CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
Historical Background

Amidst the current extremely antagonistic relations between China and Vietnam, it may be difficult to remember that there was a time hardly seven decades ago when the two countries were quite close to each other. The Communist movement developed in both countries simultaneously in 1917, and the communist parties in both countries forged friendly relations and exchanged their views and strategies. They had perfect understanding as regards their fight against colonial forces. The two communist neighbours share many cultural similarities, yet since 1979 their relations have become extremely bitter. Their conflict has some similarities with that between Iran and Iraq, but with the major difference that in the case of China and Vietnam, there is a considerable difference in the capabilities of the two countries. Both countries must own up responsibility for their soured relations, which neither of them will do.

China shares a 1400 km long border to its south with Vietnam. The other neighbours of
Vietnam are Laos on the west and Kampuchea to its southwest. The Gulf of Thailand is to its south and the South China Sea to the east. Vietnam takes the outline of a giant S and covers an area of 329,600 sq km, stretching from the 9th parallel north to the 26th parallel south.¹ Its extreme north and extreme south are the richest areas agriculturally and the most thickly populated. In the north is the intensively cultivated and rich Red River delta, with a long undulating coast to its south with small fertile plains interspersed by rocky prominences jutting out to the sea. The thin coastal strip widens further south and eventually slopes into the rich alluvial soil of the Mekong delta at the southern extreme. Inland, the mountains of the north merge into the Annamite chain which runs parallel to the coast and descends into a

series of plateaus in the west inhabited by primitive mountain tribes.\textsuperscript{2} The census of 1984 gives the total population of the country as 58.3 million. Vietnam is a primarily agricultural country, with 8 per cent of its land under forests and 20 per cent as the fertile plains of the rice-producing deltas.

The frontier with China is strategically vulnerable, even though it passes along a mountain chain. The border is contiguous with the southern Chinese province of Kwangtung. For more than a millennium (111 B.C. to 939 A.D.) the kings of China believed the Red River delta, the heart of northern Vietnam and the best plain south of the Yangtze estuary to be an integral part of China. Vietnam for a time comprised only one-third of the present country - the Red River delta and the coastal plain along the Gulf of Tonkin. The present central Vietnam,

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\textsuperscript{2} M.G. Kahin, ed.\textit{ Governments and Politics of South East Asia} (New York 1967), p.376.
\end{flushright}
which was called by the French colonialists as the Protectorate of Annam, was sporadically under Chinese rule (it was then the northern part of the kingdom of Champa). South Vietnam was in part China's territory and further south of Kampuchea.³

Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, who unified China and founded his empire in 221 B.C. was the first among a long list of Chinese kings to conquer Vietnam. From then on, Vietnam, either as a Chinese province or independently, was under Chinese influence for two thousand years.⁴ When Ch'in's dynasty came to an end with his death, Chao T'o, a newly installed official of Nanhai, took both Kwêllin and Hsiang countries by force and in 207 B.C. proclaimed himself the king of a break-away Nan Yueh (Nam-Viet).⁵ It was nearly a century before Wu Ti, a powerful Han emperor, retook Nan Yueh in 112 B.C. He divided

³. Ibid.
it into nine countries of which three
(Chiao-Chih, Chiu-Chen, and Jen-Nan) were in
present-day Vietnam. A year later Nan Yueh was
annexed by China, and for the next millennium,
until A.D. 939, it was governed as a Chinese
province. 6 The period was marked by constant
Vietnamese attempts to win back their freedom,
the most remarkable among them being the revolt
led by the two Trung sisters in A.D. 40. The
early part of the 10th century was specially
marked by a long series of revolts finally cul­
minating in Ngo Ouyen's defeat of the Chinese
in A.D. 939. 7 Unlike their Cantonese brothers,
the Vietnamese never lost the will to maintain
their separate identity and the reason was the
assimilation of the two cultures itself. 8

6. Ibid.
8. Joseph Buttinger ascribes Vietnamese nationa­
lish to this Chinese influence. He writes:
The more they (the Vietnamese) absorbed of
the skills, customs and ideas of the Chinese,
the smaller grew the likelihood of their
ever becoming part of the Chinese people.
In fact, it was during centuries of inten­
sive efforts to turn them into Chinese that
the Vietnamese came into their own as a se­
parate people, with political and cultural
aspect of their own.
For the next 500 years, although nominally united in a centralized kingship, the country was perennially rent by dynastic struggles and the wars of rival princely families. The ruling dynasty had a three-fold task, namely, to maintain its authority against internal competition, to protect the Red River delta against Chinese invasion and to provide land for an ever-expanding population by pushing southward. The long march southward meant confrontation with two rivals, the Champas and Khmers. In 982 Lo Hoan sacked the Champa capital of Indrapura, defeating the Champa king Rudravarman. After the Champa capital Bihn Dinh (Vijaya) was captured in 1069, there followed a relatively peaceful period (1069-1306) in Champa-Vietnamese relations, sealed with the marriage of a Vietnamese princess to the Champa king in 1306. But six years later the Vietnamese army sacked the Champa capital once again. A century and a half later,

Champa ceased to be an independent kingdom in the wake of the large-scale invasion of that country by Le Thank Ton in 1470, though in the Chinese annals it continued to appear so upto A.D. 1543.

By middle 16th century the Vietnamese kingdom had grown too vast to be controlled by a single centralized authority. The consequence of this expansion was the emergence of the Trinh in the north and Nguyen in the south. These two dynasties ruled over Vietnam until 1802 when Nguyen Anh reunited the country with the assistance of the French. Bishop Pigneau de Behaine arranged for a treaty between Nguyen Anh and France, resulting in the entry of the


12. A personal friend of Nguyen Anh, de Behaine advocated the former's case before the French in Versailles and on 28 November 1787, he obtained a treaty by which France promised to send an expeditionary force to southern Vietnam in exchange for the Port of Tourance, the island of Poula Cando and complete Freedom of trade (ibid, p.214).
French in Vietnamese politics. Nguyen Anh adopted the title of Gia Long. Ming Mang, who succeeded his father Gia Long in 1820,\textsuperscript{13} did not look with favour upon the presence of the European traders and the French Bishop in his country and embarked upon an anti-Christian policy. The emperor was furious at the clandestine landing of a French missionary near Da Nang in 1825 and the brunt of his anger fell on the Christian minority.\textsuperscript{14} Ming Mang's successor Thieu Tri was still more vigorously anti-Christian, which resulted in foreign intervention in Vietnam. French ships twice appeared in Vietnamese waters with aggressive intent,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ming Mang adopted a policy that the perverse religion of the Europeans corrupted the heart of man. He ordered the countrywide persecution of all Christians and issued a decree declaring Christianity illegal and a crime punishable with death (D.J.M. Tate, The Making of Modern Southeast Asia (London 1971), p. 445).
\end{itemize}
forcing the emperor to accept French demands.  

But the third time, when two French naval ships appeared at Da Nang, in 1847, the Emperor stood his ground. An inconclusive Franco-Vietnamese encounter followed; the French ships sailed off leaving the Christians to their fate.  

Tu Duc, the last of the Nguyen dynasty was still more ruthlessly anti-Christian. The consequence of his reign of terror was a joint

15. The first time the French ship appeared at Da Nang in 1842 demanding the release of five missionaries, Fathers Ducloes, Berneaux, Galy and Charrier. The demand was conceded. The second time, the ship appeared at Da Nang in 1845 to rescue the Bishop of West Cochinchina. This again was conceded. (Tate, n.14, p.445).

16. The French demanded that Thieu Tri start negotiations for guaranteeing the safety of French nationals. On the pretext of negotiating, the emperor mustered forces near Tourance. The French officers who had come to negotiate were assassinated. The French ships, the Gloire and Victoireuse sailed away in panic and the emperor punished the Christian minority in Vietnam (Hall, n.5, p.646).
Franco-Spaniard intervention in August 1858. 17
The confrontation lasted for the next two years culminating in a decisive battle near Saigon in middle 1861. European arms technology outweighed the numerical strength of the Asians here, and Tu Duc was forced to negotiate. A two-year long diplomatic manoeuvre followed, resulting in a treaty in April 1863 which gave in to French demands. 18 Tu Duc's hold over the country was

17: Before the joint France, Spaniard intervention, the French sent Montigny to Hue in 1857 to negotiate. He placed three French demands before him namely (i) a guarantee of religious liberty for Christians; (ii) permission to establish a French commercial agency at Hue; and (iii) sanction for appointment of a French consul at Hue. Tu Duc refused (Hall, n.5, p.648; Tate, n.14, p.446).

18: By this treaty Vietnam ceded to France three eastern provinces of Cochin-China and agreed to pay a heavy indemnity in instalments over ten years. Moreover, free exercise of Catholic religion and opening of Tourance, Balat and Kuang An for the French was agreed upon (Tate, n.14, pp.449-450).
weakening with the threat from the north and internal weaknesses and the French shrewdly exploited the opportunity which the situation afforded them. They started a gradual troops mobilization pretending to check the Black Flags. Finally, on 15 March 1847 France got Vietnam to sign a treaty of peace, friendship and perpetual alliance with itself. The treaty conceded sovereignty to the French over the six provinces of Cochin-China. A French Resident with armed escort would be installed in the country who would hold the Vietnamese rank of minister. Qui Nhon, Hai Phong, Da Nang and Hanoi were to be opened to French Trade with a French consul in each city, also with suitable protection, French ships were to be granted the most favoured nation treatment, French officials were to hold key posts in the Vietnamese customs.

19. Black Flags were a group of armed bandits active in the north, comprising both Chinese and Vietnamese. They symbolized the worsening economic conditions, misery and discontent within Vietnam (Tate, n.14, p.453).
Navigation in the Red River was to be free up to Yunan. Christians were to be granted complete religious freedom. In return, France recognized the complete independence of Vietnam with regard to any foreign power (i.e. China) with the rider that Tu Duc conformed his foreign policy to that of France and changed nothing in his present diplomatic mission. France also agreed to defend Vietnam against aggression but only on request. 20

Chafing against these impositions, Tu Duc sought Chinese intervention against the French. China responded accordingly but was beaten down by the French forces. French predominance over Vietnam was thus assured. Hiep Hoa, the last emperor of Vietnam was forced to sign a treaty with France on 25 August 1884, 21 virtually surrendering his country's sovereignty to that country. From that date Vietnam remained under French subjugation till 2 September 1945, the day Vietnam declared independence.

20. Ibid., p.453.

21. Under provisions of this treaty, Vietnam recognized the French protectorate. It ceded control over her external affairs to France. France was also given administration in Vietnam over local authorities.
While the French occupation diverted Vietnamese hostility from the Chinese to the French, the Chinese cultural legacies survived in Vietnam. It is sometimes observed that Vietnam, although located in South East Asia, is actually a part of the cultural world of East Asia, led by Vietnam's large neighbour, China. The argument is persuasive. Not only was Vietnam under direct Chinese rule for a full millennium, but even after regaining their independence in the tenth century, the Vietnamese turned to China as a model for their literature, art and even their written language. For nearly ten centuries the Vietnamese styled themselves almost like a carbon copy of the Chinese. In the words of a modern Vietnamese historian:

"Our nation has been influenced by China in all regards. As far as literature is concerned we studied Chinese characters, practised confucianism and gradually assimilated the thought and art of China. Even in literary works written in Vietnamese our authors could not escape the influence of Chinese literature." 22

Vietnam is the odd man out amongst the states of mainland South East Asia. Unlike its neighbours to the west, Vietnam followed the Chinese model in social organization, government and outlook, the only country in the region to have absorbed China's cultural influence. First implanted in Vietnam by conquest, this influence survived Vietnam's liberation from Chinese domination.²³ It is difficult to estimate to what extent the Chinese way of life filtered into the Vietnamese subconscious over a millennium of Chinese domination. As among other South East Asian peoples, probably only the court and the elite were able to appreciate and absorb these alien cultural importations.

It is true that the Vietnamese learned China's techniques for civil administration, agriculture, education, literature, the arts and so on. But more significantly, the Vietnamese rulers cherished the values and other characteristics of the Confucian state.... In these circumstances Vietnamese intellectuals, following the Chinese gentry, developed a tendency which led them to believe that "man of letters" was more responsible than the people of other life.... It is

²³ Tate, n.14, p.11.
asserted therefore, that there were similar cultural features between western China and Vietnam as early as 3000 B.C. Subsequent to Chinese expansion into Vietnam, Chinese culture was exported to that country by political force. 24

Chinese philosophy, literature, language, arts, social rites, and religion gradually flowed into Vietnam after 207 B.C. The Chinese established schools, introduced marriage customs and taught their literature in the Vietnamese language. 25 Confucian teachings and Taoism came with the influx of Chinese scholars and officials. Buddhism entered Vietnam via China in the second century. 26

Chinese culture in Vietnam was glorified by the educational efforts of Shih Hsieh (187-226) as governor. His administration emphasized the study of Chinese classics and the practice of social rites. 27 The Vietnamese were grateful for

his teaching and honoured him with the title "the founder of studies." After Vietnam became independent, Chinese culture became even more firmly rooted in Vietnamese society through its adoption by Vietnamese rulers.

The struggle in China for the strengthening and modernization of the country suffered a great setback immediately after the failure of the reform movement in 1898 led by K'ang Yu-Wei and Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao. The writings of the leaders of the Chinese reform movement, especially Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao, stimulated the Vietnamese to read books by Rousseau, Locke, Montesquieu in the Chinese translation. Moreover, as the Chinese republican revolution grew under the leadership of Sun-Yat-Sen, its influence resulted in the birth of a new concept of national independence and individual right to freedom.


The Chinese merchants had already built up a business empire in Vietnam before the French came. The French acquired a hold on Vietnam's commerce and banking, dominating rice and fish enterprises. Friction between the Chinese and the Vietnamese was welcomed by the French for it reduced the antagonism of the two peoples towards French rule. The French were then able to act as peacemakers.

As the political relations of the Vietnamese with China remained close, the wealth taken by the Chinese from Vietnam was considerable. The Chinese regarded Vietnam as a country of treasures from which they sought rare and precious items. A striking example was the Chinese adventure for treasures in A.D. 604 during the Sui dynasty. The emperor sent General Liu Fang with more than 10,000 soldiers and a few thousand criminals to attack Lin-I, then a district of Jen-Nan, where General Ma Yuan stationed his army. The ruler


of Lin-I resisted bravely but was defeated. Liu Fang's army looted the district of gold and other treasures before returning to China.32

Defenders of French colonialism have pointed to such developments as evidence to prove that the French rule had brought benefits to the peoples of Indochina: Vietnam had been introduced to the expanding international economic commercial magnates. But the critics have charged that French policy did not really promote the growth of trade and industry in Vietnam. On the contrary the aim of the colonial government was to discourage the indigenous production of goods that might compete with French manufactured goods.

With the unfolding of the 20th century, a new group of nationalists led by Phan Boi Chau emerged in the independence struggle unlike its predecessor "Can Young". It was more nationalistic and influenced by the liberal western democratic ideas. They sought Chinese support but as China itself was under European pressure, ulti-

32. Ibid, p.191/2533.
mately they turned towards Japan. For almost a decade, Japan became the Mecca of Vietnamese nationalists and Boi Chau tried to organize activities through the Vietnamese students studying in Japan.33 By late 1907 Phan Boi Chau planned a revolt by Vietnamese military units at Hanoi but the secret was leaked out.34 However, Phan Boi Chau continued his efforts and tried to muster Chinese support for Vietnamese causes.35 The Vietnamese nationalists under the leadership of Phan were responsible for some minor public administrations and no concrete steps were taken to achieve independence. The failure of the moderates and reformists to gain something meaningful, gradually encouraged the revolutionary groups and they became the forebears of the independence movement after the First World War.

33. Hall, n.s, p.762.
35. Ibid., p.66.
Links between the Soviet Union and Vietnamese Independence Movement (The 1920s)

The successful Communist revolution in Russia had made that country a living inspiration to all the left-leaning nationalists of the colonial countries. The Communist theory touched upon the problem of colonialism as an aspect of the worldwide class struggle.\(^{36}\) Lenin's thesis regarding revolution in the East did not mention South East Asia at all. In the early stage, the Vietnamese nationalist aspirations were centred around the Chinese nationalist activities rather than the Russian revolution, and the tide of revolution rose and fell in close parallel with the Chinese situation.\(^{37}\) The Russian influence over

\(^{36}\) Lenin in his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* propounded the thesis that imperialism is a byproduct of capitalism. In the early years, Lenin emphasized that the revolution should first occur first in the West rather than in the East but later on he recognized the importance of the East in the worldwide struggle against capitalism. Referring to the colonial question once Lenin accepted that "the Liberation of the people of these countries from the yoke of the imperialists would ensure freedom for your own country and at the same time would undermine imperialism at its very foundation."

\(^{37}\) King C. Chen, n.4. p.17.
the Vietnamese revolution at this point of time was in the nature of endowing the age-old Vietnamese resistance with a conceptual framework. The initial responsibility to guide the Annamese lay with the French Communist party in accordance with the directives laid down by the Second Comintern Congress. Ho Chi Minh at the Fifth Comintern Congress presented a report on the Indochina problem. Moscow's ignorance of the largest colonies in the Far East cannot have been from a lack of information.

The fact that these opportunities to keep abreast of events in Indochina led to no sustained Russian interest in the colony suggests an obvious conclusion: in the scheme of Soviet strategies in Asia, Vietnam was not critical or less critical than other areas. Moscow's capacity to cultivate Asian revolutionary movements, it has been observed, was not unlimited; Indochina was for the present expendable.


41. Ibid., p.107.
During the early 1920s two different lines dominated the mainstream of national independence movement. One was the radical nationalists led by Phan Boi Chau and the other the Communism-oriented groups led by Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) under the influence of the French Communist Party. No clear demarcation existed between these two and migration from one group to another was quite frequent. Ho Chi Minh's alliance with the Communists needs some clarification here. As he himself had put it:

At first was patriotism and not yet Communism which made me put my trust in Leninism and in the Third International. Step by step, in the struggle and by combining theoretical study of Marxism-Leninism with practical work, little by little I came to understand that only socialism and communism can free the oppressed nations and toiling people in the world from slavery.

Ho's activities in Paris and his contacts with Moscow in the 1920s and Phan Boi Chau's links

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42. Duiker, n. 34, p. 194.

43. Our President Ho Chi Minh, n. 38, p. 194.
with the Chinese nationalists in Canton, illustrated the role of these twin independence movements.

During the 1930s both Russia and China gave a little more attention to this long neglected French colony. After 1927, the Comintern decided to support the revolution in Asia. But this was only on paper and no concrete measures were taken to support the revolution in the East except in China. The Chinese revolution provided Ho Chi Minh ample opportunities to recruit the nationalist elements and gradually turn them into Marxist-Leninists. He laid down the foundation of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in China in 1930. Most significantly, immediately after the Comintern's recognition of the ICP, and

44. For Ho Chi Minh's activities see duiker, n.34, pp.196-199; Chen, n.4, p.21; Turner, n.38, p.6; Thompson, n.38, p.21. For Phan Boi Chau's activities see Chen, n.4, pp.15-18 and Duiker, The Age of Phan Boi Chau, n.34, pp.31-53.

45. The ICP was established under the shadow of Comintern. The following writers are agreed on this point: Our President Ho Chi Minh, n.38, pp.93-97; Turner, n.38, p.16, Chen n.4, p.26.

46. Maclane, n.39, p.112.
establishment of formal links between the two
the Chinese Communist Party sent an open letter
to the ICP and encouraged them saying that
"Indochina is one of the most important links
in the world chain of imperialism and the
Indochinese revolution is one of the decisive
factors in the East." 47

The mutiny of the Vietnamese soldiers at
En Bo in February 1930 was not of Communist in-
spiration. 48 But the ICP decided to exploit the
situation and the Moscow-controlled propaganda
machinery gave a Communist colour to the episode. 49
Soon after this, the ICP organized a mass peasants' and workers' revolt but it was ruthlessly crushed
by the French authorities. The Seventh Comintern
Congress in July 1935 outlined some basic
features of the revolution in the East as the
"United Front" action. The Congress asked the
world communist parties to support the liberation movements in the colonial or semi-colonial
world. 50 The Vietnamese communists were praised

47. Thompson, n.38, p.43
for their heroic struggle against the French imperialists. But as the Russians had to concentrate on mustering goodwill in Europe, their interest in South East Asia declined gradually, which led to their characterizing their policies towards the Vietnamese independence movement as "neutral". Ho Chi Minh was in Moscow in 1938 when the ICP was being oppressed by the French while in China the Kuomintang had launched a five-year drive against the ICP. The Sino-Japanese war however necessitated a second rapprochement between the Chinese nationalists and Communists, and Moscow accordingly signed a Friendship Treaty with China in August 1939. This atmosphere favoured a smooth Sino-Vietnamese sailing.51

The Soviet Union with all her energies devoted to the war in Europe, could hardly spare attention to the anti-imperialist movement in Asia. During those hard-pressed days the Vietnamese received a commendable amount of help from their Chinese neighbours particularly from the

51. Chen, n.4, pp.31-32.
nationalists. The Chinese General Chang Fa K'uai defended his association with Ho Chi Minh in these words: "One cannot blame me (a Commander-in-Chief of the Fourth War Area in China) for my relations with Ho Chi Minh because the central Government at Chungking was at that time cooperating with the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Union." 52

The invading Japanese forces had placed Indochina on top of the list of territories to be captured during the Second World War.

It was a rich country which every year sent abroad quantities of rice and raw materials, and the Japanese knew they would need it if they were going to extend their lines beyond their own frontiers. Nor was it solely a potential supply base, geography alone made it a key to the invasion of Southeast Asia. The Japanese considered Indochina as the near area to win over the British Empire and the control the only outlet for Chinese supplies from the outer world. In 1939 the Japanese protested against the military supplies moving into China via Tonkin and threatened to occupy it. 53


The French authorities in Indochina requested the Americans and British to save them but to no avail. Abandoned by the West and weak at home, they bowed to the Japanese demand for stationing their forces in the area. The Japanese forces moved in September 1940. The local administration was nominally in the hands of the French but it was clear that the Japanese dictated the terms.54

On 2 August 1941, Japan demanded more concessions from the French authorities in Indochina. The French Government discussed the question at length and Wellington Koo, the Chinese Ambassador to France proposed Chinese intervention in Indochina against Japan. But France was hesitant, fearful of antagonizing the Axis Powers, and also because Chinese military presence on the Indochina soil would not be welcome. Japanese demands were therefore conceded. The Japanese thus attained control of Indochina on 22 September 1941, and they controlled the territory until their eventual defeat in 1945.55 During the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) China was sympathetic to the cause of Vietnamese independence and

54. Ibid., pp. 15-20.
supported Vietnamese revolutionaries, nationalists and Communists. Many Vietnamese Communist leaders besides Ho Chi Minh, such as Pham Van Dong, Vo Nguyen Giap and Hoang Van Hoan, took refuge in China in order to escape French persecution.

The French were apprehensive that the Vietnamese nationalists would seek to exploit the interlude provided by the Japanese occupation to arrive at their goal, which the nationalists indeed tried to do. Ho Chi Minh returned to China from Moscow in 1938, in a cordial atmosphere created by the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty signed on 7 August 1937. He consolidated the ICP and conducted classes for the Vietnamese in Marxism-Leninism in southern China. In July 1940, Ho Chi Minh asked his two comrades Phan Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap to study Marxism-Leninism but as the Japanese occupied the Tonkin, he planned to go back to Vietnam with the help of the Kuomintang and the VNQDD (Vietnam Quoq Dan Dang), an organization of the Vietnamese nationalists under the protection of the Chinese

56. Ibid.
nationalists. On 19 May 1941, he tried to bring all the Vietnamese into a United Front known as Viet-Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (Vietnam Independence League) or the Viet Minh.

After the formation of Viet Minh, the Vietnamese freedom movement got a momentum. There was a revolt in Lang-Son against the French rule. Led by Phue Quoc it was directed against the French colonial system. Some Vietnamese leaders such as Hoang Luong and Nguyen Phue An hoped that the Japanese would come to their assistance to drive out the French rulers. Japanese did not intervene to oust the French Colonial System. As a result the French were able to suppress the revolt. The French tightened their administration and surveillance against the activities of the communist and nationalist activists and Vietnamese revolutionaries fled their country and sought refuge in China. The Long Son uprising was immediately followed by a second revolt in November 1941 in Mytho in which the Communists assumed a prominent role. It was in the South Vietnam that the Vietnamese confronted the French forces. This uprising was also crushed. Here also the Japanese remained
a spectator to allow the movement to be crushed. But the nationalist movement picked up rapidly soon. The Communists established a guerrilla force known as the Vietnam National Salvation Army and fought against the French and the Japanese forces simultaneously.

The Lang Son and My Tho rebellions having failed, the Vietnamese Communists faced an uncertain and bleak future. They were however sympathised by the Chinese Commander-in-Chief in the Fourth War Area, Gen. Chang Fakuai, who provided them organizational facilities resulting in the formation of the Vietnam National Liberation League in Chiensgi. Ho Chi Minh slipped back into Vietnam in 1941 and started organizing the people for the ensuing task. The Viet Minh declared its task as threefold:

- To expel the French and the Japanese "fascists" and restore the independence of Vietnam;

- To align with the democracies which were fighting against fascism and aggression; and

- To establish a Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
The Viet Minh's political, economic, social and cultural programmes are covered by several studies. Two points however need more emphasis than they have received. First, in his appeal to the Vietnamese people, Ho stressed that the struggle of the Vietnamese people was almost entirely based on patriotism and nationalism; secondly not a single word in it referred to proletarian dictatorship or Communist movement.57

Ho Chi Minh foresaw the Japanese invasion in the offing and he asked his party men to be prepared for the approaching eventuality. In 1942, he went to China possibly in search of arms for his organization but the Chinese nationalists imprisoned him at T'inpao on the Sino-Vietnamese border. Released on 29 August 1942, he could not return immediately to Vietnam, as the Allies asked him to help provide them with secret information on Japanese activities in Indochina. By agreeing to co-operate with the OSS, Ho Chi Minh hoped to get American support in Vietnam's independence struggle.

57. Our President Ho Chi Minh, n.38, p.11.
The victory of the Communist party in China tore down the wall of isolation for the Vietminh and raised the possibilities of its victory. The two parties entered into an agreement of friendship and cooperation and interacted dynamically at different levels: ideological, political and diplomatic, economic and military. The Chinese helped the Vietnamese in applying the lessons of the Chinese revolutionary effort in Vietnam, which led to the victory at Dien Bien Phu. 58

This victory hastened the process of peace in the April 1954 negotiations at Geneva. An agreement in Geneva followed in July 1954 for the transfer of power to the countries of Indochina. Vietnam was temporarily bifurcated into North and South Vietnam. There was a provision for holding a referendum in 1956 in both parts on the issue of unification. But events overtook this proposed plan, and it was after many years and much bloodshed that the referendum could finally be held. Very briefly, Vietnam's agony was the result of its people's desire to unite and be independent.

58. Chen, n.4, p.xii.
The United States intervened militarily in Vietnam in a big way despoiling the country and trying the people's courage until it was forced to withdraw in April 1975 by the undying bravery of the Vietnamese. The Paris Peace Agreement signed in 1973 between the representatives of the United States and the two parts of Vietnam envisaged a ceasefire and that the two parts of Vietnam would have a say in the decision-making. The United States was to withdraw its military presence from the region, but it did not do till 1975 when it virtually lost the war on the battlefield. Even after the American withdrawal the Vietnamese could not carry out their dream of rebuilding their country because the situation on their northern frontier rapidly deteriorated.

The Chinese were now averse to the emergence of a strong state on their southern frontier, and they resorted to diplomatic and strategic moves that sought to weaken Vietnam internally. China supported the government in Kampuchea led by Pol Pot and incited it against Vietnam. There were also unresolved issues which were causing friction between Vietnam and China. These were:
the delineation of territorial waters in the Gulf of Tonkin, and the ownership of two sets of islands in the South China Sea, the Paracels and the Spratley.59 The historical record on these issues was ambiguous. The Franco-Chinese agreement on the territorial demarcation of the Tonkin Gulf had, in keeping with contemporary practice, gone no further than the three-mile limit. As for the ownership of the Paracels and Spratley islands, four countries—China, France, the Philippines, and Taiwan—had registered conflicting claims based on somewhat imprecise historical records. Because these islands were not considered of much economic importance, they had been occupied only sporadically. In 1974, perhaps anticipating future problems with Hanoi, Chinese troops seized the major islands of Paracels while driving off a small South Vietnamese occupation force. After 1975, with the end of America's war in Vietnam, rising tensions between China and Vietnam and the lure of offshore oil deposits in

the Gulf of Tonkin and South China sea resurrected these issues and led both Hanoi and Beijing to assert ownership over both sets of islands and present conflicting claims in the Tonkin Gulf. To underline its claims, Vietnam seized several small islands in the Spratley group. Armed clashes broke out between the two countries at various points along the border. There were claims and counter-claims, which clearly indicated the growing strains in Sino-Vietnamese relations, but they were by no means the prime cause of the breakdown that led to the war between the two countries in 1979. Indeed, these were minor irritants compared to the strategic question of the border raised by the Kampuchean crisis and its impact on great-power rivalries in the region. Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea was seen by Beijing as an event that eclipsed its own influence in the area, and which by extension raised the spectre of Soviet influence over an area vital to Chinese security.

60. Ibid. See also Das, Parimal Kumar, ed. The Troubled Region: Issues of Peace and Development in Southeast Asia (New Delhi 1987), pp.32-38, 198-205.

In the Chinese view, a strong Vietnam on its southern borders capable of dominating Laos and Kampuchea is a threat to its historical designs on South East Asia. Hanoi's desire to assist the development of fraternal Communist parties in the rest of South East Asia also was a challenge to the leadership of China in this respect. Aware of such a viewpoint of the Chinese the Vietnamese took certain measures to protect their national interest. In 1978 Vietnam signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union to strengthen its security system and kept up a close supervision on the ethnic Chinese within its borders.

The developments in Kampuchea in recent years have been a major source of tension in Sino-Vietnamese relations. China had openly sided with an anti-Vietnamese regime in Kampuchea led by Pol Pot (1975-78), which the Vietnamese viewed as an attempt by China to extend its domination over the Indochina region. By early 1978, Vietnam found herself surrounded on both sides by a hostile China and belligerent Kampuchea. The Chinese
troops stationed on its northern borders and the Chinese divisions stationed in Kampuchea across its southwest border caused constant friction and tension. Vietnam sent its military forces into Kampuchea, under the name of National United Front for National Salvation (UNFNS) on 17 December 1978. By 7 January 1979, Pol Pot was overthrown and Heng Samrin was installed in his place. China's reaction to the Vietnamese action was sharp and on expected lines. It launched a sudden invasion of Vietnam on 17 February 1979 with the intention of inflicting maximum casualties and upsetting Vietnam's economy. However, China's punitive march on Vietnam failed decisively. The result was that the Vietnamese increased their influence in Kampuchea and intensified their campaign for the expulsion of overseas Chinese.62

Perhaps, Sino-Vietnamese relations are bound to remain hostile for a long time. Ho Chi Minh made manful efforts to forge bonds of friendship

between the two countries, but the efforts came to naught after his death. The two countries' self-interests as they perceive them make it difficult for them to live in amity. The fallout for Communism of this split is that a wide chasm has been caused in the Communist movement in the region and diluted its international impact.