THE SHAPING OF FOREIGN POLICY

VIETNAMESE GRAND STRATEGY AFTER THE COLD WAR

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Introduction

This study examines the case of Vietnam to explore the sources of strategic choice and the mechanisms of strategic change in foreign policy. The conventional understanding about the sources and mechanisms of foreign policy strategic choice and change rests on the distinction of "levels of analysis."[1] This distinction gives rise to two types of explanation. The first type boils down the sources of strategic choice and change to a single level of analysis. The second type mingles various sources located at different levels in comprehensive but *ad hoc* ways. Both types of explanation have serious shortcomings. Single-level analyses are mostly inadequate, while analyses of the second type are less interesting analytically and often incoherent.

The conventional understanding about Vietnam's foreign policy illustrates these shortcomings very well. It is based on four major arguments. The first posits the major source of foreign policy at the international level. Shifts in the international balance of power trigger changes in foreign policy through a mechanism commonly known as "balance of power" or power balancing. According to this argument, Vietnam reacted to the decline of Soviet-U.S. confrontation in the late 1980s and the demise of the USSR in the early 1990s by performing a balancing act between China and the United States, which has been a feature of Vietnam's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Plausible as it may seem, this argument creates, however, a number of puzzles that damage its explanatory power. One puzzle is why Vietnam persistently tried to forge an alliance with China against the United States during the early 1990s, when Hanoi believed U.S. power was in decline and a multipolar world order in which Washington would be only one pole among many would replace the Cold War's bipolar order in

[1] For important works on levels of analysis, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); J. David Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (October 1961), pp. 77-92; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976).

which the United States was one of the two superpowers. Related to this puzzle is the sister puzzle why Vietnam's policy toward the United States turned positive during 2003 after Hanoi acknowledged that the distribution of world power was nearly unipolar with the United States at the top. A third puzzle is why Vietnam veered closer to China during the late 1990s when China's power was rising.

The second and third arguments locate the main source of Vietnam's foreign policy respectively at the domestic level, particularly the regime and the societal level. These sources are the needs for regime security and economic development. Although these motives are real and strong in Vietnamese politics, they alone cannot explain the country's strategic choices and changes. For example, the settlement of territorial disputes between Vietnam and China in the border treaties of 1999 and 2000 is explained by the fact that both China and Vietnam badly needed regime security and economic development. However, this explanation generates the puzzle why the two countries did not come to a similar settlement in the early 1990s when, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square incident and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the needs for regime security and economic development for both countries had been much higher. Overall, the two arguments fail to account for how the two motives are combined and when the one prevails over the other.

The fourth argument finds the central source of Vietnam's foreign policy at the individual level. According to this argument, major strategic choices reflect the supreme leader's personality. For example, Vietnam's policy of closer ties with China in the late 1990s, including controversial concessions in the 1999 and 2000 border pacts, was a product of General Secretary Le Kha Phieu's pro-China attitude. However, the leader's personality argument fails to explain why during the leadership of General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, Vietnam underwent a major shift in strategic orientation despite the fact that Manh's foreign policy attitude remains largely unchanged.

The conventional account about Vietnam's foreign policy often combines these four major factors—power balancing, regime security, economic development, and

leader's personality—in *ad hoc* ways.[2] However, the result is an incoherent narrative and several puzzles are generated thereby. Why did Vietnam during 1989-1991, under the leadership of the reform-minded General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh, put a premium on regime security at the expense of economic development, slowing down reforms in domestic policies, escalating criticisms of the West, and seeking a security alliance with China? Why did Vietnam's efforts to join the World Trade Organization remain weak until 2003 and abruptly turn more vigorous after that despite all the rhetoric of international opening and integration that swiftly followed the launch of reform in 1986? More generally, these puzzles are related to the explanation of two major turning points in the trajectories of Vietnam's foreign policy since the mid-1980s. The first is a "left turn" in 1989 when Vietnam put brake on its comprehensive reform process and opted for a policy of close ties with China. The second is a "right turn" in 2003 which accelerated Vietnam's international integration and cleared the way for strategic engagement with the United States. The conventional arguments, singly or combined in their *ad hoc* ways, fail to account for the underlying logic and the evolution of Vietnam's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era.

My study offers a third type of explanation. Instead of recurring to a single level of analysis or combining various factors at different levels in comprehensive but *ad hoc* ways, this third type investigates how different factors—material and ideational, international, domestic, and individual—interact to produce strategic choices and changes in a state's foreign policy. Examining the case of Vietnam since the mid-1980s and using the method of process-tracing, the study generates a number of hypotheses for a theory of strategic choice and change. First, the sources of foreign policy strategic

[2] Major works on Vietnam's foreign policy after the Cold War include Gareth Porter, "The Transformation of Vietnam's World-view: From Two Camps to Interdependence," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (June 1990), 1-19; Frank Frost, *Vietnam's Foreign Relations: Dynamic of Change* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993); Zachary Abuza, "International Relations Theory and Vietnam," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (March 1996), 406-419; Eero Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World: Marxist-Leninist Doctrine and the Changes in International Relations, 1975-93* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997); James W. Morley and Masashi Nishihara, eds., *Vietnam Joins the World* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Carlyle A. Thayer and Ramses Amer, eds., *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999); Jörn Dosch and Ta Minh Tuan, "Recent Changes in Vietnam's Foreign Policy: Implications for Vietnam-ASEAN Relations," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Rethinking Vietnam* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

choice are a constant and three variables. The constant is social motivation that includes the basic needs for security, wealth, and standing. The three variables operate in the long, medium, and short-terms respectively. The long-term variable is historical experience of a society's encounter with the outside world. This experience involves an outlook on the world and the related ambition of a country's place in the world. The medium-term variable is the international balance of political, economic, and military power. The short-term variables include the power game among domestic actors as well as leaders' preferences and style of leadership. Foreign policy is derived from grand strategy, which refers to the full package of a state's domestic and foreign policies. Grand strategies emerge as a response to perceived shifts in the balance of international economic, political, and military power. However, this is not to say that international pressures and incentives are translated into foreign policy. Rather, pressures and incentives are given meaning by worldviews, which reflect a society's historical experiences of its place in the international system at traumatic junctures of its encounter with the outside world. Strategic changes in foreign policy follow what I call the "strategic algorithm," which incorporates four major mechanisms—balancing against threat, bandwagoning with power, learning, and survival by transformation.

The findings of this study challenge some common reference points used to understand contemporary Vietnamese politics and foreign policy. Contrary to the conventional understanding, I argue that Vietnamese foreign policy after the Cold War cannot be modeled as deliberate actions of a unitary actor, but more effectively, it can be modeled as resulting from a political contest between competing elite camps pursuing different grand strategies. There is a tendency in the conventional understanding to assume that Vietnamese decision making is consensus-based. This study's findings suggest, however, that strategic choices in post-Cold War Vietnam reflected a tug-of-war, sometimes stalemate, rather than a consensus between two fundamentally different grand strategic paradigms. Contrary to the conventional account that Vietnam's foreign policy in the reform era (1986-present) is in transition and marked by the gradual marginalization of ideology, I argue that, first, Marxism-Leninism had until the 2003 turning point dominated though not monopolized the

guidance of Vietnamese foreign policy, and second, the ideological evolution of Vietnam's foreign policy after the Cold War followed a zigzag course rather than a linear one as suggested by the transition narrative.

The analytic pivot of the study is the concept of grand strategy. Grand strategy refers, in a broad sense, to the full package of domestic and foreign policies of a state, and in a narrower sense, to the logic underlying that package.[3] As a paradigm that informs and guides foreign policy, grand strategy consists of premises and pathways. Grand strategic premises include assumptions about the structure and dynamics of the world and a state's goals in it. Grand strategic pathways are the methods and avenues to achieve those goals under the conditions described by the premises.

The making of a state's grand strategy involves debates among advocates of different grand strategy proposals as well as contests and compromises among competing elite groups. Different grand strategy proponents can share the same goals while disagreeing on their world views and hence their pathways to achieve their goals. More radically, they can diverge in both their views of the world and their state's goals, thus pursuing fundamentally different pathways.

States naturally try to pursue a unified grand strategy, but there are many cases in which a state is divided in terms of grand strategy as the political contest among its contradicting grand strategies remains unsettled. One example is Russia under President Boris Yeltsin, whose inconsistent domestic and foreign policies reflected the tug of war

[3] My conception of grand strategy shares this basic understanding with the general literature on grand strategy. For similar views, see Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 7 and Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 16. However, my emphasis on the premises and my distinction between grand strategic premises and pathways distinguish my concept of grand strategy from those of other authors. I also depart from most of the literature on grand strategy in that I do not assume a primacy of security motives. Doing so, I share with Paul Kennedy the insistence that a definition of grand strategy that is appropriate to the analysis of foreign policy must be flexible about the national goals. See Paul Kennedy, "Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition," in Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). Influential definitions of grand strategy that assumes the primacy of security motives include Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein, "Beyond Realism: The Study of Grand Strategy," in idem., eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

between the Atlanticists (e.g., Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar) and the Eurasianists (e.g., Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov). Post-Cold War Vietnam is another example, which will be thoroughly examined in this study. In such cases, it is useful to distinguish between elite grand strategy and state grand strategy. The latter is the result of ongoing struggles and compromises between competing elite grand strategies.

A coherent paradigm that includes both premises and pathways, grand strategy is not merely instrumental but also normative. It is not only a strategy in the popular usage of the word, but first of all, it is about values and objectives. As John Lewis Gaddis has noted, in its core meaning, strategy is "the process by which ends are related to means, intentions to capabilities, objectives to resources".[4] Grand strategy is the process by which long-term, overriding, and central objectives are defined and related to the major resources for and principal methods of achieving those objectives. With regard to foreign policy, grand strategy involves answering four basic questions:

- Worldview: What is the nature of the world?
- Self-perception: Who are we?
- Ambitions: What do we want?
- Strategic orientations: How to achieve our goals?

The first question addresses the nature of the world and its answer reflects one's view of the world. This may be a view of the world as it is or it will be or even as it should be. I do not assume *a priori* either policymakers have relatively accurate assessments of the world situation or their views tend to be influenced by their wishful thinking. Most of the scholarship assumes that policymakers perceive the world primarily in terms of world order and international structure. Yet this is not always the case. Both spatial structures and temporary trends may be equally important in policymakers' assessments.

[4] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment. A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. viii.

The second question addresses a polity's identity and its answer reflects how one perceives one's political self. The political self is the primary community you feel you belong to in the international arena. It is usually but not necessarily a nation. The popularity of nation is a consequence of nationalism, which is a historical, not primordial, phenomenon. Other kinds of political self can be sub-national, such as the ruling regime, or trans-national, such as a religious community. Policymakers' perceptions of their political self include their understanding of the boundaries between them and others and the threat to their polity's survival. They also inform about their views of the position and posture of their political community in the world.

The third question addresses a political community's aspirations and interests and its answer reflects the collective ambitions of the community. Answering this question is the process of defining a country's goals and concerns. Security is possibly the first concern among others. But in many cases the motive of a country's foreign policy is much more than security. According to Gregory Raymond's survey of a wide range of sources, the "inventory of common foreign policy goals" includes six categories: security (physical survival, territorial integrity, political independence), welfare (prosperity, economic development, well-being), prestige (recognition, status, respect, honor), ideological self-extension (promotion of values, conversion), material self-extension (power, territorial expansion, exclusive access), self-abnegation (peace, rectitude, international solidarity).[5] The six categories can, however, be reduced to three, which are more basic. As Nicholas Onuf argues, "there are three general possibilities yielding three generalized yet immediate ends common to humanity, or interests. With the help of several major writers, I identify these as standing, security, and wealth."[6]

The fourth question addresses what usually referred to as foreign policy "strategy." Answering this question is to identify the approaches and methods of

[5] Gregory A. Raymond, "Evaluation: A Neglected Task for the Comparative Study of Foreign Policy," in Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley, and James N. Rosenau, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 102-3.
[6] Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 258.

achieving the goals and objectives defined in the answer to the second and third questions. As the second question is about a country's place in the world, its answer prescribes an important state goal. Geopolitically, this specifies the roles of other players in the overall plan thus completed and the strategies toward these players.

A note about the data sources is necessary. The data will be drawn from both archival research and communications with policy makers and other informed persons. The data that provides new evidence has three major groups of sources. The first group consists of articles discussing the goals and objectives of the Vietnamese state, expressing the outlooks of the ruling elites on the world, and related to Vietnamese foreign policy. These data sources can be found abundantly in those Vietnamese media outlets that publicized debates on fundamental and foreign policy-related issues. Most important in this group are the journals, newspapers, and magazines of the ruling Party, the Army, the security forces, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There exists a certain hierarchy among these media outlets, and the Party's theoretical journal *Tap chi Cong san* (Communist Review) stands at the top of this hierarchy. Articles in *Tap chi Cong san* reflect the most authoritative views of the ruling elites. A central mouthpiece of the Party, the journal is also accessible in the West. However, this data source has been underused in Vietnamese foreign policy studies. The second group comprises of unpublished and internally distributed documents. The third group includes my conversations, usually in informal and friendly circumstances, with members of the ruling elites who are knowledgeable about the making of Vietnam's foreign policy.

I am aware that public documents usually contain a considerable amount of rhetoric and that interviews may be manipulated by the interviewee. To figure out the reality, careful reading, cross-checks, a familiarity with local practices and knowledge, and the permanent awareness that texts and talks are also speech acts are needed.

The peculiarity of communications in a Leninist regime such as Vietnam has a number of consequences for the researcher. High level of state control of ideology and communications creates a veil of secrecy and an atmosphere of fear concerning the expression of thought. Nonetheless, these circumstances do not stop the flow of information but differentiate it into a formal and an informal sphere of communications.

In the formal sphere, information must conform to the official line. It thus reveals the prevailing opinion. Private opinion and uncensored information can still be found in the informal sphere. A formal interview usually tells more about the prevailing opinion and less about other facts. But if the conditions of the conversation are arranged so that the conversation is transferred into the informal sphere, one can gain uncensored information. I have, therefore, removed all references to the individuals who helped me, consciously or unconsciously, to gather data for my research in informal circumstances.

This study is organized into six chapters. Following this introduction, chapter 2 describes the genesis and features of four grand strategic matrices from which the major grand strategies present in foreign policy discourse in post-Cold War Vietnam originated. Chapter 3 examines the motive forces that are responsible for the viability of the grand strategies in the period. It shows that two grand strategies—anti-imperialism and modernization—have been dominating the post-Cold War landscape of Vietnamese foreign policy. Chapter 4 investigates the political contest between the two from their formation in the late 1980s until the present. Chapter 5 addresses the rationale and evolution of Vietnam's geopolitical orientation. It shows how Vietnam's grand strategy frames the country's foreign policy in general and policies toward major foreign players in particular. Chapter 6 provides some concluding remarks with respect to the factors and mechanisms that govern the conduct of Vietnamese foreign policy. It also discusses the dilemma of Vietnamese policy making and the prospects of change in Vietnamese foreign policy.

Chapter Two

Grand strategic matrices

The circulation of ideas among Vietnam's ruling elites in the post-Cold War era reveals four grand strategic matrices, which people invoke when talking and writing about the world, their country, the goals and objectives of their society, and how to deal with international relations as well as certain foreign countries. All these grand strategic matrices, which I call traditionalism, orientalism, anti-imperialism, and modernization, have been developed during the course of Vietnamese history. This chapter will examine the genesis and features of these grand strategic matrices.

THE TRADITIONAL GRAND STRATEGIC MATRIX

The traditional grand strategic matrix was developed during 2,000 years of Vietnamese history before the French conquests of the late 19th century. Although the two millennia of premodern Vietnam had witnessed the rise and fall of various grand strategies,[1] what is relevant to the present Vietnamese conduct is not so much the diversity of these grand strategies but rather their combination. This is because Vietnamese foreign policymakers are familiarized with the traditions of Vietnamese foreign policy in a way that emphasizes unity rather than diversity. Talking about the international conduct of their country in premodern times, they tend to dwell on its continuity, not its changes. For most of them, there is an unbroken "red thread" that runs from at least the establishment of Vietnamese independence in the early 10th century to the dawn of the modern time in the late 19th century.

[1] For a discussion of various Vietnamese grand strategies in the last 2200 years, see Vu Hong Lam, "Lich su quan he Viet-Trung nhin tu goc do dai chien luoc" [History of Sino-Vietnamese Relations as Seen from the Grand Strategic Perspective], *Thoi dai Moi* [New Era], No. 2 (July 2004), <http://www.thoidai.org/200402_VHLam.htm>.

On the other hand, the permanent location of Vietnam on the southern edge of the Chinese empire and civilization throughout the two millennia also contributed to a commonality of the Vietnamese grand strategies during this period. As a result, the traditional grand strategic matrix can be seen as a pool of diverse ideas and experiences that still show a high level of commonality. This, however, does not imply that a different grand strategic matrix did not exist in premodern Vietnam.

In the ancient times, people in Southeast Asia probably envisioned the world through the prism of two opposite but complementary elements. They organized their social life and the world in accordance with a dualism that was symbolized by "water and earth," or alternatively, "sea and mountain."[2] Some authors speculate that this worldview might be what the Chinese call *yin-yang*, a philosophy on which the Book of Change (*I King*) and Taoism are based.[3] The Vietnamese myth of origins tells a story of the First Father and the First Mother sharing their hundred children, with fifty sons following the father to head for the seas and the other half following the mother to go up the mountains. This and other myths indicate that the ancient Vietnamese, as well as other Southeast Asians, viewed politics and the world in terms of the cooperation and conflict between two forces, one "maritime" and another "continental."[4]

However, the time when this worldview was dominant left no written record. It was possibly illiterate. The emergence of a literate and state-building, Vietnamese-speaking society was, in effect, a result of the southward expansion of Chinese empire and civilization. This expansion was one of the major factors shaping Vietnamese history prior to the French conquests in the nineteenth century. In one millennium, from 111 B.C. to 938 A.D., Vietnam was part of the Chinese empire. In the next thousand

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[2] Tatsuro Yamamoto, "Myths Explaining the Vicissitudes of Political Power in Ancient Vietnam," *Acta Asiatica*, No. 18 (1970), pp. 70-94; Tran Quoc Vuong, "Vai suy nghi tan man ve trong dong" [Some Dispersed Thoughts on Bronze Drums], *Khao co hoc* [Archaeology], No. 14 (1974), pp. 71-81; Tran Ngoc Them, *Tim ve ban sac van hoa Viet Nam* [In Search of the Identity of Vietnamese Culture] (Ho Chi Minh City: Nha xuat ban Thanh pho Ho Chi Minh, 1996), ch. 2, §5.

[3] E.g., Tran Ngoc Them, *In Search of Identity*, p. 122.

[4] Tran Quoc Vuong, "Some Dispersed Thoughts;" Tran Quoc Vuong, "May y kien ve trong dong va tam thuc Viet co" [Some Ideas on the Bronze Drum and the Ancient Viet Mentality], reprinted in Tran Quoc Vuong, *Theo dong lich su: Nhung vung dat, than va tam thuc nguoi Viet* [In the Course of History: Regions, Deities, and Mentality of the Vietnamese] (Hanoi: Van hoa-Thong tin, 1996), pp. 39-65; Keith Weller Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 5-9.

years, from 938 to 1883, it was an independent kingdom, though its ruler was formally a vassal of the Chinese emperor. For the sake of convenience, I will call the former period the Chinese millennium and the later one the Dai Viet epoch.

The Traditional Worldview, Self-perception, and Ambition

During the Chinese millennium, the imperial Chinese worldview was introduced to Vietnam. The local elites took it up and modified it to express their aspirations. After the unsuccessful revolt of the Trung Sisters (40-43 A.D.), which marked the end of the pre-Chinese Dong Son culture, the "sea and mountain" worldview no longer played a role in the Vietnamese elites' foreign policy thinking. When Vietnam regained its independence in the tenth century, its leaders inherited a worldview that was formed under Chinese domination. The first time this worldview was adopted by a ruling group based in today Vietnam was in the mid-sixth century. Ly Bi, a local chieftain, whose ancestors were said to have come from China proper, rebelled in 544 against the Chinese and proclaimed himself "southern emperor" *(nam de)*. The title implied that the Vietnamese ruler regarded himself equal to the Chinese emperor, whose function according to the Chinese view of world order was to rule the entire world, or "all under heaven" *(tianxia)*, as expressed in Chinese.

The phenomenon that local chieftains laid their claim to universal rulership by giving themselves the imperial title was common in Chinese history. The ultimate goal of such a local chieftain was to rule "all under heaven." In practice, his objective was to conquer the Chinese Central Plain and then to unite under his control all Chinese territories. It is worth noting that not all Chinese shared this unipolarist worldview. In times of the imperial collapse, regional powerholders tended to adopt bi- or multipolarism that rather reflected the actual balance of power. Upon the fall of the Qin dynasty (second century B.C.), the Chinese powerholder in the Cantonese region raised the idea of a separate empire in China's south and asked his successor to realize this vision. The man, whose name was Zhao To in Mandarin or Trieu Da in Vietnamese, named his empire Southern Viet (Nanyue in Chinese, Nam Viet in Vietnamese) and

exercised an expansionist foreign policy, which resulted, among others, in the incorporation of Northern Vietnam into his realm. Trieu Da chose for himself the title "emperor," an unprecedented act in this corner of the world. Because this implied an equal footing with the supreme ruler of the world, the Han, the dynasty that succeeded the Qin, imposed an economic embargo and threatened to use force if the Southern Viet ruler would not cease to call himself emperor. Trieu Da, out of expediency, accepted the status of a Han vassal.[5] However, his legacy lived well in the south even after the region was eventually annexed to the Chinese imperial territories. Neither had Ly Bi and the Vietnamese rulers after him the Chinese Central Plain in their objectives, nor did they aim at conquering the Chinese empire. And yet they considered themselves the rulers of "all under heaven." In fact, they were "emperors of the south" *(nam de)*, implying that they demanded no control of the north, which was China. What the Vietnamese ruler aspired to was not to become *the single* overlord of the world but to become *the other* one—with the Chinese emperor being the first. More precisely, the ultimate goal of the Vietnamese ruler was to become the sovereign of the world that lay south of the Chinese domain.[6] As a Vietnamese leader, reportedly Ly Thuong Kiet, declared in 1075, "the southern domain is the sphere of the southern emperor" *(nam quoc son ha nam de cu).* Contrary to common belief, the Vietnamese did not share the Chinese view of the world, though they draw heavily on it. They changed it in a crucial point. The result was a world vision that at first glance resembled the Chinese worldview but actually contradicted it.

Crucial to the Chinese worldview were the concept of center and the notion of hierarchy. Both ideas were taken up by the Vietnamese elites but not in their entirety. The Vietnamese put themselves in the place of the Chinese and viewed the world except China and Vietnam through the Chinese looking glass. As concerns the places of China

[5] The historical record about Zhao To/Trieu Da is from Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, Han Dynasty II, trans. by Burton Watson (Hong Kong: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[6] For a discussion of the ancient Chinese view of Vietnam's place in the world, see Truong Thai Du, "Giao Chi, Cuu Chan, Nhat Nam va su sa lay cua su hoc Viet-Trung hang ngan nam nay" [Giao Chi, Cuu Chan, Nhat Nam, and the Quagmire of Vietnamese and Chinese Historiography over Thousands of Years], *Talawas*, 23 December 2004, <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=3487&rb=0302>.

and Vietnam in the world as well as their relationship, the Vietnamese rulers developed their own views, which contradicted the view of the Chinese rulers.

In the Chinese world order the center represented the civilization and the peripheries barbarism. This center was not seen as a closed circle, but as the middle of a vivid, pulsating, stream that was unfolding outward. In the peripheries there were contrasts and contradictions, and it was the center that transformed them into harmony.[7] This is the essence of the traditional Chinese view of the order and dynamic of the world. The Chinese define themselves as people who live at the world's center—hence their country's name *Zhongguo,* or "the Middle Kingdom"—and people who represent the civilization—hence their people's name *Hua*, which means the Best and Brightest.

The Vietnamese embraced this worldview up to the point that they also saw the world in terms of center and periphery, where the center was home to civilization and the peripheries barbarism. Analogous to the Chinese, ethnic Vietnamese called themselves the *Kinh*—the Metropolitans—and labeled their neighboring Southeast Asian peoples the *Moi*, or Barbarians. King Gia Long (Nguyen Anh), for one, in 1805 employed the hallowed term *trung quoc*, which was the same as the Chinese *zhongguo,* to refer to Vietnam.[8]

The crucial point at which the Vietnamese vision of the world diverged from the Chinese involved the differentiation of either the center or the world. There was a subtle change over time in the Vietnamese worldview as this crucial point moved from the differentiation of the world to that of the world's center. In the Ly-Tran era (11th to 15th centuries) the emphasis was on the division of the world into two hemispheres, namely the south, which was ruled by the "southern emperor," who was actually the Vietnamese king, and the north, which was the domain of the Chinese ruler.[9] In the Le-Nguyen era (15th to 19th centuries), the emphasis was on the division of the world into

[7] Wolfgang Bauer, „Einleitung," in Bauer, ed., *China und die Fremden: 3000 Jahre Auseinandersetzung in Krieg und Frieden* (Munich: Beck, 1980), p. 7-8.
[8] Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 18.
[9] Alexander L. Vuving, "The References of Vietnamese States and the Mechanisms of World Formation," *Asien*, No. 79 (April 2001), pp. 62-86.

two different zones, one cultured and the other barbaric. In this conception, the Vietnamese saw their place as firmly established within the civilization, which was Sinitic.[10] Examining a body of poems from the 16th to 19th centuries, which were composed by Vietnamese envoys to China along the way and upon their return home, Liam Kelley argues that these Vietnamese poets did not seek to maintain a separate cultural identity. Rather they expressed a profound identification with the Sinitic civilization while fully recognizing their country's political subservience to China.[11] However, this Vietnamese worldview, which might be embraced by a large portion of the Vietnamese literati but not necessarily by the Vietnamese rulers, still differed from the Chinese outlook. Whereas Vietnam was regarded by the Vietnamese as part of the world center, it belonged at best only partly to the center, if seen from the Chinese perspective.

From the Vietnamese view, the difference between the Ly-Tran and the Le-Nguyen conceptions of world order is, however, of minor importance. Of greater importance are the facts that China and Vietnam were two separate territorial entities and the two were ruled by different persons. A central feature of the Vietnamese worldview was its bipolarism. The bipolarism was expressed, among others, by the imperial title that the Vietnamese rulers claimed for themselves. This contradicted the Chinese view, which was unipolarist, since the latter maintained that China was the sole center of the world. Since Ly Bi, the Vietnamese sought to assert a world order in which China and Vietnam were both central but separate. By proclaiming themselves "emperors" the Vietnamese rulers sent the message that Vietnam and China were legally equal and equally sovereign.

As concerns the differentiation between Vietnam and China, a change in the justification of this differentiation, or the rationalization of Vietnam's place in the world, took place during the 14th and 15th centuries. In the eleventh century, Commander-in-chief Ly Thuong Kiet defended the Vietnamese king's right to rule the south by referring to a cosmic order. In the fifteenth century, Prime Minister Nguyen

[10] Vuving, "References of Vietnamese States"; Liam C. Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).
[11] Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*.

Trai grounded Vietnam's similar status to China's on the fact that his country was a "cultured nation" *(van hien chi bang)* whose territory and way of life were distinct from China's.[12]

The shift in emphasis from the separateness of territory to the identity in culture did not affect the Vietnamese view of interstate hierarchy. From the Chinese perspective, as Mark Mancall pointedly remarks,

> The traditional world order was hierarchical, not egalitarian. The concept of the legal equality or the sovereignty of the individual political units in the world order did not exist. All political units arranged themselves hierarchically. There was a central recognized authority. Traditionally, that central authority was China.[13]

The hierarchical relationship between center and periphery was a fundamental concept underlying China's conduct of its foreign relations. It was regulated by a set of rituals such as tribute-paying, investiture, kowtow, and occasionally, even punitive war, which were to show the central state's supremacy and the other states' acknowledgment of its superior position. Because Vietnam perceived itself as either a world center or part of it and because this self-perception was formed under Chinese influence, it also tried to regulate its relations with the rest of the world in the Chinese way. Toward the west and the south, for example, it recognized no equality between it and the other states, expected and forced them to pay tribute to it, and if necessary waged punitive war against them.[14]

Toward China, however, Vietnam's attitude was marked by an inherent ambivalence. A widespread view among students of Sino-Vietnamese relations claims that domestically and ideally, Vietnam regarded its relations with China as between equals, whereas internationally and pragmatically, it accepted China's superior position.

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[12] Vuving, "References of Vietnamese States."
[13] Mark Mancall, "The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No. 349 (September 1963), p. 17.
[14] For a discussion, see Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*.

Another view asserts that Vietnam fully recognized its political status as China's vassal.[15] Neither view is, however, accurate. While the Chinese annals conveniently considered the Vietnamese court's tribute-paying, investiture, kowtow, etc. as expressions of China's superiority and Vietnam's vassalage, the Vietnamese records emphasized Vietnam's successes in breaking or avoiding the norms imposed by the Chinese. For example, they reported that the Vietnamese king did not go in person to China, and that the Vietnamese did not perform the kowtow properly, as the norms dictated.[16] Besides, the Vietnamese king's first act was to proclaim himself "emperor" *(hoang de)*, and his seeking of investiture as "king" from the Chinese court was only the second. War between the two courts was also a practice of this relationship, and the Vietnamese successful resistance to Chinese invasions was seen in Vietnam as a sign of the prevalence of the Vietnamese world order. In a sense, history-writing and -telling was one form of practice of international relations. Thus, the Chinese historical records, upon which much of our narratives on East Asian past are based, also took part in China's foreign relations. Naturally, they took the Chinese side of the game and asserted the world order as viewed from the Chinese capital.[17] In reality, the practices of relations between China and Vietnam can be interpreted in conflicting ways. Indeed, they were described by the contemporaries in both ways, as expression of Vietnamese vassalage and as indication of parity. From a third person's perspective, neither did they express Chinese supremacy, nor did they indicate some equality between Vietnam and China. Rather, they embodied the encounter and interplay of the two countries' conflicting worldviews, and reflected the actual balance of power between them. Whether Vietnam asserted its own view of world order or it accepted the Chinese one was not so much a matter of domestic vs. international, of ideal vs. pragmatic, or of military vs. diplomacy, but a matter of circumstances, of relative capabilities, and of expediency.

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[15] For a discussion, see Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*.

[16] Nguyen The Long, *Chuyen di su-tiep su thoi xua* [Stories about Diplomacy in the Past] (Hanoi: Van hoa Thong tin, 2001).

[17] This is also true for Vietnamese historiography. For a discussion of the role of historians in Vietnamese and Chinese politics, see W. O. Wolters, "Historians and Emperors in Vietnam and China," in Anthony Reid and David Marr, eds., *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Heinemann, 1979).

The traditional Vietnamese view perceives the world as bipolar with Vietnam and China equally sovereign along a power slope dramatically tilted toward the latter. This view was reinforced by the normalcy of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship as reached during the Ming and Qing dynasties (15th to 19th centuries). As Brantly Womack notes, this normalcy was "unequal empires," with "China dwelling on the 'unequal' and Vietnam emphasizing 'empires.'"[18]

The traditional Vietnamese view of the world corresponds with the traditional Vietnamese self-perception in two major aspects. First, the definition of Vietnam was intrinsically bound to the China factor. Vietnam was the south because China was the north and Vietnam was an empire because China was that. The second identity points to the second aspect. Seen from the traditional perspective, Vietnam is politically a domain that gives birth to an empire. The traditional Vietnamese self-perception was basically a "southern" identity plus an imperial identity. It was the identification with the south and the world's center, though it underwent a shift from the "center *of* the south" to the "center *in* the south," as time elapsed from the Ly-Tran to the Le-Nguyen. But the Vietnamese imperial identity was not solely the identification with the center. It was also the identification with a ruler and a domain.

The fact that China was superior to Vietnam in size and many other important aspects is a reason why the Vietnamese aspiration to universal rulership evolved into the ambition of parity with China. Traditional Vietnam's primary concern was thus twofold—to make an empire and to achieve parity with China.

The Traditional Strategic Approaches

Traditional Vietnamese strategic approaches were dominated by the imperative of coping with China. A general pattern of Vietnam's response to China's power can be symbolized by a ritual every Vietnamese ruler after Dinh Bo Linh (mid-10th century) must perform upon taking office. He first proclaimed himself emperor and subsequently

[18] Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 129.

sought investiture as a king, a rank lower than the emperor, from the Chinese ruler. The practice points to a two-faced strategy. The Vietnamese call it *"trong de ngoai vuong"* or "inside as emperor, outside as king." Within his realm and toward the south, the Vietnamese ruler behaved as the supreme overlord. Facing China, however, he took the role of a Chinese vassal.

A common belief among scholars of Sino-Vietnamese relations is that an "art of surviving next door to China" was developed in the course of millennia of Sino-Vietnamese interaction and this was essentially a two-pronged strategy: resistance to Chinese domination and self-Sinicization.[19] This belief is correct if strategy is understood as a long-term process. A persistent opposition to Chinese domination and a long-term trend of self-Sinicization are two features of the Dai Viet epoch. Yet the belief may be wrong if strategy is understood as a deliberate policy. The argument for self-Sinicization as a deliberate policy is that the Vietnamese tried in that way to show that direct Chinese rule to civilize Vietnam is unnecessary. In other words, the Vietnamese approach was to appeal to a formal international norm imposed by China itself. This was certainly one of the approaches pursued by Vietnam in dealing with China, but it was not an effective approach. Indeed, China could harbor goals more important than civilizing Vietnam when it attempted to invade the latter. It had enough talents and courage to create pretexts for its undertakings. Moreover, self-Sinicization was in many periods not a salient approach of Vietnamese dealings with China.

The salient approach seems to have been selected according to specific circumstances. The Ly dynasty (1010-1225) maintained at times an offensive posture toward China. In the late 11th century, Ly Vietnam even invaded southern China in a preemptive strike. Although real alliance with the great powers north of the Chinese Song—the Khitan Liao and the Jurchen Jin—was impossible due to contemporary communications technology, Ly Vietnam knew to benefit from the multipower constellation Song China was facing in the north. Taking advantage of this "China

[19] See, for example, Tran Quoc Vuong, "Traditions, Acculturation, Renovation: The Evolutional Pattern of Vietnamese Culture," in David G. Marr and A.C. Milner, eds., *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), pp. 271-277.

among equals" situation,[20] Ly Vietnam exercised a mixed strategy that combined accommodation, internal balancing, and tacit external balancing. The Tran dynasty (1225-1400) faced successively a weakened Song, a powerful Yuan (the Mongols), and a young Ming dynasty. Tran Vietnam successfully survived three Mongol invasions with a strategy that combined domestic consolidation and liberalization, military resistance, and diplomatic self-constraint.[21] In the cultural field, Ly-Tran Vietnam exemplified an open-minded attitude and an omnidirectional posture. It was open to cultural influences from both the Sinitic and the Southeast Asian worlds. Its court culture bore the mark of both Chinese and Cham influences.[22]

The Le dynasty (1428-1788) enjoyed, after its founder's military victory over the Ming invaders in 1427, a long peace with China. During this time, both the Ming and Qing focused their attention to the northern frontiers, where they has to fight powerful and aggressive enemies, and the inner realm, where rebellions were a permanent threat, thus leaving Southeast Asia almost out of horizon.[23] The Nguyen dynasty (1802-1885) benefited much from the short-lived Tay Son dynasty's defeat of Qing invaders in 1789. Both Le and Nguyen Vietnam fully engaged in the Chinese

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[20] For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). For the Song foreign policy, see also Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven: Studies in Sung-Liao Relations* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

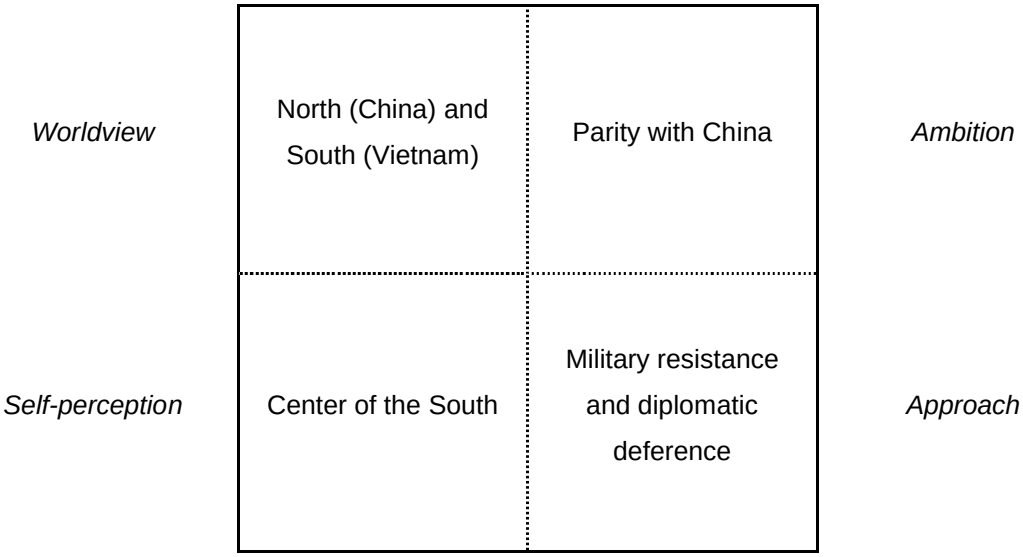
[21] For Ly and Tran Vietnam, see A. Poliakov, *Su phuc hung cua nuoc Dai Viet tu the ky X den the ky XV* [The Rise of Dai Viet from the 10th to the 15th Century] (Hanoi: Quan doi Nhan dan, 1998).

[22] Tran Quoc Vuong, "Dan gian va bac hoc" [Popular and Scholarly], in idem., *Trong coi* [Inside a Realm] (Garden Grove, Cal.: Tram Hoa, 1993), pp. 159-195.

[23] For Ming history and foreign relations, see Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, trans. by J.R. Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), chs. 19, 20; Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), part 4; Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, 8: *The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644*, Part 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For Ming geopolitical strategy, see Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Edward L. Farmer, *Early Ming Government: The Evolution of Dual Capitals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); Wang Gungwu, "China and Southeast Asia 1402-1424," in Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, eds., *Studies in the Social History of China and South-east Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 375-401; Yuan-kang Wang, *Power Politics in Confucian China*, PhD dissertation (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001). For the Ming view of Southeast Asia, see Wang Gungwu, "China and Southeast Asia." For the Qing, see Jane Kate Leonard, "Ch'ing Perceptions of Political Reality in the 1820s," *American Asian Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer 1987); and Leonard, "Geopolitical Reality and the Disappearance of the Maritime Frontier in Qing Times," *American Neptune*, Vo. 48, No. 4 (Fall 1988), pp. 230-236.

tribute system, which was the stabilized form of the lord-vassal relationship between China and its southern neighbors. Modern interpreters of the Chinese tribute system argue that this relationship was based on China's need for prestige and the lesser states' need for protection and trade.[24] This may be correct for states other than the great powers and located far from China. But for China's relations with other great powers such as England, Russia, and even with the nomad empires on the northwestern frontiers, the tributary system did not work. For China's relations with its lesser, immediate neighbors in the south such as Vietnam and Burma, it is worth noting that the Pax Sinica in the south was escorted by either great power conflicts or conquests in the north. Under such specific circumstances, engagement in the tributary system may be a cost-effective way to preserve security.

Figure 2.1. **The traditional grand strategy**



The underlying strategy of Vietnam's China policy throughout the Dai Viet epoch features three major elements. First, it was a synthesis of diverse approaches. Second, it combined military resistance with diplomatic deference, with deference

[24] The classic statement of this interpretation is John King Fairbank, "A Preliminary Framework," in Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 1-19.

mostly in the form of formal acceptance of vassalage vis-à-vis China. Thirdly, the most salient approach within the policy synthesis changed as circumstances changed.

THE ORIENTALIST GRAND STRATEGIC MATRIX

The Master Worldview at the Birth of Modern Vietnam

The French conquests of Vietnam in the late 19th century put an end to the existence of the Vietnamese state and either marginalized or degraded the Vietnamese elites to a subservient status. The French occupation sparked military resistance led by the local elites throughout the country. These revolts were fought as if they were against an enemy that was as barbarian as the other non-Sinitic people and as powerful as the Chinese. In other words, the world outlook of the Vietnamese resistance fighters was much the same as the North-South mind of the resistance fighters in the earlier, China-dominated, times. During the same period, the French domination also produced new-style indigenous elites, whose worldviews broke away from the tradition outlook. The spread of new worldviews among the old-fashioned elites, however, gained new momentum only in the early 20th century, as the anti-French uprisings were stamped out and French rule began to consolidate.[25]

A new worldview deserves special attention because it was widespread, if not dominant, among the indigenous elites. It was a direct result of the Franco-Vietnamese encounter and it reflected this encounter. It viewed the world in terms of East versus West, with Vietnam belonging to the East and France representative for the West. In this view, the East and the West were cultural entities prior to their acting as political entities. Most of the elites agreed that the Eastern civilization as it was before was inferior to the Western civilization in many respects, and a central task of the

[25] For the development of various political and ideological movements in Vietnam during the period of French rule, see David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); William J. Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Shawn F. McHale, *Print and Power: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Communism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

Vietnamese would be to reform, to renovate, to modernize their civilization. Sharing this same master worldview, the Vietnamese elites did, however, differ on questions of what to do next and how to do, questions that touched upon those of national ambitions and strategic approaches.

In the first two decades of the 20th century the Vietnamese elites found two different broad answers to the above questions. Accordingly, they can be divided into two historical blocs. The first bloc, the "revolutionist," believed in the only way of violent action and military force to regain national independence. The leading figure of this bloc was Phan Boi Chau. The second bloc, the "reformist," envisaged a gradual approach to national independence through domestic modernization, giving modern education to the populace, promoting their economic activities, and enhancing their livelihood within the French colonial mechanism. The most prominent figure of this line was Phan Chu Trinh. Although the two Phans shared the ultimate goal of national independence, they differed not only on matters of strategic approach but also on matters of geopolitical and civilizational orientation. While Phan Boi Chau regarded Japan as the model for his country, Phan Chu Trinh saw in France the example. Whereas Phan Boi Chau aimed to create a new Vietnam in the image of Meiji Japan and emphasized the significance of Confucianism to modern Vietnam, Phan Chu Trinh endeavored to build a fully Western-style Vietnam and firmly rejected the Sinitic civilization.[26]

In the 1920s both the revolutionist and reformist lines of the Vietnamese national movements ramified into various political groups with different worldviews, agendas, and orientations. However, the colonial government's uncompromised policy toward the Vietnamese nationalists made them more radical and strengthened the position of the revolutionists within the anticolonial movements. On the other hand, the establishment of Republican China and Soviet Russia amid Japan's turning away from Vietnamese revolutionists' request for military aids and support of their cause against the French now showed their consequences. In 1924, Phan Boi Chau founded the Viet

[26] Vinh Sinh, "Phan Boi Chau and Fukuzawa Yukichi: Perceptions of National Independence," in Vinh Sinh, ed., *Phan Boi Chau and the Dong-Du Movement* (New Haven: Council on Southeast Asia Studies, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), pp. 101-149.

Nam Quoc Dan Dang, a revolutionist party modeled on the Chinese Kuomintang. In 1930 Ho Chi Minh, in his capacity as an envoy of the Comintern (Communist International), unified different communist groups into the Vietnam Communist Party. Soon after that, the VNQDD and the VCP emerged as the two largest camps within the anticolonial movements.

The Orientalist Grand Strategy

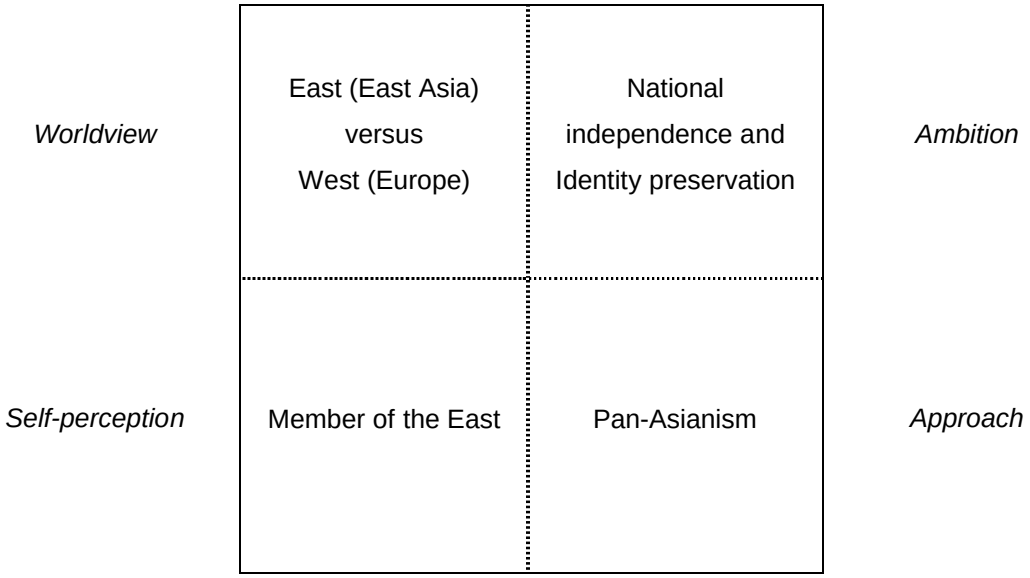
Before its complex ramification in the late 1920s, the master worldview mentioned above, which saw the world through the prism of the encounter between modernity and tradition, had had two major branches. While the "reformists" wholeheartedly adopted modernity and rejected tradition, the "revolutionists" chose a way in between. Historians of Vietnamese anti-colonialism call them "reformists" and "revolutionists" because of their different attitudes toward the French colonial rule. Had their attitudes vis-à-vis the traditional culture been the point of reference, the labels would be reversed. Accordingly, the two branches of Vietnamese nationalism in the early 20th century would better be called "orientalist" and "occidentalist." Although the two basically share the same division of the world and the same view of Vietnam's actual place in it, they disagree on a fundamental point: they diverge in their perspectives on Vietnam's future place in the world as well as their orientation on the world map.

Phan Boi Chau's ideas have laid the grounds for the orientalist grand strategic matrix. Phan clearly envisioned the future place of Vietnam in a community of those Asian countries that shared a "common culture and common race" *(dong van dong chung)*. As concerns his geopolitical orientation, he believed that "it was only from the countries of the 'yellow race in Asia' or of 'the same culture and the same race' that the Vietnamese could expect assistance."[27] Within Asia, Phan divided the nations of the continent into two groups, one consisted of the Sinitic people, the other the non-Sinitic;

[27] Shiraishi Masaya, "Phan Boi Chau in Japan," in Vinh Sinh, ed., *Phan Boi Chau and the Dong-Du Movement* (New Haven: Council on Southeast Asia Studies, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), pp. 52-100, quote p. 55.

and he identified his nation as part of the former.[28] Two elements feature prominently in his descriptions of Vietnam. First, it was an "Eastern" and an "Asian" nation. Second, it had lost its sovereignty because of its weakness. In Phan's vision, Vietnam should reach the level of civilization that Japan and Europe already enjoyed. His ultimate goal was to restore Vietnam's independence and to make his own nation as strong and wealthy as Japan and the Western countries.[29]

Figure 2.2. **The orientalist grand strategy**



Pan-Asianism loomed large in Phan's strategic approach. As Vinh Sinh observes, "Phan was an ardent adherent of pan-Asianism throughout his life. He consistently perceived that Vietnam's independence could not be achieved without the help and co-operation of other Asian countries."[30] His geopolitical orientation underwent a change when he was deported from Japan in 1909. Before this first experience of him with *realpolitik*, he "entrusted Japan with the role as the leader of an Asian alliance, 'the eldest brother among the yellow race.'"[31] After 1909, Phan still kept his expectations of Japan, though

[28] Ibid., p. 57.
[29] Ibid., pp. 64, 81
[30] Sinh, "Phan Boi Chau," p. 130.
[31] Ibid.

he no longer considered it as the leader of Asia, but as "a friend."[32] He now directed his eye toward China, and "argued that an alliance of China and Japan would be indispensable for the independence movement in Asia."[33] It is worth contrasting Phan's pan-Asianism with that of Fukuzawa Yukichi, as Vinh Sinh did. Fukuzawa was Phan's inspirator. He was a Japanese educator, who, like Phan himself, "left a strong imprint upon [his] country's modern history."[34] As Vinh Sinh argues,

> While Phan and other pan-Asianists placed emphasis on the alleged common East Asian cultural heritage, Fukuzawa had rejected an East Asian co-operation from an ideological or ethical (i.e. Confucian) consideration. He simply took into account the geographical proximity of the East Asian countries.[35]

THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST GRAND STRATEGIC MATRIX

The Anti-imperialist Worldview and Strategic Approaches

The genesis and evolution of the anti-imperialist grand strategic matrix is closely bound up with the Vietnamese communist movement. From its very inception in late 1920s and early 1930s the Vietnam Communist Party has based its theory of world politics on two central theses. The first is Marx's doctrine of "class struggle," which asserts that class struggle is the driving force of history. According to this theory, mankind's history progresses through five "socioeconomic formations," each of which is characterized by a distinctive form of class struggle—from primitive communism to slavery, feudalism, capitalism and ultimately to socialism or communism, when class struggle ceases to exist.[36] The second core assumption of the VCP's worldview is Lenin's dictum of

[32] Ibid., p. 132.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., p. 102.
[35] Ibid., p. 133.
[36] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977 [1848]).

"imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism." This thesis on wars and revolutions in capitalism is considered by Leninists a key supplement to Marx's vision of history. According to Lenin, capitalism in its highest stage has become "state monopoly capitalism" and takes the form of imperialism, which is the main source of war in this historical era. Lenin's conclusion is that proletarian revolution is the only way to preserve peace in the world.[37] Marxist-Leninists perceive the historical era as the world-wide struggle between the "progressive" forces of socialism and the "reactionary" system of capitalism/imperialism. This class struggle is constantly unfolding not only within each country but also on the international plane.[38]

These assumptions provide the hard core of Marxist-Leninist worldview, which is, as the official Vietnamese terminology describes, "the ideological foundation" of the Vietnam Communist Party. In this view of the world, socialism and capitalism/imperialism are the two central forces in the world stage. The anti-imperialist worldview obtained a major elaboration with the Zhdanov doctrine, a Soviet thesis publicized by Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) boss Andrei Zhdanov in 1947, which divided the world into "two camps"—one is socialist and democratic, headed by the Soviet Union, the other capitalist and imperialist, led by the United States. The Zhdanov doctrine, in conjunction with the Truman doctrine, heralded the Cold War, a world conflict that lasted until the Malta summit between U.S. President George Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in late 1989. Promptly, the VCP subscribed to the Soviet "two camps" theory.[39] This thesis has been embraced by the VCP not only throughout the world conflict but, as will be seen in this chapter, also well beyond.

In line with Marxist-Leninist thinking, Vietnamese Communists see the key to understand world politics in identifying its fundamental contradictions. Already in

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[37] V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: a popular outline* (New York: International Publishers, 1977 [1916]).
[38] Gareth Porter, "The Transformation of Vietnam's World-view: From Two Camps to Interdependence," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (June 1990), p.2.
[39] "Nghi quyet cua Hoi nghi mo rong Ban chap hanh Trung uong" [Resolution of the Broaden Central Committee Conference], 15-17 January 1948, in *Lich su Dang Cong san Viet Nam* [History of the Vietnam Communist Party], vol. II (1945-1954) (Hanoi: Sach giao khoa Mac-Lenin, 1979), p. 142.

1945, they identified four major contradictions in world politics—between imperialist countries and the USSR, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between oppressed peoples and colonialism, and among imperialist countries themselves.[40] This appraisal of world situation underwent a minor change in 1948, when the VCP adopted the "two camps" doctrine. Accordingly, the contradiction between imperialist countries and the USSR was reformulated as between the capitalist and socialist systems. In the 1960s and 1970s, as colonialism increasingly became outdated, the contradiction between colonialism and oppressed peoples was renamed as between imperialism and colonial and dependent countries. Although the exact formulations of the "four contradictions" varied over time, their essence remains unchanged, and the "four contradictions" thesis remains one of the central tenets of the VCP. When the Political Report of the Ninth Party Congress in 2001 states that "the era's fundamental contradictions continue to exist," it refers to these four contradictions.[41]

During the Cold War a third element, which was approved at the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties in Moscow in 1960, was added to the VCP's worldview. It says that the contradiction between socialism and imperialism must be solved by a "who will defeat whom" *(ai thang ai)* struggle between the revolutionary forces of the world and imperialism during the transitional period from capitalism to socialism. The world revolutionary forces—or "currents," as they were called after 1969—were identified as the world socialist system, the communist and working-class movement in the capitalist countries, and the national liberation movement.[42]

In the 1970s and 1980s, Hanoi's worldview was summarized as "two camps, four contradictions, three revolutionary currents" *(hai phe, bon mau thuan, ba dong*

[40] "National Resistance Order," November 25, 1945, in *Lich su Dang Cong san Viet Nam* [History of the Vietnamese Communist Party], Vol. II (1945-54) (Hanoi: Sach giao khoa Mac-Le nin, 1979), p. 6.
[41] Ban Tu tuong-Van hoa Trung uong [Central Committee Department of Ideology and Culture], *Tai lieu nghien cuu Van kien Dai hoi IX cua Dang* [Guidance Document for the Study of the Ninth Party Congress Documents], for use by key cadres and reporters (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2001), p. 27.
[42] See, for example, Le Duan, "Chu nghia Le-nin soi sang muc tieu cach mang cua thoi dai" [Leninism Lightens the Era's Revolutionary Goals], *Hoc tap* [Learning], No. 6 (June 1970), pp. 1-16.

thac cach mang). During these times, this formula was the compact—and official—description of Hanoi's view of the world.

The anti-imperialist strategic approaches are derived directly from the anti-imperialist worldview. Anti-imperialism assumes solidarity among the world's revolutionary forces and conflicts between the imperialists/capitalists. Thus, as a socialist country, Vietnam can rely on solidarity ties with the other socialist states, the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as with the workers' parties in the West. At the same time, it must exploit conflicts among the Western states. During the Cold War, the VCP believed that the application of these two approaches would maximize support for, and minimize opposition to, its own cause. These approaches were the way Hanoi managed the "balance of forces" *(can can luc luong)* to its favor. By creating a "wide front" of anti-imperialist forces that support Vietnam and deepening the conflicts among the imperialist forces, Vietnam would become stronger than it could by itself, and at the same time, its enemies would be weakened.

The Anti-imperialist Self-perception and Ambition

In the anti-imperialist worldview, the universal order has its primary significance not in the spatial dimension but in the temporal dimension.[43] In this view, the rationalization the goals and identity of the Vietnamese nation refers, in the final analysis, to the "law of development of human society," which dictates the "necessary development of the Vietnamese revolution in our era."[44] The doctrine was codified in the Resolution of the Fourth VCP Congress in December 1976. The "necessary development" is believed as resulting from the junction of two propensities, that of the nation and that of the time. While the nation's aspiration is independence, the time flows toward socialism. A chief proposition of the doctrine reads:

[43] Alexander L. Vuving, "The References of Vietnamese States and the Mechanisms of World Formation," *Asien*, No. 79 (April 2001), p. 82.
[44] Ibid., p. 76.

> In the present era, when socialism is the only solution to all urgent problems facing the various countries on the road forward, national independence and socialism are inseparable, indeed are closely bound together.[45]

The inseparability of national independence and socialism is thus the "content of the age" and one can only be successful if acting in accordance with this historical imperative.[46] This, it is pointed out, was recognized by Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnam Communist Party, who acted in accordance with the "requirement of the era" by "raising the two banners of national independence and socialism." The banners of national independence and socialism symbolized the strengths of the nation and the time. "Raising the two banners" led to the "combination of the strengths of our nation with that of our time," which, it is explained, was the reason why the Vietnamese won war with the "two big imperialists"—the French and the American.[47] In line with this reasoning, the slogan "combining the national with the epochal" has become a central guideline of Vietnamese foreign policy.

As the inseparability of national independence and socialism is identified as the "truth of our time," it is argued, nation and socialism merges into one, and national independence and socialism become the ultimate goal of the Vietnamese.[48] The country's dual strategic mission is established as building and protecting the socialist fatherland.[49] The fusion of nation and socialism entails two major implications. First, the basic and long-term enemy of the socialist fatherland is the lead country of the capitalist forces—the United States. Second, the primary political community of the Vietnamese Communists is defined ideologically first and territorially second. Thus,

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[45] *The Socialist Republic of Vietnam: Structure and Basis*, Documents of the First Session of the National Assembly of Reunified Vietnam, June-July 1976, (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1976), p. 16.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., p. 17.
[48] Ibid.
[49] See, for example, "Political Report of the 7th Central Committee at the 8th National Congress of the Party," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu VIII* [Documents of the 8th National Congress], (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 1996), p. 80.

when it comes to political identification, anti-imperialists favor the socialist regime over the nation and the country.

The proposition that the requirements of the era become the goals of the nation is the VCP's major argument for Vietnam's joining with the world. Vietnam's standing in the world is derived directly from this proposition. Here, the world is viewed in its temporal dimension and the universal order is manifested in terms of historical stages, which are bridged by epochal trends, while the political self is depicted as part of the world dynamics. The overall trend is the transition to socialism on a global scale and, as the Political Report at the Fourth Party Congress declares, "the movement of national liberation and national independence plays a most important role in the realization of the transition to socialism on a global scale."[50] Raising the two banners of national independence and socialism, Vietnam finds itself at the meeting point of two world forces—the movement of national liberation and national independence and the progress to socialism. As Vietnam's natural arena is its immediate surroundings in Southeast Asia, the VCP has, from its foundations, ascribed to Vietnam the role of the "advance post of socialism in Southeast Asia" *(tien don cua chu nghia xa hoi o Dong Nam A)*.[51] After the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu (1954), which marked the end of French colonialism in Indochina and sparked a wave of anti-colonialist armed struggles in other French colonies, the Vietnamese began to regard themselves as the world pioneer of the movement of national liberation and national independence. During its war with the United States, the VCP developed the thesis of Vietnam being the "spearhead of the movement for national liberation in the whole world" (*mui nhon cua phong trao giai phong dan toc tren toan the gioi*). With these twin roles, Vietnam was shifted from the world periphery to the world center, becoming the "focal point" of the worldwide struggle against imperialism.[52] Based on the thesis of the world's three

[50] Communist Party of Vietnam, *Fourth National Congress, December 14-20, 1976, Documents*, (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977), p. 144.
[51] Truong Chinh, *Cach mang dan toc dan chu nhan dan Viet Nam, Tac pham chon loc* [The Vietnamese National Democratic Revolution: Selected Works] (Hanoi: Su that, 1975), pp. 238-40.
[52] Gareth Porter, "Vietnam and the Socialist Camp: Center or Periphery?" in William S. Turley (ed.), *Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980), pp. 231, 255.

revolutionary currents, Vietnam saw itself as "the important offensive spearhead of the three revolutionary tides in the world."[53]

How Ambition Reshapes Worldview and Self-perception

A stable and coherent worldview was established during the first forty years of Communist Vietnam, from mid-1940s to mid-1980s. For some, its stability contrasts with the fact that Vietnam's international environment changed dramatically during these four decades.[54] This stability begs an explanation.

One can look again at the international environment and search for a constant feature of world politics during these years. Thus, one can argue that the stability of this Vietnamese worldview may be linked to another fact that a feature of world politics during these years, namely the military cum ideological cum geopolitical confrontation between the world's two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—in the form of a "Cold War," remained essentially unchanged.

Alternatively, one can look at the persons who were responsible for Vietnamese foreign policy. From the mid-1940s to the mid-1980s they were basically the same peoples. Thus, one can speculate that because these individuals were conservative and narrow-minded, they ignored the changes in the outside world and stuck to a worldview they had acquired during their formative years of youth. However, a second look at the Vietnamese worldview of the 1940s-1980s reveals that it also underwent changes. A study of these changes would provide insights into the making of Hanoi's worldview and self-perception.

The changes in Hanoi's worldview were responses to the Sino-Soviet disputes on ideological questions. At the landmark Ninth Plenum of the Third Central Committee in December 1963, the Vietnamese repeated the "four basic contradictions" in order to conclude that Soviet Party chief Nikita Khrushchev was a "revisionist," for his policy of "peaceful coexistence" between the capitalist and socialist systems

[53] Luu Quy Ky, "Nhung thay doi sau sac tren the gioi trong mot phan tu the ky qua" [Deep changes in the world in the past quarter century], *Hoc tap*, No. 9 (September 1974), p. 81.
[54] Ibid., p. 40.

represented a serious threat to the world revolution.[55] Echoing the Chinese criticism of the Soviet Union by labeling the Soviet Party chief a revisionist, Vietnam nonetheless did not choose to entirely side with China against the USSR. The Vietnamese revolt against Khrushchev's "revisionist" grand strategy had a motive in North Vietnam's determination to fight the United States in the South and reunite Vietnam.[56] Here we can see a case in which grand strategy—that is, national ambitions and the related general policy—plays a key role in determining one's worldview and the related vision of one's place in the world.

The relationship between grand strategy, worldview, and identity can be elucidated by examining Vietnamese, Soviet, and Chinese stances in the Sino-Soviet dispute.[57] A point of departure would be the appraisal of world situation that was approved at the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties held in Moscow in 1960. In this appraisal, the world was perceived as a "who will defeat whom" (*ai thang ai*) struggle that was carried on between the revolutionary forces of the world and imperialism during the transitional period from capitalism to socialism. The world revolutionary forces were identified as consisting of three components, namely the world socialist system, the communist and working-class movement in the capitalist countries and the national liberation movement. The emphasis was laid on the

[55] "World Situation and Our Party's International Duties," Resolution of the Ninth Central Committee Plenum, December 1963, translated by the US Department of State. This resolution was never published in Vietnam. According to one insider, President Ho Chi Minh and a number of Central Committee members avoided attending the plenum. See Hoang Minh Chinh, "Thu ngo cua cong dan Hoang Minh Chinh" [Open letter of citizen Hoang Minh Chinh], reprinted in *Doi thoai*, No. 3 (August 1994), p. 13.

[56] See J. C. Donnell and M. Gurtov, *North Vietnam: Left of Moscow, Right of Peking* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1968); William R. Smyser, *The Independent Vietnamese: Vietnamese Communist Between Russia and China, 1956-1969* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1980); Carlyle A. Thayer, *War by Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Vietnam, 1954-60*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), pp. 62, 66-67, 102; Eero Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World: Marxist-Leninist Doctrine and the Changes in International Relations, 1975-93* (London: Macmillian, 1997), p. 40.

[57] For a comparison of the Vietnamese, Soviet, and Chinese standpoints, see Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, pp. 45-50; and also Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," pp. 2-3. For a discussion of Chinese Communist worldview that is distinguished from that of Soviet-based theory, see Stephen Chan, "Revolution, Culture, and the Foreign Policy of China," in Stephen Chan and Andrew J. Williams, eds., *Renegade States: The Evolution of Revolutionary Foreign Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 84-90.

socialist camp, headed by the Soviet Union.[58] As a result, the concept assigned a super-leadership role to the Soviet Union: The country is represented as the lead country of the world's leading movement. Thus no wonder that the USSR clung to this theory.[59]

In contrary, China found no meaningful role for itself in the Soviet-designed world order. Already critical of Khrushchev's campaign against the "personality cult" of Stalin, which also had negative effects on Mao's position in China, the Chinese sought to re-work this Communist world-image and eventually landed on the three-world theory in the mid-1970s. The three revolutionary forces of the international proletariat, the socialist countries and the oppressed nations also constituted a central part in the Chinese interpretation. But as the Chinese rationale pointed out, these entities were not monolithic, since the international working-class was divided and the socialist and the Third World countries carried mutual contradictions.[60] The main challenge to the Soviet-designed concept of revolutionary forces lay in the Chinese emphasis on the Third World as a major force of the world revolutionary struggle. According to this Chinese view, the world was divided into three groups: The First World consisted of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union; a Second World is constituted by the developed capitalist countries. The socialist countries and the proletariat in the imperialist countries, insofar as they can resist Soviet influence, formed the Third World together with the oppressed underdeveloped countries.[61] In this three-world theory China was furnished with the leadership role in the Third World, which was carrying out the struggle against the two superpowers and exploiting the Second World in opposing the First World.

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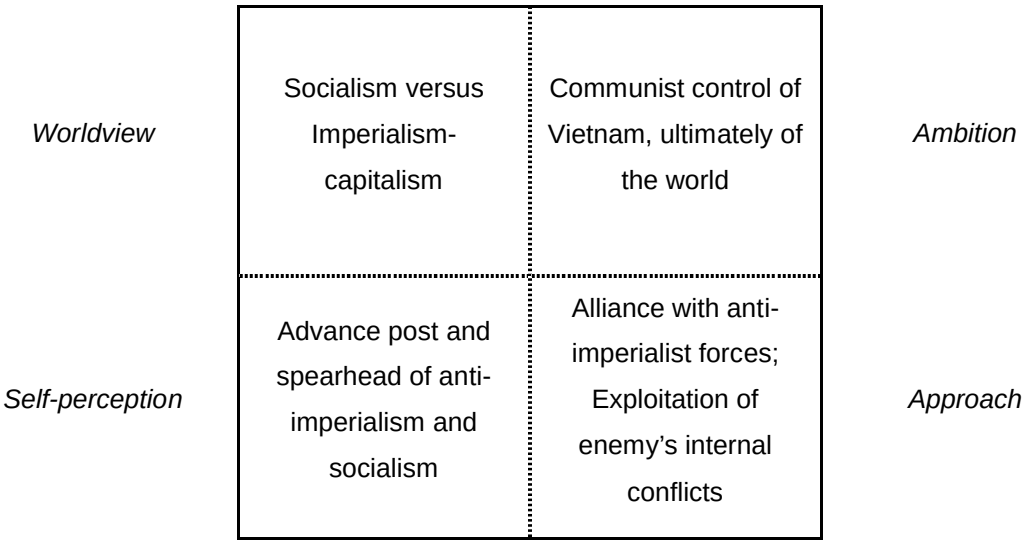
[58] See, for example, "Tasks at the Present Stage of the Struggle Against Imperialism and United Action of Communist parties and All Anti-imperialist Forces," in *International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, Moscow 1969* (Prague: Peace and Socialism Publishers, 1969).

[59] For a discussion of Soviet socialism being designed to meet Russia's global hegemonic ambitions, see Mihály Vajda, *Russischer Sozialismus in Mitteleuropa* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1991). In this book, which was originally published in Hungarian in 1989, Vajda concluded that communism must be understood rather as a successful answer to the questions of the Russian history, namely Russia's quest for world leadership, than a false answer to the questions of modernity.

[60] Editorial Department of *Renmin Ribao*, "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds Is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism," *Peking Review*, No. 45 (November 4, 1977), pp. 11-17.

[61] Ibid., pp. 12-13, 17-18.

Figure 2.3. **The anti-imperialist grand strategy**



The Vietnamese Communist elite, like the Soviet and the Chinese, also took concept of the three revolutionary forces as a point of departure. The Vietnamese embraced the Soviet conclusion that the world socialist system was the decisive force in the anti-imperialist struggle. But while the Soviets excluded China from the socialist world system, Vietnam nonetheless regarded China as a part of the system.[62] This reconciliatory stance would reflect the fact that Vietnam needed both the Soviet Union and China as the chief sources of assistance for its own war with the US. Another point of distinction in the Vietnamese definition of revolutionary forces was its special emphasis on the national liberation movements in the Third World at the expense of the workers' and democratic movements in the capitalist countries.[63] This may show certain similarities with the Chinese vision[64] but the motive behind this emphasis lies rather in Vietnam's self-understanding and ambitions than in some opportunist calculation of a balancing act between China and the USSR. From the first stage of the anti-French resistance in the late 1940s, Vietnamese Communist leaders viewed their fights as "only part of the struggle between the post-World War II anti-imperialist and imperialist anti-democratic blocs" and Vietnam itself as the "advance post" (*tien don*) of socialism "on

[62] Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, pp. 46, 53.
[63] Ibid., p. 45.
[64] Ibid., p. 47.

the line of defense against imperialism in Southeast Asia."[65] With the dual emphasis on the crucial roles of the socialist camp and the national liberation movements, the Vietnamese variant of the "world revolutionary forces" would assign a key importance to Vietnam: The country would be both the advance post of socialism in Southeast Asia and the "spearhead" (*mui nhon*) of the national liberation movements in the world. To compare, Vietnam would play a much more marginal role in the Chinese-designed world vision.

The concept of revolutionary forces underwent a minor change in 1970 as Vietnam responded to the Sino-U.S. rapprochement, which had been started in the late 1960s. It was replaced by the concept of "three revolutionary currents" (*ba dong thac cach mang*) in the world, which clearly distinguished the Vietnamese definition from the Chinese.[66] The idea of three revolutionary currents, which held that the development of the socialist camp, the national liberation struggle and the struggle of workers and other "progressive forces" in capitalist countries were reinforcing one another to push back imperialism and advance the world revolution, was credited by the Vietnamese to Soviet chief ideologist Mikhail Suslov, who first put it forward in 1969.[67] During the early 1970s, the concept of three revolutionary currents became firmly established in Vietnamese diplomatic and political vocabulary. As Palmujoki has noted, one of its meanings was to reveal Vietnam's pro-Soviet stance, or put another way, to express Vietnam's anger over China's shift toward the United States "behind the back of the Vietnamese," for "there appeared no practical difference between this concept and the formulation of revolutionary forces."[68]

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[65] The VCP's then-Secretary General Truong Chinh's article in *Su that*, February 18, 1950; and Truong Chinh, *Cach mang dan toc dan chu nhan dan Viet Nam: Tac pham chon loc* [The Vietnamese National Democratic Revolution: Selected Works] (Hanoi: Su that, 1975), pp. 238-40.

[66] Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, pp. 48-49.

[67] Huynh Kim Khanh, "Neighbors, Friends and Rivals: Changing Vietnam's Foreign Policy Perspectives," paper presented at a conference on "Managing Conflict in Southeast Asia: Cambodia and Beyond," Chiang Mai, February 21-24, 1989; and Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," p. 3.

[68] Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, p. 48.

THE GRAND STRATEGIC MATRIX OF MODERNIZATION

The Emergence of a New World Outlook

In the mid-1980s, a new worldview emerged within the Vietnamese leadership. Although the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 can be seen as the events that removed the reality basis of the "two camps" theory, a change in Vietnamese worldview had began long before that date. The initial change was a response to the failure of "really existing socialism" as a way to raise economic and military power. As Gareth Porter points out, "the origins of the revised Vietnamese world-view lie in the Vietnamese response to global economic interdependence."[69] The first sign of a sea change in Vietnam's worldview can be dated as soon as July 1984, when at the Sixth Plenum of the Fifth Central Committee of the VCP, Vietnamese leaders broke completely with the Stalinist thesis of two totally separate markets—one socialist, the other capitalist—which they had embraced for more than three decades.[70] This reconceptualization of the world economy pointed to a "new world situation" in which a single world market operated on the basis of interdependence between economies across ideological lines.[71]

Several factors contributed to the emergence of the new Vietnamese worldview. In the 1980s, the country was driven into a socio-economic crisis, which led people to question the effectiveness of socialism. In the Soviet bloc at large, the failure of socialism became evident. This stood in sharp contrast with the success of the "NICs" (variously called as the "Newly Industrialized Countries" or "Newly Industrializing Countries"), which had been stigmatized by Hanoi as the "lackeys of the imperialists." Although an isolated country, Vietnam was not uninformed of developments in capitalist East Asia. Its leaders and officials had a permanent window on the outside world through the *Ban tin Thong tan xa, Luu hanh noi bo* (internally circulated Vietnam

[69] Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," p. 3.
[70] Ibid., pp. 3-5.
[71] See Speech by Secretary General Le Duan, July 3, 1984, *FBIS Asia and Pacific*, August 20, 1984, p. K4-5.

News Agency Bulletins), which were distributed to the mid- and senior-ranking cadres. These bulletins translated news items broadcasted by Western media as well as articles published in Western newspapers and magazines. Ordinary people who were hungry of uncensored information could still obtain news from the outside world via the Vietnamese services of a number of Western broadcasters—the most popular were the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and the VOA (Voice of America). Under these circumstances, the goal of building socialism and the thesis of the "three revolutionary currents" lose their plausibility.

Another series of events that coincided with the abovementioned developments also proved catalytic for the change in Vietnamese worldview. On March 10, 1985 the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union selected Mikhail Gorbachev as the new general secretary of the party to replace Konstantin Chernenko, who had died the same day. In the following months, the new Soviet Party chief launched a comprehensive reform program called *perestroika* with the aim to restructure the Soviet economy and accelerate its growth. He also reorganized the personnel makeup of the Soviet leadership and initiated a reorientation of Soviet foreign policy. To secure a favorable international environment for his domestic reforms, Gorbachev embarked on a course of reconciliation with both the West and China, an attempt to remove hostility on both the western and eastern borders of the Soviet bloc. On July 28, 1986 Gorbachev gave a speech in Vladivostok, in which he pointed out the need for an urgent and radical break with the conventional Soviet approaches to foreign policy and announced a new Soviet outlook toward the Asia-Pacific region with the slogan "the Pacific, our common home"—one, which echoed the initiative for a "common European home" he had made toward the West. The Soviet leader also announced the partial withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Mongolia, and the Sino-Soviet borders, an effort to reduce tensions in Sino-Soviet relations. Overall, the new Soviet foreign policy was aimed at reintegrating the USSR into the community of states in the Euro-Atlantic as well as Asia-Pacific regions.

With such changes in the international environment, not only did Hanoi stop reiterating the formula of "two camps, four contradictions," but some people in the

Vietnamese leadership also began to rethink the ideological foundation of their policy, both domestic and foreign. In lieu of the division of the world into two ideological camps, a new outlook that viewed the world in terms of regional communities emerged. In its August 1987 issue, the VCP theoretical journal published an article on prospects of security and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, which, at the first time since decades, emphasized Vietnam's intimacy with the Asia-Pacific.[72] In its November 1988 issue, apparently as a response to Gorbachev's September 16, 1988 speech in Krasnoyarsk, which reinforced the Soviet desire for peace and security in the Asia-Pacific, the journal described Asia-Pacific as "a region of dynamic growth and full of potentials." It also put forward the idea that the future of Asia-Pacific would depend on the development strategies of the regional countries "with large or relative large territory and population such as the USSR, the United States, China, India, Japan, Indonesia, Mexico, Canada, Vietnam, Thailand, Australia, and the Philippines."[73]

The contents of the new Vietnamese worldview were heavily influenced by the Gorbachevian "new political thinking" in the Soviet Union. Immediately after the 27th Soviet Party Congress (February 25-March 6, 1986) new, Gorbachevian, terms such as the "world's scientific-technological revolution" *(cach mang khoa hoc-ky thuat the gioi)*, "interdependence" *(su tuy thuoc lan nhau)*, the "trend of internationalization" *(xu the quoc te hoa)*, and "international order" *(trat tu quoc te)* were introduced into the vocabulary of Vietnamese foreign policy.[74]

The Soviet Union itself had borrowed these concepts from the West. However, the Vietnamese also had their own windows on the West. Two members of Vietnam's top policymaking body, the VCP Politburo, played a central role in importing and propagating Western-born ideas in Vietnam in the late 1980s. They were Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach and Secretary in charge of the Central Department for External Affairs Tran Xuan Bach. Thach and Bach were among a few members of the

[72] See Kieu Nguyen, "Chau A-Thai Binh Duong: an ninh va hop tac" [Asia-Pacific: Security and Cooperation], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 8 (August 1987), pp. 75-79, 88, especially p. 79.
[73] Nguyen Ho, "Chau A-Thai Binh Duong truoc nguong cua the ky XXI" [Asia-Pacific on the Doorstep to the 21th Century], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (November 1988), pp. 78-83, quote p. 79.
[74] Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, p. 174.

Politburo who were eager to know serious things about the outside world and about the West.[75]

Unusually for a Vietnamese Communist cadre, Thach had a New York-based adviser in international and economic affairs. The adviser—his name is Vu Quang Viet—was an economist, who had came to the United States from South Vietnam before 1975. Unlike his predecessor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who, when visiting New York the first time, was interested chiefly in entertainment, Thach never wasted time for things other than world politics, economics and the like.[76] He was famous as a "reading and traveling minister." Although he had to give up formal education relatively early, about mid-high school, due to his participation in the anticolonial movements against French rule (he was jailed for some years because of these activities), Thach was admired by his colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for his vast knowledge.[77] Within the Vietnamese Politburo, Thach was in charge of both foreign affairs and foreign economic relations. In 1985 he was commissioned by the Politburo to study price and market reforms. According to Viet, one of his jobs in the late 1980s was to assist Thach in formulating Vietnam's economic reform. When in New York, one of Viet's tasks was to send Western books to Thach. Among the most notable books Viet delivered to Thach was Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave* (1980) and Paul Samuelson's *Economics*. It was a great event in Vietnam when Thach had the textbook of the bourgeois economics translated into Vietnamese. Thach also had his people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs translated and introduced Toffler's and Kennedy's into Vietnamese.[78] As will be seen in the following sections, Thach's new worldview bore the unmistakable mark of both Toffler and Kennedy. For example, Toffler's theses of history as successive waves of civilization and the central role of technological

[75] Another such person was then Vice Premier Vo Van Kiet.
[76] Vu Quang Viet, personal communication, July 2004.
[77] See various memoirs in the volume *Nha ngoai giao Nguyen Co Thach* (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2003).
[78] Toffler's *The Third Wave* was introduced and translated by Ton Nu Thi Ninh in the Ministry's media outlet *Quan he Quoc te* [World Affairs], Nos. 8-12 and 14 (June, July, August, September, October, and December 1990). Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* was introduced in the July and August 1991 issues of the same magazine.

revolutions in advancing historical progress, as well as Kennedy's ideas of the great powers as the major actors of world politics and economic strength as the central factor determining the fate of nations, feature prominently in Thach's new worldview.

In addition to Thach, Bach was another major source of Western knowledge within the Hanoi leadership of the late 1980s. [79] He was commissioned by the Politburo to collect information from the outside world, which was written in English, French, Chinese, and Russian, and brief the Politburo about developments in the world. Thus, Bach's function was the Politburo's official window on the world. As a result of his intense and permanent contacts with Western ideas, Bach turned from an archetypal Stalinist to a radical reformist within a short period of time. He later became the leading advocate of political pluralism in Vietnam, and for this activity he was expelled from the Party leadership in March 1990. After Bach's dismissal by the Party Central Committee, Thach drew Bach to his Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where Bach served as a research fellow until Thach's own retirement in late 1991. After that Bach lived under house arrest in Hanoi until his death. Although the ideas of pluralism and multiparty system became a taboo in post-1990 Vietnam, many of the ideas imported through Bach's office were dispersed among the Vietnamese elite and helped to shape the new Vietnamese view of the world. Bui Tin, a senior official in the Vietnamese propaganda apparatus, reports that in the late 1980s Bach's office was the only place in Hanoi having Nayan Chanda's *Brother Enemy: A History of Indochina after the Fall of Saigon*, a book that opened his eyes about the "brotherhood" among communist countries, and about the role great powers played in shaping the fate of the Vietnamese.

There are signs indicating that in the later half of the 1980s the Vietnamese reformers also studied the world outlooks of China and other successful East Asian states.[80] For example, Thach's agenda-setting article titled "All for Peace, National Independence, and Development," in which he outlined the new Vietnamese grand strategy, shows striking similarities to Deng Xiaoping's readjustment of Chinese

[79] The paragraph is based on Thanh Tin [Bui Tin], *Hoa xuyen tuyet* [The Snow-Breaking Flower] (Irvine, Cal.: Nhan Quyen, 1991), pp. 151-54.
[80] For a discussion of the influence of ASEAN's ideas on the new Vietnamese worldview, see Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*.

foreign policy as revealed in Deng's speeches "Safeguard World Peace and Ensure Domestic Development" and "Peace and Development Are the Two Outstanding Issues in the World Today."[81] The idea of regionalism in Asia-Pacific also found its way into the new Vietnamese worldview. As Nguyen Co Thach pointed out in the above-mentioned article:

> Regionalism is developing more and more to the significance attainable by economic cooperation and endeavors in terms of favorable geographical conditions across political and military alliances. This is the new specific trait of an international division of labor.[82]

In sum, the new Vietnamese world outlook was formed in a condensed moment of history. First, it was triggered by the economic failure of socialism and the radical change of international environment Vietnam was facing then. Secondly, it was inspired and influenced by the *Perestroika* and the "new political thinking" in the Soviet Union, the success story of the NICs in the Asia-Pacific region, and China's modernization. Last but not least, it was propelled by a number of leaders in the Vietnamese ruling elite, notably Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach.

The Modernizers' Worldview

Elements of the grand strategy of modernization are scattered in numerous writings by policymakers and scholars since the late 1980s. Fortunately, the most systematic and thorough formulations of the grand strategy of modernization can be found in writings by its leading figures such as Nguyen Co Thach and Vo Van Kiet. After Thach was forced to retire from the leadership at the Seventh Party Congress in July 1991, he could

[81] Compare Nguyen Co Thach, "Tat ca vi hoa binh, doc lap dan toc va phat trien" [All for Peace, National Independence, and Development], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 8 (August 1989), pp. 1-8; Deng Xiaoping, "Safeguard World Peace and Ensure Domestic Development," 29 May 1984; "Peace and Development Are the Two Outstanding Issues in the World Today," 4 March 1985, in Deng, *Fundamental Issues in Present-Day China* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987): 46-7; 97-9.
[82] Thach, "All for Peace, National Independence, and Development," p. 3.

still disseminate his ideas through his vast networks in the Foreign Affairs Ministry. In 1998, shortly prior to his death, the Party's central publishing house published his book *The World in the Past Fifty Years (1945-1995) and the World in the Coming Twenty-five Years (1995-2020),* in which Thach delineated in a systematical and detailed way his worldview and grand strategy of modernization.[83] Although the book was not accessible for the public, it was still obtainable for policymakers and advisers in the Vietnamese foreign policy establishment. After the Seventh Party Congress, Vo Van Kiet remained the leading modernizer at the top echelon of Vietnamese policymaking. As Prime Minister from 1991 to 1997 and Number 3 in the Vietnamese nomenclature, Kiet had considerable impact upon the formulation and conduct of Vietnamese foreign policy. His worldview and grand strategy was presented in a direct manner in his classified letter to the Politburo, dated August 9, 1995.[84] An examination of Thach's and Kiet's writings would provide close look into the grand strategic matrix of modernization.

Thach's book implies that its author retains Marxist philosophy while refuting Marxist worldview. Thus, whereas still adhering to dialectical materialism and the primacy of forces of production, Thach rejects viewing history in terms of socio-economic formations and the primacy of class struggle.[85] For Thach, it is not class struggle but technological revolution in the economic life that is the motor of history. Instead of approaching history in the standard Marxist way, thusly positing Vietnam in the transition from capitalism to socialism, Thach relies on Toffler and describes history of humanity as undergone first the agricultural revolution, then two industrial revolutions, and now reaching a new stage, the scientific-technological or the

[83] Nguyen Co Thach, *The gioi trong 50 nam qua (1945-1995) va the gioi trong 25 nam toi (1995-2020)* [The World in the Past Fifty Years (1945-1995) and the World in the Coming Twenty-five Years (1995-2020)] (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 1998).

[84] Although classified, the letter still found its way to the public through overseas Vietnamese media outlets. See, for example, Vo Van Kiet, "Thu gui Bo Chinh tri" [Letter to the Politburo], August 9, 1995, reprinted in *Dien Dan*, No. 48 (January 1996), pp. 16-25.

[85] For a concise formulation of Marxism, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977). This book famously notes that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (p. 35) and describes human history as successive "socio-economic formations" from primitive communism to slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and finally socialism and communism.

information revolution. This last revolution has led to the formation of new relations of production which are based on a very high level of forces of production. The result is a society that, owing to its knowledge-based economy, qualitatively differs from the industrial society, which precedes it. Thus, humankind is entering a new epoch, the "information age," which began in the early 1980s and will cause profound changes in international relations.[86]

According to Thach, the end of the Cold War is a necessary consequence of the advent of the scientific-technological revolution, because this revolution has led to an enormous growth of the world's forces of production, which, in turn, has pushed forward the trends of internationalization and globalization in world economy.[87] Under these circumstances, the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—realized that they would lose in economic competition with West Europe and Japan. They therefore changed the focus of their grand strategies from the arms race to an "economic race." For Thach, the economic challenge of West Europe and Japan was the "top strategic challenge" facing the United States.[88]

Thach characterized the post-Cold War era with three major features—a détente in great power relations, a new international division of labor following the interdependence of national economies, and an increase of globalization and regional integration. According to him, today the world has become a single world market. It is no longer divided into two antagonistic camps but unified in a globalizing world economy, in which a "new international division of labor" is taking place. While interdependence is gaining more and more momentum in this world, the biggest global contradiction remains the gap between rich and poor.[89] Thus, the grand strategic

[86] Thach, *World in Past and Coming Years*, pp. 7-8, 22, 86-88, 94-97, 99-100. This theoretical fundament of Thach's worldview was delivered by Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Morrow, 1980). Toffler divides history into three phases, with the First Wave being an agricultural phase, the Second Wave an industrial phase, and the Third Wave just beginning—in 1980 Toffler still did not have the name "information civilization" as Thach, who was writing in 1998. A premise of Toffler's view of history and civilization is that technological revolutions play the central role in advancing historical progress.
[87] Thach, *World in Past and Coming Years*, pp. 22-36, especially pp. 30-31.
[88] Ibid., pp. 45-65, especially pp. 59-60. Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (1987) played a significant role in impressing Thach, or rather reinforcing his realization, that military might is ultimately based on economic strength.
[89] Thach, *World in Past and Coming Years*, pp. 30-31, 93-94.

conflicts are no longer of military nature but taking place in the economic field. As a result, "humankind will be emancipated from world wars and enjoy a durable peace. The world is shifting step by step from the arms race to the economic race."[90] In other words, the fate of the nations would be determined by the economic race rather than militarily.[91]

Good communist as he was, Thach saw life in terms of struggle *(dau tranh)*.[92] Yet it is not class struggle but human struggle in general and national struggle on the international plane that make a permanent underlying theme throughout his book. For Thach, world politics is an arena of struggle and cooperation among nations, not of class struggles. He wrote:

> The salient feature of international relations in the past fifty years is that national interests increasingly became the decisive factors. The countries, particularly the big powers (*cac nuoc lon*), all determined their foreign policy strategies on the basis of the national interest.[93]

This also means that Vietnam should define its national goals in terms of its own national, as opposed to international or class, interests. Consequently, Thach argues that the primary objective of the Vietnamese is to develop their country economically, in other words, to modernize it. Building his argument on the more secured ground of anti-imperialist orthodoxy, Thach declares that development and modernization is the best way to advance socialism and fight imperialism and capitalism. He points out that in order to achieve that goal Vietnam should capitalize its human resources and become an integral part of the regional and the world economy. In sum, it should occupy an "optimal position" in the international division of labor, not a frontline in the crusade against imperialism.[94]

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[90] Ibid., p. 96.
[91] Ibid., p. 106.
[92] *Dau tranh* is a favorable term in his vocabulary (Vu Quang Viet, personal communication, November 2001).
[93] Thach, *World in Past and Coming Years,* p. 65.
[94] Ibid., pp. 107-111.

Vo Van Kiet's letter to the Politburo in August 1995 is an appraisal of the contemporary world situation and an outline of Vietnamese grand strategy. Immediately in the first lines of his letter, Kiet rejects a central thesis of the Party's established worldview, which is reiterated in the Party Program approved at the Seventh Congress, namely the thesis of the four fundamental contradictions.[95] Instead, he offers a new characterization of the contemporary world:

> In the present world, it is not the antagonistic contradiction between socialism and imperialism but first and foremost diversity and multipolarity that have become the most salient factors dominating the contradictions and movement of relations between all nations in the world. And unlike in the past, today national interests, regional interests, and other global interests (e.g., peace, the problem of environment, the problem of development, the deepening globalization of the development of forces of production, etc.) are playing an increasingly important role in unfolding contradictions as well as in making new assemblages of forces in the world. Many other contradictions that used to exist in the period when the world was divided into two camps – including the contradiction between imperialism and socialism – may further exist now; yet [they] are increasingly swayed by other contradictions and therefore cannot play the role they used to do in the past.[96]

Kiet asserts that contemporary world politics in general and Vietnam's foreign affairs in particular "must be evaluated in light of the new international complexion, especially within the correlation between the big powers, the 'centers,' the 'poles,' which are

[95] For the VCP's standpoint on the continuing existence of the four fundamental contradictions, see "Program of National Construction in the Transitional Period to Socialism," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu VII* [Documents of the 7th National Congress] (Hanoi: Su That, 1991), pp. 6-7.
[96] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 16.

taking sharper contours now."[97] This statement implies that multipolarity has replaced two central anti-imperialist concepts, that of "two camps" and that of "who will prevail over whom between the two roads, socialism or capitalism."[98] Contrary to the concept of "who will prevail over whom," which is struggle-oriented and class interest-centered, the concept of multipolarity is order-oriented and national interest-centered.

According to Kiet, the cardinal contradictions in contemporary international relations are those between nations. Also, the major factor of contemporary international relations is the national interest.[99] He rejects the anti-imperialist policy of forming alliance on ideological ground, pointing on

> the fact that the four [remaining] socialist countries […] cannot act and are not evaluated in the international arena as a united economic and political force. Particularly, as concerns Vietnam-China relations and Vietnam-PDRK relations, the national nature drowns—if not to say, expels—the socialist nature in relations between theses countries.[100]

Kiet also downplays the political weight and quality of the "international communist and workers' movement" in the new world conjuncture.[101] Of the "three revolutionary currents," Vo Van Kiet thus reassesses the socialist countries and the communist and workers' movement as no longer able to play an important role in world politics. He even fails to mention the third, namely the national liberation movement.

Along with terms such as the world's scientific-technological revolution, interdependence, the trend of internationalization, and multipolarity, the notion of international order is also a key concept in the vocabulary of the modernization's grand strategic matrix. Like many other new concepts, it was borrowed from the Soviet Union

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[97] Ibid.
[98] For the central role of this concept in orthodox Marxism-Leninism, see Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, Chs. 2 and 3, especially pp. 28-32.
[99] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p.16.
[100] Ibid., p. 17.
[101] Ibid.

during the campaign of renovation of thinking in the late 1980s.[102] Combined with the thesis of the primacy of national interests and the concept of multipolarity, the concept of international order provides the modernization's grand strategy with an approach to world politics that is radically different from that of the anti-imperialist grand strategy, which emphasizes two camps, the primacy of class interests, and revolution. One of the pioneer works to introduce the concept of international order into Vietnam is Phan Doan Nam's article in the September 1991 issue of the Party's theoretical journal.[103] This article, which appeared shortly after the Seventh Party Congress, dealt with methodological issues in studying world politics by presenting a "neutral concept of order, which enables one to ponder calmly the possibilities of determining what kind of international order is going to evolve and how Vietnam should respond to it."[104]

The worldview of modernization can be seen as a complete rejection of that of anti-imperialism. It no longer embraces the "four fundamental contradictions," the "two camps," and the "three revolutionary currents." The motor of history is no longer class struggle, which in the present epoch culminates in an "antagonism between socialism and imperialism." It is the scientific-technological revolution (Nguyen Co Thach's thesis) and the diversity of national, regional, and global interests and multipolarity among big powers (Vo Van Kiet's thesis) that are primarily responsible for world dynamics. Instead of "two camps" (the "socialist" and the "capitalist/imperialist"), the two men spoke of a "single world market" with the trend of "globalization" (Thach's emphasis) and a "multipolar" world with many "centers" of power (Kiet's focus). While the established worldview asserts the existence of the "offensive posture of the world's three revolutionary currents,"[105] the new worldview claims instead the epochal shift from the industrial to the information age, the trend of globalization and the multipolar

[102] Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, p. 174.
[103] Phan Doan Nam, "Phuong phap nhan biet dac diem cua cuc dien the gioi hien nay" [A Method for Identifying the Characteristics of the Present World Complexion], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 9 (September 1991), pp. 55-59.
[104] Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, p. 192.
[105] Hoang Tung, *The tien cong cua ba dong thac cach mang* [The Offensive Posture of the Three Revolutionary Currents] (Hanoi: Su That, 1978). For a discussion, see Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, pp. 48-62.

game between nations, to be the most considerable propensities of the contemporary world.

Significantly enough, the two leading proponents of the grand strategy of modernization, Nguyen Co Thach and Vo Van Kiet, share the main themes of "globalization" (*toan cau hoa*) and "multipolarity" (*tinh da cuc*). Both also agree on the decisive role of national, not class or ideological, interests in the working of world politics. To contrast, the established worldview revolved around the main themes of "anti-imperialist struggle" and the "offensive posture of three revolutionary currents," which were claimed to be driven by the "working class interests." In the new worldview, the theses of the epochal shift from the industrial to the information age, the primacy of national interests, and diversity and multipolarity have replaced the anti-imperialist thesis of an uncompromising struggle between forces of national independence and socialism and those of imperialism in the transitional period from capitalism to socialism, a thesis that describes both the structure and dynamics of the world.

The Modernizers' Self-perception, Ambition and Strategic Approaches

As modernizers envision world history as a three-stage progression from the agricultural civilization to the industrial one and now into the information age, they position Vietnam matter-of-factly in the agricultural civilization. Vietnam's overall objectives are therefore industrialization and modernization. Representative for many other Vietnamese, Nguyen Co Thach has gone as far as asserting that Vietnam "can and must bypass the industrial age and can and must go directly into the information age."[106] He believes that the scientific-technological revolution is giving a rare opportunity to Vietnam, a "traditional raw material and blue-collar labor exporting country," to restructure and modernize its economy and catch up to the most advanced

[106] Thach, *World in Past and Coming Years*, p. 107.

societies if it strongly focuses on education and endorses an expansive policy toward the knowledge-based sector.[107]

According to Thach, the contemporary world is characterized by the trends of internationalization and globalization, in which the world has become a single world market, the national economies are increasingly interdependent and the vision of a worldwide free market is looming even larger.[108] From the modernizer's perspective, these trends are objective, hence irresistible. It follows that Vietnam should take a proactive posture toward globalization. In other words, the Vietnamese must proactively pursue their country's integration into the world economy.

Table 2. 4. **The grand strategy of modernization**

Worldview	National interest; Interdependence; Multipolarity	Industrialization; Modernization	*Ambition*
Self-perception	A legged-behind nation	Integration into Asia-Pacific; Cooperation with the West	*Approach*

The world according to the modernizer is a contending field of nations, where national interests are the driving force and big powers (*cac nuoc lon*) the dominant actors. The image of nations playing game is not inappropriate here but the game nations play has nothing to do with sport. It is about survival. That is why Thach and many other Vietnamese prefer the word "struggle." The modernizer views the world as

[107] Ibid., pp. 108-110.
[108] Ibid., pp. 30-31, 103, 105, 110.

a stage, in which nations contend for survival, and because of this, they find themselves in an economic contest. Here struggle is the main motif, while cooperation a good means of struggle. The world is full of *mau thuan* (contradictions, discords), but in order to resolve the conflicts *nhung tap hop luc luong* (assemblages of forces, communities of actors) are created.[109]

Thus, on the one hand, Vietnam is a lonely contender in a Hobbesian world, but on the other, it is able to secure support from the outside world. Furthermore, such an assemblage of forces must rest upon national, regional, or global interests, not ideological or class interests as was in the old time of the antagonism between socialism and imperialism. Consider an underscored statement in Vo Van Kiet's classified letter to the Politburo:

> The salient feature is that our country is now [caught in a situation where we stand] alone, facing all [other countries], but at the same time [we are] also able to create quite a new assemblage of external forces.[110]

Examples of this "new assemblage of external forces," or in other words, new pattern of Vietnam's world anchorage, are, as Kiet has listed in his letter, Vietnam's membership in ASEAN, its framework agreement with the EU, and the normalization of relations with the United States.[111] At the same time, Kiet rejects the possibility of an assembly of forces based on ideological grounds with China or North Korea. He adds: "Even in the Vietnam-China relations there remain quite a lot of hot spots."[112] It is worth noting that Kiet fails to mention Vietnam's normalization with China (1991) as a pillar of Vietnam's world anchorage in this multipolar world. Certainly, Kiet hints to Beijing when he writes that "Besides the economic challenge, which is very fierce, our country still has to confront military and political challenges, which are occasionally highly

[109] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo."
[110] Ibid., p. 22.
[111] Ibid., p. 16.
[112] Ibid., p. 17.

sensitive and subtle."[113] Kiet did not have the United States in mind when writing this sentence. At the time Kiet's letter was written, the United States posed no military threat to Vietnam while the conflict with China over the Spratly islands was a flashpoint in Vietnam's national security agenda. On Kiet's list of "important events since the international complexion entered the new period," four Vietnam-related issues were mentioned: the Cambodia conflict; the conflict over the Spratly islands; the development of Vietnam's international relations in the last ten years, of which the most important events were Vietnam's membership in ASEAN and the framework agreement with the European Union; and the prospect of normalization with the United States. This indicates that Kiet was focusing on Vietnam's conflict with China and normalization with the "capitalist" "poles" of the world. In the same letter, Kiet has blatantly blamed "America and the other reactionary forces" for their "intentions to eliminate the Socialist Republic of Vietnam."[114] Yet this blame appears to be a kind of "barking dogs seldom bite," which is aimed at preventing possible attacks from the anti-imperialists for "lacking vigilance toward the schemes and tactics of the reactionary forces." For, as Kiet claims, the antagonism between socialism and imperialism no longer dominates the contradictions and movements in the relations between nations of the contemporary world and national interests are instead the primary driving force of international relations.[115] Consequently, if there is an ideological conflict between imperialist America and socialist Vietnam, the ideological interests must be subordinated to the national interests. Drawing the consequences of Kiet's assumptions about today international relations and reading between the lines in order to reveal what Kiet did not make explicit for reasons of sensitivity and subtlety, one can see that from Kiet's perspective, Vietnam should entertain more a critical view of China than of the United States.

Facing the new world situation, a keyword for Vietnamese attitude is *tranh thu* (taking advantage). Representatively, both Vo Van Kiet and Nguyen Co Thach concurred and stressed that the post-Cold War years were offering Vietnam a "very big

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., p. 16.
[115] Ibid.

opportunity" and the "most favorable international context" since the birth of socialist Vietnam. The Vietnamese response should be, they asserted, taking advantage of that opportunity in order to develop the country and to catch up to the regional countries.[116]

Figure 2.5. **Four Generations of Vietnamese Leaders and Their Grand Strategies**

	Orientalism	Anti-imperialism	Modernization
	←----------	----------	----------→
I	Phan Boi Chau	Ho Chi Minh*	Phan Chau Trinh
II		Le Duc Tho / Le Duan*	Vo Nguyen Giap
III		Le Duc Anh / Nguyen Van Linh*	Nguyen Co Thach
III		Do Muoi*	Vo Van Kiet
IV	Le Kha Phieu*	Nong Duc Manh*	Nguyen Van An

Notes: *Roman letters indicate the generations of Vietnamese revolutionary leaders; Asterisk indicates Party chiefs.*

Difference in perception of the political self corresponds with difference in strategic approaches. Whereas class or ideological criteria determine the political frontier in the anti-imperialist worldview, the political self in the modernizers' worldview is the nation. A country is a lonely contender in the world, and its sense of solidarity with other certain actors in the world seems relatively weak. In this worldview, too, the political frontier coincides with the emotional frontier. However, the national is closely bound to the international at least in economic terms. First, Vietnamese economy and other national economies in the world are interdependent in a single world market. Secondly, Vietnam pursues not only its own national interests but also regional and global interests. Not solidarity (*doan ket*) but integration (*hoi nhap*), not fraternity (*anh em*) but partnership (*doi tac*), and on the other hand, not antagonism

[116] Kiet, "Letter to Politburo," p. 17; Thach, *World in Past and Coming Years*, pp. 106-107.

(*doi khang*) but competition (*canh tranh*) characterize the connections between the national and the international.

The strategic approaches of the grand strategy of modernization are based on both power politics and complex interdependence. Power politics, because a country is a lonely contender in an anarchical world; it has to rely on its own before counting on the others. Complex interdependence, because states are economically interdependent; while pursuing their own interests, they are caught up in networks woven by a diversity of national, regional, and global interests.

Chapter Three

Grand strategic motivation

People usually adopt a grand strategy for two major reasons. First, they have vested interests in it. And second, they adopt it because it promises to bring about a future state of affairs that they prefer. In the basic motivational process, people start from a sense of *who* they are and try to make sure that *their* interests will be safeguarded. This chapter first outlines the landscape of Vietnamese grand strategies in the post-Cold War era. Next, it asks about the political self of these grand strategies. Finally, it explores the answers provided by the major Vietnamese grand strategies for questions of standing, security, and wealth—"the three generalized yet immediate ends common to humanity."[1] By nurturing a political self, identifying itself with it, as well as promoting and pursuing its general yet direct interests, a grand strategy as a policy current is in the position to motivate and mobilize people for its own cause.

THE POST-COLD WAR LANDSCAPE

Two grand strategies are vying for dominance in post-Cold War Vietnam. They are anti-imperialism and the grand strategy of modernization. The other two, the traditional grand strategy and orientalism, cannot compete for primacy. There are two major reasons for this. First, the latter are in their whole anachronistic. Second, the two former have absorbed elements of the two latter and transformed them into their own.

Traditionalism

For the traditional grand strategy, all it can do is to provide a strategic approach to China. The reason is obvious. Its bipolar worldview with China and Vietnam laying at

[1] Onuf, *World of Our Making*, p. 258

the foci has already been recognized as obsolete since Vietnam's joining of the modern international system in the late 19th century. Also, its self-perception as "center of the south" has long become anachronistic. Its ambition of parity with China the world leader is transformed into either the modernizers' emulation with China on the path of modernization or the anti-imperialist dream of parity with America, the world's biggest power. However, like in the 1880s-1890s and in the 1950s-1960s, two conditions in the 1990s-2000s have made the traditional grand strategy appealing. The first is the perception of China as a big power. The second is the need for protection by China against the Western threat. The traditional grand strategy is based on the assumption that China is too big and at the same time, too near. Its strategic approach is to achieve two objectives. One is the acknowledgment of China's superiority and the other is the preservation of Vietnam's autonomy. Theoretically—and this was the Chinese theory—those who accept the Chinese world order will be rewarded with protection against third party's attacks. Although many Vietnamese rulers in the past did not trust the sincerity of Chinese protectors—they themselves were not sincere in accepting the Chinese order of the world—some still made use of it.[2] In the 1880s-1890s as well as in the 1950s-1960s and again, in the 1990s-2000s, a considerable part of the Vietnamese elites resorted to the traditional grand strategy with the aim to create the possibility that Beijing will throw its heavy weight on their side in their struggle for power. Interestingly, in the post-Cold War era, those who apply the traditional grand strategy as a principal way to gain protection from China are, by and large, also those who adhere to anti-imperialism.

Yet, not only have the anti-imperialists resorted to the traditional grand strategy. Many modernizers recognize its expediency in Sino-Vietnamese relations. The expediency is made by the circumstance that after the disintegration of the USSR, Vietnam has lost its old patron but still not gained a new one. Anti-imperialists see Beijing as Vietnam's new-old patron, but modernizers disagree. However, the latter have to adapt to a situation that resembles the traditional configuration—Vietnam is

[2] The most notable, and notorious, case is King Le Chieu Thong, who called on the Qing court for protection (1788) when his regime was rendered powerless by domestic strong men.

facing a giant neighbor which is threatening, while having no comparable support from elsewhere.

The attitude of both anti-imperialists and modernizers toward the traditional grand strategy is complex. The traditional worldview and self-perception lend a little Sinocentrism to the anti-imperialist and the modernizers' views of the world and their political self, but only in individual cases. As will be seen in this chapter, the traditional ambitions have been transformed into both anti-imperialist and modernizer's ambitions. Anti-imperialists and modernizers are applying the traditional strategic approaches to China without embracing the traditional worldview and self-perception. The application is limited to Sino-Vietnamese relations and remains on the surface. It is superficial because anti-imperialists and modernizers, while appealing to it, pursue different calculations.

The anti-imperialists' main objective is to protect the socialist regime from the threat of regime change. For this reason, they seek an alliance with the People's Republic of China. Although territorial disputes between the two socialist countries also make Beijing threatening to Hanoi, the China threat is directed at the country, not the regime. Thus, for the anti-imperialists, China does not pose a mortal threat while it can provide a security guarantee. On the contrary, the modernizers need to accommodate China because they know that the relative capabilities are in Beijing's favor and no other great power is playing the counterweight to China. A central objective of the modernizers is the integration of Vietnam into the world led by the advanced industrial countries in the West. Their other objective is to defend Vietnam's territorial claims, especially in the South China Sea, which are disputed by China. An alliance with the United States would be a perfect avenue to achieve both goals. The modernizers' resort to the traditional way of dealing with China appears, in the light of the above reasoning, a tactical measure in the absence of a strong and close linkage with the United States.

Orientalism

The period from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s seems to have provided an international environment favorable for the revival of orientalism. It witnessed a

spectacular ascent of a series of East Asian countries, which was celebrated by the World Bank as "the East Asian economic miracle."[3] Moreover, it was a time when internationally the vision of an Asian-Pacific century and regionally a new Asian self-pride were in high vogue.[4] As Manfred Mols notes:

> Das asiatische Wirtschaftswunder, in dem Fluggänsemodell genannten Strategiepaket in weiten Teilen Asiens mit Sympatie diskutiert, welches dann bekanntlich eine ganze Region zu einem "global player" aufrücken ließ, rief ein zivilisatorisches Selbstbewußtsein hervor, das man in Lateinamerika allenfalls in bis heute nicht erfüllten Anläufen kannte: in Brasilien in der unter dem legendären Außenminister Rio Branco (1902-1912) geäußerten Vision von einer künftigen Weltmachtrolle und am Abend der Mexikanischen Revolution, als Kultusminister José Vasconcelos den Gedanken einer "kosmischen Rasse" in die Identitätsdebatte brachte.[5]

Under such circumstances a revival of Vietnamese orientalism seems highly plausible. To recapitulate, orientalism is based on the identity of "same culture and same race" and the vision of a Japan-led East Asian community that stands on an equal footing with the West. Indeed, Phan Boi Chau's vision was no different than an "Asia that can say no" to Western attempts of dominance and an "Asian renaissance" in the form of modernized Confucianism.[6]

However, post-Cold War Vietnam has experienced the resurgence of its Asia-Pacific identity, a regionalist worldview, and the related strategy of regional integration

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[3] World Bank, *The East Asian Economic Miracle and Public Policy* (New York: World Bank, 1993).

[4] Manfred Mols, "Auf dem Wege zu einer Pazifischen Gemeinschaft? – Formen regionaler Zusammenarbeit," in Adolf Kimmel, ed., *Vor dem pazifischen Jahrhundert?* (Baden Baden: Nomos, 1996), pp. 87-106; Mols, "Bemerkungen zur Globalisierung in Ost- und Südostasien," *Zeitschrift für Politik*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2001), pp. 427-447, esp. pp. 432-436.

[5] Mols, "Bemerkung zur Globalisierung," p. 433.

[6] The quotes are identical with the titles of two major books by leading proponents of the new Asian self-esteem. See, Shintaro Ishihara and Mahathir Mohamad, *No to ieru Ajia* [The Asia That Can Say No] (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1994), English translation *The Voice of Asia*, Tokyo 1995, and Anwar Ibrahim, *The Asian Renaissance* (Singapore: Time Books, 1996).

within the grand strategy of modernization and not in the orientalist matrix. Vietnam's re-discovered Asian-Pacific identity is grounded on its geographical location, not on its cultural heritage. The new self-perception comes along with a worldview which perceives the world in terms of regions and regards Asia-Pacific as the most dynamic region of the world. Pertaining to this self-perception and worldview are the ambition of becoming one of the next "tiger" states—i.e., a NIC—in this growth region and the goal of regional integration. Here too, the sense of an Asia-Pacific community is not one of cultural identity but one of economic integration.

The notion of a value-based, cultural community of East Asian nations still lives well in Vietnam. But it is most popular among the cultural elites and particularly among those who are antiquity-oriented. Phan Boi Chau was the most tradition-oriented among the lead persons of Vietnamese patriotism in the first half of the 20th century. He stood at the traditional extreme in a spectrum of outlooks, which spans between traditionalism and liberalism. Of the other leaders, Huynh Thuc Khang and Ho Chi Minh were to be found in the middle, while Nguyen An Ninh and Phan Chu Trinh stood at the liberal extreme. As Vinh Sinh has observed:

> Although at times Phan [Boi Chau] did show his fascinations for thing Western, because of the lack of proficiency in Western languages and first-hand experiences in the West, and of his antiquity-orientated outlook, he was unable to grasp the roots of wealth and power of the West and modern world affairs. The modernization that Phan thus envisaged for Vietnam was modelled after Meiji Japan, the one that required minimum Westernization.[7]

This outlook conflicts with that of the VCP, whose basic orientation is getting rid of the traditions and at the same time, avoiding Westernization. Representative for the mainstream Vietnamese stance in the "Asian values" debate is an article by Ho Si Quy, a scholar affiliated with the Philosophy Institute of the National Social Sciences Center,

[7] Sinh, "Phan Boi Chau," p. 135.

on "Vietnamese culture in the context of East Asian values," an article which appeared in the Party theoretical journal in July 1999.[8] Quy disagreed with Max Weber, who in his view regarded East Asia as a geopolitical region that cannot be exploited by means of market mechanism. He also rejected Samuel Huntington's thesis of East Asia as the domain of the Confucian civilization, from which the Japanese civilization was separated. Quy further argued that East Asia was not a cultural region with only positive values. In his view, "East Asia is first and foremost a cultural region distinct from the West Asian and Western cultural regions." He distinguished between the concept of East Asia and that of Asia-Pacific, and contended that the concept of East Asia refers to a cultural region rather than a geopolitical one, while the concept of Asia-Pacific refers to a geopolitical rather than a cultural region. Making reference to debates on "Asian values" in East Asian countries, Quy asserted that overestimation of the Asian values would lead to error. As he concluded, "neither does Vietnam, as an East Asian society, underestimate, nor is it dazzled by, the traditional Asian values."

Why can't orientalism reach the state level, though it is still alive at the elite level? Beside the logics of place, war and peace, which will be discussed later in this chapter, the reason is that Vietnam is still searching for an East-West synthesis. Acknowledging the superiority of East Asian over modern, European-born or Western, values is hard for Vietnam because it still finds itself struggling for modernization. Unlike Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia, which can appeal to their own success stories in giving prominence to the "Asian values," Vietnam's past and present poverty suggests that its East Asian traditions are in no way superior.

The Post-Cold War Dualism

Strategic decisions during 1988 and 1989 have laid the grounds for Vietnamese state grand strategy in the post-Cold War era. In May 20, 1988 the VCP Politburo secretly passed Resolution 13, which stipulated a new foreign policy strategy and orientation

[8] Ho Si Quy, "Van hoa Viet Nam trong boi canh gia tri Dong A" [Vietnamese Culture in the Context of East Asian Values], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 13 (July 1999), pp. 28, 37-39.

based on the new thinking propagated by Nguyen Co Thach. The resolution has not been made public, but its contents were revealed in Thach's interview in the first issue of his ministry's media outlet in January 1990.[9] It marked a breakthrough in Vietnam's view of the world, redefined Vietnam's national interests, introduced a new concept of friend and foe, and presented a novel Vietnamese outlook on war and peace, security and development, national interests and international commitments, the relationship between economy and national defense, international solidarity and alliance relationship.[10]

The transformation of Vietnam's worldview underwent a major backlash at the Seven Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee in August 1989, when General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh, in response to the collapse of Eastern European communist regimes and backed by conservative members of the Politburo, reemphasized the "unchanged nature of imperialism" and rehabilitated the anti-imperialist worldview, which had been overrun by Resolution 13 one year before.[11] However, the debate within the Vietnamese leadership over the causes of the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe did not bear consensus. In a characteristic Vietnamese manner, the leadership agreed on an "everybody is right" solution. Thus, the Eighth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee in November 1989, on the one hand, identified errors of "subjectivism and voluntarism" by Party leaders as well as slowness in expanding economic cooperation with the capitalist countries as causes of the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. At the same time, it reaffirmed that imperialism was taking advantage of the conflicts

[9] Nguyen Co Thach, "Nhung chuyen bien moi tren the gioi va tu duy moi cua chung ta" [New Changes in the World and Our New Thinking], *Quan he Quoc te*, No. 1 (January 1990), p. 7.

[10] Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view"; Chu Van Chuc, "Qua trinh doi moi tu duy doi ngoai va hinh thanh duong loi doi ngoai doi moi" [The Renovating of Foreign Policy Thinking and the Formation of the *Doi Moi* Foreign Policy], *Nghien cuu Quoc te*, No. 58 (September 2004), p. 6; Nguyen Khac Huynh, *Viet Nam va the gioi trong the ky XX* [Vietnam and the World in the 20th Century], manuscript, Hanoi, 2002, Ch. XVI, circulated in the internet at *Dan Chim Viet Online*, 8 September 2005, http://www.danchimviet.com/php/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=556.

[11] See Nguyen Van Linh, "Phat bieu cua dong chi Tong Bi thu Nguyen Van Linh be mac Hoi nghi 7 cua BCHTUD" [Speech by Comrade Secretary-General Nguyen Van Linh at the Closure of the 7th Plenum of the Party Central Committee] *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 9 (September 1989), pp. 5-12.

within the socialist regimes to promote its anti-communist schemes.[12] As Gareth Porter has observed:

> Some VCP leaders have posed the question, for example, of whether East-West *détente* is an expression of interdependence and economic forces, as argued in Resolution 13, or of imperialism's scheme to eliminate socialism.[13]

Since then, with this basic question remaining unsettled, Vietnam has followed a dual-path foreign policy that rests on an eclectic worldview which is a mixture of anti-imperialism and modernization. On the one hand, globalization is recognized as an objective, irreversible trend. On the other, the Party continues to urge its members to increase their vigilance toward "schemes of imperialism" to eliminate socialism. While modernizers see "integration" (*hoi nhap*) into the world economy as a top priority of Vietnamese foreign policy, anti-imperialists regard the struggle "against peaceful evolution" (*chong dien bien hoa binh*) a chief issue of Vietnamese politics.

The Political Report at the Eighth Party Congress in 1996 portrays the world with five "salient features" and five "major trends." Of the five features of world situation, only one is derived from the anti-imperialist worldview, while the other four pertain to the worldview of modernization. Yet, the anti-imperialist proposition stands at the first place and defines the overall conditions for the other propositions. The anti-imperialist proposition defines the "nature of the era" and the "fundamental contradictions in the world." It says, "the fundamental contradictions in the world still exist and develop, in some respect even more profoundly … National struggle and class struggle continue taking place in various forms."[14] While the concept of "three revolutionary currents" is abandoned, this formulation is a tarnished version of the "two

[12] Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," pp. 14-15.
[13] Ibid., p. 15.
[14] See "Political Report of the Party's 7th Central Committee at the Party's 8th National Congress," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu VIII* [Documents of the 8th National Congress], Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc gia, 1996, p. 76.

camps, four contradictions" theory. Framed in this anti-imperialist context, the other salient features of the world are the improbability of a new world war, the scientific-technological revolution and internationalization, the global problems, and the rise of Asia-Pacific.[15]

Of the five "major trends," three are derived from the worldview of modernization: the trend of peace, stability and cooperation for economic development; the trend of regional and international cooperation and integration; and the trend of peaceful coexistence between different socio-political regimes. The other two trends are seen from the anti-imperialist perspective. The one says, "the socialist countries, communist and workers' parties, revolutionary and progressive forces stick to the struggle for peace, national independence, democracy and social progress." The other says, "the nations are raising their spirit of independence, autonomy, and self-reliance, struggling against foreign imposition and intervention, defending [their] independence, sovereignty and national culture."[16]

The world situation as defined by the Political Report of the Eighth Congress is a marriage of two worldviews, anti-imperialism and modernization. But this was not a marriage of equal parties. The Report stresses the unchanged nature of the era, namely the transition from socialism to capitalism, while it fails to mention the epochal shift from the industrial to the information age. In other words, globalization, international integration, and peaceful coexistence must be seen as aspects of the transition to socialism, not the shift to the information age.

The Ninth Party Congress Political Report's (2001) appraisal of world prospect in the 21st century reiterates the theses outlined in the Eighth Congress Political Report (1996). Nevertheless it makes some differences. At the first place on its list of world features and trends stands the quantum leap of science and technology, the increasingly salient role of knowledge-based economy, and the objective trend of globalization. Only after these come the orthodox Marxist-Leninist theses on the continuation of the

[15] Ibid., pp. 76-77.
[16] See "Political Report, 8th Congress," pp. 77-78.

fundamental contradictions, the fierce national and class struggles, as well as the ultimate failure of modern capitalism and the ultimate victory of socialism.[17]

This ordering makes the 2001 appraisal much more ambiguous than the 1996 appraisal. While in the 1996 appraisal some sense of hierarchy may be detected, with the modernizer's view being subordinated to the anti-imperialist view, the 2001 appraisal evokes a sense of "anything goes."

As concerns the theses of the primacy of national interests and the "dominant role" (*vai tro chi phoi*) of diversity and multipolarity, two observations can be made. First, there is an absence of the thesis of the primacy of national interests in both political reports of 1996 and 2001. Second, diversity and multidirectionality, but not multipolarity, were identified in the 1996 political report as implications, not conditions as Vo Van Kiet asserted, of the world's features and trends. The conditions are still described as viewed from the anti-imperialist perspective. However, the 2001 political report failed to mention diversity and multidirectionality as two features of the world in the twenty-first century.[18]

The absence of the thesis of the primacy of national interests and that of multipolarity in both political reports is telling. There are three possible interpretations of this absence. First, the fact that every country pursues its own national interests might be taken for granted, and the dominant role of the great powers or world "centers" might be regarded as obvious. This possibility requires that the Vietnamese ruling elite concurs about the national interest as the basis and starting point of foreign policy and sees world order primarily in terms of the world centers. This is, however, not the case. The established Vietnamese worldview maintains that class struggle is constantly unfolding both on the international plane and within each country and that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism. From this perspective, world situation must be regarded primarily in terms of a struggle between socialism and imperial capitalism, not

[17] See "Political Report of the Party's 8th Central Committee at the Party' 9th National Congress," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu IX* [Documents of the 9th National Congress], Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2001, pp. 64-66.
[18] Cf. "Political Report, 8th Congress," pp. 76-78; "Political Report, 9th Congress," pp. 64-66; Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo."

as an order maintained by one or more world centers. This is why Vo Van Kiet, in his August 1995 letter to the Politburo, had to call for a change of mind when replacing the theory of the antagonism between socialism and imperialism with the theory of diversity and multipolarity as "the most salient factors dominating the contradictions and movement of the relations between every nations" and asserting that "contrary to the past, nowadays national interests, regional interests, and other global interests … are playing an increasingly important role … in the world."[19]

Yet, did the theses of national interest and multipolarity not mentioned for reasons of diplomatic sensitivity? Vietnam's leaders prefer keeping secret what they think about big powers' relations and Vietnam's position vis-à-vis these relations. Examples for such cases are the Resolution of the Ninth Plenum of the Third Central Committee (December 1963) and Resolution 13 of the Politburo (May 1988). Both have never been made public. The Resolution of the Ninth Plenum is marked by its anti-revisionist clause, while Resolution 13 by its multidirectional reorientation. In the post-Cold War era Vietnam's relations with China and the United States are the most sensitive among its foreign relations. However, Vietnam has not restrained from criticizing the U.S. hegemonial ambition.[20] As China is officially seeking for a "multipolar world order,"[21] the VCP's restraint from using the same concept in its political reports indicates that Vietnam may want to distance itself from that the Chinese world vision. Indeed, there is no heightened place for such a minor power as Vietnam in a multipolar world. Instead, Vietnam pursues a new world order that is more equitable than one that is dominated by the big powers. Shortly after the Seventh Party Congress, an article in Party's theoretical journal outlined four scenarios of the future world order; the first being based on U.S. dominance; the second on three capitalist

[19] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 16.
[20] There are ample examples for this Vietnamese criticism. One of the articles published in the Party's theoretical journal that verbally attack US policy of hegemony is Nguyen Phuc Khanh, "Cach mang Viet Nam trong boi canh quoc te hien nay" [Vietnamese Revolution in the Present International Context], *Tap Chi Cong San*, No. 9 (May 2001). Vietnam's critique of U.S. hegemony has only decreased since the strategic readjustment of July 2003, especially after the visit of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai to the United States in June 2005.
[21] See Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, "China's View on the Development of Multi-polarity," website on Chinese foreign policy, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/4499.html.

centers of the United States, West Europe and Japan; the third on the five permanent members of the UN Security Council; and the fifth on the idea of a world community made up of independent, sovereign, and equal states – and this last scenario was what Vietnam preferred.[22]

With the aforementioned possibilities ruled out, it remains the only possibility of an unsettled ideological issue. Indeed, as Kiet's letter to the Politburo indicates, the theses of the primacy of national interests and a multipolar world order are at odds with the theses of class and ideological struggle and the fundamental contradiction between socialism and imperialism/capitalism. Vietnamese foreign policy in the post-1989 period is still framed by the old image of an "uncompromising struggle" and the "fundamental contradiction" between "national independence and socialism" on the one side and "imperialism" or "capitalism" on the other.[23] In some official accounts, the terms "socialism" and "capitalism" were occasionally omitted and the struggle was then depicted as between the forces of "national independence" and that of "imperialism." Nonetheless, the basic image has been one of antagonism between two sides, not of diversity and multipolarity. An example is the article by Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien in the second January 2001 issue of the Party's theoretical journal. In this article, Nien stressed "a basic nature of the international relations in the last years of the old century and the first years of the new century":

> It is cooperation and struggle, cooperation in struggle, struggle but not breaking cooperation. Behind these relationships between cooperation and struggle are the expression forms of the era's fundamental contradictions, of the uncompromising struggle between independence and autonomy on the one side, and power politics, imposition, intervention, and imperialism's schemes of world dominance on the other side.[24]

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[22] Phan Doan Nam, "Method for Identifying."

[23] For example, see Quang Can, "Nhan thuc them ve su kien dinh muc tieu doc lap dan toc va chu nghia xa hoi" [Knowing more about our firm sticking to the goals of national independence and socialism], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 16 (August 2000).

[24] Nguyen Dy Nien, "The gioi nam qua va nhiem vu doi ngoai cua chung ta trong nam 2001" [The World in the Last Year and Our Foreign Policy Tasks in 2001], *Tap Chi Cong San*, No. 2, January 2001.

At another level, Phan Doan Nam, deputy editor-in-chief of the Foreign Ministry's academic journal,[25] attempted in the June 1998 issue of that journal to give a theoretical treatment of the Party line enshrined in the Resolutions of the Seventh and Eighth Congresses. In this article, Nam labored to compromise the need for renovation of thinking with the need for ideological continuation:

> The end of the cold war merely makes us abandon some obsolete concepts [which were valid] when the world was divided into two opposite camps, but does not require us yet to basically renew [our] ideological thinking. It is the new achievements of the new scientific-technological revolution that are the main [factors that] cause this renewal. However, renovation of thinking does not mean reversing everything the same way as "Dühring has reversed science."[26]

For Nam, "the assemblage of forces on the international political plane is no longer based on the criterion of ideology but [taking place] according to national interests." This is, argued Nam, the fundament of Vietnam's new foreign policy orientation under the motto "Vietnam wishes to make friends with all countries in the world community, striving for peace, independence, and development." At the same time, Nam maintained that not every country has abandoned ideological concerns in foreign policy. According to Nam, the United States, Europe and Japan, while regarding themselves as allies, were still trying to contain Russia and China because of the socialist or non-Western natures of their political systems.[27]

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[25] Nam is the same ideologist who outlined the directions of renovation of thinking on foreign affairs in the sprit promoted by Nguyen Co Thach (1988) and sketched a Vietnamese vision of world order in the post-Cold War era (1991), both appeared in the Party's theoretical journal. The Foreign Ministry's theoretical journal is the journal of its Institute for International Relations.

[26] Phan Doan Nam, "Cach mang khoa hoc cong nghe va quan he quoc te hien dai" [The scientific-technological revolution and modern international relations], *Nghien cuu Quoc te* [International Studies], No. 3 (24), June 1998, p. 7.

[27] Ibid., p. 8.

The absence in the Political Reports of the Eighth and Ninth Party Congresses of the theses of the primacy of national interests and the multipolarity of world order coincides with the absence in the same reports of the identification of the "fundamental contradictions." The Party merely affirmed that the fundamental contradictions continue to exist but failed to identify them. Given Vo Van Kiet's letter and Nguyen Co Thach's book, this vagueness indicates that the debate within Vietnam's ruling elite on the basic contradictions of the contemporary world still has an open end. Indeed, this vagueness has left some room for reformulations of the fundamental contradictions.

Besides Kiet's letter and Thach's book, two other examples are illustrative of the debate. One example is Phan Doan Nam's article in the issue of the Party's theoretical journal that appeared in September 1991, shortly after the Seventh Congress. Nam redefined the four basic contradictions in the contemporary world as between socialism and capitalism, between the seven most industrialized countries and the most underdeveloped countries, between the capitalist centers, the United States, West Europe and Japan, and in the immediate security interests of the world power centers, which were the United States and the Soviet Union. The decisive factors in international relations were, however, the conflicts (literally "contradictions") among the world's economic and power centers.[28] Another example for attempts to reformulate the basic contradictions is the article by Quang Can, a prominent Party and army propagandist, in an August 2000 issue of the Party theoretical journal. The timing of Can's article is noteworthy. It appeared within the one-year period of preparation for the Ninth Congress, which was to be held the next spring. Can identified three basic contradictions in the transitional period to socialism in Vietnam as between national independence and imperialism, between socialism and capitalism, and between "advancement-modernity" and "poverty-backwardness." Of these contradictions, he asserted, the contradictions between advancement-modernity and backwardness-poverty is the most fundamental.[29]

[28] Phan Doan Nam, "Method for Identifying," pp. 56-57.
[29] Quang Can, "Knowing more."

Of the three core theses of the anti-imperialist worldview, that of the four contradictions is more basic than that of the two camps and that of the three revolutionary currents. The four fundamental contradictions are the sources from which the world is divided up and moved ahead. The theses of the "two camps" and "three revolutionary currents" were the concretizations of the "four contradictions" in the Cold War era. Thus in the post-Cold War era, the VCP abandons the concepts of two camps and three revolutionary currents, but it is reluctant to divorce from the "four fundamental contradictions" theory. As a result, the transformation of Vietnamese grand strategy at the state level remains incomplete. Preaching in the Party's media about the four fundamental contradictions as identified by orthodox Marxism-Leninism and reiterated in the Party program of 1991 is still fashionable. One example is an article on the "fundamental contradictions of the era in the present period," appeared in the second September 2000 issue of the Party's theoretical journal.[30] This article can also be regarded as an ultraconservative response to the moderate conservative statement of the August 2000 article mentioned above.

Although the "two camps" thesis is dead after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, it has been reincarnated in the form of the fundamental contradiction between imperialist and anti-imperialist forces. As Nguyen Duc Binh, the Party's chief ideologist, has stressed, "the main contradiction in the contemporary world is that between hegemonic and bellicose imperialism on one side and all forces that are fighting against hegemonic and bellicose imperialism for national sovereignty, national independence, democracy, peace, progress, social fairness and human dignity on the other side."[31] Loyal to this Party line, Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien has portrayed the essence of contemporary international relations as an "uncompromising struggle between

[30] Pham Van Chuc, "Nhung mau thuan co ban cua thoi dai trong giai doan hien nay" [The Era's Fundamental Contradictions in the Present Period], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 18 (September 2000).
[31] Nguyen Duc Binh, "May van de phuong phap luan nghien cuu the gioi duong dai" [Some Methodological Issues in the Study of the Contemporary World], in Nguyen Duc Binh, Le Huu Nghia, and Tran Huu Tien, eds., *Gop phan nhan thuc the gioi duong dai* [Contributing to the Knowledge of the Contemporary World (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2003), p. 41.

independence and autonomy on the one side, and power politics, imposition, intervention, and imperialism's schemes of world dominance on the other side."[32]

Vietnam's state worldview in the post-Cold War period is an edifice without a solid foundation. Comparing the Political Reports of the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Party Congresses, one can see that increasingly, the modernizers' theses of the scientific-technological revolution and globalization have become major elements of the edifice. An indication at the elite level is the increasing number of articles dealing with these themes in the Party's theoretical journal. The modernizers' view of big power relations also plays an important role in Vietnam's state worldview. This is evidenced by the priority given to relations with the big powers in various guiding documents of Vietnamese foreign policy.[33] At the elite level, the priority of relations with big powers is evidenced by the numerous analyses of world politics in terms of big power relations, which have been prevailing in the theoretical journal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This does not mean that orthodox Marxist-Leninist elements are withdrawing from the state worldview, however. The Marxist-Leninist thesis of four fundamental contradictions, particularly the proposition of an "uncompromising struggle between socialism and imperialism in the transitional period from capitalism to socialism," remains a central element of Vietnam's worldview. The status of the modernizers' theses of an epochal shift from the industrial to the information age and the primacy of national interest is ambiguous. While, from the late 1990s onward, the two are widely accepted as correct, they cannot yet replace the theses of transition to socialism and the primacy of class interest in the official worldview of the state.

The struggle for primacy between orthodox Marxism-Leninism and the ideology of modernization has been more or less stalemated since 1990, when the New Thinking movement within the leadership was crushed, and especially since 1991, when the VCP adopted a new long-term program, which basically reaffirmed the Marxist-Leninist platform. This deadlock began to ease after the passage of a new strategy of national

[32] Nien, "The World in the Last Year."
[33] See, e.g., Hong Ha, "Tinh hinh the gioi va chinh sach doi ngoai cua ta" [World Situation and Our Foreign Policy], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 12 (December 1992), pp. 10-13. The author was Central Committee Secretary in charge of foreign affairs.

security in 2003, which removed an ideological provision based on Marxism-Leninism from the determination of friend and foe. During 2005-2006 modernizers organized campaigns to push for a new round of *doi moi tu duy* (renewal of thinking), which revived some spirit of change that has been submerged since 1990.[34] There are signs that the end of the post-Cold War dualism is approaching.

THE POLITICAL SELF

The Vietnamese ruling elites' understandings of their political self are not homogeneous. The word "Vietnam" does not always refer to the same concept, but to different notions of the political self. As the grand strategies of anti-imperialism and modernization are providing the most coherent and comprehensive theories of Vietnam as a political self, their concepts are dominant among the ruling elites.

The Anti-imperialist Concept of the Political Self

Vietnamese anti-imperialism was formed in the colonial period and became fully fledged during the anti-colonial and reunification wars of 1946-1975, which can also be seen as communist conquests. To the present day, the basic anti-imperialist attitude toward the nation remains pre-nation-building. In this view, the Vietnamese nation is posterior to the socialist revolution, for it is the revolution that transforms the old, traditional Vietnam into a new, modern nation. In the course of this transformation

[34] Major publications include Vo Van Kiet, "Nhung doi hoi moi cua thoi cuoc" [New Requirements of the Situation], *Quoc te*, April 13, 2005; Vo Van Kiet, "Dong gop y kien vao Bao cao tong ket ly luan va thuc tien hai muoi nam doi moi" [Suggestions to the Concluding Report on Theory and Practice of 20 Years of Renewal], April 2005, paper sent to the Party's Central Office; Vo Van Kiet, "Dai doan ket dan toc – coi nguon suc manh cua chung ta" [Great National Solidarity Is the Source of Our Strength], simultaneously in *VietNamNet*, August 28, 2005 and *Tuoi Tre*, August 29, 2005; Nguyen Trung, "Thoi co vang cua Dang ta" [A Golden Opportunity of Our Party], *Viet Nam Net*, January 9, 2006, http://www.vnn.vn/chinhtri/doinoi/2006/01/
530551/, *Tuoi Tre*, January 12 and 13, 2006, Nguyen Trung, "Loi tu trai tim" [Words from the Heart], four-part series, published in both *Viet Nam Net*, February, 7, 8, 9, and 10, 2006,
http://vietnamnet.vn/chinhtri/doinoi/2006/02/539842/, and *Tuoi Tre*, February 8, 9, and 10, 2006; Vo Van Kiet, "Nguoi dan doi hoi phai co su but pha moi" [The Population Demands a New Breakout], *Dau tu*, February 24, 2006.

Vietnamese society must eliminate its "reactionary" elements and absorb "progressive" elements, which can have foreign origins. The revolution thus is an attempt to enforce a political frontier in the midst of Vietnamese society and at the same time, to connect it with a larger world. The driving force of the revolution is said to be class struggle and its spirit proletarian internationalism. Out of the revolution comes a new society that is "national in form and socialist in content."[35] In 1976, at the height of its power, the Vietnam Communist Party announced:

> Today, when our Fatherland has gained complete independence and when the country has been cleaned of all aggressors and reunified, nation and socialism merge into one.[36]

In this spirit, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the ruling Vietnam Workers' Party the Vietnam Communist Party. The Party also reinvented the concept of *to quoc* (fatherland, homeland) to denote the new-type nation it strove to create.[37] The redefinition of the political frontier is escorted by a redefinition of the emotional frontier as well. A new patriotism was formulated after the end of the Vietnam War, on the occasion of the reunification of Vietnam, as follows:

> For each of us Vietnamese, love of country now means love of socialism; it means devoting all our zeal, strength, intelligence and talent to the construction of our socialist homeland (*to quoc*).[38]

According to anti-imperialism, the political self of Vietnam is not the community the Vietnamese compatriots traditionally belong to. Being Vietnamese is now not a traditional fact but a political choice. In fact, those who do not accept socialism will risk being stigmatized as "Vietnamese malefactors" (*Viet gian*). In the anti-imperialist

[35] Vuving, "References of Vietnamese States," p. 82.
[36] "Documents, First Session of the National Assembly of Reunified Viet Nam," p. 17.
[37] Vuving, "References of Vietnamese States," pp. 76-78, 82-83.
[38] "Documents, First Session of the National Assembly of Reunified Viet Nam," p. 18.

worldview the “we Vietnamese” does not cover those individuals, for they belong to the “reactionary forces.” They are “our enemies.” Since the conflict between the revolutionary and the reactionary forces is uncompromising, the Party requires the “true Vietnamese” (*nguoi Viet Nam chan chinh*) show an uncompromising attitude toward the “Vietnamese malefactors.” With this frontier-drawing, the Vietnam Communist Party has created both loyalty and hostility in its domestic environment. By cutting across Vietnamese society a political frontier that separate friends from foes, the Party is able to mobilize allegiance, but it also produces its own domestic adversaries.

On the international stage, the anti-imperialist redefinition of the Vietnamese self has helped the VCP to draw enormous resources from other socialist countries. Military, financial, diplomatic and moral supports from the socialist regimes proved crucial for the Vietnamese victory over the two “big empires” (*de quoc to*), namely France and the United Stated. Its socialist identity enabled the VCP to weave a worldwide web of solidarity ties with socialist states, national liberation movements in the Third World, and workers’ movements in the advanced capitalist countries.

It should be noted that Vietnam’s international solidarity is based rather on a common enemy than a common goal. Hanoi’s support for the national cause of the Palestinians is said to be grounded on the common aspiration to national self-determination of both peoples. If this reason is true, then, why does Vietnam take a hostile attitude toward the Kosovo-Albanian struggle for national self-determination, despite the fact that Yugoslavia was one of the countries that opposed Vietnam during the Kampuchea War? Vietnam’s vehement condemnation of U.S. hegemonic ambitions and interventionist policy reveals the fact that the specter of an American danger looms large behind Vietnam’s international solidarity.

The danger is created by the identity itself. Identifying themselves with “revolutionary and socialist forces,” anti-imperialists attribute democracy, human rights and liberal values to the West. As a result, they see demands for democracy, human rights, and liberalization with much suspicion and usually associate them with the interventionist policy of the “reactionary and imperialist forces.” It is this attitude that renders “peaceful evolution” the most dangerous threat to the Vietnamese polity. This

concern was made explicit in the Army White Paper issued in September 1998. In this document, the Army revealed that its utmost national security concern was with the danger of peaceful evolution:[39]

> The plots to interfere in Vietnam's internal affairs in the disguise of "human rights" and "democracy," the intrusion into this country by means of culture and ideology, activation of subversion and destabilization for the purpose of replacing the current political and social system are all great menaces to Vietnam's security and national defense.[40]

The Modernizers' Concept of the Political Self

Unlike the anti-imperialists, the modernizers assume a post-nation-building attitude. The nation is the starting point rather than the destination. Modernizers endeavor to create a modern country for the nation, not a modern nation for the country.

Consider the logical flow in Premier Kiet's argument in his August 1995 letter to the Politburo. For him, the country needs development because the nation needs to survive.[41] The leadership role of the Communist Party must serve the fulfillment of this requirement, not vice versa. "Our Party," warned Kiet, "will risk being stripped of its right to leadership if it does not fulfill the developmental requirement of the country." The Party's monopoly to power is attached to the nation's survival but "the survival of the country must be considered above all." [42] According to Kiet, the role of the state sector, which plays a key role in maintaining the Party's monopoly, and that of the private sector in the economy must be evaluated not against ideological criteria but against the "objective requirement that our country has to become richer as quickly as possible so that it can compete effectively and attract all resources from outside in order

[39] Zachary Abuza, *Renovating Politics in Contemporary Vietnam*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001, p. 23.
[40] Ministry of Defense, *Vietnam: Consolidating National Defense, Safeguarding the Homeland*, Hanoi: Ministry of Defense, 1998, p. 13-14.
[41] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 17.
[42] Ibid.

to uphold independence and autonomy in enlargement, cooperation and development."[43] The goal is to shorten the path of industrialization and modernization. The requirement of development must become the guiding criterion for the solutions of the economic issues. This implies that all economic sectors, no matter state or private, must be treated equally and allowed to grow without limit. This "morality" (*dao ly*), thus Kiet's view, will unite the will of the entire nation and create an unyielding moving force.[44] The Vietnamese nation, stressed Kiet, must include the entire overseas Vietnamese community as well.[45]

This morality contains two major ideas. The first is the primacy of development, which is needed for the survival of the nation. The second is the idea of an inclusive community without discrimination between the state sector and the private sector and between the citizens under the socialist state's jurisdiction and the overseas compatriots, most of whom fled the country after the communist seizure of power. The primary line of conflict is no longer drawn in the midst of Vietnamese society, as with anti-imperialism, but between the countries. Moreover, the conflict is no longer of uncompromising nature, as with anti-imperialism, but the need for cooperation is inherent in it.[46]

The same ideas are salient in the book of Nguyen Co Thach, the other leading modernizer. Thach depicted modern world history as a race of nations. In the present era, the race of nations expresses itself in economic terms. Economic development and the underlying scientific-technological factors will determine the fates of countries. The political frontier lies between countries, not between classes. Conflict between them is not represented as antagonistic, but cooperation and compromise play a key role in the race.[47]

Kiet went much farther than Thach in his urge for modernization. In Kiet's August 9, 1995 letter to the Politburo, he placed "national independence and socialism,"

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[43] Ibid., p. 18.
[44] Ibid., p. 19.
[45] Ibid., p. 22.
[46] Ibid., pp. 16, 18-19.
[47] Thach, *World in Past and Coming Years*, particularly pp. 26-34, 45-65, 86-89, 93-96, 98-100, 106-111.

the sacred goals of anti-imperialism, under revision. Kiet proposed to replace them with "nation and democracy."[48] It is clear that modernizers tend to identify themselves with the inclusive Vietnamese nation, while anti-imperialists tend to identify themselves with the communist regime and Marxist-Leninist ideology.

LOGICS OF WAR AND THE QUEST FOR SECURITY

The Vietnamese security equation involves three elements: China, other foreign powers, and the domestic society.

Since the founding of the first united Chinese empire twenty-two centuries ago Vietnam's constant security problem has been how to live in the shadow of China. The China question remains for most of the time the Vietnamese leadership's top security concern. During some episodes, when Vietnam involved in major conflicts with a third power, its leaders still had to keep an eye on China. With regard to the geopolitical environment, Vietnam's security problem since the establishment of independence in the tenth century can be analyzed in three phases.

In the first phase, which lasted until the fourteenth century, Vietnam was facing security threats on two fronts, one from China in the north and another from Champa in the south. The state of Champa was established on the southern fringes of the Chinese empire in the third century, at a time when Vietnam was the empire's most southerly frontier province. From then on, "Lin-i, the Cham kingdom on the southern coast, ceased to be a factor in domestic Vietnamese politics and became a foreign enemy."[49] Champa subsequently grew to a regional power and competed with the rulers in the Red River delta for control over the southern plains of Vietnam. As Vietnam gained its independence in the tenth century, the Vietnamese found themselves caught in a security predicament. Not only was there no other major foreign power in the area from which the Vietnamese could request aid sufficient to offset the Chinese. But the other foreign power, the Chams, also frequently waged war against them. Consequently,

[48] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 22.
[49] Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. xix.

Vietnamese rulers had to rely wholly on their own domestic society while combating two foreign powers. The Vietnamese response was twofold.

On the one hand, the anti-Chinese elite Vietnamese partially abandoned their coercive practices vis-à-vis the peasantry and instead depended on shared interests and attitudes to energize the domestic alliance.[50] This policy eventually led to what Tran Quoc Vuong called an "open and pluralist culture" in the Ly-Tran era.[51] The court and the village subcultures interpenetrated to the extent that they would be more as described as two aspects of a single culture that cannot be dissociated from each other.[52]

On the other hand, the ruling elite adopted the Chinese imperial model in order to create discipline, efficiency, and coherency for the domestic society. This adoption of the Chinese model was a result of choices made on the basis of a comparison between Chinese and Southeast Asian habits, rather than the calculation that self-Sinicization would placate Chinese claims to rule Vietnam. In the mid-ninth century, immediately prior to the independence era, anti-Chinese Vietnamese allied with the Thai kingdom of Nan-chao in Yunnan to challenge (Chinese) T'ang rule. "But the Vietnamese discovered that they could tolerate T'ang misgovernment easier than they could the undisciplined habits of their 'barbarian' neighbors."[53] Self-Sinicization might provide Vietnam with an effective tool to legitimate its right to autonomy by arguing that Vietnam is as civilized as China, hence no Chinese civilizing mission is needed. However, the chief ways to defend Vietnam against Chinese power was both to accept the diplomatic rules of the Chinese world order and apply the sophisticated Chinese model in order to prepare itself for the next war. Indeed, Vietnam's history in the monarchic times tends to confirm the wisdom of this way of statecraft.

The second phase began in the mid-fifteenth century after Vijaya, the Cham capital, fell to Vietnam's conquest, which led to the Vietnamese annexation of the plain

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[50] David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971, p. 21.
[51] Tran Quoc Vuong, "Dan gian va bac hoc" [Popular and Scholarly], reprinted in Tran Quoc Vuong, *Trong coi* [Inside], Garden Grove, CA: Tram Hoa, 1993, p. 169.
[52] O. W. Wolters, *Two Essays on Dai Viet in the Fourteenth Century*, The Viet Series, No. 9 (New Haven: Yale Council on Southeast Asia Studies, 1988).
[53] Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. xx.

of Amaravati (today Quang Nam) and division of the rest of Champa into three powerless principalities. With the crossing of the Pass of the Clouds (Hai Van) and the annexation of the Cham core area, the Vietnamese acquired a different perspective than the isolated vantage point of the Red River delta. The division of Vietnam into two separate territories under the Trinh in the old Vietnamese core area in the north and the Nguyen in the former Cham core area in the south from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century marked a turning point in Vietnam's path from a small kingdom situated on the Chinese empire's southern frontier to a major power in Southeast Asia. During two centuries, the Nguyen expanded further into the south, to the Gulf of Siam, becoming a patron of the Khmer state in Cambodia and a major rival of Siam's. In their new home, the Nguyen developed a "society and polity far removed from the Confucian model of the Le dynasty"[54] and established an alternative way of being Vietnamese "distinguished by relative freedom from the Vietnamese past and the authority justified by appeals to that past."[55] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were not one but two Vietnamese states, with the southern one becoming a major Southeast Asian power amidst an "age of commerce."[56] This second Vietnam was created out of the need to successfully resist Trinh conquests from the north and stimulated by the new environment in the south. With regard to many patterns of society and polity, the Nguyen Kingdom of Dang Trong can be seen as an inheritor of Champa, but much more successful than the latter. Based on the strengths of the former Cham core areas on the central coast of today Vietnam and a newly developed Vietnamese core area on the east bank of the Mekong, the second Vietnam was able to project power regionwide over Indochina east of Thailand and unify the two Vietnamese states. In the 19th century, unified Vietnam now had two different perspectives and two different ambitions. From the old Vietnamese state in the north, it inherited the perspective of a

[54] Li Tana, "An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyen Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, March 1998, pp. 111-121.
[55] Keith W. Taylor, "Nguyen Hoang and the Beginning of Vietnam's Southward Expansion," in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era. Trade, Power, and Belief*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 64.
[56] The phrase was coined by Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia and the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, vols. 1 and 2, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, 1993.

frontier land between China and Southeast Asia and the ambition of parity to China. From the new Vietnamese state in the south, it inherited the perspective of a Southeast Asian power and the ambition of hegemony over Indochina.

By the early nineteenth century, when the third phase began to take place, Vietnam was facing a new security predicament. While continuing to guard against Chinese power, it had to deal with not a single but a plurality of versions of being Vietnamese in the midst of a Europe-led globalization, in which European great powers competed for colonies. Nineteenth-century Vietnam responded by cultivating a Confucian model designed after the Chinese example.[57] However, the answer failed to match the challenge. As a result, Vietnam fell under foreign rule and was divided into one French colony and two French protectorates.

After World War II, there were again two separate Vietnamese states combating each other. But unlike the Trinh-Nguyen war, the twentieth-century Vietnam conflict was a proxy war embedded in the global rivalry of great powers. World War II and the subsequent Indochina wars provided the Vietnamese with a worldwide perspective. As the theater of operations was extended to the entire Indochinese peninsula, the wars reinforced the Vietnamese ambition of hegemony over Indochina. Again, the wars ended with Vietnamese unification, this time however, by forces based on the old Vietnamese core area in the north. Since World War II and particularly the three Indochina conflicts, in which external powers—Japan, France, the United States, China, and the Soviet Union—intervened directly with armed forces or indirectly with arms supplies, the Vietnamese have experienced a new dimension of their being in the world. They have realized that they are a figure on the global chessboard, where the game is played chiefly by big powers, some coming from outside of the region.

From the experience of Vietnamese history, the Vietnamese state must navigate its way in a "wind tunnel" in which the winds are blown from three corners—China for its power and proximity, the great powers for their heavy weight, and the domestic society for its intimacy with the state and yet variety in orientation. In the post-Cold

[57] Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

War era, the Vietnamese state is facing three major security questions. The first is how to cope with China, which both exercises influence on Vietnam and has territorial disputes with Vietnam along a land border of about 1,500 km and over hundreds of thousands square kilometer in the South China Sea. The second is how to cope with the West and especially the United States, which are trying to promote values and institutions antithetical to those of communism. The third is how to cope with a domestic society, which is heterogeneous in orientation and often disloyal to the regime.

Traditionalists are more sensible to the Chinese challenge but less to the other great powers. Moreover, when it comes to their attitude toward the domestic society, they become either anti-imperialists or modernizers. This is because anti-imperialists and modernizers provide the two major concepts of the political self. Although the traditional grand strategy does not provide a full concept for the security of the Vietnamese state, it does provide time-honored avenues for dealing with the Chinese challenge. Orientalists are most sensible to Westernization. This they perceive as a cultural war. Orientalist appeal to national identity means to protect the non-Western elements in the national culture. Their anti-Western outlook is, however, incorporated into anti-imperialism.

Of the four grand strategies, only anti-imperialism and the grand strategy of modernization provide comprehensive answers to the challenges to the security of the Vietnamese state. Anti-imperialism envisions a war waged by the United States and the West to eliminate the communist regime in Vietnam. It sees some parts of the Vietnamese population on the side of its enemy. On the other hand, anti-imperialism raises strong hope for solidarity based on a common ideology and a common enemy from the Chinese. Anti-imperialism appears most credible to many in the ruling elites, those who want to preserve their position as the ruling class. Here, its strategy is to highlight the communist nature of the regime, confront straightforward the major forces that threaten the regime so defined (the West, the United States, and the non-socialist sections of the Vietnamese population), and create large backing resources (China as a communist state with over one billion population).

The modernizer's goal of a rich people, strong country, and just, democratic, and civilized society is in itself a comprehensive and plausible answer to the three challenges facing the Vietnamese state. Their orientation toward the advanced industrial world and their inclusive conception of the political self meet effectively the challenge of the West and the domestic society and create large external and internal resources for facing the Chinese challenge. However, the modernization's Achilles heel lies in the anticipated instability that would come with more Westernization and the acceptance of a plural domestic society.

LOGICS OF PEACE AND THE QUEST FOR WEALTH

As with most state-makers the Vietnamese have waged war for the purposes of peace. In the conclusion of his Testament, which was written in the midst of the Vietnamese-American war, Ho Chi Minh affirmed:

> Our mountains will always be, our rivers will always be, our people will always be. Once the American invaders have been defeated, we will [re]build [our land] ten times more than today.[58]

The words had motivating power. A generation of North Vietnamese was going to war in order to bring peace to their country. Many South Vietnamese students, who went to study abroad during the War, confessed later that this couple of verses by Ho Chi Minh was decisive in turning their sympathy to the communists. They were dreaming of an independent and wealthy Vietnam living in peace.[59] The reality after the Vietnam War was, however, not peace, but again, armed conflicts with China to the north and Cambodia in the south. Coupled with these costly undertakings, the building of socialism in post-war Vietnam led to a deep and severe socio-economic crisis. Many

[58] Ho Chi Minh, "Di chuc" [Testament], May 10, 1969, reprinted in *Di chuc cua Chu tich Ho Chi Minh* [Testament of President Ho Chi Minh], Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 1999.
[59] Personal communication.

Vietnamese now realized that they won the war, but lost the peace. The boat people drama was one clear sign of the peace lost.

In the mid-1980s, Vietnam made a U-turn in its overall policy, launching reforms (*doi moi* or "renewal") in all fields of social life. The reforms were urged by the deepening economic crisis, stimulated by the Soviet *perestroika* and the reforms in other socialist countries such as Hungary and China, and heavily impressed by the exemplars of the "Asian tigers" (the newly industrialized countries in the East Asian region). Reforms also brought a new view that saw the world as a market and a new conception of national security that stressed economic issues.[60] With this new outlook the country acquired a new perspective that positioned Vietnam within the growth region of Asia-Pacific and a new ambition that envisaged the country to become a next "Asian tiger."[61] As one senior propagandist noted in 1988, "We look at Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Thailand, and we see that we are far behind them in economic performance."[62] The same year, Prime Minister Do Muoi, who would become General Secretary in 1991, warned, "If we let the [economic] situation continue as it did in recent years, we will encounter a more difficult situation and will lag even further behind neighboring countries with regard to growth rate, national income, and people's average standard of living."[63]

The quest for wealth is propelled by the grand strategy of modernization. Since the late 1980s, a brand-new ambition has been gaining a foothold in Vietnamese politics. It is the modernizers who articulate the new ambition. "To catch up or to lag behind the neighboring countries" has become a Vietnamese question of survival. As Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach argued, arms race has been replaced by economic

[60] Gareth Porter, "The Transformation of Vietnam's World-view: From Two Camps to Interdependence," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 12, No. 1, June 1990, pp. 5, 12.
[61] See Frost, *Vietnam's Foreign Relations*; Eero Palmujoki, "Ideology and Foreign Policy: Vietnam's Marxist-Leninist Doctrine and Global Change, 1986-1996," in Carlyle A. Thayer and Ramses Amer (eds.), *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999, pp. 25-43.
[62] The propagandist was Le Phuong, editor of *Vietnam Courier*, quoted in Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy since 1975*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990, p. 229.
[63] Ibid., p. 231.

race in the information age.[64] It is also the modernizers who are most sensible of the opportunities for raising wealth. As Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet pointed out in 1995:

> now we have at the same time the best domestic condition and the most favorable international context that allow us to set and to realize [the goals of] a rich people, a strong country, and a just and civilized society, satisfying the requirement of opening to the outside world in order to survive and develop, to regain the time lost, and to catch up with the neighboring countries. That is to say, the country is facing an opportunity never seen before in our nation's history.[65]

It is worth noting that the word "neighboring" is not to understand literally, for Vietnam does not lag behind Laos and Cambodia, which share borders with it in the west and the south. Vietnam's "neighboring countries" now include such countries as South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand. These "neighbors" are located not only in Southeast Asia but in the larger region of western Asia-Pacific, and do not share land borders but are linked with Vietnam by the waters of western Pacific. While the conflict with China and other claimants over the Spratly and Paracel islands has injected into the Vietnamese consciousness a maritime ambition, the withdrawal from Cambodia and the look at the maritime neighboring countries just strengthen Vietnam's new, sea-born perspective. Economic and maritime, the new Vietnamese ambition and perspective sharply contrast with the traditional ones, which are military and continental. The new perspective and ambition also furnish Vietnam with a regional consciousness, in addition to the national one. In the landmark article that appeared in the August 1989 issue of the Party's theoretical journal, Foreign Minister Thach introduced the concept of regionalism to describe the new possibilities for Vietnam's independence and sovereignty amidst interdependence. As the first priority for Vietnam was to "strive for

[64] Nguyen Co Thach, *The gioi trong 50 nam qua (1945-1995) va the gioi trong 25 nam toi (1995-2020)* [The World in the Past Fifty Years (1945-1995) and the World in the Coming Twenty-five Years (1995-2020)], Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 1998.
[65] Vo Van Kiet, "Memorandum to Politburo," p. 17.

an optimal position in the international division of labor," Thach argued, regionalism as the "new distinctive feature of an international division of labor" may provide Vietnam with new chances of survival, of becoming a "developed industrial country" within ten or twenty years.[66]

A comprehensive plan of action with a central focus on economic development, modernization outperforms the other grand strategies in the quest for wealth. However, it works much for the long run and at the national level. For the short term and at the personal level, especially for members of the ruling elites, the grand strategy of modernization does not necessarily the best path to follow in the quest for wealth. In fact, those in the ruling class who want to make their political position a source of much money need both a vigorous economy and a totalitarian state. Since modernization focuses on economic development and anti-imperialism on upholding the Leninist state, those people would welcome a certain amount of modernization but retain anti-imperialism in whole.

LOGICS OF PRIDE AND THE QUEST FOR STANDING

In his first letter to the young generation of Vietnam, written shortly after the declaration of the country's independence in September 1945, Ho Chi Minh called upon the pupils:

> Whether or not the Vietnamese land will be beautiful, whether or not the Vietnamese people will become glorious and stand on an equal footing with the world's powers, owes in a great part to your endeavors to study.[67]

To address the national pride of the Vietnamese is an effective way to motivate and mobilize them. The Vietnamese have cultivated a strong patriotic tradition that is

[66] Nguyen Co Thach, "Tat ca vi hoa binh, doc lap dan toc va phat trien" [All for peace, national independence, and development], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 8, August 1989, p. 1-8.
[67] Ho Chi Minh, "Thu gui cac hoc sinh" [Letter to the Pupils], September 1945, reprinted in *Ho Chi Minh Toan tap* [Ho Chi Minh Collected Works], Vol. 4 (1945-1946), Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2000.

imbued with a proud sense of ethnic self-awareness. Long before patriotism as a political concept and its vocabulary entered the Vietnamese language in the first decade of the twentieth century, "there existed an exhaustive lore evidencing ethnic self-awareness, especially Vietnamese pride in pursuing a political destiny separate from that of China."[68] Folk tales about Vietnamese talents outwitting Chinese emperors or envoys have been often recited. Vietnamese who resisted foreign invaders have been venerated as national heroes, many of them worshipped as deities of the soil. Vietnamese folk history tells and retells legends about national heroes defeating the superior Chinese. Behind these stories there is a single theme:

> The Vietnamese are an indomitable people (*mot dan toc bat khuat*); although we are small in numbers and weak in material terms, we are superior to more powerful foreign aggressors because our cause is just and because we are more skillful, intelligent, adaptable.[69]

As Huynh Kim Khanh has noted, before taking the form of a political concept in the twentieth century, patriotism, defined as a sense of ultimate loyalty to, or inclusion in, a community of people who share a common soil,[70] had in Vietnam been part of the folk religion.[71]

Vietnamese national pride seems to be a product of two thousand years of dwelling in the small Red River delta and resisting the powerful Chinese domination. A fertile and densely populated area, the Red River delta is on the other hand an isolated

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[68] Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 28.
[69] Ibid.
[70] This definition of patriotism is adapted from Truong Buu Lam's definition of nationalism: "a sense of ultimate loyalty to, or inclusion in, a community of people." See Truong Buu Lam, *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention, 1858-1900*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, p. 29. Lam's definition is, however, too broad to grasp the essence of nationalism in modern terms. For a constructive criticism, see William J. Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900-1941*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976, p. 30.
[71] For an illustration, see Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy. The War after the War: A History of Indochina since the Fall of Saigon*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986, p. 114.

territory: it is closed by the circle of mountains and opens only to the sea.[72] Perhaps, these demographic-geographical circumstances have contributed a great deal to the fact that, in William Duiker's words, "since early times the Vietnamese have been aware of themselves as a distinct people inhabiting a particular area."[73] This sense of distinctness, then, has been infused with a strong sense of collective pride by two mutually reinforcing factors: first, a Chinese-type outlook on the world, and second, a history of successful resistance to the Chinese.

As Paul Mus has remarked, the Chinese worldview provided a unitary, integrating perspective: the imperial China was not perceived as a nation but a world in itself. Thus, once Vietnam had absorbed the Chinese civilization, "N'ayant point admis d'y entrer à titre de province, il ne lui restait donc qu'une vocation d'empire, à échelle reduite."[74] Assimilating the Chinese view of world order, the Vietnamese began to define themselves vis-à-vis their Southeast Asian neighbors in the same fashion as the Chinese do vis-à-vis the rest of the world. In this Vietnamese vision of the world, Vietnam was, besides China, another world center. Throughout a millennium, the Vietnamese ambition of parity with China was a persistent consequence of that imperial vocation.

This ambition and the pride attached to it have been reinforced by the repeated Vietnamese successes in resisting Chinese invaders that have been recorded as time passes through. In the "Great Proclamation upon Laying Low the Chinese" of 1428, Nguyen Trai, on behalf of King Le Loi, could list various defeats of Chinese generals at the hands of the Vietnamese in order to demonstrate Vietnam's strengths and the virtue

[72] Han census records in the first period of Chinese rule in Vietnam show that the Red River plain was the demographic hub of the South China Sea. The delta was at that time home to more than half of the population of what is today Northern Vietnam and the Chinese provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan. "Han immigration into Vietnam was not overwhelming. This is clear from a study of census statistics, which indicate that there were no abnormal demographic changes in northern Vietnam during Han. There were apparently enough immigrants to form a coherent Han-Viet ruling-class society throughout most of northern Vietnam, but not enough to administratively or culturally dominate the indigenous society. The effective influence of Han immigration was spent before reaching the southern military frontier." See Keith Weller Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983, p. 54.

[73] Duiker, *Rise of Nationalism*, p. 21.

[74] Paul Mus, "Coordonnées vietnamiennes," reprinted in Paul Mus, *L'angle de l'Asie*, Paris : Hermann, 1977, p. 61.

of the Vietnamese in parity with China.[75] Five and a half centuries later, in the wake of the Chinese punitive expedition into northern Vietnam in 1979, VCP General Secretary Le Duan had even more such examples to invoke. In a secret address to senior officials on Sino-Vietnamese relations, he cited the defeats of the great Chinese armies from the Mongol (Yuan) to the Ming and the Ching at the hands of the Vietnamese and concluded that the Vietnamese were now able to beat the Chinese People's Liberation Army as well.[76]

The same statement illuminates well the views and attitudes of Le Duan, Vietnam's top leader from Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969 until his own death in 1986. As Stein Tønnesson has noticed:

> He combined an extremely strong national pride with an idea that the Vietnamese, as a particularly struggle-prone people, were playing a vanguard role in the world revolutionary struggle.[77]

A motive force behind anti-imperialist grand strategy is Vietnam's glorious past with a high standing in the world. In the anti-imperialist view, Vietnam's past in the pre-modern time is a history of resistance to the world empire of China, with the resistance having been a courageous and persistent fight for identity, and the result having been a Vietnamese parity to China, the world leader and world center. Vietnam's past in the modern time, seen from the anti-imperialist viewpoint, is a continuation of Vietnamese history. It was once again resistance to world empires ("two big empires, the French and the American") and a fight for identity ("to have a name in the world map"). With the Vietnamese defeat of the United States after the Vietnam War, Vietnam has, in the anti-imperialist view, once again achieved parity with the world's number one ("we have

[75] Stephen O'Harrow, "Nguyen Trai's *Binh Ngo Dai Cao* of 1428: The Development of a Vietnamese National Identity," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. X, No. 1, March 1979, pp. 159-174; Vuving, "References of Vietnamese States," pp. 68-69.
[76] "Comrade B on the Plot of the Reactionary Chinese Clique against Vietnam," translated and annotated by Christopher E. Goscha, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 12/13, Fall/Winter 2001, pp. 279-288.
[77] Stein Tønnesson, "Le Duan and the Break with China," introduction to "Comrade B," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 12/13, Fall/Winter 2001, p. 274.

beaten the biggest empire in the world"). Stuck fast to that glorious past, anti-imperialists see no alternative future for Vietnam but a steadfast continuation in spirit of the past. Resistance to a world power, struggle for identity, and achieving parity with the world's number one—these would be for the anti-imperialists the manifest destiny of the Vietnamese.

The anti-imperialists view and motive are clearly expressed in General Secretary Le Kha Phieu's speech at US President Bill Clinton's visit in the headquarter of the VCP Central in 2000. Immediately in the preamble, Phieu stressed, "Each nation has its own history, its own tradition, and its own cultural identity. This is true for both the United States and Vietnam. Our nation has several thousand years of its own civilization."[78] Subsequently, Phieu labored to clarify to Clinton the Vietnamese understanding – in Phieu's words, "the right understanding" – of the U.S.-Vietnamese war by contrasting the Vietnamese and the U.S. motives in the war. Phieu claimed that the American intervention in Vietnam was part and parcel of an imperialist conquest for colonies. Thus, the Vietnamese were forced to fight the invaders. From the Vietnamese point of view, as Phieu informed his American guest, what the Americans called the Vietnam War was a resistance to American invaders for national salvation. The war was a fight for identity. Therefore, said Phieu, in the Vietnamese eyes the past was not a dark, sorrowful, and unhappy chapter of history as it was for the Americans. He concluded, "the past is the root, the foundation, and the strength of the present and the future."[79]

After informing the U.S. president about the Vietnamese view of the war between the two countries, Phieu pointed out that Vietnam identified itself with the goals of national independence and socialism. He straightforwardly affirmed the leading role of the state sector and the importance of the collective sector in Vietnam's

[78] Le Kha Phieu, "Qua khu la goc re, la nen tang, la suc manh cua hien tai va tuong lai" [The Past Is the Root, the Foundation, and the Strength of the Present and the Future], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 23 (December 2000), p. 7.
[79] Ibid., p. 9.

"multisector economy." Phieu reiterated what he had said to U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright a year before, "socialism not only exists but will further develop."[80]

Phieu's show of pride ventured to contrast and bolster the Vietnamese view and identity vis-à-vis the American ones. Moreover, this was done in the face of the American president. A personal ambition apart, Phieu's subtext was to demonstrate Vietnam's parity with the world's only superpower.

As Phieu himself has revealed, the glorious recent past of defeating the world's largest power is the strength of anti-imperialism in the present. Other grand strategies are rather disadvantaged in this aspect. They have either farther and less glorious past or no past at all to invoke. Their future cannot be a continuation, but a creation.

Traditionalism can construct a vision of Vietnam no longer inferior to China, but its strategic approach of deference to the latter appears humiliating in the modern eye, which is trained in the Westphalian school of international relations. Moreover, such a goal can only be achieved, if at all, through either the anti-imperialist or the modernization's pathway.

Orientalism can appeal to the national pride by offering the vision of Vietnam as the beacon of the East in an age of rising Eastern Asia. However, the motive of this vision—to preserve and bolster Vietnam's cultural identity—is already absorbed by anti-imperialism, and the way to achieve it—industrialization and modernization—is already an integral part of the grand strategy of modernization.

Modernization is unprecedented in Vietnamese history. Unlike anti-imperialism, it appeals to the national pride in a negative way. Modernizers often call legging behind other countries the shaming of Vietnam. General Vo Nguyen Giap's address at a recent gathering of Vietnamese youth has clearly expressed the mainstream view and motive of the modernizers. Giap mentioned the Vietnamese defeat of "two large empires from two continents" (France and the United States), calling it "the greatest event for our nation, a great victory of the oppressed people and the forces that love peace, unity, independence, and democracy in the 20th century, and an unprecedented event in world history." In Giap's view, this victory has made Vietnam a "heroic country." Against this

[80] Ibid.

background, Giap quickly pointed to the fact that Vietnam was still a poor country. He called poverty a shame and appealed to the entire Vietnamese people to stop the country's legging behind the world. In conclusion, Giap declared that as a heroic country, Vietnam will become rich and strong and stand on a par with the major powers in the world. [81]

[81] Vo Nguyen Giap, "Chung ta khong ngu quen trong vong nguyet que" [We Do Not Slumber in the Olive Branch], *VietNamNet*, May 2, 2005, <http://www.vnn.vn/chinhtri/doinoi/2005/05/420017>

Chapter Four

Political contest

Given the bipolar structure of Vietnam's grand strategic landscape in the post Cold War era, the front line of the grand strategic competition is drawn between anti-imperialism and modernization. The political contest between the two involves both ideological debates and power struggle among individuals. Although the contest is portrayed as one between the camps of the anti-imperialists and the modernizers, the membership of both camps is flexible and there are a lot of moderates who stand between the two. Many changed from the modernization camp to the anti-imperialists, mostly when they went up the ladder of their career; several others moved in the opposite direction, mostly after retiring from their office. The post-Cold War era witnessed three periods of political contest between the two grand strategies. Each of the three has its distinct characteristics and corresponds with the tenure of a different Party general secretary. The post-Cold War era was preceded by a period, which witnessed the formation of both competing grand strategies.

LAYING THE GROUNDS, 1987-1991

The Sixth VCP Congress in December 1986 marked a turning point in modern Vietnamese history. At this congress, the Vietnamese leadership announced an unprecedented reform policy *(doi moi)*, which created an atmosphere of renovation in all fields of Vietnam's social and political life. Shortly after the congress, debates on fundamental issues of foreign policy were brought to the pages of the Party theoretical journal. In the May 1987 issue of this journal, an article by Phan Doan Nam, who was an assistant to Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, made a plea for renovation of foreign policy thinking. The article claimed that beginning in the early 1970s, both world politics and economics had undergone profound changes. In world politics, it

asserted, "the time in which imperialism is relying on its military preponderance to threaten has gone forever." The class struggle on the international plane had changed its form from military confrontation into peaceful emulation and competition in the economic field. Underlying the dramatic changes in social life was the second scientific-technological revolution, which had transformed relations between man and nature as well as international relations and the world economy. The world economy was now marked by internationalization, integration, and interdependence, which were of objective nature and therefore law-like phenomena. These new characteristics of the world required, the article argued, new thinking and new way of action in foreign policy. In this spirit, the article outlined a new concept of national security, which no longer focused on the military aspect alone but tried to be comprehensive while making the economic development its priority. The article also revised the old concept of national independence, arguing that independence must be brought in keeping with interdependence, because "it is this interdependence that renders international relations equitable."[1]

Nam's bold article, which certainly reflected Thach's thoughts as well, was, however, preceded by a review of Lenin's *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, which reaffirmed the "unchanged essence of imperialism."[2] Nonetheless, all the other articles relating to international relations that appeared in the Party theoretical journal in 1987 seemed to echo the new characterization of the world as depicted in Nam's. This reflected as well the general mood in political debates.

In 1987, the Party's theoretical journal was overwhelmed by articles on new developments in the Soviet Union and the general tone was very positive. The changes in the USSR not only encouraged and provided forces of modernization in Vietnam with ideas, but given Moscow's role as Hanoi's patron, they also lend enormous support to similar changes in Vietnam. The year of 1987 was a period when the political debates

[1] Doan Nam, "Ket hop suc manh dan toc voi suc manh thoi dai trong giai doan cach mang moi" [Combine the Strengths of the Nation and the Epoch in the Revolution's New Period], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 5 (May 1987): 53-57, quotations p. 54 and p. 55.

[2] Bui Ngoc Chuong, "Ban chat, dac diem va dia vi lich su cua chu nghia de quoc" [The Essence, Characteristic, and Historical Status of Imperialism], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 3 (March 1987): 99-106.

in Vietnam were revolving around the theme of *"doi moi tu duy,"* or renovation of thinking. The need for renovation of thinking in every sectors of political life was expressed and people began to propose new ways of thinking in several fields, from economics to foreign policy. The year of 1988 witnessed a deepening of the debate. The central theme of the year was governance, with the rule of law and democracy being the hottest topics. In the middle of such political and intellectual environment, the year of 1988 produced a breakthrough in Vietnam's foreign policy strategy and orientation.

In May 1988, the Politburo secretly passed Resolution 13, which stressed a "diversified and multidirectional" foreign policy orientation. In Gareth Porter's words, "it was a bold, sweeping new analysis of the dynamics of global politics and economics that bore the unmistakeable mark of Nguyen Co Thach's influence."[3] The resolution was not made public, but its ideological underpinnings were revealed three months in advance by the same Thach assistant in the Party's theoretical journal. In this article, Nam repeated the characterization of the world as described in his 1987 piece, highlighting the trend of interdependence and the need for cooperation across ideological lines in international relations. What was new in the 1988 article was its overt disapproval of the "two camps, four contradictions" theory and its criticism of the Party's tendency to "force all international events into those boilerplate models." Moreover, it maintained that it would be a fatal error if the friend-foe distinction of the class struggle within a country was applied to international relations.[4]

In the following issues of the Party's journal, Nam's article was positively echoed by two other articles, one on "the significance and basis of the creativity and dynamic in the USSR's foreign policy of peace" by the vice-director of the Institute of International Communist and Workers' Movement, the other on the "new world economic era and the new economic thinking" by an editor of the journal.[5]

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[3] Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," pp. 10-11.

[4] Phan Doan Nam, "Mot vai suy nghi ve doi moi tu duy doi ngoai" [Some Reflections on the Renovation of Thinking on Foreign Affairs], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 2 (February 1988): 50-54, 79; quotations p. 51.

[5] See An Manh Toan, "Tim hieu y nghia va co so cua tinh sang tao-nang dong trong chinh sach doi ngoai hoa binh cua Lien Xo" [Study the Significance and Basis of the Creativity and Dynamic of the USSR's Foreign Policy of Peace], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 3 (March 1988), pp. 74-77; Nguyen Thanh Tuan, "Thoi

However, the new thinking, which emanated from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was attacked by Defense Minister Le Duc Anh in the same April issue. Anh's article emphasized two points. First, "safeguarding the Fatherland is the strategic task of the entire Party and people, not something reserved for the armed forces alone." Second, imperialism, headed by the United States, has not given up its aim to eliminate socialism, therefore, one cannot exclude from one's national security calculations the possibility of full-scale wars of aggression caused by imperialist forces.[6]

The Defense Minister's article, which appeared a month before the Politburo session that would discuss the readjustment of foreign policy strategy, signified a polarization within the top leadership. The view promoted by Foreign Minister Thach advocated a radical change in grand strategy, from emphasizing the military aspect to focusing on economic development and international integration. This view had received the general support of the leadership, and one of its early fruit was Politburo Resolution No. 2, which was adopted in mid-1987. The resolution was a revision of Vietnam's national defense strategy, which most notably led to the large-scale reduction of the country's standing army to 600,000 troops from around 1,000,000.[7] Defense Minister Anh's article was an attempt to reverse the trend. By stressing the possibility of "full-scale wars of aggression," Anh tried to refocus the priority of Vietnam's grand strategy on the military aspect. Thus the Defense Minister and the Foreign Minister each became the flag for a major force in the Vietnamese leadership. Anh's article reveals that there was an intense dispute within the top leadership about the priority of Vietnam's grand strategy. The adoption of Resolution 13 in May 1988 indicates that the "new world outlook" came out as the victor. However, there remained considerable disagreements on basic ideological issues within the Vietnamese leadership despite the approval of readjustments in foreign policy orientation by Resolution 13. As Thach himself admitted in an interview in January 1990, "the implementation of Resolution 13

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dai kinh te the gioi moi va tu duy kinh te moi" [The New World Economic Era and the New Economic Thinking], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 4 (April 1988), pp. 74-77.

[6] Le Duc Anh, "Nang cao canh giac, cung co quoc phong va an ninh cua dat nuoc" [Enhance Vigilance, Reinforce National Defense and Security], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 4 (April 1988): 5-10.

[7] Tadashi Mio, "Vietnam after the 7th Party Congress," *Vietnam Generation Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3-4 (November 1992).

during the last over one year was a struggle between old and new thinking on foreign policy."[8]

Nonetheless, the "new world outlook" was able to maintain the upper hand until the regime changes in Eastern Europe. In January 1989, Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap wrote an article in the Party theoretical journal, defining economic and technological backwardness as a serious threat to the nation and set out the national goal of making the people rich and the country strong.[9] In August, the journal published an article by Nguyen Co Thach, which bore the title *All for Peace, National Independence and Development* and outlined the core ideas of the grand strategy of modernization.[10] This article's formal purpose was to celebrate the 44th anniversary of the establishment of the Vietnamese foreign service, which was due in August. But Thach took advantage of the opportunity to introduce the new worldview and grand strategic objectives of modernization. Since the adoption of Resolution 13, this was the first time the new national security and foreign policy strategy, as well as its underlying worldview, was publicized in a systematic way by a high-ranking official. Thus, the foreign minister announced:

> The foreign policy objectives are: taking advantage of the favorable international conditions and not wasting time, maximizing our ability to step by step stabilize [the socio-economic life] and lay the groundwork for an economic development in the coming 10-15 years, build socialism and safeguard the Fatherland's independence, actively contribute to the common struggle for peace and development, national independence, democracy and socialism. These are the strategic objectives and the highest interests of the entire Party and the entire Vietnamese people.[11]

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[8] Nguyen Co Thach, "Changes in the World," p. 7.
[9] Vo Nguyen Giap, "De cho khoa hoc ky thuat that su tro thanh dong luc phat trien kinh te-xa hoi" [For Science and Technology to Really Become the Driving Force of Socio-economic Development], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 1 (January 1989), pp. 7-15.
[10] Nguyen Co Thach, "Tat ca vi hoa binh, doc lap dan toc va phat trien" [All for Peace, National Independence and Development], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 8 (August 1989): 1-8.
[11] Ibid., p. 4.

In justification of these objectives, Thach referred to the "great lesson" of combining the nation's strength with that of the era. He also stated that "this lesson is the red thread running through [Vietnam's] current foreign policy and every outward activity."[12] Sticking to this great lesson, he pointed out the inevitability of the abovementioned national objectives by referring to the era's trend:

> Today, when peace, cooperation, and development have become the supreme interests of the world's people and the common trend in international relations, the combination of the nation's and the era's strengths requires that the countries follow this trend. That is, [the trend requires] both contention and cooperation in peaceful coexistence between countries with different social and political regimes and conflict-resolution by means of peaceful negotiation. Opposing this trend, any country no matter big or small will fail.[13]

Thach explained the world trend with the thesis of increasing interdependence and the logic of international division of labor. He argued that the contemporary world was witnessing an unprecedented change, which was brought about by the scientific-technological revolution, and the current stage of the revolution had accelerated the growth of the world productive forces and enlarged the scale of internationalization, which resulted in the fact that the world became a single market. According to Thach, this condition required a new division of labor on the global scale. This would lead to the restructuring of world economy, which provides an unprecedented opportunity for underdeveloped societies to reach high levels of development within a time period much shorter than they could previously. In order to grasp this opportunity, Thach went on, it was necessary to turn the country's economy into a part of the world market and

[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., p. 5.

not to violate the universal laws of the world economy.[14] In the conclusion of his article, Thach stressed that "the new situation poses the demand for renovation and, first of all, for renovation of thinking." This and the last sentences which close Thach's article indicate that the new worldview still had to coexist and be compromised with orthodox Marxism-Leninism. The article's closing sentences read:

> On the other hand, there is something unchanged in the changing world. It is [the fact] that the working people make history and that the driving force behind the development of mankind's class society is class struggle. Mankind will inevitably progress to socialism.[15]

The fact that Thach had to invoke the doctrine of class struggle in order to protect his argument, which in effect negated the doctrine, implies that Resolution 13 was adopted because of its expediency, not because of its principles.

The same month as Thach's article appeared in the Party's theoretical journal also witnessed a turning point in the debate over changes in the world among the Vietnamese leadership. From 15 to 24 August, the VCP Central Committee's Seventh Plenum was convened in Ho Chi Minh City to discuss "some urgent problems in the ideological work." On August 18, communist rule ended in Poland after Party candidates had been defeated in a multiparty election. The loss of communist party power in Eastern Europe proved to be catalytic for the resurgence of anti-imperialism in Vietnam. As said in the communiqué of the plenum, the VCP accused imperialism—that is, the West—of "attacking the socialist countries with frenzied actions and wicked tricks."[16] At the plenum, General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh rehabilitated the "two camps, four contradictions" theory, which he complained had been forgotten for a long time. Hinting at Nguyen Co Thach and other like-minded, Linh said that the denial of

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p. 8.
[16] "Hoi nghi lan thu 7 Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang Cong san Viet Nam (khoa 6)" [Seventh Plenum of the VCP Central Committee (Sixth Tenure)], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 9 (September 1989), pp. 1-4, quote p. 3.

these old teachings "has led certain persons to believe mistakenly that the essence of imperialism has changed." He declared: "In fact, as long as imperialism exists and as long as the socialist revolution has not achieved victory on a world scale, the Leninist theses mentioned above have still kept their original value."[17]

Echoing Linh, Defense Minister Le Duc Anh expressed alarm at a "peaceful evolution strategy," which were carrying out by "imperialism and international reactionary forces" to eliminate socialism from the world.[18] Following the plenum, the Party theoretical journal addressed U.S. ambitions for East Asian hegemony for the first time since the Sixth Congress, in a concerted act with the military newspaper and the monthly military journal to blame U.S. imperialism and capitalist forces.[19]

The arguments in the Party journal article and the Army papers are indicative of the battle between two grand strategies. The Party journal article criticized U.S. global strategic objectives not from the point of view of "two camps, four contradictions." Nor did it mention class struggle and imperialism. Instead, it took a nationalist perspective that favored a "multipolar world."[20] Although the army media outlets and the Party journal both directed their attacks toward the United States, each was based on a different reasoning and a different worldview. The army papers accused imperialism of their use of opposition elements and the private sector to undermine socialism and blamed capitalist forces for their "offensives" against socialism. The monthly military journal argued that the imperialist attacks made it incumbent on communists to "hold fast to the working class stance."[21] The Party journal took, however, the view that "the contemporary world has become a multipolar world, in which the nations wanted to have their places and play their roles." It asserted that Asia-Pacific would either accept

[17] Nguyen Van Linh, "Phat bieu cua dong chi Tong Bi thu Nguyen Van Linh be mac Hoi nghi 7 cua BCHTUD" [Speech by Comrade General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh at the Closure of the 7th Plenum of the Party Central Committee], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 9 (September 1989), pp. 5-12, quote p. 6.
[18] Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," p. 14, quotation from Le Duc Anh, "Excerpt from a Speech by Defense Minister Le Duc Anh," 6 September 1989, on Radio Hanoi Domestic Service, 7 September 1989, in FBIS-EAS-89-173, 8 September 1989, p. 59.
[19] Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," p. 14.
[20] See Ho Bat Khuat, "Chau A-Thai Binh Duong trong ky vong cua chinh quyen Bu-so" [Asia-Pacific in the Expectation of the Bush Administration], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 9 (September 1989), pp. 80-84.
[21] Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," p. 14. The military papers are *Quan doi Nhan dan*, 13 September 1989, and *Tap chi Quoc phong Toan dan*, October 1989.

the United States as a member of the club or resist it if the latter wanted to dominate the region.[22]

The collapse of communist regime in Eastern Europe and U.S. ambition for world leadership deeply affected Vietnam's political elites. Both were seen as general threats to Vietnam's national security. But the elaboration of these affections within the Vietnamese state followed different tracks, and the major tracks were laid down by two major worldviews. The one, which was apparently dominant in the army, saw the world in terms of a "who will defeat whom" struggle between socialism and capitalism/imperialism. The other, which was more popular at least among the Party intellectuals, envisioned the world as "multipolar," in which each nation could be a pole.

The period from August 1989 through February 1990 was a time of successive ends of Leninist regimes in the world. In Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Nicaragua, the "brother parties" of the VCP one after another were ousted from state power. Fierce debates flared up in the Vietnamese policymaking circles over what was the real cause of the collapse of these socialist regimes and what was to be done in order to prevent such developments in Vietnam. One position saw in the East European events clear evidences of imperialism's attempts to erase socialism from the world and concluded that ideological perseverance was the most urgent requirement of the situation.[23] Another position identified errors of "subjectivism and voluntarism" by Party leaders as well as their failure in expanding cooperation with the capitalist countries as the causes. The lessons drawn by this position from the collapse of socialism in Europe were that the current model of socialism was irrational, reform was necessary, democracy was a pressing demand, and that opening up to the world outside conformed to the tide of the time.[24]

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[22] See Khuat, "Asia-Pacific."
[23] Notably, Linh, "Speech at the 7th Plenum;" Anh, "Excerpt from a Speech."
[24] Notably, "Speech by Tran Xuan Bach" (to Union of Vietnam Scientific and Technological Associations), 13 December 1989, in Hanoi Radio Domestic Service, 5 January 1990 , FBIS-EAS-90-005, 8 January 1990, p. 67-68; "Speech by Vo Chi Cong," 15 December 89, in Vietnam News Agency, 19 December 1989, FBIS-EAS-89-243, 20 December 1989, pp. 67-68; but also Vu Hien, "Thu thach moi doi voi chu nghia xa hoi" [New Trial for Socialism], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 1 (January 1990): 81-84.

The two different views reflect two different self-perceptions and ambitions. The former showed little concern about the economy and more about the existence and identity of socialism. The latter was primarily interested in economic development and ready to change the model of socialism in order to survive as a country.

The period between the Seventh and Eighth Plenums of the VCP Central Committee was a time of fierce grand strategic battle. It took the Party seven months to restore order among its ranks. At the Eighth Plenum in March 1990, the Central Committee reached an agreement on advancing reforms while determining "political stability" as the chief priority. Moreover, it expelled Politburo member Tran Xuan Bach, the leading advocate of political pluralism, from the leadership.[25] The plenum thus produced at once a consensus and a warning shot, which would set the terms for public debates on ideological issues in many years thereafter. After the Eighth Plenum policy and ideological debates can be played out on the grounds provided by both anti-imperialism and the grand strategy of modernization. But they must stay within the limits set by the core values of anti-imperialism.

The consensus is reflected in the strategy set by the Eighth Plenum. It incorporates the objectives of both anti-imperialism and modernization. However, the strategy implies that anti-imperialism is more urgent than modernization. According to the Plenum's communiqué, the Plenum underscored that the task of the entire Party and people was to "speed up reform in all aspects." This was what the modernizers asserted. But the Plenum determined that the necessary condition for fulfilling that task was to "preserve political, economic, and social stability, above all political stability."[26] Political stability was what the anti-imperialists preferred. The message of the Eighth Plenum was that both political stability and reform were needed but political stability had priority over reform. The Plenum thus strengthened the policy and ideological dualism of anti-imperialism and modernization, while giving higher preference to anti-imperialism.

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[25] See "Hoi nghi lan thu tam Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang Cong san Viet Nam (khoa VI)" [The Eighth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee of the Vietnam Communist Party], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 4 (April 1990): 1-4.
[26] "Eighth Plenum," p. 2.

Was this anti-imperialist victory a consequence of the Chinese and Eastern European events in 1989? It is true that the Vietnamese top leadership rehabilitated the "two camps, four contradictions" theory in reaction to these events. The anti-imperialist turn in Vietnamese foreign policy occurred as a response to the revolt against communist rule coupled with the West's declaration of the end of communism. The revolt against communist rule in China, which led to the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989, and those against communist rule in Eastern Europe, which resulted in regime change first in Poland in August 1989 then in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Romania in the subsequent months, caused a sense of particular insecurity in Vietnam's leadership. After Poland was no longer ruled by a communist party and Hungary decided to hold a multiparty election, General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh assessed the situation as "utmost dangerous" and tried to forge an alliance for "protecting socialism" among the remaining socialist regimes of the Soviet bloc.[27] In Linh's understanding "protecting socialism" also meant "opposing imperialism" because socialism was being fiercely attacked by imperialism. His speech at the closure of the Seventh Plenum (August 1989) reveals that his rehabilitation of the "two camps, four contradictions" worldview and his insecurity feeling stemmed from his reception of the U.S. president's statements about socialism. Thus Linh praised the Plenum for its "perceptive political sensitivity" in "quickly analyzing very wicked schemes and tricks of imperialism, headed by the United States, against the world revolutionary movement." Quoting U.S. President Bush, who had allegedly said that "we are living in the last chapter of the communist experiment," Linh declared this as a daydream of "the representatives of notorious anti-communism, which cannot share the world with us."[28]

The anti-imperialist turn in Vietnamese foreign policy was, however, preceded by a conservative turn in domestic politics. The turning point was the Central Committee's Sixth Plenum, which was convened in March 1989. The Plenum was to review the first two years after the Sixth Party Congress and set out the task for the next

[27] Thanh Tin (Bui Tin), *Mat that: Hoi ky chinh tri* [True Face: Political Memoirs], (Irvine, CA: Saigon Press, 1993), section "The Planet's Greatest Opportunist Greets You." Tin's informant was Le Xuan Tung, Linh's assistant at the time of the events.
[28] Linh, "Speeach at the Seventh Plenum," p. 5.

three years. In this Plenum, the VCP defined six "basic principles" of reform. With these basic principles, reforms were disciplined within the limits set by anti-imperialism. The first principle stresses that "advance to socialism is the necessary path" and "renovation is not to change the socialist objective." The second principle affirms that "Marxism-Leninism is always the ideological foundation of our Party" and "renovation of thinking is not to deviate from Marxist-Leninist principles." The third states that renovation of the political system is to strengthen the proletarian dictatorship. The fourth principle maintains that the leadership role of the Party is the decisive condition for victory. The fifth principle asserts that democracy must be escorted by centralism and led by the Party. Finally, the sixth principle demands the combination of patriotism with proletarian and socialist internationalism and the combination of the nation's strengths with those of the epoch.[29]

The first four basic principles are copies of the Chinese "Four Basic Principles," which was introduced by Deng Xiaoping in March 1979.[30] While the grand strategy of modernization demands reforms, anti-imperialism urges orthodoxy. The adoption of the cardinal principles of reform per se does not mean that orthodoxy has gained the upper hand. However, the substance and emphasis of the six principles are permeated by anti-imperialist theses. The Sixth Plenum signaled a main message that reforms must be put within the parameters set by orthodoxy. This created a mechanism for the arrangement of power between anti-imperialism and modernization, in which anti-imperialism functioned as the defender and modernization as the striker. The weight of each view is thus determined by the actual political objective, which itself depends on the definition of the actual situation. If the situation is defined as under enemy's attacks, defense becomes the most urgent task and the defenders are more important. If the situation is defined as favorable, the team will take an offensive posture and the strikers will be

[29] "Hoi nghi lan thu sau Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang (khoa VI)" [The Sixth Plenum of the Party Central Committee (Sixth Tenure)], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 4 (April 1989), pp. 1-5, 16, here p. 4.

[30] Deng's "Four Basic Principles" are first, "we must keep to the socialist path," second, "we must uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat," third, "we must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party," and fourth, "we must uphold Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought." In 1982, the second of the principles was changed to "upholding the people's democratic dictatorship." See Kwok-sing Li and Mary Lok, *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995)

more privileged. This mechanism opens a main avenue for people to elevate themselves and their grand strategies. As a result, a decisive battle between the two camps takes place in the definition of the situation. As will be seen in the remainder of this chapter, anti-imperialists try to define the situation as marked by the threat of a "peaceful evolution," which plotted by the West to eliminate socialism. While anti-imperialists put the enemy's specter at the center of the picture, modernizers assert that "we are having a golden opportunity."

The mechanism created at the Sixth Plenum contributed a good deal to the victory of anti-imperialism at the Eighth Plenum a year later. The collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe must undoubtedly have been seen by Vietnamese Communists more as a danger than as an opportunity. The situation so perceived strengthened the position of anti-imperialists, the defenders. The Eighth Plenum just brought forward the spirit laid down at the Sixth Plenum. It set forth that in order to carry forward reforms forcefully and comprehensively, it is imperative to preserve political stability.[31] The alternative view, which was put forward by modernizers, called for radical reforms of thinking, economy, and politics as well as democratization.[32]

Whether or not the anti-imperialist turn was complete at the Eighth Plenum is difficult to answer. Indicators for the affirmation were the adoption of anti-imperialist core theses by modernizers. For example, in a panel on "the content of the era" organized by the Party theoretical journal in January 1991, modernization's ideologue Phan Doan Nam asserted that the most basic contradiction in the contemporary world was between forces of peace, national independence, social progress and the most belligerent imperialist forces, headed by the United States.[33] However, there were also indicators for the negation. Modernizers still had two major chances to turn the balance

[31] "Eighth Plenum."

[32] For the modernizer's view, see H.V., "Vai suy nghi ve tinh hinh cac nuoc xa hoi chu nghia nam 1989" [Some Thoughts on the Socialist Countries' Situation in 1989], *Quan he Quoc te*, No. 2 (December 1989), pp. 10-12; Thach, "Changes in the World;" and the articles in *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 1 (January 1990) by Tran Xuan Bach, "Mot doi dieu suy nghi tren duong doi moi" [Some Thoughts in the Path of Renovation], pp. 46-51; Kieu Nguyen, "Nhin lai tinh hinh the gioi nam 1989" [Review of the World Situation in 1989], pp. 76-80; and Vu Hien, "Thu thach moi doi voi chu nghia xa hoi" [New Trial to Socialism], pp. 81-84.

[33] Toa dam "Noi dung thoi dai" [Panel on "the Content of the Era"], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 2 (February 1991), pp 16-19, here p. 17.

of power after the Eighth Plenum. One was a campaign to bring Vo Nguyen Giap back to the top leadership. The other was Nguyen Co Thach's attempt to negotiate the end of a U.S.-imposed embargo against Vietnam. Both did, however, fail.

BUILDING UP POSITIONS, 1991-1997

The Seventh Party Congress in June 1991 did nothing but consolidate the tendency set out at the Sixth (March 1989), Seventh (August 1989) and Eighth (March 1990) Plenums. It was a triumph of those who emphasized safeguarding socialism against imperialism over those who considered modernization and opening up to the world a priority. Gen. Giap, a modernizer who was receiving wide support across ideological lines, was outmaneuvered by Gen. Anh, a leading anti-imperialist. The loudest opponents of Bach at the Eighth Plenum—Dao Duy Tung, Nguyen Duc Binh, Nguyen Ha Phan, and Nong Duc Manh—were all appointed members of the Politburo or the Secretariat.[34] However, parallel to this tendency was also a compromise, for demands for reform and opening up, especially from the populace, were pressing. The balance of power between the two grand strategies is reflected in the ruling troika that emerged from the congress. Gen. Anh received the post of State President. Vo Van Kiet, a leading modernizer, became Prime Minister. And Do Muoi, who was anti-imperialist in instinct but eclectic in calculation, replaced Linh as the Party's new General Secretary.

Also, the directives for Vietnamese foreign policy endorsed by this congress were a blend of the two grand strategies. Thus, on the one hand, the VCP declared that "Vietnam wishes to befriend all countries in the world community." On the other, however, it reaffirmed the four fundamental contradictions and stated that "the contradiction between socialism and capitalism are unfolding fiercely."[35] This policy blend was a result of the combination of "firmness on principles with tactical

[34] Bui Tin, *Hoa xuyen tuyet* [The Snow-Breaking Flower] (Irvine, Cal.: Nhan Quyen, 1991), p, 150.
[35] Communist Party of Vietnam, *7th National Congress: Documents* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishers, 1991). First quotation in the Report on the Documents of the 7th Congress, p. 43; second quotation in the Political Program for National Construction in the Period of Transition to Socialism, p. 49.

flexibility."[36] It assigned each of the two grand strategies a different status—*anti-imperialism to guard the principles while modernization to supply the tactics*. A division of labor was also instituted among the ruling troika. Following the Seventh Congress, President Anh the anti-imperialist oversaw defense, foreign, and interior affairs, while Premier Kiet the modernizer covered the economic field, and General Secretary Muoi the "ideologically fleet of foot"[37] played the moderator role between the two positions.

Although the Seventh Congress put the anti-imperialist to a privileged position, it still leaves the modernizer some room for maneuver. In 1992, as the option of a military alliance with China had been rebuffed by the latter, the option of a joining with capitalist ASEAN and integration into the capitalist-dominated Asia-Pacific became fashionable. Indeed, Vietnamese foreign policy in 1992 was moving in this direction. This created a situation, in which both the anti-imperialist and the modernizers' camps were not satisfied with the status quo.

Because the Seventh Congress was held in a turbulent time, just a few months before the disintegration of the USSR, a mid-term party conference was scheduled to serve as an additional congress. The Mid-Term Conference thus provided the competing factions in the VCP with an opportunity to alter the balance of power. During the time of preparation for this conference, in 1993, a series of articles with the common theme of opposing "peaceful evolution" was launched in the Party theoretical journal.[38] Their

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[36] Hong Ha, "Tinh hinh the gioi va chinh sach doi ngoai cua ta" [The World Situation and Our Foreign Policy], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 12 (December 1992): 10-12.

[37] Kent Bolton, "Domestic Sources of Vietnam's Foreign Policy," in Carlyle Thayer and Ramses Amer, eds., *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 170-201, here fn. 23, p. 197. For a discussion of Muoi's role and the troika's dynamics, see ibid., pp. 176, 182.

[38] See Tran Ba Khoa, "Canh giac voi am muu dien bien hoa binh cua cac the luc thu dich" [Vigilant over the Hostile Forces' Peaceful Evolution Scheme], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 1 (January 1993): 18-20; Le Xuan Luu, "Su pha hoai ve tu tuong cua cac the luc phan dong trong chien luoc 'dien bien hoa binh'" [The Ideological Sabotage of the Hostile Forces in the "Peaceful Evolution" Strategy], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 4 (April 1993): 19-22; Bui Phan Ky, "May suy nghi ve chien luoc quoc phong trong boi canh quoc te moi" [Some Reflections on Defense Strategy in the New International Context], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 5 (May 1993): 58-60, 62; Bui Phan Ky, "Ve nhiem vu quoc phong-an ninh hien nay" [On the Defense-Security Task at Present], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 9 (September 1993): 25-27; Doan Khue, "Quan triet quan diem quoc phong toan dan, tang cuong quan ly nha nuoc ve quoc phong" [Fully Comprehend the All-People Defense Concept, Intensify State Control of Defense], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 12 (December 1993): 8-10; Duong Thong, "Mot nhiem vu quan trong trong cuoc dau tranh chong 'dien bien hoa binh'" [An

authors were four generals and one colonel in both the Army and the Police. This did, however, not mean that the Army and the Police both were united behind the battle cry of opposing peaceful evolution. Interior Minister Bui Thien Ngo showed his distance from the idea by not mentioning it in his only article in the Party theoretical journal during the campaign.[39] Also, Colonel Tran Trong of the General Political Department in the Defense Ministry wrote an article in the same issue of the Journal, in which he described world economy through the modernizer's looking glass and approached it with the modernizer's attitude.[40]

The anti-peaceful evolution campaign was initiated by an article by Tran Ba Khoa, a colonel in the Defense Ministry. Khoa asserted that "peaceful evolution is a wicked trick, a strategic measure, of imperialism and all hostile forces." The substance of this strategy is, according to Khoa, to create from inside of the socialist countries "antagonist factors," which negate the communist party and the socialist regime. The next step of peaceful evolution is to adopt the Western values, to practice political pluralism, to privatize the entire economy, thus to transform the socialist state into a capitalist one, which is nothing less a victory without war for the West.[41] The author concluded that amid the enemy's attacks by means of peaceful evolution, Vietnam must hold on to the view of class struggle and the platform of Marxism.[42] Echoing Khoa, who asserted that peaceful evolution was a "who will defeat whom" struggle,[43] Lieutenant General Le Xuan Luu maintained that "peaceful evolution is a means to change the enemy's regime." He cited the U.S. National Security Committee (sic) as saying that "it is a battle between us and the enemy … It will certainly result in one

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Important Task in the Struggle Against "Peaceful Evolution"], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 12 (December 1993): 23-25.

[39] See Bui Thien Ngo, "Lam tot cong tac giu gin trat tu an toan xa hoi" [Fulfil the Task of Preserving Social Order and Security], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 10 (October 1993), pp. 3-6.

[40] See Tran Trong, "Kinh te the gioi – Cuc dien canh tranh va xu the" [World Economy – Complexion of Competition and Trends], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 10 (October 1993), pp. 55-58.

[41] Khoa, "Vigilant over Peaceful Evolution Scheme," p. 18.

[42] Ibid., p. 20

[43] Ibid., p. 18.

being alive and the other dead."[44] Like Khoa, Luu also identified ideology as the central target of peaceful evolution.[45]

Following Khoa and Luu, in the May 1993 issue of the Party theoretical journal, Major General Bui Phan Ky, who was the head of the Defense Ministry's Institute for Strategic Studies, wrote an article on "defense strategy in the new international context." Ky described the international context as "imperialist and hegemonist forces contriving to grasp the opportunity, and quickly fill the 'strategic vacuum' left by the collapse of socialist regime in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union."[46] Note that in the 1980s the term "hegemonist" was reserved to refer to China, but in this article it hardly referred to the latter, because Ky's emphasis was on the protection of the socialist regime. For the Vietnamese general, the "hegemonist" was now undoubtedly the United States. Ky argued that as always, national defense consisted of two aspects, one was territorial preservation and the other was regime protection. According to him, protection of national independence includes protection of the right to freely choose a regime. He concluded that national defense and regime protection were in reality inseparable.[47] The importance of this view is reflected in the fact that the September issue of the Party theoretical journal published a second article by the same author, in which he reiterated the same view.[48]

The last month before the Mid-Term Conference, two generals, one was the Defense Minister and the other was a Deputy Minister of the Interior, launched two separate articles opposing peaceful evolution in the Party theoretical journal. The campaign indicates that opposing peaceful evolution would be the superweapon of the anti-imperialists at the Mid-Term Conference.

But the modernizers also had their trump card. The anti-imperialist campaign to oppose peaceful evolution was in fact responding to the modernizer's proclamation of a "new opportunity." In the end-of-year session of the National Assembly in 1992, Prime

[44] Luu, "Idelogical Sabotage," p. 19.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ky, "Some Reflections," p. 58.
[47] Ibid, p. 60
[48] See Ky, "On the Defense-Security Task."

Minister Vo Van Kiet announced that the economic crisis that haunted Vietnam since the late 1970s and was escorted by hyperinflation since the late 1980s had been rolled back. This, assessed he, was a new complexion, which was opening novel possibilities and opportunities.[49] In the light of this new complexion, Kiet declared:

> The reality's situation and possibilities both require and enable our country to expand the volume of investment, speed up growth rate, narrow the gap of development [between us] with the neighboring countries, and break out from the state of a poor and underdeveloped country.[50]

Table 4.1. **Leading ideologists**

Anti-imperialists	Dao Duy Tung	Permanent Secretary, 1991-1996
		Chairman of Central Council for Ideology, 1991-1996
	Nguyen Duc Binh	Chairman of Central Council for Ideology, 1996-2001
	Le Xuan Luu	Lieutenant General
	Bui Phan Ky	Major General, Director of Defense Ministry's Institute of Strategic Studies
Middle wayers	Quang Can	Lieutenant General
	Nguyen Phu Trong	Chairman of Central Council for Ideology, 2001-2006
	Nguyen Chi My	Deputy Head of Hanoi Propaganda Department
Modernizers	Tran Xuan Bach	Secretary in charge of foreign affairs, 1987-1989
	Nguyen Co Thach	Foreign Minister, 1982-1991
	Phan Doan Nam	Assistant to Foreign Minister, 1986-1991
	Vo Van Kiet	Prime Minister, 1991-1997

[49] Vo Van Kiet, "Phat huy da chuyen bien tot cua nam 1992, day nhanh nhip do phat trien kinh te-xa hoi nam 1993" [Bring Into Full Play the Good Change's Momentum of 1992, Speed Up the 1993 Socio-economic Growth Rate], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 1, (January 1993), pp. 5-13, here p. 6.
[50] Ibid., p. 7.

According to Kiet, a major means to achieve these goals was the education of national pride, for national consciousness and patriotism had been a motive force behind the Vietnamese people's struggle for independence in the past. This spirit of patriotism needed to be mobilized in order to lift the country out of the humiliation of poverty and roll back the threat of lagging behind the other countries.[51]

The anti-imperialist campaign on opposing peaceful evolution reveals that anti-imperialists and modernizers were building up very different positions. Starting from their different perceptions of threat, the two camps came to different definitions of the situation. Nurturing different national aspirations, they prefer different ways to mobilize resources in achieving their goals. Thus, while modernizers resorted to national awareness and patriotism, anti-imperialists called for class struggle and loyalty to Marxism as the state ideology.

During the year of 1993, modernizers developed the idea of the advent of a new period of development in which the central tasks are industrialization and modernization. This view did, however, scarcely find its way onto the pages of the Party theoretical journal until the fourth quarter of the year, when the leadership determined to put it on the agenda to be adopted at the Mid-term Conference.[52] Seizing a position to counterattack anti-imperialism, the November 1993 issue of the Party theoretical journal published an article by Dang Xuan Ky, the Director of the Marx-Lenin-Ho Chi Minh Institute, in which the author argued that developing Marxism-Leninism was nothing but protecting Marxism-Leninism and that theory must come from the practice, not from a dogma. The same issue also published an article asserting that political struggle and development were the "two major levels in contemporary international relations." The article reiterated the modernizer's view on scientific-technological revolution and its impact on all fields of social life. What is noteworthy in

[51] Ibid., p. 7-8.

[52] The Journal published in 1993 only two articles to introduce the issue of industrialization. These articles' authors were three academics and one manager. See Pham Thuyen and Vu Van Han, "Nhung quan diem co ban ve cong nghiep hoa o nuoc ta" [Basic Concepts of Industrialization in Our Country], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 3 (March 1993), pp. 34-37; Phan Thanh Pho and Phan Huy Duong, "Ve van de cong nghiep hoa o nuoc ta hien nay" [On the Issue of Industrialization in Our Country Today], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 10 (October 1993), pp. 21-23.

this article is its assertion that political struggle cannot be confined to class struggle. Although class struggle plays an important role in social life, stressed the article, nevertheless it is only one of the major motors of historical progress.[53]

With the country's economic recovery, the grand strategy of modernization gained new momentum. The Draft Political Report to the Mid-term Conference, which was presented by General Secretary Do Muoi at the Sixth Plenum of the Seventh Central Committee in November 1993, did not mention the term "peaceful evolution" at all. Instead, it emphasized that the threat of legging behind other countries was the largest threat to the nation. It embraced the modernizer's appraisal of the world situation as marked by a peaceful and stable regional environment, the dynamic development of the Asia-Pacific, the increase of international cooperation, and the trend of internationalization amid the scientific-technological revolution. The Draft Report concluded that the only way to remove backwardness, strengthen stability, protect independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, as well as to uphold the socialist orientation was to pursue industrialization and modernization.[54]

The final Political Report adopted at the Mid-term Conference in January 1994 differs, however, significantly from the Draft Report. In the final Report, the danger of legging behind is no longer described as the nation's biggest concern, but as one of four equally important menaces *(nguy co)*. Two menaces that were not mentioned in the Draft Report found their way into the final document. They are the threats of peaceful evolution and deviation from the socialist path. The fourth danger is corruption. Another difference between the draft and the final Report lies in the description of the favorable conditions *(thuan loi)*. Both documents list similar factors but each lay on them different emphasis. While the Draft Report emphasizes the achievements of *doi moi*, the increase of international cooperation, the importance of the scientific-technological revolution, and the people, the final Report mentions the Party first, and

[53] Nguyen Hoang Giap, "Hai binh dien chu yeu trong quan he quoc te hien nay" [Two Major Levels in Contemporary International Relations], Tap chi Cong san, No. 11 (November 1993), pp. 56-58.
[54] Do Muoi, "Phat huy thanh tuu to lon cua cong cuoc doi moi, tiep tuc dua su nghiep cach mang nuoc ta vung buoc tien len" [Bring into Full Play the Large Achievement of the Renovation, Further Advance Our Country's Revolutionary Cause], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 1 (January 1994): 4-13.

the people second. It adds the armed forces, a factor that is not listed in the Draft Report, in the third place, and puts the achievements of *doi moi*, the scientific-technological revolution, and the trend of international cooperation in the last.[55]

The differences between the two Reports indicate an anti-imperialist victory achieved between the Sixth Plenum in early December 1993 and the Mid-term Conference in late January 1994. It was the anti-imperialists in the armed forces who brought about this victory. This anti-imperialist victory was also reflected in the new personnel of the top decision-making body. At the Seventh Plenum on the eve of the Mid-term Conference, the Politburo was extended with two anti-imperialists, a modernizer, and a moderate. The two anti-imperialists were the Army's political chief Le Kha Phieu and Head of the Central Committee Economics Department Nguyen Ha Phan. The modernizer was Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam, and the moderate was Do Quang Thang, who held the post of Chairman of the Party Control Committee.

The unexpected victory of the anti-imperialist camp at the Mid-term Party Conference would have been the result of power maneuverings within the Hanoi leadership, where the conservative generals were controlling the main tools of coercive power and violence. Nevertheless, Vietnam's situation at that time seemed to support both camps. The economy was growing with high rates, hyperinflation was substantially dampened, and foreign investment poured into the country. But at the same time, a decades-long U.S. embargo was still in effect, and America was supporting regime opposition with pressure for the respect of human rights and religious freedom. Under these circumstances, the Mid-term Party Conference was concluded with an ironic compromise. It announced that Vietnam was entering a new era and determined industrialization and modernization to be the overall objectives of the country in this new era. But it downplayed the danger of economic backwardness by adding the dangers of peaceful evolution and deviation from the socialist path to the list of "Four Menaces," and emphasizing that the four were equally important. Moreover,

[55] See "Bao cao chinh tri cua Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang tai Hoi nghi dai bieu toan quoc giua nhiem ky cua Dang" [Political Report of the Party Central Committee at the Mid-term National Conference of the Party], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 2 (February 1994): 7-26, here p. 14.

the elevation of modernization into the rank of state objective was neutralized by the elevation of two militant anti-imperialists into the all-powerful Politburo.

The Mid-term Conference opened a new ground for the battle between modernizers and anti-imperialists. The designation of industrialization and modernization as the "central tasks" meant that the period in which stabilization, above all keeping political stability, was the "immediate task" was over. Vietnam's ideological life in 1994 witnessed a resurgence of the grand strategy of modernization, which put the anti-imperialist camp back into the defensive. While modernizers elaborated on the issues of industrialization and modernization, anti-imperialists counterattacked with the themes of protection of socialism and Marxism-Leninism.[56] This anti-imperialist switch

[56] For the modernizers' elaborations of the issues of industrialization and modernization, see Vu Khoan, "Kinh nghiem quoc te va qua trinh cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa o nuoc ta" [International Experience and the Industrialization and Modernization in Our Country], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 3 (March 1994), pp. 3-8; Mai Huu Phuc, "May suy nghi ve qua trinh cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa o nuoc ta" [Some Thoughts on the Process of Industrialization and Modernization in Our Country], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 7 (July 1994), pp. 30-33; Do Duc Dinh, "Kinh nghiem cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa cua mot so nuoc co kha nang ap dung sang tao o Viet Nam" [Some Countries' Experience of Industrialization and Modernization That Can Be Creatively Applied in Vietnam], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 7 (July 1994), pp. 34-37, 41; Do Muoi, "Day toi mot buoc su nghiep cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa, dat nuoc vi muc tieu dan giau, nuoc manh, xa hoi cong bang, van minh" [Step Up the Cause of Industrialization and Modernization for the Purpose of Making a Rich People, a Strong Country, and an Equitable and Civilized Society] (Speech at the Seventh Plenum), *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 8 (August 1994), pp. 7-16; Nguyen Thanh Bang, "May suy nghi ve con duong hien dai hoa dat nuoc trong thoi dai ngay nay" [Some Thoughts on the Issue of Modernization of the Country in the Contemporary Era], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 8 (August 1994), pp. 17-20; Nguyen Co Thach, "De tao ra dong luc manh me cho cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa" [In Order to Create Strong Motive Force for Industrialization and Modernization], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 10 (October 1994), pp. 15-18; Nguyen Minh Khai, "Cong nghiep quoc phong trong su nghiep cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa" [Defense Industry in the Industrialization and Modernization], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 10 (October 1994), pp. 23-25; Vo Van Kiet, "Tin tuong va quyet tam, giu vung doc lap tu chu, thuc hien dan giau, nuoc manh, xa hoi cong bang, van minh" [With Trust and Resolve, Upholding Independence and Self-reliance, Realizing the Goal of a Rich People, a Strong Country, and an Equitable and Civilized Society] (Exerpt from Report at the National Assembly], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (November 1994), pp. 3-10. For the anti-imperialist counterattacks, see Le Xuan Luu, "Van de dinh huong xa hoi chu nghia" [The Issue of Socialist Orientation], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 3 (March 1994), pp. 9-12; Khong Doan Hoi, "Hieu the nao ve hoc thuyet gia tri thang du cua Mac trong dieu kien hien nay" [How to Understand Marx's Theory of Surplus in the Present Condition], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 7 (July 1994), pp. 23-25; Vu Ngoc Nhung, "Lam gi de giu vung dinh huong xa hoi chu nghia trong kinh te" [How to Uphold Socialist Orientation in Economy], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 7 (July 1994), pp. 26-29; Nguyen Duc Binh, "Khong co chuyen chu nghia Mac-Lenin sup do hay loi thoi" [Marxism-Leninism Did Not Collapse Nor Become Obsolete], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (November 1994), pp. 11-18; Truong Mau, "Di len chu nghia xa hoi la mot tat yeu khach quan" [Advance to Socialism Is an Objective Necessity], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (November 1994), pp. 19-23.

can be explained by the fact that protection of socialism and Marxism-Leninism was qualified as more cardinal than opposition to peaceful evolution.

The preparation for the Eighth Party Congress to be held in 1996 sparked a new round of dispute between anti-imperialists and modernizers. The inter-grand strategic debate now boiled down to the conflict over primacy between class and nation. Already in the November 1994 issue of the Party theoretical journal, Le Huu Nghia, a conservative professor at the Party Central School, reiterated Marxist view on class and class struggle.[57] In the May 1995 issue of the same journal, Lieutenant General Tran Xuan Truong, Director of the Political Institute of Defense, proposed a "solution of the relation between nation and class according to Ho Chi Minh Though." He observed that although the trends of peace, cooperation, and development were emerging and the roles of economy, science, and technology were increasing, but imperialism, colonialism, and exploitation continued to exist into the 21th century. Against this backdrop, Truong interpreted the national question as the struggle against the superpower—the United States—and other would-be hegemons, while the class question as the struggle against exploitation. Thus he concluded that the national and the class factors were closely intertwined in an "organic unity" and the motive force of the Vietnamese revolution was an integration of forces of the nation, the class, and the era.[58]

The modernizer's alternative to the anti-imperialist view of the primacy of class interests and class struggle was the primacy of national interests. In the late August 1995 issue of the Party theoretical journal, Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam argued that independence and sovereignty can only be retained if the national interest is "elevated to its height."[59] This was a tacit critique of the primacy of class interests, which was the linchpin of the anti-imperialist grand strategy. In close circles of the

[57] Le Huu Nghia, "Quan diem cua chu nghia Mac ve giai cap va dau tranh giai cap" [Marxist View on Class and Class Struggle], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (November 1994), pp. 36-39.
[58] Tran Xuan Truong, "Giai quyet van de quan he dan toc va giai cap theo tu tuong Ho Chi Minh" [Resolve the Problem of the Relation between Nation and Class], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 5 (May 1995), pp. 21-23, 27.
[59] Nguyen Manh Cam, "Ngoai giao Viet Nam gop phan xung dang vao su nghiep cach mang cua dan toc" [Vietnamese Foreign Policy's Worthy Contribution to the Nation's Revolutionary Cause], *Tap chi Cong san*, No, 10 (August 1995), pp. 9-15, 24, quote p. 12.

Hanoi leadership, Cam proposed the view that class struggle no longer played a role in international relations and concluded that the United States was no longer Vietnam's strategic enemy. Cam argued that the contemporary world privileged cooperation and the countries should not see each other as enemies but engage in economic competition.[60]

Cam's proposal was echoing Premier Vo Van Kiet's radical revision of the Party line. In August 9, 1995, Kiet wrote a classified letter to the Politburo, in which he outlined a new platform for the VCP.[61] Kiet's letter began with an analysis of the "complexion of the world today" and suggested fundamental changes in Vietnam's grand strategy as well as foreign, domestic and economic policies. He dismissed the incumbent—and anti-imperialist—worldview that the world was primarily characterized by the antagonistic contradiction between socialism and imperialism and proposed instead a new one that stressed the diversity of national, regional and global interests and the multipolarity of interrelations between the great powers. Kiet stated that the Vietnamese people were aspired to become rich as persons, strong as a country and equitable and civilized as a society. He went on to propose a definition of socialism that was in compliance with this national objective. Kiet also urged the Party to abolish its organizational principle of "democratic centralism" and change its banner from "national independence and socialism" into "nation and democracy."[62] This last proposal was unprecedented and very radical for a VCP Politburo member. Its substance was no less than to change the Party's communist identity.

In broader circles of the ruling elite, Kiet's and Cam's views encountered a vehement anti-imperialist attack. The same issue that published Cam's article also published an article by one of its editors with the title "The class struggle still exists." Noting that U.S. foreign policy from one president to another was a capitalist and

[60] Nguyen Chi Trung, "Thuc chat tu dai hoi dang IX tro ve truoc (tu thap ky 90 the ky 20) la van de gi?" [What Was Really the Problem in the 1990s Prior to the 9th Party Congress?], completed July 21, 2002 but remained unpublished. The author was General Secretary Le Kha Phieu's personal secretary. This document was leaked to the public in *Dien thu Cau lac bo Dan chu* [Email of the Democratic Club], No. 11 (November 2003), underground press.

[61] Four months later, Kiet's letter finally found its way to the public and was reprinted in a number of overseas Vietnamese media outlets.

[62] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo."

hegemonist response to the class struggle in the Third World, the article asserted that the class struggle was still very intense and fierce.[63] Cam was charged by anti-imperialists as holding a view conforming to the U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy.[64]

Table 4.2. **Top decision makers and their grand strategic affiliation**

Anti-imperialists	Nguyen Van Linh	General Secretary, 1986-1991
	Le Duc Anh	Defense Minister, 1987-1992
		State President, 1992-1997
	Do Muoi	Prime Minister, 1988-1991
		General Secretary, 1991-1997
	Le Kha Phieu	General Secretary, 1997-2001
	Nong Duc Manh	National Assembly Chairman, 1992-2001
		General Secretary, 2001-2006
	Tran Duc Luong	State President, 1997-2006
Modernizers	Nguyen Co Thach	Foreign Minister, 1982-1991
	Vo Van Kiet	Prime Minister, 1991-1997
	Phan Van Khai	Prime Minister, 1997-2006
	Nguyen Van An	National Assembly Chairman, 2001-2006

Kiet's letter also triggered strong reactions from anti-imperialists. In a number of closed meetings among party cadres, Nguyen Ha Phan, who headed the Central Committee Economics Department, branded Kiet's views a "deviation from socialism." Phan was the anti-imperialist candidate to replace Kiet as government's head at the Eighth Congress. Anti-imperialists in the Defense Ministry also circulated among high-ranking officials a document entitled *American Strategy to Transform Vietnam after the Normalization of Vietnam-U.S. Relations* to charge Kiet, indirectly though, of playing into the hands of the hostile forces, or "peaceful self-evolution." The document argued that Vietnam's opening up and integration to the capitalist world was in full conformity with a clever U.S. strategy of transforming Vietnam into a noncommunist, U.S.-friendly

[63] Vu Hien, "Van con do cuoc dau tranh giai cap" [The Class Struggle Still Exists], *Tap chi Cong san*, No, 10 (August 1995), pp. 45-48.
[64] Trung, "What Was Really the Problem."

and anti-Chinese state by encouraging intra-party opposition and by means of foreign investment as well as "friendly diplomacy."[65]

According to Nguyen Chi Trung, the proposals of Kiet and Cam were brought to discussion in a series of Politburo meetings from October 10, 1995 until the next week. Here, they gained the support of Vu Oanh, who, in Trung's words, "wanted to abandon socialism."[66] The discussion was essentially a dispute between Kiet and Le Kha Phieu, then head of the Army's General Political Directorate. At the meetings, according to Trung's report, President Le Duc Anh supported Phieu's opinion, while General Secretary Do Muoi took a neutral stance. The discussion was closed without reaching a final conclusion.[67] However, the radical changes proposed by Premier Kiet met with much opposition from the Party's conservatives. Kiet was charged by former General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh, who acted now as Senior Advisor to the Central Committee, of being both Vietnam's Gorbachev and most corrupted official. Another disadvantage to the modernizers was that the Draft Political Report to the Party Congress was authored by Permanent Secretary and chief ideologue Dao Duy Tung and Nguyen Ha Phan, the two anti-imperialist candidates for the posts of General Secretary and Prime Minister.[68]

The modernizers' counterattack was, then, focused on persons, not ideology. At one of the last plena before the Eighth Congress, both Phan and Tung were, by various efforts of the modernizers, ousted from the name list for the next Central Committee. Nevertheless, the official reasons for the dismissal of Phan and Tung were not their wrong views but their wrongdoings. Phan was put under house arrest for revealing

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[65] Phong Quang, "Dang sau 2 tai lieu 'mat', mot cuoc dau tranh gay gat" [Behind Two "Secret" Documents: An Intense Struggle], *Dien Dan*, no. 48 (January 1996): 14-15; Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnamese Foreign Policy: Multilateralism and the Threat of Peaceful Evolution," in Thayer et al., *Vietnamese Foreign Policy*, pp. 1-24, here pp. 11-12.

[66] Trung, "What Was Really the Problem."

[67] Ibid.

[68] Tung's and Phan's authorship of the Draft Political Report to the Eighth Congress is revealed by their articles, which, under pseudonyms, copied and made public in advance the text of the Draft. See Phan Dang Phu [Dao Duy Tung], "Qua trinh doi moi o Viet Nam: Thanh tuu, khuyet diem va bai hoc" [The Renovation in Vietnam: Achievements, Mistakes, and Lessons], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 17 (December 1995), pp. 8-14; Nguyen Ha [Nguyen Ha Phan], "Ve phuong huong phat trien dat nuoc trong thoi ky moi" [On the Direction of National Development in the New Era], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 17 (December 1995), pp. 15-18.

information to the enemy while imprisoned during the war in the South. Tung was not nominated for the next Central Committee for lacking the necessary number of votes. Many Central Committee members charged him of hijacking the drafting process. The modernizers nominated Kiet and Director of the Institute for Ho Chi Minh Thought Dang Xuan Ky, who was former General Secretary Truong Chinh's son, for the top jobs. But a coalition of different forces was succeeded in outmaneuvering Kiet and Ky. Of the anti-imperialists' next candidates, National Assembly Chairman Nong Duc Manh refused to run for election while Le Kha Phieu, a protégé of Anh's, was deemed too inexperienced for the job. A stalemate was thus installed. The Eighth Congress was convened in July 1996 only to reappoint the incumbent ruling troika.

Although the Eighth Congress was inconclusive in finding a successor to General Secretary Do Muoi, it appointed the anti-imperialist Phieu, who was strongly backed by the Army conservatives, as Permanent Politburo Member with the tacit understanding that this job would prepare him to become the next Party chief. Related to this understanding was another one that the troika of Muoi, Anh, and Kiet would step down the next year. Thus, when the new National Assembly convened in summer 1997, President Anh and Premier Kiet were replaced. The new Premier was Phan Van Khai, a modernizer. The new President was the ideologically colorless Tran Duc Luong, who was formerly a protégé of his fellow Central Vietnamese Pham Van Dong, a Senior Adviser and a modernizer, but obtained his job essentially due to a particular circumstance. At first, Foreign Minister Cam and Defense Minister Doan Khue run for the Presidency. A modernizer, but Cam did not gain the Southern modernizers' support, because he was seen as a man from Do Muoi's circle and because he was a Central Vietnamese. Since the Southerners made the majority in the modernizer's camp, any modernizer who did not secure their support would not have the chance to have a seat in the troika. Although a man from the Army, General Doan Khue did not wholeheartedly support the cause of its big brother, General Le Duc Anh. Khue had too early revealed his ambition to replace Anh as President and turned moderate. This behavior annoyed Anh and his clique more than secured Khue sufficient support from the moderates and modernizers. As the competition between Cam and Khue was tied, a third candidate

would have a chance. In this moment came the name of Tran Duc Luong. A long-time apparatchik with some intellectual background, Luong was acceptable for the modernizers. Some sources said that Luong was a relative of Senior Adviser Dong and thus supported by the latter. But a key to Luong's success was that he was chosen by General Anh to replace him. Apparently, Anh found that if he does Luong a favor and help the latter to become his successor, he will be able to keep Luong under his control.

PAVING A MIDDLE WAY, 1998-2001

At the Fourth Plenum in December 1997, when the leadership change was overdue, the anti-imperialists were able to put Phieu in the General Secretary seat—for he had gained some experience as Permanent Politburo Member in the previous eighteen months. The selection of the arch anti-imperialist Phieu as Party chief was the latest wave in the rise of anti-imperialism after the defining date of 1989. After the Eighth Plenum in March 1990, at which the pluralist Tran Xuan Bach was excluded from the Party leadership, each time the Party elected new members into its top decision-making body, the Politburo, the anti-imperialists gained more seats.

This time the anti-imperialist surge was escorted by two major developments in the ideological setting. The first is the resurgence of the national factor. After the Eighth Congress, the modernizers launched a new campaign for "extending the all-people's greater solidarity bloc."[69] Since Prime Minister Kiet's announcement of the new opportunity and new period of development in late 1992, national pride, patriotism, and national unity ("greater national solidarity") had been identified by modernizers as the prime "driving force of Vietnamese revolution."[70] Another prime driving force recognized by modernizers was science and technology.[71] In September 1996, the Party theoretical journal published an article entitled "Greater National Solidarity Is the Force

[69] See Tran Van Dang, "Mo rong khoi dai doan ket toan dan trong cong cuoc doi moi dat nuoc" [Extend the All-people's Greater Solidarity Bloc in the Country's Renovation], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 16 (August 1996), pp. 10-13.
[70] See Kiet, "Bring Into Full Play the Good Change's Momentum," pp. 7-8.
[71] See Thach, "World in the Past Fifty Years" and Giap, "For Science and Technology to Really Become the Driving Force."

to Industrialize and Modernize the Country."[72] Its author was Vu Oanh, a former Politburo member who just stepped down at the Eighth Congress. Oanh demanded that reform, industrialization, and modernization rely on national unity as their guiding idea, resources, and driving force. Conversely, national unity must revolve around reform, industrialization, and modernization as its focal point.[73] Oanh's call for greater national solidarity must be seen in the context of Premier Kiet's and Foreign Minister Cam's advocacy of national interests as opposed to class interests. National unity was thus the modernizer's answer to both questions "Who are we" and "How to achieve our goals."

However, national unity was not the only answer of the modernizers to the latter question. The coming of age of the modernizer's second answer to this question is the other development that the arch anti-imperialist Phieu had to face. Modernizers saw in Vietnam's opening up to the world a main avenue to lift the nation from backwardness. From the time of Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, modernizers have talked about internationalization as a world trend that brings golden opportunities to the country. In the mid-1990s, the term "internationalization" was replaced by that of "globalization." In early June 1998 the Party theoretical journal published an article on "integration to the regional and the world economy." The tone of the article suggests that its author was a high-ranking leader who was writing under a pseudonym.[74] The article's main argument was that "international integration is an objective necessity." Its author saw international integration as the means to harness external resources for the modernization's purposes. The article advocated the formulation of a comprehensive strategy of international economic integration and demanded further integration of

[72] Vu Oanh, "Dai doan ket dan toc la suc manh de cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa dat nuoc" [Greater National Solidarity Is the Force That Helps to Industrialize and Modernize the Country], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 17 (September 1996), pp. 3-6.
[73] Ibid., p. 3.
[74] Probably, it is Vo Van Kiet who was the piece's author. The psydonym was Hong Lam, which meant red and blue, the colors of the former South Vietnamese branch of the VCP. Kiet was the informal leader of the Southerners in the Vietnamese ruling elite and formerly a lead figure of the Southern branch of the VCP.

Vietnam into regional and free trade organizations such as ASEAN, AFTA, APEC, ASEM, and WTO.[75]

Anti-imperialists replied to the two issues—the national factor issue and the international integration issue—with much disapproval than approval. They admitted that "the national factor was a very strong force in our country's tradition and revolution."[76] Nevertheless, they were not hesitant to add that "only from the class's perspective and a true Marxist stance can one fully realize and bring into full play the national forces."[77] Anti-imperialists could not deny the fact of globalization either. However, they took a more careful approach than modernizers and loudly protested against the negative effects of globalization and the possible loss of identity in the course of international integration. While the modernizers were proactive toward globalization, the anti-imperialist attitude was reactive.[78] While the modernizers emphasized *"hoi nhap"* (integration), the anti-imperialists gave the warning that *"hoi nhap ma khong hoa tan"* (integration but no dissolution).[79]

A highly ambitious man, Phieu was keen to resolve the most burning problems of Vietnamese politics. These problems were the wide ideological gap between modernization and anti-imperialism, which threatened the unity of the ruling party, and widespread corruption among the officials, which destroyed the effectiveness of the state and the credibility of the party.

When it comes to policy, the gap between the two grand strategies involves the determination of both the national goals and the strategic means to achieve those goals. Both camps are talking about "rich people, strong country" and socialism as the desired future of the country, but while modernizers stress "rich people, strong country" and

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[75] Hong Lam, "Hoi nhap voi kinh te khu vuc va the gioi" [Integrate to the Regional and World Economy], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (June 1998), pp. 3-11.
[76] Nguyen Duc Binh, "Xay dung Dang ve tu tuong va chinh tri" [Strengthen the Party in Ideology and Politics], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 5 (March 1999), pp. 7-12, 18, quote p. 12.
[77] Ibid.
[78] For anti-imperialist views of globalization, see Tran Van Giau, "Nhin ve the ky XX va nhin sang the ky XXI" [Hindsight to the 20th Century and Foresight to the 21st Century], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 19 (October 1999), pp. 15-18); To Huy Rua, "Ban them ve toan cau hoa" [Additional Discussion on Globalization], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 21 (November 1999), pp.11-16.
[79] Vu Hien, "Nhan thuc ve thoi dai hien nay" [Cognition of the Contemporary Era], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 14 (July 1996), pp. 52-55.

pay lip service to socialism, anti-imperialists do the contrary. My survey of the anti-imperialist writings reveals that for them socialism was inevitable while "rich people, strong country" was neglectable. The gap between the two grand strategies has its roots in their different views of the world and different perceptions of the self. Modernizers see the world in terms of nations and regard themselves as sons and daughters of the Vietnamese nation. Anti-imperialists see the world primarily as a struggle between socialism and imperialism and regard themselves as belonging to the worldwide community of anti-U.S. forces. But as a state-sponsored survey on the changes in value system of the Vietnamese revealed in 1996, the contemporary Vietnamese valued national interests higher than international interests.[80] In Vietnamese Communist jargon, the latter refers either narrowly to the proletarians or broadly to the world's anti-imperialist forces. Thus anti-imperialists knew that they would lose popular support to the modernizers.

Anti-imperialist in instinct but opportunist in calculation, Phieu chose to stay firm in anti-imperialist goals while seeking a way to raise popular support for his regime when it comes to the means to achieve those goals. After taking office, Phieu promised to reach out to the larger populace. Although Phieu failed to achieve national unity, his regime created an atmosphere, which encouraged some move toward the national. Phieu's concern about popular support for his regime was one part of his broader concern about good governance. A life-long Army political commissar, who was born to a peasant family and received little modern education, Phieu routinely resorted to popular Confucianism when it came to governance. Thus instead of promoting rule of law and transparency as liberal intellectuals would suggest, Phieu urged to heighten the ethical qualification of the cadres.

In August 1998, the Party theoretical journal published an article which discussed the changes in value system of Vietnamese society and the ways to heighten the ethical qualification of the cadres. Its authors were Nguyen Chi My, then Deputy Head of the Propaganda Department in the Hanoi Municipal Party Organization, and

[80] Pham Minh Hac, "Van de con nguoi trong su nghiep cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa dat nuoc" [The Human Issue in the Country's Industrialization and Modernization], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 13 (July 1996), pp. 49-53.

Nguyen The Kiet, a lecturer in the Party Central School. My and Kiet claimed that among the traditional ethical values in Vietnamese society, patriotism was the red thread going through the entire Vietnamese ideological and ethical systems. As they wrote, "it was the most basic, most central, most overriding, and highest value."[81]

In the next issue, the same journal published an article by the conservative Tran Van Giau on "the Vietnamese patriotic ideology."[82] Two months later, a third article by Nguyen Viet Thao, a lecturer in the Party Central School, appeared in the journal, discussing the class and national problems in the contemporary world. Thao admitted that the struggle for national interests and the trend of multipolarity were the dominant features of international relations in the post-Soviet era. However, he argued that the class struggle between socialism and capitalism still existed. As Thao asserted, "it still determines the nature and shapes the political orientation of relations among countries, especially between the countries with antagonistic regimes and ideologies."[83]

If these articles were part of a concerted act, they would indicate a strategic adjustment in the anti-imperialist camp, which also involved some moderates. While holding on their workers' class identity and Marxist-Leninist ideology on the international stage, they nevertheless turned to patriotism in the domestic sphere. Yet this adjustment appeared to be a test of the waters rather than a resolute change. In the next years, things evolved into a real bifurcation that contracted the anti-imperialist camp.

In the early March 1999 issue of the Party theoretical journal, Party chief ideologue Nguyen Duc Binh launched an attack against "a form of eclecticism, which is essentially a deviation from Marxism."[84] This eclecticism demanded the appreciation of other schools of thought beside Marxism-Leninism and warned against dogmatism.

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[81] Nguyen Chi My and Nguyen The Kiet, "Su bien doi cua thang gia tri dao duc trong xa hoi ta hien nay va viec nang cao pham chat dao duc cua can bo" [The Changes in the Ethical Value System in the Contemporary Vietnamese Society and the Elevation of the Cadres' Ethical Qualification], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 15 (August 1998), pp. 26-28, 59, quote p. 27.

[82] Tran Van Giau, "He tu tuong yeu nuoc Viet Nam" [The Vietnamese Patriotic Ideology], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 16 (August 1998), pp. 10-14.

[83] Nguyen Viet Thao, "Ve dac diem cua van de giai cap va dan toc tren the gioi hien nay" [On the Characteristics of the Class and the National Problems in the Contemporary World], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 20 (October 1998), pp. 59-60, quote p. 60.

[84] Binh, "Strengthen the Party," p. 8.

According to Binh, "this is not wrong, but the subtext behind it is to pave the way for downplaying Marxism-Leninism and extolling the other theories."[85] As Binh revealed, these "eclectics" were those who equated the different theories, worshipped that of Alvin Toffler and Paul Samuelson's economics—a side blow at Nguyen Co Thach and the modernizers.[86] Binh also leveled heavy criticism at those who gave prominence to Ho Chi Minh Thought. For him, these people intended to downplay Marxism-Leninism, even pit Ho Chi Minh against Marx and Lenin, thus making not only a cognitive mistake but also a political one. Binh mentioned a phenomenon, which he believed was no longer purely ideological but had nearly become a political and organization issue. To this phenomenon belonged both the radical rejection of Marxism-Leninism and the refusal of the dominant role of Marxism-Leninism while still accepting the latter to a certain extent.[87] From the collapse of socialist regimes in the Soviet Union Binh drew the lesson that the deviation from and abandoning of Marxist view on class in *perestroika* as well as the adoption of the bourgeois ideology were the capitulation before imperialism that led to the latter's victory without war. Binh concluded that it was wrong to give nation primacy over class.[88]

Promptly, the next issue of the Party theoretical journal published an article by Nguyen Chi My and Nguyen Ngoc Long, which asserted that in certain historical conditions Marxist view does allow the primacy of the national over the class nature of a socialist state. Reviewing history of Vietnamese nation and revolution, the authors found that "Vietnamese history manifests itself primarily as a history of struggle for national survival, defense of national sovereignty, and defense of national cultural identity."[89] They also quoted Ho Chi Minh to support their argument. My and Long then described the particularity of the transition to socialism in Vietnam as opposed to that in other countries, particularly the former USSR. According to them, in other

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., p. 9.
[88] Ibid., p. 12.
[89] Nguyen Chi My and Nguyen Ngoc Long, "Net dac sac trong viec giai quyet moi quan he dan toc va giai cap o Viet Nam" [The Distinct Trait in the Solution of the Relation between Nation and Class in Vietnam], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 6 (March 1999), pp. 19-22.

countries the transition to socialism is about to solve the "who will vanquish whom" problem between the proletariats and the bourgeoisie, and this struggle determines the primacy of the class nature over the national nature of those countries' political systems. In Vietnam, they claimed, things were different. They wrote:

> Yet the issue of class and class struggle in our country today cannot be reduced to the struggle between the proletariats and the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes. Class struggle in the transition to socialism in Vietnam manifests itself as a struggle against the antirevolutionary forces, the enemies of national independence and socialism. Despite their small number in the population, these forces are very dangerous because they are imperialism's tools in carrying out "peaceful evolution." In the struggle in defense of the Fatherland and the revolution's achievements, the Vietnam Communist Party, the sole party representing the national interest since over half a century, continues to hold high the banner of nation. Now in the transition to socialism, the common interests of the nation still surpass the interests of the class. It is the national solidarity bloc, whose leader the VCP is, that is the guarantee of *doi moi* in the socialist orientation. In the transition to socialism the political system can only fulfill its historical task if it is the vivid manifestation of national unity and solidarity, a tool for maximizing the strength of the nation. Of course, this national solidarity bloc relies on the firm basis of the coalition of the workers, the peasants, and the working strata. The fundament of national interests is the basic interests of the working classes and strata.

My and Long claimed that "the most important and central task of the Vietnamese people and political system in the transition to socialism is to build of a society in with the people are rich and the country is strong." Citing the Party Program, the authors stressed that in order to achieve this goal the key and a long-term task was to "radically change the socioeconomic underdevelopment." This, according to them, was about the

survival of the nation. My and Long stated that the threats of further lagging behind the modern world in economic terms was one of the biggest threats and failure to overcome it would lead to other dangers, including political instability. They asserted:

> Class issues such as struggle against the danger of "peaceful evolution," opposition to spontaneous capitalist development, building a new class structure for the society, correct settlement of the relations of interests between the classes and social strata, etc. are naturally complex problems and of utmost importance. Yet one cannot separate those issues from the central task, which are economic reform, consistent implementation of the policy of developing a multisector economy in the socialist orientation, industrialization, and modernization. A socialist Vietnam must be a Vietnam in which the people are rich, the country is strong, and society is just and civilized. Conversely, the only alternative for building a Vietnam in which the people are rich, the country is strong, and society is just and civilized is to build socialism after a correct "model."[90]

This argument shows that the authors relegated the anti-imperialist objectives, including class struggle and opposition to peaceful revolution, to a secondary status, while attaching higher priority to the modernizationist goals. As quoted above, My's and Long's article reveals striking similarity to Kiet's letter to the Politburo. The two were also in full agreement with the leading modernizer Kiet when they asserted, "leading the nation and the political system, the working class must raise the banner of nation." This, according to My and Long, is both a lesson of Vietnamese revolution and a strong tendency of the era. As they noted, "ruling parties which have underemphasized the national question all received difficulties, even political and economic failures."[91] They concluded:

[90] Ibid., p. 21.
[91] Ibid., p. 22.

> Recognizing the primacy of the national over the class factor, we can obtain a correct view on very basic issues such as the determination of the revolution's targets [the enemies], the determination and assemblage of revolutionary forces [alliance building] in constructing a socioeconomic strategy, which is in compliance with the conditions of the nation and the era.[92]

Touching on fundamental and sensitive issues and contesting the orthodox view, My's and Long's article must have been backed by a powerful force in the top leadership. Some sources trace My's connection first to his immediate boss Nguyen Phu Trong, who was head of the Hanoi Municipal Party Organization, and then to General Secretary Le Kha Phieu. Trong was a moderate by conviction, not by expediency. Despite having defending ultra anti-imperialist positions prior to taking office as Party chief, Phieu was seeking a middle way that would bridge the two grand strategies of anti-imperialism and modernization. This would be a way out of the crisis of anti-imperialism as a fashionable grand strategy but not a way in to the Western and capitalist future anticipated by modernization.

Unlike the modernizers, whose pet topics did not include protection of national identity, My and Long enthusiastically called for defense of national cultural identity, saying that "loss of national identity is equal to loss of everything." A difference between the modernizers and these neopatriotists lay in their divergent attitudes toward things modern and international. While modernizers emphasized modernization and international integration, neopatriotists warned against losing cultural identity in the course of opening up to the world.[93]

In July 1999, the anti-imperialist Quang Can re-raised the topic of nation-class relationship. He started from three premises. The first was that the Vietnamese workers' class had, through the VCP and since its very foundation, held on the banner of nation and "become the nation." The second was that in colonial Vietnam, the Vietnamese

[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.

bourgeoisie were also oppressed by imperialism. Nowadays, the newly emerging Vietnamese bourgeois class played a positive role in the reform and transition to socialism. Can's third premise was that Marx did not anticipate the reality in Vietnam. It was Ho Chi Minh who creatively applied Marxism in Vietnam and the advance to socialism in Vietnam had to pass through the national path.[94] Based on these premises, Can argued that socialism was impossible without national independence and inseparable from national independence. He went on to discuss the salient problems in relations between nations and within the nation. Can defined the situation in international relations as imperialism trying to eliminate socialism and impose neocolonialism on the nations. In such a situation the basic problem was, thus Can, between national independence and socialism on one side and imperialism and capitalism on the other. The anti-imperialist Can did, however, incorporate the modernizer's view when discussing the basic problem within the Vietnamese nation. For Can, the most basic domestic problem was how to strongly boost the forces of production while creating socialist relations of production. This required mobilization of the entire nation, which meant that even the national bourgeoisie must be drawn into the VCP-led coalition. Can summarized:

> Socialist revolution in Vietnam is above all a national issue, both in the sense that one must mobilize the strength of the entire nation to advance to socialism and in the sense that one must safeguard national independence in political, economic, and cultural matters in international relations.[95]

Like My and Long, Can also urged the Party to hold high the banner of nation. While talking about combining national independence and socialism, Can emphasized national independence as the objective number one, the basic and indispensable condition for a successful building of socialism. In conclusion, he argued that emphasizing nation in its

[94] Quang Can, "Lai ban ve quan he dan toc va giai cap" [Rediscussing the Nation-Class Relationship], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 13 (July 1999), pp. 20-21, 27, here p. 20.
[95] Ibid., p. 21.

relation with class was in agreement with Ho Chi Minh Thought and the reality of Vietnamese revolution and doi moi.[96]

In the early November 1999 issue of the Party theoretical journal, Can elaborated his view on Ho Chi Minh Thought and the emphasis of nation. He argued that for Ho Chi Minh, nation and class were a union, in which nation was first and foremost, nevertheless it was not nationalism but nation in the stance of the workers' class, nation based on the coalition of the workers, the peasants, and the intellectuals, and nation bound to the international.[97]

In May 2000, Can took another step in the middle path between anti-imperialism and modernization when he adopted Toffler's three-civilization view of history in an article on Ho Chi Minh's political thought. In this article, he asserted a "new thinking on the working class [which] reflects correctly the objective development of forces of production—from the industrial civilization to the information civilization."[98] Can noted that Ho Chi Minh paid permanent attention to the building and strengthening of national unity. He argued that Ho Chi Minh gave prominence to nation in its relation to class, yet this was nation on the stance of the working class, and "nationalism in Ho Chi Minh was communist-oriented nationalism."[99] Like Vo Van Kiet in his letter to the Politburo in August 1995, Can redefined socialism in terms of the nation, not the other way around. The difference between Can and Kiet lay, however, in Can's espousal of the working class and "national independence and socialism."[100]

Can's idea of Ho Chi Minh's nationalism as communist-oriented nationalism was fully embraced by General Secretary Le Kha Phieu in his speech on the 110th

[96] Ibid., p. 27.
[97] Quang Can, "Thu tim tiep mot dinh nghia ve tu tuong Ho Chi Minh" [An Attempt in Further Searching for a Definition of Ho Chi Minh Thought], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 21 (November 1999), pp. 18-19, here p. 19.
[98] Quang Can, "Tu duy chinh tri Ho Chi Minh tiep can tu goc do van hoa" [Ho Chi Minh Political Thought as Apporached from the Cultural Perspective], *Tap chi Cong san*, No.10 (May 2000), pp. 25-29, here p. 26.
[99] Ibid., p. 28.
[100] Ibid.

anniversary of Ho's birthday.[101] In the same speech, Phieu quoted Ho as saying "Nationalism is a big driving force of the country."[102] Phieu also adopted some modernizationist views of the world in his speech. His review of the world situation reflected a true modernizer's view when talking about the "speedy development of the modern scientific-technological revolution," the "transition to the intelligence civilization," and the advent of a "new socioeconomic era, the era of global knowledge economy and information society." However, Phieu still revealed his anti-imperialist instinct when talking about globalization, the worldwide class and national struggle, and other conflicts in the world.[103]

The same issue of the Party theoretical journal that published Phieu's speech also published an article by Nguyen Duc Binh, which reveals a subtle yet fundamental discord between the Party chief and the Party's chief ideologue. While Phieu maintained that communist-oriented nationalism was Ho Chi Minh's biggest contribution to Marxism-Leninism and the world's revolutionary movement, Binh asserted that Marxism-Leninism was the most central, the "most decisive," root of Ho Chi Minh Thought.[104] On the surface, the discord lay in the two men's different emphases in their descriptions of the relation between Ho Chi Minh Thought and Marxism-Leninism. But at a deeper level, it was a fundamental conflict between two strategies. Binh represented those anti-imperialists who stayed loyal to the orthodox Marxist-Leninist views. Phieu promoted those who were paving a middle way between anti-imperialism and modernization. Emphasizing nation in its relation to class and Ho Chi Minh's nationalism in the nexus of his thought and Marxism-Leninism, these middle way followers were those whom Binh called "eclectics." Again, in his article on

[101] Le Kha Phieu, "Tu tuong Ho Chi Minh soi sang con duong Dang ta va nhan dan ta tien vao the ky XXI" [Ho Chi Minh Thought Belights Our Party's and Our People's Path into the 21st Century], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (June 2000), pp. 3-10, here p. 5.
[102] Ibid., p. 4.
[103] Ibid., pp. 7-9.
[104] Cf. Phieu, "Ho Chi Minh Thought," p. 5 and Nguyen Duc Binh, "Nguon goc tu tuong Ho Chi Minh" [The Roots of Ho Chi Minh Thought], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (June 2000), pp. 11-13.

Ho Chi Minh Thought, Binh blamed those who were seeking "a certain difference, a certain contrast, between Ho Chi Minh Thought and Marxism-Leninism."[105]

As Phieu's speech has shown, the paving of a middle way between anti-imperialism and modernization includes not only the incorporation of the emphasis of national interests into anti-imperialism, but also a marriage of Marx's and Toffler's views of history. Phieu's endorsement of the "intelligence civilization" and the "new era of global knowledge economy and information society" in May 2000 was not made without a preliminary test of the waters. In June 1999, the anti-imperialist Le Huu Nghia wrote an article on "the nature and main content of our era." He described the era as marked by two distinct revolutions, one was the social revolution, whose essence was the struggle for peace, national independence, democracy, and socialism, the other was the scientific-technological revolution. According to Nghia, the interaction of these two revolutions had created two basic yet intertwined processes—the transition from capitalism to socialism and the transition from the industrial civilization to the information civilization.[106] In his conclusion, Nghia predicted that the future's socialism and communism would be based on the information civilization.[107]

Although Nghia wrote the article in his capacity as Deputy Director of the Party Central School, his view remained subject to dispute even within his own institution. In January 2000, Nguyen Tinh Gia, a lecturer at the same school, launched an attack on Toffler's three-civilization approach to history in the same journal that published Nghia's article. Gia imputed the collapse of socialist regimes in the former USSR and Eastern Europe to the adoption of Toffler's view by communists, and reaffirmed that Marxism-Leninism was scientific, thoroughly, and revolutionary.[108]

Apparently, Gia was siding with Binh in the attack on middle way followers, or whom Binh labeled "eclectics." But the middle way continued to attract more anti-imperialists. In July 2000, the Party theoretical journal published an article by

[105] Binh, "Roots of Ho Chi Minh Thought," p. 24.
[106] Le Huu Nghia, "Ve tinh chat va noi dung chu yeu cua thoi dai chung ta" [On the Nature and Main Content of Our Era], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (June 1999), pp. 20-22.
[107] Ibid., p. 22.
[108] Nguyen Tinh Gia, "Cach tiep can lich su bang cac nen van minh" [The Civilization Approach to History], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 1 (January 2000), pp. 23-25.

Lieutenant General Tran Xuan Truong, Director of the Political Institute of Defense, in which he adopted the three-civilization approach to history. As Truong wrote, "The advanced capitalist countries have progressed from the agricultural civilization through the industrial civilization to the intelligence civilization. This is the universal path of mankind's forces of production."[109] Viewing history this way, Truong not only came to disharmony with orthodox Marxist-Leninists who claimed exclusive truth for Marx's five-formation approach to history, but he also refused what he himself had asserted five years before. In July 1995, Truong wrote an article in the Party theoretical journal to criticize Alvin Toffler. Admitting the existence of a new era in human history, which was variously named "post-industrial civilization," "informational civilization", or "intelligence civilization," Truong nevertheless leveled heavy criticism at Toffler's worldview. He claimed that Toffler's worldview was an opposition to Marxism regarding the most essential issue—the historical evolution of humankind. As Truong noted, "Toffler's followers described their master's ideas as a new worldview, an approach to history as successive civilizations, as opposed to Marx's approach to history as successive socioeconomic formations, which they regard as obsolete."[110] Truong said that he did not agree with Toffler's "waves of civilizations" worldview because this view refused the role of "class struggle, national struggle, and the struggle between the oppressed-exploited and the oppressor-exploiter."[111] According to Truong, the "waves of civilizations" approach was an attempt to converge socialism and capitalism, which was unacceptable.[112]

The surge of the middle way culminated in two articles by Quang Can and Nguyen Chi My, both were published in the second half of 2000, or the last stage of the preparation for the Ninth Party Congress. Can's article repeatedly requested the Party to hold fast and raise the banner of nation. Turning away from the orthodox thesis of four

[109] Tran Xuan Truong, "May van de kinh te trong thoi ky qua do len chu nghia xa hoi – cai pho bien va cai dac thu" [Some Economic Problems in the Transition to Socialism: The Universal and the Particular], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 14 (July 2000), pp. 25-27, 36, quote p. 27.
[110] Tran Xuan Truong, "Tuong lai duoi con mat nha tuong lai hoc An-vin To-phlo" [The Future in the Eyes of the Futurist Alvin Toffler], part 1, *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 7 (July 1995), pp. 14-19.
[111] Ibid., p. 19.
[112] Tran Xuan Truong, "Tuong lai duoi con mat nha tuong lai hoc An-vin To-phlo" [The Future in the Eyes of the Futurist Alvin Toffler], part 2, *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 8 (July 1995), pp. 21-26.

contradictions, Can claimed that in the transition to socialism in Vietnam, there were three basic contradictions, namely, national independence vs. imperialism, socialism vs. capitalism, and backwardness-poverty vs. progress-modernity. He went so far as to identify the contradiction between backwardness-poverty and progress-modernity as the most basic of the three.[113]

My's article tried to justify the necessity of an ideology of national unity. He argued that the sustainable development of the strategy of greater national solidarity needed an ideology to rest upon. My remarked that the ideology of greater national solidarity in Vietnamese tradition had been patriotism and the new patriotism, which was the fundament of Vietnamese greater national solidarity, was what he called "revolutionary patriotism." This term is My's coinage. The Vietnamese communist vocabulary usually says "socialist patriotism," not "revolutionary patriotism." At another place in his article, My also deviated from the standard Vietnamese communist vocabulary when he wrote that patriotism was the red thread running through "the cause of national solidarity." The Vietnamese communist vocabulary usually says "the cause of national liberation," not "the cause of national solidarity." For My, patriotism was not a tactical tool but a strategic objective. As he wrote, "the revolution's tasks can vary from period to period, but the purposes 'for the country and for the people', 'all for the country's independence and freedom and the people's happiness' are never changed."[114] My's middle way is revealed more clearly in his formulation of the national aspiration. As he asserted, "National independence and a rich people, a strong country, a just and civilized society are what we are aspiring to and also what will test the patriotic firmness of all Vietnamese in complex changes of the world."[115] After a decade of conflict between anti-imperialism and modernization, "national independence" became fixed as an anti-imperialist codeword for opposition to U.S. imperialism and Westernization, while "a rich people, a strong country, a just and civilized society" was

[113] Can, "Further Recognition," esp. p. 23.
[114] Nguyen Chi My, "Ve van de y thuc he cua dai doan ket dan toc o Viet Nam" [On the Issue of the Ideology of Greater National Solidarity in Vietnam], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 22 (November 2000), pp. 35-37, quote p. 36.
[115] Ibid.

always the expression of the modernizer's goals. My's deviation from orthodox anti-imperialism is manifest in his attempt to redefine socialism. Thus, he gave the term "socialist orientation" the eclectic content of "upholding national independence and advancing to a rich people, a strong country, a just and civilized society."[116]

The Party chief ideologue's anger at "eclectics" and his contradiction against the Party's supreme leader were signs of a deep split within the anti-imperialist camp. Although Nguyen Chi My was a moderate, Le Kha Phieu, Quang Can, Tran Xuan Truong, and Le Huu Nghia had been ardent anti-imperialists before becoming middle way followers. The disputes between Binh et al. on one side and Phieu et al. on the other indicate a widening cleavage within the anti-imperialist camp, a cleavage which cut across the top echelons of Vietnamese leadership and ran deep into worldview, state ambition, and strategy. The anti-imperialists-turned-middle-way-followers parted company with orthodox anti-imperialists by incorporating the modernizer's worldview, ambition, and strategy in their body of thought and balancing them with orthodox anti-imperialist worldview, ambition, and strategic approaches.

The emergence of this middle way was a response to the need of finding solution to the double problems posed by the two grand strategies of anti-imperialism and modernization. In the early October 1995 issue of the Party theoretical journal, an article by Vo Thu Phuong, one of the journal's foreign policy editors and a modernizer, praised—much to the pleasure of the modernizers—the achievements of Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy but described this policy as reflecting the principle that denied the law of an excluded middle. Phuong maintained that there were not merely "us and the enemy" in this world, but a constant variation from one pole to the other. Looking at the world in this way, Phuong adopted the prime concerns of both anti-imperialists and modernizers and concluded that the danger of lagging behind other countries and that of dissolution into the outside world were creating a new situation which was very hard to deal with.[117]

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[116] Ibid., p.37.

[117] Vo Thu Phuong, "Y kien nho ve mot thang loi lon cua ngoai giao Viet Nam" [A Small Opinion about a Big Achievement of Vietnamese Foreign Policy], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 13 (October 1995), pp. 49-52.

The middle way proposed by Nguyen Chi My, Quang Can, and others was an attempt to break out from the tug-of-war between the two major elite grand strategies but also an attempt to adapt the ruling anti-imperialist grand strategy to reality. As Quang Can explained why anti-imperialists should turn to the nation rather than stick to the class, "Without national independence, we will have neither land and nor people to build socialism. The Party must continue to hold high the banner of nation and keep the national banner not to fall into the hand of others."[118]

As the Party's chief, Le Kha Phieu shared the same concern and, as an anti-imperialist, he adopted the same view. While continuing to envision international relations through the looking glass of anti-imperialism, Phieu did nevertheless embrace what Nguyen Duc Binh labeled "eclecticism" in domestic affairs. Phieu's endorsement of the middle way was motivated by his personal ambition to cement his position as the supreme leader of Vietnam.

As Phieu was elected General Secretary of the VCP, the former troika of Muoi, Anh, and Kiet were appointed Senior Advisers to the Central Committee. In their new positions, they continued to be invited to attend every Politburo session and Central Committee meeting, where they could raise their voices and witness happenings. Because the three possessed the largest power bases among all VCP leading persons, their respective clout was cast over Vietnamese policymaking even after the leadership change.

An ambitious leader, Phieu was keen to find a way out from the shadow of the Advisors. The existence of two large camps within the Party and the principle of collective leadership put Phieu in a delicate situation. Now the arch anti-imperialist had to play the moderator role between the two camps if he did not want to lose his seat. Although his instinct and an essential part of his worldview remained anti-imperialist, Phieu tried to build his own power base with people, who were not necessarily adherents of anti-imperialism.[119] For example, one of Phieu's protégés was Foreign

[118] Can, "Rediscussing," p. 27.
[119] For Phieu's worldview, see his speech at the 70th anniversary of the VCP, "Dang Cong san Viet Nam mai mai vi dan, vi nuoc, thuy chung voi be ban" [The Vietnam Communist Party Is Forever Devoted to the People and the Country and Loyal to the Friends], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 4 (February 2000): 3-10.

Minister Nguyen Dy Nien, who was a very cautious modernizer. Moreover, Phieu was bent on curbing the power of the Advisors. Thus, he got in serious conflict with the latter. At the end of a power struggle between Phieu and his former protégés, Muoi and Anh, the Advisors managed to unseat Phieu at the Ninth Party Congress in April 2001.

EATING THE POTLUCK, 2001-2005

The end of the Phieu era removed the political backing for the middle way elaborated by Quang Can and Nguyen Chi My. Phieu's attempt to elevate some sort of nationalism—Can's "communist-oriented nationalism" and My's "revolutionary patriotism"—to the state level was aborted. Right after the Ninth Congress, Nguyen Khoa Diem, the new supervisor of the communications field, blamed "narrow nationalist mentality" in the Party theoretical journal.[120]

However, the Phieu era did not remain without legacy. Many anti-imperialists have adopted the middle way's concept on the driving force of Vietnamese revolution and its approach to history. Thus, the thesis of greater national solidarity as a central driving force and the thesis of a transition from the industrial to the intelligence or information civilization as a major content of the era are widely accepted and incorporated into the new orthodoxy.

An example for anti-imperialist adoption of the former thesis is the arch anti-imperialist Le Xuan Luu's article on "class struggle, national struggle, and all-people's solidarity are the basic driving forces of Vietnamese revolution." A Lieutenant General, Luu was also a leading ideologue of the anti-imperialist camp. He claimed that although there were many new things in the contemporary era but these new things had not changed the nature of imperialism and the content of the era. Nevertheless, he took integration and cooperation with the capitalist world for granted and argued that

[120] Nguyen Khoa Diem, "Day manh cong tac tu tuong-van hoa gop phan thuc hien thang loi Nghi quyet Dai hoi IX cua Dang" [Intensify the Ideology-Culture Work to Contribute to the Successful Implementation of the Ninth Party Congress Resolution], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 11 (June 2001), pp. 7-9, here p. 9.

effective integration and cooperation required the mobilization of the entire people.[121] The new General Secretary Nong Duc Manh also embraced the idea of greater national solidarity. As he said, "Greater national solidarity not only is a big current issue in the present day but stays forever the basic and long-term issue of Vietnamese revolution, national longevity, and development." Quoting Ho Chi Minh's famous slogan "solidarity, solidarity, greater solidarity, victory, victory, greater victory" (literally, the word is "success," not "victory"), Manh asserted that this slogan "forever stays the maxim and guide for all activities of the Vietnam Communist Party."[122]

In January 2003, the Party theoretical journal published an article by Tran Huu Tien on "the characteristics of the contemporary world." The author was one of the leading ideologues in the Party Central School and a contributor to the state-level research project on "The Major Characteristics, Major Trends of the World and Prospects in the First Two Decades of the 21st Century," a project led by Nguyen Duc Binh. In that article, Tien asserts that the contemporary era has two major contents, one is the transition from capitalism to socialism, the other the modern scientific-technological revolution. This realization allows him to identify the contemporary era as the "post-industrial era," or the "era of information society," or the "era of knowledge economy."[123]

The Phieu era not only helped to promote the modernizers' theory of the content of the era into an equal footing with that of orthodox Marxism-Leninism. It also contributed to the turn of the tide of battle between the two grand strategies with regard to the question "Whose interests do we serve?" While modernizers prefer national interests, anti-imperialists privilege class interests, which in plain English means the interests of the regime as opposed to those of the nation and the country. Between 1990 and 1998, public discourse was dominated by proponents of class struggle and class

[121] Le Xuan Luu, "Dau tranh giai cap, dau tranh dan toc, doan ket toan dan la nhung dong luc co ban cua cach mang Viet Nam" [Class Struggle, National Struggle, and All-people's Solidarity Are the Basic Driving Forces of Vietnamese Revolution], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 19 (October 2001), pp. 34-37.
[122] Nong Duc Manh, "Thuc hien dai doan ket dan toc la trach nhiem cua ca he thong chinh tri va toan xa hoi" [Realizing Greater National Solidarity Is the Responsibility of Both the Political System and the Entire Society], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 24 (December 2001), pp. 6-9, quote p. 9.
[123] Tran Huu Tien, "Ve nhung dac diem cua the gioi duong dai" [On the Characteristics of the Contemporary World], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 1+2 (January 2003), pp. 103-107, quote p. 104.

interest. From late 1998, with the emergence of neopatriotism and neonationalism ("communist-oriented nationalism") the tide of battle began to reverse. As a result, in the subsequent years, preferring the national interest was no longer dangerous. Thus, in January 2003, the extremely cautious Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien, who had sung along the anti-imperialist chorus even in 2001 when asserting the era's fundamental contradiction being expressed in the uncompromised struggle between independence and imperialism, noted that the countries in the world were giving highest priority to national interests and their policies were thus realistic.[124]

In the Manh era, the modernizers' worldview and self-perception became part of the new orthodoxy, which at the same time retains anti-imperialist core concepts and attitudes. Increasingly, everyone can talk with his or her real voice. However, bold and novel ideas are rare, while reiterating the self-contradictory new orthodoxy is a routine. The landscape looks not like "a hundred flowers blooming" but like "everybody eating the potluck."

The potluck includes both "national independence" and "international integration," both "socialism" and "rich people, strong country." It also includes "democracy," as the Ninth Congress changed the slogan to "a rich people, a strong country, and a just, democratic, and civilized society." This inclusion of democracy as a state goal resulted from the efforts of the modernizers, not of the middle way followers.

While "eating the potluck" is the general character of the Manh era, its hottest dispute revolves around the issue of globalization. The two grand strategies provide two contending views, each of which shows a different attitude toward globalization and prefers a different approach to international integration. Both camps agree that globalization is a world trend and an undeniable fact, which rests on the scientific-technological revolution and the activities of market economy. However, the two camps disagree on who is controlling globalization. Modernizers tend to regard globalization as resulting from policy interaction of all nations and leading to economic

[124] Nguyen Dy Nien, "Boi canh the gioi nam 2002, thanh tuu doi ngoai va nhiem vu truoc mat cua chung ta" [The World Context in 2002 and Our Foreign Policy Achievements and Immediate Tasks], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 1+2 (January 2003), pp. 30-34, quote p. 31.

interdependence.[125] For them, globalization is uncontrollable by any nation-state.[126] Viewing the world as an aggregation of nations under capitalist-imperialist attack, anti-imperialists blame globalization as a calculated policy of the United States and other Western countries. For them, globalization is nothing less than Americanization and Westernization.[127] Different views lead to different attitudes and different approaches. Believing that globalization is irresistible, modernizers maintain a positive attitude and urge a proactive policy toward it.[128] On the contrary, anti-imperialists doubt that globalization is irresistible; they show their sympathy with the anti-globalization forces, call for taking globalization out of Western control, and prefer a delay of Vietnam's further integration to the world.[129]

Attempting to cap the anti-imperialist resistance, modernizers managed to set a deadline for Vietnam's accession to the WTO. It was announced that Vietnam's objective is to join the WTO by 2005. Beginning in 2003, as the deadline was approaching, the modernizers' campaign for international integration regained momentum. Yet the anti-imperialists persistently resisted attempts to liberalize the economy. As Vietnam refused to make more concessions, it failed to conclude an agreement with the United States on its accession to the WTO. In November 2005 Deputy Premier Vu Khoan, who was in charge of international cooperation, announced the withdrawal of the deadline as it turned out that Vietnam would not join WTO by the

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[125] Phan Doan Nam, "Mau thuan va phuong thuc giai quyet mau thuan trong quan he quoc te ngay nay" [Contradictions and Methods of Contradiction-solving in Contemporary International Relations], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 30 (October 2003), pp. 52-58.

[126] Do Trong Ba, "Toan cau hoa va chu nghia dan toc kinh te" [Globalization and Economic Nationalism], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 18 (June 2003), pp. 59-61.

[127] Tien, "Characteristics of the Contemporary World," p. 105; Pham Chi Dung, "Phan bien quan niem ve toan cau hoa kinh te" [Critique of the Concept of Economic Globalization], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 17 (June 2002), pp. 80-83; Tran Van Binh, "Thoi co va thach thuc doi voi van hoa dan toc trong xu the toan cau hoa" [Opportunities and Challenges for National Culture in Globalization], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 19 (July 2002), pp. 41-45, 64; Le Huu Nghia, "Toan cau hoa – mot so van de ly luan va thuc tien" [Globalization: Some Theoretical and Practical Issues], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 18 (June 2003), pp. 7-11.

[128] Nguyen Thi Doan, "Chu dong hon nua hoi nhap kinh te khu vuc va the gioi" [More Proactive in Economic Integration to the Region and the World], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 19 (October 2001), pp. 23-26; Nam, "Contradictions"; Ba, "Globalization"; Do Hoai Nam, "Nam chac co hoi, vuot qua thach thuc, gia nhap To chuc Thuong mai The gioi" [Grasp Fast the Opportunities, Overcome the Challenges, Join the World Trade Organization], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 34 (December 2003), pp. 3-6.

[129] Diem, "Intensify Ideology-Culture Work"; Dung, "Critique"; Nghia "Globalization"; Pham Dinh Nghiem, "Phong trao chong toan cau hoa" [The Anti-globalization Movement], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 30 (October 2003), pp. 59-63.

end of that year. As the United States was the only major country that refused to give the green light for Vietnam's accession to the WTO, Khoan echoed the anti-imperialists in their blame of the United States for Vietnam's failure.[130] Khoan's opportunistic siding with the anti-imperialists indicates that the balance of power is still tilted toward the anti-imperialists.

However, further developments in the subsequent months show a volatile balance of forces between the two camps. In December 2005 and January 2006, self-critical voices that argue that the cost of staying outside the WTO outweighs the cost of joining it became increasingly louder.[131] This coincided with the run-up to the Thirteenth Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee in late January 2006, when the final personnel arrangement for the Tenth Party Congress is due. During this crucial Plenum, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill and a delegation of senior U.S. lawmakers visited Vietnam. A new round of negotiation between Vietnam and the United States on Vietnam's joining of the WTO was also held in Hanoi in those days. This coincidence was unprecedented. A year before, Hanoi would deny such visits by Americans on the grounds of lacking time.

The Plenum is expected to make the final decision on who will be the next Party chief. As the nominee of the Central Organization Department for the top post is the arch-modernizer Nguyen Minh Triet, the chance for to radical change is significant.

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[130] Vu Khoan, "Chung ta khong gia nhap WTO bang moi gia" [We Do Not Join the WTO at Any Cost], *Thoi bao Kinh te Viet Nam* [Vietnam Economic Times], online edition, 4 November 2005, <http://www.vneconomy.com.vn/vie/index.php?param=article&catid=1017&id=8a8717951c0735>

[131] For the conservative voices, see Vietnamese Ambassador to the WTO Ngo Quang Xuan's interview in "Mot so nuoc dang lam kho Viet Nam" [Some Countries Are Impeding Vietnam], *Tuoi tre*, October, 22, 2005, <http://www.tuoitre.com.vn/Tianyon/Index.aspx?ArticleID=104331&ChannelID=3>. For pro-joining voices, see the opinions of Pham Chi Lan, an advisor to the Prime Minister, and former Deputy Minister of Trade Nguyen Dinh Luong, who was the Vietnamese chief negotiator for the U.S.-Vietnamese Bilateral Trade Agreement, in Viet Lam, "Cai gia cua viec lo tau" [The Price of Missing the Train], *VietNamNet*, December 16, 2005, <http://vietnamnet.vn/chinhtri/doingoai/2005/12/522845/>. See also Luong's article "Gia nhap WTO – bai toan duoc mat" [Joining the WTO: Calculating Gains and Losses], *Tuoi tre*, November 27, 2005, <http://www.tuoitre.com.vn/Tianyon/Index.aspx?ArticleID=109876&ChannelID=11>; and his interview "Chua thay ai 'mat' khi hoi nhap" [Never Seen Anybody Lost in International Integration], *Thoi bao Kinh te Saigon*, December 29. 2005, pp. 37, 43. This interview is also reprinted in the Party central newspaper's website. Especially, see former Premier Vo Van Kiet's sharp criticism of anti-imperialists in his interview "Vao WTO: Viet Nam bo lo mot nuoc co" [Entering WTO: Vietnam Has Lost a Good Chance], *Viet Nam Net*, January 4, 2006.

Yet, in the absence of a strong urgency, the Tenth Party Congress, which is due in summer 2006, is unlikely to put a modernizer in the general secretary seat. However, it is likely that the modernizers will make the majority in the new Politburo. As anti-imperialist ideology and personnel are increasingly unable to resolve the problems that are amounting, the Eleventh Party Congress or even a mid-term conference before that congress is due will likely to replace the anti-imperialist Nong Duc Manh with a modernizer. That will mark the end of an era, the era of reform by the conservatives.

Chapter Five

Strategic orientations and relations

Given the two different sets of worldview and self-perception, Vietnam's strategic orientations in the post-Cold War era do not form a coherent foreign policy. Albeit confronting the same conditions, different outlooks on the world and perceptions of the self have led to different definitions of and solutions to the problems. Thus, Vietnam's strategic orientations have evolved throughout the period on two separate but sometimes interrelated paths laid by two different lines of policy. I have called the two "anti-imperialism" and "modernization" after their overarching themes. Vietnam's grand strategy since the late 1980s is two-pronged. What is more, its two components are basically in discordance with each other.

Although the Vietnamese leadership is divided in terms of worldview and self-perception and it is more accurate to talk about the elites in plural, the majority of Vietnamese foreign policy makers appear to agree on one important point: they need political stability in order to realize their different ambitions. This practical agreement accounts for the relative stability of the ambivalence inherent in post-Cold War Vietnamese foreign policy. As a result of domestic compromise, Vietnamese foreign policy has zigzagged between the two lines.

While the preceding chapters have examined the making of Vietnam's grand strategy, this chapter looks at its foreign policy output. The chapter has three sections. In the first section I outline the logics that interlink the grand strategic premises (worldview, self-perception, and ambition) with the foreign policy implications (threat perception, geostrategic orientation, and foreign policy approaches). The second section examines the trajectory of Vietnam's foreign policy orientation since the later half of the 1980s. The last section shows how Vietnamese grand strategy determines the country's foreign relations.

THE TWO-HEADED GRAND STRATEGY

The Anti-imperialist Grand Strategy

A central attitude of the anti-imperialist grand strategy is its leaning on the past. As General Secretary Le Kha Phieu explained to U.S. President Bill Clinton, "the past is the root, the foundation, and the strength of the present and the future."[1] In the anti-imperialist memories, the past features a Vietnam that is the outpost of socialism in Southeast Asia and the spearhead of the national liberation movement worldwide, a Vietnam that has "defeated two big imperialists," including the sole superpower of today, the United States.

The anti-imperialist past-oriented ambition finds its concrete expression in a set of interrelated goals: protecting the socialist regime, preserving the national identity, and resisting the current, bad, global hegemon to ultimately create a different global hegemony, that of communism. Here the national identity is not self-organized but of a self that obtains its meaning in the conflict with its other. This other is portrayed as Western, capitalist, and imperialist. And the self is understood as Eastern or Asian, socialist, and representing national independence. As socialism is an integral part of the Vietnamese identity, argue the anti-imperialists, safeguarding the socialist regime also means protecting the national identity. Ultimately, the anti-imperialist goal is to achieve communist victory on a global scale.

The rationale for the anti-imperialist goals is that the world's development is ultimately in favor of socialism and national independence. Thus, by riding on the waves of the future the Vietnamese can advance forward in the long run and will finally be rewarded with both a high standing in the world and a guaranteed success.

However, anti-imperialism is facing an unfavorable environment in the post-Cold War era. The old socialist model has gone bankrupt. A new model is still to be found. Furthermore, the socialist superpower and the world socialist system have collapsed, making room for a global surge of the capitalist superpower and the world

[1] Phieu, "Past Is the Root."

capitalist system. Under these conditions, anti-imperialist grand strategy has assumed a reactive and defensive posture. A motto is Lenin's famous dictum of "one step back, two steps forward." In this spirit, anti-imperialists have agreed to reform the economy and even the political system, nonetheless with the reservation that the speed of reform must not be too fast to keep feasible the more important goals of preserving identity and safeguarding the regime. Thus, political stability becomes a pretext for slowing down the process of reforms and opening up to the world.

As concerns foreign affairs, anti-imperialist grand strategy pursues two major orientations. First, it focuses the combat on the main enemy, the "U.S. imperialism." The combat is, however, in the defensive. A slogan is "to enhance vigilance toward imperialism's schemes and tactics." Often, the fight is reduced to a war of words and principles. The most denouncing tone with which Vietnam's official media have commented on a foreign country's behaviors and policies was applied in statements on what they deem U.S. interventions and impositions. Particularly telling is Vietnam's anti-American stance in relation to the spy plane affair between the United States and China in 2001.[2] This anti-American stance is noteworthy because Vietnam has territorial disputes with China over the Paracel islands, which China seized from Vietnam in 1974. As the accident occurred in the vicinity of the Paracels, one has to raise the question why the Vietnamese accused the Americans of "violating Chinese sovereignty" while at the same time keeping silent about the "Chinese occupation" of the nearby Paracel islands. Another telling example is Vietnam's anti-American stance concerning the conflict between the United States and Yugoslavia in the Kosovo War.[3] This Vietnamese stance is also worth noting because Yugoslavia held an anti-Vietnamese stance regarding the Cambodia conflict and Yugoslavia has never maintained a warm relationship to Vietnam. A function of these anti-American stances is to demonstrate Vietnam's insistence on the principle of non-interference. The

[2] See, for example, the related articles in the April 6, 2001 issue of the Party central newspaper *Nhan Dan*. The Foreign Ministry spokeswoman held, however, a more neutral standpoint. See *Voice of Vietnam* web site in Vietnamese 3 April 2001, "Vietnam follows China-USA air collision affair 'with keen interest'," in BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific – Political, April 4, 2001.
[3] See, for example, related articles in the May 13, 1999 issue of *Nhan Dan*.

principle of non-interference is of utmost importance for the anti-imperialists because it is a key to achieving both the goals of identity preservation and regime protection. These Vietnamese stances also reveal that the anti-imperialists regard Vietnam's ideological conflict with the United States more fundamental than its territorial conflict with China.

The war of words and principles is coupled with Hanoi's efforts to join an international coalition against U.S. hegemony and America's attempts to establish a unipolar world order. Of Vietnam's relations with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the political-military "big powers" (*cac nuoc lon*), its relations with Russia, China, and France are, estimated by the tone of words Vietnam's media have utilized to describe exchanges between them and the other countries' behaviors, the warmest. What is distinctive in these relations is, first, that the three were deeply involved in Vietnam's history in the last century, and secondly, that they all are opposing a hegemony or unipolar world order led by the fourth country that was similarly involved in Vietnam's history, the United States. At summit meetings and in joint statements between Vietnam and the three countries, they unanimously vowed for a "fair and just international order," a tacit denial to U.S. world leadership.[4]

The second orientation in the anti-imperialist grand strategy lies in the fact that it looks at China as a model and an ally.[5] The strategy of following China provides Vietnam's leaders with twofold security. On the one hand, letting China lead would protect Vietnam from irritating its giant neighbor. On the other, staying just one step behind China in reforms and opening up to the West will spare Vietnam the costs and risks of being a pioneer. "If China succeeds in its reform, then we'll succeed," General Secretary Phieu told a Chinese delegation in 2000. "If China fails, we'll fail."[6] At a more fundamental level, the strategy of following China on its road to modernization

[4] See "Vietnamese Party General Secretary holds talks with French President," VNA Hanoi, May 22, 2000; "Joint Vietnam-China Statement for Comprehensive Cooperation," VNA, Hanoi, December 25, 2000; "Vietnam-Russia Joint Statement on Strategic Partnership," VNA, Hanoi, March 1, 2001.

[5] Other discussions on the theme include Carlyle A. Thayer, "Comrade Plus Brother: The New Sino-Vietnamese Relations," *Pacific Review*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (September 1992); idem, "Vietnam: Coping with China," in ISEAS, *Southeast Asian Affairs 1994*, Singapore; Nayan Chanda, "Friend or Foe?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 22, 2000, p. 32.

[6] Quoted in Chanda, "Friend or Foe?"

would resolve the three-cornered problem of staying in backwardness, provoking the mighty neighbor, and losing the communist and Asian identity in the course of integration into a noncommunist and Western-dominated world.

Vietnam's policy of closer ties with China may be seen as a simple reversion to "one of its historic roles, in which it is a pupil and China the teacher."[7] However, it was in fact a well-calculated strategy to pursue both personal and national ambitions at the same time. What is peculiar in it is made by two interrelated sets of perception and cognition. The first is the anti-imperialist worldview, which sees the world primarily through the prism of a basic antagonism between socialism and imperialism, the "highest stage of capitalism." Those who see the world through this prism and find themselves on the side of socialism will see the United States as a basic enemy while China as an ally and model. The second is the related anti-imperialist self-perception, which comprehends the political self chiefly from the perspective of a regime whose mission is to transform the Vietnamese nation into a socialist society. From this perspective, the interest of the regime is more urgent than that of the nation at large, and national security is attached more to regime maintenance than to territorial integrity.

The Grand Strategy of Modernization

Unlike anti-imperialism, whose attitude is leaning on the past, the grand strategy of modernization reflects the attitude of learning from the past. For the modernizers, the past is primarily a lesson for the present and the future. Here it is not triumphalism but realism that marks the attitude toward past experience. The realism overwhelms the triumphalism with a series of "buts." We won the war but lost the peace. We transformed the society and the economy into socialism but fell into a deep and severe socio-economic crisis. We struggled for national independence but remained caught in a game played primarily by the big powers. And perhaps most strikingly, we defeated the world's biggest power but lag behind the neighbors that we once looked down as Asian lackeys to that superpower, as "new-type colonies of U.S. imperialism." In fact, the

[7] Historian David G. Marr, quoted in Chanda, "Friend or Foe?"

bitter experience of economic crisis and international isolation in the 1980s are a major motive force behind the grand strategy of modernization.[8]

This experience determines the objectives in the modernization's path. In a first phase, it is to overcome the economic crisis and to break out of the international isolation. In the second phase, the objective is industrialization, stretching out (*vuon ra*)[9] to the world and surging to a high position in the international arena. In the modernizers' vision, Vietnam should become an advanced industrialized country and a regional power within a relatively short period of time. In 1989, as Vietnam still sat deeply in a total crisis, Thach voiced the dream of Vietnam becoming a developed industrial country within ten or twenty years, speedier than did the region's newly industrialized countries.[10] In 1995 then-Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet's urged to speed up reforms and opening up in order for Vietnam to "become rich as soon as possible." Thus he, too, set forth the task to "shorten the path of industrialization and modernization, as did some 'Asian dragons'."[11] Both the Eighth and Ninth Party Congresses embraced this vision and set the goal for Vietnam to become an industrial nation by 2020.[12] To give a more concrete objective, in the early 2000s, Premier Phan Van Khai set out the goal of joining OECD.[13] To get rich and become an industrial nation is not an end in itself. From the modernizer's perspective, these objectives must serve the goal of getting strong, so that the country can be able to protect its independence and autonomy.[14] In line with this vision, the interrelated goals of "a rich people and a strong country" (*dan giau nuoc manh*) is given highest priority in reforms. More than that, as Premier Vo Van Kiet urged the Party in his classified letter of 1995, the goals of "a rich people, a strong country, a just and civilized society" should be the

[8] For a discussion, see Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view."
[9] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 17.
[10] Porter, "Transformation of Vietnam's World-view," p. 12.
[11] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," pp. 18-19.
[12] "Political Report of the Eighth Party Congress," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu VIII* [Documents of the 8th National Congress], Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 1996, p. 80; "Strategy for Socio-economic Development 2001-2010," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu IX* [Documents of the 9th National Congress], Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2001, p. 148.
[13] Le Dang Doanh, "Bai noi chuyen cua Tien si Le Dang Doanh" [Talk by Doctor Le Dang Doanh], on November 2, 2004 for the research project KX-10, *Dien thu Cau lac bo Dan chu*, No. 41 (March 2005).
[14] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 18.

primary core criterion for the definition of socialism and the utmost purpose of national development, for they are "our people's aspiration."[15]

This aspiration has been translated into more visible ambitions. In the modernizer's vision, catching up or lagging behind the neighboring countries becomes a question of life or death. Here the "neighbors" mean the newly industrialized countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand. Vietnam's "imagined vicinity" is not confined to Southeast Asia but expanding to Northeast Asia. In this vicinity looms large, on the other hand, the shadow of China. The Vietnamese are taught by their millennia-long history that they must be strong to keep China peaceful to them. As a Vietnamese diplomat said, "In all of history, we have been secure from China in only two conditions. One is when China is weak and internally divided. The other is when she has been threatened by barbarians from the north."[16] Either way, the logical implication for the Vietnamese is to get strong.

According to the modernizers' estimation, Vietnam now has a great opportunity to realize that aspiration.[17] In line with the classic Chinese framework, with which traditional Vietnamese thinking shares a lion part, the opportunity is believed to exist in the present period due to a favorable conjunction of three major factors: the heavenly (*thien*, Chinese *tian*), the earthly (*dia*, Chinese *di*), and the human (*nhan*, Chinese *ren*). In the current period, estimate the Vietnamese modernizers, the international context – the heavenly factor – promises a long détente and the replacement of armed conflict by economic development.[18] Furthermore, Vietnam is favored by its location within the boom region of the Asia-Pacific (the earthly factor).[19] Finally, Vietnam is endowed with a population that is young, educated and industrious (the human factor). And to grasp

[15] Ibid., p. 17.
[16] Quoted in Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 135.
[17] E.g., Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo." Kiet was Prime Minister from 1991 to 1997. Thach, *World in the Past Fifty Years*, pp. 106-107. Thach was Foreign Minister from 1980 to 1991 and the architect of the paradigm shift in Vietnam's foreign policy in the late 1980s.
[18] E.g., Thach, *World in the Past Fifty Years*; Trung, "Golden Opportunity."
[19] E.g., Vu Khoan, "Viet Nam va tuong lai chau A" [Vietnam and the Future of Asia], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 13 (July 2000), excerpt from a speech at the international conference on "The Future of Asia," 8-9 June 2000, Tokyo. Khoan had been a long-serving Deputy Foreign Minister until early 2000, when he was appointed Trade Minister. At the Ninth Congress in early 2001, Khoan became Party Central Secretary in charge of foreign affairs.

the opportunity is to take advantage of the factors available. The existence of the three favorable factors is recognized by the anti-imperialists, too. However, as their prime concern is with the survival of the socialist regime, the anti-imperialists focus their attention on the dangers of "peaceful revolution" and "deviation from the socialist path" rather than insist on taking advantage of what the modernizers recognize as a "golden opportunity."

Table 5.1. **The Two Grand Strategies**

		Anti-imperialism	***Modernization***
Worldview		• Fundamental conflict between socialism and imperialism led by the United States • Transition from capitalism to socialism • Primacy of class (ideology) interest	• Multipolarity • Interdependence - Globalization - Regional integration • Scientific-technological revolution • Primacy of national interest
Self-perception		• Regime > nation	• Nation > regime
Ambition	*Ultimate*	• Communist victory on a global scale	• A rich, strong, democratic, and civilized nation
	Immediate	• Regime protection	• Industrialization
Foreign policy orientation		• Alliance with China • Opposition to the United States	• Close ties with the West • Integration to Asia-Pacific and ASEAN • Strategic partnership with the great powers

With its emphasis on opportunity, the grand strategy of modernization assumes a proactive posture toward its operational environment. Domestically, it calls on "bringing into full play the internal strength." This slogan became popular in the wake of the 1997 Asian crisis. In 2001 the Ninth Party Congress embraced a policy of promoting the national strength and symbolized the endorsement by putting the slogan

at the first place in its Political Report's title – "Let's bring into play the entire nation's strength, continue with *doi moi*, step up industrialization and modernization, build and safeguard the socialist Vietnamese Fatherland."[20]

On the international plane, the modernizers pursue three major orientations. The first is to gain wide and secure access to major financial and technological resources and export markets. The second is to strengthen relations with the major powers. The third is to integrate the Vietnamese economy into the world, particularly the growth region of Asia-Pacific. The three made up the core of a paradigm shift in Vietnam's strategic orientations, which was endorsed in the Politburo Resolution 13 of May 1988. The new orientations are later known as "diversification and multi-directionalization" and "international and regional economic integration." Albeit all the three new orientations were included in Resolution 13 and carried out de facto since then, integration was not determined by a party congress as a major foreign policy task until 2001.[21]

The three new orientations are to serve an overall objective, which become not only possible but above all necessary in a new world situation following the détente between the big powers in the late 1980s. In this new situation, Vietnam faces the challenge of being left without a patron. Earlier signals of this new situation were sent with changes in Moscow's relations with its clients in the Soviet bloc. The change is known as the replacement of the Brezhnev doctrine ("limited sovereignty") with the "Sinatra doctrine," dubbed after the theme of a Frank Sinatra hit, "do it your way." The loosing of Soviet control also meant a loosing of Soviet support. Thus, the Vietnamese had to seek new anchorage in the world in case the Russians cease to be able and willing to back up Vietnam militarily, economically, diplomatically and ideologically. The "diversified and multidirectional" foreign policy and Vietnam's economic

[20] See "Political Report of the Party's 8th Central Committee at the Party's 9th National Congress," in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu IX* [Documents of the 9th National Congress], Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2001, p. 60.

[21] Cf. "Political Report of the 8th Party Congress" (Section 8, "Foreign Policy"), in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu VIII* [Documents of the 8th National Congress], Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 1996, pp. 120-121 and "Political Report of the 9th Party Congress" (Section 7, "Expanding External Relations and Active International Economic Integration"), 2001, pp. 119-120.

integration into the world are the strategic avenues to Vietnam's new world anchorage in its post-Soviet era.

World anchorage, on the other hand, is not an end in itself. It is in turn a means to achieve ambition, for it is a way to overcome the problems. For the modernizers, indeed, the three new orientations would pave the way for Vietnam to catch up with the more advanced countries in the surrounding region and to counterbalance China. First, having access to major financial and technological resources and export markets is a prerequisite for an economy to soar up. Secondly, as the Vietnamese realize that the world is interdependent in economic terms and that globalization is an "objective trend," they infer that their chances for survival lie within integration into the world.[22] Last but not least, Vietnam's strong and – given the world's multipolarity, as modernizers see it – multi-directional relations with the "big powers" and other "centers" or "poles" of the world would give the Chinese no incentive to do harm to the Vietnamese. Never officially stated since the normalization with China for reasons of "sensitivity and subtlety,"[23] but many Vietnamese officials believe the China threat must be countered by strategic ties with and military presence of other great powers and regional countries.[24] Former Deputy Foreign Minister Hoang Anh Tuan, now a senior researcher at the Institute for International Relations (the Ministry's think tank) in Hanoi, concurred with an American author that "the United States can help to deter any overly ambitious policies on the part of either China or Japan and to moderate any Sino-Japanese tension that may emerge by adopting a balancing role."[25] Tuan's views also

[22] Nguyen Mai, "Hoi nhap kinh te voi the gioi" [Economic integration into the world], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 4 (March 2000); Ho Vu, "Kinh te the gioi khi buoc vao the ky XXI va quan he kinh te doi ngoai cua Viet Nam" [The world economy at the entry to the 21st century and Vietnam's external economic relations], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 10 (May 2001); Nguyen Thuy Anh, "Chu dong hoi nhap kinh te quoc te" [Actively integrating into the international economy], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 12 (June 2001).

[23] See the hint in Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 22.

[24] See Richard K. Betts, "The Strategic Predicament," in James W. Morley and Masashi Nishihara (eds.), *Vietnam Joins the World* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p. 107 and fn. 31; Tatsumi Okabe, "Coping with China," in ibid., pp. 129-131; Donald S. Zagoria, "Joining ASEAN," in ibid., p. 156; Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations,"

[25] Hoang Anh Tuan, "Vietnam's Membership in ASEAN: Economic, Politic and Security Implications," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (December 1994), p. 268. The American author is Robert S. Ross, "China's Strategic View of Southeast Asia: A Region in Transition," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (September 1990), pp. 101-119.

reflect that of the modernizers on U.S. military presence in the region and Vietnam's membership in ASEAN:

> Clearly, active U.S. involvement as well as a continued American military presence in the region is of crucial benefit to the smaller countries in the dispute. Vietnam, for some reason, finds it hard to express openly its view on the role that the United States is playing or which Vietnam wants to see it play. But as a member of ASEAN it would be easier for Vietnam to take a common stand on this issue with other ASEAN members.[26]

In sum, Vietnam's membership in ASEAN, its efforts to reconciliation with the United States, and its policy of close ties with Japan, Western Europe, and with India are part of the twin strategies of internal buildup and external anchorage to catch up with the regional countries and to counterbalance China.

Threat Perception and Geostrategic Orientation

Conflicting foreign policy implications are drawn from the two Vietnamese grand strategies. Before examining the evolution of Vietnam's foreign policy orientation, it is apt to summarize the logical structure of the two grand strategies in comparison. Table 5.1 summarizes the two grand strategies in four basic questions.

The underlying strategic rationale of each grand strategy is closely linked with their threat perception. Both grand strategies are the Vietnamese responses to two different mortal threats, which came up in the 1980s. The first is the economic crisis that haunted the country from the late 1970s until the mid-1990s. In the mid-1980s it caused the sense of a mortal threat, which forced the Vietnamese leadership to enter a comprehensive reform process. The crisis helped Vietnamese leaders to see things in a

[26] Hoang Anh Tuan, "Vietnam's Membership in ASEAN," p. 268.

new light. Much of the new views came from the Soviet Union and China.[27] According to the new worldview, the danger of a new world war is pushed back to a far future. Now the world trends are "peace and development."[28] The real threat is, however, that Vietnam was legging far behind other countries in the region in terms of economic performance and technological infrastructure. This legging-behind entails that the country does not meet the preparedness requirements against military attacks. The strategic objective is thus to get rich and strong.[29]

The second mortal threat came with the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, beginning with the end of communist rule in Poland after Solidarity won the first multi-party election in August 1989. The threat is seen in the enemy's attempts of "peaceful evolution." This prompted the strategic objective of opposing the regime's enemy, which is believed as led by the United States.

Table 5.2. **Geostrategic Orientation**

	Anti-imperialism	***Modernization***
Formula	• Anti-American coalition	• Multi-directional anchorage
Key relationships	• Enemy: U.S. • Ally: China • Friends: Russia, France	• Partners: U.S., EU, Japan, ASEAN • Opponent: China • Counterweigh: U.S.

[27] Striking similarities exist between the writings of Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, the architect of the modernizer's worldview, and those of Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping.

[28] For the Vietnamese view, see Nguyen Co Thach, "Tat ca vi hoa binh, doc lap dan toc va phat trien" [All for Peace, National Independence and Development], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 8 (August 1989): 1-8. For the Chinese view, see Deng Xiaoping, "Safeguard World Peace and Ensure Domestic Development," 29 May 1984; "Peace and Development Are the Two Outstanding Issues in the World Today," 4 March 1985, in Deng, *Fundamental Issues in Present-Day China* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987): 46-7; 97-9. The Soviet view was developed through a lengthy debate that culminated in the "New Thinking." See, for example, Vadim Medvedev, "Velikii Oktiabr i sovremennyi mir," *Kommunist*, No. 2 (January 1988), pp. 5-6, quoted in R. Craig Nation, *Black Earth and Red Star: A History of Soviet Security Policy, 1917-1991* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 296 and the discussion in Craig Nation's book, pp. 287-297.

[29] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 22.

Different threat perceptions entail different strategic objectives, which in turn imply different geostrategic orientations. The anti-imperialist formula for Vietnam's geostrategic orientation is anti-American coalition. From the anti-imperialist perspective, Vietnam's key foreign relationships can be grouped in three tiers. In the first tier, there are the United States as the strategic enemy and the People's Republic China as the strategic ally. The second tier includes Russia and France. These are, alongside with China, those great powers that resolutely oppose U.S. primacy. In the third tier, there are those non-great powers that were on Vietnam's side in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle and are critical of U.S. primacy.

The modernizers' formula for Vietnam's geostrategic orientation is multi-directional anchorage. Unlike anti-imperialism, modernization has no fixed enemy on the international plane. From the modernizers' perspective, the most important partners are those powerful and technologically advanced states, such as the United States, the core EU members, Japan, and the ASEAN countries. For proponents of modernization, American global primacy does not pose a great problem. On the contrary, Chinese preponderance in Vietnam's immediate neighborhood is much more threatening. This is because Chinese local hegemony entails encroachment on Vietnamese territories and pressure on Vietnamese politics. Modernizers are more sensitive to Chinese primacy than anti-imperialists because the former perceive themselves as the country and the nation rather than as the regime. For this reason, the Sino-Vietnamese relationship is a key relationship in the modernizers' framework, but here China plays primarily the role of a major threat. This brings the relationship with the United States one more time to the fore. From the modernizer's perspective, America should be not just the most important partner of economic cooperation but also the major counterweigh to China.

Foreign Policy Approaches

Elite discourses of foreign policy in Vietnam after the Cold War reveal four major ways of thinking international relations. Each approach is based on a distinct principle of international relations and was adopted by the Vietnamese at different time points in

history. I will call them, after their respective operational principle, the "balancing," the "deference," the "solidarity," and the "enmeshment" approaches.

The Balancing Approach

According to Kenneth Waltz, "balancing" refers to two forms of states' response to a growing or already greater power. The more visible form is external balancing, which involves building alliance with third parties on the international stage. The less apparent but more popular form is internal balancing, which means a country building up its domestic strengths to enhance its preparedness. These two forms of behavior rest on a common rationale. As Waltz has remarked, "Weakness invites control; strength tempts one to exercise it, if only for the 'good' of other people."[30] Because disparity in power generates insecurity, the way of providing for security is to establish a balance of power.

Although the realist school of international relations coined the term "balancing," the balancing strategy has been practiced since thousands of years. Since Vietnam's split from the Chinese empire in the 10th century, internal balancing has been an indispensable ingredient of Vietnamese grand strategy. External balancing is almost absent from the tradition of Sino-Vietnamese relations prior to 1978, when Hanoi entered a formal military alliance with the Soviet Union as a response to China's threat.[31] From then until the normalization of relations between Hanoi and Beijing in 1990-1991, external balancing provided the essence of Vietnam's China policy.

Balancing thinking is quite familiar to Vietnamese policy makers. The international relations textbook taught at the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, the central political training institution for senior state officials, lists balance of power analysis as one of the six major methods for a proper study of international relations.[32]

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[30] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 27.

[31] The best account of the circumstances that led to this change in Vietnam's China policy is Chanda, *Brother Enemy*.

[32] Hoc vien Chinh tri Quoc gia Ho Chi Minh, Vien Quan he Quoc te [Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy's Institute of International Relations], *Tap bai giang Quan he Quoc te* (Chuong trinh cao cap ly luan chinh tri) [Textbook of International Relations for the Advanced Political Theoretical Program]

Balancing thinking features prominently in the writings of Vietnamese foreign policy makers. In his survey of the world since the end of World War II, former Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach has painted a picture of world politics that is featured by the international balance of forces, alliances ("assemblage of forces"), and great power relations.[33]

The Deference Approach

The deference strategy has its roots in the traditional Vietnamese way of dealing with imperial China. This tradition rests on the earlier experience of over a millennium under Chinese rule and the later experience of nearly ten centuries as an autonomous kingdom neighboring China. A basic reality featured these two thousand years of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship—the unchangeable asymmetry in favor of China in terms of size and capacities.

Based on the experience of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, Brantly Womack has recently developed a theoretical elaboration of asymmetric dyads. He points out that in an asymmetric bilateral relationship the two sides nurture different patterns of attention and status sensitivities. These differences are the roots of systemic misperception and thus can lead to conflict. Systemic stability can be reached by fulfilling the minimum expectations of both sides. For the weaker, it is acknowledgement by the stronger. In return, the stronger expects deference from the weaker. Acknowledgement implies that the stronger respects the weaker side's autonomy. Deference means that the weaker pursues its interests in a manner that corresponds to the stronger side's superior status.[34]

The tradition of Vietnamese dealings with China is well alive among Vietnam's ruling elites. One of the most often recalled stories is the Vietnamese Le court's

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(Hanoi: Ly luan Chinh tri, 2004), p. 18. The other five methods are economic, historical, holistic, empirical, and class analysis.

[33] Thach, *World in the Past Fifty Years*, especially p. 62.

[34] Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception: China, Vietnam and Cambodia during the 1970s," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (June 2003), pp. 92-119, especially p. 96-99.

treatment of Ming Chinese troops after defeating them on the battleground in 1427. Instead of revenge the Vietnamese supplied their enemies with food and sent them unharmed back to China. The Vietnamese often say that military resistance and diplomatic deference are the twin characteristics of the traditional Vietnamese way of dealing with China. As expressed by the Vietnamese Party chief Le Kha Phieu's personal secretary, the rationale of Vietnam's deference to China is that "we live adjacent to a big country; we cannot afford to maintain tension with them because they are next door to us."[35] The man was using this argument to justify his boss's acceptance of China's terms in a visit to Beijing and Phieu's concessions to the latter in the Sino-Vietnamese border pacts of 1999 and 2000.

The Solidarity Approach

Vietnamese politics is dominated by the Communist Party, which from its very foundation has endorsed Marxism-Leninism. During half a century of communist rule in Vietnam, Marxism-Leninism has become the state ideology. Many of its ideas are propagated and repeated to the extent that they are taken for granted. These include Marxist-Leninist view of the world.

According to Marx, the driving force of history is class struggle.[36] Marxist-Leninists perceive the contemporary world primarily as a class struggle between forces of "socialism" and those of "imperialism." The forces of socialism have the communist countries as their core, while those of imperialism concentrate in the West. Hanoi's propaganda describes the conflict between socialism and imperialism as a "who will defeat whom" struggle.[37] This struggle requires the working class's internationalism,

[35] Nguyen Chi Trung, "Thuc chat tu dai hoi dang IX tro ve truoc (tu thap ky 90 the ky 20) la van de gi?" [What Is the Real Problem in the 1990s Prior to the 9th Party Congress?], Hanoi, 2002, disclosed in *Dien thu Cau lac bo Dan chu* [E-mail of the Democratic Club], No. 11 (November 2003).
[36] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*.
[37] For a discussion of Marxism-Leninism as Vietnam's foreign policy ideology, see Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*.

and first of all, solidarity among the socialist forces. All communists know their battle cry as packaged in the *Communist Manifesto*: "Proletarians of all countries, unite!"[38]

Solidarity among socialist forces is premised on the common fate and common interests shared by the socialists in the common struggle against their class enemies. Although the alliance of socialist forces against those of capitalism has a certain balancing ingredient, nevertheless solidarity is different from balancing. In the balancing thinking, considerations of relative capabilities are prior to the determination of enemy. In the solidarity thinking, the determination of enemy is prior to any other considerations. While a good balancing strategy requires flexibility in the determination of friend and foe, a good solidarity strategy requires fixity.

The solidarity approach informed the linchpin of Hanoi foreign policy during the Cold War. The War was and is still perceived by a large part of Vietnamese policy makers as a class and ideological conflict between "forces of national independence and socialism" and those of "capitalism and imperialism." A front fighter in this war, Hanoi experienced the alliance of its friends in the socialist states, the Third World, and the advanced capitalist countries—which it called the world's "three revolutionary currents"—as a solidarity bloc. Their support for Vietnam was understood as expression of solidarity among anti-imperialist forces. In the post-Cold War era, the same approach is based on the alleged solidarity among communist states, which are facing the threat of regime change emanating from the West. As the Vietnam Communist Party chief ideologue Nguyen Duc Binh has emphasized in a joint Sino-Vietnamese conference on ideology, the root of the strength of socialism is solidarity among the "revolutionary forces."[39]

The Enmeshment Approach

The enmeshment strategy is premised upon economic interdependence and the interlocking of political interests among state as well as non-state actors in the

[38] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*.
[39] Nguyen Duc Binh, "Doi dieu suy nghi ve van menh chu nghia xa hoi" [Some Thoughts on the Destiny of Socialism], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 13 (July 2000), pp. 7-16.

international arena. The idea traces its theoretical roots back to the Complex Interdependence school of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye.[40] The theory claims that societies are connected through multiple channels, be they interstate or transnational. These have given rise to non-state actors such as international organizations and regimes, as well as multinational corporations. At the same time, the linkages among societies have reached the stage of complex interdependence. Under these conditions the relative utility of military force declines, while economic issues become as salient as classic security issues.

The concept of interdependence was first introduced to Vietnam through Gorbachev's "new thinking" in the late 1980s. Then Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach was among the lead proponents of this outlook in Vietnam. The theory of complex interdependence also features prominently in Premier Vo Van Kiet's view of the contemporary world. In his classified letter to the Politburo on August 8, 1995, Kiet emphasized that the primary factors responsible for the dynamics of the world today are its diversity and multipolarity, which result from diverse national, regional, and global interests.[41] Recently, in an unpublicized position paper, Kiet has again counseled the Party to change its approach to Vietnam's world anchorage. Instead of seeking a certain great power to lean on, he urges, Vietnam must interlock the diverse interests of different actors into situations favorable to Vietnam. It must even create new interests for its opponents and then enmesh them in a matrix beneficial to it.[42]

Summary

The two Vietnamese grand strategies differ over what approach to international relations they prefer to apply. Anti-imperialism prefers solidarity, while modernization prefers enmeshment. However, both are instinctively based on balancing. The

[40] Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*.
[41] Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo," p. 16.
[42] Vo Van Kiet, "Dong gop y kien vao bao cao tong ket ly luan va thuc tien 20 nam doi moi" [Suggestions to the Concluding Report on Theory and Practice of 20 Years of Renewal], April 2005, disclosed in, for example, *Dan Chim Viet*, October 2, 2005, online edition <http://www.danchimviet.com/php/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=641>

modernizers' motive for getting rich and strong is internal balancing. They see in Vietnam's legging to far behind other countries in the surrounding region the central threat to national security. Solidarity is the preferred way the anti-imperialists build alliance. But this alliance is not an aim in itself. It is to serve the aim of "opposing imperialism." Solidarity is the way anti-imperialism balances against the United States. Neither the anti-imperialists nor the modernizers want the deference approach. But both are constrained by the asymmetry of power vis-à-vis China and Chinese policy to force Vietnam to return to deference. Both anti-imperialists and modernizers agree, grudgingly though, on deference to China as expediency.

EVOLUTION OF VIETNAM'S GEOPOLITICAL ORIENTATION

Since the late 1980s, no substantial innovation has been made in Vietnamese foreign policy thinking. The appraisal of world situation as well as the foreign policy directives adopted at the Ninth Congress (2001) rest on the same grounds as those approved at the Seventh (1991) and Eighth Congresses (1996). They all depict a world in which a scientific-technological revolution is vigorously unfolding, involving all corners of the world, and triggers a process of internationalization and globalization, which is a powerful world current. At the same time, they also posit the world in the transition from capitalism to socialism. This means that the "fundamental contradictions" that are caused by the activities of capitalism still exist and to resolve them, "national and class struggles" are forcefully waged. International relations are marked by both cooperation and combat in this picture. The directives determine the purpose of Vietnamese foreign policy as twofold. On the one hand, it is the maintenance of a peaceful international environment and the creation of conditions favorable for domestic socio-economic development and national defense. On the other, Vietnam should actively contribute to the "common struggle of the world's people for peace, national independence,

democracy and social progress"—the old Vietnamese code word for the fight against imperialist capitalism.[43]

To implement the above-mentioned tasks, declared Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien in a news conference that was part of the Ninth Congress, "Vietnam will continue to attach importance to respecting and developing relations of friendship and cooperation with socialist, neighboring and powerful countries." He added, "Vietnam will consolidate and expand its relations with traditional friendly, national independent and developing countries. At the same time it will diversify relations with developed countries and international and regional institutions."[44] Nien's list, in this order, reflects the ranking of priority of Vietnam's foreign relations. However, in the course of its evolution since the dawn of *doi moi*, Vietnam's geopolitical orientation has witnessed a number of shifts within this priority ranking.

Joining the World and Defending Socialism, 1988-1991

In 1987-88, Vietnam was still heavily oriented toward the USSR and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe. But Resolution 13 soon initiated a "diversification and multidirectionalization" *(da dang hoa, da phuong hoa)* of Vietnam's international orientation.[45] In 1989 Vietnam's integration to the Western-dominant world economy and Asia-Pacific yielded the first fruits. The country's exports to the non-socialist areas grew sharply from 350 million dollars in 1988 to 1,139 million dollars in 1989. In 1989 the capitalist countries also outweighed the socialist countries in Vietnam's foreign trade.[46] Vietnam's geopolitical reorientation toward the Asia-Pacific was also reflected

[43] Compare CPV, *7th National Congress*, pp. 41-43, 48-50; Communist Party of Vietnam, *VIIIth National Congress: Documents* (Hanoi: The gioi, 1996), pp. 33-35, 77-79; Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu IX* (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2001), pp. 64-66, 119-123.
[44] "Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien says Vietnam to seek to 'diversify' international ties," *Voice of Vietnam*, 20 April 2001, text web site, in Vietnamese.
[45] The terms *da dang hoa* and *da phuong hoa* first appeared at the Seventh Party Congress (1991) but the policy's origins traced back to Resolution 13. The word *da phuong* can be understood both as "multidirectional" *(da phuong vi)* and "multilateral" *(da bien)*. Judged after the spirit of the new Vietnamese foreign policy strategy, it should mean multidirectional rather than multilateral.
[46] Vu Hong Lam, "Lich su quan he Viet-Trung nhin tu goc do dai chien luoc" [History of Sino-Vietnamese Relations as Seen from the Grand Strategic Perspective], *Thoi dai Moi*, No. 2 (July 2004).

in the field of communications. In 1989 the ratio of articles related to Asia-Pacific, Southeast Asia, and capitalist countries in the region (excluding the United States) appeared in the Party theoretical journal, compared with those concerning the USSR and socialist countries in Eastern Europe was 4 to 5, while in 1988 this ratio had been 1 to 13. This indicates a sharp turn of Hanoi's attention, away from Eastern Europe to Asia-Pacific. However, this trend was halted in early 1990, apparently in reaction to the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. From then on till the end of 1991, the journal published no articles on Asia-Pacific, but devoted space primarily to condemning imperialism and America, as well as expressing solidarity with communists in Eastern Europe.

The period between 1989 and 1991 stands out as a time, when Vietnam was in search for a new geopolitical orientation. Modernizers leaned toward regional integration into the Asia-Pacific while seeking to normalize relations with the "big two"—China and America—in a balanced way. Yet anti-imperialists favored instead a "red option"—an alliance with China against the United States and the West. As Secretary-General Linh said at the April 10, 1990 meeting of the Politburo, "Vietnam and China are two socialist countries opposing imperialist plots of wiping out socialism. [The two countries] must together oppose imperialism."[47] According to then Deputy Foreign Minister Tran Quang Co, this red option gained the upper hand in the Hanoi Politburo from about March 1990.[48] Vietnam's endeavor to restore relations with China during 1990-91 was seen by the modernizers as an effort to "diversify" its international relations in the spirit of the "diversified and multidirectional" foreign policy. But the real motive that drove people like Secretary-General Linh, Defense Ministry Anh, and a majority of the Politburo members to push for a rapprochement with China was, as Anh explained in 1990, this:

For the data, see Tong cuc Thong ke [General Directorate of Statistics], *So lieu thong ke Cong hoa Xa hoi chu nghia Viet Nam 1986-1991* [Statistic Data of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1986-1991] (Hanoi: Thong ke, 1992), pp. 93-94.

[47] Co, *Memoirs,* p. 33.

[48] Ibid., pp. 30-33. Note that this time coincides with the Eighth Plenum, at which pluralism was officially rejected and its advocate Bach expelled from the Central Committee.

> The United States and the West want to exploit this opportunity [the end of the Cold War] to eliminate communism. It [the U.S.] is eliminating [communism] in Eastern Europe. It has declared the elimination of communism in the entire world. Obviously, it is the direct and dangerous enemy. We must seek [an] ally. This ally is China.[49]

The first breakthrough in Sino-Vietnamese relations after a decade-long hostility is the Chengdu summit on September 3-4, 1990. On September 2, 1990 the Vietnamese chiefs of Party and Government did, however, not stay in Hanoi to celebrate the 45th birthday of their state, but flew to Chengdu, China's tenth largest city, for a secret summit with the Chinese leadership.[50] This was the first meeting between the Vietnamese and Chinese leaders since the mid-1970s. The Vietnamese understood that their acceptance of the time, place and the personnel composition of the meeting, which included Vietnamese elder statesman Pham Van Dong and excluded Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, was a sign of deference to China. During the meeting, Vietnam's leaders also let the Chinese dictate the terms of negotiation.[51]

Why this breakthrough? There must have been an urgent reason for the Vietnamese to do so. From the deference strategy's perspective, the Vietnamese behavior was reasonable because the counterweight of the Soviet Union was no longer available and Vietnam was still in isolation from both its regional context and the West. Facing China, Vietnam found a disproportionately more powerful neighbor, and in order to prevent Chinese aggression, Hanoi had to pay deference to Beijing. This could be the calculation of elder statesman Pham Van Dong and Premier Do Muoi. Yet, Party chief Nguyen Van Linh had a different concern and priority.[52] Before the summit, the latter had eagerly sought Chinese contact to discuss about protecting socialism against the United States and the West. This was also his primary intention at Chengdu.[53]

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[49] Ibid., p. 51.
[50] September 2 is the Independence Day, the greatest national celebration, in Vietnam.
[51] Co, *Memoirs*, chs. 13-14.
[52] Linh, Muoi, and Dong headed the Vietnamese delegation at Chengdu.
[53] Ibid., chs. 10 and 13.

Although the Chinese refused to play the Vietnamese game, Linh and his like-minded in the VCP Politburo still tried to reestablish the Sino-Vietnamese relations on an ideological basis. As Linh himself explained to Chinese ambassador to Vietnam on June 5, 1990, the situation was marked by imperialism's offensive to eliminate socialism and the difficulties of the Soviet Union, the stronghold of socialism, in defending socialism. In this situation, Linh concluded, "China should raise high the banner of socialism and stick to Marxism-Leninism."[54] A Sino-Vietnamese alliance to defend communism against the West was the foreign policy linchpin of the anti-imperialist grand strategy.

While the Party chief and the Defense Minister sought an alliance with China to oppose the West, Foreign Minister Thach favored a balanced position between the great powers. As Thach resisted Beijing's attempt to force him to adopt Linh's line, his relations with China deteriorated.[55] A month later, the United States made an about-face in its Vietnam policy when announcing it would withdraw its recognition of the anti-Vietnamese Cambodian coalition and open talks with Hanoi on Cambodia. This raised Thach's hope in a separate agreement with the United States, which would lead to both a settlement of the Cambodia crisis and the lifting of U.S. embargo against Vietnam. Washington's policy change also triggered a turning point in China's attitudes toward Vietnam. Beijing suddenly agreed to a high-level meeting between leaders of the two countries, an event that Hanoi had unsuccessfully requested in the past.[56] This would be the Chengdu summit of September 3-4, 1990. On September 10, Washington also announced it agreed to discuss with the Vietnamese on normalization of relations between the two countries. As with the Chengdu summit with China, Thach's meeting with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker did not bring what the Vietnamese had hoped.

At the Seventh Congress of the VCP in July 1991, Thach was dismissed from the all-powerful Politburo. He was seen as a main obstacle for closer relations between

[54] Ibid., p. 36.
[55] Ibid., chs. 10 and 11. See also Carlyle A. Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations: The Interplay of Ideology and National Interest," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No. 6 (June 1994), p. 516.
[56] Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations," p. 516.

China and Vietnam.[57] After the Seventh Party Congress, the new permanent decision-making body at the top echelons of the Hanoi leadership now consisted of General Secretary Do Muoi, who was eclectic in calculation but anti-imperialist in instinct, and two ultra anti-imperialists, President Le Duc Anh and Dao Duy Tung, with General Anh supervising defense, security, and foreign affairs. To further marginalize the Foreign Ministry, where modernizers were in the majority, the Party decided that the Chinese ambassador to Hanoi would replace the Vietnamese embassy in Beijing as the main nexus of communications from Vietnam to China. Explaining this strange manner, Anh said it was done at China's request.[58]

The Vietnamese request for an anti-imperialist alliance was, however, repeatedly rebuffed by China. During the visit of Secretary-General Muoi and Premier Kiet to Beijing in November 1991, when relations between the two states and parties were formally normalized, the Chinese responded to the Vietnamese that China and Vietnam could be "comrades but not allies."[59]

Returning to the Regional Matrix and Hoping for Solidarity, 1992-1998

With the anti-imperialist proposal discredited, the modernizers' agenda regained momentum. Before the Beijing summit and immediately after the Paris Peace Accord on Cambodia, Premier Vo Van Kiet had visited Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore, the three leading ASEAN states. The visits opened a new and friendly chapter in Vietnam's relations with the regional countries. In March 1992, the Party theoretical journal published an article entitled *Vietnam in the Common Trend of the Asia-Pacific* by Deputy Foreign Minister Dinh Nho Liem. He did not explicitly define the geographic scope of the region but referred to "India, China, the United States, Japan, Indonesia, and other ASEAN countries" as regional states. Liem argued that for the sake of its national security and socio-economic development, Vietnam could not help but make its relations with the Asia-Pacific a priority of its foreign policy. He admitted that the

[57] Co, "Memoirs," p. 62.
[58] Co, "Memoirs," p. 62.
[59] Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations," here p. 523.

intertwinement of Vietnam's security and development with that of the Asia-Pacific "is a very novel issue" to the Vietnamese. But he quickly assured that "building and defending Vietnam along the socialist path do not contradict the interests of the regional countries." Liem also made a plea for "really new thinking on domestic and foreign policy," and defined socio-economic development as the country's highest objective. He concluded: "Following the path chosen by President Ho Chi Minh, our people will build a rich and strong Vietnam, becoming a deserving member of the peaceful, independent, and developed Asia-Pacific."[60]

Liem's article was preceded by a number of important events. In December 1991, the USSR was formally disbanded. Also from December 1991, China renewed activities that were seen in Hanoi as seriously violating Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity.[61] After 1991, Vietnam's situation was this: The Soviet Union was history. China refused to play the solidarity game with Hanoi. The United States refused to play the balancing game with Vietnam. For the Vietnamese, the only possible avenue that remained was to play the enmeshment game. This meant that Vietnam must take advantage of complex interdependence, multilateralism, and regionalism. It must integrate itself with the Asia-Pacific, become a member of ASEAN and join other multilateral and regional frameworks. Only through these frameworks could Vietnam provide security for itself.

In June 1992 the Third Plenum of the Seventh Central Committee issued a resolution on the guidance of Vietnamese foreign policy in the following period. Although the resolution was never made public, its contents were presented in Secretary-General Do Muoi's report at the plenum and the Party's central secretary in charge of foreign affairs Hong Ha's article in the December 1992 issue of *Tap chi Cong san*.[62] The resolution reaffirmed the policy of "diversification and multidirectionalization" and formulated four maxims for Vietnamese foreign policy.

[60] Dinh Nho Liem, "Viet Nam trong xu the chung cua chau A-Thai Binh Duong" [Vietnam in the Common Trend of the Asia-Pacific], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 3 (March 1992): 60-61.
[61] Co, *Memoirs*, ch. 20, p. 92; Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations," p. 523-526.
[62] See Do Muoi, "Thoi cuoc hien nay va nhiem vu cua chung ta" [The Present Situation and Our Tasks], report at the Third Plenum of the Seventh Central Committee, *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 8 (August 1992): 3-10; and Hong Ha, "World Situation."

The fourth maxim on geopolitical orientation stipulated that Vietnam "actively participate in regional cooperation and expand relations with all countries, especially the great powers and the big economic centers."[63]

The next year, the Party theoretical journal published an article by Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam, in which he pointed out that relations with the great powers and the regional states were two "major directions" of Vietnamese foreign policy. He also stressed that Southeast Asia would serve as the "bridge" for Vietnam to integrate into the world.[64] A few months later, Cam was echoed by Vu Khoan, one of his deputies in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with an article entitled *Asia-Pacific: A Major Direction in Our State's Foreign Policy*, in the party journal.[65]

Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy in fact mixed up an enmeshment and a balancing strategy. This was manifested in Hanoi's treatment of the Kantan affair of 1997. On March 7, 1997 China sent oil platform Kantan-III and two pilot ships to conduct exploratory oil drilling in an area located 64,5 sea miles from the Vietnamese coast and 71 miles from the Chinese island of Hainan, which Vietnam claimed to be within its own exclusive economic zone and continental shelf under the name "Block 113." Despite Vietnamese maritime control forces' warnings, the Chinese ships continued with their drilling. Three days later, the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry raised a written protest demanding that the Chinese halt their activities at once and withdraw their platform and ships from the area. China replied indirectly at a regular press conference on March 18 by saying that the Chinese ships were conducting a "normal drilling work" within the Chinese continental shelf and exclusive economic zone. The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry reiterated in a March 20 press conference and again in a radio report on March 25 that the area was within Vietnam's zone and shelf. According to an AFP report of March 20, the Vietnamese sent a request to Beijing for a meeting to discuss the dispute and also called in the ASEAN ambassadors to explain the

[63] Hong Ha, "World Situation," p. 13.
[64] Nguyen Manh Cam, "Tren duong trien khai chinh sach doi ngoai theo dinh huong moi" [In Developing Foreign Policy after the New Orientation], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 4 (April 1993): 11-15.
[65] Vu Khoan, "Chau A-Thai Binh Duong – mot huong lon trong chinh sach doi ngoai cua nha nuoc ta" [Asia-Pacific: A Major Direction in Our State's Foreign Policy], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 6 (June 1993): 57-58.

Vietnamese position.[66] During the row with China, the command of US forces in the Pacific Joseph Prueher went to Hanoi on March 22, becoming the highest US military official to visit Vietnam since normalization. The visit resulted in an "Agreement in Principal on the Way Ahead for Military Relations." Both countries agreed on creating a "Colonel-Level Group" for dialogue and information exchange as well as on common military training in the future. The US was also ready to train Vietnamese military staffs in US military academia.[67] At a regular press conference on March 27, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson restated China's position but added that China valued its good neighborly friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation with Vietnam and was ready to hold consultations with Vietnam to solve the existing problems. On April 1, the Chinese moved the vessels out of the disputed area, and two days later it was announced that a bilateral expert-level meeting would be held on April 19 in Beijing.[68]

Beneath and in parallel with the enmeshment and balancing approaches, Hanoi was still pursuing the strategy of solidarity with socialist forces. Besides the resolution on foreign policy, which stressed "diversification and multifirectionalization," the Third Plenum in June 1992 also issued a separate resolution on defense policy and national security, which established opposing "peaceful evolution" as the top national security priority. Anti-imperialists managed to issue in the form of the oral briefing of the Third Plenum resolution a directive that instructed Party cadres about the geopolitical priorities. It determined the distance to be held between Vietnam and a foreign country on an ideological basis. Thus, it considered the Marxist-Leninist states—China, Cuba, North Korea, and Laos—to be the closest friends of Vietnam.[69] Although China undertook steps that were called "expansionist" even by General Secretary Do Muoi, interaction between the two parties and governments was still intensified. In 1993, for example, the average number of high-level exchanges jumped to two delegations a month.[70]

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[66] Ang Cheng Guan, "Vietnam-China Relations since the End of the Cold War," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 12 (December 1998), pp. 1131-1132; *Südostasien aktuell*, May 1997, pp. 221-222.
[67] *Südostasien aktuell*, May 1997, p. 223; *South China Morning Post*, March 22, 1997.
[68] Ang, "Vietnam-China Relations," p. 1132.
[69] Thanh Tin, *True Face*.
[70] Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations," pp. 525-527.

After 1995, when Vietnam acquired membership in ASEAN, a new, ASEAN, identity was added to the country's Asia-Pacific orientation. In 2002, an article in the Party theoretical journal went so far as to regard Vietnam's membership in ASEAN the country's new standing *(vi the)* that had replaced its former self-perception as the advance post of socialism in Southeast Asia.[71]

Despite its ever firmer ASEAN identity, Vietnam has not regarded its relations with ASEAN the prime geopolitical orientation. In the Vietnamese blueprint of world anchorage, which results from the superposition of the two grand strategies, ASEAN is rather a bridge than a destination.[72] As a consequence, Vietnam has still been in search for a new cornerstone of its foreign relations even after joining ASEAN.

Seeking Close Ties with Key Partners and Still Closer Ties with China, 1999-2003

The change of the guard at the top post of the Vietnam Communist Party in December 1997 introduced a new phase in Vietnam's geopolitical orientation. An ambitious boss without a power base, the new general secretary Le Kha Phieu directed his primary concerns after taking office toward gaining domestic and international support. Domestically, he attempted to establish neopatriotism as a new official ideology. Phieu's foreign policy reflected both his worldview and his need as a ruler with no power base of his own. He turned to China for support. However, Phieu was not able to pursue this line as soon as he became the Party chief. He had to consolidate his position first before taking a risk with the new foreign policy.

In 1998, there were between the two countries 52 exchanges at vice-ministerial level or above. In 1999, the number of high-level visits jumped to 80, with Phieu himself visiting China. Other major attempts to win China over to its side were Vietnam's two border pacts with the former on land borders and maritime borders in the

[71] See Nguyen Huu Nguyen, "Vi the moi cua Viet Nam o Dong Nam A" [Vietnam's New Standing in Southeast Asia], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 24 (August 2002): 39-43, 49.
[72] For another discussion of Vietnam's interests and role in ASEAN, see Jörn Dosch, "In Search of Sustainable Security: Vietnam's Interests and Role in ASEAN," paper presented at the EUROSEAS Conference, London, 6-8 September 2001.

Gulf of Tonkin, inked on the last days of 1999 and 2000 respectively. In these border pacts, Phieu made several concessions to China, which informal sources estimate to be about 2,000 square kilometers.[73] In early 2000, Phieu went again to Beijing for an unpublicized meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, despite the informal rule that had been observed since 1991 that a Vietnamese leader's visit to China should be followed by a Chinese leader's visit to Vietnam the next year. Diplomatic sources said Phieu went to reassure China about a planned visit to Hanoi by U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen.[74] Informal sources in Hanoi said that Phieu went to Jiang with a proposal for annual summit meetings between the Vietnamese and the Chinese supremos, an attempt to reinvigorate the socialist camp with a twin-leadership of China and Vietnam.[75] Although the Chinese did not hail this idea, they were willing to stand behind Phieu in his domestic power struggle. At the Ninth Party Congress in 2001, Phieu received substantial support from China for his bid for Party chief. It was in Phieu's initiative that China and Vietnam agreed to hold regular Sino-Vietnamese consultations on ideology. At the first such conference in 2000, Vietnamese Party chief ideologue Nguyen Duc Binh urged the Chinese to intensify solidarity among the socialist countries.[76]

While Phieu tried, unsuccessfully, to elevate Vietnam into a pole in China's multipolar world order, other factions in the Hanoi leadership pursued their own agendas. The modernizers tried to balance Vietnam's close ties with China by strengthening relations with the United States. Notably, they were eager to conclude a comprehensive trade pact with the United States, which would facilitate Vietnam's integration to the world economy and veer the country in the direction of Washington. Although the anti-imperialists successfully delayed the pact, they were not successful in altering its substance, when it was finally signed in 2001. To meet both the modernizers' need for balancing and the anti-imperialist need for solidarity, some

[73] David Koh, "The Politics of a Divided Party and Parkinson's State in Vietnam," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (December 2001), pp. 533-51.
[74] Chanda, "Friend or Foe?"
[75] N.S.P., "Thu Ha Noi" [Letter from Hanoi], *Dien dan*, No. 104 (February 2001).
[76] Binh, "Some Thoughts on the Destiny of Socialism," p. 16.

circles led by President Tran Duc Luong created a strange mixture of both in the "strategic partnership" with Russia. Luong was namely reassured during his 1998 visit to Moscow that "Russia still attaches importance to relations with Vietnam, regarding Vietnam as a strategic partner in Southeast Asia and Russo-Vietnamese relations as one pole in the multipolar world."[77] The Russo-Vietnamese rapprochement culminated in the declaration of a "strategic partnership" between the two former allies during President Putin's trip—the first ever visit of a Russian top leader to Vietnam—in 2001.

The replacement of Le Kha Phieu by Nong Duc Manh as Party chief at the Ninth Party Congress in April 2001 did not change Vietnam's geopolitical orientation substantively. Unlike Phieu, who rather pursued his own path, Manh yielded to the wishes of all major factions in the ruling elites. Thus, as a true anti-imperialist, he tried to define the Sino-Vietnamese relationship as "comrades plus brothers."[78] The Sino-Vietnamese joint statement issued at his first visit to Beijing included for the first time an anti-hegemonist clause, which indicated Vietnam's alignment with China in opposing American preponderance.[79] To the comfort of the modernizers, Manh established, though not wholeheartedly, a "reliable partnership" with Japan and a strategic and comprehensive cooperative relationship with India, two potential rivals of China in Asia, at his visits to the two countries in 2003.

Balancing the Balancing Act, 2003-2006

The U.S. war against Iraq in 2003 hit hard on the mind of the Vietnamese leadership. After a short period of fury, Hanoi realized that the balance of forces was much more in favor of the United States than Vietnam had estimated. From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, both camps in the Vietnamese leadership—the anti-imperialists and the modernizers—believed that although the United States remained the only superpower, its ability was heavily constrained by the other "poles," or "centers" of world power.

[77] Hong Viet, "Cong tac doi ngoai cua nuoc ta nam 1998" [Our Country's Foreign Affairs in 1998], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 1 (January 1999), pp. 11-16; here p. 13.
[78] *Nhan dan*, November 30, 2001.
[79] "Vietnam-China Joint Statement," December 2, 2001 (VNA, December 4, 2001).

But the Iraq War of 2003 shows that the notion of a multipolar world makes little sense. Prior to the War, many in the Vietnamese leadership thought that the United States would not go to war because a series of big powers such as Russia, China, France, Germany, and India would not tolerate U.S. unilateralism. These people also thought that even if the United States decided to invade Iraq, they would meet with fierce resistance and the war would last for years. Thinking about Iraq, they had the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, and the Vietnamese involvement in Cambodia in mind. But Saddam's defeat was too quick and the other major powers' reaction was too weak.

Although the Vietnamese kept predicting the advent of a multipolar world order publicly, in private some admitted that the world was currently unipolar and the United States was, as the Iraq war had shown, unchallengeable. In July 2003 the Eighth Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee passed a new "Strategy for Defense of the Fatherland in a New Situation." The new strategy concept removes an ideological clause in the determination of friend and foe in Vietnam's foreign relations. The ideological clause existed since the Cold War era and was reiterated in July 1993, along with the strategic reorientation of Vietnamese foreign policy at that time. The ideological provision stipulated that Vietnam's closest friends were the remaining socialist states (China, Cuba, and North Korea) and the United States was the main "target of struggle," or the chief enemy. According to the new strategy concept of 2003, anyone who opposes Vietnam's objectives will be the "targets of struggle" (*doi tuong*). Anyone who respects Vietnam's independence and sovereignty, and anyone who supports friendly and cooperative relations with Vietnam on an equal footing will be the partners (*doi tac*). [80]

This marks a new beginning. Ideological considerations should no longer play a role in determining who Vietnam's friends are and who its enemy is. For example, the United States can be now a close partner if it treats Vietnam as equal, respects Vietnam's independence and sovereignty, and wants a friendly and cooperative

[80] Ban Tu tuong-van hoa trung uong [Central Committee Department of Ideology and Culture], *Tai lieu hoc tap Nghi quyet Hoi nghi lan thu Tam Ban chap hanh Trung uong Dang khoa IX* [Documents for the Study of the Resolution of the Eighth Plenum of the Ninth Party Central Committee] (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2003), p. 44.

relationship with Vietnam. Prior to 2003, a close relationship with the United States was not possible because of the ideological provision.

The fundamental change reached at the Eighth Plenum in July 2003 has two major implications. First, it has improved the position of the modernizers, who associate themselves with the nation as opposed to an ideology and instinctively favor balancing and enmeshment over solidarity. Secondly, it paved the way for intensifying contacts with the United States. In the second half of 2003 four Vietnamese ministers and a deputy prime minister went to the United States, a phenomenon unthinkable in the previous times. Moreover, November 2003 saw the first ever visit by a socialist Vietnamese defense minister to Washington and U.S. warship's first ever port call to communist Vietnam. In June 2005, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai paid the first visit by a communist Vietnamese leader to Washington, at which he and President George W. Bush laid down a new framework for relations between the two former enemies.

The new-found friendship between Vietnam and the United States rendered Vietnam's geopolitical orientation more balanced. Again, Hanoi's balancing act was demonstrated in 2005 when Vietnam sent General Secretary Manh to France and President Luong to China right after Premier Phan Van Khai's visit to the United States. With a friendlier relationship with Washington, Hanoi becomes more self-confident and less disadvantageous when facing Beijing. At the same time, it is careful not to do harm to the good relationship with the giant neighbor. While the solidarity approach is waning, the deference approach has gained the approval of both the modernizers and the anti-imperialists.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

How Grand Strategy Determines Foreign Relations

Vietnam's relations with foreign countries in the post-Cold War era seem to have followed a number of geopolitical strategies to various extents. Contingent on momentary circumstances, the geopolitical strategies were nevertheless shaped by the

grand strategies, which provided them with purposes and principles. The purpose of the grand strategy of anti-imperialism was to oppose U.S. imperialism, and its principle *exploiting the contradictions* facing the enemy. There was a tactical change within this strategy during the "long 1990s."[81] In the earlier part of the period, the main contradiction was thought to be between socialism and imperialism, geopolitically represented by tensions in Sino-U.S. relations following the Tiananmen Square massacre. To put in conventional international relations vocabulary, Hanoi tried to balance Washington by bandwagoning Beijing. But circumstances changed significantly in the latter part of the period. Sino-U.S. relations were restored. At the same time, a new contradiction emerged between the U.S.-led "unipolarization" of world order and the counter-movement of "multipolarization." Recognizing that this was momentarily the main contradiction of U.S. imperialism, Vietnam was ready to join China, Russia and France, the major powers which advocated a "multipolar" world order, in various attempts to counter "unipolarization."

The purpose of the grand strategy of modernization was to turn Vietnam into an industrial country and to catch up with the developed countries in its neighboring region. The principle designed for achieving this was *taking advantage* of the external sources and trends to create conditions favorable for domestic development. Following this principle, modernizers tried to forge close ties with the world financial-technological centers, namely the United States, Japan, and other advanced industrial countries, which are potential sources of capital and technology. At the same time, they promoted Vietnam's participation in the regional cooperation and integration into the world economy, in which ASEAN and the WTO played a crucial role.

The superposition of the two grand strategies provides the framework for Vietnamese foreign policy priorities, and a mixture of the two defines Vietnam's policy toward foreign powers. Accordingly, two foreign powers are the primary foci of Vietnamese foreign policy—the United States and China.

[81] The "long 1990s" started with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and ended with the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in September 2001.

The United States is both the allegedly central source of subversion—the "basic enemy"—and the potentially most valuable source of capital and technology—the "greatest partner." Vietnam's attitude toward America is thus ambivalent. It is marked by both admiration and hostility. The director of the Hanoi Institute of World Economy, also an adviser to Do Muoi, distinguishes four possible approaches to the superpower in what he calls a "multi-centered world." The first is alliance, the second a strategic partnership, the third a combination of selective cooperation and resistance, and the fourth confrontation. He assesses that right now very few countries still follow the fourth option, and seems to hint at Japan for the first, China for the second, and Vietnam for the third category.[82]

Vietnam's perception of China also varies according to grand strategy. However, both grand strategies have to deal with the same China problem. This problem includes China's rising power, which can entail assertiveness and pressures, and its territorial conflicts with Vietnam, particularly in the South China Sea. Territorial dispute with Beijing represents a big problem for Vietnamese anti-imperialists, because they consider China their strategic ally. However, they solve this problem by pointing to the United States as the "dangerous, direct, basic, and long-term enemy," thus relegating the China problem to a secondary threat. For Vietnamese modernizers, on the contrary, China is much more a menace than a chance. They see in Chinese assertiveness on territorial and border issues greater a threat than in Western pressures for democracy and human rights.

To contrast, anti-imperialists are quick to make concessions to China, as they did in the Chengdu summit (1990) and the border pacts of 1999 and 2000, but remain stubborn in dealing with the United States, as manifested in their blockage of the U.S.-Vietnamese trade accord in 1999.[83] The reverse is true for the modernizers. These were

[82] Vo Dai Luoc, "Mot so van de ngoai giao cua nuoc ta trong nhung thap ky dau the ky XXI" [Some Issues of Our Country's Foreign Policy in the First Decades of the 21st Century], in Bo Ngoai giao, *Ngoai giao Viet Nam trong thoi dai Ho Chi Minh* [Vietnamese Foreign Policy in the Ho Chi Minh Era] (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2000), pp. 420-442, here p. 433.
[83] The U.S.-Vietnam trade deal was delayed by the VCP from September 1999 to July 2001.

ready to make concessions in the trade deal with Washington but they delayed the ratification of the border agreement on the Tonkin Gulf with Beijing.[84]

Although not every modernizer is pro-Western and not every anti-imperialist is pro-China, modernizers tend to prefer closer ties with the West while anti-imperialists are inclined to keep nearer distance to China. This follows from the objective requirements of their respective strategic goal. Modernization requires capital, technology, know-how, and other factors which are primarily in the possessions of the West. On the contrary, the objective of opposing imperialism and capitalism puts most great powers and advanced industrial countries to the enemy's side. It leaves China almost the only candidate for a strategic ally, because it is the solely remaining socialist great power after the disintegration of the USSR. Almost, because some people in Vietnam still regard Russia a non-capitalist—hence, non-imperialist—great power, especially from the late 1990s onward, when Moscow has relinquished the Atlantic orientation and adopted the Eurasian orientation in its grand strategy. This is also a reason for the decision to establish a "strategic partnership" with Russia. To be sure, this was a decision at the top leaders' level. At the experts' level both in Vietnam and Russia, however, nobody has believed this "strategic partnership" can go beyond the nominal. Yet the strategic partnership with Russia is the safest choice under the constraints of the two-headed grand strategy. The Russia option also points to a multitude of eclectic and opportunists in the Vietnamese policymaking establishment. Although dominant in number, they do not have their own agenda. Their policy choice is what is in compliance with the current balance of power between the anti-imperialists and the modernizers.

At the grand strategic level, foreign policy choice follows from the policymaker's self-perception. The anti-imperialists identify themselves with the regime rather than with the nation, while the modernizers identify themselves with the country defined in territorial terms rather than with the regime in its Stalinist fashion. For anti-imperialists like President Anh and Permanent Secretary Tung, safeguarding the

[84] Signed in December 2000, the Tonkin Gulf pact was ratified by the Vietnamese National Assembly only in May 2004.

Fatherland means first of all to protect the regime and Marxism-Leninism. Modernizers like Foreign Minister Thach and Premier Kiet endeavor to change the identity of the regime while retaining its name. They are more concerned about their country's territory than communism's principles. The eclectics are those who cannot decide whether to prefer regime over nation or country over ideology. And the opportunist is one who swings with whichever camp that may provide him with the largest benefit. A matrix of worldview, ambition, and self-perception, grand strategy provides the framework for identity to affect foreign policy choice. However, this fact does not imply automatic solidarity across national boundaries among peers and like-minded.

Despite striking similarities in worldview between Vietnamese and Chinese modernizers, Vietnamese modernizers do not consider China their strategic partner or ally. With regard to territorial disputes between the two countries, they are even rivals. Furthermore, leading Vietnamese modernizers like Thach and Kiet did not look upon China as a model of development. Their rationale was, "if someone is better than China, why follow China; if China is learning from someone, why not directly learn from the latter." Thus their "natural" model was the capitalist Asian "tigers." In effect, Premier Kiet's models were South Korea and Japan. His reform of the state sector in 1990-1991 was aimed to establish big corporations mirrored upon the *chaebols* and the *zaibatsus*.[85] This fit into his ambition. He wanted powerful conglomerates to lead the Vietnamese economy in the world market. To him, the Korean and Japanese models with big conglomerates were more attractive than the Taiwanese model with small and medium enterprises, for instance.

Dealing with China

Different ways of coping with China are inherent in the two grand strategies. Anti-imperialism entails some camaraderie with China and the anti-imperialists hope that this may undercut the northern giant's pressures and reduce its assertiveness. Modernization

[85] Nguyen Dinh Cung, "Cai cach doanh nghiep nha nuoc: Nhin lai va suy ngam" [State Enterprise Reform: Retrospection and Reflection], *Viet Nam Net*, 10 September 2004.

requires close ties with the West and full integration into the regional and the world economy. These linkages would provide two different avenues to cope with the China problem. One is that China will be balanced or deterred by Vietnam's "assemblage of forces." The other avenue, which can be called "enmeshment," is based on economic interdependence and a dense web of regional cooperation.[86] As a Vietnamese foreign ministry official explained:

> Sino-Vietnamese relations will be meshed within the much larger regional network of interlocking economic and political interests. It is an arrangement whereby anybody wanting to violate Vietnam's sovereignty would be violating the interest of other countries as well.[87]

Each of the three strategies has, however, its own handicap. As to the first, China refuses to engage in any formal alliance with Vietnam and remains tough when it comes to territorial disputes. As to the second, it is not certain that the other powers, among which the United States is the most competent, will throw their weight to the Vietnamese side if the latter is seriously threatened by China. To the third, it depends on China to let itself be "meshed" in the regional arrangements.

The post-Cold War era has been a learning process for Vietnamese anti-imperialists and modernizers alike. Chinese refusal of alliance with Vietnam, anti-imperialist blockage of closer ties with the United States, and the resulting U.S. reluctance to engage with Vietnam taught the two Vietnamese camps that solidarity and balancing are not realistic. Also, enmeshing China through multilateral mechanisms did not bring the desired effects as the Vietnamese had expected. As a result, both camps resorted to deference as a traditional expedient in dealing with China.

The saliency of the deference approach is manifested in Vietnam's responses to Chinese police's killing of Vietnamese fishermen in the Tonkin Gulf in January 2005

[86] For a discussion of Vietnam's approach to Chinese power, see David Wurfel, "Between China and ASEAN: The Dialectics of Recent Vietnamese Foreign Policy," in Thayer et al., *Vietnamese Foreign Policy*, pp. 148-169.
[87] Nguyen Hong Thach, quoted in Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations," p. 528.

and to Sino-Philippine joint exploration in the South China Sea some months later. In the former case, Hanoi calmed down popular outrages and accepted the Chinese arguments at the negotiation. As the Chinese argued, the Vietnamese fishermen were "pirates" and the killing was a "little incident" which cannot be allowed to undermine the "big picture" of a good relationship between the two countries. In the latter, Vietnam agreed to join the Sino- Philippine pact, though it had previously described the very same deal as a violation of the Declaration of Conduct, a non-binding agreement between China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei on their conduct in the South China Sea.[88]

Sino-Vietnamese relations reached a new era of normalcy in the late 1990s.[89] The terms of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship was, however, dictated by China. In 1999 both countries agreed during General Secretary Le Kha Phieu's visit to China on a framework of their bilateral relations, which is summarized as the Sixteen Word Guideline. There is a delicate discrepancy between the Chinese and the Vietnamese versions of the Sixteen-Word Guideline. The sixteen words are the same in both versions but their order is different. The Chinese reads "long-term stability, future orientation, good neighborliness, all-round cooperation" *(changqi wending, mianxiang weilai, mulin youhao, quanmian hezuo)*, while the Vietnamese reads "good neighborliness, all-round cooperation, long-term stability, future orientation" *(lang gieng huu nghi, hop tac toan dien, on dinh lau dai, huong toi tuong lai)*. Thus, the Chinese send the message that the Vietnamese should give priority to the long-term stability of their relationship with China and not look back to its past, while the Vietnamese signal that they prefer to see in China a friendly neighbor who engages in a comprehensive cooperation with Vietnam. This divergence notwithstanding, the framework signifies to the pro-China faction in the Hanoi leadership that an alliance

[88] For an account of the joint exploration, see Clive Schofield and Ian Storey, "Energy Security and Southeast Asia: The Impact on Maritime Boundary and Territorial Disputes," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Fall 2005), http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/160/43

[89] Womack, *China and Vietnam*, ch. 10. The normalization of Sino-Vietnamese relations takes place in a wider context of China's new security concept. See Carlyle A. Thayer, "China's 'New Security Concept' and Southeast Asia," in David W. Lovell, ed., *Asia-Pacific Security: Policy Challenges* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), pp. 89-107.

with Beijing on ideological grounds is not welcome, while to Sinophobic people that they must avoid antagonizing the "good neighbor" in the north. In 2001, on the eve of his visit to China, General Secretary Nong Duc Manh defined the Sino-Vietnamese relationship as "comrades plus brothers." In 2002, during his visit to Vietnam, President Jiang Zemin responded to the Vietnamese suggestion by describing the objectives of the relationship with a Four Good Motto—"good neighbors, good friends, good comrades, good partners." As the Vietnamese got the message, they are neither allies nor brothers. Nevertheless, with these frameworks, contending factions within the Vietnamese leadership can negotiate their different approaches to China on a common platform, and not, as during the 1990s, in a ravine between "red option" on one cliff and opposition on the other, which rendered Vietnamese responses to China subject to factional struggle, not to skillful deliberation, and hence suboptimal.

The way China and Vietnam practiced annual top-level exchanges is an indication of the evolution of Sino-Vietnamese relations. A framework of annual top-level exchanges between the two countries was agreed in 1991. From 1991 to 1997, an exact rotation between the two countries was observed. If, for example, this year the Vietnamese Party chief has visited China, then the next year a Chinese top leader will travel to Vietnam. But from 1998, this reciprocative scheme has no longer been observed. The Vietnamese may visit China in two consecutive years and not wait for a Chinese return. For example, General Secretary Do Muoi visited China in 1997 and Premier Phan Van Khai did so in 1998. Or, President Tran Duc Luong and General Secretary Nong Duc Manh visited China in 2000 and 2001 respectively.

On the other hand, also from 1998, the two countries have intensified their top-level exchanges and there may be two, not only one, highest-level visits within one year. For example, the year of 1999 saw General Secretary Le Kha Phieu's visit to China and Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to Vietnam. Or, in 2004, both Premiers Phan Van Khai and Wen Jiabao visited the other country. Also, in 2005, President Hu Jintao made a visit to Vietnam in November while President Tran Duc Luong had visited China in July.

The pattern of top-level exchanges during 2003-2005 differs significantly from those of the previous periods. This was probably an effect of the U.S.-Vietnamese rapprochement that was set into motion after Vietnam's adoption of a new national security strategy in 2003. But, as the Vietnamese responses to the Tonkin Gulf incident of 2005 and the Sino-Filipino joint exploration in the South China Sea indicate, Hanoi has not taken much advantage of a balancing approach which now seems possible. It probably wants to combine balancing with deference in its relations with China. This is also a consequence of the two-headed grand strategy.

Dealing with America

America evokes different meanings when seen from the anti-imperialist and the modernizers' perspectives. It is the largest world power center in the modernizers' eyes, and the chieftain of the world capitalist forces if viewed through the anti-imperialist looking glass.

As regard U.S. hegemonic ambitions, modernizers see the roots of America's quest for global influence in its being a center of world power, while the anti-imperialists find U.S. drive for world domination in its capitalist nature.[90] As the anti-imperialists regard the eradication of capitalism their final objective, they believe that America's ultimate goal is the elimination of socialism. They find themselves locked in a "who will defeat whom" struggle with the United States. The modernizers recognize a conflict of interest between little and great powers, but they consider the existence of great powers as an inescapable reality of world politics. What is more, the modernizers' highest priority is Vietnam's economic development and not opposition to global hegemony. Given America's abundance in capital and technology, the modernizers seek close ties with the United States rather than oppose to U.S. hegemony.[91]

[90] See Thach, "Changes in the World," p. 5.

[91] For prominent examples of the modernizer's outlook, see Thach, *World in the Past Fifty Years*, and Kiet, "Letter to the Politburo." For a major example of the anti-imperialist perspective, see Nguyen Duc Binh, "May van de phuong phap luan nghien cuu the gioi duong dai" [Some Methodological Issues in the Study of the Contemporary World], in Nguyen Duc Binh, Le Huu Nghia, Tran Huu Tien, eds., *Gop phan*

As the anti-imperialists maintained the upper hand in Vietnamese politics, they sabotaged to a considerable extent major attempts to normalize and strengthen U.S.-Vietnamese relations, as well as major endeavors to integrate the country into the region and the world. As Nguyen Trung has recently revealed, Vietnam's membership in ASEAN, its signing of a Bilateral Trade Agreement with the United States, and its accession to the WTO all were delayed by a single "no" vote at the highest echelon of Hanoi's decision making.[92] The U.S.-Vietnamese Bilateral Trade Agreement was a landmark in the normalization between the two countries. It was planned to be signed at the September 1999 APEC summit in New Zealand. But only hours before its planned signing ceremony, top anti-imperialists managed to stop the deal. As former Premier Vo Van Kiet later said, he felt deeply painful, because had it be inked at that planned date, Vietnam had been one step further than China in a trade accord with the United States and might be accepted to the WTO at an early date.[93] While the trade pact would be delayed for two years, a visit by President Bill Clinton to Hanoi in 2000 was concluded without any substantial agreements.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 marked a turning point in the evolution of Vietnam's policy toward the United States. This show of force convinced the most skeptical of America's unchallenged ability. Before this point, the standard Vietnamese estimation of the post-Cold War world order is that it will be marked by multipolarity—a situation when no single country is in a dominant position. Yet after the Iraq war even the anti-imperialist has to admit the existence of a unipolar moment with the United States as the prime power.[94] Both the anti-imperialist and the modernizer still maintain the hope for a multipolar world, but both recognize the reality of America's quasi-hegemony. However, both are unprepared for this situation.

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nhan thuc the gioi duong dai [Contributions to the Comprehension of the Contemporary World] (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2003), pp. 9-58.

[92] Nguyen Trung, „Nguoi tai bi do ky va khong duoc trong dung [Talents Are Begrudged and Underused], *VietNamNet*, February 9, 2006, http://www.vietnamnet.vn/chinhtri/doinoi/2006/02/539842/

[93] Kiet, "Vietnam Lost a Good Chance."

[94] See Quang Loi, "Bao luc cuong quyen" [The Violence of Power Politics], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 10 (April 2003): 57-61; Hoang Hoa, "Thach thuc cua vi the sieu cuong My" [Challenge of the U.S. Superpower Position], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 36 (December 2003): 60-63.

The pattern response to such a situation is, as former Vice-Chairman of the National Assembly Vu Dinh Cu points out in the Party theoretical journal, to identify the "unchanged," and, as he concludes, "once we have determined our 'unchanged' we are clearly able to avoid risk in 'reacting to all changes'."[95] Since the "unchanged" of anti-imperialism is to defeat imperialist capitalism, which is led by the United States, it is understandable why anti-imperialist comments on the Iraq war and U.S. predominance all display signs of embarrassment and helplessness amid an outright indignation. As the "unchanged" of modernization is "a rich people and a strong country," this grand strategy has gained some prevalence after the Iraq war.[96] The "Strategy of Fatherland's Defense in the New Situation" adopted at the Eighth Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee in July 2003, which removed the ideological clause in determining "targets" of combat and "partners" of cooperation and affirmed the maintenance of a peaceful international environment as Vietnam's "highest interest," marked a readjustment in the direction away from anti-imperialism toward modernization. It was the American show of force in Iraq that made the Vietnamese anti-imperialists ready for a friendship with America.

Prioritizing and Defining Strategic Relationships

From the anti-imperialist perspective, Vietnam is on the same side of battle with China, other socialist countries (Cuba, North Korea, and Laos), and the "national independent" (in effect, anti-American) states like Iraq (of Saddam Hussein), Iran, Libya, Myanmar, Yugoslavia (of Slobodan Milosevic), Venezuela (of Hugo Chavez), etc., confronting the United States and its allies. From the modernizers' view, Vietnam should focus on relations with the great powers, the advanced industrial countries, and the regional states of the Asia-Pacific. Many people in both grand strategies, starting from the fact

[95] Vu Dinh Cu, "Gop phan tim hieu su kien I-rac" [Contributions to the Study of the Iraq Incident], *Tap chi Cong san*, no. 36 (December 2003): 56-59, quote p. 59.
[96] Cf. Phan Doan Nam, "Mau thuan va phuong thuc giai quyet mau thuan trong quan he quoc te ngay nay" [Contradictions and Methods of Resolving Contradictions in Today's International Relations], *Tap chi Cong san*, No. 30 (October 2003): 52-58, which can be seen as an informal explication of the Strategy of Fatherland's Defense in the New Situation.

that Vietnam is a developing country, regard the developing countries as natural allies in the North-South conflict. The superposition of the two grand strategies has made a priority list of foreign relations, which was revealed by Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien during the Ninth Party Congress.

Strategic relations are those with the most important co-players, be they partners of cooperation or objects of struggle. Vietnam's primary strategic co-players are China and the United States—China, because it is the socialist great power and the giant neighbor, and America, because it is the leading capitalist state, the superpower, and the largest and most advanced world economic-technological center. Next in rank are relations with the other great powers, the ASEAN members, as well as some regional and advanced industrial countries. Although this list may suggest a key role played by the modernizer's view in shaping Vietnam's strategic relations, basically the country's policies toward its strategic co-players are dominated by anti-imperialism.

Hanoi has consistently tried to give each of its bilateral strategic relationships a stable normative framework. Timely priority was given to the neighbors that share land borders with Vietnam. Except the long-established "specific relationship" with Laos, the first of such frameworks was the Sixteen Word Guideline with China, which was agreed at the Party chief's level in early 1999. In June 1999 General Secretary Phieu proposed during his visit to Phnom Penh a guideline for bilateral relations between Vietnam and Cambodia in the 21st century, which read "traditional, stable, long-lasting, bonds of friendship, solidarity, cooperation and good neighborliness." However, this guideline was only endorsed by Cambodia two years later in the "framework for bilateral cooperation" signed during President Luong's visit to Phnom Penh.[97]

The first years of the new century seem to present a good time for concluding agreements on long-term cooperative relations. In December 2000 Vietnam signed with China a joint statement on "comprehensive cooperation." This was followed in 2001 by the "strategic partnership" with Russia, the "comprehensive partnership in the 21st century" with South Korea, and the framework with Cambodia. The next year, Vietnam and Japan reached during Party chief Nong Duc Manh's visit to Tokyo a normative

[97] Cf. *Nhan Dan*, 10 June 1999, p. 5; 11 June 1999, pp. 1, 5; 27 November 2001, p. 1.

framework for relations between the two countries in the 21st century. A little discrepancy existed as to Vietnam and Japan favor different guidelines for the relationship. While Vietnam put emphasis on the "reliable partnership with long-term stability," Japan preferred "joint action and joint progress." Both maxims were at the end included in the framework. This difference reflected Hanoi's fear of deepening cooperation with capitalist countries.[98]

During 2002-04, Vietnam concluded bilateral frameworks for long-term cooperation with the Philippines (2002), Indonesia (2003), Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia (2004), leaving Myanmar and Brunei the only ASEAN members that do not have a formal cooperative agreement with Hanoi. These agreements are informally regarded as a kind of "strategic partnership" pact, but Hanoi still regards relations with great powers more important strategically. For instance, although Thailand stresses that the Thai-Vietnamese relationship is a "strategic partnership," Vietnam prefers reserving the explicit use of this label for its relations with great powers. During Secretary-General Manh's visit to India in 2003 the two countries signed a "framework of comprehensive cooperation," in which Indo-Vietnamese relations were explicitly qualified as "strategic" and codified as "reliable partnership and comprehensive cooperation."

Vietnam also intended to reach similar agreements with France, Germany, and the United States. During German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's visit to Hanoi in 2003, Premier Phan Van Khai proposed the guideline "reliable partnership with long-term stability"—a phrase that was identical with the one Hanoi had offered Japan.[99] However, this wasnot codified in a joint statement and remained Vietnam's own definition of the relationship. Franco-Vietnamese ties were praised as "exemplary" by Paris and defined as "traditional friendship, long-term comprehensive cooperation, and reliable relations" by Hanoi.[100] Yet a formal agreement on the guideline or framework for relations between the two countries was not achieved.

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[98] Cf. *Nhan Dan*, 2 October 2002, p. 1; 6 October 2002, pp. 1, 4, 7.
[99] See *Nhan Dan*, 16 May 2003, p. 7.
[100] *Nhan Dan*, 30 May 2003, p. 4 and 15 April 2004, p. 7.

As early as 2003, Vietnam expressed its desire to establish a "long-term and stable framework" of relations with the United States.[101] In June 2005, Vietnam and the United States reached a formal definition of relations between the two countries as a "friendly, constructive, and multi-faceted cooperative partnership on the basis of equality, mutual respect, and mutual benefit."[102] This new friendship between Hanoi and Washington was a joint product of the "shock and awe" effect the Iraq War had on the Vietnamese leadership, which prompted them to rethink their belief and behavior, and the rise of China, which poses a rivalry to American primacy in Asia.

[101] *Nhan Dan*, 30 January 2004.
[102] "Joint Statement between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," June 21, 2005, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050621-2.html>. Note that unlike the Sixteen Word Guideline of Sino-Vietnamese relations, there is no difference between the American and the Vietnamese versions of this definition.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

In late 1986 Vietnam embarked on a comprehensive reform process, which still continues to the present day. Since then, the country's foreign policy has undergone five strategic changes. The first was marked by the adoption of Politburo Resolution 13 in May 1988. Solidarity with the socialist countries and alliance with the Soviet Union remained a component of Vietnamese foreign policy, but the resolution stressed a new orientation, which was called "diversified and multidirectional." This was an adjustment to the new world complexion, which in the eyes of the modernizers was marked by multipolarity, interdependence, internationalization and regionalism. At the same time, the strategic reorientation was a triumph of the new world outlook of modernization over the incumbent Marxist-Leninist worldview. The new policy called for normalization of relations with China and the United States, integration with the Asia-Pacific, and ending of Vietnamese involvement in Cambodia. Vietnam's integration into the Western-dominant world economy and Asia-Pacific soon yielded the first fruits. The country's exports to the non-socialist areas grew more than three times within a year, from 350 million U.S. dollars in 1988 to 1,139 million U.S. dollars in 1989. In 1989 the capitalist countries also outweighed the socialist countries in Vietnam's foreign trade.[1]

In the same year, however, the Tiananmen Square incident in China in June and the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe from August caused a strong sense of insecurity in the Vietnamese leadership. The Vietnamese leadership was deeply divided over the cause of these events. One view held that socialism was in crisis because Party leaders for a long time ignored new developments of forces of production in the West, and failed to cooperate with the capitalist countries and integrate to the world economy. Another view blamed the United States and the West for the collapse

[1] See Tong cục Thong ke, *Statistic Data*, pp. 93-94.

of socialist regimes. It claimed that the West led by the United States was trying to eliminate socialism from the world, supporting subversive elements and causing internal instability in the socialist countries. The former position reflected the new world outlook of the modernizers, the latter the old Marxist-Leninist worldview. After six months of fierce debates, Marxism-Leninism prevailed over modernization. Although modernization was supported by the State president and the foreign minister, Marxism-Leninism was embraced by the Party chief and the defense minister. Just a few days after Solidarity won the first multiparty election in Poland, the Party chief quickly rehabilitated the old Marxist-Leninist worldview and enthusiastically revived the new-old grand strategy of anti-imperialism.

The third strategic reorientation of Vietnamese foreign policy occurred in 1992 as a response to a new situation that emerged after 1991. The situation was this: The USSR was disintegrated; China turned down the Vietnamese request for an alliance; and America refused to join hands with Vietnam in balancing China. For the Vietnamese, the only possible avenue that remained was to play the enmeshment game. This meant that Vietnam must take advantage of complex interdependence, multilateralism, and regionalism. It must integrate itself into the Asia-Pacific, become a member of ASEAN, and join other multilateral and regional frameworks. Only through these frameworks can Vietnam provide security for itself. In July 1992, the Party Central Committee issued a resolution on reorientation of foreign policy in this direction.

The fourth reorientation of Vietnamese foreign policy took place during 1999-2000 and bore the strong mark of new Party chief Le Kha Phieu, who took office in December 1997. Unlike the three former changes, this one was not codified by any legal document. In 1998 the Party chief still followed a tradition in Vietnam's practice of foreign relations. His first visit abroad after taking office led him to Laos and not China. But after his visit to China in 1999, Vietnam entered a period of closer ties with the socialist power in the north. From about this time, in internal communications, Vietnamese officials were told that China was Vietnam's strategic ally.

The Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 certainly had an indirect impact on this strategic reorientation. As ASEAN and other "capitalist countries" in the region weakened and China remained stable during the crisis, while multilateral mechanisms proved less useful for the crisis's management than China's decision not to depreciate its currency, Vietnam had a plausible reason to turn away from regional blocs to China. However, as insiders leaked to me, General Secretary Phieu's plan to lean on China was independent from and had been outlined before the crisis.[2]

The fifth strategic change in Vietnamese foreign policy since the mid-1980s came after the Iraq War in 2003. This was a readjustment to a new global situation, in which U.S. unilateralism prevailed over multilateralism. The new Vietnamese strategy was codified by Central Committee Resolution 8 in July 2003. It replaced the ideological provision that since decades had stipulated that Vietnam's closest friends were the communist states and the country's chief enemy the United States with a pragmatic view in determination of friend and foe. In other words, this was the first time that pragmatism was elevated to a formal principle of foreign policy in communist Vietnam. The 2003 strategic reorientation was the result of a learning process of the anti-imperialists rather than a result of the defeat of the anti-imperialists by the modernizers in power struggle. No personnel reshuffle was made after the policy change and the strategic concept of 2003 still upholds the anti-imperialist worldview. The learning process of the anti-imperialists can be summarized as follows:

- 1989: After regime change in Poland and Hungary, attempt to consolidate rest of Soviet bloc but failed
- 1990: Seek alliance with China "to protect socialism and oppose imperialism" but China refuses

[2] The turn of the balance of power between China and the regional capitalist countries in favor of China might have facilitated Phieu's ascendance to Party chief and/or his policy change. However, this question must be reserved for future research when we have more information. For a discussion of the impact of the Asian financial crisis on Vietnamese politics, see Carlyle A. Thayer, "Doi Moi 2? Vietnam after the Asian Financial Crisis," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Winter 2000), http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/55/5/

- 1991: New leadership after 7th Party Congress seeks alliance with China but China says the two countries would be "comrades but not allies"
- 1992: Vietnam determines regional integration and relations with great powers as foreign policy priority but anti-imperialists still regard solidarity with socialist countries as priority
- 1999: New Party chief revives proposal of alliance with China but China does not respond
- 2001: New Party chief suggests Vietnam and China are "comrades plus brothers"
- 2002: China responds by proposing the two be "good neighbors, good friends, good comrades, good partners" – just friends, no brothers
- 2003: After Iraq war, accept accommodation to the United States

The reorientations of Vietnamese foreign policy resulted from the interplay of the two grand strategies of anti-imperialism and modernization. The process that generates the strategic changes in each grand strategy can be modeled by a "strategic algorithm." In its entirety, it is a six-step process:

- Step 1: Define your ambitions.
- Step 2: Learn about the ambitions of others.
- Step 3: If you have conflict of ambitions with a foreign country then it is your opponent.
- Step 4: If the opponent is stronger then seek allies to balance it.
- Step 5: If the alliance is definitively weaker than the opponent then accommodate to the opponent.
- Step 6: If you're definitively too weak then redefine your ambitions – feedback loop to the first step. While redefining your ambitions, you may revise your worldview and self-perception as well.

The strategic algorithm represents a long-term process. Years or decades may have to elapse for one to go from one step to the next. It took the Vietnamese one decade, from 1978 to 1988, to go from step 4 to step 5 (vis-à-vis China). It took the anti-imperialists 14 years, from 1989 to 2003, to go from step 4 to step 5 (vis-à-vis the United States). The strategic algorithm models a learning process, but it is also a "doing" process. The periods between the steps are the time for strengthening oneself and weakening one's opponent—by diplomacy and alliance building, by economic development and competition, by war and arms race.

A number of remarks can be drawn from the strategic algorithm. Considerations of relative power play a decisive role in policy choice but are conditioned by considerations of relative ambitions. However, the latter are not independent from the former; a change of ambitions, even of worldview and self-perception, is more likely to occur when the imbalance of power is perceived as desperately in favor of the opponents. Whether power (and material factors) or ideas (and ideational factors) play a more important role in policy choice is, therefore, a false question.

Also, the distinction between systemic (third-image), domestic (second-image), and personal (first-image) factors creates more confusion than clarity. Four of the five reorientations mentioned above were triggered by third-image factors. The other one was brought about primarily by a first-image factor: the Party chief. However, in all five cases, the "causal" effects of the international and personal factors on foreign policy were shaped and channeled by grand strategies, which are in turn based on worldviews, a factor which cuts across the three levels.

The grand strategies in our case are responses to major shifts in the global balance of forces. The grand strategy of modernization was a response to a fundamental shift in the balance of economic power between the socialist and the capitalist systems. In the mid-1980s the modernizers recognized that the world forces of production had dramatically increased as a result of the scientific-technological revolution, internationalization, and a new international division of labor. All these occurred, however, in the West and some economies that closely cooperated with the West. Vietnam as well as the entire Soviet bloc was isolated from these "trends of the time."

As a result, the socialist world fell into a deep economic crisis, while the capitalist world was prospering. The grand strategy of modernization represents a complete transformation of worldview, self-perception, ambitions, and strategic approaches and orientations. The aim is to join the main currents of the world and to catch up with the West.

The anti-imperialist grand strategy was revived by a tectonic shift in the balance of political power between the socialist world and the West. As a series of former socialist countries changed their regime, the socialist world dwindled and was in danger of being erased from the planet. The anti-imperialists, much more than the modernizers, saw in the West and above all the United States the major force that wanted to complete the elimination of socialism. The anti-imperialist grand strategy would not be viable without the China factor. Seeing what China did at the Tiananmen Square, the Vietnamese anti-imperialists believed that China was keen to safeguard socialism against Western attacks. With a population of over a billion, China can stand the attacks. A close relationship with China is the keystone of the anti-imperialist grand strategy.

If systemic pressure is the "cause" of foreign policy outcome, it "causes" the latter in a counterintuitive and complicated way. Intuitively, we think that Vietnamese foreign policy would remain unchanged until the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War (hereafter: "1989"), which then would generate a turn in the direction of something similar to that of the grand strategy of modernization.[3] On the contrary, a few Vietnamese policy makers, particularly Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, had anticipated the end of bipolarity and ideological blocs even before "1989" and succeeded in diverting their country's geopolitical orientation toward multipolarity and regional integration. Also, when "1989" occurred, some Vietnamese policy makers, notably General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh, vehemently countered the pressure and managed to bring their country's geopolitical orientation back to the Cold War time. Systemic pressure is not translated but transmuted into foreign policy output.

[3] I thank Steve Miller for pointing me to this idea.

The transmutation is dependent on the content and the contest of worldviews. Three major factors contribute a great deal to this process. The first is the society's historical experience. Historical experience determines the grand strategic matrices within which policy obtains its inspiration and formulation. Vietnam's distinctive experience explains why it is not enthusiastic with the orientalist grand strategy and why the anti-imperialist grand strategy still is viable in the post-Cold War era.

The second factor is leaders' personalities. Personalities played an important role in the ascent of both grand strategies. Resolution 13 could not be passed without the efforts of Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. Without a few modernizers in the top leadership, such as Thach and Vo Van Kiet, who contributed a great deal to the formulation and promotion of the grand strategy of modernization, Vietnam might have remained either a hard-line communist and isolated state, something like North Korea and Cuba, but without an individual dictator. Likewise, had the Party chief in late 1989 been a modernizer, the anti-imperialist turn after August 1989 might not have happened.

The third factor is the political system's learning capacity. Vietnam's communist system has a weak learning capacity, especially with respect to global developments. Open-minded people like Thach, Kiet, and Tran Xuan Bach are rarity in the Vietnamese leadership. Even within his Foreign Ministry, Thach was said to be "one head higher" than his deputies and assistants with respect to both strategy and theory. Neither of his deputies, including Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien (since 1999) and Vice Premier and Secretary in charge of foreign affairs Vu Khoan (since 2001), can compete with Thach on strategic and theoretical thinking. In general, the Vietnamese foreign policy machineries are staffed with many people of low talent and poor knowledge. Except for a short period when Thach was powerful enough to enforce a meritocratic recruiting scheme in his Foreign Ministry, and except for some tiny groups in the security and the arms forces, the dominant recruitment scheme of the Foreign Ministry, the Public Security Ministry (formerly Interior Ministry), and the Defense Ministry is loyalty- and bribery-based rather than knowledge-based.[4]

[4] The Party Central Department of External Affairs also plays a role in the making of Vietnamese foreign policy, but its influence at the level of strategic decisions is much lesser than those of the "big three." The

The weak learning capacity of the Vietnamese political system is additionally rooted in a general distrust of "men of knowledge." The majority of VCP "men of power" is of lower-class origins and has little education. They envy "men of knowledge," mobbing them, thus creating a political atmosphere in which "red" (loyalty to communism) commands over "expert." The political distrust of experts also manifests itself in the poor role think tanks have played in the making of Vietnamese foreign policy. As leaders expect think tanks to provide "illustrations" (*minh hoa*) of their views and not expert analyses, they create an atmosphere hostile to creative thinking and freedom of thought within the think tanks, thus further undermine their capacity and degrading them into a subservient status. The weak learning capacity of Vietnam's political system is one of the reasons why Vietnam needed fourteen years to re-recognize the post-Cold War reality of global developments.

Vietnamese foreign policy since the late 1980s has resulted from the interplay of two different grand strategies, each of which is based on a different vision of the world. It is the conflict and compromise, and blend and division of labor, between the two grand strategies that has framed Vietnam's policy toward the world.

To elucidate the point of the story, let us imagine foreign policy as a journey and the state as a ship. The Vietnamese ship has two captains with two different maps and two different destinations. These destinations are in themselves not incompatible. But in a situation when the key external resources necessary to domestic modernization are centered in the hands of the biggest capitalist powers, the goals of anti-imperialism conflict with those of modernization. As a result, the captains have to renegotiate their destinations. In fact, neither relinquishes his destination, but they agree on a compromised direction. The ship thus approaches neither of the shores the captains want it to land on. The captains' dilemma is that if they want to reach their respective destination, they have to split their team (supposed that to split the ship is not an option), but if their team is divided up, a third party may take over the lead.

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influence of other major state agencies such as the Finance Ministry, the Planning and Investment Ministry, and the Trade Ministry on Vietnamese foreign policy is neglectable at the strategic level. But here too, loyalty and corruption play a role much larger than expertise and capability in the recruitment and promotion of officials and civil servants.

Grand strategy is a place in which worldview, identity, and interest are molded, fused and reinforced. Policymakers regardless of their ideological affiliation are concerned about their collective power as members of the ruling party and their personal position in the state apparatus. However, they approach the problem of how to retain power and position in various ways. Some stick to the regime, others to the country. Probably, the difference is determined by a vision about "which one has future or more power" and "where I obtain higher position." Underlying such visions can be a worldview, which accounts for who has more power, an identity, which explains where one can reach higher position, or an ambition, which induces one to simply choose one way and not another. Driving by different motives at the personal level, the policymakers end up at two major grand strategies at the elite level.

The superposition of two grand strategies results in what modernizers perceive as "paradigm lost."[5] This dualism is counterproductive to the purpose of modernization but actually serves the *hidden agenda* of anti-imperialism. When the archenemy (America) is still very strong and the strongest comrade (China) still refuses to cooperate in strategic matters, maintaining wide but shallow relations with other players in the world is the best way to guard oneself and bide one's time.

Policy, however, has to confront reality. The reality that Beijing has repeatedly rebuffed Hanoi's proposal for an alliance founded on ideological grounds presents a strong pressure for fundamental changes in the anti-imperialist paradigm. As time passed and events cumulated, more and more people in the Hanoi leadership realized that China's real objective is to become a superpower, not to protect socialism. This has two implications. First, Hanoi must rely on itself, and second, it must rethink its ambition.

Hanoi is pressed to adjust its ambition to the domestic reality, too. The rise of a multi-sector and market-coordinated economy has seriously challenged the crusade against capitalism. All these will affect the balance of power between the two grand strategies of anti-imperialism and modernization. The nutshell of their conflict concerns the question: Which one is primary to the other—national or class interest? Between

[5] See Thayer, "Vietnamese Foreign Policy."

1990 and 1998, the discourse was dominated by proponents of class struggle. Anyone who was arguing for the primacy of national interest had to do it sub rosa. An example was Kiet's letter to the Politburo. The "tide of battle" began, however, to reverse in early 1999. From then on the thesis of the primacy of national interest became prevailing in the discourse.

The wind of change may blow additionally from a third corner. As Chinese power is rising, Washington increasingly sees Beijing as a competitor. Given Vietnam's strategic location in the southern frontier of China, the United States has changed its view of Vietnam from a chapter in history into an actor in strategy. Growing U.S. strategic interests in Vietnam have balanced Hanoi's position between China and the United States. Whether or not Washington may offer Hanoi some heightened position in its global chessboard remains to be seen. However, there is a great chance that after the Tenth Party Congress in 2006, the transformation of Vietnam's state grand strategy that started in the late 1980s will become complete.

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