excessive deference toward China. On the whole, these episodes suggest that Vietnamese leaders may have been disappointed and even infuriated by Chinese aggressive moves on border issues, but they were far from viewing China as an enemy and the United States as a friend or an ally.

CONCLUSION

In 2007, following the Tenth Party Congress, the Party's Central Council on Theory [*Hoi Dong Ly Luan Trung Uong*] convened a group of experts to advise the Party on strategic issues. Duong Van Quang, a former ambassador and director of the prestigious Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, wrote a study on the situation facing communist and worker parties around the world.[59] In his study, which was made public only

[58] Tran Dang Thanh, "Dai ta Tran Dang Thanh giang ve bien Dong cho lanh dao cac truong Dai hoc" [Colonel Tran Dang Thanh lectures on the Eastern Sea to university administrators], December 19, 2012. Available at http://anhbasam.wordpress.com/2012/12/19/1481-dai-ta-tran-dang-thanh-giang-ve-bien-dong-cho-lanh-dao-cac-truong-dai-hoc/#more-86178.

[59] Duong Van Quang, "Nhung dac diem va xu the cua the gioi," 108–189.

recently, Quang reviewed changes in the US-dominated world order since the end of the Cold War, the revival of leftist movements in Europe and Latin America, and the foreign policy of China. The seasoned diplomat Quang acknowledged that the VCP had class commitments but believed that the Party should give primacy to national interests [*loi ich dan toc*]. He proposed that Vietnam develop strong state-to-state and party-to-party relations with all parties and governments in power, regardless of their class base. Quang argued that in the current world order, class interests should be subordinate to national interests. From the perspective of national interests, Vietnam should not seek to challenge *Pax Americana* and should avoid taking part in or creating the false impression that it was still searching for a way to build an anti-imperialist ideological alliance.

This chapter ends here with Quang's wise words. They attested to the durable legacies of ideology in Vietnam today and confirmed my thesis that ideology has played a central role in driving the Vietnamese revolution and in shaping Vietnam's foreign relations. A quarter century after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the effective end of the Vietnamese revolution, Quang still warned Vietnamese leaders not to place real or imagined class interests above those of the nation. He was still concerned that his leaders might do something to give the impression that Vietnam wanted to challenge the capitalist world order. The conclusion will touch on more recent developments, showing that Vietnamese leaders remain ambivalent and unwilling to leave the Party's radical past behind.

Epilogue

Ho Chi Minh's Last Wish

A few days before his official seventy-fifth birthday and two months after the first brigade of American Marines landed on the shore of Da Nang in central Vietnam, President Ho Chi Minh signed his testament in the presence of Party First Secretary Le Duan. Ho would live on for four more years, and would meticulously revise his testament several times, but the version published right after his death on September 2, 1969 still carried the following words in the original draft:

> The anti-American resistance may last for some more years .... Regardless of hardship and suffering, our people shall win completely. The imperialist Yankee shall have to leave our country. Our fatherland shall achieve unification. [Our] Northern and Southern compatriots shall live together under one roof. Our small country shall be able to take great pride in having courageously defeated two big imperialist powers; and [in] having contributed significantly to the [world's] national liberation movement.
>
> Regarding the world's communist movement – As a person who has dedicated his entire life to revolution, the prouder I am of the growth of the international communist and worker movement, the sadder I am about the current disputes among [our] brother-parties!
>
> I hope that our PARTY shall strive to effectively assist with rebuilding the solidarity of [our] brother-parties based on Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, on both reason and sentiments. I'm very confident that the brother-parties and brother-countries shall become united [again].[1]

[1] "But tich cac ban thao di chuc cua Chu tich Ho Chi Minh (1965–1969)" [Handwritten versions of President Ho Chi Minh's testament], signed on May 15, 1969 by both Ho and Duan. *VKDTT*, v. 30, images beginning on page 253. Underlined and capitalized words are in original. In the first announcement of Ho's death, the date of his death was changed to September 3rd, and parts of his testament were deleted before the document

As North Vietnam steeled itself to face direct American intervention, Ho voiced both concern and determination in his testament. Next to the anticipated protracted war with the United States, his other major concern was about the world's communist movement, in particular the breakout of open conflict within the communist bloc. During 1965–1969, Hanoi was enjoying the highest-ever level of material support from Moscow and Beijing; so foreign aid must not have been a cause of Ho's distress. Rather, his concern and thus his wish that Vietnam would make the effort to help rebuild the broken communist brotherhood merely reflected his lifelong revolutionary commitment. In fact, other than Le Duan's failure to preserve fraternal relations with China in the late 1970s, which would likely have upset Ho, other top Vietnamese leaders ever since have pursued policies broadly in line with his dying wish.

The story in this book began with a young Ho but extended to four decades after his death when he left behind the solemn words just quoted. We have traced his and his comrades' evolving worldview as they rose to power and led their country through revolution, war, and peaceful development. The eighty-year history of Vietnamese communism demonstrated their intense and resilient commitment to the doctrine. These men and women revered Marx and Lenin, and strove to live up to the teachings of those Masters. Over more than half a century, Vietnamese communists determinedly confronted not only colonial domination but also "imperialism," "class exploitation," and cultural and economic "backwardness." They identified themselves with the communist brotherhood and entrusted the destiny of their nation to communism. In return, the brotherhood nurtured and protected the Vietnamese revolution. Brotherly ties at times experienced intrigues and betrayals, but they remained a treasure to be cherished.

THE POWER OF IDEOLOGY

The worldview of Vietnamese leaders continually evolved throughout the course of the revolution as a result of profound internal debates at crucial points. Although internationalism was the core element in their belief, some did not grasp its logic right away, and most did not maintain a fixed attitude toward it over time. At first, it took time for the founding members of the communist movement to digest the theoretical notion that the

was made public. The Party disclosed the full contents and the various drafts of his testament around 1990.

Vietnamese revolution was an integral component of world revolution. Confronted by the Sino-Soviet dispute of the early 1960s, Party leaders remained committed to internationalism while developing a realistic perspective of the communist brotherhood. In particular, they recognized that members of the group could have different, even conflicting, interests due to their countries' different positions in the global order. By the late 1960s, overblown confidence in their ability gave Hanoi leaders the conceit of being the world's revolutionary vanguard. They challenged not only the United States but also China and the Soviet Union. They dominated Indochina and sought influence throughout Southeast Asia and beyond. As their worldview clashed against reality, the clarification and reinterpretation of key concepts were frequently required, although this took place within certain clear boundaries. For example, the voluntary withdrawal from the brotherhood, as Tito did, was one boundary that no Vietnamese leader ever crossed.

Ideological loyalty did not necessarily mean an inability to compromise. Following master revolutionary strategists such as Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, Hanoi leaders became masters themselves in using "united front" tactics to manipulate the "balance of forces." This was done by isolating their chief enemy while trying to form a political coalition as large as possible without compromising "class interests." When they fought the Japanese and French in the early 1940s, Washington's support was cultivated. When they were at war with the Americans in the 1960s, Paris was courted. These deft maneuvers often confused their enemies, their supporters, and outside observers. Yet they themselves were rarely confused about who must be regarded as their brothers and who not.

The Marxist-Leninist creed played various roles in the Vietnamese revolution and the communist state's foreign relations. It defined what goals to accomplish, established who were friends and who were foes, brought with it a global and domestic brotherhood of individuals, groups, and states with shared goals and common enemies, and served as an effective tool of state building. However, ideology did not determine the success or failure of any particular policy or of the revolution as a whole. In fact, their worldview frequently misled Vietnamese revolutionaries. For example, Le Duan's persistent belief in Marx's teaching that revolution was the work of the masses led to disastrous military outcomes. In the *Tet* Offensive in 1968, and again in the Easter Offensive in 1972, much of his hope for victory was pinned on urban mass uprisings that would force the United States to withdraw. Hanoi lost hundreds of thousands of its best troops in the two campaigns yet those uprisings never materialized.

Even if being misled, it was those very efforts to live up to their convictions that enabled Vietnamese revolutionaries to have significant impacts abroad and at home. Fueled by ardent ideological commitments and a dogged determination, this revolution lent support to anticolonial and anti-imperialist movements around the world, helped install communism in Laos and Cambodia, drew the two communist giants into Southeast Asia, and sucked the United States into a quagmire. Without Hanoi's determination to unify the country under its rule, Vietnam would likely remain divided today, as China and Korea still are. This was no ordinary feat. Not that the great powers were free from blame for war, but the efforts of Vietnamese revolutionaries to confront imperialism and their dedication to utopia were truly extraordinary.

COMMUNIST STRATEGIC THINKING IN THE VIETNAM WAR

The findings of this book question many enduring myths and assumptions about the Vietnam War. Scholarship on this event is heavily American-centric and often exaggerates the role the United States played or could have played in Vietnam.[2] When Hanoi leaders formulated a revolutionary strategy, their thinking, in fact, centered on the world's revolutionary conditions and not on US policies *per se*. If those worldwide conditions were favorable, the revolution was to proceed despite the risks of Washington's intervention. Of course, American policies *around the world* were closely monitored and attempts were made to minimize the US threat without losing sight of long-term revolutionary goals. However, these US policies were to be considered together with the policies of other powers and balanced against global anti-American forces.

Understanding the nature of the Vietnamese revolution and the strategic thinking of its leaders helps dispel the most cherished myth of US-centric scholarship about the American "missed opportunities" in Vietnam.[3] In light of the Vietnamese evidence, no opportunities were missed in the late 1940s for the United States to lure Vietnamese revolutionaries away from communism, nor was there ever any slight chance they could have become Titos. Ho Chi Minh and his comrades continued to harbor their

[2] For an extended critique along this line, see Edward Miller and Tuong Vu, "The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4:3 (2009), 1–16.

[3] For a convincing attempt to demolish a similar myth in the study of Sino-American relations, see Chen Jian, "The Myth of America's 'Lost Chance' in China: A Chinese Perspective in Light of New Evidence," *Diplomatic History* 21:1 (Winter 1997), 77–86.

communist belief even though Stalin ignored their repeated appeals for help from 1945 to 1950. During the same period, world revolution was advancing rapidly: the communist camp expanded across Eastern Europe and into Northeast Asia; the French Communist Party appeared poised to take power in France; communist revolts erupted throughout Southeast Asia; and Mao's Red Army emerged triumphantly in the Chinese civil war toward the end of the decade. The Americans were but one consideration among several in that big picture. Where many American scholars today see a "missed opportunity," Vietnamese leaders, at the time, shared with their Chinese comrades the conviction that the world was going their revolutionary way. It is unthinkable, therefore, that Vietnamese communists would have given up their radical ambitions at such an exciting time, even if American policies had been more accommodating.

The failure to appreciate Vietnamese revolutionary ambitions similarly leads US-centric scholarship to portray North Vietnam as a powerless victim of American aggression.[4] There is no question that the United States enjoyed massive military advantage over communist Vietnam. Concerns about American military might were indeed voiced in North Vietnamese documents many years before actual US intervention. Yet Hanoi authorized armed struggle in 1959 despite such concerns. After the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, their worries about US intervention generated not restraint but aggression as Hanoi leaders believed that they should try to defeat Saigon *before* the United States decided to intervene.[5] It was Hanoi's escalation during 1964–1965 that provoked a hesitant Johnson into authorizing American troops to be sent to Vietnam.[6] Even though Hanoi leaders soon discovered that they had underestimated the Americans, they did not retreat but proceed to launch the suicidal *Tet* Offensive.

[4] For example, see Gareth Porter, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Porter argues that an "overwhelming imbalance of power" during the Cold War that favored the United States over the Soviet Union and China shaped American decisions on military intervention in Vietnam.

[5] Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 198–201, also makes this point.

[6] On the debates in the United States over intervention during 1963–1964, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999). Writing about the American decision to escalate the conflict in 1964–1965, Logevall appears unaware that Hanoi had already chosen war in late 1963, so there was no "lost chance for peace" regardless of what Lyndon Johnson decided. Logevall also assumes that Hanoi leaders could have followed Tito's path if Washington had not chosen war, an assumption not supported by the evidence here.

Why did Hanoi dare to challenge the most powerful military on earth? North Vietnamese leaders' foreign and military strategies followed the Leninist concept of "correlation of forces," not Hans Morgenthau's balance of power logic. In their imagination of an "Age of Revolution," they saw the overall American posture crumbling under powerful challenges from global socialist and progressive forces (including conscientious American citizens who opposed the war). Hanoi leaders thus calculated that, despite possessing nuclear weapons, the Americans were vulnerable and could be defeated in Vietnam.

AMERICAN BLUNDERS

Regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the Vietnam War, it was not unwinnable, nor did the containment of the Vietnamese revolution even require direct US military intervention. There were cracks inside the communist state and wedges in Hanoi's relations with its brothers that, if effectively exploited, could have rendered direct military intervention unnecessary. North Vietnam's economic situation already was in a dire situation in the early 1960s due to poor weather, collectivization, and mismanagement. The leadership was deeply divided over Khrushchev's policies and over the appropriate strategies for socialist development.

In view of such difficulties, North Vietnam did not pose a serious threat to the security of South Vietnam and other American allies in Asia to the extent that direct military intervention was necessary. In fact, Hanoi might not have escalated the war in the absence of major blunders committed by American leaders. Le Duan was not optimistic about any easy victory in the South in 1961–1962, and American concessions at the Geneva conference on Laos were truly encouraging news for Hanoi.[7] The November 1963 coup against South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, which President Kennedy connived in, was a game-changing event. Ngo Dinh Diem had a mixed record as a leader, but Saigon had regained the initiative in its war against the insurgency by late 1962, and South Vietnam in 1963 was not in a difficult military situation.[8] American

[7] My interpretation of the evidence here agrees with the arguments made by Mark Moyar and Pierre Asselin about the strong performance of the ARVN and the unpromising situation of the Southern insurgency in 1961–1962. Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, chapters 6 & 7; Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War*, chapters 4 & 5, esp. 94, 109–117, 122–125. See also Turley, *The Second Indochina War*, 61, who notes the "soft" American stand in Laos.

[8] Miller, *Misalliance*, 247–253. It is true that communist forces scored some successes against strategic hamlets in 1963 thanks to a new strategy, but their gains by no means

disengagement would have been the more appropriate and legitimate response to the deadlock between Kennedy and Ngo. The coup set in motion a spiral of chaos that lasted for three years and wiped away many achievements under President Ngo; it necessitated subsequent American direct intervention, which further delegitimized the Saigon regime. In hindsight, this was perhaps the worst blunder made by Washington in the entire course of the war. In Hanoi, Le Duan's militant faction seized the moment to rally the Party leadership and set the goal for a quick victory in 1964–1965.

It was with that militant spirit that the North Vietnamese navy attacked the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2, 1964. In his announcement of the bombing of North Vietnam in retaliation to that and subsequent alleged attacks on August 4, 1964, President Johnson declared, "the United States intends no rashness and seeks no wider war."[9] Johnson's statement was reassuring to Hanoi leaders, who feared the most a ground invasion by US forces into North Vietnam and who immediately dispatched their main force units to the South following the Maddox affair.[10] If Johnson had left open the option of a wider war, he might well have kept the infiltration of North Vietnamese troops into the South to a level that the Saigon military could have managed without the need of American troops.

Although it was justifiable and conscientious to oppose the US bombing of North Vietnam for moral or other reasons, Johnson's major mistake was to de-escalate in 1968 following the *Tet* Offensive. Having authorized half a million American troops to be sent to Vietnam, the commander-in-chief abandoned the effort just when his enemy was desperate to break the stalemate, went for broke, and suffered massive losses.[11] Johnson thus offered Le Duan and the militant leaders in Hanoi the opportunity to claim victory, practically rescuing them from their colossal blunder in launching the Offensive. As former PAVN colonel

endangered the overall security of the RVN. Philip Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 191–192.

[9] North Vietnamese boats did attack the US ship on August 2 but not on August 4. The statement is available at www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/lbj-tonkin/

[10] Bui Tin, *From Enemy to Friend: A North Vietnamese Perspective on the War*, transl. Nguyen Ngoc Bich (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 81–82. Turley notes the immediate dispatch of whole units but believes that it was unrelated to the Tonkin Gulf resolution. Turley, *The Second Indochina War*, 84.

[11] The term "go-for-broke" is from Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, 75. For discussion of communist military losses, see Turley, *The Second Indochina War*, 154–156, 170–172.

Bui Tin would say four decades later, "the [*Tet*] Offensive [was a military failure but] caused a disastrous turnabout in US policy that gave Hanoi breathing room at just the moment when we were hardest-pressed in South Vietnam! ... This paradoxical quirk of history ... is clear proof that politics is not always wedded to military victories, and vice versa."[12] After the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem, this was perhaps the second worst blunder in the American conduct of the war.

REVOLUTIONARY AND POSTREVOLUTIONARY POLITICS

Vietnam teaches scholars of revolutions about a fundamental paradox of revolutionary politics. On the one hand, revolutionary ideologies may unleash extraordinary power by motivating people to sacrifice their lives without hesitation. As Ho Chi Minh reportedly told the French in 1946, "You can kill 10 of my men for every one I kill of yours, yet even at those odds, you will lose and I will win."[13] Although the authenticity of this statement cannot be verified, the fact is that North Vietnam suffered about one million battle casualties out of a population of less than 20 million during the Vietnam War. Proportionally, that number would be equivalent to 10 million American deaths.

On the other hand, the same fanaticism that turns revolutionaries into fearless fighters makes them a threat to everyone, including their own people. For all their possibly noble intentions, Vietnamese revolutionaries took their country into three wars with millions of lives lost. Once acquiring power, they turned Vietnam into a giant laboratory for half-baked utopian ideas. Their draconian policies in the late 1970s pushed millions into the ocean in search of an escape, with tens of thousands of those "boatpeople" perishing along the way. Impatience for radical changes, penchant for violence, and ambition to be the vanguard of world revolution turned the three communist brothers Vietnam, Cambodia, and China against each other. Over half a century, revolutionary energies were consumed by such destructive endeavors, which eventually outlived many revolutionary leaders and left behind a country in ruins and a people in destitution. This self-destructive character of revolutions has been played down in many prominent works whose authors are favorably impressed by the ability of revolutionary states in imposing public order, promoting

[12] Bui Tin, *From Enemy to Friend*, 64–65.

[13] According to Stanley Karnow who does not cite any sources, Ho said the above to a French visitor. Karnow, *Vietnam*, 197–198.

peasants' interests, expanding political participation, and mobilizing the masses for international war.[14] However, under that impressive ability of revolutionary states lurk their fanaticism and tendency for destructive violence in the name of utopia.

Even though their revolutionary energies had largely burnt out by the late 1980s when Hanoi leaders embarked on market reforms, the revolutionary ideology has lived on in political culture and institutions, and continued to obstruct Vietnam's process of reintegration into the global order. Comparative scholarship suggests that this process is fraught with difficulties that can be overcome only over a long time and under certain conditions. These conditions include leadership changes,[15] the abandonment of the revolutionary doctrine,[16] changes in the political-economic system of the revolutionary state,[17] the reduction of threats to revolutionary regimes from the international environment,[18] and the lessening of hostility from dominant *status-quo* powers, which can be a result of changes in their domestic politics.[19]

All those factors are present in the Vietnamese case, but ideological legacies are arguably the most important one. The deaths in the late 1980s of Le Duan and other senior leaders facilitated initial market reforms, but these reforms were meant to have more, not less, socialism. The new leaders were only a few years younger than their predecessors, and were no less loyal ideologically. They thus viewed the great change in international politics from bipolarity to unipolarity in the early 1990s chiefly through ideological lens. Their swift move to seek Chinese alliance to substitute for the loss of Soviet patronage in 1990 is puzzling without taking ideology into account. Just two years earlier, China had seized from Vietnam some islands in the Spratly archipelago in a naval

[14] Examples include Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), chapter 5; Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*; Theda Skocpol, "Revolutions and Mass Military Mobilization," *World Politics* 40: 2 (1988), 149; Theda Skocpol, "What Makes Peasants Revolutionary?" *Comparative Politics* 14: 3 (1982), 363.

[15] Wight argues that the great revolutions have "never for long maintained [themselves] against national interest. Doctrinal considerations have always within two generations been overridden by *raison d'etat*." *Power Politics*, in Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbrand, eds. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978), 92–93.

[16] Maximilian Terhalle, "Revolutionary Power and Socialization: Explaining Revolutionary Zeal in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Security Studies* 18: 3 (2009), 557–586.

[17] Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics*, 139.

[18] Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[19] Jervis, "Socialization, Revolutionary States and Domestic Politics," *International Politics* 52:5 (2015), 609–616.

battle resulting in sixty-four Vietnamese casualties. However, that conflict was curiously not as alarming to Hanoi as were successful US invasions of Panama in 1989 and of Iraq in 1991 that took place nearly halfway around the globe.

Robust ideological legacies have since ensured that men loyal to Marxism-Leninism are in control of Party leadership and that the communist character of the regime is preserved. This has resulted in a curious situation. On the one hand, the integration of the Vietnamese economy into the global economy continues to diversify Vietnamese society and leadership, and loyalists are increasingly becoming a small minority. On the other hand, close Sino-Vietnamese relations following bilateral normalization in 1991 have significantly altered Vietnam's reintegration path. Vietnam's political, military, and economic ties with China now dwarf those with the United States, Japan, and others.[20] In a sense, Vietnam still has one foot in the old brotherhood.

China's assertive policy since 2005 to enforce its sovereignty claims in the South China Sea against Vietnam's rival claims has further isolated but not yet dislodged the loyalists from power.[21] At the same time, US policy since 2012 to "pivot" to East Asia, which can be interpreted as a strategy to counter China's rising influence in the region, has translated into greater American willingness to accommodate Vietnam on various issues from trade to weapon sales to human rights. This was symbolized most clearly by the visit to Washington in 2015 by Party leader Nguyen Phu Trong and by the new Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreements that will expand access to the US market for many Vietnamese goods.[22] Trong, whom we met previously, had just journeyed to Cuba three years earlier to lecture about the evils of capitalism and the merits of socialism.

[20] See Carlyle Thayer, "Background Brief: Vietnam's Military Diplomacy – China and the United States," unpublished paper (March 2010). China was Vietnam's largest trade partner in 2014, with total Sino-Vietnamese trade revenues being $63.7 billion. The United States was Vietnam's second largest trade partner in the same year, with total revenues being $35 billion. See "China-US political contest could aid Vietnam, *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, October 22, 2015; data on US-Vietnamese trade is available at www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm.

[21] A key event was China's move to place a giant oil rig within 200 nautical miles from Vietnam's coast in 2014 that spurred violent protests in Vietnam. Kate Hodal and Jonathan Kaiman, "At least 21 dead in Vietnam's anti-China protests over oil rig," *The Guardian*, May 15, 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/15/vietnam-anti-china-protests-oil-rig-dead-injured.

[22] www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/obama-vietnam-party-boss/1967904.html

It is possible that China has threatened Vietnam's geopolitical interests and pushed Hanoi closer to the United States and its allies. President Obama's pivot policy may also have pulled Hanoi further away from Beijing's orbit by reassuring the Vietnamese and offering them practical rewards for cooperation. However, those changes in the international environment are yet to fully overcome ideological legacies. There has been no drastic reorientation of Vietnam's foreign policy to the United States, even after Trong's trip to Washington.[23] Hanoi's conflicting responses to Chinese moves and US overtures continue to baffle analysts. As Party leaders vie for power and fight over the legacies of the revolution, it remains to be seen if and when President Ho's death wish will finally be forgotten.

[23] Among other signs, prior to Trong's visit to Washington, he went first to Beijing to inform the Chinese about the trip. Relationship between Chinese and Vietnamese militaries and public security ministries remains close. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/07/c_134131246.htm.

APPENDIX A

Ho Chi Minh's Letter to Stalin, October 14, 1950

Below is the full text of a handwritten letter in English Ho Chi Minh wrote and sent to Stalin to report the Vietnamese victory in the Border campaign of 1950.[1] Ho's tone and his Russian pseudonym in the letter gave the strong flavor of a comrade, a Comintern agent, and a disciple addressing his comrade, boss, and God, rather than a head of state communicating with another head of state.

Beloved Comrade Stalin,

I am happy to send you the following reports. Thanks to the great help given by you & by the Chinese Comparty [sic], the first phase of our Border counter-offensive has been successfully concluded.

The Caobăng – Dôngkhe – Thâtkhê [sic] front is about 70 kilometers long, very mountainous.

Our force:[2] 25,500 regular army men,

970 local army men,

18,000 villagers, men and women in transport work, each person working 10 days.

Enemy force: 6,000 soldiers (about 2,700 white, 2,600 Nord-Africains, 700 Vietnameses [sic]).

Fighting phases: (1) Đông Khê post, from 16 to 20 September. Enemy force: 350 soldiers. They have been totaly [sic] annihilated. We took Đông Khê.

(2) Enemy troops evacuated Caobăng, trying to get to Thâtkhê, with 1,850 soldiers (Oct. 3). But when near Dôngkhê, they were destroyed by us. Their commander Colonel Charton & his staff surrendered.

[1] This document was copied from Russian archive and published in Ban Tuyen Giao Trung Uong & Bao Tang Ho Chi Minh [Central Party Commission on Propaganda and Education & Ho Chi Minh Museum], *Chu tich Ho Chi Minh voi nuoc Nga* [President Ho Chi Minh and Russia] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2013), 141.

[2] All the underlining in the letter, likely by Ho Chi Minh, was done in red color.