CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
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There is sometimes a tendency to see similarities between the Sino-Vietnam conflict and the conflicts between Iraq and Iran or India and Pakistan etc. The complexities in the Sino-Vietnam conflict however are more and deeper rooted. India and Pakistan or Iran and Iraq no doubt have unequal territories, but their military capabilities are similar. Vietnam is unequal to China both in area as also in military strength. There is a great imbalance in their power equation. Vietnam is underdeveloped and weak as compared to the powerful China. The latter is far advanced in its technological might and overall development; it has modern weapons and international support; it has power enough to overwhelm Vietnam. In its overall policy China is nationalistic and wants to dominate over the other countries in the region of East and Southeast Asia. The Chinese expect Vietnam to remain under their influence. They have grabbed by force Paracel islands, on which Vietnam lays territorial claims; they are also making claims on other Vietnamese territories. China has aided and abetted the activities that seriously undermine Vietnam's stability and regularly threatened its security. China is still conscious of the policy of the Han dynasty
to extend influence further south.

The Vietnamese however have been able to stand up to China, just as they have been able to fight to French and the superior forces of the United States, because of their remarkable sense of independence and national identity. They are fighting for their national survival and territorial integrity. As a part of South East Asia Vietnam's relations and influence in the region depend to a great extent on its relationship with China. Vietnam wishes to develop cordial relations with all the South East Asian countries but that can be successful only when its relationship with China develops in the right direction.

It may be pertinent here to compare the nature of Indo-Pakistan and Iran-Iraq disputes with that between China and Vietnam. The Indo-Pakistan conflict originated with the partition of India in 1947 when some contiguous areas of India were separated from the motherland to become a separate country, known as Pakistan. The division was made on religious grounds. India opted for democratic rule and Pakistan gradually came under dictatorship. The two countries have some contentious areas such as the occupation of Kashmir and their common borders,
for which the two countries have fought three major wars. The great powers have backed one against the other and there has always been a climate of mutual distrust between the two countries.

In the Iran-Iraq dispute there are similar contested areas of Khalige-Fars claimed by Iran and Khalige-Arab claimed by Iraq on their common borders. The two Muslim states have different languages, culture and civilization, socio-religious festivals and customs. Iran is representative of the ancient Zoroastrian history and expects to play a special role in the politics of the Persian Gulf. Iraq is representative of the Arab culture and considers Iranians as agam (non-Arab) and therefore inferior. Iraq is not ready to concede any areas to the agam Iran. It is fighting Iran against great odds.

Vietnam also has border disputes with China and is not ready to concede any areas to its traditional enemy. Both countries have similar lifestyles and both are Communist states, but they have serious differences and reservations against each other.

Vietnam is anxious to strengthen its security system and defend its borders against the Chinese aggression. It also endeavours to project itself as an effective bulwark against the Chinese threat.
over the rest of South East Asia. But such a self-assumed role of Vietnam has yet to be recognized and accepted by the ASEAN states. The six non-communist ASEAN countries, i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, Singapore and the Philippines totally disapprove of Vietnam's military adventures in Kampuchea. Being pragmatic and realistic in their foreign policy orientation, they are unwilling to support such radical developments. ASEAN countries are worried about the developments in Indochina. They have forged cordial relations with China and signed a series of trade and cooperation agreements with it. Friendship with China gives them benefits in the areas of technology and agriculture. It has also helped them to suppress the insurgency movements within their territories, these insurgencies in fact having been mostly inspired and aided by the People's Republic of China. Their rapprochement with the Chinese has given them the appropriate environment to pursue their national interests in peace.

The Vietnamese endeavour to proffer itself as a bulwark against the Chinese has not aroused the desired response in the region. Indonesia is the only country not to have sent its ambassador to China but other ASEAN countries share the political and
strategic outlook of the Chinese rulers in the region of South East Asia. They have established not only ambassadorial relations but forged several technological and cultural agreements with China. China is exporting consumer items and oil to some Southeast Asian countries and helping in the process of nation building. The Chinese Government is no longer averse to continuing American military presence in the South East Asian region. ASEAN also does not feel an urgency to press that demand. Thus the Subic Bay Naval Base and Clarke Air Base in the Philippines where the U.S. military is deployed are not to be disturbed at present. The Bangkok Declaration (1967), Kuala Lumpur Declaration (1971) and some provisions in the new Philippines constitution (1978) are aimed against U.S. military bases in the region, but they have all been glossed over as a consequence of the Sino-American and Sino-ASEAN rapprochement. The Chinese and ASEAN outlook on Vietnam's intervention in the Kampuchean affair is convergent, the result of which has been the stalemate in Kampuchea. If a consensus has to emerge in Vietnam on the need to unite the warring factions in Kampuchea so that an indigenous regime can be formed there, the diametrically opposite views of China and Vietnam on the
issue will have to change their mutual antagonism diluted. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the most respected Kampuchean leader in exile is capable of effecting the Vietnamese withdrawal by negotiation and replacing the Heng Samrin Government to restore peace to war-torn Kampuchea. But his negotiation and agreement with the Heng Samrin regime cannot be a reasonable success unless it is also supported by the Khmer Rouge faction and its Chinese mentors. Every negotiated settlement involves give and take, but flexibility of approach is possible only if the parties negotiating are doing so in relative independence. In the absence of this prerequisite, Sihanouk's government in exile is unable to finalize the terms of agreement with Heng Samrin. The external pressures are too many and the internal dissension self-defeating.

Thailand, sharing a common border with Laos and Kampuchea, is a frontline state in the Kampuchean imbroglio. Vietnam's military intervention was a disturbing development for Thailand. It sheltered Kampuchean rebels and helped them to fight against Vietnam by providing them training facilities and modern weapons.

The guerrilla war between Vietnamese forces and
the Kampuchean rebels has been going on for a decade now on the Thai-Kampuchean borders. By its very nature of being a guerrilla war with strong external backing, this war cannot be decisive. There have been heavy losses on both sides, but neither the Khmer Rouge forces nor the Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea have thought it necessary or advisable to compromise. Vietnam requires peace for development, and it wants a negotiated settlement. The continuance of the war has subjected it to dependence on Soviet aid which Vietnam may prefer to lessen. Vietnam's decision-makers seem to have opted for a policy of gracefully withdrawing their military presence in Kampuchea in gradual stages and concentrating their attention on national development. Rapprochement with China would be welcome in the Vietnamese view, but the geo-political environment in the region is surcharged with regional and extra-regional power competition with serious apprehensions about the strategic motivations and objectives of both China and Vietnam.

Vietnam is sensitive to China's ambitions over its southern neighbours. It has had the experience of being under Chinese subjugation for a thousand years and it became independent only after a long
protracted war. The Vietnamese are apprehensive of the Chinese policy and so is China of Vietnam's long-term quests. China has had territorial ambitions over Vietnam. The boundaries of the two countries were earmarked during the colonial period. China does not accept the existing national demarcation line with Vietnam just as it does not accept its boundaries with India and the Soviet Union. Against all the three countries China has fought border wars in the recent past, there is an impression that the Chinese Government will not hesitate to employ military means to occupy contested areas if it reads the situation as opportune. China has already annexed parts of India (Aksai Chin) and Vietnam (Paracel Islands) by military means. Vietnam is a tiny state compared to China. Having commonalities in lifestyle and socio-political values, they understand the motivations and objectives of each other, but Vietnam being much less powerful than China is concerned about its security and territorial integrity in the face of Chinese hostility.

China and Vietnam have shown in the past that they can cooperate very well in order to promote their national interests. Ho Chi Minh and some of his ardent followers lived in China in exile for many
years before the Second World War. The Vietnamese and Chinese Communists adopted guerrilla warfare in order to defeat their enemies. The Communist party volunteers of the two countries fought against the Japanese aggressors together during the Second World War. The Chinese Communist Party supported the Vietminh and National Liberation Front for South Vietnam through diplomatic and military means. But after the success of the NLF and the subsequent unification of Vietnam in 1976, the Sino-Vietnam conflict became apparent. The differences arose due to biased Chinese perception of Vietnam's friendship with the Soviet Union which Vietnam was cultivating at the same time as its relations with China. The Sino-Soviet schism had originated due to difference on their existing common boundaries. China had close relations with the Soviet Union since 1949 but became hostile to it after 1967. Similarly China considered some area in Vietnam as being its own and gave indications of its desire to extend its southern border. It waited for some years to articulate its claim.

The Soviet Union had given massive economic and military aid to Vietnam to fight against the American forces, which independent Vietnam could not forget. Moreover it was suspicious of Chinese designs. But China found Vietnam's friendship with the Soviets distasteful. Walking the tight rope between China
and the Soviet Union Vietnam chose to lean towards the Soviets. China had already occupied the Paracels islands in 1974 and it had begun to concentrate its forces on its border with Vietnam after 1976.

Vietnam has had the bitter experience of repeated invasions since the beginning of the Christian era and particularly in the last fifty years. Freedom is something its people have learnt to guard jealously. Facing a potential threat from China it had to take precautionary measures. The activities of the Chinese within its territory (the Hoas) had to be guarded against on account of their inclination to act as fifth columnists for China. Towards the reconstruction of the country, it began to introduce major socio-economic reforms. It also began to consolidate Indo-Chinese unity and fraternity. The Laotian comrades were of one mind as their Vietnamese comrades. The Communists in Kampuchea however diametrically different from the Vietnamese and tended to see things from the Chinese point of view. Kampuchea began to lay claims to territories on their common borders falling within Vietnam and began to strengthen military deployment on its Vietnamese front.

In view of the Sino-Kampuchea threat, Vietnam
decided to join the Soviet bloc formally, and signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in November 1978. Article VI of the treaty said that the two parties signatory to the treaty would exchange views on all important international questions, relating to the interest of the two countries. In case either party was attacked or threatened with an attack, the two parties would immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating that threat and would take appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and security of the two countries. The western media viewed Article VI as having military connotation and thus regarded Vietnam as an ally of the Soviet Union. The Chinese leaders became openly bellicose, and their example was followed by Kampuchea's Khmer Rouge government. Vietnam considered that the Pol Pot government had gone too far and took military action to overthrow it.

Vietnam did not set a healthy precedent in resorting to military means to silence the voice of Democratic Kampuchea. Vietnam's socio-political norms are not much different from those of the Chinese, and it did what the Chinese would have done in similar circumstances: it took a drastic decision to sort out the problem not through negotiation, but on the
battlefront. The Khmer Rouge regime was overthrown and replaced by the People's Republic of Kampuchea led by Heng Samrin. The new political system thus became a pro-Vietnam system, but it was not recognized by the international community.

China and Vietnam clashed with each other over the occupation of the spratly group of Islands in March 1988. The contested areas have been under the effective control of the Vietnamese since 1975, but the Chinese have claims over all the islands in the South China Sea. They have applied military pressure to deter Vietnam and occupy the entire archipelago. Vietnam, however, is not the only claimant for jurisdiction in the South China Sea. The Philippines, Taiwan and Brunei also have their legitimate claims. If China insists upon the Vietnamese vacating the South China Sea today, it may do so for other countries also, such as the Philippines and Taiwan. It is necessary therefore that a negotiated settlement of the dispute is supported at the national level. Vietnam's policy is aimed at finding a diplomatic solution of the spratlys dispute.

Both China and Vietnam are engaged in nation-building activities. They require peace to pursue their objective. Vietnam has the distinction of being the country that boosted the Asian morale by defeating
the American forces. Now it can show the way how a devastated Asian country can recoup inspite of hostile elements and bring peace to the South East region. The Vietnamese leaders require an appropriate environment at the national and international level to be able to channel their energies towards national development and progress.

The Chinese susceptibilities and, to an extent, geo-political ambitions, will have to be accommodated. Vietnam has to adjust its regional ambitions accordingly. The glasnost euphoria has inspired the Soviet leaders to take peace initiatives in relation to China and the United States. If the Soviets can successfully understand and accommodate Chinese demands it may have a salutary impact on the politics of Sino-Vietnamese relations also.

The role of the great powers in the Indochinese region since 1954 has been dubious. It has contributed more to the accentuation of the regional conflict than towards its resolution. Most of the international agreements and treaties such as SEATO for the region have been concluded at the cost of Vietnam's interest.

In 1972 President Nixon visited China and there has been considerable improvement in Sino-American
ties ever since. The United States and China are maintaining a common stand against Vietnam on the Kampuchean issue. As China supports the American global outlook, its decision-making towards Vietnam is far from normal and full of acrimony and distrust.

A long history of Sino-Vietnamese confrontation and the repeated invasions of the Vietnamese territories by foreign powers in the recent past have increased Vietnam's susceptibilities about the intentions and ambitions of foreign powers. However, in order to promote Asian solidarity and good will, a rapprochement in Sino-Vietnamese relations is essential. It is equally important for an enduring peace and development of South East Asia also. But the anti-communist crusaders would make it appear that the consolidation of friendship and cooperation between China and Vietnam will have an adverse impact on the politics of the region and it will destabilize the power balance.

The main concern of Vietnam's China policy is how to convince China of its good-neighbourliness without losing anything in return. Acquiring China's good will and cordiality is a sine qua non for Vietnam's prosperity. But it will be a long and arduous process on which will depend Vietnam's future role in South East Asia.