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## Letter from the Editors

The Spring 2023 edition of the *Undergraduate Journal of History* is now available, and our team is thrilled to share it with readers. We take pride in offering a platform for undergraduate students to showcase their historical research and encourage open discussions, intellectual debates, and curiosity. Our gratitude goes to the six authors who contributed to this volume and to the faculty and graduate student peer reviewers who made it possible. This latest issue covers various periods and diverse topics to illuminate lesser-known stories and provide fresh historical perspectives. Our undergraduate editors extend a warm welcome to both new and returning readers.

We start this issue with Olivia Bauer's article on Queen Elizabeth I and an examination of her diplomatic relationships with the leaders of the Sa'adian Sultanate of Morocco, the Ottoman Empire, and Safavid Persia, which allowed her to establish trading companies and expand Britain's empire. While the history of English foreign policy towards the Islamic world has often been associated with exploitative enterprises and violent warfare, the author argues that Elizabeth I's relationships with Muslim rulers were founded on diplomatic and peaceful means and explored the politics, gender, and religious factors that contributed to this diplomatic success.

Adrian Hammer's article, "Manufacturing Murder," provides a nuanced examination of the evolution of mass murder methods from 1933 to 1945, emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of what happened, why it happened, and who it happened to, all to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future. Hammer discussed the significance of memorializing the severity of such atrocity. "The linear teaching of the history of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust," Hammer writes, "fails to fully capture the extent of the crimes committed and the deranged mindset of those responsible."

Victoria Korotchenko's essay explores the role of children during the French Revolution and how they actively participated in the events of the time, including joining mobs, petitioning legislators, and fighting in wars. Korotchenko writes that, while most scholarship focuses on the perspectives of grown men and women who participated in the French Revolution, "the sweeping changes, violence, and warfare impacted those who had no choice but to grow up during this tumultuous decade." This essay highlights children's curiosity and active nature during this unstable time.

Alyssa Medin's article deciphering Sor Juana as a "proto-feminist figure" in history. Medin examines three questions related to Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz's work: whether her work was published without her consent, was submissive or subversive, and if it can be considered "proto-feminist theology." Medin categorizes Sor Juana's contributions to theology into three areas: a promotion of intellectual pursuits

for women theologians, an aesthetic theological claim, and a pneumatological argument for deepening personal relationships with God through the Spirit.

O’Gorman’s work focuses on the Christian religion and military upheavals in late medieval Europe. He argues that losing Christian positions in the Middle East after the Fall of Acre in 1290 led military orders to reevaluate their identities. Many returned to their non-militaristic origins or expanded their crusading ideals into new regions. By comparing the founding stories and rules of military orders with their actions after 1290, Gorman demonstrated how the rules of military orders, including the Teutonic and Hospitaller Orders, also emphasized their hospital care in addition to their military actions.

Susan Samardjian retrospects upon how the post-war Vietnamese regime under communism in 1975 faced setbacks that disrupted both the nation’s stability and that of neighboring countries concludes our issue. Samardjian argued these setbacks contributed to an already deteriorating economy and formed the communist leaders to reevaluate their attitude toward their neighbors. In response, the communist government implemented domestic and foreign policy reforms to encourage bilateral trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and eventually normalized relations with the US, which had imposed sanctions on Vietnam, leading to economic investment opportunities.

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**From Reunification to Normalization:  
Twenty Years of Vietnam, 1975-1995**

*Susan Samardjian*<sup>1</sup>

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**Introduction**

As North and South Vietnam united under Communism in 1975, the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) faced continuous setbacks as their goals of a socialist transformation fell to ruin. The severe economic stagnation in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam following the Second Indochinese War sparked a series of events, from a refugee crisis to an invasion of Cambodia and a brief war with China, all of which left Vietnam isolated and ostracized. The domestic policy changes made under the VCP, such as the implementation of collectivization, caused thousands of Vietnamese civilians to flee to neighbouring countries.<sup>2</sup> Vietnam's weary neighbours depicted the refugee crisis as the VCP's attempt to expand its influence in Southeast Asia, as Thailand and Cambodia marked Vietnamese expansionism as a threat to national security. Frequent border disputes between the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) and Vietnam, as well as the purging of the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, led to the invasion of Cambodia in 1978.<sup>3</sup> The occupation of Cambodia by the Vietnamese provoked severe economic sanctions regionally and internationally as the US kept close ties with key Asian states like Thailand and China.

The fate of Hanoi's economy after reunification was the principal reason behind the reconstruction process leading up to the normalization of relations. Conceptualizing the refusal to establish trade relations with many nations that did not share Communist loyalties, Hanoi's leadership overlooked the importance of bilateral regional and international relations. The occupation of Cambodia and the Third Indochinese War further placed Vietnam in a position of isolation and ostracization that put the economy in a precarious position, forcing the Vietnamese government to re-evaluate its domestic and foreign policies. While previous scholarship attributes the *Doi Moi* – the name given to the economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986 – and normalization efforts to the consequences of American economic sanctions, I propose that territorial contentions with the

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Samardjian is a Master's student at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, with an interest in terrorism and covert operations during the Indochinese Wars.

<sup>2</sup> Shimojo Hisashi, "Local Politics in the Migration between Vietnam and Cambodia: Mobility in a Multiethnic Society in the Mekong Delta since 1975," *Southeast Asian Studies* 10:1, (2021): p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Ramses Amer, "Cambodia and Vietnam: A Troubled Relationship," *International Relations in Southeast Asia: Between Bilateralism and Multilateralism* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2010), p. 93.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) catalyzed reforms due to the immediate national security concerns surrounding its shared border with China and Cambodia. While considering the implications of American foreign policy in Vietnam, precarious relations with regional states greatly impacted Vietnamese foreign policy and economic decline. The economic consequences of the ostracization of Vietnam caused by regional disputes prompted a series of normalization efforts to improve regional and international relations in Vietnam. Economic stagnation since reunification sparked a dramatic re-evaluation of the VCP's domestic and foreign policies leading to *Doi Moi* and bilateral trade reforms.

### **A Short Victory: Domestic Affairs Following Reunification**

After a thirty-year war for independence, Vietnam became a unified state when the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) took Saigon on 30 April 1975, creating the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. For the Vietnamese Communists, 1975 marked the triumph over Western capitalist exploitation. However, for many Vietnamese civilians, this year marked the beginning of a new form of misery. The PAVN quickly took over police services, schools, hospitals, and businesses while confiscating American-supplied war resources.<sup>4</sup> Given the brutality of the war in Vietnam, the Communists distrusted the South. They maintained a direct rule by increasing the presence of the PAVN, removing all South Vietnamese officials and sending them to re-education camps. By July 1976, Vietnam became a single-party dictatorship controlled by the VCP. The VCP then set out a program for a socialist reconstruction of the North and a transformation of the South.<sup>5</sup>

The Communist takeover came at a significant cost to the economy. In 1975, the United States issued a trade embargo on Vietnam, while China and ASEAN members distanced themselves as Vietnam grew closer to the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> The economic situation deteriorated further when one million civilians in the South became unemployed, many of whose careers were compromised by their collaborations with the anti-Communist movements. In 1976, the Politburo (a Soviet policy-making body) stressed the importance of economic reform and initiated a Five-Year Plan (FYP) from 1976 to 1980, with the primary goal being a socialist reconstruction of Southern Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> With the new FYP inspired by the Stalinist model, the VCP sought to repair the economy by collectivizing Southern Vietnam to produce enough resources to feed the nation and fund Vietnam's rapid industrialization. If

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Goscha, "The Tragedy and Rise of Modern Vietnam," in *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), p. 372.

<sup>5</sup> David W.P Elliot, *Changing Worlds: Vietnam's Transition from Cold War to Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Goscha, "The Tragedy and Rise of Modern Vietnam," p. 385.

<sup>7</sup> Kosal Path, *Vietnam's Strategic Thinking during the Third Indochina War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), p. 64.

Stalin's FYP was not enough proof, Vietnam's FYP of collectivizing the South dramatically decreased the productivity of civilians as they were no longer incentivized. Collectivized civilians lost their property, and the VCP forced them to work on large government farms holding about 100,000 people in each collective.<sup>8</sup>

While the families loyal to the VCP enjoyed more job opportunities and higher education, southern families had their lands redistributed. The VCP placed discriminatory policies against those who worked with the capitalist regimes dating back to the 1940s.<sup>9</sup> Like Ngo Dinh Diem's dictatorship, the VCP's police force compiled a list of suspects and mandated identity cards with short biographies to categorize civilians by their previous loyalties. The VCP used identity cards to reward loyal families and discriminate against and punish capitalist sympathizers.<sup>10</sup> In 1975 alone, 6.5 million civilians' careers became "compromised" due to their families' connection to the French or the Americans. The VCP's mistrust of the South hindered their ability to industrialize and repair the country, as the collectivization of the South, along with discriminatory policies, caused a massive economic downturn.<sup>11</sup> The FYP showed that the VCP acted out of revenge rather than a desire to rehabilitate the nation. Hanoi's development model was an inadequate way of transforming the South.

Not only were the Southern Vietnamese targeted by the VCP, but the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam also faced discrimination as the scapegoats for the haphazard socialist transformation of the South. While Sino-Vietnamese tensions continued into the late 1970s, the VCP encouraged the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam to leave, including those loyal members of the PAVN and VCP.<sup>12</sup> Many of the bourgeoisie the VCP targeted during the socialist transformation of the South were ethnic Chinese who served the Diem regime. Hoang Van Hoan, a Chinese associate of Ho Chi Minh and a member of the Politburo, fled Vietnam in 1979, making him one of the most senior members of a Communist government to defect. Many ethnic Chinese who attempted to flee became political prisoners and died in the re-education camps.

### **The "Boat People": Vietnamese Mass Migration**

The economic stagnation and discriminatory policies made living conditions so unbearable in Vietnam that civilians, most of whom were Southern Vietnamese, began to flee to neighbouring countries. Civilians bribed border patrolmen to let them pass and went by boat to China, Hong Kong, and other

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<sup>8</sup> D.R. Sardesai, *Vietnam, Past and Present* (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 129.

<sup>9</sup> Hisashi, "Local Politics in the Migration between Vietnam and Cambodia," p. 381.

<sup>10</sup> Hisashi, p. 382.

<sup>11</sup> Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 474.

ASEAN countries, where they were referred to as “boat people.”<sup>13</sup> Many also migrated to Thailand via Cambodia and became undocumented workers in places like cassava farms. Although the PAVN restricted cross-border migration, the passage to Cambodia and Thailand persisted despite all the political chaos in Vietnam.<sup>14</sup> The government could not control migration at the border, considering the civilians took informal routes.

Bangkok and Phnom Penh perceived Vietnamese “boat people” as the VCP’s plan for the “Vietnamization” of Southeast Asia – a ploy to increase the VCP’s influence in the region.<sup>15</sup> Thailand’s strategic location and ideological inclination made Bangkok alert to the disputes in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> The glue keeping Vietnamese-Thai relations together was Hanoi’s relations with ASEAN countries and Hanoi’s treatment of its members. From Hanoi’s perspective, Thailand’s aid to the US during the Second Indochinese War was one of the most salient implications to Vietnamese-Thai relations. Thailand provided a military base for American fighter planes to remain close to Vietnam during the war. Notably, the fact that US military bases remained in Thailand was alarming, as Hanoi viewed this as Bangkok’s show of support for the US policy against Vietnam.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Hanoi and Bangkok frequently competed for political influence in Indochina, which made Thailand “sensitive” to Vietnam’s foreign policy in the region, particularly with Cambodia, where the two powers competed for influence. The VCP’s aims to influence Indochinese ideologies impacted Thailand and caused a tornado effect, leading China to react negatively. Although China and Vietnam had a mutually beneficial relationship as the major Communist powers in Asia, Vietnamese reunification caused tensions to rise between the two long-standing allies.

### **The Sino-Vietnamese Communist Connection**

Chinese and Vietnamese Communists had collaborated since the late nineteenth century, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) provided organizational models that the VCP followed.<sup>18</sup> When Vietnam became a unified Communist state, a Chinese representative spoke before the Economic and Social Council, praising North Vietnam’s victory and the “dumping of the puppet Saigon regime.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Goscha, “The Tragedy and Rise of Modern Vietnam,” p. 385.

<sup>14</sup> Hisashi, “Local Politics in the Migration between Vietnam and Cambodia,” p. 100.

<sup>15</sup> Amer, “Cambodia and Vietnam,” p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> Nguyen Vu Tung, “Vietnam-Thailand Relations After the Cold War,” *International Relations in Southeast Asia: Between Bilateralism and Multilateralism* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2010), p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> Vu Tung, “Vietnam-Thailand Relations After the Cold War,” p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> The Black Panther Party, “Intercommunal News: U.N. Appeals for Aid to Indochina,” *Black Panther Productions*, 13:13 (1975): p. 45.

However, Sino-Vietnamese relations became problematic once Beijing realized that Hanoi could rival its influence over Indochina. When Vietnam became a competitor, its “fraternal cooperation” quickly shifted to a power struggle between the two nations. By the end of the Second Indochinese War, the relationship turned into a rivalry between China and North Vietnam as it became evident that a unified Vietnam could be a pro-Soviet state.<sup>20</sup> Over the years, Moscow and Hanoi developed a close fraternal relationship over shared ideology, as the *Moscow News* compared Vietnam’s independence to the October Revolution.<sup>21</sup> When Vietnam joined the Soviet-controlled Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), a 25-year treaty of friendship, China responded by ending economic and military assistance to Vietnam. This, coupled with the fact that China saw the exodus of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam as a threat, caused tension between the Communist allies. Beijing understood the exodus as Hanoi’s way of breaking ties with it and removing any person of influence representing the CCP in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup>

China’s fear of the Soviet Union’s growing influence convinced Beijing to seek a normalized relationship with the US. When Jimmy Carter became the president in 1977, he approached Huang Chen, China’s liaison chief, with the thought of normalization as they both distrusted the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> Most notably, an improved relationship between Beijing and Washington would force the Soviet Union to divide its attention between two enemies. When Sino-American relations normalized in January 1979, their mutual goals to contain the Soviet Union made Hanoi a target as Moscow’s closest ally in Southeast Asia. Although ideological differences and Sino-American normalization contributed to Vietnam’s increasing reliance on the Soviet Union, it was not the only reason Hanoi moved away from Beijing. One of the most significant blows to Sino-Vietnamese relations was China’s support of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, or the DK, which signalled to Hanoi that the Chinese planned to encircle Vietnam with enemies.<sup>24</sup>

One view of the Sino-DK-Washington relationship was that it was a product of the Sino-Soviet split and Hanoi’s endorsement of Soviet ideology. When Vietnam grew closer to the Soviets, it became apparent that Beijing would be trapped in the north by the Soviets and in the south by the Vietnamese.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Norman G. Owen, “Vietnam After 1975: From Collectivism to Market Leninism,” *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), p. 473.

<sup>21</sup> *Moscow News*, “Soviet-Vietnamese Declaration,” *Moscow News*, 45 (1975): p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Owen, “Vietnam After 1975,” p. 474.

<sup>23</sup> Deborah Kalb and Marvin Kalb, “Clinton: The First Baby-Boomer President,” *Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Mertha, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979* (Ithaca: New York, Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 5.

The creation of the DK following a coup in 1975 opened a path to offset the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance seeing that the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) had increasing hostilities with the VCP. In 1977, Beijing provided the DK with food and resources and planned for Pol Pot to meet Mao Zedong on a secret visit to China to secure military aid. China sent one billion dollars worth of aid, the most significant commitment in the history of Communist China. The US, which shared the desire to contain the Soviets, ignored Pol Pot's human rights violations and secretly provided covert aid to the DK. Like China, the US hoped to precipitate the decline of the VCP and Vietnamese expansionism as it resented the nation after withdrawing from the Second Indochinese War. The human rights issues in Pol Pot's genocidal regime were not enough to sway the US administration against providing covert aid, despite President Jimmy Carter referring to the Khmer Rouge as the "worst violator of human rights in the world today."<sup>26</sup> When the American public began to draw attention to the administration's lack of interest in the Khmer atrocities, Carter stated that the US would continue to oppose nations that violated human rights. However, China and the US did nothing to stop the Khmer regime. Even after the VCP drove Pol Pot from the DK, the US provided covert aid to the Khmer Rouge so that they may one day return to power.

### **The Invasion of The DK And The Third Indochinese War**

The historically tumultuous relationship between the Chinese and Vietnamese greatly influenced the turmoil between Vietnam and the DK. Through Chinese and American aid, Pol Pot's regime came to power with vehement anti-Vietnamese sentiments. Hanoi hoped that the Khmers would adopt a pro-Vietnamese doctrine, similar to the Laotian Communists, to maintain its sphere of influence in Indochina. However, this was not the case.<sup>27</sup> When Pol Pot established the DK, he immediately removed any Vietnamese Communist allies. He spread anti-Vietnamese sentiments by claiming land rights to the Mekong Delta, causing collisions with the PAVN located at the DK-Vietnamese border. Vietnam was partly to blame for the disputes, as Politburo reports stated that the status of the Mekong Delta was unclear. The border skirmishes continued until 1976, when attempts to settle these disputes broke down, and the DK government refused to negotiate. Consequently, Phnom Penh and Hanoi officially terminated diplomatic relations in December 1977.<sup>28</sup> Until 1978, the Khmer Rouge attacked the Vietnamese provinces of Tay Ninh, Kien Giang, and An Giang, killing thousands of civilians while purging any ethnic Vietnamese and Hanoi-trained Khmers in the DK.

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<sup>26</sup> Jimmy Carter, "Human Rights Violations in Cambodia Statement by the President," *The American Presidency Project*, April 21, 1978.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> Amer, "Cambodia and Vietnam," p. 92.

By mid-1978, the Vietnamese government concluded that a conflict similar to its previous 'People's War' would not be applicable in this situation. The VCP decided to launch a military expedition, mirroring the 1968 Prague Spring, to bring the DK under Vietnam's sphere of influence as it had desired for many decades.<sup>29</sup> The border disputes soon escalated to a full-scale war in December 1978 when 100,000 Vietnamese troops entered Eastern Cambodia, capturing Phnom Penh after two weeks of fighting.<sup>30</sup> Following the fall of the Pol Pot regime, Vietnamese officials created a People's Revolutionary Council to act as the provisional government until the acting council established the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and remained in power until the PAVN withdrew from Cambodia.<sup>31</sup>

China had something to lose in the war with the Khmers since it supported the Pol Pot regime. In an attempt to retaliate and teach Vietnam a lesson, China invaded Northern Vietnam in February 1979.<sup>32</sup> Chinese leaders viewed their southern neighbours as ungrateful for all the CCP had aided them during their Peoples' War. Beijing's leadership agreed to a short attack on Northern Vietnam to limit the costs and other concerns that the senior members had. This way, Beijing would accomplish its goal of punishing Vietnam while keeping the cost of war to a minimum. Many viewed this operation as a military failure for the Chinese but a success in strategy and diplomacy. The war successfully blocked Hanoi's ambitions to attain a sphere of influence over Indochina, forcing Hanoi to keep a portion of the army on its shared border with China.

For the VCP to have facilitated a prosperous post-war reconstruction depended on a peaceful regional environment where military operations could be reduced in favour of foreign aid and trade. Vietnam's economic rehabilitation would have greatly benefitted from a continuous inflow of Chinese aid. However, this was impossible given the political and military relationship between the Chinese and the Khmer Rouge.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, military action against the Chinese-backed Khmers resulted in economic and military retaliation against the Vietnamese instead of support. The only nation to stand behind Hanoi's decision to invade the DK was the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union publicly defended Vietnam's foreign policy. It condemned Chinese aggression, calling it a violation of the United Nations

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<sup>29</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Amer, "Cambodia and Vietnam," p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> Amer, p. 95.

<sup>32</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 221.

<sup>33</sup> Bonny Lin, David Grompert, and Hans Binnendijk, "China's Punitive War Against Vietnam, 1979," *Blinders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2014), p. 89.



Charter and international law and urging international organizations to stand in solidarity with Hanoi.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the pariah state known as Vietnam would not receive support from Western nations.

### **Vietnam's Pariah Era: Economic Ostracization**

Even though the invasion and occupation were regionally and internationally opposed, for the leaders in Hanoi to have sat idly while the Khmer Rouge purged ethnic Vietnamese civilians would have made them appear passive and weak. The Third Indochinese War and the occupation of Cambodia brought about a period of instability in Asia where no player left with a positive outcome. Cambodia had the most to lose that being its independence, military might, and integrity, which the Cambodian Civil War only worsened.<sup>35</sup> Hanoi's overthrow of the Chinese-backed Pol Pot regime was embarrassing for Beijing. Beijing labelled itself as the country that could check Hanoi's ambitions, but it failed to teach the Vietnamese a lesson by establishing military superiority over its smaller neighbour.

The Vietnamese domination of Cambodia came at a cost to Hanoi's national security, international reputation, and economic stability. Though it achieved the goal of defeating the Khmers, the Vietnamese did not expect the magnitude of international condemnation for its actions and thus endured ostracization for ten long years.<sup>36</sup> The FYP failed since it forced Hanoi to postpone reconstruction programs in favour of military defence to maintain "preparedness" at the border with China. With its international credibility dramatically reduced, Hanoi's chances of receiving assistance from other countries were slim. International isolation drastically impacted the Vietnamese economy, and the VCP became more dependent on Soviet assistance to maintain domination.<sup>37</sup> The boycott of Vietnam and Vietnamese-occupied Cambodia deprived Hanoi of developmental aid until 1991, with only a handful of Western countries that continued to send supplies, such as Sweden.<sup>38</sup> There was a lack of support even in developing countries where the Vietminh revolutionaries were once an inspiration.

Economic advisors in Hanoi regarded the period before the Cambodian invasion as a missed opportunity to establish economic relations with the West. Hanoi's economic planners noted that they had the chance to explore further development in the reconstruction process had they not limited themselves to allying with the Soviet Union. In 1985, Vo Van Kiet, a socialist politician and economic researcher, stated that Vietnam did not recognize the primacy of bilateral and multilateral economic relations. Since 1975, Hanoi made the mistake of primarily building relations with countries with shared interests, and policymakers did not stress the importance of exporting and increasing imports in a

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<sup>34</sup> Moscow News, "Hands off Vietnam! Appeal of the International Emergency Conference in Support of Vietnam," *Moscow News*, 12, (1979), p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Sardesai, *Vietnam Past and Present*, p. 187.

<sup>36</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 219.

<sup>37</sup> Sardesai, *Vietnam Past and Present*, p. 187.

<sup>38</sup> Westad and Quinn-Judge, p. 220.

developing economy.<sup>39</sup> This missed opportunity hindered Hanoi's ability to build a thriving socialist state. Van Kiet further wrote:

Our psychology of reliance on outsiders was deep, widespread, and resistant to change. Because of that, we were not able to exploit our strength and potential in our country to widen our economic relations with other countries, particularly to increase our exports. We did not see as important investments in building infrastructure and material foundations in service of large-scale exports. We were too slow to determine the necessary policies and measures to strengthen our export sector.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Path To *Doi Moi***

From 1985 to 1986, Hanoi was increasingly receptive to economic reform. The shift to a more open-minded approach to economic reform was undoubtedly influenced by Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* policy of loosening economic constraints on civilians to incentivize them to work harder.<sup>41</sup> The Soviet economy, on the brink of collapse, could not afford to fund uprisings in Third World countries, causing Gorbachev to reduce economic and military aid to its allies, including Vietnam. Before this, Vietnam heavily relied on the Soviet Union for aid, especially during the war with Cambodia and the Third Indochinese War. This changed in 1985 when the economic planners in Hanoi paid more attention to the decline of the Soviet Union's economic might and the steady downfall of the COMECON countries, which owed an overwhelming amount of debt to the West. Hanoi had to begin considering partnerships with other nations to save the economy. In a report written in March 1985, decision-makers informed the VCP that many capitalist nations and economic organizations refused to enter a partnership with Vietnam because of political issues, such as the US economic sanctions and regional conflicts, meaning Vietnam's military presence in Cambodia.<sup>42</sup>

The occupation of Cambodia diminished any prospect of normalization with the US. The US participated in propaganda campaigns labelling Hanoi as the 'aggressive Cuba of the East,' encouraging other nations to distance themselves from the pariah state. The American administration's stance on Vietnam prompted European nations to cut off food aid, and the United Nations (UN) General Assembly refused to recognize the Vietnamese-backed government in Cambodia.<sup>43</sup> By 1986, hostilities with China during the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia drastically destabilized the region, which caused unfavourable economic circumstances. Distancing itself from the Cambodian conflict and

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<sup>39</sup> Path, *Vietnam's Strategic Thinking during the Third Indochina War*, p. 174.

<sup>40</sup> Path, *Vietnam's Strategic Thinking during the Third Indochina War*, p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 221.

<sup>42</sup> Path, *Vietnam's Strategic Thinking during the Third Indochina War*, p. 174.

<sup>43</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 222.

normalizing relations with China was the only way to repair the nation. A negotiated peace agreement could have been established sooner if the US and China had stopped backing the Khmer Rouge, but the two powers were adamant about bleeding Vietnam dry. By 1989, Hanoi withdrew from Cambodia and accepted a Cambodian government under UN supervision.<sup>44</sup>

Hanoi's decision-makers discussed the withdrawal from Cambodia as early as 1988. Cases of famine and malnourishment spread nationwide, leaving seven-million Vietnamese civilians starving. The threat of another famine in 1989 caused turmoil within the government that urged Hanoi to redirect its focus from military expansion to economic stability.<sup>45</sup> The food crisis forced Hanoi to come to terms with the impact of regional and international isolation and revisit its relations with ASEAN countries and other international players. As 1989 ended, Communist regimes worldwide fell, which alarmed Hanoi and encouraged decision-makers to seek normalization with China as soon as possible to protect the regime.<sup>46</sup> By 1990, bilateral trade in Vietnam had dropped from eighty percent to fourteen percent. This dramatic decrease prompted Hanoi to redesign its foreign policy to meet the needs of the economy and national security.

Economic success would strengthen Vietnam's credibility and power, giving it a greater ability to protect its sovereignty and "promote international prestige."<sup>47</sup> Hanoi found that economic instability was the root of the Communist collapse, which led to political chaos. The VCP did not wish to join the ranks of the fallen COMECON parties in Eastern Europe. Soon after Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia, the Politburo established a resolution outlining the next steps toward protecting national security. The Politburo identified a strong economy capable of covering national defence and opening bilateral and multilateral trade and relations. For these goals to be met, Hanoi must pursue peace with its neighbours and the international community.<sup>48</sup> With these interests in mind, and with the fear of losing its regime amid the Communist collapse in Eastern Europe, Hanoi had to first create reforms in the regime before turning outward to signal a shift in attitude in Hanoi and to appear receptive to new alliances.

### ***Doi Moi* And Normalization With ASEAN**

The path to normalization for Vietnam in the 1980s began with domestic reform known as *Doi Moi*, or 'renovation,' where economic development was the principal focus. In April 1987, the VCP

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<sup>44</sup> Le Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Domestic-Foreign Policy Nexus: Doi Moi, Foreign Policy Reform, and Sino-Vietnamese Normalization," *Asian Politics and Policy* 5:3 (2013), p. 388.

<sup>45</sup> Elliot, *Changing Worlds*, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Domestic-Foreign Policy Nexus," p. 397.

<sup>47</sup> David Denoon, *China, the United States, and the Future of Southeast Asia*, (New York: New York University Press, 2017), p. 155.

<sup>48</sup> Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Domestic-Foreign Policy Nexus," p. 397.

incentivized citizens by establishing reforms to increase peasants' and workers' wages.<sup>49</sup> This meant rice farmers could earn an additional forty percent of profits from production, and the increased autonomy allowed people to operate businesses without state intervention. This dramatically decreased inflation as the rate went from seven hundred percent in 1985 to thirteen percent over the next decade.<sup>50</sup> The Sixth Party Congress also established a "soft reform" of socialism to liberalize the economy and open up to the capitalist world. The VCP worked to shift to a market-based economy, as opposed to a centrally controlled economy, which required their participation in global capitalist institutions.<sup>51</sup>

At the Seventh Party Congress, The VCP wanted to hold diversified trade agreements with several countries and economic organizations and build strong relationships with all countries. Rather than isolating itself from one nation as it did with the Soviet Union, Hanoi began to follow a multidirectional foreign policy going into the 1990s known as the "clumping bamboo" strategy.<sup>52</sup> Bamboo will fall when standing alone, but it stays strong when grouped. This strategy maximized Hanoi's economic inflow and prevented hyper-dependence on one nation. The clumping bamboo almost immediately precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which severely impacted Vietnam's economy and strategic policy implementation. Hanoi lost a significant source of economic assistance, such as trade agreements and financial aid. This left the nation scrambling to adapt, causing a drastic economic crisis in the early 1990s with hyperinflation, unemployment, and a decline in economic output. As Vietnam's largest trading partner during the Cold War, the collapse forced Hanoi's decision makers to seek new bilateral and multilateral partners.

The Politburo encouraged the foreign policy guideline of having more friends and fewer enemies by mending relationships to promote national interests.<sup>53</sup> Without the Soviet Union to protect it from its Chinese neighbours, it was paramount for Hanoi to normalize relations with China seeing that it could no longer afford to remain in defiance of it. As VCP leader Le Duan once stated regarding China, "Behind an enemy, sometimes we can find a friend... Behind a friend, sometimes an enemy."<sup>54</sup> The history of animosity between these two nations had been consistent, but China, as the most prominent Communist state since the fall of the Soviet Union, made normalization increasingly salient. However, by 1990, the fact remained that China and Vietnam had unresolved territorial disputes making Beijing the biggest security threat to Hanoi. From Beijing's perspective, the CCP was not

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<sup>49</sup> Sardesai, *Vietnam Past and Present*, p. 136.

<sup>50</sup> Sardesai, p. 137.

<sup>51</sup> Sardesai, p. 469.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Manyin, "Vietnam Among the Powers: Struggle and Cooperation," *International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier: ASEAN, Australia, and India*, (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2018), p. 210.

<sup>53</sup> Vu Tung, "Vietnam-Thailand Relations After the Cold War," p. 75.

<sup>54</sup> Lan Huong To, "Thai do cua TBT Le Duan voi lanh dao Trung Quoc" (General Secretary Le Duan's attitude toward Chinese leaders), *SOHA.vn.*, February 16, 1979.

entirely receptive to the idea of normalization with Hanoi. Even though China invaded Northern Vietnam, there was strong resentment and disdain for the VCP in Beijing for damaging its credibility as a military force.

China was reluctant to mend fences with Vietnam over recent border issues and did not share the same ideological outlook. As normalization progressed between the nations, it became clear that its relationship would not be mended over a shared ideology but rather a shared national interest and a desire to avoid political and economic chaos.<sup>55</sup> Beijing clearly stated to Hanoi that its relationship would be limited and did not constitute an ideological alliance. For Hanoi, the most important factor of its partnership was that it was no longer adversaries with its powerful neighbour. Post-Cold War Vietnam was relatively stable once China was brought into the fold, as it held a mutually beneficial trading relationship.<sup>56</sup> Once Hanoi stabilized its relationship with its biggest regional adversary, the VCP turned its focus to Thailand and the other ASEAN countries.

Hanoi viewed Bangkok as the most important ASEAN country to mend fences with, seeing that the two nations held opposing ideologies. If Hanoi could improve relations with the Thais, it could be used as a litmus test for the rest of ASEAN.<sup>57</sup> Even more so, Bangkok was the front-line opposer to reunified Vietnam, and Hanoi would require its approval for other ASEAN countries to consider building a relationship with it. Since the invasion and occupation of Cambodia was the biggest threat to Thai-Vietnamese relations, tensions between the two nations decreased once Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia. Following the normalization of relations between Bangkok and Hanoi, Thailand was an avid supporter of Vietnam during its application for membership to ASEAN.<sup>58</sup> Hanoi continued its involvement with Thailand and similar ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, with which Vietnam had solid relations during its 1980s pariah era.<sup>59</sup> Increased diplomacy with nations which held opposing ideologies was Hanoi's strongest effort to normalize relations with ASEAN, not only to aid its economy but to facilitate the peaceful environment it initially needed to focus on the socialist transformation of Vietnam. In response, ASEAN countries agreed to a partnership with Vietnam because they shared a fear of the increasing power of China and believed Hanoi could help maintain a balance.<sup>60</sup>

The process of joining ASEAN began in 1991 after the Paris Agreement on Cambodia concluded. Even though the Vietnamese resented the ASEAN countries for their involvement with the US during the Second Indochinese War, Hanoi put this aside to focus on building solid regional relations. For the Vietnamese government, building relations with its neighbours was closely connected

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<sup>55</sup> Elliot, *Changing Worlds*, p. 91.

<sup>56</sup> Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Pursuit of Alliance Politics in the South China Sea," p. 273.

<sup>57</sup> Vu Tung, "Vietnam-Thailand Relations After the Cold War," p. 78.

<sup>58</sup> Elliot, *Changing Worlds*, p. 145.

<sup>59</sup> Elliot, p. 145.

<sup>60</sup> Elliot, p. 144.

to the security and overall development of the nation. Exercising a solid relationship with its neighbours was a part of Hanoi's method of creating a "security belt" around it to establish long-term national security and strengthen its defence.<sup>61</sup> Regarding economic rehabilitation, Hanoi found that ASEAN would help contribute to the economy in the long run. Developing ties with the region by joining ASEAN would heighten Vietnam's international significance and make it look more attractive to investors. This gave Hanoi the ability to defend itself while gaining support from ASEAN.<sup>62</sup>

ASEAN countries also had something to gain from their relationship with Vietnam. While its association with ASEAN made Vietnam more relevant to foreign investors, joining the organization would give ASEAN increased power and influence. ASEAN could utilize Vietnam's strategic location as a relay station between the mainland and the islands in Southeast Asia, as well as between members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the relations between Asian and European nations.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, Vietnam, as a member of ASEAN, had the potential to play a vital role in repairing political and national security issues in Southeast Asia. Vietnam could use this opportunity to leverage its influence in the association, giving it more authority over regional politics.

### **American Reconciliation**

The fall of the Soviet Union catalyzed a change in global politics, resulting in the US becoming the dominant superpower. Consequently, with Hanoi's decision to expand relations with regional players, Vietnamese foreign policy in the 1990s worked to normalize relations with powerful Western nations. Addressing the trajectory of Vietnam's road to joining ASEAN comes simultaneously with Vietnam's normalization efforts with the US. In some respects, Vietnam's full membership in ASEAN was contingent on establishing normalization with the US.<sup>64</sup> Reconciling with the US was vital for Vietnam as it would end the economic embargo and give Hanoi access to greater aid funds from Western-dominated organizations like the World Bank and IMF. However, the Americans, like the Chinese, were not receptive to normalization with the Vietnamese. Even though the Cambodian occupation concluded, which the US government listed as its primary obstacle to normalization, other unresolved issues took its place.

Following the American war in Vietnam and again during the occupation of Cambodia, American civilians regarded Communist Vietnam as a nation filled with "cruel Orientals" whose only wish was to unite Indochina under the VCP's Communist model.<sup>65</sup> The US government and the

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<sup>61</sup> Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 105.

<sup>62</sup> Elliot, *Changing Worlds*, p. 128.

<sup>63</sup> Elliot, p. 152.

<sup>64</sup> Elliot, p. 131.

<sup>65</sup> Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 208.

American public resented Hanoi's leadership as they still felt the sting of losing their first war. The Second Indochinese War haunted the American public. When incidents like the My Lai massacre surfaced, the US lost its reputation as a nation that protected and upheld human rights and freedoms. Many concluded that the legacy of the Second Indochinese War would remain for many years.

Americans in the 1980s, in particular, held strong anti-Vietnamese sentiments after the release of multiple prisoners of war (POW) films from 1983 to 1985. This highlighted the missing-in-action (MIA) issue that was prominent at the war's end. The release of the films during the Vietnamese pariah era caused the US population and many other nations to find Vietnam problematic and untrustworthy. This influenced the successive administrations to avoid seeking normalization with Vietnam for several years.<sup>66</sup> Hanoi and Washington went back and forth on the POW-MIA issue from February 1982, when Vietnam first attempted to improve relations with the US. The Vietnamese government returned MIA remains to a US delegation in Hanoi for the first time, led by the Deputy Secretary of Defence Richard Armitage.<sup>67</sup> It was not until June 1985 that Hanoi approached the US, stating it was willing to settle the issue of MIA soldiers in Vietnam. Shortly after, Hanoi returned the remains of 26 American soldiers who fought in the Second Indochinese War, the largest transfer of remains since 1982. In November 1985, Hanoi allowed a joint excavation of a B-52 crash site to find the remains of MIA soldiers and service people.<sup>68</sup> Near the end of 1990, the US government received 100 MIA remains from Hanoi, but Washington listed 1750 MIAs left in Vietnam after the war. By the time Hanoi withdrew from Cambodia, negotiations for a normalized relationship between Washington and Hanoi stalled because of the POW-MIA issue and Hanoi's domestic policies and internal structures.<sup>69</sup>

Washington gave Hanoi an outline of what it must do to achieve normalization with the US on the road to achieving full diplomatic relations and the removal of the economic embargo. To incentivize the VCP to cooperate, Washington announced a program to provide one million USD in prosthetics assistance for those wounded in the Second Indochinese War. By February 1994, Washington lifted the trade embargo on Vietnam and removed it from the official list of American enemies, allowing US trade and investment to flow through Hanoi.<sup>70</sup> Washington's decision to open trade with Vietnam influenced other Western European nations and Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN members to expand their trading relationships with Vietnam. Bilateral trade and investment between Washington and Hanoi helped build a strong economy for Vietnam, which ultimately aided its socio-political and economic recovery after three Indochinese Wars and an invasion of Cambodia. The United

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<sup>66</sup> Sardesai, *Vietnam Past and Present*, p. 204.

<sup>67</sup> Sardesai, p. 201.

<sup>68</sup> Sardesai, p. 202.

<sup>69</sup> Elliot, *Changing Worlds*, p. 143.

<sup>70</sup> Sardesai, *Vietnam Past and Present*, p. 204.

States and China ranked among the top dollar-value bilateral trading partners. Washington also cleared Hanoi's debts and allowed Vietnam to take IMF and World Bank loans. By 1994, bilateral trade between Washington and Hanoi had risen to two hundred twenty million.<sup>71</sup>

When Bill Clinton came to office, he advocated for normalized relations with Vietnam as he opposed the Second Indochinese War in previous years.<sup>72</sup> Referred to as the first baby-boomer president, Clinton did not view the Second Indochinese War through the same lens as his predecessors, thus giving him no reason to oppose normalization. Clinton was known to be a draft dodger during the war and felt guilty when he started his political life as one of the few politicians with no direct ties to the war.<sup>73</sup> As president, he was adamant about coming to terms with his past and putting Vietnam behind him by focusing on reconciliation. The prospect of normalization with a country that had deeply scarred the American people was a difficult pill to swallow for the citizens who still believed that Vietnam was harbouring POWs. When Clinton announced in July 1995 that the administration had plans to normalize relations with Vietnam, he did not have the support of the people. President Clinton responded that normalized relations with Vietnam would bolster American interests in Asia and contribute to a stable environment.<sup>74</sup> An economic relationship with Vietnam promoted trade and investment for American businesses and allowed them to exploit an emerging Vietnamese market. Even though Clinton's administration denied it, advocates stressed the importance of relations with Hanoi as a countermeasure to the increase in China's military power.

### **The South China Sea: Hanoi and Washington Unite Against Beijing**

Normalization between Hanoi and the US was a mutually beneficial establishment, particularly for its interests in Southeast Asia, as China's economic might grew stronger. This was not a favourable prospect for either country as both feared that China would turn against it. The US was aligned with China when they both shared mutual interests in checking Vietnam's expansionist plans. However, unlike in the 1970s, China had become an economic competitor and not a strategic partner for the US. When Washington and Beijing first made an agreement in 1979, China's economy was relatively weak and unthreatening.<sup>75</sup> By 1995, the Chinese economy experienced dramatic gains, and its growing military strength threatened America's influence in the region and globally.

Hanoi also had something to lose from China's rise in power. By the mid-1990s, normalizing relations between China and Vietnam was simply a label and held no real weight. Hanoi struggled to

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<sup>71</sup> Frederick Brown, "Rapprochement Between Vietnam and the United States," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 32:3 (2010), p. 324.

<sup>72</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 2004), p. 173.

<sup>73</sup> Clinton, *My Life*, p. 161.

<sup>74</sup> Sardesai, *Vietnam Past and Present*, p. 205.

<sup>75</sup> Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Pursuit of Alliance Politics in the South China Sea," p. 279.



preserve its sovereignty and political autonomy while maintaining a peaceful and mutually beneficial foreign policy with Beijing.<sup>76</sup> Although it abided by China's stance on political non-interference, Hanoi frequently butted heads with Beijing for power and influence.<sup>77</sup> The two neighbours still competed for influence over Laos and Cambodia to control the Communist movements - a historic rivalry between the two successful Asian Communist nations with diverging ideologies. Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have also been a cause for significant concern for Hanoi policymakers, who felt that Hanoi must protect its sovereignty by establishing strategic relations with other key players.

China's continuing aggression in the South China Sea is a fundamental foundation for Hanoi's strategic policies. Improved relations with the US have been the most promising outcome to emerge from the Sino-Vietnamese tensions in recent decades. Since 1995, Vietnamese-American trade relations and economic agreements have surprised many who believed the two nations could never work together after the Second Indochinese War. Although they do not share ideologies and views on governance, the relationship between Vietnam and the US has flourished through bilateral and regional strategic relationships with which it does share common interests.<sup>78</sup> In the face of historical animosity in the "largest and least successful war in US history," the US Department of Commerce listed Vietnam as one of its largest markets.<sup>79</sup> Serving its economic and security interests in Southeast Asia, Vietnam went from a fierce opponent to a close ally in a matter of decades. Normalization was the final straw of a terrible experience on both sides and brought both nations to a place of mutual respect and admiration. Its shared strategic interests in keeping China in check have united them and the ASEAN members. While Hanoi worked to solidify ties with regional states to protect itself against China and the tension in the South China Sea, the US was also working to strengthen ties with ASEAN members to block China's interests.<sup>80</sup>

China's increasing aggressiveness in the South China Sea essentially brought nations together. It led Hanoi to socioeconomic and political security and stability where chaos and famine once existed. Normalizing relations between Hanoi and the rest of the world solidified the importance of regional and international investment and aid. It showed that self-reliance can sometimes be counterproductive due to the lack of trade and investment in the nation. Vietnam's self-reliance during its ostracization turned a nation that had potential into a poverty-stricken country with yearly famines. Since normalization, Hanoi has averted the economic crisis, and the nation has healed dramatically by re-evaluating its foreign policy priorities and trade relations. The regional and global normalization of

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<sup>76</sup> Manyin, "Vietnam Among the Powers," p. 158.

<sup>77</sup> Manyin, p. 159.

<sup>78</sup> Brown, "Rapprochement Between Vietnam and the United States," p. 318.

<sup>79</sup> Allan E. Goodman, "The Political Consequences of Normalization of U.S.-Vietnam Relations," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 17:4 (1996), p. 421.

<sup>80</sup> Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Pursuit of Alliance Politics in the South China Sea," p. 283.

relations with Hanoi had transformative implications for Vietnam's socio-political and economic stability.

### **Conclusion**

The normalization of relations between Vietnam and the rest of the world drastically transformed the economic capability of the nation and played a crucial role in making Hanoi a significant regional power. Bilateral and multilateral trade agreements between Vietnam and the rest of the world were integral to Hanoi's post-Cold War trajectory. After a thirty-year war for independence, an occupation of Cambodia and a brief war with its powerful neighbour, Vietnam finally settled the political and economic chaos. Regional and international trade and investment were the bread and butter of the new Vietnamese economy, which significantly transformed the quality of life for Vietnamese civilians and the global reputation of Hanoi, turning it into an attractive trade and investment partner. The political consequences of ostracization due to Vietnam's expansionist goals paved the way for political and economic reform like *Doi Moi*, which made it possible to readdress foreign policy relations with many key players like the US. Normalization with the US was integral to Hanoi's reformation as it facilitated trade relations with other Western nations and enhanced Vietnam's legitimacy. A long and bloody war between the two nations led to a normalized relationship and a robust trade and investment agreement that continues to protect Hanoi from being overpowered by its ever-growing Chinese neighbours.