CHAPTER – V

THE FINAL TAKE OVER:
(1 APRIL 1975 TO 21 JANUARY 1976)
THE FINAL TAKE OVER:  
(1 APRIL 1975 TO 21 JANUARY 1976)

Introduction

The final surrender of the U.S. in Vietnam on 30 April 1975 brought about a huge responsibility of building the nation which had been devastated and destroyed economically by the foreign countries viz. Japan, France and the U.S. Its economic development, foreign policy establishment, development of academic community, political and social reunification were the primary targets which Vietnam wanted to reach fast. In this regard friendly countries like the Soviet Union and China extended the help to the country. The U.S., in spite of promises, did not come forward for any assistance. A free market economy was introduced for the first time in Saigon which was renamed as Ho Chi Minh city. But reunification of two Vietnams was deferred for another five years as the attitudes and manners of both the peoples were completely different. So South Vietnam constituted its own National Assembly. But gradually preparations for unification of two Vietnams started by holding elections in two Vietnams in the first half of 1976. The U.S. gradually moved away from the Southeast Asian scene.

The Final Surrender

The U.S. policy towards Vietnam continued to change from time to time during 1968 to 1976. Therefore, it is essential to study the pattern of change in U.S. policy. In fact, one of the fundamental causes of continuing violence and sad state of affairs in Vietnam had been the frequently changing American policy in Vietnam. The U.S. first entered the Vietnam scene in 1950, paying 80 percent of the French costs between 1950 and 1954 during the first Indo-China War (1945-1954). Its stated reason for doing so was to suppress a revolution whose success was seen as a serious threat to “freedom” and as the extension of the Chinese communist “yellow peril”. Despite the signing of the Paris Agreement and the U.S. – Chinese détente, nothing much changed in 1973 except in words; the U.S. continued to intervene in the name of “honour”, “generation of peace” and “national security”. The U.S. utilized a 20,000 man strong civilian force and
through massive economic and military aid, the U.S. had acted contrary to Article 4, Chapter 2 of the Agreement which reads: “The United States will not continue its military involvement or interfere in the internal affairs of South Vietnam”.

The U.S. efforts to continue intervening in Vietnam after the Paris accord, despite widespread popular feeling in the U.S. against re-intervention were based on American ignorance of the Vietnamese revolution.

On 23 January 1973, the day the Agreement was initialed in Paris, President Nixon, in Washington, in a televised address stated that “the United States will continue to recognize the government of Republic of Vietnam (Saigon) as the sole legitimate government of South Vietnam”. But President Nixon was contradicted the next day, 24 January 1973, when Henry Kissinger during a press conference admitted that with regard to the question of “who is the legitimate ruler of South Vietnam”, the Agreement “leaves it open to negotiations among the parties and political evolution of South Vietnam”, and, therefore, the definition of “what ultimately will be considered by all South Vietnamese the legitimate rule”. This meant, of course, that Saigon’s claim to be the sole legal government of South Vietnam had no basis under the Agreement, which made it clear that until the final settlement, there would be two “administrations” (Government of Republic of Vietnam or GCVN and Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam or PRG) in South Vietnam. Months later, Kissinger’s own State Department ignored the Agreement’s clear provision and supported Nixon’s January 23 line.

The 1973 Paris Agreement has thus fulfilled in principle and on paper the two main objectives of the Vietnamese revolution: independence and unity. The third objective i.e. social justice for the masses was in principle left to the Vietnamese to decide among themselves. And social justice could not be rendered without the recognition of the existing political realities in South Vietnam. While almost all Vietnamese at least publicly accepted the principle of independence and national unity, there were those who feared the establishment of a socialist system in the South.
Like any other agreement, the Paris Agreement was reached through compromises by both sides (the DRV and the U.S.) which for different reasons wished for a settlement of the war. The losing side was clearly Saigon. No longer did it have the visible manpower backing of over half a million U.S. soldiers (not counting the U.S. Seventh Fleet and the U.S. Air Force) and the logistical support of the American armada, although Washington had supplied armaments which boosted the Saigon air force with 1,300 fixed-wing aircrafts and 800 helicopters two months before the Agreement. Moreover, Saigon had to contend with the presence of Hanoi troops besides those originating in the South. The acceptance by the U.S. of these Northern troops south of the 17th parallel evidenced U.S. recognition that Vietnam, territorially, was one country.

President Thieu's real support was, therefore, the U.S. which paid for his army, his police, his bureaucracy and financed his economy. In December 1973, the U.S. Congress passed a series of bills which provided him more than 1.5 billion dollars in direct military and economic aid. His government's budget amounted to $800 million, less than 10 per cent of which was self-generated.

As the Year of the Buffalo ended and the Year of the Tiger began (23 January 1974), there was more than enough evidence that the 1973 Paris Agreement on "Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam" had neither ended the war nor restored peace. Any alternative to a bloodier third Indo-China war did not lie in more Kissinger-Tho meetings or secret big-power manoeuvres which in the long run could not change the basic aims of the DRV and the PRG. It was only possible through the full and correct implementation of the 1973 Paris Agreement, especially the implementation of Article 12 and the immediate formation of the Council for National Reconciliation and Concord. The Paris Agreement was the only instrument available that could satisfy the basic objectives of the Vietnamese revolution and the aspirations for peace, independence, unity and social justice of the long suffering Vietnamese people.

Due to a conspicuous change in the U.S. policy towards Vietnam after President Ford assumed office, there was a gradual decrease in U.S. attention
towards President Thieu, Saigon and South Vietnamese affairs. Before the annual meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Kissinger said:

•

The Vietnam debate has now run its course. The time has come for restraint and compassion. The Administration has made its case. Let all now abide by the verdict of the Congress-without recriminations or vindictiveness.  

With the negative response which generally met the Secretary's remarks, it seemed that Kissinger knew well that he was whistling in the dark. The nation's longest and most unpopular war could not be expected to disappear without a whimper. The Secretary was in fact extremely reluctant to talk about the war's lessons or its more mysterious aspects such as President Nixon's secret military assurance to President Thieu in January 1973 at which time Nixon promised to 'respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam'. Considering the promise was probably made with the connivance of Kissinger in his role as National Security Advisor to the President, it was hardly surprising to learn that the Secretary would want to bury the matter. When pressed, however, at a news conference in late April with regard to what lessons could be drawn from the war, the Secretary attempted to reserve the question for a later occasion except to say: "I do not think that we can solve the problem of having entered the conflict too lightly by leaving it too lightly, either". Moments later, when asked whether or not the war had so stunned the nation that it might never again come to the economic and military aid of a friend such as Israel, Kissinger finally conceded: "One lesson we must learn from this experience is that we must be very careful in the commitments we make, but that we should scrupulously honour those commitments that we make". Further, he hoped "that no lessons should be drawn by the enemies of our friends from the experiences in Vietnam". Given the Soviet Union's acquiescence in North Vietnamese violations of the Paris Accords and lack of restraint, if not actual encouragement, served as a model for the combined

---


206
Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel in the October 1973 crisis, it was not hard to imagine what other ‘enemies’ he had in mind.

An analysis of observations by the nation’s intellectuals in the foreign policy establishment and the academic community revealed little that was new, although some of it was very interesting. A case in point was McGeorge Bundy, President of the Ford Foundation and former Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs from 1961 to 1966. At the University of Texas commencement address, Bundy apprised his audience that the intense emotions raised by the war would be a serious handicap to understanding the uniqueness of Vietnam for years to come. Nonetheless, Bundy, who was as responsible as anyone else for the kind of thinking that had identified American security with the defence of South Vietnam and among whose generation those such as Walt W. Rostow\(^5\) had completed the process, was certain about one thing. “Let me suggest to you,” he averred, “that there is at least one great lesson about Vietnam which deserves to be learned and understood by all of us just about as soon as possible; it is that the case of Vietnam is unique”. If this were true, he continued, “it does not make sense to set as a central objective the redesign of our foreign and defense policy so as to avoid another Vietnam”; for “the world is so shaped, geographically, politically and historically, that the particular set of circumstances which led to the American role is most unlikely to be repeated”.\(^6\) Bundy’s case for the exceptionalism of American involvement in the region constituted an important departure from the conventional paradigm that had for so long portrayed South Vietnam as a critical test case and a model of Mao’s wars of national liberation.

In contrast to Bundy, George Frost Kennan presented the model of consistency. As Kennan had argued over the past ten years, the lessons of the war were obvious and easy to grasp. According to him, “The lessons of Vietnam are few and plain: not to be hypnotized by the word ‘communism’ and not to mess into other people’s civil wars where there is no substantial American

---


strategic interest at stake". The end of U.S. presence in Indo-China, continued Kennan, changed nothing. The problem is and remains, he concluded, as one of "learning to view Russia and China as national rather than communist great powers", and treating them accordingly, "with a view primarily to avoiding serious destabilization of the international power balance, further proliferation of nuclear weaponry and the catastrophe of nuclear war".7

Meanwhile, North Vietnamese accusations against alleged U.S. military help to Saigon and its unflinching support to President Thieu never ended for quite sometime. By as late as end of March 1975, North Vietnamese government was seen accusing the U.S. of supplying enormous military aid to Saigon and supporting continuation of Thieu in office. It alleged that U.S. troops in South Vietnam had already been increased to 26,000 and the U.S. had already supplied 150,000 tonnes of weapons and ammunitions to Saigon government. Thus the Saigon government was busy grabbing land and terrorising people in South Vietnam.8

On the political front President Thieu, right since 1974, had been accused of always proposing a time-table for elections in South Vietnam and creation of a national body to conduct them. But every time he was found inserting a condition of withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces before elections were to take place. The communists never agreed to this condition and so never shared a legal place in the political life of the country.9

In spite of these North Vietnamese accusations, the overall situation in South Vietnam, both political and military, was not at all encouraging. In fact, the whole of Indo-Chinese region was gradually experiencing a political holocaust. The resurgent nationalist spirit was gathering momentum and U.S. supported regimes in the Indo-Chinese region were finding themselves in hopeless situations.

7 New York Review of Books, 12 June 1975, p. 28. Also see Kennan’s testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 89th Congress, 2nd Session, 10 February 1966.
In such a peculiar background, it was Cambodia which first recorded a sudden and sweeping change in its political framework. On 1 April 1975, President Lon Nol, a U.S. protégé, fled away from Phnom Penh and Cambodia fell into the hands of Khmer Rouge government. Following its collapse, several countries including India and the USSR accorded de jure recognition to Prince Norodom Sihanouk’s government. In fact, the USSR openly congratulated Khmer government for its success in the conflict for freedom, independence and non-alignment. North Vietnam also congratulated pro-Prince forces and assured continued assistance to them as they were in “a struggle against a common enemy”, Premier Pham Van Dong stated.

Political situation in South Vietnam by then had already shown irreparable cracks of a dimension suggesting gradual surrender by the end of March 1975. By 27 March there were enough indications that Thieu regime was falling in the face of military debacle sweeping South Vietnam. In fact, the whole month of March saw the offensive from the PRG and North Vietnamese side in South Vietnam, which was enough to indicate its fall. But still the PRG maintained a policy of reconciliation among the masses to address the anti-communist feelings.

By 1 April 1975 the situation in South Vietnam had undergone a sea-change. The NLF by then had captured all the Northern and Central areas constituting three-fourth of the country after stunning Saigonian reverses in the battle-field. In the Central South Vietnam, the cities like Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, Cam Ranh, Da Lat, Da Nang, Hue and Qui Nhon had already come under their control. Besides, Phan Rang and Phan Thiet areas were also abandoned. However, the entire operation sent 2 million refugees out of a total of 20 million population to look for shelter under NLF control, which created a massive

---

11 “Puppets on the Run, Cambodia, S. Vietnam”, *People’s Democracy*, vol. 11, no. 14, 6 April 1975, pp 1 and 11.
economic problem. Still U.S. military aid never stopped though aid for rehabilitation was somehow curtailed.13

Apart from these military reverses, a political crisis erupted in Saigon when Premier Tran Thien Khiem submitted his resignation. A new war cabinet seemed to be in the offing. On 2 April 1975 the Senate at Saigon passed a resolution calling for “a new leadership” to end the war. President Thieu was accused of only relying heavily on military solution. He was also accused of abuse of power, corruption and social injustice. He came under fire from both the radical and moderate political leaders. It was alleged that because of him the country lost more than three-fourth of the territory to communists. The U.S. was also blamed for its failure to respect the commitments to South Vietnam.14

War continued unabated in South Vietnam. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge forces entered Pnom Penh ending five years of war that had devastated the country. To this, the USSR reacted saying that attempts from outside to impose foreign regimes were gradually being rejected by people all over the world. Such foreign regimes were doomed to failure. In Saigon, this incident had its impact also. Opposition politicians in South Vietnam were getting disillusioned by then and they argued that unless the U.S. forced Thieu to resign, South Vietnam might soon be compelled to surrender as happened in Cambodia.15

China hailed the victory of nationalist forces in Cambodia. However, it criticised the USSR for being late in lending support to the communist insurgents. Besides, it strongly denounced the USSR by saying that “the superpower which flew the banner of socialism, tore off its disguise as a supporter of the Cambodian people and staked all on the treacherous Lon Nol

clique. But their gamble did not come off. A mere five years elapsed but the situation then had changed radically.¹⁶

U.S. reaction to this was very sordid. It felt that unless the U.S. Congress provided military aid to South Vietnam, the same fate would befall South Vietnam. There would be bloodbath if South Vietnam was taken over by the communists. Besides, if this happened, then two lakh people's life would be in danger. Slowly, evacuation plans were prepared for the future to meet such an eventuality.¹⁷ U.S. Congress was getting adamant day by day not to grant military aid. On the other hand, situation on the war front gradually started deteriorating.¹⁸

On 21 April 1975 President Thieu resigned and left South Vietnam after appointing Vice-President Tran Van Huong as his successor. He accused the U.S. of breaking its promise to support an anti-communist government in Saigon. Hence he directed Huong to cease war immediately and enter into peace negotiations. He said that it was Nixon who had given all-out military as well as moral support to Saigon. But Watergate undid the American resolve in aiding Vietnam. Soon the U.S. deserted its ally. It was rather surprising that the same U.S., which on 30 January 1973 re-emphasized the Vietnaming of the war and continuing economic and military aid to Saigon, changed its stand by 20 April 1975.¹⁹

On 21 April Huong was sworn in. However, the U.S. Congress responded to Thieu's departure with bitter relief because he left the country too late for anything to be negotiated. The members in the Congress promptly urged for a ceasefire and a political settlement as well. In fact, the U.S. decided to

cooperate with the new government. French government also welcomed the resignation of Thieu on a positive note.\textsuperscript{20}

Earlier on 23 April Saigon government called for a ceasefire and negotiations with the communists with a view to form a joint government. The PRG, however, rejected the offer. Saigon then requested for the formation of NCNRC, but to no avail. Instead, the PRG demanded overthrow of Thieu and talks without preconditions to bring peace.\textsuperscript{21}

On 25 April the PRG agreed that it would talk with a provisional administration without any Thieu clique. But Saigon should renounce all U.S. dependence and insist on complete withdrawal of Americans in every shape or form. The PRG agreed that a government would be formed with three segments as provided in the Paris accord. U.S. intervention in the internal affairs of South Vietnam was to be banned. The PRG also claimed that it would not allow any U.S. evacuation process from South Vietnam as a pretext for continued intervention.\textsuperscript{22}

On 26 April Parliament in Saigon voted for Huong to step down and appointed Gen. (Big) Minh as the President. It was hoped that Gen. Minh might be acceptable to the PRG as a peace-negotiator. It asked the new government to seek “peace with honour” with the NLF.\textsuperscript{23}

President Huong, before leaving, also alleged that the US had abandoned them and left them in the lurch. Meantime, on 27 April, both the houses of South Vietnam’s National Assembly agreed to install Gen. Minh as the country’s new President. By then, communist forces had already renewed their offensive which had cut off Saigon from its main food supplies channel. Besides, Saigon

\textsuperscript{22} Chanda, n, 19, p. 13.
was already bombarded twice by them. Politically also dismantling of the Saigon administration had started. 24

On 28 April 1975 President Huong stepped down and Gen. Minh was sworn-in. Immediately he promised to contact the communists and negotiate a ceasefire along with other peace proposals. His objective was to emphasize on a political solution under the framework of the Paris Agreement. He emphasized that those who would be more acceptable to the PRG and representatives of various religious groups would be taken in the new government, as it was a government of reconciliation and concord. He promised the release of political prisoners and freedom of the press. 25

Next day, swarms of helicopters drifted thousands of Americans and Vietnamese from Saigon. This was the final American disengagement from Vietnam. Twenty years of positive American involvement ended in scenes of chaos as weeping Vietnamese pleaded for places in evacuation convoys and tried to force their way to American Embassy. This evacuation started after a PRG call for all Americans to leave the country within twenty-four hours. Thousands of civilians begged a ride out of Saigon, but to no use. There was utter chaos in and around the Embassy just for evacuation. In the process, destruction and looting also started.

The 56,000 Vietnamese who had been evacuated before the last week of April by the conventional airlift were now mostly strung out at the staging posts—the Philippines, Guam and Wake, where arrangements were improvised to receive them - on their way to the camps being prepared at three big military bases in California, Arkansas and Florida. The administration had been thinking of receiving about 135,000 in all; now it would presumably receive those who managed to arrive, perhaps more than 100,000 in spite of the abrupt end to the airlift and the Congress would be asked for funds to resettle them, a process that would take months.

25 Ibid.
While the administration was conscious of its moral obligation to these people, the members of Congress taking into account the opinion of common people appeared to be less welcoming than the precedents of the Hungarian and Cuban emigrations might suggest.

Painful scenes in Saigon during their escape were still fresh and fright-filled memories for many thousands of Vietnamese when they encountered a new brand of hostility – American resentment at their sudden arrival. California’s reaction to the prospect of some 20,000 refugees being siphoned out of congested temporary camps in Guam and the Philippines to a military base south of Los Angeles expressed the dismay at the lack of federal planning for this massive emergency operation and its social implications in a country hard-pressed by unemployment and recession.

Although not yet expressed as a personal rebuff to any of the refugees, the hostile attitude was making itself evident; state officials were worried and radio talk shows and newspaper letters-to-the-editor voiced apprehension. Blunt questions regarding funds were being asked and some dusty answers were being provided. In fact, Washington asked California to advance some funds to provide temporary housing for the refugees, to be repaid later from federal taxes. California’s Governor Edmund Brown Jr. replied that the state “couldn’t afford” to help, with unemployment close to 10 per cent of its labour force. Reserves for such crises did not exist in the state budget, Californian officials said. Governor Brown wanted to know how the federal government planned to feed, distribute and settle the incoming refugees. After Brown’s rejection of state responsibility, the Defence Department announced that three military bases would be used as reception centres: Camp Pendleton in Southern California, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas and Eglin air force base in Florida.

Irked at its inability to learn what was happening, California sent its own emissary to Guam to get the facts and then ordered Travis air force base, near San Francisco, to halt the landing of refugees there until adequate plans were developed for their care. Dryly, the Travis commander told California’s Secretary of Health and Welfare, Mario Obledo, who had issued the order, that Travis must
bow to “a higher authority” and continue to receive Vietnamese families and lead them to immigration receiving desks and helpful Red Cross centres. Military aircrafts at Travis and military airports in Southern California, once emptied of refugees, promptly turned round to take food and supplies back to the refugees in Guam and the Philippines.

A large portion of the first Vietnamese to arrive had welcoming sponsors to whom they dispersed, once through immigration processing, often with emergency visas. They were not poor (or were poor only because they abandoned their possessions in flight) but were educated, professional people. Many of them were civil servants in the old regime or had American relatives or friends.

On the ammunitions side, 2000 million dollars worth of American weapons, equipment and facilities were lost in the collapse of South Vietnam. About 5000 million dollars worth of equipment was left behind in South Vietnam as well. 26

An important reason as to why the U.S. prolonged a costly intervention in Vietnam was that it mistook the movement of indigenous Vietnamese forces towards a social revolution for an offshoot of a global communist conspiracy. The final NLF victory in Saigon had prompted the U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger to confess this mistake. Such a confession could generate hope that the U.S. might resign itself to a non-interventionist role in Asia. However, prospects on this matter were not at all encouraging. If the U.S. was to prepare itself for a non-interventionist role in Asia, it must promote reconciliation among Asian countries, especially among Southeast Asian countries which found themselves on opposing sides as a result of their support for or resistance against American military activities in the Indo-China region. For years, the U.S. had used Thailand as a base for bombing operations in the Indo-China region. With the establishment of communist governments in Pnom Penh and Saigon in

April 1975, the U.S. should, if it was interested in a non-interventionist role, have helped Thailand in achieving reconciliation with its communist neighbours. Recent American actions, however, had made it difficult for Thailand to achieve this reconciliation. For example, the PRG (Provisional Revolutionary Government) in Saigon wanted Thailand to return some highly valued combat aircrafts flown to Thailand by South Vietnamese pilots on the eve of NLF victory. But the U.S. had taken these war machines from Thai territory to the deck of an American aircraft carrier. Thailand was not in a position to accede to the PRG's request and return these machines to the PRG. Another example of how the U.S. made it difficult for Bangkok to achieve amity with Pnom Penh and Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) was related to the American merchant vessel Mayaguez. Cambodians seized Mayaguez because, according to them, it strayed into Cambodia's territorial waters. Eventually, the U.S. got back its merchant vessel by means of a military action that was preceded by the landing of American marines in Thailand without Bangkok's concurrence. Such actions on the part of the U.S. coupled with the Ford administration's insistence on developing a military base in Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean could not but raise doubts on whether, even after the Vietnam debacle, the U.S. was ready for a non-interventionist role in Asia.27

The details regarding surrender ceremony at Saigon are worth mentioning. On 30 April Gen. Minh conveyed a message after the capture of Presidential palace at Saigon that he was impatiently waiting for handing over power. So, when North Vietnamese forces entered the palace, President Minh along with Vice-President and Foreign Minister was waiting for them. But the North Vietnamese army asked for surrender rather than handing over of power, as the power was slipping through the hands of Gen. Minh. The three leaders thus obeyed whatever was commanded to them.28


216
On the same day, the official representative of the PRG reached there to receive the unconditional surrender of President Minh's government. Gen. (Big) Minh was declared a free man and he was invited on 4 May 1975 to join hands with the new government to help rebuild the nation.29

After thirty-five years of war against Japan, France, the U.S. and finally the Saigon regime, forces of the NLF emerged victorious on 30 April 1975. By then, the NLF forces had closed in on the capital. These NLF forces, which were the military wing of the PRG, namely the Military Management Committee (MMC) took over the control of the entire country on 1 May 1975. The whole of South Vietnam was thus liberated. The last of the areas to be freed from Saigon regime were twenty provinces north and north-west of Saigon, in the Mekong delta as well as Saigon city itself.30

It was a thorough take over of the whole nation. Collection of arms and explosives as well as confiscation of banks, firms and businesses took place immediately. All public offices; barracks; industrial, agricultural and commercial establishments; banks; transport, cultural, educational and health establishments together with the property of U.S. imperialism and Saigon administration were confiscated. From then onwards, they were to be manned by the revolutionary administration. In fact, documents, property and technical equipment left behind by the U.S. officials were also to be turned over to the new government.31

Communication links between Saigon and other parts of the world were broken on 1 May 1975. China hailed this fall of Saigon through their own T.V. and radio. However, inside South Vietnam, publication of all kinds of books,

newspapers, magazines and printed matter was temporarily suspended. Besides, distribution of previously printed material was also suspended without authorization from the Revolutionary government. Personnel at diplomatic missions abroad were instructed to remain at their posts to await new orders. All the properties owned by these missions now belonged to the people of South Vietnam. So the new government had custody over them. Theses included files, documents, bank accounts, real estates and forms of transportation. Lt. General Tran Van Tra was appointed as the head of the new government at Saigon.32

However, since the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975 to the victorious army of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, a chain of events had been unfolding over “a vast region stretching from Alaska in the north to Antarctica in the South and from California in the east to Pakistan in the West - an area of 94 million square miles, or 40% of the earth’s surface”. U.S. ground forces were being steadily withdrawn from all the bases of this area since the Paris peace agreement on Vietnam was signed in January 1973. But this did not necessarily mean that U.S. imperialism was going to quit this vast area once and for all. On the contrary, the U.S. imperialists were bent on clinging to most of their old bases at any cost and as a consequence, the U.S. naval strength was being increased in this area.33 The Pacific Command of the U.S. Navy with its headquarters in Hawaii, had a fleet comprising of “286 warships (including seven aircraft carriers), 2,100 warplanes, and 265,000 sailors and marines”. It was now the most powerful maritime force in the world. This expansion of naval forces including its air arm with simultaneous reduction of ground forces was based on the ‘so called’ Nixon Doctrine, which called for a reduced role of U.S. ground forces in Asia along with the involvement of high-technology, capital intensive services – air and naval forces – to support the indigenous armies of threatened allies.34

32 Peiris, ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 127.

218
The post-Vietnam US policy in Asia, as enunciated by James Schlesinger, former U.S. Defence Secretary, at a press conference on 1 May 1975 i.e. two days after the liberation of Saigon, called to "stress the steadfastness of U.S. ties with traditional U.S. allies – Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand – that are part of the island chain off the coast of Asia that is defensible". This new policy had also been extended to the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf area, because the Gulf area contained some 60 per cent of the world’s known oil reserves. Hence the penetration of U.S. Pacific fleet into the Indian Ocean. "The United States has important interests in the area", according to Admiral Thomas Moore, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, "even beyond the self-evident need for access to oil and mineral resources. We must demonstrate to both allies and would-be adversaries U.S. resolve to deter threats to the vital sea lanes of communications in the area".35

By then over 172,000 U.S. soldiers were in Asia to guard the U.S. interest, because it was here that the U.S. investments were growing at a very fast rate. Hence the growing interest of the giant U.S. corporations was evident in this area. "There is no more vast or high area for resource development or trade growth in the world today", said Rudolph Peterson, former Bank of America President, "than this immense region and it is virtually in our own backyard".36

This new awareness regarding the Pacific Basin had been extended to the Indian Ocean area. Because, "the western portion of the Indian Ocean heartland," according to Rocco Paone, Professor of Foreign Affairs at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, "includes much of the untapped mineral, agricultural and forest resources of some of the most fertile regions of Africa. Along the northwestern border is concentrated about 60 p.c. of the world's oil reserves. The northern portion of this heartland includes the manpower resources of India, and, on its eastern and south-eastern areas are located the enormous riches of the East Indies and the rapidly developing continent of Australia". So, the Pentagon had adopted a new naval strategy for maintaining

36 Ibid., p. 128.
American superiority at sea by strengthening the old bases and acquiring new ones on strategic islands and offshore strong points.\footnote{Ibid., p. 128.}

**Various Nation-building Problems**

The objectives of the new government were publically pronounced on 10 May 1975. Firstly, it envisaged that the country would have friendly relations with all nations and would not take sides in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Secondly, PRG's Military Management Committee would cease to function as soon as the new government was installed in Saigon. Thirdly, Saigon would be renamed as Ho Chi Minh city. Fourth, there would be elections in South Vietnam to replace the PRG. Fifth, the reunification of both Vietnams would not be allowed to materialise so soon in the near future in the form of a political merger. Sixth, the Piastre currency would remain without being replaced by North Vietnamese Dong. Thus it was clearly decided that reforms would take place slowly in the country. The old South Vietnamese soldiers were to be re-registered with the police.\footnote{\textit{Asian Recorder}, n. 9, p. 12654; and Russell Spurr, "A town called Ho Chi Minh", \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review}, vol. 88, no. 19, 9 May 1975, pp. 10-11; and see Valery Skvortsov, "In Liberated Saigon", \textit{New Times}, no. 23, June 1975, pp. 10-11.}

With regard to labour movement, the new leaders termed the top union leader Tran Quoc Buu as a traitor and took over the movement through seizing the headquarters of the Confederation of Labour, the umbrella organization for South Vietnam's unions.\footnote{\textit{Asian Recorder}, ibid., p. 12653.}

Civilian authorities of Saigon regime were asked to continue work. But nothing was known about army officers and policemen. Military Administrative Committees were formed for future security maintenance of the country. After the initial problems were over, it was decided to replace these committees with Revolutionary Committees which would be widely representative to express national unity and concord. Power stations and water tanks were kept closely guarded to protect them from anti-social elements. A new official newspaper called \textit{Saigon Liberation Daily} was launched on 4 May 1975. Besides, Gen. Minh
and eighteen other top officials were released from custody as decided by the eleven-man military committee which controlled administration. They were, however, asked to change themselves or face punishment.\textsuperscript{40}

Meanwhile, victory celebrations were held from 15 May for three days continuously. During this period, the U.S. was charged with trying to seize hundreds of aircraft and dozens of ships illegally taken abroad by former Saigon government troops. They demanded these aircrafts and ships back to the PRG, as it was the custodian of all such properties.\textsuperscript{41}

The subsequent periods witnessed hectic activities in nation-building work. On 30 May 1975, full three weeks of top level discussions on future of this nation ended. There they agreed that Saigon was to be made a free market. Socialism was to be introduced in the whole of the nation. The re-unification of two Vietnams was to be deferred for another five years. It was because the attitude of the people and the manner of life in the towns of both the countries were completely different. Hence it would take some years to bring them close enough to re-unify the country. But trade and communications would continue between the two. They also agreed that election for a National Assembly in the South should be held as soon as security conditions permitted.\textsuperscript{42}

On 10 June 1975, a statement on complete liberation of South Vietnam was issued by the fifth National Assembly of North Vietnam. The statement called upon Vietnamese people to maintain their freedom and independence for good. It appreciated the USSR, China and all other states which had provided support to the country in its struggle against the alien domination. Lastly, it


\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Asian Recorder}, ibid., p. 12655. For various political and military developments after the Political Consultative Conference in Saigon for unification, see Evgyry Kobelev, "A Dream Coming True", \textit{New Times}, no. 51, 1975, pp. 6-7; also see "A new Chapter opens in the life of Vietnamese People", \textit{Soviet Review}, vol. 12, no. 23, 15 May 1975, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{42} For the training given to soldiers, civil servants and members of political parties for change of attitude see Nayan Chanda, "South Vietnam : The Classroom Revolution", \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review}, vol. 88, no. 26, 27 June 1975.
demanded economic assistance from the US for reconstruction as promised by it in the Paris Agreement. 43

Before this on 6 June 1975, the PRG observed its sixth anniversary. On this occasion, it announced that it had virtually assumed all responsibility for running the nation. It would begin issuing directives on foreign affairs, trade, finance and economy. The government there was proposed to be an advanced democracy as opposed to the socialist system in the North. Basic freedoms would be respected. Private business would be allowed. A foreign policy of neutralism would be followed. Concurrently people were also gradually making themselves familiar with the PRG and its manifold policies. 44 The PRG, in due course, started having economic as well as diplomatic relations with the rest of the world. On 30 June 1975, it finalized a pact with Iraq. 45 On 3 September 1975, North Vietnam expressed desire to establish normal relations with the US on the basis of respect for each others' independence, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual interests. This, according to them, would usher a period of development for their country as well as South Vietnam. Now that both the governments were busy in economic reconstruction of the country, they thought it wise to normalise relations with all peace-loving countries of the world. As U.S. would not be able to revive its neo-colonialism in the region, it was thought advisable in U.S. circles to establish good relations with both Vietnams. 46

Gradually other nations also came forward to establish good relationship with both Vietnams. Japan, on 8 October 1975, granted a huge economic aid to North Vietnam and thus established strong diplomatic relations with it. It also opened an embassy there. Earlier, Japan had already recognised Saigon regime

as the true representative of all Vietnam. But after the fall of Saigon, it immediately patched up with Hanoi and granted economic assistance. Cordial relationship was also established with India.\textsuperscript{47}

On 14 November 1975 the U.S. showed its consent to open discussions with the communist states of Indo-China on normalising relations. This came after nine Americans were released, who had been captured in South Vietnam in March 1975 and the PRG agreed to take back 1600 Vietnamese refugees from Guam and elsewhere. But the U.S. did not agree to grant economic aid as it considered the Paris Agreement as dead in view of North Vietnamese invasion of the South that led to Saigon's fall.\textsuperscript{48}

Thus gradually the two Vietnams established themselves as independent nations and improved their economy to become self-sufficient in every respect. Of course, aids from friendly nations such as China were in due course flowing. But the determination of the people of Vietnam gradually made them self-reliant in the periods to come.

**Preparation for Reunification**

Meanwhile, preparations for reunification of both the Vietnams started. The first of the attempts on 30 May 1975 came in the form of a full three-week discussion at the top level, where it was decided that political re-unification would take a minimum of five years. This was because the attitudes, the manners of living, cultures, etc. of either Vietnam were different from the other. Hence, it would take some more years to bring them close enough to re-unify the country.\textsuperscript{49}


The next step towards reunification took place on 27 July 1975, when President Huynh Than Phat of PRG as well as North Vietnam and NLF declared that reunification of two Vietnams was not possible immediately. At this stage, at least President Phat took a liberal stand in the sense that five years’ requirement for unification was abandoned. Nguyen Hu Tho suggested on 31 July that South Vietnam would move from military rule to civilian rule through peoples’ revolutionary committees and then only South would eventually merge with the North.\(^5^0\)

The objectives of the coming civilian administration would be to set up a progressive democracy; rapid healing of the wounds of war; development of industry and agriculture; restoration and expansion of land; development of internal as well as international marine and air transport and elimination of decadent cultural aspects for an improvement in people’s material and cultural life.\(^5^1\)

On 15 July South Vietnam and on 17 July North Vietnam applied for U.N. membership separately. This showed that their re-unification would take sometime, at least a few years. But the U.S. vetoed the entry of both Vietnams into the U.N. on 11 August 1975 because the South Korean question could not be tagged with it. Similarly again on 30 September 1975 it vetoed its entry for the same reason.\(^5^2\)

On 21 November 1975 both Vietnams agreed to hold general elections in the first half of 1976 to create a unified socialist country out of the nation that remained divided for the last twenty-one years. There would be a common national assembly. There would be one representative for each one lakh population. A national election council would be set up to prepare the elections with equal number of representatives from both the zones. According to Phat, President of PRG, though national re-unification had been achieved in many


respects, it was not yet complete. In order to bring about quick national reconstruction and advancement of revolution, he wanted the reunification at the state level to take place as soon as possible.53

Along with the reunification issue, nation-building activities also kept on going. The defeated soldiers were asked to surrender and come out of their hide-outs. At this time, it was pointed out that the old forces of U.S. imperialism were still carrying out counter-revolutionary activities through their agents. This phase was called “neo-colonialism”. So in order to carry out socialist construction satisfactorily, it was necessary that all schemes and activities of the counter-revolutionaries should be foiled. Social order should be stabilized, peoples' security should be ensured, vestiges of the feudalism and comprodon bourgeois should be eradicated and the influence of the decadent and reactionary culture and ideology left behind by the enemy should be modified. In fact, these U.S. henchmen were surreptitiously engaged in business activities, thereby badly affecting the market economy.54

Meanwhile, on 3 December 1975, the People’s Democratic Republic was established in Laos replacing the coalition government. This had its direct impact on Vietnam. Monarchy was abolished and Prince Souvanna Phouma resigned as the head of state. Communist Pathet Lao formed the government there. So its relationship with North Vietnam became absolutely cordial.55

The U.S. gradually kept on moving away from the Southeast Asian scene day by day. Meanwhile, President Ford visited China on 8 December 1975. After this visit, a new pacific doctrine was issued which moved a step away from Nixon’s doctrine of encouraging self-help for those who would like to defend themselves. He emphasized on reconciliation policy and “constructive ways for

53 Nguyen Huu Tho, n. 50, pp. 22-23.
easing out tensions". In fact, this policy was propounded to bring U.S. Asian policy into a coherent form in order to change the popular perception that no one would ever trust the U.S. again after the communist conquest of Indo-China. In six premises of his doctrine, President Ford emphasized that force alone was insufficient to ensure security for a nation. Rather, popular legitimacy and social justice were vital pre-requisites for resistance against subversion or aggression.

As early as 1970 thoughtful observers such as Walter Lippmann, the doyen of American journalists, undertook the task of analysing what went wrong. The proposition struck Lippmann as somewhat absurd: "Here we are, some 200 million of us, with the greatest armaments that any country has ever possessed, and there are the North Vietnamese, some 20 million of them, with a primitive industrial system. Yet we have been unable to make them do what we want them to do". Lippmann thought that he had the answer to why this had occurred. "Because", he reasoned, "armed peasants who are willing to die are a match for the mightiest power". The United States military, according to Lippmann, found itself with an impossible task: "Thus, our failure in Vietnam sprang from a great mistake. We asked the armed forces to do what it was not possible for them to do". This was a fair assessment of the situation and, coming from the 'father' of the critique of containment, it struck a responsive chord among a large section of the population.

Other scholarly critiques of Vietnam in the early 1970s focused on the character of U.S. involvement, with particular attention paid to the nature of the commitment. Louis Halle, a former career officer in the State Department and an historian, contended: "If we will only brush the dust of polemical rhetoric out of our eyes, we shall see that we are not fighting in Indo-China for imperialistic reasons that we are not fighting there because we want to increase our

---

territorial possessions or build an empire". Why, then? "We are", he asserted, "fighting there because in a moment of national aberration, we acted on a false conception of what the situation was". That misconception was, stated simply, the belief among policy makers that, in the words of Loy W. Henderson in 1950: "It is impossible, in the opinion of the United States, for a Communist in the Moscow sense of the term to be a genuine nationalist." From there, it did not require a great deal of mental gymnastics to identify a presumably Kremlin-sponsored Ho Chi Minh with a presumably communist monolith.

Alongside 'great mistake' and 'national aberration' equally significant was the theme of the unsuitability of exporting democratic institutions and practices to certain foreign countries. Chester Cooper, a well-known Asianist and Director of the International Division of the Institute for Defense Analysis, presented this particular motif in unequivocal language. "In the past", argued Cooper, "we should have been more prudent and have insisted upon some minimum standards of stability, appeal and effectiveness before committing major resources to South Vietnam's aid – no matter how assiduous the Prime Minister, no matter how attractive the people". Linked to this construction of events, and a lesson still relevant for people seasonally obsessed with corruption in high places, was the inability of the U.S., unlike the British before them, to compensate fully for an ineffective government or an inadequate civil service. "We have not", observed Cooper, "demonstrated the ability or knowledge to administer effectively a society at once strange and complex". If one added to this White House dissenter George Ball's conviction that South Vietnam had never been a nation but rather an improvisation, Cooper's appraisal takes on special meaning. Thus the U.S. was compelled to change its policy towards Indo-China.

Along with this basic change in the policy, the U.S. decided to have an economic pact with Japan.\textsuperscript{63} Then normalization of relationship with China was taken up seriously. Outstanding conflicts with Korea were gradually being resolved. A new structure of economic cooperation with East Asia was introduced. Accordingly, a changed Asian policy of the U.S. came into the scene.\textsuperscript{64}

President Ford observed that the Asian countries should be free to develop in a world where there was mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; where people were free from the threat of foreign aggression; where there was non-interference in the internal affairs of others; and where the principles of equality, mutual benefit and co-existence shaped the development of a peaceful international order.\textsuperscript{65}

On the U.S. policy towards both Vietnams, President Ford held that this would largely depend on their conduct towards the U.S.. If they exhibited restraint towards their neighbours and adopted constructive approaches to international problems, the U.S. would develop a good relationship with them, he assured.\textsuperscript{66}

American strategy for protecting its interests in Vietnam would henceforth rest on three main elements, the linchpin being Saigon's military ability to continue the war and defeat the revolutionary forces. As a back-up, there would be the deterrence of overwhelming U.S. military force, in the form of nuclear equipped Seventh Fleet, or located in Pacific island bases, in Thailand and the Philippines and further back in Japan.

The third element in the U.S. armory was political – what the PRG (and obviously Hanoi) called the "so-called détente". Washington believed that because of "détente", the Soviets and Chinese, armourers of the PRG, would

\textsuperscript{63} Rao, n. 33, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{64} For a study of fluctuations in the North Vietnamese alignment between Soviet Union, China vis-à-vis US, see Jean Lacouture, n. 10, pp. 569-71.
\textsuperscript{65} For details of US, USSR and China policy towards Vietnam, see "Victory of Revolution in Indo-China", \textit{The Call}, vol. XXVI, no. 9, May 1975, pp. 3-4.
develop a vested interest in restraining Hanoi. The PRG substantiated its thesis of America’s determination to continue the war in Vietnam using “hired hands” with evidence of massive U.S. military supplies to Saigon immediately before the Paris Agreement, at the time of the troop withdrawal, and through illegal shipments. The U.S., according to the PRG, from its own stockpiles, left Thieu with sophisticated weapons ranging from 175mm guns and M-48 tanks to F5E aircraft. From November 1972 to the conclusion of the Paris Agreement, claimed the PRG, the U.S. rushed into South Vietnam nearly 700 aircraft (260 fighters, 300 helicopters, 52 C-130s and 60 reconnaissance aircraft), 30 175mm guns, 25 155 mm guns, 462 105 mm guns, 64 anti-aircraft guns, 570 tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APC), and 200 warships and launchers. The PRG also claimed that Washington surreptitiously brought in 694 planes, 1,100 tanks and PACs, 800 guns and 204 warships and launchers after the Paris pact.

Even after the U.S. officially withdrew from South Vietnam, said the PRG, the conduct of the war was ultimately in U.S. hands. The chain of command for military, political and economic affairs went back finally to the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, headed by Graham Martin. To run the war at the regional level, the PRG alleged that U.S. commands, disguised as consulates, were set up in Da Nang, Nha Trang, Bien Hoa and Can Tho and at less strategic points.

In the prevailing imbalance of rival military forces and weapons, the PRG had no other choice but to use political methods to end the war. It was counting on increasing disillusionment with the Saigon government and the deteriorating economic condition to accelerate political demands for an end to the war.

In such a background of changed U.S. Asian policy, the constitution of the Democratic State of Cambodia was promulgated on 5 January 1976. In the process, a fully communist Khmer Rouge government was set up almost nine months after U.S. left Cambodia on 17 April 1975. This change of government had its impact on both Vietnams as well. Gradually the formation of communist governments in Laos and Cambodia in a span of just one month, accelerated the
pace of reunification of both Vietnams and the establishment of communist-led government in the country.  

Simultaneously with the preparation for reunification work, a massive domestic reconstruction work in South Vietnam was taken up by the people with the help of Hanoi government. Hanoi supplied one million tonnes of construction material and goods to South Vietnam. It sent tens of thousands of political workers in order to take over the newly liberated areas and to build and consolidate the revolutionary powers. These political workers would help the South Vietnamese cadres, fighters and people in this respect.

On 11 September security forces raided the houses of a score of the wealthiest – mainly Chinese – families in the Cholon area of the capital. It was the beginning of a nationwide campaign which, within a few days, led to the arrest of several hundred hoarders, speculators and blackmarketeteers. The people detained were later charged with illegal profiteering and a variety of other economic offences.

That same day, Saigon’s newspapers carried banner headlines summarising a 14-point declaration signed by Prime Minister Huynh Tan Phat a few hours earlier, announcing measures to boost industry and trade and to put down “compradore capitalists who have monopolised and illegally hoarded goods and disrupted the markets”. (The term “compradore” formerly referred to Chinese agents of foreign companies trading with China. In Southeast Asia, the descendants of such agents founded trading empires of their own to become “compradore” capitalists.)

Many people including workers, businessmen and housewives marched through the streets under banners demanding punishment for hoarders and profiteers, a clean-up of the marketing system and price controls. One big procession of some 8,000 persons comprising delegates from most of the trade


68 Douglas Pike, n. 54, pp. 38-40.
unions marched through the central market area shouting slogans while merchants peeped cautiously from behind their shop-windows.

Other groups, obviously from the poorer parts of the city, invaded the exclusive shopping centre of what used to be known as the European area. Among the most militant of the demonstrators were Chinese workers and businessmen in the heart of Cholon – the section of Saigon where about half South Vietnam’s one million Chinese lived.

As the city’s loud-speaker system began broadcasting the first results of the seizure of merchandise, the effect on market prices was dramatic. In the early hours of 11 September, there was the usual abundance of foodstuffs and textiles at the huge central market. Trading was unusually slack, but there were heated arguments between customers and stall-holders. By mid-day, the last prices started lowering down prices.

When it was announced that four million meters of silk and cotton cloth had been found in the warehouses of “textile king” La Nghia, prices of silk and cotton dropped by 30 per cent-50 per cent. As the disclosure of stocks of hoarded foodstuffs were announced, price of sugar came down drastically. Price of mosquito netting dropped from VNP 32,000 per roll to VNP 18,000 within minutes. “What was missing from the markets”, reported the Liberation Daily newspaper the next day, “was found in the hoarders’ warehouses”.

In an exclusive interview a few hours before the raids started, Prime Minister Huynh Tan Phat revealed how the compradore capitalists had artificially disrupted the market “to sow dissension and to direct the discontent over price and food shortages against us”. When prices of sugar, salt, cigarettes and other goods rocketed, rumours were circulated that this happened because huge quantities had “been shipped to Hanoi”. But no one was buying rice. A day or two earlier, the government had set up a network of rice distribution centres where rice was sold at VNP 180 per kilogram, compared to VNP 220-VNP 200 (according to quality) per kilogram in the private shops.
On 13 September the government announced that apart from state distribution networks for rice and petrol (the latter at VNP 250 per litre compared to VNP 600 from private traders), state shops would soon be selling, at fixed prices, a wide range of consumer goods, especially foodstuffs.

_Tin Sang_, an independent afternoon paper owned and edited by Ngo Cong Duc, a leading Catholic opponent of the former Thieu government, published a list of nine leading compradore families, most of them known as the “kings” of their respective monopolies. These included Ma Hi the “rice king”, Tran Thien Tu the “coffee king,” Siou Phong the “tobacco king” and Ong Tich, known as the “Tiger of Saigon” because of the means he used to maintain his monopoly over river transport and boat-building.

The heads of the families named by _Tin Sang_ had already fled abroad. Most of those named were Chinese, with the notable exception of Hoang Kim Quy, known for his close associations with the Thieu family and the US High Command. One of his most profitable monopolies was the importation of barbed wire, the most familiar single article in any town or village in South Vietnam.

A week before the crackdown, locally-made Bastos cigarettes almost disappeared from the market and prices shot up from VNP 160 to VNP 400 for a packet of 20. Huge stocks were discovered in the warehouses of tobacco king Siou Phong, and by 14 September, Bastos cigarettes were in plentiful supply at VNP 130 a packet. The Lam Ho group, among the nine cited by _Tin Sang_, had an import-export monopoly over 18 different items, including the export of scrap iron – a very lucrative venture.

The private fortune of rice king Ma Hi, who was on the top of the _Tin Sang_ list, was estimated, after two days of inventory-taking at his various establishments, to be about US$400 million. Enormous stocks of pharmaceutical supplies were found in several warehouses of a Vietnamese compradore, and on the following day, the government distributed 600 varieties of medicines – not all of them confiscated – to the city’s 1,000 pharmacies, to be sold at fixed prices well below the rates charged until then.
On the evening of 11 September General Ma Chi Tho, deputy commander of the Military Management Committee, which administered Saigon, met a large number of manufacturers and businessmen in the city's biggest cinema, the Rex, to reply to "five worries" of the city's capitalists. These could be summed up as "if the compradore capitalists today - why not capitalists in general tomorrow"?

Gen. Ma Chi Tho presented his reply mainly on the basis of the fourteen-point declaration which had been published earlier in the day. He stated that there was a clear distinction between compradore capitalists who had always served foreign interests and "national" capitalists who had suffered at the hands of the compradores and foreign interests. The latter would have an important role to play in the economic reconstruction of the country, but the principal role would be played by the State. The fourteen-point declaration, the preamble to the fourteen-point and Gen. Ma Chi Tho's explanation clarified the economic policies of the new administration.

Meanwhile, an American Congressional delegation visited North Vietnam and Laos to search for missing and dead U.S. personnel. With the help of this delegation, three American airmen's dead bodies were returned to the U.S.. The delegation was assured that North Vietnam would help in recovering any such dead and missing personnel in the war. North Vietnam also expressed a strong desire for close ties with the U.S.. It suggested the lifting of embargo by the U.S. on trade with North and South Vietnams. The delegation had brought a letter from President Ford to Premier Pham Van Dong in which he had requested to forget the past and look to the future. This letter was a reaffirmation of his Pacific Doctrine of 7 December 1975 presented in Honolulu.

This very doctrine was an invitation by the U.S. to the smaller nations, hitherto subjugated by super powers in Asia and Asia Pacific, to come forward

70 Pike, ibid., pp. 41-42; and Harish Chandola, n. 52, pp. 24-25. For latest American foreign policy which envisages that American hegemony provides security and stability to the world, see Michael Mandelbaum, "David's friend Goliath", Foreign Policy, vol. , no. , January/ February 2006, pp. 50-56.
and build up their own nations with the help of friendly nations and establish stronger relationships for a better future. Hence it was expected that the year 1976 would usher in an era of reunification and concord so far as two Vietnams were concerned.

On the social and community front, throughout the period from the Geneva Conference of 1954 to the spring offensive of 1975, the issue of national reunification over-shadowed all decisions affecting the establishment of a socialist society in North Vietnam. With the communist victory in the South, a new era had opened which for the first time would provide outside observers an opportunity to evaluate the genuine importance of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the nation-building in Vietnam.

In Marxist-Leninist parlance, the struggle in South Vietnam was a people's war to complete the national democratic revolution against the American imperialists and their feudal lackeys, the Thieu government in Saigon. The National Liberation Front, led by the local branch of the Vietnam Workers' Party (the People's Revolutionary Party, formed in 1962), represented a four-class alliance of the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty and the national bourgeoisie against the reactionary forces of the government in Saigon. When victory came in 1975, South Vietnam had reached the point earlier attained in the North when the communists took power in 1954. If the previous pattern were to be followed, South Vietnam would now enter a period of economic reconstruction and rehabilitation to advance towards socialism.

It seemed apparent that the communist leadership carefully deliberated before deciding for a policy. First indications suggested that Hanoi planned a separate government in the South — presumably as a means of allowing the newly liberated region to develop at an appropriate speed for an extended period of time before achieving complete reunification with the North. The Provisional Revolutionary Government continued to operate in the South, and in July the two governments submitted separate applications to join the United Nations.
By fall 1975, however, it had gradually become clear that the communist leadership had decided to forego a separate “first stage” to complete the national democratic revolution and instead decided to launch a drive to begin immediately the process of realigning the South into the North Vietnamese model. Confirmation of this decision came at the conclusion of a Political Consultative Conference held between representatives of North and South in mid-November; the South would not undergo a separate first stage of new democracy, but would immediately begin the second or “socialist transformation” stage.

It was Truong Chinh’s lengthy report at the conference which provided the most concrete indication of the nature of the new strategy:

South Vietnam has been carrying out a people’s national and democratic revolution. At present, when it has been completely liberated, should South Vietnam limit itself within the people’s national and democratic revolution for a period of time before embarking on the socialist revolution and socialist construction? I think that is not necessary. The great victory of the general offensive and uprising in the Spring of this year has put a victorious end to that phase of the people’s national and democratic revolution in South Vietnam and opened up for the South Vietnamese people a new phase of the revolution with a new strategic task, that of socialist revolution. 71

The present task for the South, then, was to begin “the step-by-step socialist transformation of the national economy and the building of the first foundations of socialism”. At the same time, Chinh said that it must complete the remaining tasks of the national democratic revolution through building a people’s revolutionary administration, repressing reactionaries, helping ex-members of the South Vietnamese government and armed forces through reeducation, abolishing the feudal system of land ownership and putting into effect “land to the tiller”.

“How should the two regions achieve reunification? The main link”, stated Truong Chinh, “was to achieve unity first on the government plane”. Until reunification at the state level had been achieved, “there will be many difficulties in planning and developing the National Economy throughout the country”. So

---

The first task would be to achieve unity at the state level, unity of the party leadership and unity in the political programmes and regulations between the Fatherland Front in the North and the National Liberation Front in the South. Once the governmental institutions had been unified, the South could “gradually transform the private capitalist industry and commerce, agriculture, handicrafts and small trade along socialist lines, and set up the economic sectors under the state and collective management or under joint private-state management”. 72

The decisions taken at the Political Consultative Conference in November clearly accelerated the process of political and socio-economic reforms in South Vietnam and set in motion the elections held on 25 April to select a joint national assembly and eventually to form a unified government for the two zones. The reasons for the decision to embark immediately on reunification were not so clear. In his speech announcing the decision, Truong Chinh simply observed that the two regions were basically similar in their essential characteristics. He conceded that there were some differences in the economic sector (in the North, the collective and state-owned economy had “absolute predominance,” while in the South private ownership continued to be the rule) and in the social class structure (in the North, the exploiters had been essentially reformed, and there were only three classes – the proletariat, the collective peasantry, and the socialist intellectuals, while in the South there were peasants, workers, various types of bourgeoisie, and remnants of the feudal class). None of these was as important, however, as the fact that “the similarities are essential and decisive whereas the differences are conditional and temporary”. Therefore, it was essential then to look elsewhere for indications of the motives behind the change i.e. unification of both Vietnams.

Comments in the official press amplified to some degree the vague statements made by Truong Chinh in November. In the first place, as a number of commentaries had pointed out, the situation in the South in 1975 differed in a number of respects from that of the North in 1954. In the latter case, the primitive state of the economy required an extended period of

---
72 Ibid.
economic construction to build up industry and raise the technical level of the economy prior to an advancement towards socialist production relations. In the South in the mid-1970s, the urban economy was considered by the Hanoi leadership to be relatively advanced and manifestly more capable of moving directly towards socialist forms of ownership. Light industry was well developed, particularly in the urban areas and there was a relatively advanced commercial and manufacturing sector. There were large numbers of petty bourgeoisie in the South, their technical level was fairly high and the transport and communications infrastructure was quite sophisticated. In some respects – notably in the area of minerals and construction material – the South was inferior to the North, but these disadvantages were outweighed by advantages in other areas. Evidently the party leadership was hopeful that the conditions for rapid material and technical development were already present in the southern part of the country.

Secondly, according to the estimates of the communist leadership, the situation in the rural areas was considered fairly promising for a rapid progression towards socialism. Whereas in 1954 North Vietnam had to end "the remnant feudal production system" in the rural areas, in post-war South Vietnam this process was "nearly completed." The power of the feudal forces in the rural areas in the South "had declined greatly" as a result of ex-President Thieu's "land to the tiller" law, and land reform had been "nearly completed." Private land-owning peasants then constituted, in Troung Chinh's words, "a very large section of South Vietnamese society, and there were relatively few landlords". Although it was not spelt out, these facts seemed to indicate that the party felt that a comprehensive and nationwide land reform programme along the lines of the programme in the North in the mid-1950s was not necessary as a preliminary to collectivisation. Land reform would presumably be necessary in

---

74 Chien Thang (pseudonym), "The last stage of the anti-U.S. national salvation resistance," Nhan Dan, 1 December 1975.
some areas, but it could be undertaken without disrupting the pace of socialisation in more advanced areas of the South.\textsuperscript{75}

There were, of course, other possible reasons for the decision to condense the revolutionary process in South Vietnam. Many commentators emphasized that the international situation was more favourable now than it was in 1954. The world socialist system was now economically advanced and major powers such as the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China could provide massive assistance to smaller nations like the DRV.\textsuperscript{76} Moreover, presence of communist governments in Laos and Cambodia, as well as in Vietnam, addressed the government's immediate concern over possible American activities along Vietnam's frontier.

Most persuasive, perhaps, was the obvious fact that resistance to the new order collapsed much more rapidly than the communists expected. Not only did the Thieu regime disintegrate at a quicker pace than predicted, but it was likely that resistance throughout the South had been less severe than the DRV had anticipated. If this was the case, the cautious strategy dictated by the previous assumption that the communists would have to share power with non-communist elements had been proven excessively pessimistic by events. Communist power had been consolidated with greater ease than had been anticipated and the need to compromise with non-communist elements obviated by conditions.

In sum, there were a number of political and economic factors which might have indicated to the communist leadership that an intervening stage of economic reconstruction and rehabilitation was not necessary prior to the beginning of the socialist transformation stage. Bolstered by the "Great Rear"- the socialist government, party, and masses in the North - the South could immediately begin the transition to building a socialist society.

\textsuperscript{75} For comments to this effect, see the interview with Nguyen Khac Vien in \textit{Rinascita}, 30 April 1976. translated in \textit{Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS), vol. 67, no. 569, Translations on North Vietnam, no. 1817.}

\textsuperscript{76} Ho Liem, n. 73.
The decision to advance directly to socialism in the South did not appear to be a sign that Hanoi was “dizzy with success”. The official press, while echoing the decision to move directly on two fronts in the South, had been careful to stress that the change over to socialism would require an extended period of time and would be accompanied by numerous difficulties in a situation of extreme complexity. As one lengthy article published in successive issues of Quan Doi Nhan Dan in late 1975 indicated: “No matter how good we may be and no matter how great our efforts, we still need a period of many years, even tens of years, before all these difficulties are solved”. In the first place, the South must recover from the long years of military conflict: war damage, high unemployment (up to three million by communist estimates), and the need to clear up “the harmful neocolonialist garbage of the U.S. imperialists”. Then there were the more basic problems like the existence of a private capitalist economy, the prevalence of small-scale production in both urban and rural areas and the survival of bourgeois ideology. These problems could not be resolved “in a period of five to seven years”.

In effect, the party leadership had formulated a plan to move directly to socialism, but on a gradual basis. The struggle would be long and complex. One source quoted Lenin to the effect that no new class had ever appeared on the historic stage to take power without undergoing a period of instability and violent shock, of absurd turmoil, confusion and useless activities. The first problem, in the view of the leadership, was to consolidate power, to solve, in communist parlance, the issue of “who defeats whom”. In united front terms, the regime was determined to root out major reactionary elements and eliminate their control over the economy—the comprador bourgeoisie in urban areas and the feudal landholding class in the villages. More specifically, the most obvious enemies of the new order were the high civilian and military officials of the departed Thieu regime. All were instructed to report immediately to the new government and be sent to political reeducation centres for training periods up to several months. According to government statements, if their repentance was

---

77 The series began on 27 November 1975, in Quan Doi Nhan Dan.  
78 Ibid., citing Vladimir Lenin, The Immediate Task of the Soviet Administration.
sincere, and if they had not committed basic crimes against the people, they
would eventually be released and allowed to return to a normal life in society.79

On the positive side, power had to be transferred to the new order with a
minimum of disruption. To handle the problems of transition, a Military
Management Commission, composed primarily of military officers, was
established in the immediate aftermath of victory. Below the central level, law
and order and the suppression of reactionary elements were undertaken by
hardcore, self-defence militia units. Once power was stabilized, people's
revolutionary committees at all levels were gradually formed.80 In areas of
considerable sensitivity (inhabited by Catholics, Hoa Hao or Montagnards), the
new regime took extra care and only after the situation had settled, did it begin
to move against elements it considered hostile—such as elements in the Catholic
hierarchy.

Within the economic sector, the regime found that it could not address
the countless problems of stabilizing the economy without seizing control of
many of the major industries and manufacturing enterprises and controlling the
sources of goods and management of wages and prices. On the other hand, it
was aware that with 40 per cent of the population living in urban areas,
commerce and manufacturing could not be drastically curtailed for fear of
throwing the economy into a tailspin. The new regime, therefore, moved
cautiously in this area. A decree issued shortly after the takeover reassured the
populace that shops and manufacturing establishments would remain open.
Business and plantation owners were informed that they could retain ownership
of their enterprises and that their profits were guaranteed, "so long as it benefits
the national economy and the welfare of the people".81 Experts were
encouraged to continue in their jobs (except for those considered "dangerous
bullies"), although they were to be subjected to on-the-spot control for a period
of six months to one year.

79 Standards were publicized in a Hanoi broadcast in January 1976, Federal Broadcasting Information
Service, vol. IV, 29 January 1976; also see Jean Lacouture, Vietnam : Voyage a travers une Victoire
80 Tran Phuong Loc, "Motivate and assist the people in the newly-liberated area and restore and develop
production," Tap Chi Quan Doi Nhan Dan, no. 8, August 1975.
81 Saigon Giaiphong, 10 September 1975.

240
At the same time, the new government began to move carefully to strengthen its control over the means of production and distribution: all property of the past government was confiscated and banks and some enterprises belonging to foreign capitalists were seized. At the same time a campaign was launched to confiscate the property of the comprador bourgeoisie (described in one article as bankers, war contractors, ex-imperialists, investors and speculators). Claiming that these hostile elements were responsible for speculation, hoarding and disrupting the market, the government moved quickly to reduce or eliminate them, confiscating their property and seizing their business installations in a campaign described in the local press as "difficult, violent and extremely complex". To reassure other middle-class elements, the regime encouraged the national and petty bourgeoisie to join the campaign to disclose the reactionary exploiters. The national bourgeoisie "should enthusiastically take part in this struggle", which was described as a wide-ranging attack on all aspects of the reactionary comprador bourgeois culture that was dominant in South Vietnam before the communist takeover in 1975.

Lack of information made it more difficult to evaluate the situation in the rural areas. There were a few reports of class struggle in the countryside, but nothing resembling a nationwide campaign. In the immediate aftermath of victory, the government appeared to be making maximum effort to reassure the rural population in order to facilitate a large grain harvest. The government stated that land would remain in private hands. It was not long, however, before the government began to take steps to increase its control over the distribution process. Statements in the press indicated that it was going to purchase and distribute rice as a means of controlling prices. Private rice merchants were allowed to remain in retail trade, but they were required to obtain a license from local revolutionary authorities.

82 Ibid.
83 See the article regarding the campaign against Hoang Kim Quy "Barbed wire king", in Nhan Dan, 18 September 1975.
84 See the lead editorial in Hoe Tap, April 1976. For the statement on licenses, see Nhan Dan, 29 January 1976.
Conclusion

Thus, South Vietnam in these nine and a half months went through a tremendous change not only politically but also economically and socially. The people and the country as a whole saw many upheavals while the union of both Vietnams took place. The nation-building process was slow and tardy. Still the effect of the new government due to changes in economy and foreign policy on the new nation was overwhelming. The nation prepared itself thoroughly to reunite gradually.