

Chapter 4. Government and Politics



*Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap plan Dien Bien Phu campaign,
March 1954.*

THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (SRV) is governed through a highly centralized system dominated by the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP, Viet Nam Cong San Dang). As the force controlling the system, the party exercises leadership in all matters. The government manages state affairs through a structure that parallels the party's apparatus, but it is incapable of acting without party direction. All key government positions are filled by party members.

Society is ruled by the party's ubiquitous presence, which is manifested in a network of party cadres at almost every level of social activity. All citizens are expected to be members of one or another of the mass organizations led by party cadres, and all managers and military officials are ultimately answerable to party representatives.

The VCP in the mid-1980s was in a state of transition and experimentation. It was a time when a number of party leaders, who had been contemporaries of Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969), were stepping down in favor of a younger generation of pragmatists and technocrats, and a time when the prolonged poor condition of the economy sparked discontent among grass-roots party organizations as well as open criticism of the party's domestic policy. The party's political ethos, which had once seemed to embody the traditional Vietnamese spirit of resistance to foreigners and which had known great success when the country was overwhelmingly dominated by war and the issues of national liberation and reunification, appeared to have changed after the fall of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) in the spring of 1975 and the reunification of Vietnam in 1976. This ethos had been at the core of the VCP's rise to power during the struggles for independence and unification. To a large degree, the popularity of the communist movement remained tied to these causes; when victory over the South was achieved in 1975, it became apparent that some of the party's governing principles did not easily translate to peacetime conditions. In the absence of war, the ethos changed and the difference between what was communist and what was popular became increasingly noticeable.

Hanoi was apparently unprepared for the scale of its victory in the South, having anticipated that the path to complete power would require at the very least a transition period of shared power with the Southern communist infrastructure (the Provisional Revolutionary Government) and even elements of the incumbent order.

Two separate governments in North and South Vietnam were planned until the surprisingly swift disintegration of the South Vietnamese government eliminated the need for a lengthy transition. Following the establishment of communist control in the South, the government immediately was placed under a Military Management Commission, directed by Senior Lieutenant General Tran Van Tra with the assistance of local People's Revolutionary Committees. At a reunification conference in November 1975, the Party's plans for uniting North and South were announced, and elections for a single National Assembly—the highest state organ—(see Glossary) were held on April 26, 1976, the first anniversary of the Southern victory. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was formally named at the first session of the Sixth National Assembly (the "Unification Assembly"), which met from June 24 to July 2, 1976.

After reunification, the focus of policy became more diffuse. Policy makers, absorbed with incorporating the South into the communist order as quickly as possible, were confronted with both dissension within the North's leadership and southern resistance to the proposed pace of change. The drive undertaken by party ideologues to eliminate all vestiges of capitalism and to collectivize the economy in the South was outlined in the Second Five-Year Plan (1976–80) and announced at the Fourth National Party Congress in December 1976. The plan, the first after reunification, stressed the development of agriculture and light industry, but it set unattainably high goals. The government expected that all industry and agriculture in the South would be state-controlled by the end of 1979. According to Vietnamese sources, however, only 66 percent of cultivated land and 72 percent of peasant households in the South had been organized into collectivized production by early 1985, and socialist transformation in private industry had led to decreased production, increased production costs, and decreased product quality. Meanwhile, the country's leaders were finding it necessary to divert their attention to a number of other equally pressing issues. Besides addressing the many problems of the country's newly unified economy, they also had to work out postwar relations with Cambodia, China, and the Soviet Union. The Sixth National Party Congress held in December 1986 was a watershed for party policy in the 1980s. The party's political mood was accurately reflected in the congress' candid acknowledgment of existing economic problems and in its seeming willingness to change in order to solve them. A new atmosphere of experimentation and reform, apparently reinforced by reforms initiated by the Soviet Union's new leadership, was introduced, setting the stage for a period of

self-examination, the elimination of corrupt party officials, and new economic policies.

Development of the Vietnamese Communist Party

The state Constitution adopted in 1980 describes the party as “the only force leading the state and society and the main factor determining all successes of the Vietnamese revolution.” The party’s role is primary in all state activities, overriding that of the government, which functions merely to implement party policies. The party maintains control by filling key positions in all government agencies with party leaders or the most trusted party cadres and by controlling all mass organizations. Citizens belong to mass organizations appropriate to their status, such as the quasi-governmental Vietnam Fatherland Front, the Vietnam General Confederation of Trade Unions, or the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League (see Party Organization, this ch.). Party cadres leading such organizations educate and mobilize the masses through regular study sessions to implement party policies.

Although party congresses are rare events in Vietnam, they provide a record of the party’s history and direction and tend to reflect accurately the important issues of their time. In February 1930 in Hong Kong, Ho Chi Minh presided over the founding congress of the VCP. At the direction of the Communist International (Comintern—see Glossary), the party’s name was changed shortly afterwards to the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). The designated First National Party Congress following the party’s founding was held secretly in Macao in 1935, coincidentally with the convocation in Moscow of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. At the Seventh Congress, the Comintern modified its “united front” strategy for world revolution chiefly to protect the Soviet Union from the rise of fascism. Member parties were instructed to join in popular fronts with noncommunist parties to preserve world socialism in the face of fascism’s new threat. Although the Vietnamese party subsequently adopted the strategy, the timing of the two meetings dictated that the Vietnamese in Macao wait until after their meeting for directions from Moscow. Consequently, the resolutions enunciated at the ICP’s first congress turned out to be only provisional because they stressed the older and narrower concept of the united front that divided the world into imperialist and socialist camps but failed to account for fascism. Under the new strategy, the ICP considered all nationalist parties in Indochina as potential allies. The Second National Party Congress was held in 1951 in Tuyen Quang, a former province in Viet Bac, a remote region of the North Vietnamese highlands controlled by

the Viet Minh (see Glossary) during the First Indochina War (see Glossary—also known as the Viet Minh War). It reestablished the ICP, which had been officially dissolved in 1945 to obscure the party's communist affiliation, and renamed it the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP, *Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam*). Nine years later in Hanoi, the Third National Party Congress formalized the tasks required to construct a socialist society in the North and to carry out a revolution in the South.

The Fourth National Party Congress, which convened in December 1976, was the first such congress held after the country's reunification. Reflecting the party's sense of rebirth, the congress changed the party's name from the Vietnam Workers' Party to the Vietnam Communist Party. This congress was significant for disclosing the party's plans for a unified Vietnam and for initiating the party's most widespread leadership changes up to that time. The delegates adopted a new party Statute, replacing one that had been ratified in 1960 when the country was divided. The new Statute was directed at the country as a whole but focused on the application of Marxist-Leninist principles in the South, stating that the party's goal was to "realize socialism and communism in Vietnam." It further described the VCP as the "vanguard, organized combat staff, and highest organization" of the Vietnamese working class, and a "united bloc of will and action" structured on the principle of democratic centralism (see Glossary). Democratic centralism is a fundamental organizational principle of the party, and, according to the 1976 Statute, it mandates not only the "activity and creativity" of all party organizations but also "guarantees the party's unity of will and action." As a result of unification, the Central Committee expanded from 77 to 133 members, the 11-member Political Bureau of the Central Committee grew to 17, including 3 alternate or candidate members, and the Secretariat of the Central Committee increased from 7 to 9. More than half of the members of the Central Committee were first-time appointees, many of whom came from the southern provinces.

Membership in the party doubled from 760,000 in 1966 to 1,553,500 in 1976, representing 3.1 percent of the total population. Comparable figures for China (4.2 percent) and the Soviet Union (6.9 percent) in 1986 suggest that the 1976 proportion of party membership to total population in Vietnam was small. Nevertheless, the doubling of the party's size in the space of a decade was cause for concern to Vietnam's leaders, who feared that a decline in the party's selection standards had resulted in increased inefficiency and corruption. They believed that quantity had been



*Ho Chi Minh's tomb in Hanoi
Courtesy Bill Herod*

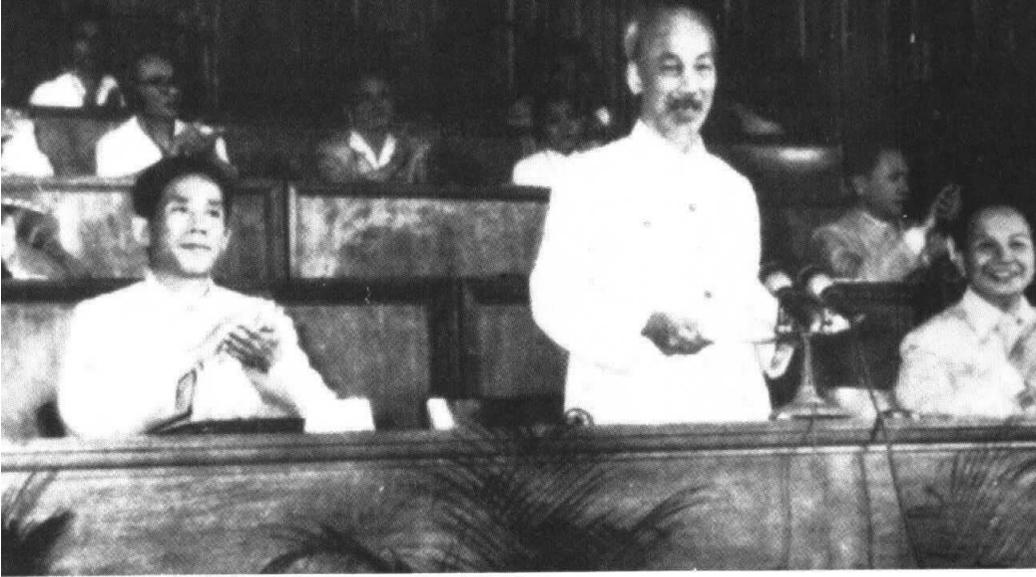
substituted for quality and resolved to stress quality in the future. In an effort to purify the party, growth over the next decade was deliberately checked. Membership in 1986 was close to 2 million, only about 3.3 percent of the population. According to Hanoi's estimates, nearly 10 percent, or 200,000 party members, were expelled for alleged inefficiency, corruption, or other failures between 1976 and 1986.

Turning to the economy, the Fourth National Party Congress transferred the party's emphasis on heavy industry, initiated at the Third National Party Congress, to light industry, fishing, forestry, and agriculture. It directed attention to the Second Five-Year Plan, which was already a year old (see *Economic Roles of the Party and the Government*, ch.3). The Fourth National Party Congress also introduced a number of economic objectives, including establishment on a national scale of a new system of economic management, better use of prices to regulate supply and demand, budgets to implement economic development programs, tax policy to control sources of income, and banks to supply capital for production. Finally, differences over the role of the military surfaced at the congress, dividing party pragmatists, who saw the army as a supplement to the labor force, from the more doctrinaire theoreticians, who saw the military as a fighting force, the primary mission of which would be obstructed by economic tasks.

The Fifth National Party Congress, held in March 1982, confirmed Vietnam's alignment with the Soviet Union but revealed a breach in party unity and indecision on economic policy. An unprecedented six members of the Political Bureau were retired, including Vo Nguyen Giap, defense minister and former chief military strategist in the wars against France and the United States, and Nguyen Van Linh, future party general secretary who later returned to the Political Bureau in June 1985. The six who departed, however, were from the middle ranks of the Political Bureau. The topmost leaders—from General Secretary Le Duan to fifth-ranked member Le Duc Tho—remained in their posts. Thirty-four full members and twelve alternate members of the Central Committee also were dropped. The new Central Committee was increased from 133 members and 32 alternate members to 152 members and 36 alternate members. Party strength had grown to 1.7 million.

The Sixth National Party Congress, held in December 1986, was characterized by candid evaluations of the party and more leadership changes. There was an extraordinary outpouring of self-criticism over the party's failure to improve the economy. A new commitment was made to revive the economy but in a more moderate manner. The policy of the Sixth National Party Congress thus attempted to balance the positions of radicals, who urged a quicker transition to socialism through collectivization, and moderates, who urged increased reliance on free-market forces. Three of the country's top leaders voluntarily retired from their party positions: VCP General Secretary and President Truong Chinh, aged seventy-nine; second-ranked Political Bureau member and Premier Pham Van Dong, aged seventy-nine; and party theoretician and fourth-ranked Political Bureau member (without government portfolio) Le Duc Tho, aged seventy-five (see Appendix B). Afterwards, they took up positions as advisers, with unspecified powers, to the Central Committee. Chinh and Dong retained their government posts until the new National Assembly met in June 1987. Their simultaneous retirement was unusual in that leaders of Communist nations tend either to die in office or to be purged, but it paved the way for younger, better educated leaders to rise to the top.

Nguyen Van Linh, an economic pragmatist, was named party general secretary. The new Political Bureau had 14 members, and the new Central Committee was expanded to 173, including 124 full members and 49 alternate members. In continuing the trend to purify party ranks by replacing old members, the Sixth Party Congress replaced approximately one-third of the Central Committee members with thirty-eight new full members and forty-three



Ho Chi Minh addresses the Third National Party Congress (September 1960), flanked by Le Duan and Truong Chinh.

Courtesy Indochina Archives

new alternate members. It expanded the Secretariat from ten members to thirteen, only three of whom had previously served.

Party Organization

The Party Congress and the Central Committee

As stipulated in the party Statute, the National Party Congress (or National Congress of Party Delegates) is the party's highest organ. Because of its unwieldy size (the Sixth National Party Congress held in December 1986 was attended by 1,129 delegates), the infrequency with which it meets (once every 5 years or when a special situation arises), and its de facto subordinate position to the party's Central Committee, which it elects, the National Party Congress lacks real power. In theory, the congress establishes party policy, but in actuality it functions as a rubber stamp for the policies of the Political Bureau, the Central Committee's decision-making body. The primary role of the National Party Congress is to provide a forum for reports on party programs since the last congress, to ratify party directives for the future, and to elect a Central Committee. Once these duties are performed, the congress adjourns, leaving the Central Committee, which has a term of five years, to implement the policies of the congress.

The Central Committee—the party organization in which political power is formally vested—meets more frequently than the National Party Congress—at least twice annually in forums called plenums—and is much smaller in size (the Central Committee elected at the Sixth National Party Congress in December 1986 numbered 124 full members and 49 alternate members). Like the National Party Congress, however, it usually acts to confirm rather than establish policy. In reality, the creation of policy is the prerogative of the Political Bureau, which the Central Committee elects and to which it delegates all decision-making authority.

The Political Bureau, composed of the party's highest ranking members, is the party's supreme policy-making body; it possesses unlimited decision- and policy-making powers. At the Sixth National Party Congress, the Central Committee elected thirteen full members and one alternate member to the Political Bureau.

Acting in administrative capacities under the direction of the Political Bureau are a party Secretariat, a Central Control Commission, and a Central Military Party Committee. The Secretariat is the most important of these three bodies, overseeing the party and day-to-day implementation of policies set by the Political Bureau. In 1986 the Secretariat, headed by the party general secretary, was expanded from ten to thirteen members. Five of the Secretariat's members held concurrent positions on the Political Bureau: Nguyen Van Linh, Nguyen Duc Tam, Tran Xuan Bach, Dao Duy Tung, and Do Muoi. Among its roles are the supervision of Central Committee departments concerned with party organization, propaganda and training, foreign affairs, finance, science and education, and industry and agriculture. In 1986 there existed a seven-member Central Control Commission, appointed by the Central Committee and charged with investigating reports of party irregularities. A Central Military Party Committee with an undisclosed number of members, also appointed by the Central Committee, controlled the party's military affairs. In 1987, party committees throughout the armed forces were under the supervision of the People's Army of Vietnam's (PAVN—see Glossary) Directorate General for Political Affairs, which, in turn, was responsible to the Central Military Party Committee. These committees maintained close relationships with local civilian party committees (see fig. 14).

Other Party Organizations

Party caucuses operate throughout the government and mass organizations. Using assorted methods of persuasion and proselytization, they implement party lines, policies, and resolutions;

increase party influence and unity; and develop and propose guidelines and programs for mass organizations and party committees at various administrative levels. Party caucuses are responsible for appointing political cadres to serve as delegates or to hold key positions in such government organizations as the National Assembly and the people's councils, or in such party organizations as the party congresses and the mass organizations (see *The System of Government*, this ch.). In state agencies where the "manager system" is practiced—those in which party cadres have been appointed officially to management positions—the functions of party caucuses are assumed by coordination and operations committees.

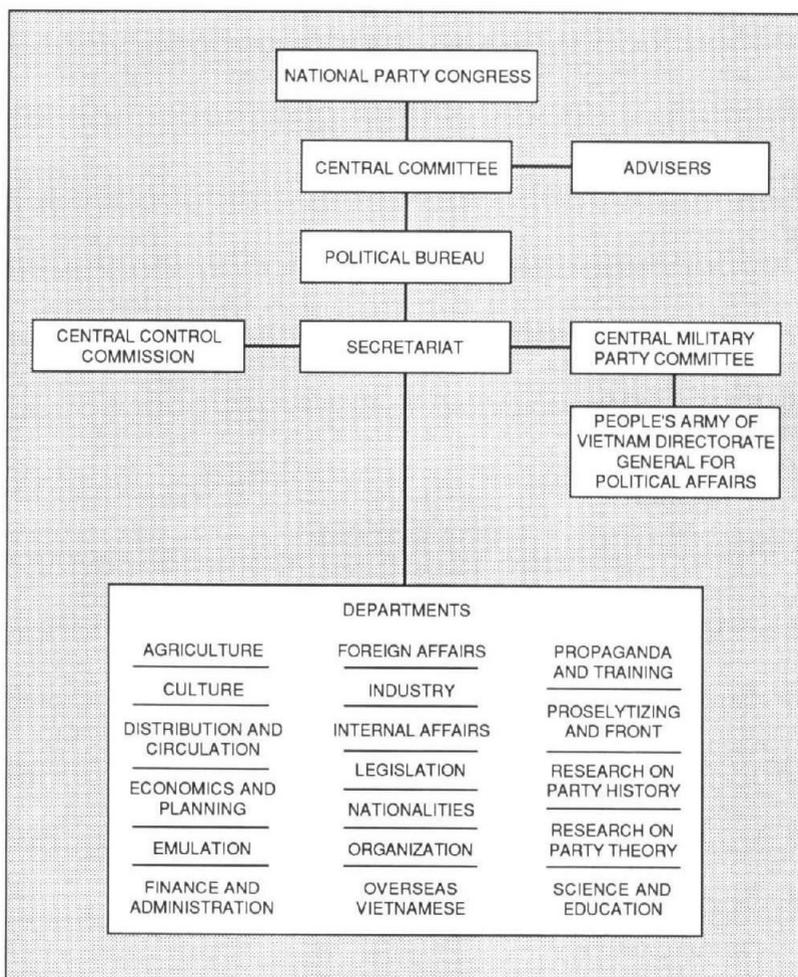
The chapter is the basic party unit. It numbers from three to thirty members depending upon whether it represents a production, work, or military unit. Larger groups, such as factories or cooperatives, may have more than one party chapter. A chapter's chief responsibilities are to indoctrinate party members and to provide political leadership for production units and the armed forces.

Cadres are party members in leadership positions. They function at all levels of party organization but are most numerous at lower levels. The strength of the cadre system is its ability to mobilize the people quickly. Its weaknesses include abuse of power, which is facilitated by the absence of enforced standards of conduct, and over-reliance by the higher echelons on the lower. The higher party leaders tolerate the excesses of lower echelon cadres because the lower-level representatives tend to be well entrenched in local society and in the best position to influence the people. Higher officials simply lack the clout to motivate the people as well.

Front Organizations

The purpose of front organizations is to mobilize and recruit for the party and to monitor the activities of their members in cooperation with local security agents. Organizations may be segregated by sex, age, national origin, profession, or other traits designated by the party. From members of front organizations, such as the Red-Scarf Teenagers' Organization and the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League, the party is able to select potential party members.

The Vietnam Fatherland Front, because it unites a number of subordinate front organizations, is the most important. Its first unified national congress took place in January 1977 when all national front organizations, including the National Front for the liberation of South Vietnam, informally called the National Liberation Front (NLF, Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai Phong Mien Nam Viet Nam), operating in the south, were merged under its banner. In the late 1980s, the Vietnam General Confederation of Trade



Source: Based on information from United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *Directory of Officials of Vietnam*, Washington, July 1985, 1-6; Nguyen Van Canh, *Vietnam under Communism 1975-1982*, Stanford, California, 1983, 57.

Figure 14. Organization of the Vietnamese Communist Party, 1987

Unions, described by the party as the “broadest mass organization of the working class,” was also significant because its members, along with party members, state employees, and members of the Youth League, were included among the elite granted material privileges by the state. Finally, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League was important because it acted to screen, train, and recruit party members.

In the mid-and late 1980s, the party increasingly viewed the front organizations as moribund and criticized them for being no longer representative of party policy. Party General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh, however, sought to revive and develop them as important avenues for controlled criticism of party abuses.

Political Dynamics

The VCP has been characterized by the stability of its leadership. According to Vietnam observer Douglas Pike, Hanoi's leadership was "forged of a constant forty-year association" in which individuals shared "the same common experience, the same development, the same social trauma." Because of their small number, Political Bureau members were able to arrive at agreement more easily than larger forums and hence were able to deal more effectively with day-to-day decisions. As individuals, they tended to take on a large number of diverse party and government functions, thus keeping the administrative apparatus small and highly personalized.

Decisions tended to be made in a collegial fashion with alliances changing on different issues. Where factions existed, they were differentiated along lines separating those favoring Moscow from those preferring Beijing or along lines distinguishing ideological hardliners and purists from reformists and economic pragmatists. The accounts of Hoang Van Hoan, a former Political Bureau member who fled to Beijing in 1978, and of Truong Nhu Tang, former justice minister of the NLF, verified the existence in the early 1970s of factions identified by their loyalty to either Moscow or Beijing. They asserted that the pro-Soviet direction taken following Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969, and particularly after the Fourth National Party Congress in 1976, was the result of the party's having progressively come under the influence of a small pro-Soviet clique led by Party Secretary Le Duan and high-ranking Political Bureau member Le Duc Tho, and including Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong, and Pham Hung. Until Le Duan's death, these five represented a core policy-making element within the Political Bureau. Whether or not a similar core of decision makers existed in the Political Bureau of the mid-1980s, under Party Secretary Nguyen Van Linh, was not clear.

Differences within the Political Bureau in the mid-1980s, however, appeared focused on the country's economic problems. The line was drawn between reformists, who were willing to institute changes that included a free market system in order to stimulate Vietnam's ailing economy, and ideologues, who feared the effect such reforms would have on party control and the ideological purity of the society. The leadership changes that occurred in late 1986

and early 1987 as a result of the Sixth National Party Congress suggested that the reformers might have won concessions in favor of moderate economic reform. The scale of the infighting reportedly was small, however, and the changes that were made probably were undertaken on the basis of a consensus reached between the hardliners and the reformers. Nevertheless, the results demonstrated that Vietnam's leaders increasingly had come to the realization that rebuilding the country's war-torn economy was as difficult an undertaking as conquering the Saigon government.

Political Culture

Vietnam's political culture has been determined by a number of factors of which communism is but the latest. The country's political tradition is one of applying borrowed ideas to indigenous conditions. In many ways, Marxism-Leninism simply represents a new language in which to express old but consistent cultural orientations and inclinations. Vietnam's political processes, therefore, incorporate as much from the national mythology as from the pragmatic concerns engendered by current issues.

The major influences on Vietnamese political culture were of Chinese origin. Vietnam's political institutions were forged by 1,000 years of Chinese rule (111 B.C. to A.D. 939). The ancient Chinese system, based on Confucianism, established a political center surrounded by loyal subjects. The Confucians stressed the importance of the village, endowing it with autonomy but clearly defining its relationship to the center. Those who ruled did so with the "mandate of heaven." Although they were not themselves considered divine, they ruled by divine right by reason of their virtue, which was manifested in moral righteousness and compassion for the welfare of the people. A monarch possessing these traits received the unconditional loyalty of his subjects. Selection of bureaucratic officials was on the basis of civil service examinations rather than heredity, and government institutions were viewed simply as conduits for the superior wisdom of the rulers (see *The Social System*, ch. 2).

The Vietnamese adopted this political system rather than one belonging to their Southeast Asian neighbors, whose rulers were identified as gods. Nevertheless, Vietnamese interpretations of the system differed from those of the Chinese both in the degree of loyalty extended to a ruler and in the nature of the relationship between the institutions of government and the men who ruled. In Vietnam, loyalty to a monarch was conditional upon his success in defending national territory. A history of Chinese domination had sensitized the Vietnamese to the importance of retaining

their territorial integrity. In China, territorial control did not arouse the same degree of fervor. In interpreting the role of government institutions, Vietnamese beliefs also conflicted with Confucian theory. Whereas the Confucians held that institutions were necessarily subordinate to the virtuous ruler, Vietnamese practice held the opposite to be true. Institutions were endowed with a certain innate authority over the individual, a trait manifested in the Vietnamese penchant for creating complex and redundant institutions. Despite Confucian influence, Vietnamese practice demonstrated a faith in administrative structures and in legalist approaches to political problems that was distinctly Vietnamese, not Confucianist.

Nevertheless, Confucian traits were still discernible in Vietnam in the mid-1980s. To begin with, many of the first-generation communist leaders came from scholar-official backgrounds and were well-versed in the traditional requisites of “talent and virtue” (*tai duc*) necessary for leadership. Ho Chi Minh’s father was a Confucian scholar, and Vo Nguyen Giap and the brothers Le Duc Tho and Mai Chi Tho were from scholarly families. They cultivated an image of being incorruptible and effective administrators as well as moral leaders. The relationship between the government and the governed was also deliberately structured to parallel the Confucian system. Like the Confucians, leaders of the highly centralized Vietnamese communist government stressed the importance of the village and clearly defined its relationship to the center.

In this link between ruler and subjects, the Confucian and communist systems appeared to co-exist more readily among the disciplined peasants of the North than among their reputedly fractious brethren in the South, where the influence of India and France outweighed that of China. Searching for reasons to explain the phenomenon, some observers have suggested that the greater difficulty encountered in transforming Vietnam’s southern provinces into a communist society stemmed, in part, from this region’s having been the least Sinicized. In addition, Southeast Asian influences in South Vietnam, such as Theravada Buddhism, had created a cultural climate in which relations with a distant center of authority were a norm (see Religion, ch. 2). Moreover, the South’s political systems had tended to isolate the center, in both symbolic and physical terms, from the majority of the people, who had no clear means of access to their government. The South had also been the first to fall to the French, who had extended their influence there by establishing colonial rule. In the North, however, the French had maintained only a protectorate and had allowed a measure of self-government. As a result, French influence in the

North was less than in the South and represented a smaller obstacle to the imposition of communism.

The influence of modern China, and particularly the doctrines of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party, on Vietnamese political culture is a more complicated issue. Vietnamese leaders, including Ho Chi Minh, spent time in China, but they had formed their impressions of communism in Paris and Moscow and through Moscow-directed Comintern connections. The success of the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, however, inspired the Vietnamese communists to continue their own revolution. It also enabled them to do so by introducing the People's Republic of China as a critical source of material support. The Second National Party Congress, held in 1951, reflected renewed determination to push ahead with party objectives, including reconstruction of the society to achieve communist aims and land reform.

The Soviet model, as well, can be discerned in Vietnamese political practice. In the areas of legal procedure, bureaucratic practice, and industrial management, the Vietnamese system more closely resembles the Soviet system than the Chinese. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, VCP leaders were attracted particularly by advances made in Soviet economic development. In the majority of cases, however, Vietnamese policies and institutions, rather than adhering strictly to either Chinese or Soviet models, have tended to be essentially Vietnamese responses to Vietnamese problems.

Traditional adversarial relationships with neighboring states have also helped to define Vietnam's political culture. The country's long-standing rifts with Cambodia and China, which developed into open conflicts in 1978 and 1979 respectively, suggest the need to view contemporary relationships in historical perspective (see *Early History* and *The Chinese Millennium*, ch. 1; *Foreign Relations*, this ch.). Hanoi's attitude regarding its relations with these two neighbors is grounded as much in accustomed patterns of interchange as in current concerns for national security. It is also firmly based in the Vietnamese tradition of resistance to foreign rule, which has been a theme of great appeal to Vietnamese patriots since the time of Chinese domination. The founding members of the VCP were the dissenting elite of a colonized country. They were attracted to Marxism-Leninism not only for its social theories but also because of the Leninist response to colonial subjugation. Ho himself was reported to have been more concerned with the problem of French imperialism than with that of class struggle.

Vietnam's agrarian economy also contributed to its political culture. As an agricultural people, the Vietnamese lacked an urban industrial proletariat to carry out their revolution. Leadership,

therefore, necessarily passed into the hands of scholar-official intellectuals and peasants.

Vietnam's political culture, in turn, has contributed to the country's comparative isolation from noncommunist states. This isolation is partially a result of the ideology that has created self-imposed political barriers with the West, but it is also the result of the collective mentality of the nation's leadership, which views itself as set apart from communist as well as noncommunist nations. This view stems from years of preoccupation with the struggle for independence and the reunification of the country. Such an ethnocentric focus on domestic affairs resulted in a provincial outlook that continued in the late 1980s and was reinforced by the lack of international experience of many of Vietnam's leaders whose foreign travel was limited to official visits to other communist states. In addition, Vietnam's military victories over reputedly superior military forces, including those of France, the United States, and, in 1979, China, have created a sense of arrogance that a wider world view would not justify.

Communist ideology, particularly as manipulated by the Vietnamese leadership, has also helped to shape Vietnam's political culture. The country's communist leaders have been adept at stressing the continuity of Marxist-Leninist doctrine with Vietnamese history. The VCP successfully identified communism with the historical goals of Vietnamese nationalism and achieved leadership of Vietnam's independence struggle by accommodating the aspirations of a number of ethnic, religious, and political groups. The party has presented the myths and realities of the past in a manner that suggests that they led naturally to the present. In his writings, Ho Chi Minh used classical Vietnamese literary allusions to convey a sense of mystique about the past, and he cultivated the classical Vietnamese image of a leader who reflected *uy tin* (credibility), a charismatic quality combining elements of compassion, asceticism, and correct demeanor, which legitimized a leader's claim to authority. The communist regime additionally promoted the importance of archaeology, popular literature, and cultural treasures in order to emphasize its ties to Vietnam's classical traditions. VCP historiography views the French colonial period (1858-1954) as more an interruption than a part of Vietnamese history.

Despite the care taken to preserve Vietnamese identity, the party has hesitated to deviate from Marxist-Leninist doctrine even when its application resulted in failure. The planned rapid and total transformation of the South to communism in the 1970s failed because it was almost entirely ideologically inspired and did not sufficiently

anticipate the scale of economic and social resistance that such a plan would encounter in the South. This failure paralleled the failure to collectivize the North rapidly in the 1950s. In both cases, however, the party maintained that the predominantly ideological programs had been instituted to attain nationalist goals and that nationalism had not been exploited for the purpose of furthering communism.

Vietnam's political culture represents, therefore, the steadfast survival of what is Vietnamese in the face of a long history of outside influence; integration of historical political ideals with an imported communist organizational model has created a communist identity that is no less Vietnamese.

The System of Government

Constitutional Evolution

The communist party-controlled government of Vietnam has ruled under three state constitutions. The first was promulgated in 1946, the second in 1959, and the third in 1980. Significantly, each was created at a milestone in the evolution of the VCP, and each bore the mark of its time.

The purpose of the 1946 constitution was essentially to provide the communist regime with a democratic appearance. The newly established government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) was sensitive about its communist sponsorship, and it perceived democratic trappings as more appealing to noncommunist nationalists and less provocative to French negotiators. Even though such guarantees were never intended to be carried out, the constitution provided for freedom of speech, the press, and assembly. The document remained in effect in Viet Minh-controlled areas throughout the First Indochina War (1946–54—see Glossary) and in North Vietnam following partition in 1954, until it was replaced with a new constitution in 1959.

The second constitution was explicitly communist in character. Its preamble described the DRV as a "people's democratic state led by the working class," and the document provided for a nominal separation of powers among legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. On paper, the legislative function was carried out by the National Assembly. The assembly was empowered to make laws and to elect the chief officials of the state, such as the president (who was largely a symbolic head of state), the vice president, and cabinet ministers. Together those elected (including the president and vice president) formed a Council of Ministers, which constitutionally (but not in practice) was subject

to supervision by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly. Headed by a prime minister, the council was the highest executive organ of state authority. Besides overseeing the Council of Ministers, the assembly's Standing Committee also supervised on paper the Supreme People's Court, the chief organ of the judiciary. The assembly's executive side nominally decided on national economic plans, approved state budgets, and acted on questions of war or peace. In reality, however, final authority on all matters rested with the Political Bureau.

The reunification of North and South Vietnam (the former Republic of Vietnam) in 1976 provided the primary motivation for revising the 1959 constitution. Revisions were made along the ideological lines set forth at the Fourth National Congress of the VCP in 1976, emphasizing popular sovereignty and promising success in undertaking "revolutions" in production, science and technology, culture, and ideology. In keeping with the underlying theme of a new beginning associated with reunification, the constitution also stressed the need to develop a new political system, a new economy, a new culture, and a new socialist person.

The 1959 document had been adopted during the tenure of Ho Chi Minh and demonstrated a certain independence from the Soviet model of state organization. The 1980 Constitution was drafted when Vietnam faced a serious threat from China, and political and economic dependence on the Soviet Union had increased. Perhaps, as a result, the completed document resembles the 1977 Soviet Constitution.

The 1980 Vietnamese Constitution concentrates power in a newly established Council of State much like the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, endowing it nominally with both legislative and executive powers. Many functions of the legislature remain the same as under the 1959 document, but others have been transferred to the executive branch or assigned to both branches concurrently. The executive branch appears strengthened overall, having gained a second major executive body, the Council of State, and the importance of the National Assembly appears to have been reduced accordingly. The role of the Council of Ministers, while appearing on paper to have been subordinated to the new Council of State, in practice retained its former primacy (see Council of State and Council of Ministers, this ch.; Appendix A, table 12).

Among the innovative features of the 1980 document is the concept of "collective mastery" of society, a frequently used expression attributed to the late party secretary, Le Duan (1908-1986). The concept is a Vietnamese version of popular sovereignty that advocates an active role for the people so that they may become

their own masters as well as masters of society, nature, and the nation. It states that the people's collective mastery in all fields is assured by the state and is implemented by permitting the participation in state affairs of mass organizations. On paper, these organizations, to which almost all citizens belong, play an active role in government and have the right to introduce bills before the National Assembly.

Another feature is the concept of socialist legality, which dictates that "the state manage society according to law and constantly strengthen the socialist legal system." The concept, originally introduced at the Third National Party Congress in 1960, calls for achieving socialist legality through the state, its organizations, and its people. Law, in effect, is made subject to the decisions and directives of the party.

The apparent contradiction between the people's right to active participation in government suggested by collective mastery and the party's absolute control of government dictated by "socialist legality" is characteristic of communist political documents in which rights provided the citizenry often are negated by countermeasures appearing elsewhere in the document. Vietnam's constitutions have not been guarantors, therefore, of the rights of citizens or of the separation and limitation of powers. They have been intended instead to serve the party-controlled regime.

The 1980 Constitution comprises 147 articles in 12 chapters dealing with numerous subjects, including the basic rights and duties of citizens. Article 67 guarantees the citizens' rights to freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and association, and the freedom to demonstrate. Such rights are, nevertheless, subject to a caveat stating "no one may misuse democratic freedoms to violate the interests of the state and the people." With this stipulation, all rights are conditionally based upon the party's interpretation of what constitutes behavior in the state's and people's interest.

Government Structure

The National Assembly

Constitutionally, the National Assembly is the highest government organization and the highest-level representative body of the people. It has the power to draw up, adopt, and amend the constitution and to make and amend laws. It also has the responsibility to legislate and implement state plans and budgets. Through its constitution-making powers it defines its own role and the roles of the Council of State, the Council of Ministers, the People's Councils and People's Committees, the Supreme People's Court, and

the Supreme People's Organs of Control. The assembly can elect and remove members of the Council of Ministers, the chief justice of the Supreme People's Court, and the procurator general of the People's Supreme Organ of Control. Finally, it has the power to initiate or conclude wars and to assume other duties and powers it deems necessary. The term of each session of the National Assembly is five years, and meetings are convened twice a year, or more frequently if called for by the Council of State.

Despite its many formal duties, the National Assembly exists mainly as a legislative arm of the VCP's Political Bureau. It converts Political Bureau resolutions into laws and decrees and mobilizes popular support for them. In this role, the National Assembly is led by the Council of Ministers acting through the Council of State and a variable number of special-purpose committees. Actual debate on legislation does not occur. Instead, a bill originates in the Council of Ministers, which registers the bill and assigns a key party member to present it on the floor. Before presentation, the member will have received detailed instructions from the party caucus in the assembly, which has held study sessions regarding the proposed legislation. Once the legislation is presented, members vote according to party guidelines.

A general national election to choose National Assembly delegates is held every five years. The first election following the reunification of the North and South was held in April 1976 and the voters selected 492 members, of which 243 represented the South and 249 the North. In 1987 the Eighth National Assembly numbered 496 members. Because successful candidates were chosen in advance, the electoral process was not genuine. No one could run for office unless approved by the party, and in many cases the local body of the party simply appointed the candidates. Nevertheless, every citizen had a duty to vote, and, although the balloting was secret, the electorate, through electoral study sessions, received directives from the party concerning who should be elected. The elections in 1987, however, were comparatively open by Vietnamese standards. It was evident that the party was tolerating a wider choice in candidates and more debate.

The Council of State

The Council of State is the highest standing body of the National Assembly. Its members, who serve as a collective presidency for Vietnam, are elected from among National Assembly deputies. The Council of State is "responsible and accountable" to the National Assembly, according to Chapter VII of the 1980 Constitution. It plays a more active role than the titular presidency provided for

in the 1959 constitution and, in addition, it has assumed the day-to-day duties of the former Standing Committee of the National Assembly under the old constitution. The council thus holds both legislative and executive powers, but in actuality it wields less power than the Council of Ministers. As stipulated in the Constitution, the Council of State comprises a chairman, several vice chairmen (there were three in 1987), a general secretary, and members (there were seven in 1987). Members of the Council of State cannot be concurrently members of the Council of Ministers. Its chairman concurrently commands the armed forces and chairs the National Defense Council, which controls the armed forces (see *The Armed Forces*, ch. 5). The Council of State nominally presides over the election of deputies to the National Assembly; promulgates laws and issues decrees; supervises the work of the Council of Ministers, the Supreme People's Court, the procurator general of the Supreme People's Organ of Control, and the People's Councils at all levels; decides, when the National Assembly is not in session, to form or dissolve ministries and state committees and to appoint or dismiss the vice chairmen of the Council of Ministers, ministers, and heads of state committees; declares a state of war, and orders general or local mobilization in the event of invasion. Such decisions, however, must be submitted to the next session of the National Assembly for ratification. The five-year term of the Council corresponds with that of the National Assembly, but the Council continues its functions until the new National Assembly elects a new Council of State.

The Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers is entrusted by the 1980 Constitution with managing and implementing the governmental activities of the state. It is described in that document as "the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the highest executive and administrative state body of the highest body of state authority." It is accountable to the National Assembly, and, more directly, to the Council of State when the National Assembly is not in session. Its duties include submitting draft laws, decrees, and other bills to the National Assembly and the Council of State; drafting state plans and budgets and implementing them following the National Assembly's approval; managing the development of the national economy; organizing national defense activities and assuring the preparedness of the armed forces; and organizing and managing the state's foreign relations. Its membership includes a chairman, vice chairman, cabinet ministers, and the heads of state committees, whose terms of office coincide with that of the National Assembly. The Council of Ministers includes its own standing

committee, which serves to coordinate and mobilize the council's activities. In 1986 the standing committee was expanded from ten to thirteen members.

Each ministry is headed by a minister, who is assisted by two to twelve vice ministers. The number and functions of the ministries are not prescribed in the Constitution, but in 1987 there were twenty-three ministries, and a number of other specialized commissions and departments. In apparent response to the call by the Sixth National Party Congress in 1986 for a streamlined bureaucracy, several ministries were merged. The former ministries of agriculture, food, and food industry were joined in a newly created Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry. The ministries of power and mines were merged to form the Ministry of Energy, and a newly created Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Welfare consolidated the duties of three former ministries. The addition of two new ministerial bodies also resulted from the 1986 Congress: a Ministry of Information to replace the Vietnam Radio and Television Commission, and a Commission for Economic Relations with Foreign Countries to act as a coordinating body for foreign aid.

People's Courts and People's Organs of Control

Vietnam's judicial bodies are the Supreme People's Court, the local People's Courts at the provincial, district, and city levels, the military tribunals, and the People's Organs of Control (see Internal Security, ch. 5). Under special circumstances, such as showcase trials involving breaches of national security, the National Assembly or the Council of State may set up special tribunals. Judges are elected for a term equivalent to that of the bodies that elected them, and trials are held with the participation of people's assessors, who may also act as judges. The Constitution guarantees defendants the right to plead their cases. Cases are prosecuted by a procurator.

The Supreme People's Court is the highest tribunal and is charged with the supervision of subordinate courts. As a court of first instance, it tries cases involving high treason or other crimes of a serious nature; and as the highest court of appeals, it reviews cases originating with the lower courts. Appeals are infrequent, however, because lower courts tend to act as final arbiters.

Local people's courts function at each administrative level except at the village level, where members of the village administrative committees serve in a judicial capacity. Proceedings of local courts are presided over by people's assessors.

The Supreme People's Organs of Control function as watchdogs of the state and work independently of all other government

agencies, although they are nominally responsible to the National Assembly. They are subordinate to the Supreme People's Organ of Control also known as the Supreme People's Procurate, which, in turn, is headed by a chief procurator or procurator general. These organs exercise extraordinary powers of surveillance over government agencies at every level, including the court system and agencies for law enforcement.

A new Penal Code was adopted in January 1986, replacing a 1950 code of justice based on the French Civil Code. Under the new code, crime is defined very broadly. Authorities interpret a wide range of antisocial behavior as potentially criminal, such as graft, petty corruption, hoarding, and currency malpractice (see fig. 15).

Local Government

Vietnam in 1987 remained divided into thirty-six provinces, three autonomous municipalities, and one special zone directly under the central government (see fig. 1). Provinces are divided into districts, towns, and capitals. The autonomous municipalities directly under central authority are divided into precincts, and these are subdivided into wards. Provincial districts are divided into villages and townships; provincial towns and provincial capitals are divided into wards and villages. Each administrative level has a people's council and a people's committee.

The people's councils represent the local authority of the state and are the top supervisory bodies at each level. They do not govern directly but instead elect and oversee people's committees that act as executive bodies and carry out local administrative duties. Council members are popularly elected—although candidates are screened by the party—and are responsible for ensuring strict local observance of the Constitution and laws and for ruling on local plans and budgets. Council members are further charged with overseeing the development and maintenance of local armed forces units (see *The Armed Forces*, ch. 5).

Following the Fourth National Party Congress in 1976, the districts became the basic administrative units of the government. The Congress had declared that the districts should become agro-industrial economic units, acting to orchestrate the reorganization of production. Formerly, they had functioned simply as intermediaries for channeling directives to the village level. After 1976 they functioned as agencies for economic planning, budgeting, and management, and as the chief political units of local government. Emphasis on this latter function has created an enormous bureaucracy. Many provincial people's committees have in excess of thirty

separate departments, and each district people's committee has had to establish an equal number of counterparts.

The three autonomous municipalities in Vietnam are Hanoi, Haiphong, and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). The government of an autonomous municipality consists of an elected people's council that in turn elects an executive committee headed by a mayor. The executive committee oversees numerous departments administering various activities.

The precinct wards of the three autonomous municipalities are divided into sectors, which are then further divided into neighborhood solidarity cells. As many as 28 to 30 cells, together numbering 400 to 600 households, may make up a sector, and 10 sectors may compose a ward. The administration of a village corresponds to that of an urban ward.

The ward executive committee ensures that government activities prescribed by the precinct committee are carried out. The precinct committee simply represents an intermediary level between the municipal government and the ward committees.

At the ward level, in addition to people's councils and executive committees, there are security departments with connections to the national security apparatus. The security departments monitor the activities of ward members, but the departments' decisions are kept secret from the chairpersons of the ward executive committees (see *Internal Security*, ch. 5).

A sector, instead of having an executive committee, has a residents' protective committee concerned with fighting fires and preventing petty crime. A sector security officer is charged with the suppression of dissent. Every head of household belongs to a subcell of only a few families and reports regularly to a neighborhood solidarity cell comprising twelve to twenty families. Party directives and policies reach the citizenry via the party's mass organizations or the hierarchy of the party and its representatives at the ward level.

Foreign Relations

Until the fall of the South Vietnamese government in 1975, the VCP considered foreign policy interests to be subordinate to the overriding issue of national liberation and reunification. Only with the end of the war did Hanoi turn its full attention to foreign policy concerns. Among the more pressing were its relations with Laos, Cambodia, China, the Soviet Union, the member nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the West. Like domestic policy, foreign policy required the reconciliation of ideology and nationalism.

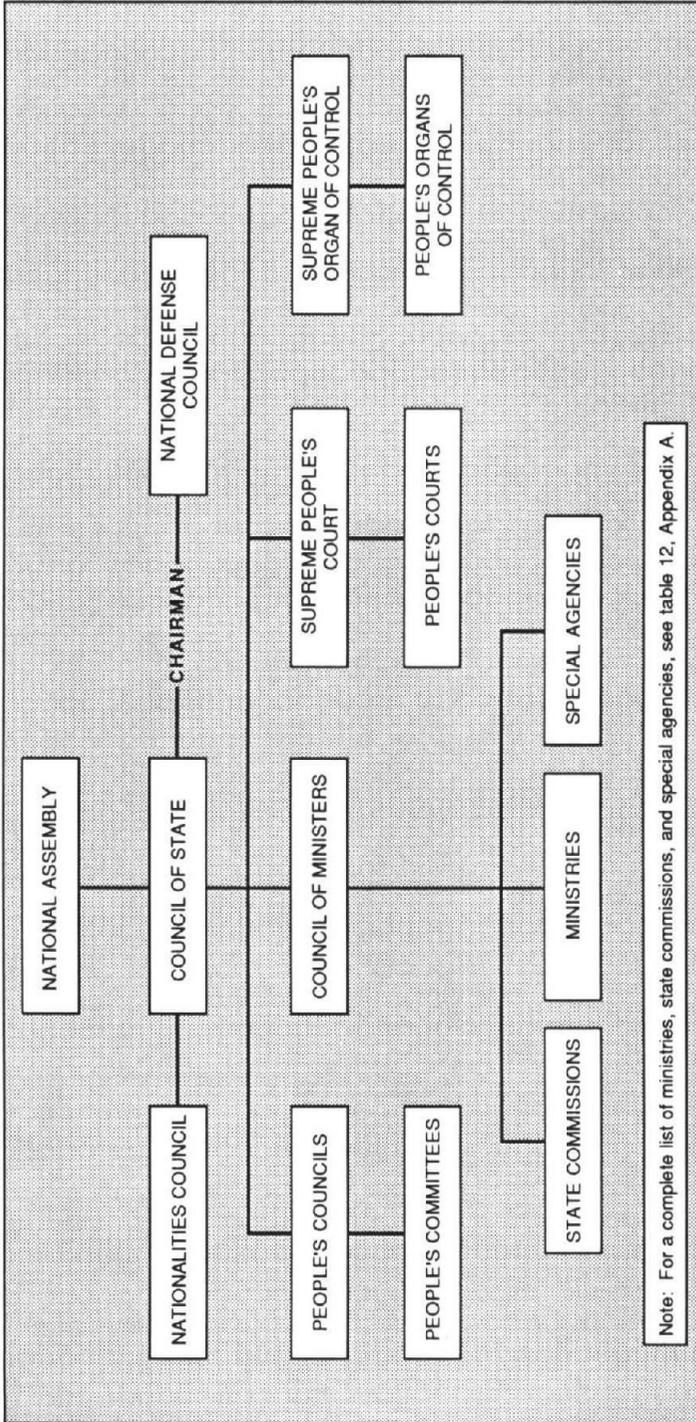


Figure 15. National Government Structure, 1987

From an ideological standpoint, the Vietnamese saw themselves as fulfilling their international socialist duty by defeating a major “imperialist” enemy and by carrying out a revolution that could be a model for the Third World. Communist ideology in turn served Vietnamese nationalism by providing a justification for the pursuit of its nationalist goals. A Marxist-Leninist historical view, for example, justified creating an alliance of the three Indochinese countries because such an alliance was instrumental in the struggle against imperialism. By the same reasoning, Hanoi’s decision in 1978 to overthrow the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia was defensible on the grounds that a new government more closely dedicated to Marxist-Leninist principles was required in Cambodia in order to reestablish an effective alliance against imperialism. Ideological and nationalist goals thus were often interchangeable, and Vietnamese foreign policy could be construed as serving national interests and international communism at the same time. In the final analysis, however, nationalism and national security remained the primary foreign policy concerns.

Laos and Cambodia

In 1987 Vietnam’s relationships with Laos and Cambodia did not differ substantially from their historic patterns. Contemporary Vietnamese attitudes reflected the conviction of cultural and political superiority that had prevailed during the nineteenth century when weaker monarchs in Laos and Cambodia had paid tribute to the Vietnamese court in a system modeled on Vietnam’s own relationship to China (see *The Chinese Millennium, Nine Centuries of Independence*, ch. 1). In the 1980s, Laos and Cambodia had once more become Vietnam’s client states. Laos, with a communist party long nurtured by the Vietnamese, entered the relationship with docility; Cambodia, however, under a ruthless, but anti-Vietnamese dictatorship of its own, resisted being drawn into the Vietnamese orbit. Tension between the two states escalated into open warfare and, in 1978, Hanoi launched an invasion that toppled the Pol Pot regime in Phnom Penh. In 1987 Cambodia remained a state governed precariously by a regime installed by Hanoi, its activities constrained by the presence of a substantial Vietnamese occupation force and a tenacious insurgency in the countryside. Repeated Vietnamese assurances that Hanoi would withdraw its troops from the beleaguered country by 1990 were received with skepticism by some observers.

The communist victory in Vietnam in 1975 was accompanied by similar communist successes in Laos and Cambodia. The impression of the noncommunist world at the time was that the

three Indochinese communist parties, having seized control in their respective countries, would logically work together, through the fraternal bond of a single ideology, to achieve common objectives. What appeared to be a surprising deterioration in relations, however, was actually the resurfacing of historical conflict that ideological commonality could not override (see *Early History*, ch. 1). The victories of the Vietnamese communists and the Cambodian communist Khmer Rouge (see *Glossary*) in 1975 did not bring peace. Relations between the two parties had been strained since the close of the First Indochina War. The Geneva Agreements had failed to secure for the Khmer communists, as part of the first Cambodian national liberation organization, the United Issarak Front, a legitimate place in Cambodian politics. Some Khmer Communist and Issarak leaders subsequently went to Hanoi, but among those who stayed behind, Pol Pot and his faction, who later gained control of the Khmer (Kampuchean) Communist party, blamed Vietnam for having betrayed their party at Geneva. Pol Pot never lost his antipathy for Vietnam. Under his leadership, the Khmer Rouge adhered for years to a radical, chauvinistic, and bitterly anti-Vietnamese political line. Skirmishes broke out on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border almost immediately following the communist victories in Saigon and Phnom Penh, and in less than four years Vietnam was again at war, this time with Cambodia. Vietnam's offensive forces crossing the Cambodia border in December 1978 took less than a month to occupy Phnom Penh and most of the country.

When tensions between Cambodia and Vietnam broke into the open, the reason was ostensibly Cambodian demands that Hanoi return territory conquered by the Vietnamese centuries earlier. Vietnam's offers to negotiate the territorial issue were rejected, however, because of more urgent Khmer concerns that Hanoi intended to dominate Cambodia by forming an Indochina Federation (see *Glossary*) or "special relationship." In any event, Vietnamese interest in resolving the situation peacefully clearly came to an end once the decision was made to invade Cambodia.

The invasion and the subsequent establishment of a puppet regime in Phnom Penh were costly to Hanoi, further isolating it from the international community. Vietnam's relations with a number of countries and with the United Nations (UN) deteriorated. The UN General Assembly refused to recognize the Vietnamese-supported government in Phnom Penh and demanded a total Vietnamese withdrawal followed by internationally supervised free elections. The ASEAN nations were unified in opposing Vietnam's action. Urged by Thailand's example, they provided support for



*Statue representing Vietnamese and Cambodian solidarity,
Prey Veng, Cambodia
Courtesy Bill Herod*

the anti-Phnom Penh resistance. In February 1979, China moved to retaliate against Vietnam across their mutual border (see China, this ch.).

The ensuing conflict in Cambodia pitted Vietnamese troops, assisted by forces of the new Phnom Penh government—the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK)—against a coalition of communist and noncommunist resistance elements. Of these elements, the government displaced from Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese, Pol Pot's communist Khmer Rouge (which had established the government known as Democratic Kampuchea in Cambodia in 1975), was the strongest and most effective military force, mainly because of support from the Chinese. The extremism and brutality of the Khmer Rouge's brief reign in Phnom Penh, where it may have been responsible for as many as 2 million deaths, made it infamous. ASEAN's concern that the reputation of the Khmer Rouge would lessen the international appeal of the anti-Vietnamese cause led it to press the Khmer Rouge and noncommunist resistance elements into forming a coalition that would appear to diminish the Khmer Rouge's political role. The tripartite Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) was formed on June 22, 1982. In addition to the Khmer Rouge, it comprised a noncommunist resistance force called the Kampuchean People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF)—under the leadership of a former official of Prince Norodom Sihanouk's government, Son Sann—and Sihanouk's own noncommunist force (the Armée Nationale Sihanoukiste—ANS). The Cambodian government in exile needed the added legitimacy that noncommunist factions and the prestige of Sihanouk's name could contribute. The Chinese were reluctant to withdraw their support from the Khmer Rouge, which they viewed as the only effective anti-Vietnamese fighting force among the three coalition members. They were persuaded, however, to support the coalition and eventually began supplying arms to Son Sann and Sihanouk as well as Pol Pot.

Despite an extensive record of internal squabbling, the coalition government in 1987 provided the international community with an acceptable alternative to the Vietnamese-supported Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh. From 1982 to 1987, the coalition survived annual Vietnamese dry-season campaigns against its base camps along the Thai-Cambodian border, and, by changing its tactics in 1986 to emphasize long-term operations deep in the Cambodian interior, increased its military effectiveness. The coalition's military operations prevented the Vietnamese from securing all of Cambodia and helped create a stalemate.

In 1987 the situation remained deadlocked. Despite the costs, Vietnam's negotiating position remained inflexible. Hanoi apparently perceived itself to have gained enormously in terms of national security. The "special relationship" it had futilely sought with Pol Pot was effected almost immediately with the new Phnom Penh government when, in February 1979, a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed. In 1982 and 1983 a substantial number of Vietnamese reportedly settled in Cambodia, although Vietnam did not seem to be making a concerted effort to colonize the country. Instead, Hanoi appeared to be striving to build an indigenous regime that would be responsive to general Vietnamese direction and become part of an Indochinese community under Vietnamese hegemony.

In contrast to its relationship with Cambodia, Vietnam's relations with communist Laos have been fairly stable. Historically, the ethnic tribes comprising present-day Laos had been less resistant to Vietnamese subjugation, and relations had never reached the level of animosity characteristic of the Vietnam-Cambodia relationship.

Although Hanoi was a signatory to the Geneva Agreement of 1962 that upheld the neutrality of Laos, it has failed to observe the agreement in practice. During the Second Indochina War (see Glossary), for example, the North Vietnamese obtained the cooperation of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (Pathet Lao) in constructing and maintaining the Ho Chi Minh Trail (see Glossary), an unauthorized road communications network that passed through the length of Laos. Thousands of Vietnamese troops were stationed in Laos to maintain the road network and provide for its security. Vietnamese military personnel also fought beside the Pathet Lao in its struggle to overthrow Laos' neutralist government. Cooperation persisted after the war and the Lao communist victory. In 1976, agreements on cooperation in cultural, economic, scientific, and technical fields were signed between the two countries, followed in 1977 by a twenty-five-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. The treaty was intended to strengthen ties as well as sanction Vietnam's military presence in, and military assistance to, Laos. Following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, Laos established links with the Vietnamese-supported PRK in Phnom Penh. Meanwhile, Hanoi maintained 40,000 to 60,000 troops in Laos. In 1985 the three governments discussed coordinating their 1986-90 five-year plans, and Vietnam assumed a larger role in developing Lao natural resources by agreeing to joint exploitation of Laotian forests and iron ore deposits. Nevertheless, such growth in cooperation

prompted some debate on the Lao side over the country's growing dependence on Vietnam.

China

The deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations was gradual, commencing perhaps most dramatically with Richard M. Nixon's 1972 visit to China (which Hanoi later called the beginning of China's betrayal of Vietnam), but in the mid-1970s the signs of an impending breakdown were barely discernible. Until 1977 the Vietnam-Cambodia dispute appeared to the outside world to be purely bilateral, and China's strategic considerations seemed only distantly connected to the skirmishes taking place on the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. The Chinese in the 1976-77 period were preoccupied with internal affairs, including the deaths of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, the arrest of Mao's widow, and the return to power of Deng Xiaoping. As the situation between Vietnam and Cambodia deteriorated, Cambodia's strategic importance to both China and Vietnam became more evident, and signs of a potential Sino-Vietnamese rift became clearer. Aside from risking the return of the Khmer Rouge, Vietnam viewed disengagement from Cambodia as tantamount to inviting China to establish a foothold on a second Vietnamese frontier. In China's view, Vietnam's sustained presence in Cambodia precluded such a development, but, more importantly, it placed Cambodia under the authority of an historic Asian adversary now closely allied with a superpower rival, the Soviet Union.

Vietnam's and China's shared modern experiences, namely their common exploitation by colonial powers and adaptations to communist ideology, did little to alter Vietnam's historical view of China, which was colored by lengthy periods of Chinese conquest and domination. During the Second Indochina War, China acted as North Vietnam's closest ally, but, according to later Vietnamese statements, the Chinese tried to dominate the relationship from the beginning. Vietnam's desperate need for Chinese assistance forced it to maintain good relations with Beijing for the duration of the war, despite Vietnamese suspicions that China's ultimate purpose was to weaken Vietnam (see *The Chinese Millennium and Nine Centuries of Independence*, ch. 1).

After the end of the Second Indochina War, underlying tensions between the two countries surfaced, and in 1978 a number of issues converged to bring the relationship to the breaking point. In addition to the growing dispute in Cambodia, these issues included territorial disagreements and Vietnam's treatment of its own largest

minority group, the Hoa (see Glossary) or ethnic Chinese, who numbered nearly 2 million.

The territorial dispute involved primarily delineation of territorial waters in the Gulf of Tonkin and sovereignty over two archipelagos in the South China Sea, the Paracel and the Spratly Islands (the Xisha and the Nansha in Chinese; the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa in Vietnamese). A border dispute on land (over fewer than sixty square kilometers) was responsible for the relatively steady occurrence of low-level border clashes involving cross-border violations and the exchange of small-arms fire. In 1958 the two governments decided to defer settling their border differences until after victory had been achieved in the South.

Disagreement over territorial waters in the Gulf of Tonkin stemmed from agreements reached between China and France in 1887, stipulating a territorial limit of no more than three nautical miles. These agreements had been adequate until 1973, when Hanoi announced to Beijing its intention to negotiate contracts with foreign firms for the exploration of oil in the Gulf of Tonkin. The disputed islands in the South China Sea assumed importance only after it was disclosed that they were near the potential sites of substantial offshore oil deposits. In January 1974, Chinese military units seized islands in the Paracels occupied by South Vietnamese armed forces, and Beijing claimed sovereignty over the Spratlys. Following their conquest of South Vietnam in the spring of 1975, units of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) nevertheless moved to occupy the Spratly Islands previously held by the Saigon regime.

Vietnam's treatment of the Hoa became an issue in 1978, when Hanoi instituted a crackdown on the Chinese community because of its pervasive role in domestic commerce in the South and its alleged subversive activities in the North. The government action forced an unprecedented exodus of thousands of Hoa across the border into China, prompting Beijing to accuse Vietnam of persecuting its Chinese community and of breaking a 1955 agreement that called for the gradual and voluntary integration of the Hoa into Vietnamese society. The situation was aggravated when Vietnam denied landing privileges to three Chinese ships dispatched to evacuate Hoa seeking voluntary repatriation to China. Beijing threatened Hanoi with unspecified retaliation, and Chinese activities on the Sino-Vietnamese border escalated.

The deterioration in bilateral relations became evident when China reduced in May 1978 and then cancelled on July 3 its remaining aid projects in Vietnam. The official announcement followed by only a few days Hanoi's admission on June 29 to the Soviet-dominated Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon—see Glossary).

A few months later, in November 1978, a new era in Soviet-Vietnamese relations began with the signing of a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that called for mutual assistance and consultation in the event of a security threat to either country. The document facilitated Soviet use of Vietnamese airports and port facilities, particularly the former United States military complex at Cam Ranh Bay (see *The Armed Forces*, ch. 5). In return, it assured Vietnam of economic and military aid for the anticipated invasion of Cambodia and established the Soviet Union as a deterrent to possible Chinese intervention in Cambodia.

Vietnam's decision to align with the Soviets, together with its invasion of Cambodia and mistreatment of the Hoa, provoked Beijing to "teach Hanoi a lesson." A "self-defense counterattack," mounted by China along the Sino-Vietnamese border on February 17, 1979, ended less than a month later, on March 5, when Chinese leaders announced that their objectives had been met and proceeded to withdraw their forces (see *History*, ch. 5). Despite the Chinese boast of having shattered the myth of Vietnam's invincibility, the invasion effected little more than the diversion of some Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. The bulk of the resistance reportedly was offered by local Vietnamese border units and regional forces. Outnumbered, they performed well, exposing significant weaknesses in Chinese tactics, strategy, logistics, equipment, and communications. In the final analysis, the results were far from conclusive. Peace negotiations were initiated following the disengagement of forces, but broke down several times before being discontinued in December 1979.

The Cambodian crisis, too, remained stalemated, and Vietnamese dependence upon the Soviet Union continued. In 1987 tensions along the Sino-Vietnamese border erupted in sporadic fighting. China believed that the Cambodian conflict would serve Chinese interests by draining the Vietnamese economically and weakening Hanoi. China's sustained pressure on Vietnam's northern border would also tax Vietnam militarily, while satisfying ASEAN's requests for Chinese assistance in the conflict and providing Chinese armed forces with invaluable combat experience. Consequently, Vietnam's dry-season campaigns to eliminate CGDK resistance base camps along the Thai-Cambodian border were generally matched by corresponding Chinese acts along the Sino-Vietnamese border. China issued vague threats to Vietnam of a "second lesson" in the mid-1980s but as of 1987 had not acted on these threats.

China imposed the removal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia as a precondition to improved Sino-Soviet relations, and



*Lang Son following 1979 Chinese invasion
Courtesy Bill Herod*

diplomatic activity in late 1986 indicated that Vietnam might mend its differences with China in the event the Soviets moved closer to the Chinese. Despite Hanoi's desire to ease tensions with Beijing, however, it was not willing to do so at the expense of its position in Cambodia.

The Soviet Union

Since the earliest days of the VCP, when the party's primary mentor was the Comintern, the Soviet Union has played a complex role in VCP affairs. Many of Vietnam's leaders had trained in the Soviet Union and had formed personal ties with their Soviet contemporaries. Historically, however, the relationship between the two nations has been characterized by strain, particularly on the Vietnamese side, and the record suggests several instances of Soviet neglect or betrayal of Vietnamese interests. These included Moscow's indifference to the founding of the VCP in 1930; failure to support materially or otherwise the Vietnamese resistance war against the French in the 1930s and early 1940s; failure to recognize North Vietnam until five years after its founding; failure to support Vietnam's application for membership in the UN in 1948 and 1951; support for the partitioning of Vietnam at the Geneva Conference in 1954; and sponsorship of a proposal to admit both North and South Vietnam to the UN in 1956. These examples of

Soviet policy reminded the Vietnamese of the peril inherent in placing too much trust in a foreign ally.

The Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s favorably altered the Soviet attitude toward Vietnam. Beginning in 1965, the Soviets initiated a program of military assistance to Hanoi that proved invaluable in carrying on the Second Indochina War. Hanoi, however, continued to suspect Soviet motives and perceived that Soviet aid, when offered, was insufficient and given only grudgingly after repeated appeals.

Following the conquest of South Vietnam in 1975, Hanoi sought to retain the equilibrium of its wartime relations with both China and the Soviet Union, but mounting tensions with Beijing, culminating in the loss of Chinese aid in 1978, compelled Hanoi to look increasingly to Moscow for economic and military assistance. Beginning in late 1975, a number of significant agreements were signed between the two countries. One coordinated the national economic development plans of the two countries, and another called for the Soviet Union to underwrite Vietnam's first post-reunification Five-Year Plan. The first formal alliance was achieved in June 1978 when Vietnam joined Comecon. That organization, which facilitated the economic integration of the Soviet Union, six East European countries, Cuba, and Mongolia, was able to offer economic assistance for some of the projects abandoned by China (see *Foreign Trade and Aid*, ch. 3).

Vietnam's decision to invade Cambodia, which the leadership apparently made shortly after joining Comecon, required more than economic assistance from the Soviets (see *Laos and Cambodia*, this ch.). The possibility of a formal alliance between Hanoi and Moscow had apparently been discussed since 1975, but the Vietnamese had rejected the idea in order to protect their relationship with China. In 1978 that relationship had deteriorated to the point where protecting it was no longer a consideration, and circumstances in Cambodia confirmed the need for Vietnamese-Soviet military cooperation. In spite of Vietnam's needs, it is likely that the November 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was imposed by the Soviets as a condition for military assistance. As a result of the treaty, the Vietnamese granted the Soviets access to the facilities at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay. Use of the bases represented a substantial regional strategic gain for Moscow, whose naval bases in the Pacific Ocean, until then, had been limited to the Soviet Far East.

Soviet support sustained Vietnamese operations in Cambodia. Military aid in 1978 approached US\$800 million annually, but after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the Chinese attack on

Vietnam in February 1979, the figure rose to almost US\$1.4 billion. The sharp increase, reflecting the Soviet effort to replace quickly Vietnamese equipment losses on the Sino-Vietnamese border, was subsequently reduced to between US\$800 and 900 million in 1980 and between US\$900 million and 1 billion in 1981. Military aid increased to 1.7 billion annually in the 1982-85 period and decreased to an estimated US\$1.5 billion in 1985. Reported Soviet dissatisfaction with Hanoi's handling of Cambodia, stemming from the stalemated battlefield situation and its high costs, did not appear to affect Moscow's decision to continue to provide assistance for the war. At the end of 1987, there was no indication that the Soviets were pressing Vietnam to resolve the conflict.

In addition to its role as Vietnam's exclusive donor of military aid, the Soviet Union in 1987 was also Vietnam's largest contributor of economic aid and its biggest trade partner. During the Third Five-Year Plan (1981-85), the Soviets provided some US\$5.4 billion in balance-of-payments aid, project assistance, and oil price subsidies. Total economic aid for 1986 was an estimated US\$1.8 billion. The Soviets also have been a major supplier of food and commodity aid on a mostly grant-aid or soft-currency basis. By 1983 they were supplying 90 percent of Vietnam's petroleum, iron and steel, fertilizer, and cotton imports and 70 percent of its grain imports (see *Foreign Trade and Aid*, ch. 3).

Soviet-Vietnamese ties in the mid-1980s were sound, although troubled by some underlying strain. The Vietnamese distrusted Soviet intentions and resented Hanoi's dependent role; the Soviets in turn distrusted the Vietnamese for not confiding in them. Reportedly, on a number of occasions Moscow learned of major Vietnamese policy plans and changes only after the fact. According to some foreign observers, the Soviets were not entirely prepared for the sudden deterioration in Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1978, and they may not have been aware of the full extent of Vietnamese plans in Cambodia. Others believe the Soviet Union was aware of the deterioration and was allowing Vietnam to play the role of proxy in Moscow's own dispute with Beijing.

Friction was particularly evident in economic relations. The Soviets resented the enormous burden of their aid program to Vietnam and felt that much of it was wasted because of Vietnamese inefficiency. In turn, the Vietnamese were offended by Moscow's 1980 decision to reduce aid in the face of severe economic hardships in Vietnam. In the mid-1980s, aid continued at a reduced rate although Vietnam's economic situation had worsened.

The prospect of an improvement in the state of Sino-Soviet relations in the mid-1980s did not appear to threaten the Soviet

Union's ties with Vietnam. Although China demanded that Moscow ensure Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia as a condition to normalizing the Sino-Soviet relationship, Vietnamese leaders proceeded as if they were sure their existing policy in Cambodia would not be threatened. The Soviets even went so far as to promote improved relations between Hanoi and Beijing. At Vietnam's Sixth Party Congress in December 1986, the senior member of the Soviet delegation suggested that the normalization of relations between Vietnam and China would improve the situation in Asia and the world as a whole. The Vietnamese agreed with this premise but were unwilling to seek improved ties at the expense of weakening their position in Cambodia.

Eastern Europe

In addition to relations with the Soviet Union, Vietnam maintained close relations with other members of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. Between 1965 and 1975, Eastern Europe provided Vietnam with some US\$844 million in aid amounting to 18 percent of all aid received during that period. Between November 1976 and June 1977, Vietnam signed commodity and payments agreements with eight communist countries, cultural agreements with four, scientific cooperation agreements with eight, and separate agreements for economic, scientific, or technical cooperation with five. Its relations with Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), and Hungary were particularly close.

The United States

The Communist victory in South Vietnam in 1975 abruptly concluded three decades of United States intervention in Vietnam and brought to a close a painful and bitter era for both countries. The war generated considerable social and political discord in the United States, massive disruption in Vietnam, and was enormously costly to both sides. Vietnam endured physical destruction—ravaged battle sites, leveled factories and cities, and untold numbers of military and civilian casualties. The United States escaped physical devastation, but it suffered the loss of 58,000 lives (2,400 unaccounted for) and spent roughly \$150 billion in direct expenses to sustain the war. The war also divided and confused American society.

To the Vietnamese communists, the war against the United States simply extended the war for independence initiated against the French. In Hanoi's view, when the United States displaced the French in Indochina, it assumed the French role as a major-power obstacle to Vietnam's eventual reunification.

For the United States, intervention was derived from considerations that largely transcended Vietnam. In the closing months of World War II, the United States had supported the idea of an international trusteeship for all of Indochina. Subsequently, in spite of misgivings in Washington about French intentions to reimpose colonial rule in Indochina, the United States eventually tilted in support of the French war effort in the embattled region. Anti-colonial sentiment in the United States after World War II thus failed to outweigh policy priorities in Europe, such as the evolving North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) relationship. The formal creation of NATO and the communist victory in China, both of which occurred in 1949, led the United States to support materially the French war effort in Indochina. The perception that communism was global and monolithic led the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower to support the idea of a noncommunist state in southern Vietnam, after the French withdrawal under the Geneva Agreements of 1954. Although this goal arguably ran counter to two key features of the Geneva Agreements (the stipulation that the line separating North and South Vietnam be neither a political nor territorial boundary and the call for reunification elections), it was based on the United States assessment that the Viet Minh—which, contrary to the agreements, had left several thousand cadres south of the demarcation line—was already in violation. The first United States advisers arrived in the South within a year after Geneva to help President Ngo Dinh Diem establish a government that would be strong enough to stand up to the communist regime in the North.

Although Washington's advisory role was essentially political, United States policy makers determined that the effort to erect a non-communist state in Vietnam was vital to the security of the region and would be buttressed by military means, if necessary, to inhibit any would-be aggressor. Defending Vietnam's security against aggression from the North and from southern-based communist insurgency was a mission Washington initially perceived as requiring only combat support elements and advisers to South Vietnamese military units. The situation, however, rapidly deteriorated, and in 1965, at a time when increasing numbers of North Vietnamese-trained soldiers were moving into South Vietnam, the first increment of United States combat forces was introduced into the South and sustained bombing of military targets in North Vietnam was undertaken. Nearly eight more years of conflict occurred before the intense involvement of the United States ended in 1973.

An "Agreement Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam" was signed in Paris on January 27, 1973, by Washington,

Hanoi, Saigon, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government, representing the Vietnamese communist organization in the South, the Viet Cong (see Glossary—contraction of Viet Nam Cong San). The settlement called for a cease-fire, withdrawal of all United States troops, continuance in place of North Vietnamese troops in the South, and the eventual reunification of the country “through peaceful means.” In reality, once United States Forces were disengaged in early 1973 there was no effective way to prevent the North from overwhelming the South’s defenses and the settlement proved unenforceable. Following the fragile cease-fire established by the agreement, PAVN units remained in the South Vietnamese countryside, while Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN—see Glossary) units fought to dislodge them and expand the areas under Saigon’s control. As a result, the two sides battled from 1973 to 1975, but the ARVN, having to fight without the close United States air, artillery, logistical, and medevac (medical evacuation) support to which it had become accustomed, acquitted itself badly, losing more and more ground to the communists.

The surprisingly swift manner in which the South Vietnamese government finally collapsed in 1975 appeared to confirm that the Paris agreement had accomplished little more than to delay an inevitable defeat for the United States ally, South Vietnam, and that Washington had been impotent to avert this outcome.

Following the war, Hanoi pursued the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States, initially in order to obtain US\$3.3 billion in reconstruction aid, which President Richard M. Nixon had secretly promised after the Paris Agreement was signed in 1973. Under Article 21 of the agreement, the United States had pledged “to contribute to healing the wounds of war and to post-war reconstruction of the DRV . . .” but had specifically avoided using terminology that could be interpreted to mean that reparations were being offered for war damages. Nixon’s promise was in the form of a letter, confirming the intent of Article 21 and offering a specific figure. Barely two months after Hanoi’s victory in 1975, Premier Pham Van Dong, speaking to the National Assembly, invited the United States to normalize relations with Vietnam and to honor its commitment to provide reconstruction funds. Representatives of two American banks—the Bank of America and First National City Bank—were invited to discuss trade possibilities, and American oil companies were informed that they were welcome to apply for concessions to search for oil in offshore Vietnamese waters.

Washington neglected Dong’s call for normal relations, however, because it was predicated on reparations, and the Washington

political climate in the wake of the war precluded the pursuit of such an outcome. In response, the administration of President Gerald R. Ford imposed its own precondition for normal relations by announcing that a full accounting of Americans missing in action (MIAs—see Glossary), including the return of any remains, would be required before normalization could be effected. No concessions were made on either side until President Jimmy Carter softened the United States demand from a full accounting of MIAs to the fullest possible accounting and dispatched a mission to Hanoi in 1977 to initiate normalization discussions.

Although the Vietnamese at first were adamant about United States economic assistance (their first postwar economic plan counted on the amount promised by President Nixon), the condition was dropped in mid-1978 when Hanoi made additional gestures toward normal relations. At that time, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach and the United States government reached an agreement in principle on normalization, but the date was left vague. When Thach urged November 1978, a date that in retrospect is significant because he was due in Moscow to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, Washington was noncommittal. During this period, United States officials were preoccupied with the question of the Indochinese refugees, and they were in the process of normalizing relations with China. This was an action that could have been jeopardized had Washington concurrently sought a rapprochement with Vietnam, a nation whose relationship with Beijing was growing increasingly strained. Policy makers in Hanoi correctly reasoned that the United States had opted to strengthen its ties with China rather than with Vietnam, and they moved to formalize their ties with the Soviets in response. Their original hope, however, had been to gain both diplomatic recognition from the United States and a friendship treaty with Moscow, as a double guarantee against future Chinese interference.

In the United States, the issue of normalizing relations with Vietnam was complicated by Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in December 1978, the continuing plight of Vietnamese refugees, and the unresolved MIA issue (see *Ethnic Groups and Languages*, ch. 2). In 1987, under President Ronald Reagan, the United States continued to enforce the trade embargo imposed on Hanoi in 1975 and barred normal ties as long as Vietnamese troops occupied Cambodia. Any efforts to improve relations remained closely tied to United States willingness to honor its 1973 aid commitment to Vietnam and to Hanoi's failure to account for the whereabouts of more than 2,400 MIAs in Indochina. From the signing of the Paris

agreements in 1973 until mid-1978, the Vietnamese had routinely stressed the linkage between the aid and MIA issues. Beginning in mid-1978, however, Hanoi dropped its insistence that the MIA and aid questions be resolved as a precondition for normalization and stopped linking the MIA question to other unresolved matters between the two countries. Vietnamese leaders contrasted their restraint on the MIA issue with its alleged political exploitation by the United States as a condition for normal relations. As additional signs of goodwill, Hanoi permitted the joint United States-Vietnamese excavation of a B-52 crash site in 1985 and returned the remains of a number of United States servicemen between 1985 and 1987. Vietnamese spokesmen also claimed during this period to have a two-year plan to resolve the MIA question but failed to reveal details.

Although Vietnam's Sixth National Party Congress in December 1986 officially paid little attention to relations with the United States, the report of the congress noted that Vietnam was continuing to hold talks with Washington on humanitarian issues and expressed a readiness to improve relations. Although ambivalent in tone, the message was more positive than the 1982 Fifth National Party Congress report, which had attributed the stalemated relationship to Washington's "hostile policy." The improved wording was attributable to the influence of newly appointed Party General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh, who was expected to attach high priority to expanding Vietnam's links with the West.

Within a few months of the Sixth National Party Congress, however, Hanoi began to send conflicting signals to Washington. In mid-1987 the Vietnamese government, having determined that cooperation had gained few concessions from the United States, reverted to its pre-1978 position linking the aid and MIA issues. The resumption of its hardline stand, however, was brief. A meeting between Vietnamese leaders and President Reagan's special envoy on MIAs, General John W. Vessey, in August 1987 yielded significant gains for both sides. In exchange for greater Vietnamese cooperation on resolving the MIA issue, the United States agreed officially to encourage charitable assistance for Vietnam. Although the agreement fell short of Hanoi's requests for economic aid or war reparations, it marked the first time that the United States had offered anything in return for Vietnamese assistance in accounting for the MIAs and was an important step toward an eventual reconciliation between the two countries.

ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed



*Ho Chi Minh City poster
portrays American and Chinese “aggressors,” 1979.
Courtesy Bill Herod*

in 1967 as a regional, economic, cultural, and social cooperative organization. The original five member nations—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand (the sixth member, Brunei, was admitted in January 1984)—had little in common in their culture, history, or politics. Nevertheless, after a slow start the organization flourished; by 1987 it had the fastest growing GNP of all economic groups in the world and was a key force for regional stability.

ASEAN's charter declares that membership is open to all states in the region—a gesture toward Vietnam that Hanoi repeatedly rebuffed. Before Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia in December 1978, integration of the three Indochinese states and ASEAN into a larger regional organization was discussed within the ASEAN community as a possible solution to regional problems. The proposal surfaced at an ASEAN summit meeting held in Bali in January 1976, when, following reunification, Vietnam requested observer status at ASEAN meetings. It was understood at the time, however, that the inclusion of communist states within a grouping of free-market countries was unprecedented, and the idea was interpreted to be more a goodwill gesture than a serious proposition.

From 1976 to 1978, ASEAN's differences with Vietnam were both symbolic and real. ASEAN, for example, proposed establishing

Southeast Asia as a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality and invited Vietnam to support the proposal. Hanoi refused but countered with its own proposal, calling instead for a region of peace, independence, and neutrality. Apparently, the Vietnamese objected to the term *freedom* because of their vulnerability to criticism on human rights issues. The term *independence*, on the other hand, was promoted by the Vietnamese as a concept opposing all foreign military bases in Southeast Asia, an idea that many of the ASEAN nations did not share.

During the Second Indochina War, each ASEAN state pursued its own Vietnam policy. Malaysia and Indonesia maintained strict neutrality, whereas Thailand and the Philippines contributed personnel and matériel to South Vietnam. Perceptions of Vietnam as a possible threat to the region also varied among member nations. Indonesia and Malaysia viewed Vietnam as a buffer against Chinese expansionism, whereas Thailand, wary of possible repetition of historic patterns of confrontation with Vietnam, turned to China for protection following the war's end and the subsequent withdrawal of United States forces from Thailand.

Following the 1978 invasion of Cambodia, however, the ASEAN nations were united in their condemnation of Hanoi. They took the lead in mobilizing international opinion against Vietnam, and, in the UN General Assembly, they annually sponsored resolutions calling for withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and for internationally supervised elections. The ASEAN nations also were instrumental in preventing the Vietnam-sponsored Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh from taking over Cambodia's UN seat. In June 1982, ASEAN was instrumental in persuading three disparate Cambodian resistance elements to merge into a coalition resistance government (see Laos and Cambodia, this ch.).

ASEAN's position on Cambodia was important to Hanoi, because it was through ASEAN's efforts at the UN that the world's attention continued to focus on Cambodia in the late 1980s. The Vietnamese thus saw ASEAN as having the power to confer upon them or to deny them legitimacy in Cambodia. Vietnamese diplomats sought to convince the ASEAN countries that the invasion of Cambodia was intended to eliminate the threat posed by Pol Pot's alignment with China. Rather than have its activity in Cambodia perceived as potentially damaging to ASEAN's security, Vietnam wanted to assure ASEAN members that it was in the group's interest to join with Vietnam in countering the Chinese threat to the region. Cultivating goodwill with key ASEAN members was an important part of this strategy. Thus, in 1978 Vietnam and the Philippines agreed to negotiate but failed to settle their conflicting

claims to the Spratly Islands. Foreign Minister Thach, during a late-1982 visit to Indonesia, took a conciliatory position in discussing Vietnam's and Indonesia's competing claims to the Natuna Islands, and in 1984 Hanoi made a similar gesture to Malaysia in order to help resolve their conflicting claims over Amboyna Cay. In 1987, however, resolving the war in Cambodia remained the key to any further resolution of differences between Vietnam and ASEAN.

Thailand

As the ASEAN member most vulnerable to a Vietnamese attack, Thailand was foremost among the ASEAN partners opposing Vietnam's 1978 invasion of Cambodia. Thailand's suspicion of Vietnamese long-term objectives and fear of Vietnamese support for an internal Thai communist insurgency movement led the Thai government to support United States objectives in South Vietnam during the Second Indochina War. In 1979, after Vietnam's military occupation of Cambodia had raised these same concerns again, Bangkok was compelled once again to ally with an adversary of Vietnam and looked to Beijing for security assistance. In both instances, Thailand's actions hardened Hanoi's attitude toward Bangkok.

In 1973 a new civilian government in Thailand created a chance for some degree of reconciliation with Vietnam, when it proposed to remove United States military forces from Thai soil and adopt a more neutralist stance. The Vietnamese responded by sending a delegation to Bangkok, but talks broke down before any progress in improving relations could be made. Discussions resumed in August 1976. They resulted in a call for an exchange of ambassadors and for an opening of negotiations on trade and economic cooperation, but a military coup in October 1976 ushered in a new Thai government that was less sympathetic to the Vietnamese. Contact was resumed briefly in May 1977, when Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos held a conference to discuss resuming work on the Mekong Development Project, a major cooperative effort that had been halted by the Second Indochina War. Beginning in December 1978, however, the conflict in Cambodia dominated diplomatic exchanges, and seasonal Vietnamese military offensives that included incursions across the Thai border and numerous Thai casualties particularly strained the relationship.

Other Noncommunist Nations

Relations with noncommunist nations were still in the early stages of development in the mid-1970s to mid-1980s. Noncommunist aid, nevertheless, was a significant part of Hanoi's budget prior to

Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in December 1978. In 1976 and 1977, for example, aid from noncommunist nations amounted to US\$438.5 million, of which Sweden, France, Japan, and UN-related organizations accounted for 78 percent. With the exception of aid from Sweden, however, such aid was either significantly curtailed or terminated following the invasion.

Trade ties, after the invasion, suffered similarly. In 1976 four noncommunist trading partners—Japan, Hong Kong, France, and Sweden—accounted for 44 percent of Vietnam's imports, and more than half of Vietnam's exports went to noncommunist buyers such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and France. A decade later, in 1986, only 20 percent of Vietnam's imports were of noncommunist origin, and 40 percent of its exports were reaching noncommunist markets.

By the mid-1980s, however, Vietnam was actively seeking to improve its economic and political ties with the noncommunist world community in order to stimulate aid, trade, and investment. With few exceptions, noncommunist nations were prepared to reciprocate. The one obstacle preventing their doing so remained Hanoi's continued occupation of Cambodia and the absence of a resolution to the conflict.

International Organizations

In 1976 Vietnam was admitted to the UN and gained membership in a number of the organization's affiliated agencies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF, see Glossary), the World Bank (see Glossary), and the Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin (see Glossary). Hanoi also successfully claimed the seat formerly occupied by South Vietnam in the Asian Development Bank (see Glossary). In the 1980s it was a member of Comecon, the Colombo Plan (see Glossary), the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT, see Glossary), and actively participated in the Non-aligned Movement (see Glossary) and the Group of 77 (see Glossary).

The Media

Although an official description of the press, offered by the Sixth National Party Congress, defines the media's role as being "the voice of the party and of the masses," and identifies its task as being to "propagate the party's lines and policies," as well as to report and analyze the news, the Vietnamese press is much more a medium for educating the public and filtering information, than for reporting news. It is controlled by the VCP Central Committee's Propaganda

and Training Department in accordance with guidelines established by the Ministry of Culture, and both agencies act to ensure that it reflects the policies and positions of the party. In mid-1987, however, there emerged increasing evidence within the media that a movement might be underway to change the character of the press. Articles stressing the importance of investigative reporting, calling for more journalistic freedom to report accurately, and defending the right of the people to be heard appeared in many of the leading newspapers. The movement appeared to be led by a small but influential group of journalists seeking to make the press more assertive by emphasizing accurate reporting and a more balanced reflection of public opinion.

In the late 1980s, there were approximately 350 national or local newspapers, magazines, journals, news bulletins, and newsletters published in Vietnam. Some local newspapers were published in the languages of tribal minorities and one, in Ho Chi Minh City, was published in Chinese. In addition, there were a small number of publications intended for distribution outside Vietnam.

The national press included publications intended for the general public (e.g., *Tap Chi Cong San*, Communist Review) as well as those aimed at specific audiences, such as women (*Phu Nu Vietnam*, Vietnamese Women) or trade union members (*Tap Chi Cong Doan*, Trade Union Review). Separate journals and newspapers covered sports, culture, economics, social sciences, the military, and science and technology. Each of the thirty-six provinces and the three autonomous municipalities, as well as the special zone, published a newspaper and one or more journals dealing with culture, education, and science and technology. Local newspapers covered local events and did not compete with national publications.

Party control of the press ensured the political correctness of a story and determined in which publication it would appear. Rarely was the same story covered in more than one national newspaper or magazine. *Nhan Dan* (People's Daily)—the VCP daily—and *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* (People's Army)—the armed forces daily—were normally limited to national and international stories. Articles on subjects like sports or art appeared in newspapers or journals devoted to those subjects. *Nhan Dan*, the leading national newspaper and the official organ of the VCP Central Committee, began publication in 1951. By 1987, as a four-page daily reporting domestic and international news, it published the full texts of speeches and articles by party and government leaders and included feature articles on the government, party, culture, and economy. *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, published daily except Sunday by PAVN, was also four

pages in length and included international and national news, but with an emphasis on military activities and training.

The principal national magazine was *Tap Chi Cong San* (Communist Review), a monthly journal. Formerly called *Hoc Tap* (Studies), its name was changed in January 1977, after the Fourth Party Congress. It was a theoretical and political journal and was considered to be the voice of the VCP. In 1987 its table of contents was published for international dissemination in English, French, Spanish, and Russian.

Publications intended specifically for foreign audiences in the 1980s were *Vietnam Courier*, in English and French—a monthly with articles on current events as well as Vietnamese culture and history; *Vietnam*, in Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, Russian, English, French, and Spanish—a monthly with pictorial essays on all aspects of Vietnamese life; *Vietnam Foreign Trade*, in English; *Vietnam Social Sciences*, in English, French, and Russian; *Vietnam Youth*, in English and French; *Vietnamese Scientific and Technical Abstracts*, in English; *Vietnamese Studies*, in English and French; *Vietnamese Trade Unions*, in English, French, and Spanish; *Women of Vietnam*, in English and French; and *Informado El Vjetnamio* (Information on Vietnam) in Esperanto.

The country's wire service, the Vietnam News Agency (VNA), was the principal source of domestic and international news for the nation's domestic and international media in 1987. It published, on a daily basis, a twelve-to-sixteen-page English-language compendium, *Vietnam News Agency*, which provided standard press-service coverage of the day's news events.

By 1986 international shortwave news reports were broadcast by the Voice of Vietnam in eleven languages (Cambodian, Chinese—both Mandarin and Cantonese, English, French, Indonesian, Japanese, Lao, Russian, Spanish, and Thai) as well as Vietnamese. The broadcast sites for these programs included five in Hanoi and fifteen in other locations throughout the country. Transmissions reached neighboring Southeast Asian countries and regions as distant as Latin America, Africa, and Europe. Domestic service was provided from fifty-one AM transmission sites, of which five were located in Hanoi, three in Ho Chi Minh City, and the rest in other cities and districts. In addition an FM station was located in Ho Chi Minh City, and an unspecified number of other FM stations were located elsewhere in Vietnam.

The Central Television network was created in 1970. By the mid-1980s, five channels were known to broadcast from twenty-one transmission sites in Vietnam. Viewers were served by two channels in Hanoi, one in Ho Chi Minh City and one in Da Nang;

Hue, Can Tho, and Qui Nhon were served by another channel. There may have been broadcasts from Nha Trang and Vinh as well. Television Vietnam offered programs in color and in black and white. Black and white daily national programming was broadcast from Hanoi, on Monday through Friday, for ninety minutes a day and, on Saturday and Sunday, for three hours a day.

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Recent books on the political process in Vietnam are comparatively few in number, and even fewer detail the structure and the inner workings of the party and the government. Among works that are extremely informative, however, are *Vietnam since the Fall of Saigon* and *Vietnam: Nation in Revolution*, by William Duiker, and *Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective*, the assembled views of a number of leading Vietnam scholars, edited by William Turley. Nguyen Van Canh's *Vietnam under Communism, 1975-1982* is useful because of its discussion of party and government structure both at the national and local level.

A legal discussion of the 1980 Constitution is provided in Chin Kim's article on "Recent Developments in the Constitutions of Asian Marxist-Socialist States." Party congresses are discussed in Ralph Smith's "Vietnam's Fourth Party Congress," Carlyle Thayer's "Development Strategies in Vietnam: The Fourth National Congress of the Vietnam Communist Party," An Tai Sung's "The All-Vietnam National Assembly: Significant Developments," and Thai Quang Trung's "The Fifth Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party."

Vietnam's foreign relations, particularly the war in Cambodia and the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, have prompted a number of useful books and articles. First among these on the subject of the war in Cambodia is Nayan Chanda's *Brother Enemy*, a work also useful for its discussion of postwar United States-Vietnamese relations. *The Third Indochina Conflict*, edited by David Elliott, includes a number of informative chapters on the subject. The Chinese-Vietnamese border war in 1979 is discussed in a historical context in G.D. Loescher's "The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict in Recent Historical Perspective," and in Eugene Lawson's *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*. Vietnam's relations with Southeast Asia are covered in David Elliott's "Vietnam in Asia: Strategy and Diplomacy in a New Context," and Soviet-Vietnamese relations are discussed in Robert Horn's "Soviet-Vietnamese Relations and the Future of Southeast Asia," Douglas Pike's "The USSR and Vietnam: Into the

Swamp,” and Leif Rosenberger’s “The Soviet-Vietnamese Alliance and Kampuchea.”

An overview of Vietnam since the end of the Second Indochina War is presented by Carlyle Thayer and David Marr in *Vietnam since 1975—Two Views from Australia* and by William Turley in “Vietnam since Reunification.” Additional articles focusing on Vietnam’s domestic problems following unification include Carlyle Thayer’s “Vietnam’s New Pragmatism,” William Turley’s “Hanoi’s Domestic Dilemmas,” Stephen Young’s “Unpopular Socialism in United Vietnam” and “Vietnamese Marxism: Transition in Elite Ideology,” and Jayne Werner’s “Socialist Development: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in Vietnam.”

To follow Vietnam’s politics and government on a daily basis, some of the most useful reference sources are the *Daily Report: Asia & Pacific*, published by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, and *Southeast Asia Report*, published by the Joint Publication Research Service. The *Indochina Chronology*, a quarterly published by the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley, is also invaluable. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)