CHAPTER – VIII

CONCLUSION
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U.S. initial involvement and disengagement in Vietnam is more or less a sum total of the story of U.S. policy towards Vietnam during the Post-War period and the reactions of the international community to it. It started approximately at the beginning of the Second World War and ended after the withdrawal of all American forces from the Vietnamese territory in the mid-1970s. The entire process took more than three decades.

Vietnamese history has witnessed a series of alien aggrandisements and simultaneous steady endeavours of its people to keep the country independent. In fact, the country has lost and gained independence several times during the last two thousand years of its history. The Vietnamese had already been engaged in constant and continuous struggle against various alien aggressors (Japan, France) before the U.S. entered into the life history of this small country.

Initially the U.S. was neither itself a colonial power in the West nor had it perceived any possible security interest in the Southeast Asian region. This region was located at a great distance from the American mainland. The relations of the U.S. with colonial powers like the French were friendly. American trade with the region was quite modest. Suddenly, at the break of the Second World War, American policy-makers visualised the possibility of the southward expansion of Japan. Simultaneously, the possible involvement of the U.S. in an imminent war against Japan provided it with an opportunity to take note of the strategic location of Southeast Asia, mainly French Indo-China and more precisely Vietnam. The U.S. policy-makers were particularly concerned with the implications for U.S. security if this region fell under the control of a hostile Japan. This was basically the framework in which U.S. policy towards Vietnam was formulated.

The U.S. involvement, initially, was confined to providing military help to the French in their fight against the Nationalist Vietnamese of the Northern part of the country. Gradually, this involvement encompassed all political, social, military, cultural and economic spheres of Vietnamese life. The
Japanese and the French, however, unlike the Americans, left Vietnam sooner than expected. As for the U.S., little attention was paid to work out an approach by which Vietnamese people could get the evidence of American willingness to support the principle of self-determination effectively. The U.S. was guided by the policy of 'containment of communism' as its motto in the Asiatic region.

American policy-makers felt that if Vietnam were to come under the control of a power hostile to the U.S. – the Soviet Union, China or “international communism” – the security of Southeast Asia would be gravely jeopardised and American global interest would be adversely affected. Also, they were too optimistic to assume that the government and people of Vietnam would be kept ‘oriented’ towards the West for the benefit of the U.S..

The U.S. found the continuous divisive status of North and South Vietnams quite suitable to its policy designs. Soon it found an ally in Bao Dai, to be later replaced by Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu, who were equally amenable and dependable enough to uphold and perpetuate American vested interests in the region. The entire process was carried out through technical, economic and military aid in such a fashion so as to promote greater amenability on the part of Vietnam and discourage hostility and confrontation.

However, subsequent periods recorded a division of the erstwhile united nation at the thirteenth parallel with the Northern fold raising arms against the American intervention in the internal affairs of the country. There were different interpretations to rules of international law as to whether South Vietnam was the successor state to French Vietnam and whether it was obligatory on its part to implement the Geneva Agreements and thus hold elections in the whole of Vietnam (both North and South together). Interpretations varied and American policy-makers could not afford to see their own vested interests suffer. The U.S., by then, had committed itself to its ally Bao Dai and subsequently to Diem to such an extent that it was impossible for it to move backwards in this alignment in the region.
Various pretexts and alibis were shown to the world to justify American involvement. Many strategies were formulated to perpetuate U.S. involvement. The reason was to oppose, contain and destroy the "international communism" holocaust that had raised its head in the form of Chinese expansionism in the region. In the process, not much attention was paid to the desirability of understanding and assisting, to the extent possible, the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people—at least in areas that posed no real (as distinct from an imaginary) threat to U.S. interests.

The failure of the U.S. policy-makers at this stage could be attributed partly to the legacy of the past, partly to the momentum of the policies initiated by the previous administrations and partly to the 'threat perception' in the region. If the policy-making process in the White House and Pentagon are analysed threadbare, the lacunae can be traced back to the apparent lack of knowledge of the policy-planners about the growing aspirations of the peoples under the colonial rule. On the contrary, the most urgent task before the U.S. policy-makers and, as perceived by the U.S., before all "freedom loving" peoples was to collaborate under American leadership to meet the challenge of "communist imperialism" spearheaded by Moscow and Peking.

One can see here the genesis of a myth that the war might after all have been won by joint action, with France contributing its expertise and the U.S. providing the air power that France had lacked. Yet at the time of Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. was already and secretly paying three-quarters of France's military costs and was offering every assistance short of ground troops or nuclear weapons. The French lost in Vietnam for the same reason that the Americans lost and any outside power was bound to lose, they were fighting a mass resistance that was both nationalist and socialist in its inspiration. This lesson was learned the hard way by General de Gaulle who wrote to President Kennedy in 1961: "The more you commit yourself (in Indochina) against communism, the more communists will appear to be champions of national independence".
The "domino theory" that if Indo-China fell, so would all Southeast Asia, had proved to be a fallacy, with no sign of communist threat to the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia or Thailand, apart from the feeble guerrilla bands that had been struggling in some remote districts since World War II. The two nearest dominoes to Vietnam, that is Laos and Cambodia, fell as a consequence not of communist revolt but of U.S. military intervention. Without U.S. invasion and massive bombing of Cambodia, there would have been no Khmer Rouge and the country might still be ruled by that great statesman, the Royal Buddhist Socialist Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

At this juncture, the establishment of a military alliance of all the "like-minded" countries under the American leadership was the priority goal of the U.S. administration. In line with that objective, the U.S. was inclined to initially respond to the sensitivities of the French than to the aspirations of the Vietnamese nationalists led by Ho Chi Minh. As a hangover from the war-time past, the National Security Council continued to indicate its reservations concerning the quality and capabilities of the domestic leadership in the Third World. Only when it became clear that the French themselves did not have the military capability to overcome the nationalist forces and so lost to Dien Bien Phu, did the U.S. begin to persuade the French to "respectfully depart" from the Vietnamese soil and came to settle down in head long collision with indigenous Vietnamese interests in their own territory.

No subsequent government made any concrete efforts to build effective bridges of goodwill with the Vietnamese people. It failed to draw appropriate lessons from history that Ho Chi Minh and his ancestors were fiercely nationalistic to the extent that they had even thrown back Chinese invaders many times during their two thousand years of history. Instead, American policy-makers tended to construct their approach on the basis of their own appraisal of the "communist threat" to Vietnam. The attainment of nuclear weapons by the USSR, establishment of a communist regime in China and the outbreak of the Korean War accelerated U.S. efforts to raise the bogey of communist threat to the 'free world' in the Asia-Pacific region. McCarthysm at home contributed more to the U.S. administration's strong anti-communist
posture. However, the ultimate end result turned out to be exactly the opposite. Richard West wrote in August 1979 that out of the countries likely to fall to communism under the Domino theory as per Senator Kennedy (Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines, Laos and Cambodia), none had fallen yet.

Close association of China with the Allied Powers during this period played a very important role in framing an unfavourable American policy towards communism and subsequently against Vietnam. Moreover, loss to the U.S. was gain to the freedom loving nationalists of that region. Both China and the USSR, in contrast to the attitude of the U.S., vociferously championed the cause of the nationalists who were branded as 'communist enemies' by the U.S. They stole this opportunity to win their hearts and spread their influence faster in this region as against the short-sighted American 'containment' policy.

The golden French "policy of divide and rule" played an important role in American policy-making towards Vietnam. In fact the U.S. did not feel that the preservation of unified Vietnam as an entity was necessarily of decisive importance to it. An unified Vietnam, unfriendly to the U.S. and inclined to collaborate with the Soviet Union and China was regarded by the U.S. as calling for counter-measures. To a large extent, the ignorance of American policy-planners of Vietnamese society and politics played its part in formulation of such a policy.

In the midst of such an American involvement, the nationalist Vietnamese raised vigourous protests against the uncalled for and unwarranted involvement in the internal affairs of their country. The situation gradually deteriorated and the protest was converted into a regular warfare between the U.S. forces stationed in this region and the people of Vietnam, who received ample moral as well as military support from the Soviet Union and China. The escalation of the war in Vietnam caused serious concern in the minds of the people of both the U.S. and Vietnam along with the world public, because it brought on its trail heavy losses, destruction and devastation.
of human life and material on both the belligerent parties. The U.S. Congress cried for peace and withdrawal of forces from the region.

At this point, when the world as well as American public opinion was critical of the American political leadership for undue and unnecessary destruction of human life and material in Vietnam, the American government gave a serious thought to disengage itself from the Vietnam conflict. For the policy-planners, there were several compelling reasons, by then, which guided them to switch their policy from involvement and containment to disengagement and peaceful co-existence. At this state, it would be pertinent to analyse the errors, if any, committed by the U.S. in engaging itself in Vietnam affairs though circumstantial in nature. First, the executive authorities responsible for the crucial decisions to intervene and escalate (that is, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and their immediate advisors) specifically ignored, at certain critical junctures, the analysis and advice that might have called for a different course. This refers to the estimates of the intelligence community, particularly the CIA, about the strength and stamina of the enemy; the advice of military experts, such as General Maxwell Taylor in 1962, who warned that only the infusion of a large number of American ground forces would be sufficient to do the job; or the reasoned memoranda of Under Secretary of State George Ball in 1964 and 1965, who was skeptical of any purely military solution, particularly bombing. This view derives from “inside” sources – memos, estimates, private briefs and debates within government. The thesis is that the advice was so persuasive that it is clear – at least in retrospect – that it should have been preferred and accepted on its merits. But the mindset – the prevailing views and shared beliefs – of the entire government generally miscalculated the character of the conflict and the nature of the enemy. The “error” in this judgment centers on what turned out to be – and might obviously have been at the time – mistaken estimates of the civil conflict in Vietnam and the capabilities of communist China. A variant of this view is that the war became a mistake – at least an “objective” mistake – as the Sino-Soviet split developed, as the power struggle in China prepared a faction (Mao, Chou, and Lin) that disfavoured active intervention in the
Vietnam war and the diplomacy of Nixon and Kissinger partially defused China’s support for North Vietnam and isolated Hanoi diplomatically.

But this judgment ignores the live possibility and a plausible interpretation – that, even if decision makers had appreciated the intelligence and advice to which they were exposed, they would still have acted as they did and set the U.S. on the course of intervention and escalation in Vietnam. In other words, these were not mistakes, but choices; arrays of substantive alternatives and acts of choice; the course that was chosen and the courses that were not chosen, and the costs and consequences of each, real or hypothetical. The mistake theory puts the whole matter on the wrong perspective, only judgments proceed from the attribution of error; lessons proceed only from the analysis of choice.

America’s mistake in Vietnam does not invalidate the vital principle that countries invaded by their neighbours should be assured of international help. Successive American presidents thought that in Vietnam they were upholding this basic principle of world order. The U.S. has now withdrawn from the disastrous consequences of making a political mis-judgement. It would be an even greater disaster if the U.S. were now to conclude that the principle itself was useless.

Indeed, it is ironic that some of those who are most articulate in condemning the Vietnam War are most reluctant to draw sufficiently general conclusions from that experience. A cardinal example is the judgement of George Ball. His analysis embodies all three elements of the classic proportional critique: that the conduct was not proportional to the importance of the interest; that Vietnam was unique; and that the intervention was a mistake. Ball asserts a restricted characterisation of Vietnam and consequently a restricted judgement of its lessons.

But the proportional critique is really not designed to avoid a future intervention. Quite the contrary, the position of the proportionalists is quite simple: “intervention when necessary”, and “intervention as long as feasible”. The presumption in favour of intervention is held. The doctrine of proportion
serves only to qualify the style of intervention, establish a control on escalation and provide a principle of practical morality. Insistence on the uniqueness, the nonreplicability of Vietnam preserves the commitment to future intervention. Thus, it is entirely consistent with the proportionalist position to see intervention in Vietnam as a "mistake" – the mistake, precisely, of failing to recognise the unique features of the situation. Ironically, the analysis of the proportionalists in defining the character of the Vietnam war leads to a failure to generalise usefully from that situation, to draw conclusions of sufficient amplitude to provide guidance in future situations that will vary in certain respects and degrees.

Two prominent critiques that reject the "mistake" theory of progressive American involvement in Vietnam are those of Leslie H. Gelb and Daniel Ellsberg. Gelb argued that U.S. Presidents and most of those who influenced their decisions did not stumble step by step into Vietnam, unaware of the quagmire. U.S. involvement did not stem from a failure to foresee consequences. Those who led the U.S. into Vietnam did so with their eyes open, knowing why and believing they had the will to succeed. The deepening involvement was not inadvertent, but mainly deductive. The perceived stakes and attendant high objectives were clear. Debates revolved around how to do things better and whether they could be done, not whether they were worth doing. No systematic or serious examination of Vietnam's importance to the U.S. was ever undertaken within the government. Endless assertions passed for analysis. Each President was essentially doing what he thought was minimally necessary to prevent a communist victory during his tenure in office.

Gelb's critique of the instrumentalism that prevailed within government during the Vietnam escalation is undoubtedly logical. Gelb also tends to believe that "political solutions", such as that proposed by George Ball, were not truly available: "Most of our leaders and their critics did see that Vietnam was a quagmire, but did not see that the real stakes – who shall govern Vietnam – were not negotiable". But, interestingly, while Ball contended that the nature of the struggle made negotiations imperative, Gelb argues that this same feature made negotiated peace impossible: "the real struggle in Vietnam
was not between sovereign states. It was a civil war for national independence%. Furthermore, according to Gelb, "our Presidents, it seems recognized that there was no middle ground".

There is a certain impression of affinity between Gelb's analysis of Vietnam and that of Daniel Ellsberg. Ellsberg also explicitly rejects the previous reigning paradigm of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., which postulated "inadvertence" and "one more step" ("each step in the deepening of the American commitment was reasonably regarded at the time as the last that would be necessary").

One finds capitalist institutions as a sufficient condition for intervention to be a blind alley. This is because the elimination of capitalist institutions as a sufficient cause would still leave other potential sufficient causes for repressive interventions; though it is possible that Marxists are asserting institutional factors as both sufficient and necessary causes of repressive interventions.

Ellsberg's analysis strongly implies the necessity of some institutional change. Those who come to disagree with the moral foundations of a war must acquire some means to make their voice heard and the weight of their response felt and even decisive within the decision-making system; or nothing will change. And even Ellsberg's postulate that "only Congress and the public" can make a difference, and that they must find their conscience, can make sense and have effect only if our larger political system, or its distribution of weights, is changed. Ellsberg implies as much in asking that the Presidency, as an institution, be shorn of some of the imperial features that it has acquired, especially in the area of foreign policy-making.

Thus the most important lesson of the Vietnam War is the recognition of the constraints that operate on and limit the production, projection and application of American military power. This is a subtle question. Almost all types of critics have recognized some constraints; some have emphasized the external, situational constraints; others the internal, particularly the economic constraints.
But the trouble is not that one has failed to apprehend the constraints. Even the Nixon Doctrine – and certainly the final war-termination strategy of Nixon and Kissinger – were acknowledgments and partial responses, to them. The trouble is that the instrumentalists, to some extent the proportionalists and even the consequentialists, still dream of overcoming the constraints, manipulating these parameters, changing the rules of the game, buying another chance, preparing for next time – in short, doing better. The alternative, of course, is living within the constraints, adjusting to them and accepting the consequences.

The international political-military “terms of trade” are tilting against the feasibility of intervention, against the basic presumption of limited war, the discriminating, coercive and selective use of force. One would find that each future replay will be more difficult, more elusive, more costly, more disastrous for the American society and its political system. With the present distillation of wisdom from Vietnam, Americans might well become involved, but find that they cannot prevail or that they have to exceed prudent or civilized bounds to shoot their way out.

Circumstances might eventually teach Americans this most general lesson of adaptation to circumstances, situations, outcomes – rather than intervention to preempt or forestall them. Thus, looking back at Vietnam – putting even more time and distance between Americans and this experience – they might yet find themselves more ready to forgive the micro-mistakes that might have been made, but to analyse the situations that seem to invite, even to justify, American intervention. But it would be better if the U.S. learns this macro-lesson before, not after and especially not during the next round.

Meanwhile, negotiations were by then the best process to adopt for disengagement. It provided a diplomatic platform for the U.S. to squeeze out its forces from the War-torn region in a planned manner and ultimately bring about a total disengagement from the political, economic as well as military affairs of Vietnam. However, the very effectiveness of negotiations towards quick disengagement has been debated by various authors of peace from time
to time. Some questioned the viability of such a method, even though by then the Korean issue had already gone through some bad patches of negotiations, but had come out successful confirming the effectiveness of the negotiation process as a tool towards respectful disengagement.

International negotiations can be modeled as a two-level process that involves competing interests within and between the parties concerned. It is a complex process which is often discussed at an abstract level. It can place the relevance of key concepts discussed in international relations theory such as absolute versus relative gains into perspective for the participants. Role playing also increases the participant’s awareness of these complexities. It has often been used as a tool to simulate international bargaining as the game has integral commonalities with the international system. Both situations lack a sovereign to enforce agreements. Therefore, the dominant strategy for the individual or state is often to defect from signing treaties or ignore them.

In the classic game theory, single play or one-shot as it is called, cooperation is highly unlikely as neither participant knows whether they can trust the other party in the game. Gradually cooperation becomes more likely as groups realize that interaction will occur in the future. This “shadow of the future” encourages groups or individuals to cooperate.

Trust is important for negotiating. Trust often develops contracts, verbal agreements and handshake deals. Sometimes, parties see how easy it is to develop mistrust and how arduous it can be to build trust. A good deal of discussion and debate occurs within the parties concerning what the negotiator should say to the opposing team. When a group has a strong president or dictator, the message from the negotiators is often more coherent and respected. Dissension within groups often leads to mixed signals and lower cooperation from the opposing group. In general, the more the negotiators actively engage in the group discussion, the better the group seems to function.

Negotiations involve the concepts of relative and absolute gains. After many trials of negotiations, both teams lose more often than either team wins.
Although it is beneficial for the groups to establish some type of contract where each group receives at least some benefit, groups often view their gain in relation to their opponent. As long as the other team loses, they are content with the outcome.

Another concept that is important to flesh out during the contract is the role of trust in negotiations. In the absence of an enforcement mechanism, trust is critical to reaching a cooperative outcome. Without some trust building, it is very difficult to reach a mutually beneficial arrangement.

In Vietnam, the weakness of this tool lay in the very strength of either party in enforcing a decision in the battlefield. Hence in this case, the victories and losses of the belligerents every time in the battlefield had a direct impact on their submitting themselves to negotiations or conveniently avoiding it as far as possible. The constant ray of hope that either side might impose a total military victory on the other, had always disillusioned the belligerents. Hence at the slightest sight of victory in the battlefield, they never sincerely showed any intention to end their conflict through negotiations. Thus right since the beginning, both sides were quite apprehensive regarding the effectiveness of negotiations to end the war.

Once the scores were settled in the battlefield for all, which clearly indicated that neither side could win the war over the other, the most careful, clumsy and cunning game of disengagement started through the negotiations. It would be worth mentioning here that except at different stages of the talks and at different stages of the policy-making, there had been no diplomatic hints from the U.S. to respectfully disengage itself from Vietnam. Sometimes there had been intelligent disguised steps taken by the U.S. towards apparent disengagement, but openly there had been no such emphasis on disengagement by the U.S..

Throughout the negotiation period, President Nixon adopted a very convenient and successful carrot and stick policy to bring the enemy down to its knees through heavy offensives on the battlefield and simultaneously grant abundant concessions to the other party on the negotiating table. This
pattern was quite discernible throughout the negotiation period. Therefore, it is quite clear that this negotiation in Paris had been a unique one which had combined both war and peace talks together in a tangled thread of American democracy.

The carrot and stick method was diplomatically designed to show to the world that the U.S. would force a peace settlement on its enemies by thoroughly breaking their morale on the battlefield. President Nixon was under the impression that by this process, he would prove to the world that U.S. disengagement in Vietnam was not something which was imposed on him by the enemy, but on the contrary, he himself opted for U.S. disengagement in Vietnam and forced the enemy to sign the Peace Agreement.

Attempts towards peace-making through negotiations, thus, according to President Nixon, was not a face-saving device, but one which President Nixon himself embraced as his own policy on Vietnam and disengaged the U.S. forces from this region. In this manner, he granted independence to Vietnam out of his own accord without being compelled by the surge of xenophobic nationalism in this region. This was the Nixonian interpretation of disengagement, quite different from the communist interpretation of U.S. disengagement.

It would not be out of place to mention here that modern warfare requires the application of both the science and the art of war. And for the strategist, the principles of war provides a set of military planning interrogatives – a set of questions that should be considered if military strategy is to best serve the national interest. The U.S. army published its first set of principles of war in a 1921 Army training regulation. It had objectives like every military operation should be directed towards a clearly defined, decisive and attainable objective. Similarly, the details of offensive, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, simplicity etc were clearly elucidated in the principles of war.
Still it is one of the anomalies of Vietnam war that accounts of U.S. experience are more "dis-buried" than "reeking with scent of battle". Yet research on that war has brought to light those fundamental principles and the combinations and applications which have been productive of success. That it was not U.S. success makes it even more imperative that the whole world learnt from that experience. The quintessential "strategic lesson learned" from the Vietnam war is that U.S. must once again become masters of the profession of arms. The American people deserve, demand and expect nothing less of their Army.

Besides, the goals set by United States for itself in Vietnam was parallel to the goals set by Republic of Vietnam who was pursuing two complimentary tasks such as resisting North Vietnamese aggression and building their republic in South Vietnam. But the difficulties arose when unlike Korea, U.S. combined resisting and repelling outside aggression with the task of eliminating subversion and building the Republic. Korean model was rejected in Vietnam, even though there were obvious similarities. When building the Korean Republic was left to the Government of the Republic of Korea, the Vietnam scenario included equipping South Vietnam to counter North Vietnamese aggression as well as invasion of the North. The virtual collapse of the Republic of Vietnam during intervention by North Vietnamese regular units added fuel to the entire issue. Therefore it became apparent that there was no single U.S.–RVN combined command. The war was dominated by the U.S. and not only it did not promote "the growth of leadership and acceptance of responsibility", it also failed to "leave a strong independent country at the time of their withdrawal". The Vietnamese had no military doctrine, they followed the American military doctrine only. In fact the strategic planning failed because it could not effectively stop the infiltration from the North. South Vietnam could have solved its internal problems if the infiltration could have been brought under control. U.S.A. failed in controlling infiltration and it could

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not have solved internal problems of South Vietnam as only Vietnamese themselves could accomplish this task.

Over-involvement was U.S.'s another problem. It thought that it knew what was best for the world in terms of social, political and economic development and saw it as their duty to force the world into the American mold. It is difficult today to recall the depth of U.S. arrogance. In fact it was Kennedy administration which was more zealous in its commitment to containment, meeting indirect non-overt aggression, intimidation, subversion and internal revolution than Eisenhower administration.

Earlier this over-involvement had been minimal since the concentration was on conventional containment of potential North Vietnamese aggression rather counterinsurgency. In 1964, the dubious methods for counterinsurgency such as "search and destroy", "clearing operations", "securing operations" were adopted. It is here that the basic error was made in the conduct of the war. U.S. thought that North Vietnam was a Chinese proxy and any effort against North Vietnam could bring China into the war. Moreover, Laotian and Cambodian neutrality prevented U.S. from sealing off the infiltration routes. Besides, U.S. clearly failed to differentiate between what a beleaguered nation could do and should do for itself and the limits of assistance an outside power could provide. Failure to understand these differences led the U.S. to involve itself on nation building tasks that only the South Vietnamese could ultimately accomplish. It was a fatal strategic price. Almost all of the criticism of the U.S. actions in Vietnam have to do with "search and destroy" operations – Agent Orange, My Lai, massacre at the Phoenix Programme, and many more are burning examples. The U.S. public opinion had adverse effects on warfare.

Perhaps the greatest drawback to the use of artillery as the main destructive force in Vietnam was its indiscriminate nature. With increased media footage being broadcast that focused on American destruction of property by artillery, bombs and soldiers, the phrase "search and destroy" developed unwanted connotations. The dangerous nature of search-and-
destroy missions undertaken in a hostile jungle against an unseen and deadly enemy erupted an international legal clamour for military justice.

Many legal questions were raised. Whether the sovereign must observe the ordinary laws of war in dealing with rebellious subjects who have openly taken up arms against him. All acts of violence disturb the public order and are crimes against the state, even when they are based upon just grounds of complaint, for violent measures are forbidden in civil society, persons who are injured should go to the magistrates for relief. Otherwise civil war breaks the bonds of society and of government. Foreign nations must not interfere in the domestic affairs of an independent state. There were thus many debates on intervention by U.S. in Vietnam. The principal policies underlying the relevant legal norms indicated that providing defensive military assistance to the Republic of Vietnam was a lawfull policy alternative. That lawfulness meant compliance with existing structures of international law and the United Nations.

But there were radically different perceptions of the situation by the principal parties. The U.S. held that the ceasefire agreement of 1954 established a boundary between what became virtually independent state of North and South Vietnam and North Vietnam, by infiltrating men and supplies to assist Vietcong was guilty of “armed attack” upon South Vietnam in violation of international law and the ceasefire agreement. South Vietnam was justified in using force in self-defence and U.S. was justified under international law and Art 51 of the U.N. Charter in assisting South Vietnam at its request by measures of “collective self-defence against armed attack”. Thus there were many legal issues which followed during the war debates and ultimately issues like Metternich doctrine of legitimacy, philosophy of the Holy Alliance, neutral principles minimum world public order etc. were extensively debated. Two distinct opinions divided the international legal community and ultimately the war ended in a inconclusive resultless fashion.

Another irony is in the results of the war. The primary reason for which U.S. got involved was to check Chinese communist expansion and today U.S.
now shares many objectives in common with China. The independent nation of the Republic of Vietnam in the South has ceased to exist. For China, it has a hostile state i.e. Vietnam allied with its most dangerous enemy i.e. Soviet Union. But in war the result is never final. The outcome is merely a transitory evil for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date.

The architects of peace in Vietnam were many. Most famous of them were Henry Kissinger, one time Security Adviser to the President Nixon, and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam. These were the two personalities who after arduous efforts brought about the Paris Agreement to end the war and materialise U.S. disengagement from Vietnam. But behind the scene, there had been innumerable personalities not only from the U.S. and Vietnam but also quite a few from all over the world especially from the Soviet Union, China, the UN, etc. influencing the Americans to change their foreign policy towards Vietnam. A number of studies and evidence are available on this issue. Briefly, it was President Nixon guided by able diplomats such as Henry Kissinger, W. Aravell Harriman and Bruce, who designed U.S. policy. Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam guided by Le Duc Tho, Xuan Thuy and Madam Binh of NLF formulated Vietnamese policy.

Ultimately all the American troops left Vietnam by July 1976 before which the reunited Vietnam had already been enjoying its first independent session of the representative body. No wonder, Vietnam had to go a long way to attain independence. The determination of the Vietnamese people to attain this objective, even went to the extent of bringing a change in U.S. policy towards Southeast Asian nations. Ultimately, the U.S. emphasized on reconciliation and constructive ways to ease out tension in this region. According to U.S.’s changed policy, force alone was insufficient to ensure security. Popular legitimacy and social justice were also needed to resist subversion or “aggression”.

Today The Wall Street Journal has frequent Vietnam stories. In true American fashion, there is a rush to hold emerging market conferences and
strategy sessions in Ho Chi Minh city so that the American senior management team can understand what it takes to capture Vietnam. Whenever there is an American business leader of Fortune 100 CEO rank visiting Vietnam, the visit carries all the courtesies extended to highly placed political figures, which includes top brass from Hanoi, descending and offering them goodies and wooing them to invest along with their China investment adventures.

They emphasize their young population, their outsourcing advantages, their hyper fast-paced GDP growth and the fact that they may be small on a stand-alone basis, (61 billion U.S. dollars GDP and 84 million people) but when added to global company’s Asean portfolio, they make a big difference to the vibrancy of that portfolio. In fact Vietnamese authorities aggression wooed Intel for investment and Intel made the strategic decision to hedge against China. It decided to set up a brand new 600 million U.S. dollar chipset factory at Saigon High Tech Park.

Even though U.S. had dropped more tonnage of bombs in the temples and fields of North Vietnam than had been dropped by all sides in the entire span of World War II, still the communists in Vietnam seem to have no problem in embracing America for what America has to offer. Thus the communists everywhere in the world seem to have managed their hybrid model well – they fight America in the history books and museums while wooing America to help improve quality of life and GDP of the present. Thus communists all over China, Vietnam and Russia depend on America for their economy, their communist head honchos are all smiles, laying out both hospitality and concessions thick for American business.

On the other hand in spite of this gruesome experience in Vietnam, the U.S. military policy even today looks unchanged. For instance, China blasted Pentagon’s 2006 China Military Power Report released on 23 May 2006 for spreading “China threat theory” endangering international relations. China condemned that the report has a “cold war mentality” unnecessarily spreading the news that China was adding about 100 short-range missiles a year for deployment opposite Taiwan, exactly in the same manner as the U.S. did in
1945 while intervening in Vietnam. So there is hardly any significant change in U.S. policy vis-à-vis international politics even today.

The Vietnam War will certainly be a compelling case study from several stand-points for the examination of all types of wars, the behaviour of major powers, various social strata, the role of international opinion and other aspects of modern warfare. Of particular interest was the fact that the Vietnam war involved the use of the entire arsenal of the most modern technology against a nation like Vietnam united in arms. This ultimately served to reconfirm the well-known thesis that a people that knows what it is fighting for is unbeatable, should never attempt to conquer, a fact that represents a new factor in the assessment of the international correlation of forces.

One would like to reflect on another aspect of the war: the importance of what is happening and has happened in Vietnam from the broader international standpoint. The greatest confrontation since World War II, Vietnam was a testing ground for many political and military strategies for shaping the post-War international system, for influencing the course of development of the newly liberated countries and for confronting all trends of national and social development. The war represents in many respects the end of the post-War era and the beginning of a new phase of development in international relations. Although conceived as a local or regional war, a combination of factors – its long duration, the ferocity of the struggle, the use of the most up-to-date technology, the great cost in terms of human life and material, the moral reaction abroad – made the Vietnam war a kind of world war against the rights of small nations to an autonomous development. In this sense the war acquired global dimensions having a bearing on international relations.

The Vietnam War and the victory of the Vietnamese people had the effect of questioning many concepts on which the post-War world had been built. From whatever aspect post-War developments are analysed, whatever analytic approach is used – the development of the Cold War and détente, the
great upheavals and conflicts that led the world to the brink of war, the emergence of the non-aligned countries in international affairs, the revolutionary changes resulting from the anti-colonial struggle, the strengthening of socialism as a world process, the strengthening of trends toward national and social emancipation and the throwing off of new aspects of colonization – the Vietnam war and the victory of the Vietnamese people has been in the centre of attention both as a negation of old concepts and as a harbinger of new phenomena and new correlations of forces. The Vietnamese victory demolished many hopes to construct a world based on bipolar, or other multi-polar divisions of power; annulled many concepts of security in the framework of power-bloc politics, power configurations, or other models of equilibrium; and validated the concept of self-reliance and international solidarity. The Vietnam case clarified that international problems cannot be resolved through unilateral application of force or in the framework of a limited number of powers, highlighting the fact that each nation is to be taken into account and that there are new international forces that cannot be ignored. The Vietnamese victory represents one of the major events in recent history, an event to be compared with the victory over fascism, the anti-colonial revolution, or the emergence of the non-alignment movement. Vietnam is the most comprehensive lesson of history, one which wipes away all myths of absolute power, the omnipotence of modern technology and the resignation and importance of the small and impoverished.

Thus, in spite of many hindrances, Vietnam today is one of the most progressive nations in Southeast Asia. Its economic growth is phenomenal. Its adaptability to capitalist economy is praise-worthy. Unlike Iraq, there is no sectarian division in the country. The whole nation is one and is on its path to progress receiving all kinds of support from all nations including the U.S.