

**VIETNAMESE FOREIGN POLICY: MEMORY AND
LEARNING IN THE DOI MOI ERA**

By

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Ever since 1988, Vietnam has successfully diversified and multilateralised its relationships, whilst placing a strong degree of focus on integration into the international political economy. This multidirectional foreign policy is designed to contribute to a peaceful international environment and a stable domestic one in order to promote economic growth and build up the aggregate strength of the country. At the same time, it is designed to boost the country's autonomy, protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as hedge against potential threats. This multidirectional foreign policy has contributed significantly to the economic reformist agenda, formally initiated at the 1986 Sixth Party Congress, otherwise known as Doi Moi. Additionally, it has boosted Vietnam's international profile and reversed the diplomatic isolation it faced as the Cold War came to a close. As such, multidirectionalism has become a fundamental aspect of the Doi Moi process. This thesis traces the learning process since multidirectionalism's inception and argues that this learning process, along with the economic benefits reaped, have evolved into positive memories for the Vietnamese Communist Party. This means multidirectionalism continues to be reinforced and as a result, these memories shape Vietnam's continued expansion of that policy. Additionally, this thesis also offers a conceptual definition to the term multidirectionalism as well as explores the mechanisms through which Vietnam implements this policy.

Dedication

For Mum and Dad, whose love and support knows no bounds

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List of Abbreviations

Cases

ADB : Asian Development Bank

ADMM : ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting

AEC : ASEAN Economic Community

AFTA : ASEAN Free Trade Area

AKFTA : ASEAN South Korea Trade Agreement

APEC : Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

ASEAN : Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BTA : Bilateral Trade Agreement

CEP : Comprehensive Economic Partnership

CG : Consultative Group

COC : Code of Conduct

COMECON : Council for Mutual Economic Assistance

CPTPP : Comprehensive Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

DOC : Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea

EEU : Eurasia Economic Union Eurasia

EFTA : European Free Trade Association

EPG : Eminent Persons Group

EU : European Union

FDI : Foreign Direct Investment

FTA : Free Trade Agreement

GDP : Gross Domestic Product

HLTF : High-Level Task Force

JICA : Japan International Cooperation Agency

ODA : Official Development Aid

PCI : Pacific Consultants International

RCEP : Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

RTA : Regional Trade Agreement

SOE : State Owned Enterprises

SOM : Senior Officials Meeting

TPP : Trans-Pacific Partnership

UK : United Kingdom

UN : United Nations

UNDP : United National Development Programme

UNSC : UN Security Council

US : The United States of America

VCP : Vietnamese Communist Party

WTO : World Trade Organisation

Chapter 1

Introduction

Vietnam is a country that has shed its traumatic past to embark on a path focused on economic development. The watershed moment of Doi Moi (renovation) saw Vietnam remove the ideological lens through which it conducted its foreign policy and place greater emphasis on cultivating friends and engagement with the international community. Since 1988 Vietnam has embarked on what it calls a multidirectional foreign policy. It has indeed become a friend and reliable partner of the international community. Consecutive years of high economic growth, an impressive reduction in poverty, and much-improved living standards has alleviated the legitimacy crisis the regime faced in the wake of its socially planned economy following the reunification of the country in 1975. On the international stage Vietnam has gone from an isolated country, largely dependent on Soviet aid, to a country that is bolstering its standing in bi and multilateral forums. It is with no surprise, therefore, that Vietnam has continued on its path towards promoting a multidirectional foreign policy to diversify its relationships and seek the most amount of economic benefit from participation in the global economy. In fact, multidirectionalism has become an integral part of the economic reform agenda.

At the Eleventh Party Congress in 2011, the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) outlined its foreign policy objectives. The VCP wanted to:

Implement a foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, peace, cooperation and development; diversify relations, and be productive about international integration; be a reliable friend, partner and a responsible member of the international community; work for the interest of the country and the nation and for a prosperous and strong socialist Viet Nam. The tasks of foreign relation work are to maintain a

peaceful environment and create favorable conditions for speeding up industrialization and modernization while defending independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity; to raise the country's status; to contribute actively to the struggle for peace, national, independence, democracy and social progress in the world.¹

Speaking in 2014, Hoang Binh Quan, Head of the Party Central Committee's External Relations Commission, stated the core components of Vietnamese Foreign Policy:

Implementing the foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, cooperation and development, multilateralization and diversification of relations, and active international integration, which was initiated by the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, party external affairs have over the last 30 years been boosted and expanded with the aim of consolidating a political foundation for state-to-state and people-to-people relations and creating a proactive position in international relations to conform to the rapid changing world; party external affairs together with state and people-to-people diplomacy has contributed significantly to Vietnam's diplomatic victory and the construction and defense of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.²

Therefore, we can see that Vietnamese foreign policy is focused on promoting development, integrating into the world economy, promoting cooperation in order to construct and defend the country. Additionally, this foreign policy seeks to protect Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

But what drives this continued emphasis on multidirectionalism and subsequently how is it implemented? In the thirty years since Vietnam implemented multidirectionalism numerous problems, both extrinsic and intrinsic, have arisen. China's rise has posed pressing

problems for Hanoi and the question as to whether its rise will be peaceful creates a pressing headache for Vietnamese leaders. China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea has done little to quell Hanoi's fears in addition to threatening Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, Vietnam is keen to adopt human rights as an accepted international norm; however, you have a contrast when observing domestic situation. Additionally, the VCP is eager to protect itself from "peaceful evolution"

Internally, Vietnam has seen its recent economic growth lead to an increasing amount of income inequality, widespread corruption, and environmental degradations. These issues, combined with a lack of political reform, have enhanced critics of the regime. To complicate matters, many dissidents feel aggrieved at the government for its muted response to Chinese assertiveness in addition to its alleged over-reliance on China for economic growth. This has led many to question whether the regime is facing a new legitimacy crisis.

This empirically grounded work seeks to trace the historical development of Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy. It examines its origins, its evolution, and how it has become an inaugural part of Doi Moi. Subsequently it addresses the issues and problems associated with this policy. It focuses on the mechanisms through which Vietnam has implemented this foreign policy since the 2011 Eleventh Party Congress. In doing so, it adopts a constructivist approach in which the VCP is the unit of analysis. Subsequently, it uses a holistic approach in which both structural and domestic level considerations are analyzed.

Multidirectionalism has been in place for almost thirty years, and whilst numerous studies examine its origins, they are mostly from a realist perspective. A realist perspective is useful in examining the decisions when looked at individually, but when looked at as a process, a realist interpretation ignores legitimacy, history, memory and learning - things this thesis argues are equally important. In order to assess this process, the thirty-years since Doi Moi's

implementation is chosen as the period of study. Thirty-years is an ample timeframe for examining the learning process that took place after Resolution 13 was issued. Ultimately the thesis will contribute to the discourse on Vietnamese foreign policy, asymmetrical relations, and foreign policy analysis, particularly for smaller, less analysed states.

Research question

Why does Vietnam continue to emphasise a multidirectional foreign policy and how does it implement it?

Hypothesis

Collective memory and learning have played a considerable role in the evolution and continued development of multidirectionalism, and it has such become a fundamental component of Doi Moi. As it has evolved, three key mechanisms have emerged in its implementation: strategic partnerships, trade agreements, and multilateralism.

Methodology

This thesis will be an empirical, qualitative analysis of Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy, focusing on how the collective memory of the Party has been reinforced by domestic and structural benefits. Many of the questions asked in this thesis are open-ended - making a qualitative method more desirable. Chapter three is based on archival research done at the Vietnam National Archives Center. Furthermore, two interviews were conducted: one with a leading Vietnamese foreign policy expert at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, and one with embassy personnel. A wide range of additional primary and secondary sources were also consulted. These include scholarly journals, news reports, official government statements, and surveys conducted by scholars, independent companies, or media organizations.

Timeframe

The period for analysis is predominantly the thirty years since Vietnam enacted Doi Moi, i.e. 1986-2016. However, explaining Vietnam's foreign policy evolution cannot be understood without looking at the post-reunification era, therefore Chapter Three also analyses the events that led to such a dramatic foreign policy shift. Furthermore, the majority of this thesis was written in the fall and winter of 2017. Therefore, events occurring after 2016 are also mentioned in Chapter Six and the Conclusion.

The thesis is structured to follow Vietnam quinquennial Party Congresses. A Party Congress is the highest organ of the party in which the Central Committee and Politburo are elected. Whilst key policy decisions often result in between congresses, documents emanating from the Party Congresses usually chart the course of the country for the next five years. Party Congresses have been held every five years since 1976. This, in Carl Thayer's words, was the "regularization of politics" within the VCP.³ By organizing the thesis this way, one can gain greater understanding of the evolutionary process of Vietnamese Foreign Policy.

Limitations

This thesis has had several limitations. The biggest limitation has certainly been time. With the first year of the PhD program dedicated to preparing for comprehensive exams and proposal defence, little time existed to carry-out extensive field research conducive to an empirically-based research project. Bureaucracy has also been a limitation given the fact that it is incredibly difficult to gain access to Vietnamese officials willing to do interviews. Furthermore, interviews were sought at the US embassy in Hanoi, yet the author was unable to obtain one due to the busy schedule of embassy officials. Lastly, language has been a barrier. I have attempted to employ a balance of Vietnamese sources but as deadlines approached, I have relied more heavily on English-based sources given the fact that Vietnamese is not my native tongue.

Note on Sources

Chapter three draws on sources obtained from the Vietnamese National Archive Center 3 in Hanoi. When citing these sources, I have used the file name and cited the page number according to the page number assigned by the archive center. This is often different from the page number printed on the page. For example, a “Report on a Parliamentary Visit to Japan” may be placed into a larger file entitled “Reports on Visits to Japan in 1992.” The specific parliamentary report may have the page number 3 printed on it, but the Archive Center will have assigned a page number corresponding to the location within the larger file. I have used this assigned number to assist those interested in accessing the source.

Worthy of note, however, is that the page number is often hand-written on. Due to time constraints as well, I received copies of many of the documents and upon returning home, the page number was unclear or blurred. In these instances I have listed the title page in Vietnamese to direct researchers should they wish to access the sources.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one is the introduction. It contains background information, research question and hypothesis along with a chapter outline.

Chapter two will be the literature review and conceptual framework. This thesis employs the constructivist concept of “collective memory and learning.” This plays a prominent role in explaining why and how Vietnam’s multidirectional foreign policy has emerged in recent years. Additionally, Vietnamese policymaking requires understanding the concept of the regime’s own interests – that is one in which it places its survival at the forefront. Doing so can explain why such an emphasis on stability – whether it be economic or political – has emerged. Whilst it is usually implicit, it is nevertheless a key national interest in addition to promoting economic growth and protecting Vietnam’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Chapter three will examine the origins and genesis of multidirectionalism. It argues that the period right after reunification resulted in a failed attempt to implement a multidirectional foreign policy. This led to it becoming over-reliant on the Soviet Union. It therefore had disastrous domestic effects on the economy and subsequently severely damaged the VCP's legitimacy. The subsequent learning process undergone after multidirectionalism was initiated in 1988 has alleviated this legitimacy crises, and as such, Vietnam's multidirectionalism has become a key instrument in the Doi Moi process. But the learning process often walked a careful balance between reform versus conservatism. This was natural, given the collapse of the Soviet Union and eastern bloc and China's reluctance to posture itself as heir to the socialist bloc.. Additionally, significant headway was made on three fronts; first restoring relations with China, normalising relations with the US, and the joining of ASEAN. By 1995, therefore, Vietnam had restored normalcy in its diplomatic relations and could pursue multilateralism with greater vigour.

However, domestic wrangling within the Party over the depth and scope of economic reforms led the brakes being put on reforms. Scared of losing control, the VCP installed Le Pha Khieu to act as a bridge between the two camps. Vietnam too, did not emerge from the 1997 Asian Financial crises unscathed. This reinforced the fear of "losing control" over reforms.

The threat of being undermined via a US human rights driven agenda similarly emerged after the two countries restored diplomatic ties. Therefore, the period from 1996 to 2001 saw the emergence of a cautiousness to multidirectionalism. However, by 2001 it was clear that Vietnam faced little choice than to fully embrace integration into the international political economy. After a decade of multidirectionalism, it was therefore elevated at the Ninth Party Congress and also saw the emergence of Vietnam's third vital component of multidirectionalism; economic integration.

Chapter four will examine the period from 2001 to 2006. It will argue that economic integration became a core component of multidirectionalism. Vietnam's outlook on the international world was changed to accommodate the integrated, globalised economy. Additionally, Vietnam's national interests became codified vis-à-vis Resolution 8 and its Defensive White Paper. This was all part of an economically driven approach to foreign relations.

At the same time, however, integration was not an easy process as it involved reforming from within. Diversification and multilateralism meant pursuing greater relations based on national interests, however, integration involved external standards being applied and completely renovating Vietnam's domestic policies. Areas of cooperation, and areas of struggle emerged. This was demonstrated during the intense, drawn-out process of negotiations for the World Trade Organization (WTO). These negotiations, along with its attempts to meet its ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) goals, would throw up many challenges and frustration as Vietnam needed to come up with concrete changes rather than simply being a friend and reliable partner of the international community. Nevertheless, trade-deals began to emerge as an important mechanism through which Vietnam stimulated economic growth.

Chapter five will explore the period 2006 – 2011. It traces Vietnam's attempts to be a more proactive state within multilateral institutions, most notably ASEAN. At the same time, a dual narrative began to emerge in terms of Vietnam-China relations. Relations had never been stronger, and indeed the 2008 Vietnam-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signified this, yet tensions within the South China Sea asked worrying questions regarding China's peaceful rise. Therefore, Vietnam, which had focused extensively on economic cooperation, began the process of broadening its concept of cooperation; delving into military/defensive spheres too.

Additionally worrying for the VCP, was its growing trade deficit with China. This would lead to greater initiatives for bi-lateral trade in the future, but it is during this period in which the deficit and the subsequent leverage China exercised of Vietnam began to become apparent. Lastly, domestic undercurrents began forming that began to threaten the legitimacy of the regime. This not only impacted the collective memory of the Party but also put Vietnam's development tools in jeopardy. Corruption and the Party's close relationship with China threatened the stability the VCP desired.

Chapter six is an examination of Vietnam's recent mechanisms put in place to promote its multidirectional foreign policy. It argues that Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy is implemented through three key mechanisms: strategic partnerships, trade-deals, and multilateralism. Since 2011, there has been a focus on deep, broad-based cooperation over a significant variety of areas. Through strategic partnerships, Vietnam has been able to deepen this cooperation yet at the same time pursue a highly economically driven agenda vis-à-vis trade deals. Since 2011 Vietnam has inked a plethora of strategic partnerships and trade-deals. Additionally, it has become more proactive within multilateral organizations, with a focus on promoting defensive security and promoting "political trust." Participation with United Nation (UN) peacekeeping forces, the ASEAN community, and greater participation in the Shangri La dialogue bears testament to this. These mechanisms provide Vietnam with the option of broad-based balancing instead of traditional bandwagon and balancing approaches, whilst promoting its autonomy and diversity. It also allows it to carefully manage the mature asymmetry it has in its relationship with China.

Chapter seven will be the conclusion. It will offer the findings found throughout the thesis and also contain a section on the ongoing developments within Vietnamese foreign policy. It will look at three key factors that deserve greater attention in regards to Vietnamese foreign policy studies: domestic issues, the diminishing importance of ASEAN, and managing

its relationship with China. The kidnapping of Trinh Xuan Thanh, a former oil executive who fled to Germany after being charged with embezzling assets from Vietnam's state-owned enterprise, demonstrated the lengths to which the regime will go to promote its anti-corruption image. The event severely strained German-Vietnam relations and therefore, with rising problems at home, we might see a shift from *realpolitik* thinking to more drastic action as the VCP seeks to preserve the status quo. Meanwhile ASEAN's increasing immobilisation will mean a diminished role of significance from the Vietnamese perspective. Lastly, managing the asymmetries with its relationship with China will be a continuing theme into the future. Yet Vietnam will resist pressures to pursue balancing and instead promote diversification and multilateralization instead. Additionally, it argues that economic development is the main driver of Vietnamese foreign policy and therefore it will tread carefully in its dealings in regards to the South China Sea

¹ *85 Years of the Communist Party of Viet Nam: A Selection of Documents from Eleven Party Congresses* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 2015), 1304.

² Phuc Van Vu, "Reform Policy of the Communist Party of Vietnam after Nearly 30 Years of Renewal," *Tap Chi Cong San*, December 12, 2014, accessed May 14, 2018, <http://english.tapchicongsan.org.vn/Home/Politics/2014/765/Reform-policy-of-the-Communist-Party-of-Vietnam-after-nearly-30-years.aspx>.

³ Carl Thayer, "Vietnam's Sixth Party Congress: An Overview," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 9, no. 1 (June 1987): 12.

Chapter 2

Memory, Learning, Interpolartiy: A Conceptual Framework for Multidirectionalism

Multidirectionalism has been a process; one that involved learning, reinforcement, and evolution. It started out as a means for Vietnam to work its way out of economic backwardness but has become much more focused, developed, and beneficial in recent years. Multidirectionalism has mutually reinforcing benefits. It promotes economic development, contributes to peace and stability in the region, protects Vietnam's autonomy, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. At the same time, the economic development it promotes in turn reinforces the Party's legitimacy. Of course, multidirectionalism is not solely responsible for this, but it no doubt is a policy that has contributed to Vietnam's extensive economic development. Additionally, the VCP can point to multidirectionalism as a way to strengthen Vietnam's international reputation whilst at the same time, boosting its autonomy, hedging against potential threats, and contributing the aggregate strength of the nation.

But what do we mean by multidirectionalism? How do we define this concept and what is conducive to its formation? Why has the VCP for 30 years resolutely followed such a policy? What role has memory and learning played in this process? Furthermore, what are the specific characteristic of Vietnamese multidirectionalism. This entirety of this thesis will examine the intertwinement of domestic and external affairs arguing that both are relevant in the explanation of Vietnamese foreign policy.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to first conduct a review of relevant literature and then develop a conceptual compass to guide this thesis. As such it will examine the concepts of memory and learning and how this affects the VCP's collective memory. This analysis is played out mainly through emphasising legitimacy vis-à-vis economic development and stability to foster that development. However this was not an instantaneous decision by the

Party, but rather a process in which economic legitimacy became the principle driving force of the Party's foreign policy and legitimacy. This process was played out at the domestic and structural level. It started with Doi Moi. But while the collapse of the bipolar world after the Cold War proved to be a source of confusion, the subsequent interconnectedness of the international political economy provided fertile ground for Vietnam to pursue a multidirectional foreign policy. Lastly, this chapter identifies the specific characteristics of Vietnamese multidirectionalism.

Literature Review

Literature pertaining to Vietnamese Foreign Policy is dominated by the writings of Carl Thayer and undoubtedly much of his analysis features throughout this thesis. Nevertheless, he and many scholars, such as Alexander Vuving, David W.P. Elliot, Edward Malesky, and Thomas Jandl, agree that Politburo Resolution 13 in May 1988 marked the beginning of a new era of Vietnamese foreign policy. Resolution 13 called for a "multidirectional foreign policy orientation" and marked a "major landmark" in foreign policy shift.¹

This foreign policy shift was a necessary component for Doi Moi due to the fact that Doi Moi was originally domestically orientated. However, Vietnamese leaders realised that without integration into the global economy, little to no economic reform could take place given the country's international isolation due to its intervention in Cambodia. This was all the more pressing given the vast reductions in Soviet Aid, Vietnam's main Cold War ally, during the 1980s. While subsequent resolutions would slightly modify Vietnamese foreign policy, it has remained multidirectional in nature since Resolution 13. The multidirectional foreign policy seeks to cooperate with countries, regardless of their ideological standing, through diversifying and multilateralizing its relationships to stabilize and strengthen the domestic economy and ensure a peaceful international environment. This then contributes to economic development and bolsters national defence.² The late 1980s and early 1990s marked the beginning of

Vietnam's positive experience with multidirectionalism and its impact should not be discredited as it set the tone for Vietnam's reintegration into the global political economy.

Integration has become a focal point of multidirectionalism since 2001, after the Party agreed to "take the plunge" and embrace globalisation.³ It was a gradual build-up and debates erupted within the Party on how to go about reforming. David W.P. Elliott points out that while both factions did not want to dismantle the socialist regime already in place, the reformists pushed for a shift to a "performance-based legitimacy" and a prioritization of economic development, whereas the conservative faction sought to preserve the status quo and place tight restrictions on economic reforms. The former won out in the name of *realpolitik* thinking despite almost a decade of "foot-dragging" by the conservative faction in response to "external shocks," such as the Tiananmen Square incident, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, and the Asian Financial Crisis. This demonstrates that initially, multidirectionalism was primarily centred on economic development as a means to ensure regime preservation. Although globalisation has opened Vietnam to "its challenging mix of perils and opportunities," it has nevertheless been successful in abating any crisis.⁴ Additionally, as time progressed, Vietnam has become more aware of the intricacies of the integrated international system along with the multipolar world order. Given these two aspects, from 2001 onwards, Vietnam has elevated multidirectionalism to be a fundamental component of the economic reform agenda.

From a structuralist perspective, scholars such as Carl Thayer, Pham Quang Minh, Quyet Nguyen, and Le Hong Hiep have noted the success in Vietnam's diversified approach to foreign relations. Thayer notes that Vietnam's approach gives it "equity" in its relationships so that no power can wield influence over Vietnam.⁵ Minh highlights the shift to a *realpolitik* approach to international relations.⁶ Meanwhile, Hiep notes that Vietnam's omnidirectional, hard and soft approach to hedging against China is giving it more autonomy in dealing with

the burgeoning threats from China.⁷ Meanwhile Nguyen has noted that from a security standpoint, increased diversification of foreign relations fits into Vietnam's "three nos" approach to defence. That is: "no military alignment or alliance with any power, no military bases on Vietnamese soil, and no reliance upon another country to counter a third party."⁸ All of these scholars agree that seeking strong bilateral and multilateral approaches avoid a situation in which Vietnam is forced to forge a close relationship with any one particular power that might bring this policy into question. At the same time, Vietnam is able to enmesh and hedge against potential threats from China.

Still, these efforts often utilize a realist outlook into interpreting Vietnamese foreign policy orientations in the post-Cold War period. A constructivist approach, however, is lacking. Nguyen Vu Trong, in reexamining Vietnam's decision to join ASEAN, highlights the dearth of constructivist interpretations in approaching Vietnam's foreign policy. He notes that:

Joining ASEAN at first glance would be seen as the rational response to the changes in the post-Cold War period. Yet deeper analyses would suggest that it was a result of a process of asserting a new state identity that subsequently materialised in the decision to join ASEAN.⁹

Trong's analysis goes on to claim that ASEAN would fill the void of Vietnam's identity crisis in the post-Cold War period. Certainly, both interpretations hold true but this thesis seeks to broaden the narrative and incorporate notions of legitimacy, memory, and learning. Nearly thirty years have passed since Vietnamese foreign policy transition and therefore ample time for us to trace this process. Furthermore, Trong's also highlighted the "internal dimensions" of Resolution 13. This is where this thesis seeks to plug a hole in the literature via incorporating these internal dimensions and the concepts of learning and memory into the narrative. In doing

so, the principal driver in this narrative is economic development to foster two things – enhanced legitimacy and stability.

Elliot's description above notes the link between legitimacy and Vietnam's national interests. Meanwhile, Casy Lucius identifies "protected values" as the main priorities of the VCP. They are: building and strengthening the Party, protecting the homeland, and promoting and ensuring economic and social stability.¹⁰ Lucius also argues that the Vietnamese political process is shaped by a continued obsession with social and political stability with the VCP regime perseverance as the main priority, sometimes even trumping *realpolitik* thinking.¹¹ This again, demonstrates the limitations of a dominantly realist interpretation. This thesis continually keeps this in mind, by arguing that multidirectionalism is part of ensuring stability – both at the domestic and international level.

Memory and Learning

The academic debate rages about what drives foreign policy and whether there is a need to shift from purely rationalist and materialist assumptions about state behaviour. Moreover, do norms, memory, and learning matter in foreign policy formation? Do states, like people, undergo a learning process that affects their overall actions? Certainly, there has been a rise in scholarship pertaining to learning and the role that memory plays in foreign policy formation.¹² This thesis adopts a constructivist lens in examining Vietnamese Foreign Policy. This is not to say that a realist perspective is irrelevant. Certainly, when looking at the decision to implement a foreign policy shift in 1988, a materialistic, strategic orientated argument can be drawn. However, a constructivist argument provides a complimentary analysis to the discourse of Vietnamese foreign policy making.

Alexander Wendt, the leading scholar on constructivism, argues that a state has four types of interests. That is: physical survival, autonomy, economic wellbeing, and collective self-

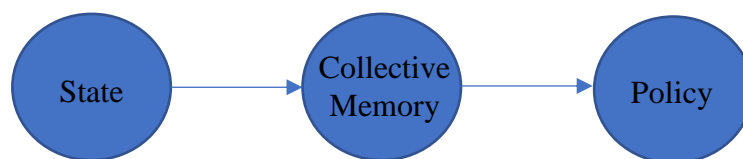
esteem.¹³ He goes on to speak of a social process in which interlocking actions seek to satisfy identities and interests by adjusting behavior to changing incentives in the environment.¹⁴ John Hobson has argued that “agents are derived from identity-construction, which is constituted in the course of social interaction.”¹⁵ Certainly, this thesis prescribes to the notion that identities are fluid in nature and defined according to not only to systemic factors, but internal ones as well.¹⁶ What is meant here is that the VCP is subjected to two faces of constructions – domestic ones and external ones. But whilst identities are fluid, crucial here is what influences the continued re-affirmation and evolution of multidirectionalism?

When scholars talk about identity in regards to foreign policy, they are referring to how cultural, historical memory, sociological, and geographical aspects shape and project themselves into a foreign policy. Brantly Womack has argued how the memory of history weighs heavily on the Vietnamese conscious pertaining to China. A thousand years of occupation means that managing their asymmetrical relations with China has been at the focal point of Vietnamese consciousness. Meanwhile, William Turley has stated that the VCP’s concept of “socialist democracy in the Vietnamese context,” ushered in during Doi Moi, stems from the VCP’s ingrained sense of mass mobilization under the tutelage of the party.¹⁷ Therefore, historical memories are relevant in the context of explaining the state behaviour of Vietnam.

Vietnam is not unique in having historical aspects shape its foreign relations. N. Ganasen talks of “historical overhangs” in international relations within East and Southeast Asia. He claims it is “a negative perception that derives from historical interactions and subsequently becomes embedded in the psyche of a state, both at the level of the elites and the citizen.”¹⁸ Maung Aung Myoe elaborates on this concept when discussing Myanmar’s international relations. He argues that British colonial rule has shaped a strongly anti-imperialist or neo-

colonialist narrative. Furthermore, he argues that historical overhangs exist within Myanmar-Thai relations, mostly stemming from the Thai-side.¹⁹

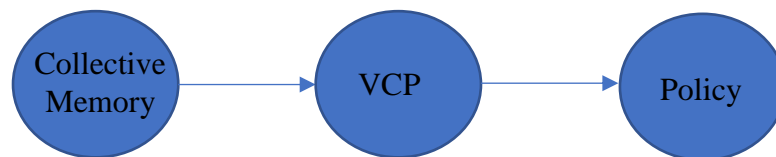
Constructivist scholars argue that the past can shape current policy through the “prism of collective memory.”²⁰ This memory, it has been argued, is a major influence on the policy and values of actors.²¹ Duncan Bell describes collective memory, in a general sense, as the “widely shared perceptions of the past,” which shape “the story that groups of people tell about themselves, linking past, present and future in a simplified narrative.”²² Meanwhile, Nuzov describes the politics of memory as a “state-sponsored approach to shaping the collective memory of past traumatic events to justify current politics.”²³ In other words, states will shape the historical narrative to pursue various policies. Nuzov’s analysis is referring to Ukraine and its memorization of certain historical events pertaining to the Soviet Union and its attempts to mold public consciousness and legitimize its more centralist orientation. Vietnam is no stranger to this. The VCP has continually promoted a version of the past that installs it as the legitimate leader of the Vietnamese nation vis-à-vis its revolutionary credentials.²⁴ The VCP evokes historical memories of defending the nation from the foreign aggressors (the French, then the Americans, and the Chinese, etc.) to legitimize its grip on power and influence policies.



Vietnam is certainly party to the above formula in the sense that the VCP has largely shaped the nationalist narrative. As a one-party, semi-authoritarian state, Vietnamese foreign policy, historically speaking, has never been subjected to domestic constraints. The VCP is not forced to compete with alternative sources in shaping its state-sponsored historical memories.

Eric Langenbacher has described the limits on memory studies concerning non-democratic regimes. He argues that non democratic regimes foster collective memories based on the threat of outsiders harming the nation. He cites imperial Japan, the Soviet Union, Castro’s Cuba, and communist China as examples. These memories are so one sided, he claims, that they are not memories but myths.²⁵

But this is where this thesis adopts a different approach. It does not seek to address how the state influences the collective memory of the nation but how internal and external factors influence the collective memory of the Party and therefore reinforces the policy of multidirectionalism. To quote Langenbacher again, he states that “collective memory helps to constitute a political culture, and thus it is an ideational factor that influences the thinking of individuals.” In this case the agent is the VCP.



Studies on memory often conjure up the notion of trauma. That is, a traumatic past lends itself to justification of present identities, policies, and actions.²⁶ Many other states have been influenced by collective memory, subsequently influencing their present behaviour. For Germany, the “Nazi memory” has led to a foreign policy that regards adventurism, power projections, unilateral action, or opposing democracy as anathema.²⁷ Brazil has seen its foreign policy shaped by its internal ambitions to link together such a vast, diverse geographical entity. It thus, avoids engaging in expansionist behaviour. Similarly, its relatively peaceful engagement with its neighbours has seen a moderate international diplomacy that seeks to reduce conflicts and difficulties whilst emphasizing cooperation with its South American neighbours.²⁸

Meanwhile, China's foreign policy places a large degree of emphasis on sovereignty, with little flexibility, stemming from its "century of humiliation" that is always firmly imprinted on the collective memory of its citizens and political leaders alike. It is necessary to take the China comparison further, given the similarities in governmental structures between Vietnam and China. Ning Lao has noted that China's struggle for national rejuvenation is rooted in the collective memory, becoming institutionalized and fostered into a collective identity.²⁹ She goes on to point out that there is a "second order" in which foreign diplomacy is conducted that is largely shaped by the regimes commitment to following social norms based around Chinese nationhood.³⁰ What this means, in terms of this analysis, is that Vietnamese foreign policy analysis needs to incorporate both structural and domestic level analysis since the VCP faces dual areas of identity construction – the domestic level and international one.

Therefore, we need to assess what influences the collective memory of the VCP, and subsequently what has become a part of that memory. In order to do this, the dichotomy of legitimacy and learning need to be discussed. A key difference between Vietnam and many other countries is that the survival of the state is intrinsically linked with the survival of the Party. The political process of Vietnam continually walks the - at times - contradicting tightrope of economic reform vs. political control. Some argue that the Vietnamese political process is shaped by a continued obsession with social and political stability with the VCP regime perseverance as the main priority, sometimes even trumping *realpolitik* thinking.³¹ Other scholars agree, "The central party values its long-term survival above all else."³² This therefore demonstrates the shortfalls of a realist approach. It can certainly explain the initial development of a multidirectional foreign policy but the constructivist argument helps formulate why Vietnam has continued to adhere to such a policy and why it has become a cornerstone. It is linked to ensuring the survival of the Party.

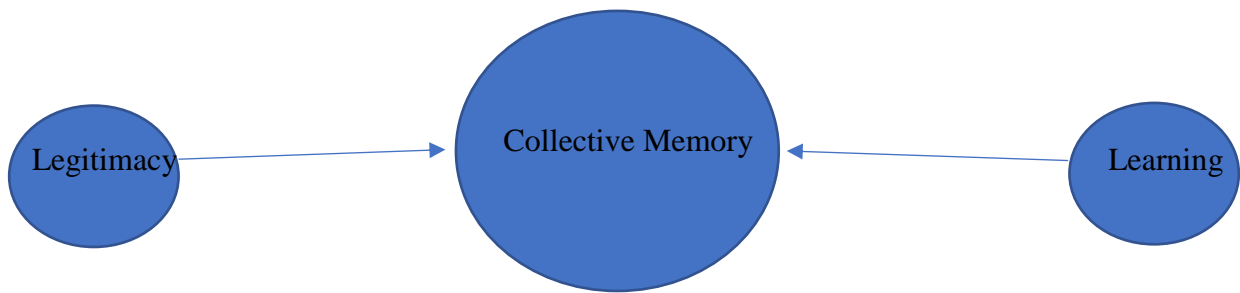
Events at both the structural and unit level can have adverse effects on a state's foreign policy. Even within constructivism there exist three approaches to foreign policy: a structural analysis, a unit-level, and a holistic approach. In the case of Vietnam, explaining the formation of "multidirectionalism" requires incorporating both a systemic and unit level analysis because both are mutually re-enforcing. Its positive benefits gained at the unit level reinforce the performance-based legitimacy of the VCP in place since Doi Moi. The structural benefits of further integration and maintaining a diverse array of partners allows for Vietnam to operate with a high degree of autonomy and hedge against threats. This positive reinforcement strengthens, and has led to the development of, a strong foreign policy centered on multidirectionalism.

But what do we mean by learning? There is little consensus on when or how states learn. Nevertheless, scholars have come up with various theories for learning. Joseph Nye and William Jarosz define learning as the "acquisition of new knowledge or information that leads to change in behaviour" This would indicate that learning occurs prior to a change in behaviour. However, Vietnam's case is the opposite. A domestic crisis, coupled with systemic pressures led to a behavioural change, but the subsequent internal and external benefits it has produced has reinforced this behaviour. Ultimately, a learning process took place in the years after Politburo Resolution 13. This is more in line with Jack Levy's approach to learning, in that studying learning during the post-change period is more conducive to learning what gets translated into policy and how it evolves. He argues, "Conceptualizing learning involves a two-stage process in which the observation and interpretation of experiences lead to a change in individual beliefs and belief-change influences subsequent, behaviour." Alexander Wendt similarly states that learning has a construction effect on identities and interests.³³

This thesis will trace the learning process undergone by Vietnam. Immediately after reunification, the VCP elevated its revolutionary credentials as the prime driving force of its

legitimacy. It led the nation to historic victories against the French and American and successfully re-unified the country after years of struggle. Yet this became undermined due the failure of the socially-planned economy. This in essence became a traumatic event in itself. The regime is painfully aware of these mistakes that led to it facing a legitimacy crisis merely ten-years after reunification. Doi Moi saved the VCP from “historical irrelevance.”³⁴ But Doi Moi was not possible without a fundamental change at the international level.

Whilst, the emergence of a multidirectional foreign policy has its origins in the structural changes in the international environment at the end of the Cold War along with the economic crises that led to a shift to a performance-based legitimacy, it does not explain the development and continued re-affirmation to such a policy. The subsequent learning process undergone since it initiated a multidirectional foreign policy, along with the internal and external benefits it has brought, has re-enforced the strength of this foreign policy. In other words, VCP’s collective memory has been shaped by the legitimacy benefits of multidirectionalism along with the learning process involved at the international level. Multidirectionalism has contributed to positive memories such as averting the legitimacy crisis and becoming an economic success story, reversing diplomatic isolation, and boosting its international profile (henceforth referred to the collective memory in singular form). As such, this policy has become a cornerstone of Vietnamese foreign policy, is seen as an intrinsic aspect of the reform process, and become a core-component of Vietnam’s diplomatic profile.. Indeed, this thesis seeks to trace how the learning process led to these memories taking shape. But before that, a greater theoretical discussion on what a multidirectional foreign policy entails and the structural nature conducive to its formation is needed.



Multidirectionalism

Vietnam is hailed as one of the emerging regional players in Southeast Asia. But it stands apart because of its unique historical, economic and political ties with the world's dominant powers, namely China, Russia and the United States as well as a key European player, France. These ties, both recent and further back in time, play into the country's adoption of a multidirectional diplomacy. The study of how Vietnam's foreign policy has evolved in the post Doi Moi era provides valuable insights and lessons for other countries, especially those navigating between fewer or less dominant global players.

Multidirectionalism bears several lexical titles. Omni-directionalism, multi-vectorism, and diversified foreign policies are notable interchangeable terms. As is the case with Vietnam, small and medium states are the prime adopters of multidirectional foreign policies. Small states frequently use multidirectional foreign policies when dealing with asymmetrical relations. Brantly Womack states that an asymmetrical relationship is one in which a disparity of capabilities exists between two states, leaving the weaker side more exposed to the stronger.³⁵ Yet the stronger side is unable to dictate its terms to the smaller state since the smaller side dedicates plenty of resources to resisting the larger state, more resources than the larger state is realistically able to dedicate itself. Small and medium-sized states implement multidirectional foreign policies to alleviate some of the threats and potential challenges an asymmetrical relationship may pose. Traditional forms of balancing and bandwagoning are options, but doing so reduces their autonomy. Therefore, they emphasise diversity and

integration within their relationships to maximise gains and reduce threats. States with historical asymmetrical relationships are thus more prone to have multidirectional foreign policies since doing so allows them to preserve their autonomy vis-à-vis their larger neighbour.

Another key aspect of multidirectionality is the evolving nature of a multipolar system that differs sharply from the bipolar system of the Cold War and unipolar system that followed shortly thereafter. The use of force or unilateral action has become increasingly “self-limiting”.³⁶ Furthermore, economic growth, energy security, and environmental sustainability has led to an “interest-based, problem-driven, and process-oriented” interconnected system that creates a greater need for cooperation.³⁷ For larger states, this means that they find their behaviour increasingly constrained, yet a global demand placed on them for greater leadership in dealing with global, integrated problems. Meanwhile, for smaller states who were traditionally constrained to the sidelines of great-power politics, a multipolar world has allowed them greater freedoms and platforms to pursue foreign policies that bring them the most amount of political, security, and economic benefits possible.

On the other hand, however, a multipolar world also means that prevailing uncertainty is prominent.³⁸ The rise of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, as well as across Asia, creates a potential future source of conflict. Financial crises such as the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the 2008 financial crisis, as well as the 2015 Chinese Stock Market turbulence, illustrate the grave economic uncertainties that pose a threat to the economic well-being of smaller states. These states are less capable of riding out the storm created by such financial restrictions. There is also a domestic component to this uncertainty with the rise of value/norm-based foreign policies. In particular, the US and the European Union (EU) have a high ability to define norms in the international context. Given their economic might, they have considerable leverage in exerting these norms, which can pose a threat to the sovereignty of smaller states that are less resistant to such pressures.

Multidirectionalism can also be a useful policy in pursuing a hedging strategy, a strategy that is all the more useful in the multipolar world. Hedging is a form of alignment behaviour but different from traditional forms of alignment such as balancing or bandwagoning. It allows a state to exhibit both forms of “power acceptance” and “power rejection.”³⁹ In other words, it is a strategy that strikes the middle ground without committing to a larger power. It maximises rewards but mitigates risks and uncertainties.

Given the high-stakes and high-uncertainty in a multipolar world, states involved in asymmetrical relations must attempt to acquire as many benefits as possible yet secure alternatives for worst-case scenarios. Often these policies are contradictory yet necessary in order to present a stance of neutrality to preserve gains and minimise losses. As will be demonstrated below Vietnam has skillfully implemented a series of mechanisms that allow it to hedge against potential military, economic, and political threats. However, it has been skillful at ensuring these preventative measures do not inhibit it from gaining from the interconnected, multipolar world. At times, these mechanisms appear contradictory and wide-ranging but that is precisely what a hedging strategy is designed to do: maximise benefits and reduce potential risks. Ultimately a multidirectional foreign policy allows for the successful implementation of a hedging strategy.

Post-Soviet states, such as Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan, have all been proponents of “multi-vector” foreign policies. These are policies that seek neither to “balance nor bandwagon.”⁴⁰ Rather it is a tactical manoeuvre that seeks to maximise wealth whilst maintaining a degree of autonomy and thus enhance the bargaining power of itself. Given post-Soviet states’ preferences to avoid becoming over-reliant on Russia, but at the same time maintain cordial relations, they often seek out further partners in order to give themselves both greater flexibility in dealings vis-à-vis Russia, and attract the economic benefits of major players such as the US, China, and Japan. These multi-vector foreign policies are geared

towards ensuring autonomy and a stable environment that encourages economic development. Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev demonstrates the use of such a policy by claiming that a multi-vector foreign policy develops “predictable and friendly relationships with all countries,” creating economic benefits in the process while at the same time minimising security threats.⁴¹ Similarly, multi-vector foreign policies are designed to avoid being engaged in a tug of war between two powers.

Thailand is another country that has historically been associated with an omnidirectional foreign policy. In 1985 then foreign minister Siddhi Savetsil outlined Thailand’s new omnidirectional approach to foreign relations after a decade of preoccupation with the Indochina conflict. Cheow describes this foreign policy as a desire to play a more active role on the global stage in order to strengthen Thailand’s national and economic security. Thailand sought to strengthen its relations with larger powers, prioritise ASEAN, and link foreign policy to economic diplomacy.⁴² This foreign policy offered flexibility that accommodated large powers, yet maintained a high degree of autonomy in the process, and was one geared towards economic growth. As such, Thailand enjoyed good relations with its neighbours and super-powers alike, and reaped considerable economic benefits, at least until the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.⁴³

Although Japan’s present-day foreign policy is more prominent and proportionate to its economic size, historically Japan engaged in what it labelled an “omnidirectional foreign policy.” Scholars describe Japan’s omnidirectional foreign policy during the Fukuda Doctrine as a “simplistic policy, which allows economics to be separated from politics, when it is to Japan's advantage, by maintaining friendly relations with all.”⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Vietnam’s current multidirectional foreign policy has been described as the process of forming as many equidistant partners to ensure freedom and protect itself from overdependence on one particular

power.⁴⁵ Matthias Maass goes on to discuss Vietnam's "multi-dimensional foreign policy" as seeking to link up with all the great powers and major international organisations.⁴⁶

Weaving together the above descriptions, we can characterize multidirectionalism as a foreign policy in which a state, usually a small or medium power, attempts to play a more active role, which encourages diversity and pragmatism in its relationships to reap the most amount of economic, political, and security benefits as possible and at the same time enhance its bargaining position, notably vis-à-vis asymmetrical relations. It is a strategy that maximises gains but also guards against the potential pitfalls of uncertainty and future conflict in an increasingly complex, interdependent, and multipolar world order.

Based on the definition of multidirectionalism, there are considerable benefits in pursuing a multidirectional foreign policy for Vietnam. Economic development is paramount for the state as it seeks to meet its 2020 development targets outlined shortly after the Twelfth Party Congress, some of which include economic growth rates of 6.5-7 percent, a growth domestic product (GDP) per capita of \$3,200 - \$3,500, and having 80 percent of citizens covered by health insurance.⁴⁷ Economic ties are now a focal point of international relations.

In pursuing a multidirectional foreign policy Vietnam can draw on additional sources of economic growth and avoid becoming over-reliant on a single power for growth. Paramount to promoting sustainable economic development, however, is securing peace and stability, and ensuring the protection of Vietnam's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Given recent events, particularly China's more assertive posture in the South China Sea, Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity have come under threat. By pursuing a diversified foreign policy Vietnam can draw on the support of various actors, both large and medium-sized powers, in its dispute with China to gain greater leeway. Due to the massive disparity in size, in addition to the desire to rectify the problem peacefully, a diversified approach offers Vietnam

greater alternatives in quelling the conflict without jeopardising Vietnamese economic and political relations with its neighbour to the north. Additionally, Vietnam avoids a situation where it becomes sucked into taking sides between an increased US-China rivalry. It can pursue a “multipolar balancing strategy” as opposed to a narrower balancing strategy.⁴⁸

From a security standpoint, increased diversification to foreign relations fits into Vietnam’s “three nos” approach to defence. That is: “no military alignment or alliance with any power, no military bases on Vietnamese soil, and no reliance upon another country to counter a third party.”⁴⁹ Pursuing a diversified foreign policy via multilateral institutions, as well as strong bilateral partnerships avoids a situation in which Vietnam is forced to forge a close relationship with any one particular power that might bring this policy into question. Thus, a multidirectional foreign policy fits into Vietnam’s strategic objectives of creating a peaceful, stable environment to bolster its standing, bi and multilaterally, in addition to protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Multidirectionalism and Vietnam

There are three terms related to Vietnamese multidirectionalism: *Diversification*, *Multilateralism*, and *International Integration*. Whilst examining these terms in great detail is beyond the scope of this thesis, this section will briefly outline what these terms mean within the Vietnamese context. *Diversification* is the process by which Vietnam first establishes, then strengthens relations. Politburo Resolution 13 in 1988 initially called for “more friends, less enemies.” The Seventh Party Congress in 1991 made note that the overall task of Vietnam’s foreign policy is to promote friendship and cooperation in order to create favourable conditions for national defence. It also stated that part of the process involved developing friendly relations with all countries, and promoting normalisation with both China and the US.⁵⁰

The first phase from 1991 to 1995 saw Vietnam establish relations with 163 countries, restore relations between itself and the West, Japan, the US, and China. By 1995, and for the first time it had diplomatic relations with all five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The Eighth Party Congress documents therefore started to use the term “diversification.”⁵¹ Since then, Vietnam has sought to strengthen cooperation with its partners and add differentiating layers to existing relationships. After entering the twenty-first century, Vietnam has laid the foundation for cooperation by inking numerous strategic/comprehensive partnerships with international partners, big and small alike. They have sought to add substance to their partnerships and diversify the areas of cooperation. Traditionally this cooperation has been economically focused, but the diversification has seen defensive, social, cultural, with technological aspects gaining greater emphasis in recent years.

Ultimately, however, diversification is a relatively simplistic process given the fact it is built on the country’s own national interests and involves bargaining with one bilateral partner.⁵² It is worthy to note that Vietnam achieved normalisation with 163 countries in only a 5 year period. Yet developing these relationships is an ongoing process. As ties become deeper, better mechanisms to promote deepening relations are needed. Subsequently, managing those relations becomes additionally more complex as various institutions are required to manage it. Chapter Six of this thesis focuses on the mechanisms of deepening bilateral relationships vis-à-vis forming strategic/comprehensive partnerships.

Multilateralism is defined by Robert Keohane as the “practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions.”⁵³ Meanwhile John Ruggie defines it as “coordinating relations among three or more states in accordance with certain principles.”⁵⁴ In simplistic terms, and in regards to Vietnam, it is a process in which Vietnam seeks to firstly join multilateral institutions and international organisations alike. Then it seeks to actively participate in such organisations.

Vietnam's first foray into multilateralism in the Doi Moi era began with Vietnam's ascension to ASEAN in 1995. This, as Carl Thayer notes, "signaled a fundamental change in its foreign policy orientation" and represented the first time "Vietnam sought security with, rather than security against, Southeast Asia."⁵⁵

The Eighth Party Congress in 1996 marked the beginning of Vietnam's emphasis on this multilateralism. Documents from that Congress make note of its dynamic implementation of diversification and multilateralization, highlighting joining ASEAN as pivotal.⁵⁶ Going forward, the documents state that the country needed to initiate the process of joining the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the WTO. This also involved adopting international trade norms.⁵⁷ However, whilst the initial benefits of multilateralism are evident from a purely materialistic perspective, Vietnam is also forced to play by the rules of the game.

Whilst joining these organisation brings substantial economic benefits, it raises Vietnam's international profile, and gives the country greater strength in numbers when confronting threats, but it takes a substantial amount of time for Vietnam to adjust its own policies. Writing shortly after Vietnam joined ASEAN, Pham Cao Phong noted that Vietnam's understanding of ASEAN at the time it joined was poor. A lack of English speaking personnel, wide-economic gaps, and a lack of information regarding ASEAN cooperative programs meant that Vietnam had to step up its integration into the organisation. Phong went on to note that "the impact of a subsidised economy cannot be erased overnight and stated that its low GDP per capital prevented Vietnam from actively and positively participating in ASEAN economic co-operation programmes."⁵⁸

Pham Quang Minh has similarly noted the 'learning curve' experiences shortly after joining ASEAN along with its initially modest participation.⁵⁹ Therefore, multilateralism involved a substantial amount of learning. Gradually, and as this thesis seeks to show,

Vietnam's participation shifted to a more proactive stance and learning took place. As Vietnam began to bridge the gap its economy and other ASEAN nations, acquire greater knowledge of operations, and train personnel capable of navigating the environment, its activities within ASEAN shifted from modest participation to proactive participation. Similar patterns of learning also emerged in its joining of the WTO. But ASEAN was notable for being the first step into the multilateral arena.

Integration became prominent as Vietnam entered the twenty-first century and as it attempted to adjust to the terms and conditions of AFTA, and later on the WTO. Peter Robinson defines integration as “the institutional combination of separate national economies into larger economic blocs or communities.”⁶⁰ Based on this definition, the concept of multilateralism and integration are intertwined. Integration, however, is Vietnam adjusting to the rules of the game, adopting norms, and rules and regulations to suit that of multilateral organisations or multilateral trade agreements. Integration is closely linked with re-structuring Vietnam's economy to be more suited to the demands of the integrated, international economy. It is designed to create favourable conditions for the import-export markets, enhancing the efficiency of Vietnamese enterprises, and provide impetus for the reformations of socio-economic management, legal system, and the management of its own domestic resources.⁶¹

Integration is a process that leads to greater rewards. But at the same time, it also exposes Vietnam to greater risks. Additional complications arise because it involves a change from within yet often dictated by outside forces: forces it is unable to control.⁶² Integration also challenges the absolute sovereignty of the country and this explains why integration came later. It wasn't until the Ninth Party Congress in 2001 that Vietnam began to emphasize the concept of integration. The following chapter will analyse integration's evolution in greater detail, given the considerable debate that erupted within the government about the scope and scale of the reform process. Ultimately, the reform camp won out and in 2001 Vietnam momentarily

agreed to fully integrate into the international political economy in order to reap the economic benefits.

Yet integration is an ongoing process and has not been without its difficulties. Joining the WTO was an arduous process. Vo Tri Thanh and Nguyen Anh Duong wrote shortly after Vietnam's ascension to the WTO that integration had considerable positive impacts on the economy, such as exports, investment, growth, and employment as a result of access to foreign markets, technological transfer and greater business linkages. However, they also state that integration also exposes Vietnam to greater risks.⁶³ Additionally, writing in 2007, Carl Thayer made note that sovereignty came under challenge as part of its foreign policy geared towards reforms. "Paradoxically", he adds, is that integration "has strengthened the party-state in unexpected ways rather than undermining its vertical control." Therefore, integration is a more cautious process. It requires transformation from within, rather than simply pursuing singular interests and necessitates reaping the benefits whilst mitigating the risks.

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Chapter 3

Multidirectionalism's Origin and Evolution

For nearly 30 years, Vietnam has embarked on a multidirectional foreign policy. As time has gone by, this policy has grown in importance and become deeper and more diverse. Initially seen as a way out of international isolation and an attempt to foster economic growth, the policy has been reaffirmed at each subsequent Party Congress, growing in scope and nature. But why has Vietnam continued to pursue such a policy? Is it merely based on pragmatic calculation or does history paint a different narrative? One could argue that ever since the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was formed in 1945, it has engaged in a struggle for autonomy through diversity. Upon declaring independence on September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed a foreign policy that would seek to “add friends and reduce enemies.” Politburo Resolution 13 in 1988 similarly called for more friends and fewer enemies.¹

Throughout its turbulent war against the French, then the US, the Vietnamese Communist Party (previously known as the Vietnamese Workers Party) engaged in a diplomatic offensive to cultivate allies in its struggles and carefully sat on the fence during the Sino-Soviet Split. Even after the war ended in 1975, again, a foreign policy of pragmatism was promoted with Vietnam keen not to ally itself too closely with the Soviet Union or China, but to reopen relations with socialist and non-socialist states alike.

Upon reunification, Vietnam was optimistic about conducting independent diplomacy.² However, the war in Cambodia and China, along with failed attempts to acquire Western aid, led to Vietnam becoming over-reliant on the Soviet Union. Similarly, Vietnam faced the task of reunifying North and South – politically and economically – along with reinvigorating a war-torn economy. Disastrous economic policies and international isolation meant that by

1986, the VCP was faced with the prospect of “reform or die.” Doi Moi and a foreign policy, focused on more friends and fewer enemies ensued.

As Doi Moi initially struggled to invigorate the economy, given the country’s isolation, Vietnamese leaders began to recognize that the only way to do so was through becoming an active member of the international community – something that required withdrawing its troops from Cambodia and dropping the ideological lens of its foreign policy outlook. Resolution 13 outlined the new foreign policy-thinking and the Party fully endorsed a multidirectional foreign policy at the Seventh Party Congress in 1991. The years from 1991 to 1995 saw Vietnam completely diversify its relations. By 1995 it held diplomatic relations with all five permanent members of the UN Security Council, joined ASEAN, began laying a framework for joining APEC and the WTO, and successfully began a period of economic growth. Vietnam proclaimed it wanted to be a friend to all countries in the world.

The origins of Vietnam’s multidirectional foreign policy evolved from numerous shocks, both internal and external.³ Politburo Resolution 13 was based on rational and realist calculations. Scholars such as Carl Thayer and David Elliot have discussed this at large. However, there has been an absence of discussion about the role of learning and memory and how it influences the Party’s behavior as multidirectionality began to evolve.

Using the VCP as the principle actor, this overall thesis seeks to address the role of memory and learning by exploring the disastrous post-reunification period from a holistic perspective and the subsequent learning process in which the benefits of multidirectionality began to bear fruit. Memory here is enhanced legitimacy benefits brought about by multidirectionality and contrasts to the failed decade after re-unification. More specific to this chapter, however is the failed socially planned economy along with diplomatic isolation and overreliance on the Soviet Union. It argues that, initially, a combination of structural and

domestic mistakes exacerbated one another leading to pragmatism veering off course, threatening the VCP's survival. The over reliance on the Soviet Union, along with grave economic mismanagement, would prove to be catastrophic. It severely threatened the legitimacy of the VCP and left a historical legacy that is firmly imprinted on the collective memory of the Party and served as a traumatic experience. Subsequently, multidirectionalism has largely abated this crisis and led to Vietnam becoming a proactive member of the international community with impressive economic achievements to boot. This has reinforced the behaviour of the state and developed into a core component of Doi Moi.

This chapter will the historical evolution of Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy, from its origins in the post-1975 period, to its adoption in 1988, to the learning and socialization process taking place during the nineties, culminating in its elevation in 2001. Doing so will seek to draw links between memory, learning, and legitimacy with foreign policy orientation. Not ignoring or downgrading the role that a rational model plays in Vietnam, the constructivist argument in this paper is merely there to act as a supplementary viewpoint to the discourse on Vietnam's foreign policy. In doing so, it primarily looks at the situation through the eyes of the state.

Learning its Lesson

On April 30, 1975 the long, bitter struggle for reunification of South and North Vietnam came to end as the tanks rolled into Saigon. A wave of optimism swept the VCP, proclaiming a "historic victory for the great people of the South and indeed the whole country."⁴ Yet this was the beginning of a new challenge. Attention quickly turned to implementing a successful reunification process. Reunification presented the leadership with several daunting challenges. How to reunify a country, politically and economically, separated by thirty years of war and two vastly different political and economic systems. From the outset, Vietnam demonstrated its ambitious targets with the 1976-80 five-year plan, calling for \$7.5 billion in investment and

highly ambitious agricultural, food, and steel targets – much of which had to be revised down after economic realities sunk in.

From a foreign policy perspective, the VCP faced three pressing questions after reunification.⁵ First of all, how should it approach relations with the non-communist camp? Should it pursue a more independent foreign policy or should it firmly ally itself within the socialist camp. Would the VCP strike a balance between its ideological goals of continuing the revolution and pursuing its own national interests? After all, the country was in desperate need of economic aid, and despite Le Duan's proclamation affirming Vietnam's commitment to the international revolutionary cause, pragmatic calculations would deem that aid was more necessary. Secondly, how was Vietnam to handle the ongoing Sino-Soviet dispute within the socialist camp? Was it to avoid taking sides and continue its policy of fence sitting and encouraging fraternal friendship, or should it ally itself with either side?⁶ Given that both countries had provided a substantial amount of aid to Vietnam's war effort, the former was clearly the more desirable. Thirdly, how should Vietnam approach its relations with its revolutionary partners: Laos and Cambodia?

Of course, Vietnam ultimately became heavily reliant on the Soviet Union, entered into a costly war with Cambodia – causing China to invade, and was diplomatically and economically isolated as a result.⁷ However, there is considerable academic debate as to how this happened. Some have argued that ideological considerations played a part, but others argue that structural issues forced Vietnam into its position. This paper tends to side with the latter argument, but what is crucially important for the current debate is that Vietnam failed to maintain its autonomy and became less independent, which had a trickle-down effect on economic performance; all of which threatened the regime's survival.

This was even though leaders were awash with optimism for an independent foreign policy that cultivated friends with socialist and non-socialist countries alike. For the first time the country faced no external threat. China and the Soviet Union were natural backers for the regime, and to boot, Richard Nixon's secret promise of billions of dollars looked like a strong bargaining chip in any attempts to reconcile with the VCP's former adversary.

At the Fourth Workers' Party Congress, Nguyen Duy Trinh stated that Vietnam would expand its relationship with all countries, in a clear statement of pragmatism. Vietnam was in desperate need of aid and would take it from whatever source it came from.⁸ Evidence of weariness to become over-reliant on a superpower was also there. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong in 1978 proclaimed that: "Whenever in our four-thousand-year history Vietnam has been dependent on one large friend it has been a disaster for us."⁹ He similarly echoed Vietnam's attempts to be a friendly country to all countries when asked about the matter by a Japanese reporter: "We expand diplomatic relations with all countries in the world on the basis of respect for independence, sovereignty, equality and all parties benefit."¹⁰

Meanwhile Hoang Quoc Viet proclaimed that: "Sometimes dealings between big nations can be made at the expense of a small nation and crush it."¹¹ Similarly, the resolution of the 24 plenum of the Party Central Committee desired: "Favorable conditions (at the international level) for the rapid construction of the material and technical bases of socialism and for consolidation of national defense and security."¹² Writing in 1980, Lee Dutter and Raymond Kania outlined that one of the fundamental goals of Vietnamese foreign policy was: "Political independence from all non-Vietnamese influences," affirming that Vietnam's ultimate goal was independence and autonomy.¹³ Yet, this goal was never realized.

Le Duan paid visits to China and the Soviet Union in September and October of 1975 respectively. The South China Sea issue dampened the Beijing visit but in return Vietnam

received a “substantial interest free loan” along with a protocol on commodity exchange.¹⁴ Similarly, the delegation to the Soviet Union secured an economic aid agreement for 1976-1980 and a protocol on the coordination of state plans for 1976-80.¹⁵ Given the historical animosities between Hanoi and Beijing, it was clear that Vietnam was posturing itself towards the Soviet Union, yet Beijing was still a fundamentally important ally.

Still, this is not to say that Vietnam was completely in the pockets of its socialist brothers. Hanoi distanced itself from Beijing and Moscow considerably by becoming the first socialist country to join the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September of 1976. Similarly, at the USSR Communist Party’s Twenty-Fifth Congress, Le Duan emphasized diversity in foreign relations, irking its host. Vietnam similarly refused to join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) initially, waiting until ambitious economic targets of the five-year plan forced it to join in June 1978 with *Nhan Dan* stating that the move was of “economic necessity.”¹⁶

In a sign of how important aid was to the re-construction of Vietnam, Hanoi published a liberal code for foreign investment indicating it was open for business. It was even shown to US bankers beforehand. Furthermore, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, in a speech to the national assembly, formally extended an invitation to the US to normalize relations. Meanwhile, Bank of America and First National City bank were invited to Vietnam, indicating how desperately they craved US aid.¹⁷ Pham Van Dong similarly paid a visit to France and ASEAN countries in 1977 to attempt to secure a diversification of aid before becoming over-reliant on the Soviet Union.¹⁸

From a military perspective too, Vietnam indicated that it was no Soviet pawn since it resisted overtures from the Soviet Union to set up naval bases in the south of the country in

addition to setting up a treaty of friendship. Vietnam even declared that no foreign country would be permitted to establish a military base on its soil.¹⁹

Arguably two factors led to Vietnam's dependence on the Soviet Union – its souring of relations with China and its failure to normalize relations with the US. All of which was compounded by stark economic necessities. After reunification, relations with China began on a downward spiral. During Le Duan's visit in September 1975, schisms within the relationship were abounding. On the eve of the arrival, China sent radio broadcasts to Vietnam and China regarding developments on the Paracel and Spratly Islands. China, having seized the Paracel islands in early 1974, had awakened Vietnamese concerns over China's expansionist ambitions. Similarly, it weakened the pro-China faction within the VCP.²⁰ Additionally, Deng Xiaoping castigated Duan for Vietnam continually stirring up anti-Chinese sentiments, reminding Duan that China had not annexed a "centimeter of Vietnamese territory."²¹ In a sign of Vietnam's disapproval, they failed to issue a return banquet invitation to their hosts along with not issuing the standard joint-communiqué.²² To add insult to injury, all of these were offered during Duan's visit to Moscow the following month.

Yet China was still an essential partner for Vietnam. It had allegedly pledged \$1.5 billion in aid.²³ Future Prime Minister Do Muoi met with Hua Guofeng in December of 1976 requesting assistance in settling projects in Vietnam. Yet, Hua Guofeng indicated that domestic factors were pre-occupying China. Mao's death had thrown up a leadership transition, and prolonged droughts along with the Great Tangshan earthquake had hampered China's commitment to aid. This meeting reinforced the sense of "ungratefulness" China felt from Vietnam.²⁴ Adding to the already strained relations, Vietnam's expulsion of ethnic Chinese led to China terminating 51 aid projects and public criticism of Vietnam. Then, in December 1978, Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of Cambodia after years of border clashes. Ultimately, Vietnam's embracing attitude towards the Soviet Union, territorial disputes,

Vietnam's expulsion of ethnic Chinese and its invasion of Cambodia, led to the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War. All compounded by on-going economic crises in both countries.²⁵

Attempts to normalize relations with the US did not materialize. An overconfident Vietnamese negotiating team, determined to secure the \$4.75 billion promised by Richard Nixon in 1973, scuppered initial attempts at normalization. The Vietnamese negotiating team presented the infamous letter to the Woodcock Commission arriving in Vietnam in March of 1977.²⁶ Vietnam's precondition for aid proved to be a strategic miss-calculation, with relations with China souring and the economic realities pushing it closer to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile the larger, geopolitical landscape proved to be to the detriment of Vietnam. Zbigniew Brzezinski viewed Vietnam as a Soviet Proxy and did not want to offend Chinese interests. Brzezinski travelled to Beijing in May of 1978, where he learnt the depth of the Sino-Vietnamese split.²⁷ By the time Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach indicated in a meeting in September of 1978 that aid would no longer be a precondition for normalization, the possibility of a war with China was clearly on his mind.²⁸

In an interview with the New York Times in October 1978 he stated that: "We hope, of course, for peace. But if we were to assume an ostrich posture we would certainly end up with a war on our back. We have to prepare for the worst."²⁹ And preparing for the worst they were. Shortly after the interview Thach flew to Moscow where the Soviet Union and Vietnam signed the "treaty of friendship" on November 3, 1978. Although Vietnam was heavily reliant on the Soviet Union, it has been pointed out by scholars that Vietnam was certainly autonomous in its decision making to invade Cambodia, in addition to the economic policies set out in its failed Second Five Year plan. Adam Fforde and Vladimir Mazyrin point out that the leadership suffered from a "dizziness from victory" after winning the Vietnam War.³⁰ Yet the invasion of Cambodia set in chain a series of events that would lead to Vietnam becoming almost entirely economically reliant on the Soviet-Union.

Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia put the final nail in the coffin of Vietnam-US normalization. The American trade embargo stuck. Western and ASEAN countries similarly withdrew aid, with ASEAN imposing its own embargo. Vietnam's political isolation worsened its economic difficulties. Industrial output dropped 15% from 1978 to 1980, mismanagement, corruption, and shortages were rife.³¹ Food shortages led to widespread theft, and refugees increased. Even one Politburo Member commented that Vietnam would be "poor and hungry" until the end of the century.³² By 1981 the Soviet Union contributed to roughly 90% of Vietnam's food imports, 100% of its oil imports, and almost 90% of its cotton imports, indicating how economically vital they had become.³³

Le Duan addressed the Fifth National Congress by admitting the "failure of the leadership to realize the difficulties and complexities of the advance to socialism from a primarily small production economy."³⁴ However, military prioritization was still key, with a tense situation in Cambodia, and with troops stationed in the North in case of a repeat Chinese invasion. Roughly 50% of the Vietnamese budget was spent on the military. The military component was highlighted in Party documents stating: "The need to stand ready to cope with the possibility of a large-scale aggression by the enemy."³⁵ "It was clearly evident by the Fifth Party Congress that Vietnam was firmly sitting within the Soviet Camp. Le Tho Duc spoke out firmly against the Chinese, stating that: "The entire Party and people must regard the militant solidarity and all-round co-operation with the Soviet Union, Laos, Kampuchea and other fraternal socialist countries as a principle and a matter of strategic significance of our Party's and state's foreign policy."³⁶ He went on to stress that relations with socialist countries, the COMECON and the non-aligned movement, were priorities.³⁷

Nevertheless, the Fifth Party Congress also saw Vietnam come under criticisms from the Soviet side for Vietnam's misuse of aid.³⁸ As a result, the Soviet Union placed more advisors within the Vietnamese bureaucracy to monitor the use of its aid, dealing a further blow to the

concept of autonomy. Additionally, Vietnam had become wary of Chinese territorial ambitions. Vietnam caved into Soviet demands for access to Cam Ranh Bay. The Soviet Union began leasing the base rent-free in 1979. In July 1980, Vietnam and the Soviet Union signed an agreement for technological assistance, as well as fixing and repairing much of Cam Ranh's facilities.³⁹ Additionally, the number of Soviet Naval Warships using the facilities increased from twelve to twenty-four from 1982 to 1985.⁴⁰ Despite Vietnam being eager to assert that it was maintaining an independent position, it was clear it was not.

As a result of its political isolation stemming from its invasion of Cambodia, Vietnam's aid was almost entirely from the Soviet Union and socialist bloc. The table below shows how much aid dwindled from 1976 to 1985 from non-socialist countries.⁴¹

| | Total from DAC Countries | Sweden | France | Japan | Denmark | Finland | Total ODA |
|------|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|---------|---------|--------------|
| 1976 | 160.9 | 87.1 | 2.4 | 28.4 | 16.4 | 1.5 | 185.6 |
| 1977 | 200 | 113 | 25.3 | 12.5 | 12 | 1.4 | 247.6 |
| 1978 | 208.3 | 77 | 23.8 | 28.5 | 32.8 | 0.4 | 369.6 |
| 1979 | 229.5 | 63.6 | 44.9 | 38.7 | 15.8 | 4.3 | 336.5 |
| 1980 | 151.9 | 91.9 | 15.1 | 3.7 | 12.8 | 10.1 | 228.5 |
| 1981 | 125.2 | 71.2 | 13.4 | 0.9 | 0.5 | 11.4 | 242.4 |
| 1982 | 101.9 | 65.5 | 3.8 | 1.3 | 2.2 | 8.8 | 135.5 |
| 1983 | 70.9 | 49.8 | 4 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 7.8 | 105.9 |
| 1984 | 80.7 | 63 | 4 | 1.1 | 1.4 | 4.1 | 109.9 |
| 1985 | 54.2 | 37.5 | 2.8 | 0.6 | 1 | 5.8 | 114 |

The 1985 plan for foreign delegation visits stated that the socialist bloc would be the main source of visits.⁴² Indeed by this time, the realization of Vietnam's poor economic management began to hit home. Vo Van Kiet told Nhan Dan that year: "Our inadequacies in economic management in the last 10 years are the main obstacle to the economic construction of the country."⁴³

September of that year saw economic reforms introduced to alleviate the problems of the rigid, centrally planned economy. Even Nguyen Van Linh, who had been ousted at the Fifth Party Congress but later oversaw somewhat successful reforms in the South, was brought back into the fold in 1985. However, problems were abounding, with inflation rife, and little to no management expertise, accessible markets, and investment or outside assistance. To compound this problem, technological assistance coming from socialist countries was generally outdated and inferior, rendering Vietnam substantially uncompetitive in the East Asian market place.⁴⁴ Le Duc Tho similarly admitted to the mistakes of the Party. He stated: "We have made big mistakes in a number of policies on the economic front which have, therefore, influenced many respects of life, the economy, society and politics."⁴⁵ A United National Development Programme (UNDP) report also noted that conflicts had an adverse impact on economic performance.⁴⁶

It was clear just before the Sixth Party Congress in December 1986 that something had to change. Reflecting on this time period, Phan Doan Nam, Former Assistant Secretary to Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, stated that long lasting mistakes had placed Vietnam into a socio-economic crisis and diplomatic isolation.⁴⁷ The veering off course of a foreign policy designed to ensure autonomy, coupled with two costly wars, had devastating impacts on Vietnam's economy; thus, threatening the regime's survival. Whether or not one subscribes to the ideological or nationalistic argument as the causes of Vietnam's isolation, ten years of

failed socialist economic planning had eroded the VCP's claims to legitimacy, and a renovation was needed both at the domestic and international level.

Doi Moi – the Catalyst for Foreign Policy Re-orientation

The Sixth Party Congress is most notable for Doi Moi – a series of economic liberalization policies, including agricultural reform, the end of collectivization, price controls, subsidies, and opening up Vietnam to international trade, with an emphasis on export growth. These reforms were a “...reaction to an economic crisis that threatened the legitimacy of the regime.”⁴⁸ Yet the Sixth Party Congress is also notable for its less ideological rhetoric stance and the VCP's growing awareness that economic strength was linked to military strength, and that the welfare of the people was of paramount importance. Similarly, the concept of peace at the international level became a vital part of that equation. Party documents state that:

The tasks of the Party and State in the field of external affairs are to strive to combine the strength of the nation with that of the epoch, firmly maintain peace in Indochina, and contribute actively to the firm maintenance of peace in Southeast Asia and the world.⁴⁹

Yet at the same time, there was no indication that Doi Moi would apply to the political arena. In fact, there was an abundance of text dedicated to strengthening the Party. In these regards, 1986-1991 was a time of great learning for the Party. They had one foot in the reform door, but were still on a steep learning curve before “renovation” could truly begin.

Complicating these matters was the startling changes occurring amongst the socialist bloc. China had already embarked on its own set of reforms; the Soviet Union was undergoing its own reforms via Perestroika and Glasnost. Soon the Eastern-bloc would begin to crumble. Ultimately, this time is notable for three concepts emerging within the collective memory of the Party: comprehensive security, a linkage between economic reforms and international

cooperation and peace, and reforms as a means to strengthen Party leadership – all of which continue to be emphasized to this day.

The concept of “comprehensive security” is a term that includes all aspects of national strength: economic, political, cultural, as well as the military component. David Elliot argues that the Party was forced to adopt this concept as the world around them was becoming more complex.⁵⁰ The more ideological, military-driven concept of security was evaporating. Increasingly, failure to develop was seen as the major threat to the nation. Seeing fellow Asian states such as Thailand and Indonesia follow in the footsteps of South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong brought home the fact that Vietnam was being left behind in an area of high economic potential. In the lead up to the Sixth Party Congress, Truong Chinh asked whether or not the Party’s policies had helped develop the nation’s economy and whether or not national defence and security were subsequently strong.⁵¹

The Sixth Party Congress resolution called for “enhancing the strength of the entire system of proletarian dictatorship, closely combining the economy with national defense.”⁵² Reflecting twenty years later, the National Assembly’s report on 20 years of Doi Moi claimed that Doi Moi had helped the country come out of a social-economic crisis in which the collective strength of the country improved dramatically.⁵³ Furthermore, current secretary general Nguyen Phu Trong, writing almost thirty years later, spoke of the Sixth Party Congress as “concretizing” the general guideline of economic construction.⁵⁴

The concept of comprehensive security was a pivotal realization for the Party as it led to the linkage between economic security and securing peace at the international level. Essentially, all tools were necessary for ensuring the national defence of the country – economic, diplomatic, and political in addition to military. The collapse of the Eastern-bloc and the Soviet Union would bring this point home further. A linkage factor emerged in May

and June of 1986, when the politburo adopted Resolution 32. This resolution called for a solution to the Cambodian problem, but also linked the concept of “peace and development” as the highest priority.⁵⁵ At the same time, a more reform minded leadership emerged from the Sixth Party Congress. Le Duan, died in July 1986, replaced by Truong Chinh who was then replaced by the reformer, Nguyen Van Linh in December 1986. Similarly, other reform minded personnel joined the Politburo, such as Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. This appointment also indicated the prioritization of diplomatic affairs as a means to ensure development. This linkage factor, however, was strengthened by Doi Moi’s growing pains and failure to attract aid from foreign investors.

Inflation in 1986 was already at a whopping 774.4% - an eight-fold increase from the previous year.⁵⁶ Grain production fell significantly, leading to severe food shortages by 1988. Disagreement within the Politburo over the scope and depth of the reforms essentially led to a mini-economic crisis in itself. State enterprises lost huge amounts of money due to the shift to market prices. Overvalued exchange rates also caused difficulties for export companies.⁵⁷ Prime Minister Do Muoi painted a grim picture of the economic state of the economy in an address to the National Assembly in October, 1988, claiming that Vietnam had become one of the poorest nations and that economic renovation was hampered by poor organization and management.⁵⁸

However, writing in 1993, David Wurful pointed out that fortunately for the reform process, the reformers were firmly in control. Had they not been then the conservative faction could have used the economic disasters to further scale back reforms.⁵⁹ Ultimately, the reformers’ response was to take the brakes off the reform. In 1988, Vietnam devalued its currency by seven-fold in an attempt to secure loans from the IMF – a move one government economic advisor said was “...pure economic reality.”⁶⁰ Hanoi also invited an IMF team to give advice to the government – the first time it had been done. Furthermore, the government

enacted a new foreign investment law resulting in more than fifty projects with low capital, a move Vo Van Kiet stated: “Interpreted the trend for the expansion of International Relations.”⁶¹ Nguyen Van Linh had declared that the “state must get foreign loans” and it was clear that foreign aid and loans was becoming crucial to Vietnamese strategic thinking, and that further diplomatic efforts were needed to ensure aid could be secured.⁶²

In the diplomatic sphere, Doi Moi, at first, did not produce any major achievements. Some western newspapers at the time noted that: “Western nations and particular the United States, would not pay much attention to the reforms.”⁶³ Then secretary of state, George P. Schultz, called the political changes to take place after the Sixth Party Congress “discouraging” and again urged Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia. Similarly, ASEAN nations were intent to keep Vietnam isolated until it withdrew from Cambodia and reversed its economic policies.⁶⁴ ASEAN, in particular, viewed Vietnam’s isolation as self-inflicted, and that Vietnam was the root cause of ASEAN’s frustrations to build a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality.⁶⁵

Speaking to the author, a Vietnamese official described the situation as follows:

Vietnam was basically on its own. People were poor. It had opened up in 1986 but no one came because of the Cambodia crisis so after resolving that, Vietnam was desperate to lift itself out of poverty. They, in a sense, were forced to build trust and open up.⁶⁶

Carl Thayer also agrees that the leadership was becoming increasingly aware that Doi Moi could not be accomplished without settling the Cambodian issue.⁶⁷ In 1987, the VCP secretly adopted Resolution No. 2, which decided to withdraw troops from Cambodia. As such Vietnam issued its codified foreign policy re-orientation, Politburo Resolution 13, in May 1988 calling for a multidirectional foreign policy with an emphasis on maintaining peace and taking advantage of favourable world conditions.

The failure of Doi Moi to take off at first led to the Party undergoing a realization that domestic reforms could not occur without peace in Cambodia, along with a significant policy re-orientation committed to pursuing balance within its external relations. Do Muoi, speaking in 1988, spoke of the lessons learnt from the Sixth Party Congress. He claimed that “combining the strength of the nation with the new situation” of paramount importance, with a focus on trade, economic, and technological cooperation. He also stated that Vietnam had been reliant on the USSR and other socialist countries but that it was trying to develop relations with other countries on the basis of “equality and mutual benefits.”⁶⁸ The first priority for Vietnam was to navigate the international system and create a more balanced situation vis-a-vis normalizing relations with the US, Western partners, ASEAN, and even China.

As some of the domestic teething problems of Doi Moi were starting to subside, Vietnam announced in the spring of 1989 that it was withdrawing its troops from Cambodia. It was essentially the beginning of the end of the “Cambodian Problem” and was met with international praise. The US State Department welcomed Vietnam’s announcement stating that the withdrawal would be a “positive development.”⁶⁹ Additionally, a considerable number of voices emerged from the US that favoured ending Hanoi’s international isolation and “weaning it off its dependence on Moscow.”⁷⁰

Meanwhile headway was made with ASEAN relations. Nguyen Van Linh indicated that Vietnam was opening a “new page” in relations with ASEAN states by “building friendly and cooperative relations with all countries in the region for the sake of a peaceful, stable, and cooperative South-East Asia.”⁷¹ The Thai Prime Minister publically stated his support for Vietnam’s joining of ASEAN. Then in November 1990, President Suharto of Indonesia became the first ASEAN leader to pay an official visit to Vietnam. On the visit Suharto echoed Linh’s proclamation of a new page by claiming the visit marked a “new chapter in the history of south-east [sic] Asia.”⁷² Finally, in 1991 the Malaysian Prime Minister claimed that his country saw

no problem in Vietnam joining ASEAN.⁷³ Resolution, 32, 2, and 13 and the subsequent small diplomatic successes boded well for Vietnam, and further brought home the fact that ensuring a peaceful international environment to foster economic growth had now become equally, if not more important, than traditional sovereignty related security issues. Vietnam was, starting afresh, and pragmatism could again lead the way.

However, another crucial concept that also emerged during this time was the concept of strengthening the Party through economic reform. The VCP has always emphasised strengthening the Party's leadership role at every Party Congress. Party documents indicate that the Party must become more powerful politically, ideologically, and organisationally and renew its thinking economically.⁷⁴ As already described, it was clear that the economic crises in the post-unification era had severely damaged the legitimacy of the Party. In the wake of the economic crises, Truong Chinh stated that mistakes had created "widespread doubt about the future" and a "lack of confidence in the leadership of the Party."⁷⁵

Yet this did not mean renovating the political system. Rather, it emphasised broadening democracy, something that essentially meant the cultivation of greater debate regarding policy within the Party.⁷⁶ As part of this process, the National Assembly, previously a rubber stamp institution, held elections in 1987 in which some candidates were nominated instead of appointed. It gained a greater debating role. Nevertheless, broad-based political pluralism would not be tolerated and the Party would use lessons from its decade of economic hardship to strengthen its leadership role in getting the country out of the crisis.

In addition to economic stability, the Party also placed a great deal of emphasis on "political stability." Speaking in 1988, Nguyen Van Linh insisted that:

We will gradually stabilize the socio-economic and political situation and the people's livelihood, and then we will move from instability to basic stability

to create a favourable situation for our rapid and vigorous advance, extricating the country from its dire straits and developing it, and making our people happy.⁷⁷

In order to achieve economic and political stability, and to quell its legitimacy crisis, the Party adopted the concept of “performance legitimacy,” in which legitimacy is linked to economic performance and people’s livelihoods. This became coupled with the VCP’s other forms of legitimacy: charismatic leadership, Ho Chi Minh thought, and defending Vietnam from foreign domination.⁷⁸ Performance legitimacy is linked to the economy. As described thus far, the Party linked economic performance with an open attitude towards all countries, regardless of standing, focused on cultivating better relations in order to attract desperately needed foreign aid and diplomatic support. As the Party realized Doi Moi could not occur at the domestic level without a substantial foreign policy re-orientation, foreign policy became a core component of economic renovation. Therefore, Doi Moi and the linkage between domestic economic reforms, securing peace and cultivating friends at the international level, was the first step in intertwining elements of the Party’s legitimacy at international level. Scholar Pham Quang Minh notes the importance of what he calls an “open door policy” when he states:

The Communist Party of Viet Nam understood the country’s survival could not be ensured without the open-door policy and that the policy could have an impact on its position as the ruling party. With this in mind, Viet Nam foreign policy has always been implemented cautiously and deliberately.⁷⁹

Indeed, the same language applied to domestic reforms, were applied at the international level. The concept of favourable conditions became a focal point, both internationally and domestically, with the Party at the forefront of such struggles. Documents from the Sixth Party Congress state that:

The international activities of our Party and State must serve the struggle to defend the homeland, maintain political security, ... We should secure new favourable [sic] conditions in economic and scientifically technological cooperation, participate ever more widely in the division of labour and cooperation within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, and at the same time widen our relations with other countries.⁸⁰

Thus, Vietnam's foreign policy re-orientation, along with its renovation in economic thinking, became coupled. One could not occur without the other and thus political legitimacy intertwined at the international level. This period was, however, the first step. The subsequent learning process at the international level would further strengthen this concept. The period of 1986-1991 was a time of great learning for the VCP. Comprehensive security, the linkage of peace and cooperation at the international level, along with reforms were a means to strengthen the Party during a time of great changes at both the domestic and international level.

Overcoming Difficulties - On the Road to Diversification

The year 1991 was eventful for Vietnam for many different reasons. The Seventh Party Congress, taking place in June, fully endorsed Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy and sought to forge close relations with countries and international organizations alike.⁸¹ It called for diversification and multilateralism. On October 25, the Paris Peace Accords were signed, bringing an official end to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. This opened up the door for joining ASEAN, restoring relations with industrialized countries including China, and pushing ahead with economic liberalization. However, 1991 was also a year of great uncertainties and difficulties for the VCP as the communist camp collapsed. Although the leadership had been painfully aware that the old Soviet model socialism was no longer favourable to their national interest, certainly the collapse of the Soviet Union instilled a sense of anxiety within the

regime.⁸² The period 1991-2001 can be characterized as overcoming difficulties (vuot qua kho khan) via diversification (da dang hoa) and multilateralisation (da phuong hoa).

The first order of business for Vietnam was to restore relations with China. Since the border war in 1979, China had been viewed as the principle threat to Vietnam, with even the constitution having a preamble stating that: “China was a dangerous, direct enemy of the Vietnamese people.”⁸³ In March 1988, Vietnam and China clashed in the Spratly Islands with 64 killed on the Vietnamese side, and 54 killed on the Chinese side. Instead of increasing hostilities, this event marked the beginning of Vietnamese rapprochement. Three months later, Vietnam removed the anti-Chinese statement and Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach called for talks. Anti-Chinese propaganda also significantly waned.⁸⁴

Secret talks between the two countries took place in Chengdu in September 1990. At the talks were Communist Party Leader Nguyen Van Linh, Prime Minister Do Muoi, and former Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. The Chinese delegation consisted of Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Premier Li Peng. Although it was the highest-level delegation to visit China since the border war in 1979, the trip was widely viewed as a diplomatic failure.⁸⁵ Beijing flexed its muscles by indicating that no such normalization could take place until the Cambodian issue had been settled. The seemingly anti-Chinese foreign minister, Nguyen Co Thach would be forced out, and the Vietnamese hopes of a new Chinese led socialist bloc were ignored by China.⁸⁶

The asymmetries in Sino-Vietnam relations are a recurring theme. The dire economic situation in Vietnam and the crumbling socialist world meant that China was an essential partner if the Vietnamese Communist Party were to navigate the changing international landscape unscathed. Ties were normalized almost immediately after the Paris Peace Accords in November, 1991. Shortly thereafter, China’s Foreign Minister Qian Qichen visited Vietnam

where a memorandum of understanding and agreements concerning communication, transportation and economic cooperation were reached. Trade links then sprouted between the two countries with China offering 80 million yuan in preferential loans to boost Vietnam's textile industries.⁸⁷

Trade between the two countries grew gradually but, as always, the Vietnamese acted cautiously and acted within the ebb and flow of their asymmetrical relations. Cross-border trade naturally began to flourish, although Vietnam called for greater efforts to manage border trade with particular attention paid to smuggling. Yet investment and trade never reached the level of countries like France, Japan, or even South Korea.⁸⁸ Sovereignty issues came back to the forefront with China passing a new law on territorial waters that included the Spratly and Parcel Islands. China also signed an agreement with Crestone Energy Corporation to explore for oil in the disputed territories.⁸⁹

Party Secretary General Do Muoi paid a visit to China in November 1995. In a speech in Beijing, he emphasized that Vietnam had closed the past and was looking to the future. He indicated that globalization would create a new world order characterized by increasing cooperation, yet at the same time, increasing competition. Reflective of Vietnamese pragmatic thinking, he stated that creating an international environment, one based on peace, stability, and cooperation, would ensure development as the main driving force in Vietnamese foreign policy.⁹⁰ Yet, the lessons of the 'lost years' were not lost on Vietnam. Operating within the context of asymmetry, it chose not to balance against China, as it had done with the Soviet Union, but seek a broader base for economic development. Weary of Chinese behaviour, diversification became a means to achieve a more equitable partnership with China.

Economically, the situation had improved slightly since 1988 but substantial diplomatic efforts were needed to alleviate the crisis. It became increasingly clear that, aid and investment

were high up on the agenda and better relations and greater integration were needed to facilitate these goals. In other words, there was no way forward other than diversification. This was not possible unless Vietnam normalized relations with the US due to its economic embargo. However, the normalization process was relatively slow. Nevertheless, by 1995 Vietnam had achieved normalcy in its diplomatic relations, going from having relations with just 23 countries to 163 by 1995. Vietnam's opening up bore significant benefits and was subsequently widely praised. This justified multidirectionalism and, in the eyes of the Party. It became a means to secure significant economic, political, and even security benefits and positively influenced the collective memory of the Party.

Vietnam passed a new constitution in 1992, which acknowledged private property, and different economic components of the economy, ensuring reforms would not be reversed.⁹¹ This move was widely praised by Japanese investors, despite their concerns with poor infrastructure, poor banking, and an unforeseeable liberalization policy.⁹² In fact, 1992 was a monumental year for Japan-Vietnam relations. Chairman of the National Assembly Le Quang Dao and Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam both paid visits to Japan in April and October of that year respectively. During Dao's visit, Japan praised Vietnam for Doi Moi and its attempts to foster greater relations with other countries. Vietnamese documents also make note of Japanese linkage to Doi Moi and the solving of the Cambodia crisis, stating that the international community developed "different attitudes" towards Hanoi after the Sixth Party Congress and the Paris Peace Accords.⁹³ Despite there being many difficulties to overcome, the Japanese delegation reminded Dao that Japan was willing to cooperate with Vietnam.⁹⁴

Shortly after this trip, Japan resumed Official Development Aid (ODA) to Vietnam after a thirteen-year hiatus. Additionally, two-way trade between the two countries had tripled since 1989 and Japan had thirty-seven investment projects in Vietnam.⁹⁵ Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet paid a visit to Japan in March 1993, signing agreements to increase financial aid and economic

projects to Vietnam. Then, Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam stated that the visit marked: “The start of a new era in the relations of cooperation and friendship between the two states and peoples of Vietnam and Japan.”⁹⁶ Trade relations increased substantially from 1992 to 1994 as seen in the table below.⁹⁷

| | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 |
|--------------------|-------|-------|------|
| Non-refundable aid | 15.8 | 66.8 | 94 |
| Preferential Aid | 970 | 470 | 580 |
| Total | 385.8 | 536.8 | 674 |

South Korea and Vietnam established diplomatic relations in 1992. Nguyen Manh Cam visited in February 1993 and for the first time, a Vietnamese Prime Minister visited South Korea later that year. On this visit, Kiet secured a \$58 million aid package with \$8 million being non-refundable. He also secured a \$100 million loan through the Export-Import Bank of Korea. In addition, two-way trade between the two countries grew from 1992 to 1994. In 1992, it stood at \$493.5 million but by 1995 it was over \$1 billion.⁹⁸

In the spring of 1995, General Secretary Do Muoi paid a visit to both Japan and Vietnam. Do Muoi stoked similarities between Vietnam and South Korea in terms of their 20th century wars. He also noted that he hoped to emulate Korea’s development path and achieve an economic success story. Such sentiments represented Vietnam’s shift to a more development-orientated foreign policy, one that sought to raise it out of poverty as opposed to one rigidly based on ideology. Additionally, Muoi reasserted that Vietnam was committed to solving

issues diplomatically and respecting the independence of other nations, symbolizing that peace had become an inaugural part of Vietnamese foreign policy thinking.⁹⁹ Without peace, there could be no development, and without development, Vietnam would surely fall back into economic chaos.

In a speech to South Korean President Kim Young Sam in 1995, Do Muoi outlined how joining ASEAN will create a more “peaceful” and “stable” region. Similarly, he noted that by deepening engagement with the international community, Vietnam was preparing favourable conditions and he hoped that South Korea would provide its backing for Vietnam’s participation in international organizations such as APEC and WTO. He also added that aid was an important component of relations by noting that he hoped cooperation on the international stage would translate into economic aid and investment into Vietnam.¹⁰⁰

Vietnam made substantial progress in developing relations with other industrialized countries, including France, which began providing annual loans to Vietnam in 1990 and began helping it negotiate aid agreements with international financial institutions. French President Francois Mitterrand’s visit to Vietnam in 1993 saw 360 million francs of aid guaranteed along with a host of cooperation agreements. The President also denounced the continuation of the US embargo.¹⁰¹

After signing an agreement to repatriate boat people in Hong Kong camps in 1991, trade relations between the United Kingdom (UK) and Vietnam began to grow. On a 1992 visit Nguyen Manh Cam became the first foreign minister to make an official visit to Britain since diplomatic relations were established in 1973. Whilst there, Britain noted its appreciation of Vietnam’s policy of diversification and issued its intent to support Vietnam in its normalization with international organizations. Trade quadrupled between the years 1990 and 1994.¹⁰² Vietnam also made a milestone agreement with the EU: the EU-Vietnam Framework

Cooperation Agreement. This shifted the dynamics of their relationship, from one focused on humanitarian aspects, to one that cultivated economic assistance through aid, funding, and credit.

Normalization with industrialized countries acted as a lubricant for normalization with the US. Restoring relations with the US was key for two reasons. First, it would lead to the lifting of the embargo and therefore increase ODA. Furthermore, normalization would mean that Vietnam would become able to receive special drawing rights from the IMF, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank. (ADB) Frustratingly, the US outlined a series of steps for the Vietnamese to take before normalization could take place in spite of the Cambodian conflict coming to an end. This became known as the Bush Road Map. A US Official speaking in December 1991 noted that:

The first big element in moving forward toward normalization was the Cambodian settlement. That was signed; it's beginning to be implemented. As it's successfully implemented we will be able to move forward. We also have said to the Vietnamese that we want to see meaningful progress, conclusive progress on the missing-in-action question in Vietnam. And we've had some progress, but I wouldn't call it overwhelmingly conclusive progress at this point. So we think it's important to keep pressing for that as part of the normalization process.¹⁰³

Despite some saying that Washington was moving the goal posts, Vietnam's assessment of the situation was more optimistic than some scholars have suggested.¹⁰⁴ A letter from the State Planning Commission on prospects for economic cooperation in 1993 noted that, in spite of the embargo being lengthened an extra year, substantial progress has been made in opening relations with the US, thanks in part to Doi Moi and warmer relations with US allies. In December of 1992, US companies had been allowed to enter Vietnam to set up business

contracts in certain sectors, and the business lobbies inside and outside the US, along with ODA providing countries, would lobby hard for normalization. They saw the years 1993 and 1994 as a crucial period in which successful negotiations to end the embargo and restore ties would take place.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, they were right. The United States finally lifted its trade embargo with Vietnam in 1994, with relations normalized in July 1995. Do Muoi called normalization with the US a result of successful implementation of Doi Moi, again indicating how important of a catalyst Doi Moi was for Vietnam's foreign policy re-orientation. Nevertheless, Vietnam was still weary of Peaceful Evolution; the concept that the US would use western ideals such as multi-party democracy or human rights to undermine the Communist Party and bring about political change.¹⁰⁶ As such, Vietnam sought comfort within ASEAN.

In the early nineties, the mutual benefits of ASEAN started to become apparent. ASEAN provided an umbrella to shield Vietnam from its two identified primary threats - China and Peaceful Evolution. Additionally, economic factors also meant joining ASEAN were the natural course of action. In fact, some scholars have argued that this was the primary factor.¹⁰⁷ Vietnam ascended to the ASEAN treaty in 1992 in a sign that it accepted the ASEAN concept. It gained observer status in 1993 and joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994. Vietnam essentially adopted a two-handed approach to dealing with areas of tension. On the one hand there was the promise to vigorously protect its own territorial integrity, while on the other to build up strategic trust and diminish areas of tension vis-à-vis cooperating with ASEAN.¹⁰⁸

At the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, the Party drew up some lessons learnt since Doi Moi. First, they argued that they had maintained independence and socialism via Doi Moi, Secondly, they had successfully achieved a balance between political and economic

systems, thus abating the economic crisis and solving the social woes. They highlighted the importance of the economy and development and how these aspects enhance national power. They claimed that continued diversification and multilateralism were the best way to take advantage of the foreign world and that they had, and would continue, strengthening the Party.¹⁰⁹

This indicates how important this flurry of diplomatic activity had on the Party's thinking. In the space of less than ten years, they had learnt from the mistakes of the past to reinvigorate the economy and Vietnam's international standing. It was clear too that diversification had enhanced comprehensive security, contributed to peace at the international level, and strengthened the Party in the process.

The year 1995 represented the culmination of Vietnam's diversified approach to foreign relations. As one Vietnamese official put it, Vietnam finally escaped its diplomatic crisis and achieved normalcy in its diplomatic relations.¹¹⁰ It normalized relations with the US and became an ASEAN member. These steps marked Vietnam's complete turnaround from its isolationist period, drawing international praise and representing an event of huge political and economic importance. This approach laid the foundation for economic growth, and a push for greater multilateral engagement. But the learning process would continue.

On the Path to Integration

By 1995, Vietnam had established relations with 163 countries. Whilst the fear of losing political control over widespread reforms was still on the minds of certain factions within the Party, there was no doubt that further liberalisation and integration with the international political economy was the way forward.

Still, a Nhan Dan article in 1996 widely criticised Vietnamese foreign policy for lacking any clear, distinct identity. It criticised the use of the word assimilation (*hoa nhap*), rather than

integration (hoi nhap).¹¹¹ Using the word assimilation, it argued, would mean that Vietnam would be swallowed up into a capitalist world. Whereas integration would allow Vietnam to enter the global system, while maintaining its distinct political and social economic characteristics. Therefore, it was at that time the Party began putting forward a foreign policy centred around an “open economy, integration with the region and the world, and strong export orientation.”¹¹²

The period from 1996 to 2001 saw Vietnam continue to diversify and multilateralise its relations and move hesitantly towards integration before fully embracing and elevating a multidirectional foreign policy at the Ninth Party Congress in 2001. The Eighth Party Congress in 1996 made note of Vietnam’s vastly improved economic situation. Annual GDP growth rates from 1991 to 1995 were 8.2%, exports had increased by 20%, FDI projects reached over \$19 billion, and the inflation rate had decreased from 67.1% to 12.7%.¹¹³ They also made note of the four dangers originally mentioned in 1994: lagging behind economically, peaceful evolution, corruption, and deviating from socialism.¹¹⁴

Normalisation with international organisations such as the IMF and World Bank, and the ADB, had taken place in October 1993. This was according to Resolution of the 3rd plenum of the Seventh Congress in June 1992 that called for expanding relations with international organisations. However, this merely marked the start. A more comprehensive framework for integration was necessary.

The integration period officially started with Vietnam’s accession to ASEAN. The integration process however, is different from simple diversification. Diversification was based on Vietnam’s own self-interest of securing aid and restoring relations to normalcy, but integration meant having to change within; and sometimes these changes are out of your control. It was like joining a club, as one author put it. Joining obtains benefits, but with those

benefits also come obligations.¹¹⁵ This dichotomy would become a recurring theme as integration brought with it growing pains, and stressors on the domestic situation.

Diversification had merely been the first step, but a much easier one to accomplish. Yet Vietnam's positive experience would ease the pressure of implementing step-by-step integration. In fact, Vietnam's diversification process was largely vindicated by the substantial amount of praise it received, in addition to a massive increase in aid, funding and foreign direct investment (FDI). Take for example the projected assistance for the year 1996. Total assistance from industrialised countries stood at \$1.3 billion. This compared to just \$114 million ten years prior. There was also a further \$824.6 million coming from multilateral institutions such as the ADB, the European Union, the UNDP, and the World Bank.¹¹⁶

A parliamentary delegation visit by Russia praised Vietnam's achievements in recent years such as normalising relations with the U.S. and joining ASEAN, noting that these steps served as no hindrance to Russian-Vietnamese relations. The Vietnamese side noted that socio-economic achievements had abated the crises and created stable conditions that would contribute to the modernisation of the country. They also affirmed their commitment to peace, stability, development and cooperation in the international arena.¹¹⁷

Similarly, a British Parliamentary delegation also made note of the same achievements. During this visit, the Vietnamese highlighted their economic and diplomatic achievements made possible via Doi Moi.¹¹⁸ Doi Moi was seen as a catalyst for a more open, integrated approach to international relations. In a visit to Australia by Nong Duc Manh in 1998, the leader of Australia mentioned that Vietnam had now become a meaningful partner in the Pacific-Region and reiterated support for Vietnam joining of international organisations such as ASEAN, ARF, APEC, and the WTO.¹¹⁹

A European Union parliamentary delegation made a visit to Vietnam praising the country's diversification and multilateralisation efforts, whilst at the same time announcing their instructions to banks to lend further credit to Vietnam for development projects.¹²⁰ As mentioned in the previous section, industrialised countries were stepping up investment into Vietnam by a considerable amount. Compare this to 10 years prior when, according to former Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan, Vietnam faced complete isolation at international conferences.¹²¹

With Vietnamese relations returned to normalcy, the groundwork was in place for further integration into the international system and greater multilateral engagement. In early 1994, Do Muoi spoke at the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council. He stated that joining APEC was a logical development for Vietnam. He also reiterated: "Vietnam has given first priority to the task of broadening cooperation with countries in Asia and the Pacific along with promoting relations with other countries in the world."¹²² Vietnamese diplomats echoed this sentiment when they stated their hopes that ASEAN membership would help them in joining other international bodies such as APEC and the WTO in a diplomatic meeting with Japan.¹²³

Restoring bilateral relations and a policy of openness had allowed Vietnam to garner strong support for its bid to join APEC. Even though a US official widely denied that ASEAN membership constituted "backdoor to membership" of APEC, joining ASEAN certainly boosted Vietnam's cause.¹²⁴ At the Ministerial Meeting in November 1995, ASEAN formally requested that APEC admit Vietnam as a member early the following year. This was despite the fact that APEC had frozen membership for three years in 1993 in order to prioritise fostering cooperation.¹²⁵ Vietnam subsequently applied for membership in June 1996.

Vietnam's membership, along with Russia and Peru, was approved at the November 1997 summit and accession would take place the following year. The economic significance

of joining this organisation was immense. In 1997, two-way trade between APEC countries and Vietnam stood at \$15.7 billion. Trade with APEC countries also represented about 80 percent of Vietnam's trade, and members represented a significant source of ODA and FDI.¹²⁶

At the accession ceremony, Nguyen Manh Cam noted that accession was “of great significance and marked a new step in Vietnam's integration process into the regional and global economy.” He also extended his thanks to the support of various countries and international organisations for helping Vietnam achieve membership. Whilst making note of the challenges ahead, he reiterated: “Vietnam will strive to expand the mutually beneficial cooperation with regional countries and actively contribute to the implementation of the forum's objectives for Asia-Pacific development and prosperity.”¹²⁷ Obviously, joining APEC was a major milestone in Vietnam's integration process. It also represented the culmination of a new degree of openness to foreign relations that had a socialising role on the leadership's experience with multidirectionaism. This, coupled with the success of Doi Moi, meant that the leadership was in a much stronger position.

Speaking almost 20 years later, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Than Son stated that joining APEC in 1998 had helped the country's efforts to push ahead with reform, economic restructuring, and integrating into the global economy. He also highlighted the political significance, noting that joining helped improve relations with member countries and fostered greater cooperation through bi lateral meetings held on the sidelines.¹²⁸ Joining APEC, it was believed, would also pave the way for Vietnam to join the WTO. However, this would be a longer, tedious process with greater challenges and pressure placed on Vietnam's domestic reform.

Vietnam applied for WTO membership in 1995. It was, in Nguyen Manh Cam's words, “an inevitable step” for Vietnam despite the challenges it presented the country.¹²⁹ Another

significant event that reinforced the merits of cooperation and multilateralism was Vietnam's experience hosting a major international summit. The Seventh Francophone Summit took place in November of 1997. At Vietnam's insistence, economic matters were at the focal point of the summit.¹³⁰ They issued the Hanoi Declaration, which emphasised the interconnectedness of peace and development. The summit saw praise heaped upon Vietnam for its integration and its economic successes. Twenty years later, a seminar was hosted in Hanoi to mark the 20th anniversary of hosting the summit and discuss memories of the event. Belgian Ambassador Jehane Roccas noted that the summit marked the success of Vietnam's diplomacy and openness towards multilateralisation.¹³¹

Vietnam tried to rally support for its WTO membership via its membership of ASEAN, APEC, and strengthened bi-lateral relations. Support was forthcoming from most sides with Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer expressing his support for Vietnam's entry into the WTO.¹³² Nevertheless, the complexities of joining the WTO hit trade officials hard as the first round of negotiations began in July 1997. Trade officials were given a questionnaire of more than 2,500 items regarding Vietnam's eligibility for membership.¹³³ Furthermore, complicating this matter, were two factors: the emerging cautiousness within the Party that brakes on reform were needed, and the Asian Financial Crisis.

The resolution of the Fourth Plenum of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee, passed in Hanoi in December 1997, stated that while the economy has continued to grow and progress has been made, economic development has not yet been consolidated; "limitations and weaknesses remain" and "research on political theories has not caught up with the demands of the new era."¹³⁴ This indicated the degree of scepticism the Party held towards the speed of reforms. There was a sense they were losing control. Nevertheless, the same resolution also praised the Party's foreign policy orientation, saying that: "It proved the

correctness of the Party and state lines and policies.” It also highlighted the importance of cooperation and assistance from the international community.

What this indicated was that the dichotomy between control and integration were posing fundamental questions to the Party. Political control and the strength of the Party, as already discussed, were widely important aspects. The tradeoff between economic growth and the political risks were becoming hard to bear. Arguably, the Thai Binh Peasant Protests against corruption, tax demands, land disputes, unfair rice prices, and labour contributions caused the Party to question the political cost of economic reform.¹³⁵ The Asian Financial Crisis that hit in 1997 would compound these matters.

In December 1997, Do Muoi stepped down as secretary general and was replaced by Le Kha Phieu who came from a military background. Tran Duc Luong became President and Phan Van Khai became Prime Minister. Some scholars have written that Phieu’s appointment was a means to reassert control and stabilise the political situation.¹³⁶ The more conservative faction within the Party cited the fact that Vietnam had largely escaped the damage of the crisis as evidence that full-on integration was detrimental to Vietnam’s interests.

However, as much as this was initially true, as time went on Vietnam found itself indirectly affected by the downturn. FDI dropped, exports declined, and the Dong’s strength made it uncompetitive with its regional neighbours. An ADB assessment in 1998 significantly downgraded Vietnam’s GDP projected growth from 9.2 to 4-5 percent.¹³⁷ Therefore, Vietnam’s economy and indeed the more reluctant reformers were caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, partial integration had led to benefits. On the other it had exposed Vietnam to the risks, but not provided insulation from them.¹³⁸

At the same time, the complex issue of restructuring the financial sector and State Owned Enterprises (SOE) became apparent. An IMF report in 1998 stated that Vietnam’s banking

reforms implemented from 1988 to 1992 had boosted macro-economic performance. However, those reforms had waned, leading to a weakening of the banking system, further compounded by the Asian Financial Crisis.¹³⁹ The argument for halting integration became weaker as Vietnam's economic performance continued to wane in the late nineties. Arguably, Vietnam was facing its second post-Doi Moi test – the first being when reforms failed to take off due to Vietnam's diplomatic isolation. As at that time, a coupling of foreign policy initiatives, along with further domestic reforms, was needed to escape the current crisis. The deeply ingrained failure of the post-reunification era on the collective memory of the Party meant that turning back now was not an option.

The hesitant nature of the Party's decision-making in the late 90s can be seen in their negotiations with the US for a trade deal. In the summer of 1999, Vietnam and the US achieved a bilateral trade agreement. This would give Vietnam access to the coveted US market and also entice the US to support its entry into the WTO. Such an agreement would also help with the restructuring of Vietnam's domestic legislation and remove barriers to free trade. However, Vietnamese officials allegedly balked at the terms because it would remove many of the trade barriers protecting SOEs. Therefore, they initially shelved the agreement.¹⁴⁰

Three things reversed this. First, China signed a similar deal with the US, meaning that Vietnam would become uncompetitive with its neighbour. Secondly, Bill Clinton dangled a carrot by sending a letter to Vietnam in May of 1999 indicating the US's support for Vietnam's efforts in joining the WTO. And lastly, the continuing economic slump caused by the Asian Financial Crisis and waning domestic reforms had started to threaten the notion of comprehensive security. Therefore, the Vietnamese reversed their position and the official signing took place in July 2000. The agreement came into effect in December 2001 and was instrumental in reducing tariffs on numerous goods and services, bringing Vietnam in line with a number of WTO requirements.¹⁴¹

As Vietnam geared up for its Ninth Party-Congress it was clear that there was no turning back. Ten years after being formerly adopted, a multidirectional foreign policy had ended Vietnam's diplomatic isolation, enabled domestic reforms to take place and ensure economic growth, providing a solid foundation for Vietnam's integration into the international political economy. The learning process had been one of great success. As such, it stated:

The achievements of the past five years have increased our aggregate strength, changed our country's physiognomy and our peoples' lives, firmly consolidated our national independence and socialist regime, and improved the status and prestige of our country on the international arena.¹⁴²

Additionally, it fully incorporated the concept of integration. It stated it would continue:

Proactively integrating into the international and regional economies in the spirit of maximizing our international strength, raising international cooperation efficiency, ensuring independence, autonomy, and the socialist orientations, safeguarding national interests and national security, preserving national cultural identity, and protecting the environment.¹⁴³

The Ninth Party Congress essentially elevated multidirectionalism as a core foundation for Vietnam's development. Despite some hesitancy on the part of the conservative faction, the Congress resolved to "broaden the multifaceted, bilateral and multilateral relations with all countries and territories, major international political and economic centers, and international regional organizations"¹⁴⁴ In a sense, multidirectionalism had become a quintessential aspect of Vietnamese Foreign Policy. Furthermore, the Ninth Party Congress saw a leadership transition with Le Kha Phiu stepping down as Party Secretary General with General Nong Duc Manh succeeding. Arguably, Vietnam had decided to "take the plunge" into the world of globalisation as it sought to modernise, and lift Vietnam from underdevelopment.

However, this merely marked the first phase of multilateralisation and integration. The process would continue to evolve as Vietnam entered the twenty-first century. Multidirectionalism thus adopted the concept of integration and this too became a focal point of ensuring Vietnamese autonomy, strength, independence, and territorial integrity were maintained.

Conclusion

In the twenty-five years after re-unification, Vietnam's foreign policy tells two stories: one of failure and one of success. The overconfidence shortly after re-unification proved to be disastrous as relations with China deteriorated and normalisation with the US never materialised. Add to that, the complex threat stemming from Cambodia and China, Vietnam faced little choice than to begrudgingly move into the embrace of the Soviet Union. Doing so compounded the disastrous socially planned economic policies enacted after re-unification. Essentially, isolation at the international level placed a bottom down pressure on an already precarious economic situation.

The Eighties were then a time of grave mistakes and trauma, with catastrophic consequences for the VCP. Over-reliance on the Soviet Union ebbed away at Vietnam's autonomy, while economic mismanagement ebbed away at its legitimacy. The two forces combined and severely impacted the collective memory of the Party. Hence the need for Doi Moi and a multidirectional foreign policy focused on diversity and ensuring economic growth. These two abated the legitimacy crisis and corrected the mistakes so frequently mentioned by Party members. Speaking 30 years after Doi Moi was initiated, Vu Khoan, former Deputy Prime Minister stated: "That foreign policy is a supporter of domestic policy."¹⁴⁵ This is certainly the case, as Doi Moi acted as the catalyst for a bottom-up change in foreign policy. But multidirectionalism did not bring about an instant change. In fact, it has, as the Party has continually reiterated, been a step-by-step process. Diversification led to a restoration of

Vietnam's external relations to normal, laying the groundwork for integration into international economic and political organisations.

What had started as a bottom-up change now became coupled with a top-down learning process. Vietnam's diplomatic efforts to pursue deeper bilateral relations with different countries bore considerable tangible benefits, mostly through aid, as well as praise for Vietnam's change in foreign policy and for its economic reforms. Coupled with this, Vietnam's effort to become more integrated into international organisations also had a socialising effect on the VCP, reinforcing Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy. Furthermore, the late nineties saw Vietnam turn towards integration as a way out of economic crisis as opposed to turning inwards. As such it bore greater importance and took root as a fundamental concept in Vietnamese foreign policy thinking.

Therefore, we can see that a multidirectional foreign policy became the bedrock of the VCP. It played a pivotal role in avoiding the legitimacy crisis and became a cornerstone of Vietnamese foreign policy. This chapter has attempted to trace the origin and initiation of Vietnamese multidirectional foreign policy. Although Politburo Resolution 13 was based on rational and pragmatism, the memory of failure – both at the domestic and international level – has not been forgotten. This drove the continued evolution of such a policy. Yet, as multidirectionalism became elevated and further expanded with integration becoming a focal point, the policy itself was predominantly economically driven. Furthermore, the growing pains from integration would begin to take hold as Vietnam entered the twenty-first century. Complicating this matter was globalization and the interconnected nature the international arena. The following chapter will explore the impact of those growing pains, along with the evolving integration and the changing international landscape that required broadening multidirectionalism.

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Chapter 4

Multidirectionalism in the Twenty First Century: On the Path to Integration

The previous chapter demonstrated the origins and learning process of Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy. Many teething problems occurred, but by 2001 the elevation of multidirectionalism indicated how strategic of a policy it was for the Party. In fact, Vietnam had firmly set its course on further integration, diversification, and multilateral engagement. Vietnam remained committed to its philosophy of being a friend and reliable partner of the international community. But how did Vietnam continue this path as it entered into the twenty-first century?

As has already been mentioned, multidirectionalism has been a process, one filled with both benefits and challenges. It has evolved in the thirty years since it was first implemented. The first decade of the twenty-first century was testament to this. Within the Party there emerged a new line of thinking in terms of how it approached foreign relations. It began to see relationships, not as black and white "us against them," but complex and multi-faceted. These relationships would throw up areas of cooperation, yet also areas of struggle.

As such, multidirectionalism underwent some policy changes to reflect the changing nature in which the Party now viewed the international system. First, Resolution 07 codified the integration aspect within multidirectionalism. Shortly thereafter Resolution 13 fully rid Vietnam of ideological considerations and accepted the multipolar, complex nature of the international system. Vietnam also outlined its national security goals by publishing a White Paper, first in 1998, then the second one in 2004. Being a friend, a reliable partner, promoting diversity, multilateralism, and integration, and bolstering aggregate economic strength were the cornerstones of Vietnam's policy. Yet so too was maintaining "political and economic stability."

From 2001 onwards, the Party had firmly decided that it was to “take the plunge” and embark on international integration, whilst promoting diversification and multilateralism.¹ The desire to promote economic growth proved to be the main driver behind deepened cooperation. Continued economic growth rates, reduction in poverty, and further liberalisation of its economy displayed how multidirectionalism at the international level was having a trickledown effect on the country. Pham Quanh Minh agrees that economic cooperation was becoming increasingly important for the VCP. He states: “It (the VCP) wished to cooperate on the basis of not only friendship, but also economic partnership and benefit.”²

Yet taking the plunge was not without its struggles and tribulations. Restructuring one’s economic system to fit into the larger international system was no easy process. It involved renovating oneself from an external-based pressure. Vietnam’s struggles, as it entered the twenty-first century, centred around securing membership of the WTO and deepening economic ties at the bilateral level. The negotiation process would be a huge source of learning for the Party and was reflected in the aforementioned policy directives.

Additionally, cooperation at the bi and multilateral level was primarily economically focused. The White Papers development of the ‘three nos’ was reflective of the Party’s traumatic experience of its over-reliance on the Soviet Union. Similarly, having achieved “mature asymmetry” in its relations with China, Vietnam did not want to jeopardise its relationship with this increasingly pivotal partner. Nor too did it want to become a pawn in the Sino-US rivalry that began to emerge with China’s rise. Therefore, Vietnam attempted to build upon its foundations of normalization with countries via adding more substance to its now broad ranging bilateral relations.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the period from 2001 to 2006 to show the complexities evolving from deepened integration and increased bi and multilateral

engagement. These complexities were extremely evident in negotiations to join the WTO. However, positive benefits were associated with membership. Additionally, the Party began to see the benefits of two key mechanisms to implement multidirectionalism: trade-deals and strategic partnerships. This took place vis-à-vis increased cooperation with ASEAN and with larger powers. Nevertheless, the collective memory of over-reliance and economic stability meant that cooperation became centred on economics. The successes of such an approach were widely praised after the 2006 Tenth Party Congress, indicating how positive an effect they had on the learning process – subsequently reinforcing multidirectionalism.

Codification

Vietnam's motto during the 2001-2006 period was: "Expanding relations and proactively engaging in international economics."³ Shortly after the Ninth Party Congress, the Politburo Issued Resolution 07-NQ/TW. This codified and elevated international economic integration as a key orientation of the Party and subsequently became the third element in multidirectionalism. If successful, economic development was a means to propel Vietnam into becoming an industrial country.

Resolution 07 outlined four principle guidelines:

1. Economic integration was a cause for the entire population
2. Integration included both cooperation and competition
3. There had to be a clear road map for integration
4. And integration had to go together with political stability.⁴

Again, the regime's prioritisation of political stability came to the forefront. The Party saw economic integration as a key component to achieve Vietnam's development targets, whilst promoting economic reforms within. Cooperating bi and multilaterally would also go

together with this approach. Accompanying this resolution were laws and guidelines designed to bring about the institutional change required of integration. The Government revised its trade law so that companies and individuals no longer required a special licence to export their goods. Meanwhile, the pace of equitising state-owned enterprises began to take off.⁵

At the same time, the international arena was becoming increasingly complex. The events of 9/11 threw up insecurities and highlighted non-traditional security threats. Additionally, big-power relations were becoming much more complex given the increasing interolarity of the international situation. China's rise, Russian resurgence, along with India's growth, provided new pastures for economic and political engagement. Yet at the same time, interolarity also raised the potential for conflict. Vietnam sought to manoeuvre itself away from being caught in the middle between larger powers, particularly given the rising US-Sino rivalry.

Yet there was a growing sense of cooperation. The ASEAN Summit in Bali 2003 emphasised a strong degree of regional cooperation, both within ASEAN via establishing an ASEAN Community, and working closely with regional partners such as Japan, South Korea and China. The Asia-Pacific region was a region on the up, with dynamics and complexities that would lead to opportunities, but also potential conflicts.

As such, the Eighth Central Committee issued Resolution 8 In July 2003. Resolution 8 diverged from Vietnam's traditional 'friends vs. enemy' approach. The concept of partner (*doi tac*) and opponent (*doi tuong*) emphasized that within a relationship, areas of cooperation and areas of conflict can simultaneously operate. The resolution also called for a flexible approach to relations. Since then Vietnam began to recognize the integrated international system with other emergent power sources, such as Russia, China, and India, etc.⁶

This resolution also promoted national interests as the foundation for foreign policy. It claimed that there was "no permanent enemy nor no permanent partner." Rather the Party

should identify long-term strategic partners and create stable benefits that promotes building the “fatherland.”⁷ Pragmatism was the name of the game. Alexander Vuving points out that this policy had three implications. Firstly, it dampened the previously solidarity orientated approach to foreign policy. Secondly, it injected a firm basis into the “intergrationists” who defined foreign policy according to national interests, rather than ideological consideration. And lastly, it would allow Vietnam to move closer to the US. This did not mean Hanoi walking warmly into the embrace of the US, however. It merely meant a “balancing” of Vietnamese partners.⁸

Indeed, the significance of this policy has not gone unnoticed. Carl Thayer pointed out that Resolution 8 was made considering territorial disputes in the South China Sea and “new opportunities” in relations with the United States. Vietnam sought to cooperate as much as possible with China, due to its economic and political importance, yet guard against China when its national interests were threatened, usually in the form of disputes pertaining to the South China Sea. At the same time, Vietnam would cooperate with the US, mainly in the economic sphere, but struggle against it when its interests were threatened. These threats primarily stemmed from Peaceful Evolution.⁹

Vietnam provided an overview of the issues the country faced in its first-ever Defense White Paper, published in 1998. In 2004, it released its second white paper. This paper outlined numerous threats to the nation, but it stated, “guarding against the danger of lagging behind economically” as the principle threat. As such, fostering stability, cooperation, development, and peace should be at the heart of Vietnamese foreign policy. It stated that Vietnam’s foreign policy of independence, diversification, multilateralization was a cornerstone for achieving these goals. It highlighted the contributions to international organisations of ASEAN, ARF, and APEC. Additionally, this white paper reiterated the ‘three nos’. No joining an alliance, no

military bases on Vietnamese soil, and no taking part in any military activity that uses force or threatens to use force against another country.

What can be interpreted from this was a strong sense of independence, but also a large amount of emphasis on comprehensive strength and bolstering economic power. The ‘three nos’ indicated Hanoi’s cautiousness in moving ahead with military alliances. The collective memory of its overreliance rang true in diplomatic discourse too. After China, Russia and the US showed interest in utilising Cam Ranh Bay a Vietnamese official admitted: “It is just the idea of bases we don't like. The deal with the former Soviet Union was signed at a time when we were a little weak and worried about China and Cambodia.”

Summarizing the Party’s new outlook on the international system, Vu Khoan stated that the purpose of Vietnam’s foreign policy served two goals: development and security with development at the forefront. Additionally, integration is neither a trend nor an enforced concept. Rather it is a clear “choice” of Vietnam to pursue its development goals. As such, and with the world no longer divided into two poles, Vietnam must occupy a flexible, active position that creates mutually beneficial components for itself and its partners. Therefore, maximising diversification, multilaterlateralism, and integration would go a long way to realising Vietnam’s development goals, along with providing a sense of security for it to do so.¹⁰

This encapsulated the economic orientated approach to multidirectionalism that emerged during this period. Yes, security and defensive concepts still mattered, but “lagging behind” economically was the principle threat. A foreign policy based on diversification, multilateralisation, and integration was a method through which Vietnam could transform itself, and as such, security matters, whilst still warranting some attention, took a back seat to

trade liberalisation. The emergence of free trade deals, Vietnam's WTO accession, and stepping up diversification would subsequently display this approach.

Multilateralisation – A Means to Step up Integration

When Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, many marked it as a major milestone in Vietnam's diplomatic achievements since Doi Moi. Vietnam indeed gained significantly from joining ASEAN since it helped Hanoi integrate into mainstream international affairs and diversify its relations, particularly with regional states. Although fears existed that Vietnam would go against the ASEAN way after initially joining, these fears did not come into existence.¹¹ However, Vietnam did encounter institutional challenges that would require time, and adjustment upon joining.

For Vietnam, there were two clear benefits for joining ASEAN. Firstly, there were economic ones. Secondly its ability to provide an enmeshment strategy, vis-à-vis larger powers: namely China. From 2001 to 2006 these benefits came to fruition, albeit with certain limitations. Two examples will be demonstrated; the Declaration of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, and in the promotion of free-trade, both within ASEAN and with regional partners.

The South China Sea issue was the largest barrier to cooperation between Vietnam and China, externally speaking. Joining ASEAN had acted as a shield from which to protect Hanoi as well as a means to amplify its bargaining position on the matter. In 1992, prior to Vietnam joining, ASEAN released the Manila Declaration, which emphasised ASEAN's unified stance on the matter and called for establishing an international code of conduct on the South China Sea. Then in 1995, after China occupied Mischief Reef, ASEAN issued a sterner statement calling for "self-restraint by the parties concerned."¹² Nevertheless, in November 2002, on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Phnom Penh, ASEAN foreign ministers and China's Vice

Foreign Minister, Wang Yi signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. (DOC).

The declaration outlined: “The need to promote a peaceful, friendly and harmonious environment in the South China Sea.” It was in fact the first document concluded between ASEAN and China regarding the South China Sea issue.¹³ Furthermore, the DOC represented a successful attempt by ASEAN states to multilateralise the issues. China had until this point insisted on bilateral negotiation.¹⁴

Yet as many scholars have pointed out, this represented a failure of ASEAN and China to agree on a binding code of conduct. The DOC, whilst building trust and confidence-building measures, fell short of a legally binding one. Vietnam also lost out in two regards. It failed to include the Paracel Islands into the declaration, and Vietnam’s demands that no new structures were built on the islands were not met.¹⁵ Initial hopes were that this would be a baby step in fostering greater cooperation that would coerce China into realising a legally binding code of conduct was in its interests.

Writing ten years after, Carl Thayer noted that the DOC was essentially “stillborn” and its implementation was slow, fraught with tension and sticking points. He points out that it took 25 months for senior officials to reach an agreement on just the terms of reference for the ASEAN-China Joint Working Group to implement the DOC. Even then the final draft took a further twenty successive drafts whilst China continued to promote bilateralism as its preferred way of negotiating the issues.¹⁶ The ASEAN-China joint working group also failed to contain tension throughout the latter half of the noughties. This tension would be played out in greater detail ten years later at the same location. But for the time being, it represented both the benefits and limitations of ASEAN for Vietnam. On the one hand Vietnam’s “instrumental” role in the ASEAN-China negotiations had secured a status quo result in the DOC. On the other

hand, it had given up grave concessions and failed to secure a binding solution, even within the parameters of collective bargaining.¹⁷

Despite the frustration experienced in regard to the South China Sea, Vietnam certainly enjoyed greater political clout in dealings elsewhere. The ASEAN Free Trade Area would serve as a valuable learning process for Vietnam, particularly in boosting its WTO ascension. Le Dang Doanh, consultant to the Minister of Planning and Investment, stated that: “The AFTA is a training ground, and the WTO is the stadium.”¹⁸ ASEAN had been Vietnam’s first foray into the multilateral arena in the nineties and the AFTA was the first step in Vietnam’s path to integration.

Vietnam had signed up to AFTA in January 1996 with the decision providing significant benefits. FDI attracted from the region increased rapidly and reached \$7.8 billion by 1997.¹⁹ AFTA’s completion had been scheduled for 2008 as per the original decision at the 4th ASEAN Summit in Singapore in January 1992. However, this was accelerated to 2003. As Vietnam did not join until 1995, it was given until 2006 to complete its tariff reduction to 0-5%. ASEAN had become one of Vietnam’s major trading partners. In the year 2000, it made up 18 per cent of Vietnam’s export turnover and 28 per cent of the country’s exports. In 2001, the implementation of tariff reduction under the Common Effective Preferential Tariff within AFTA began. By 2002, 5,500 (roughly 86 per cent) of items had their tariffs cut. This was in line with Vietnam’s roadmap to AFTA ascension.²⁰

Although by 2003 Vietnam was firmly on the course to implementation, Vietnamese officials were aware of the realities in joining AFTA. Deputy Trade Minister Luong Van Tu, speaking in 2003, noted that “the open market is a battlefield, and there will be a natural elimination in this competitive process.” He noted that the challenges to Vietnamese businesses are stepping up to the plate and “seizing the opportunity AFTA presents.”²¹

Still, on July 1 2003, Vietnam implemented an import tax cut on over 700 items to 20 per cent or less.²² This had originally been scheduled for January of that year under the original road map, but it was delayed because of legal and institutional frameworks not being adequately prepared.²³ Certainly, economic growth that year remained strong, despite difficulties such as the SARS epidemic, Iraq War, and droughts. The official economic growth rate for the year 2003 stood at 6.9 per cent officially, 6.4 per cent according to the ADB, and 5.7 per cent according to the IMF. Despite the variations, it was indeed positive signs for the VCP.

Speaking in 2003, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Vo Hong Phuc again emphasised that AFTA would serve as a stepping-stone for WTO accession. He went on further to state that joining AFTA would enable Vietnam to become a bridge - to 500 million people in ASEAN and, due to its geostrategic location, 1.3 billion Chinese consumers.²⁴ There was no doubt that growing pains associated with joining AFTA and the WTO would ensue, but the rewards reaped would certainly trump them. Throughout 2005, Vietnam continued to bring its own domestic policies in line with AFTA. Reforms of state-owned enterprises and state-owned commercial banks were accelerated, albeit limited to smaller companies. By 2006 it had reached completed tariff reduction on all relevant products.

AFTA and the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), with the US (discussed below), were two fundamental trade deals that Vietnam had become a part of. In fact, it is through these trade deals that a core mechanism of multidirectionalism came to fruition. Trade deals with ASEAN's regional partners exposed the benefits of such deals. In November 2002, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and leaders of ASEAN signed the Framework Agreement on China-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Cooperation at the Sixth China-ASEAN summit. This had the objectives of strengthening economic, trade and investment cooperation, liberalise and promote trade, explore new areas for development, and facilitate effective economic

integrations of the newer ASEAN member states.²⁵ The agreement called for the establishment of an ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) within ten years. Then two years later ASEAN and China signed the “Agreement on Trade Goods of the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Co-operation” which would come into force in January 2005. The agreement set tariff reduction rates with an aim to eliminate them. The agreement also distinguished between WTO and non-WTO countries, allowing for non-WTO countries’ liberal time frames for implementation.²⁶

ASEAN and South Korea also began to explore the possibilities of establishing an ASEAN South Korea Trade Agreement (AKFTA) at the 2003 ASEAN- Korea Summit. An Expert Group was established to pursue avenues for an FTA. Just two years later, negotiations commenced, and the two sides signed the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between ASEAN-Korea in December 2005. Shortly thereafter, in August 2006, the two sides signed the ASEAN-Korea Trade in Goods Agreement.²⁷ Under this Agreement, ASEAN exports would enjoy greater market access to Korea with all tariffs on outline goods eliminated by 2010. This would be reciprocated by ASEAN states in 2012 except for newer ones, such as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, which were given greater time for implementation.²⁸

Japan too was involved in trade deal negotiations with ASEAN during this period. This deal was more limited in scope and labelled a Comprehensive Economic Partnership (CEP). As such, the original declaration made at the Japan-ASEAN summit in 2002 called for elements of an FTA to also be pursued.²⁹ The Framework for CEP was agreed upon in October 2003. The two sides went through numerous rounds of negotiations before concluding a deal in November 2007.³⁰

This growth in free-trade deals not only provided Vietnam with greater access to markets amongst the fastest growing region, it also had the internal impact of stabilising the domestic economy and promoting a conducive environment for business to flourish, and the economy to grow. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted:

Active participation in ASEAN economic cooperation activities also contributes to stabilizing the domestic trade environment, avoiding major fluctuations, negatively affecting the rolling stock, the national trade balance, contributing to a healthy business environment in the country, putting pressure on domestic enterprises to improve their competitiveness, contributing to strengthening and improving the quality of trade activities, and making business processes and procedures simpler and more convenient. In recent years, the trend of expanding comprehensive cooperation with major trading partners such as China, Japan and South Korea has opened up great opportunities for Vietnam, which helps develop export markets and attracts foreign investment, to develop a comprehensive and stable economy.³¹

The process of reforming Vietnam was not without its challenges. Writing in 2007, Nguyen Vu Tung criticized that bureaucratic inertia and protectionist pressure from state enterprises that prevented the preparation and implementation of AFTA. He also highlighted the absence of ASEAN's enforcement measures, indicating that cooperation agreements were merely for the purpose of "gaining political scores."³² Certainly, there is a large degree of truth to the latter half of that statement, but again this highlights the learning process in which the state, and indeed the VCP, was going through. The change was being dictated from outside, but being initiated from within and natural tensions would certainly arise. AFTA was the first

step, and a much lighter step than WTO accession. And as those negotiations would prove, would be much harder and cutthroat in nature.

It was clear that by the Tenth Party Congress, the economic integration process was seen as a means to promote cooperation, and that FTA and Regional Trade Agreements (RTA) were a means to do so. Writing for *Tap Chi Cong San* in 2007, Trinh Minh Anh, now Chief of the Office of the Inter-sectoral Steering Committee for International Economic Integration, claimed that integration facilitates bi, regional, inter-regional, and multilateral cooperation. He went on to state that liberalisation is taking place via FTA and RTAs and highlighted both the immense benefits - yet increasing challenges - Vietnam would face on this journey.³³

Furthermore, for Vietnam participation within ASEAN was providing it dividends economically. Vietnam met the majority of targets, and in some cases exceeded them.³⁴ GDP growth doubled in the same period. Thus, whilst security matters threw up their own limitations, economic benefits were clearly being felt. These benefits were also resonating within the leadership. Speaking shortly after Vietnam was granted membership to the WTO, newly appointed Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung stated that the step-by-step process of integration has led to a process in which the internal strength of the country is raised. He highlighted ASEAN FTAs, AFTA, the US-BTA, as important steps in the integration process – a process that, despite its internal challenges, was opening Vietnamese business to new markets. In order to take greater advantage of these opportunities, he added, further domestic reforms were needed.³⁵

Therefore, we can see the effect that active participation within ASEAN was having. It was a means to promote Vietnam's own domestic reforms, promote trade relations with regional partners, and act as a stepping stone in its bid to join the WTO. The learning process associated with these trade agreements would play out later when Vietnam began to negotiate

bilateral FTAs with regional and international powers. The period from 2001 to 2006 saw trade deals establishing themselves as a mechanism for multidirectionalism. This was reinforcing the strength of multidirectionalism and positively impacted the regime's collective memory. However, the WTO negotiations would provide a sterner test for integration.

Joining the WTO

As mentioned in the previous chapter, joining the WTO would prove to be a long, tedious, and at times, frustrating process. The “inevitable step” looked uncertain, but Vietnam nevertheless achieved the feat in 2006. In December 2001, China joined the WTO, just days after Nong Duc Manh had completed his visit to China during which the two countries issued a joint statement. In the statement, Vietnam congratulated China on its accessions and China reiterated its support for Vietnam's entry at the earliest possible date.³⁶ Since Vietnam had indicated its desire to join the WTO, its active stance to cultivate friendly relations with all had meant that support for its accession was in abundance. Yet international support, whilst helpful, would not overcome the need for the transformation from within of Vietnam's own domestic policies. In fact, at times even the friendliest of countries threw up barriers to entry. Again, this brought home the new international environment and how integration into the international system would not be an easy task. Diversification and to an extent, multilateralisation means an outward change based on your own interests. However, integration means a change from within, often imposed externally.

The man given the responsibility of negotiating Vietnam's accession to the WTO was Vu Khoan. He had played a leading role in negotiating the BTA with the US. The VCP appointed Khoan as Minister of Industry and Trade and subsequently elevated him to a member of the Politburo at the Ninth Party Congress. He was then appointed Deputy Prime Minister in 2002. His elevations indicated the prioritisation and importance the VCP regarded WTO trade negotiations. Vietnam entered negotiations in 2002. The complexity of the task was illustrated

by the fact that they involved bilateral discussions with over 20 countries. Hanoi naively thought that Washington held the most sway in WTO accession and that the BTA would significantly lubricate Vietnam's entry. To further illustrate the point, the Vietnam-US FTA had covered 300 tariffs. WTO negotiations covered 9,300.³⁷

Whilst the BTA had set Vietnam on a healthy path towards accession, this was by no means a foregone conclusion. In fact, as negotiations continued into the new millennium tensions arose when the US Department of Commerce's ruled in January 2001, that Vietnam's economy was a "non-market" one. The Vietnamese Trade Minister called the DOC decision "non-objective", and "unjust", but the US side responded that inconsistent economic policies were the barrier to WTO accession.³⁸ Inconsistent economic policies were becoming a prominent problem in Vietnam's relations as well (see relations with Japan).

The EU was also a pivotal partner that needed to be negotiated with. Vietnam underwent two-rounds of negotiations with them in April and November of 2001. During the second round, Vietnam received tough questions for its lack of clarification regarding its WTO entry action plan. Even China's support for Vietnam did not translate into smooth negotiations, with Vice Minister for Trade, Luong Van Tu, indicating that negotiations were often tense and lasting long into the night.³⁹

By 2003, Khoan identified "four-solutions" to boosting Vietnam's WTO membership. These were: "Reforming taxation, raising enterprises' competitiveness, opening the market, and amending the legal framework."⁴⁰ This was all part of a big push to join by 2005. Whilst Vietnam received praise for its efforts, trading partners indicated that it still had a long way to go before entry could take place. Industrialised nations were keen to point out that lowering average tariffs to 22 per cent was not enough.⁴¹

By late 2004, however, Vietnam achieved a milestone in concluding negotiations with the EU. The trade commissioner for the European Commission indicated that the deal “unlocks the door for Vietnam’s entry into the WTO.” Vice Trade Minister Truong Dinh Tuyen replied that concluding negotiations allows Vietnam to move on to finalising negotiations with the US and China.⁴² What the Party began to realise between 2001 and its ascension in 2006, was the complexity, voraciousness, and at times, paradoxical nature of negotiations. Although Vietnam had a per capita income of less than \$1,000, it was not ranked a poor developing country due to its health, culture and educational levels. It was in fact labelled as a lesser-developed country, and as such they could negotiate being accepted as a low-level income country, which granted them a transitional period to implement numerous WTO required policies.⁴³

The 2005 deadline would prove to be overly optimistic. By 2005 it had signed WTO agreements with the EU, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, and Singapore, but big-hitters such as the United States, Japan, China, Canada, New Zealand and Australia had yet to sign off on agreements. Two other factors caused Vietnam to lower its expectations. The first was the realisation that the timeframe was too short for Vietnam’s National Assembly to modify the plethora of rules, laws, and decrees it needed to ensure it complied with WTO regulations.

The second factor was down to China’s ascension in 2001. Complaints that Beijing was failing to deliver on its reforms meant that countries aspiring to join the WTO now faced a higher bar. Economic advisor to Prime Minister Phan Van Khai stated: “Since the accession of China the United States’ requests are higher.”⁴⁴ Adam Stickoff, director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi, echoed these sentiments when he stated: “China has raised the bar of Vietnam’s WTO accessions. Not the United States, not the New Zealanders.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, Truong Din Tuyen labelled the 2005 target, as “unrealistic” citing that joining the following year would be a more tangible target.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the emerging consensus was that Vietnam would benefit immensely from WTO membership, sooner rather than later. Some academics speaking at the time argued that the longer they were outside, the harder it would be to meet WTO standards in the future.⁴⁷ Indeed the Vietnamese textile industry viewed the restrictions of growth on its sector as “crippling” to its potential. The industry, one of Vietnam’s largest, wanted broader access to markets under WTO rules.⁴⁸ Under the US-Vietnam BTA, the textile industry had access to US markets, but this was becoming bottlenecked.

Perhaps the biggest breakthrough was made after Vietnam and the US concluded a bilateral agreement that would clear the way for WTO entry. The US was the final country to conclude bilateral negotiations with Vietnam and the negotiations could therefore move onto the multilateral stage.⁴⁹ However, the agreement did not come without significant concessions from the Vietnamese side. The US would still consider Vietnam ‘a non-market economy’ for the ensuing 12 years. Vietnam also agreed to open its financial sector and rein in its garment exports seeing as it enjoyed a large trade surplus with the US in this area. Similarly, the US pressured Vietnam to give up rice subsidies. Again, however, these concessions were argued necessary given that Vietnam “could not afford to drag out negotiations.”⁵⁰

In October 2006, Vietnam’s WTO accession negotiations reached their final phase. A Vietnamese delegation headed to Geneva to hammer out its final deal. Complicating the process was the fact that countries that already had bilateral agreements in place with Vietnam, raised fresh concerns at the multilateral rounds: Vietnam’s special consumption tax, granting trading monopolies on certain goods to state-owned companies, intellectual property rights, and its lack of sanitary measures in place to ensure the safety of food exports.⁵¹

Nevertheless, headway was made, and Vietnam secured its desired entry into the WTO. The organisation invited “one of the rising stars of world trade” to become its 150th member.

The timing of this was auspicious given that Hanoi was monumentally the venue for the 2006 APEC Summit. Joining the WTO, as one Vietnamese official described to the author, represented the apogee of multilateralisation. Indeed, other Vietnamese officials shared this sentiment. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Le Dung claimed it a “momentous event in the international economic integration of Vietnam, showing Vietnam’s deep and comprehensive participation in the global trading system.”⁵² Still, Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Kiem urged a degree of cautiousness when he stated that Vietnam would continue to develop a “socialism-orientated market economy.”⁵³

The long, drawn-out process of negotiations imprinted two things on the leadership. Firstly, friendly nations can also put up barriers to cooperation based on their own national interests. And secondly, that negotiating trade deals did not come without concessions. Speaking in 2007, Luong Van Tu described the cutthroat like nature of negotiations. He recalls:

“I remember every meeting because each tested my own endurance. Each party had its own demand. They consistently asked Vietnam to open the market for their exports. For instance, they asked Vietnam to reduce import tax rates from 20 percent down to 0-5 percent for their beef and pork. In that case, we could no longer raise cows in Vietnam. In my dealings with them, no matter more or less friendly, they all upheld their national interests.”⁵⁴

He went on further to state that even friendly countries remained “intransigent” on securing the best possible deals for the sake of their national interests.⁵⁵

As Vietnam stepped up its integration process, Resolution 8 became all the more understandable given the complexity of the international arena. Succumbing to concessions was no longer a “zero-sum game.” It may be a source of contention, but the overall end product would result in much needed economic restructuring, further bolstering Vietnam’s overall

economic outlook and, as such boosting the Party's legitimacy. The world was a complex place and negotiating required approaching it with the ideals of cooperation and struggle in mind.

Shortly before the Tenth Party Congress that would take place in April 2006, the government released Resolution NO 01/2006NQ-CP entitled 'On Major Solutions for the Implementation of the 2006-Socio-Economic and Social Budget Place.' This emphasised high growth, in addition to promoting coordination between local markets to take advantage of AFTA and WTO commitments whilst limiting the negative effects of international economic integration and globalisation.⁵⁶ The resolution also set out to "step up" the reorganisation, renewal, and equitisation of state enterprises in line with relevant action plans.⁵⁷ What it displayed was that Vietnam was serious about bringing its own domestic laws up to international standards. The resolution indicated how committed it was to pursuing this fundamental aspect of multidirectionalism.

Adding Substance to Diversification and the Emergence of Strategic Partnerships

Throughout the nineties Vietnam had begun the groundbreaking in normalising relations with numerous countries, laying the foundation for future cooperation. As it entered the twenty-first century Vietnam moved ahead with cultivating economic relationships, but at the same time, moving cautiously and wearily in fostering areas of defensive or security cooperation. There are numerous explanations for this. Vietnam did not want to give the impression that it was seeking to ally itself against any potential threat. It did not want to irk China and make it think that it was taking measures to balance against it. Similarly, Vietnam wanted to ensure it maintained a strong degree of autonomy and not be forced to dance to the tune of any one country. Arguably the collective memory of its over-reliance on the Soviet Union loomed large in the background, but so too did its fearfulness of peaceful evolution, and jeopardising its relations with China. As such, fully rounded cooperation did not develop as such, rather an economically driven approach, sprinkled with a liberal dosing of political cooperation,

developed. These deepened relations were played out amongst major international partners such as Russia, China, the US, Japan, South Korea, and the EU.

Russia: At the turn of the century, two-way trade between Vietnam and Russia had dwindled consistently since the days of the Cold War. Deputy Prime Minister Phan Van Khai had visited Russia in September 2000, where an agreement between the two countries was signed settling Vietnam's Cold War-era debts. This paved the way for Vladimir Putin's historic visit to Hanoi in February 2001. It was the first visit by a Russian Head of State in 51 years. The two countries proclaimed it a: "New stage in Vietnam-Russia relations."⁵⁸ And this is essentially what it was – it was the restarting of a traditional friendship. During the visit, there was the signing of Vietnam's first strategic partnership. This strategic partnership saw cooperation in electric energy, oil and natural gas, chemistry, mechanics, metallurgy, electronics, agriculture, communications, science and technology, culture, and education. The two sides also stated they would strengthen their cooperation in terms of defence equipment. Russia-Vietnam defensive ties, due to historical reasons, have been close. However, Hanoi's cautiousness was evident in its emphasis that: "Military cooperation between the two countries was not directed against any third country."⁵⁹

This partnership was designed to take the countries' relationship to a new height and boost two-way trade between them. Furthermore, Russia saw Vietnam as a pivotal partner for greater engagement with the ASEAN region, something that brought a lot of prestige for the Vietnamese. As such Russia appointed Vietnam coordinator of relations between Russia and ASEAN. Vietnamese cooperation in the early years of the twentieth century were focused on oil and energy production. The joint Russian Vietnamese venture Vietsovpetro, originally founded in 1981, focused on developing oil deposits on the Vietnamese continental shelf. President Tran Duc Luong indicated the importance of these projects when he stated that it: "Serves as the basis of the whole Vietnamese oil production industry" on his 2004 visit to

Russia.⁶⁰ During the visit the two sides agreed to continue political dialogue and expand commercial-economic investment cooperation. They also agreed to expand relations to other areas such as the humanities.⁶¹ Russian energy business, Silovye Mashiny provided \$40 million of equipment for Vuong's hydroelectric power plant. Furthermore, another Russian business sought to assist in the Vietnam Coal Cooperation in the construction of a heavy-duty truck factory at the Chu Lai Open Economic Zone in Quang Nam province.⁶²

Yet if there is one word to describe Vietnam-Russian relations during this period, it would be subdued. Two-way trade between the two countries stood at \$651.3 million in 2003.⁶³ Yet this pales into significance when compared to other partners, and when compared to Soviet-Vietnamese trade prior to the end of the Cold War. Russia did not even make it into Vietnam's top five trading partners.⁶⁴ The lack of substance in their relations was demonstrated in an interview with Phan Van Khai by Russian News Agencies, Ria Novosti and Itar-Tass. He pointed to common views on regional and international issues, but merely heralded the Strategic Partnership and aforementioned projects. The relationship was symbolic – rather than strategic. It indicated the waning of Russia's significance, in terms of practical measures, in Vietnam's burgeoning diversification efforts.⁶⁵

The US: Relations with the US at the turn of the millennium looked optimistic. Bill Clinton had visited in November 2000, the first US president to do so, where the BTA between the two countries was agreed. Yet the election of George W. Bush saw the Jekyll and Hyde nature of US-Vietnamese relations come to the forefront. Hanoi was extremely cautious, not to move too closely into Washington's arms. It was also extremely wary of the threat of peaceful evolution.

Such worries were exposed when George W. Bush delayed the signing of the treaty because of Vietnam's human rights records. Nhan Dan responded by stating “we strongly

criticize and reject the intentions of forces in the United States which are creating or raising many new hurdles for the process of normalization of Vietnam-US relations.”⁶⁶ Hanoi’s paranoia was further exposed when the spokesperson of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a strong rebuttal of American media claims that Hanoi had sabotaged the deal due to the arrest of the priest and dissident: Nguyen Van Ly. The ministry spokesman labelled the claims as a “total fabrication.”⁶⁷

Yet throwing wrenches into cooperation was not only coming from the US side. In January 2001, Vietnam cancelled the visit of Admiral Dennis Blair, the commander of all US military forces in Asia and the Pacific. Compounding the embarrassment was the fact that the cancellation occurred at the last minute.⁶⁸ This represented the cautiousness of the Vietnamese not to antagonize China, nor stray into the embrace of any one country, as well as its overall careful approach to cooperation outside economic matters.

Still, Admiral Blair made the visit the following year in which Blair was allegedly “very keen” to gain access to Cam Ranh Bay.⁶⁹ The Russian lease of the geostrategic port expired in 2004, yet Russia decided to withdraw one year earlier. Vietnam’s recently proclaimed ‘three no’ policy would of course rule out any further leases being developed with Vietnam, which proclaimed that the port would be “for the cause of national construction and defence.”⁷⁰

Vietnam was extremely cautious in broadening its relationship with the US. Fearfulness of peaceful evolution, Hanoi’s eagerness not to jeopardise its relations with China, and an economic orientated approach to foreign relations were certainly reasons behind this. However, November 2003 saw a historic event take place with the Vietnamese Defence Minister Lieutenant-General Pham Van Tra. He became the first post-war Vietnamese defence minister to visit the United States. Vietnamese observers were quick to point out that this represented a “thaw” in military relations and that they were also becoming more “rounded.”⁷¹

Yet tensions were there. Tra registered a complaint, about a recent Congressional Resolution denouncing Vietnam's human rights abuses.⁷² In the meeting with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, much of the dialogue was regarding remnants of the Vietnam War. Issues such as missing US soldiers and Agent Orange appeared to trump those of regional and security. Indeed, a major symbolic event took place the following week as well.

The USS Vandegrift frigate became the first American warship to make a port visit to Vietnam since the end of the war when it called at Ho Chi Minh City.⁷³ These two events had largely symbolic importance, but did not encapsulate an inclusion of military cooperation. Merely, the barriers for this were falling. Economic ties were still, from Hanoi's point of view, of greater importance - demonstrated by Deputy Vu Khoan's visit to the US in December 2003. It was an attempt to promote investment and trade with the US. He led a large delegation of business leaders to numerous cities and met with trade representative Robert Zoellick, along with Secretary of State Colin Powel. Khoan noted his disappointment that the US was not the number one investor in Vietnam. However, US trade officials remained optimistic about the future, especially given the progress in WTO negotiations. Khoan too, was eager to play down fears that corruption and slow progress in reforming the financial sector would hamper Vietnam's economic growth.⁷⁴

Still, political relations continued to move closer. In 2005 Prime-Minister Pham Van Khai made a historic visit to the US. He proclaimed that Vietnam-US relations had entered a "new-stage of development."⁷⁵ Along with meeting then-President Bush, he also met with the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, witnessed the signing of an agreement to purchase four Boeing 787 aircraft, met with Senator John McCain, and spoke at a dinner hosted by the US-Vietnam Business Council.⁷⁶ Khai's visit resulted in the establishment of the framework: "Friendly relations, building partners, multi-faceted cooperation, stability, long-term based on

mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefits,” something that would set in motion deeper cooperation in the future.⁷⁷

China: Scholars such as Brantly Womack and Carl Thayer have noted that Sino-Vietnamese relations during this period had achieved “mature asymmetry.” Mature asymmetry essentially refers to the careful management of relations to keep the peace.⁷⁸ Or in other words: normalcy. Secretary-General Le Kha Phieu visited Beijing in February 1999 where a 16-word guideline calling for “long-term, stable, future-orientated and all-round cooperative relations.”⁷⁹ A flurry of meetings, increase in trade, and treaties followed. This included: “The resolution for disputes on the land border, and the maritime rights in the Gulf of Tonkin, and a Joint Statement for Comprehensive Cooperation in the New Century.”⁸⁰ Whilst the South China Sea territorial dispute was not resolved, due to its complexity, these treaties “narrowed the scope of their territorial disputes” and therefore provided the impetus for greater cooperation.⁸¹

According to Thayer, the 2000 joint statement set out a “long-term framework for cooperative bilateral state-to-state relations with a provision for the regular exchange of high-level delegations led by their respective State Presidents, Prime Ministers, other Ministers, national legislatures, and other political organizations.”⁸² Indeed this period marked a drastic reverse, albeit expected, given that diplomatic relations had only been restored just ten years previously.

Alexander Vuving has gone on to argue that Le Kha Phieu’s replacement, Nong Duc Manh, continued, “lip-service to China.” Manh, in the beginning of his reign, certainly sought strong relations with China. He visited China in November 2001 with Jiang Zemin reciprocating in February the following year. During Jiang’s visit to Vietnam, he invoked Ho Chi Minh’s sayings - the “brotherly states” and “comrades plus brothers.” He recited a song

that states: “Vietnam China, mountains are connected with mountains, and rivers are linked with rivers.”⁸³ During the visit – Jiang and Vietnamese leaders agreed to promote “mutual trust to a new high order to promote long-term stability, future orientation, good-neighbourliness and all-around cooperation.”⁸⁴

Normalisation in 1990 was primarily driven by political concerns. Vietnam needed a political ally in a world littered with crumbling socialist regimes. Yet the turn of the century marked the beginning of economic factors becoming a prominent factor in shaping each other’s policies towards one-another. The strengthening of relations, from the Vietnamese perspective, was initially driven by political solidarity, but bolstering trade relations became equally, if not, more important.

Chinese investment into Vietnam was meagre in 1991. By 1999 it had risen dramatically.⁸⁵ As such, the ministry of planning and investment called for multifaceted cooperation, especially in areas of investment, tourism, and trade relations.⁸⁶ Certainly, economic relations between the two countries improved and even became labelled as the highlight in good relations between the two countries. Vietnam and China had initially set a target of two-way trade to grow to \$5 billion by 2005, yet it surpassed that significantly and reached \$8.73 billion. Trade around the border areas showed significant improvement with Guangxi province pouring \$21 million into 49 projects in Vietnam. The two sides also began forming joint ventures that would produce and sell products in third countries.

Accompanying this increase in trade and economic cooperation was the start of a worrying trend - a growing trade imbalance with China. Vietnam’s trade deficit was just \$0.2 billion in 2001 yet by the following year it grew five times to \$1.03 billion.⁸⁷ From 2003 onwards, it would continue to grow and became a source of anxiety amongst the ruling elite, who were keen to avoid overreliance yet at the same time maintain cordial relations. Whether

or not Vietnamese leaders believed that China's rise was to be peaceful, it is clear that in the early stages of the 2000s, that cooperation was fostered, and it embraced the cooperation mainly in the economic sphere. This was largely a result of geostrategic realities, but as the following chapter will demonstrate – provide a stimulus for broadened cooperation.

India: India had always been a supporter of Vietnam's cause for independence, but after the Ninth Party Congress, it became a pivotal partner in Vietnam's attempts to bolster economic cooperation as well as provide an outlet for political support. The support was not one-way. India, much like Russia, saw Vietnam as a gateway to greater opportunities within the ASEAN region. Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Bajpayee visited Hanoi in January 2001.

In addition to promoting relations in the name of “peace, stability, cooperation and development in the region and the world,” they agreed to increase bilateral cooperation significantly. This was especially felt in the economic sphere with five accords signed, including a \$238 million oil and gas exploration deal. During the meeting, Vajpayee emphasised Vietnam's “critical role in fostering better relations with ASEAN.”⁸⁸

Nong Duc Manh subsequently visited India in May 2003. The two countries signed a “Vietnam-India Joint Statement on Comprehensive cooperation.” This included three action plans and a focus on cooperation in politics, economics, trade, investment, industry, credit, science and technology, agriculture and telecommunications. They agreed to raise two-way trade between the two countries, and India granted \$4.7 million in non-refundable aid.⁸⁹ Then in 2004, in a meeting between Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien and his Indian counterpart Natwar Singh, Singh issued his support for Vietnam's bid for accession to the WTO.⁹⁰ Whilst India-Vietnam relations would take some time to further integrate and develop, certainly a budding relationship was on the horizon. This relationship would be strengthened later on.

Japan: Throughout the nineties, Vietnam-Japan economic relations experienced a boom with Vietnamese exports to Japan doubling from \$1.2 to \$2.4 billion from 1994 to 2000.⁹¹ Entering the twenty-first century Japan had become Vietnam's leading trading partner in addition to being the biggest giver of ODA. It was no surprise, therefore, that Prime Minister Phan Van Khai labelled Japan Vietnam's number one partner, at a seminar on the future of Asia in 2001. Nong Duc Manh paid a visit to Japan in October 2002, where he met Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and the Emperor of Japan. The build-up to the visit was overshadowed by the closure of a Honda factory after the Vietnamese government lowered the annual ceiling on imported parts. The Japanese side was worried about "inconsistent" Vietnamese investment policies.⁹² The visit also came at a time when Japan was looking to cut government spending.

Still, this did not stop the sides from agreeing to "reinforce economic relations," with Vietnam re-affirming its commitment to facilitating a stable environment for Japanese investment and business to flourish.⁹³ Indeed, the two countries had set up a wide variety of dialogue mechanisms and high-level forums that met annually, contributing to mutual trust and understanding between them. This included bilateral summit meetings, including meetings taking place vis-à-vis ASEAN.⁹⁴ Continuing from Manh's successful visit, Vietnam and Japan signed the Japan-Vietnam investment agreement, which came into force in late 2004. The agreement was designed to stabilise the investment climate in both countries.⁹⁵

Two-way trade value increased rapidly during the period 2000-2005 with an annual growth rate of 14.2 per cent. Japan continued to be the largest donor of ODA to Vietnam with a focus on developing human resources, construction, agriculture, education and healthcare, and environmental protection. By August 2006, Japan had 677 investment projects with a total capital of \$6.8 billion. The two countries had also deepened cooperation into other spheres, such as tourism and educational cooperation.⁹⁶

Then in October 2006, Japan and Vietnam signed the Joint Statement Toward a Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia, on the occasion of newly-appointed Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's visit to Japan.⁹⁷ Dung noted that the two countries wanted to take their relationship to "another level," and certainly Vietnam's second strategic partnership did exactly that.⁹⁸ As part of the strategic partnership, the two sides also agreed to launch negotiations for a Japan-Vietnam Economic Partnership Agreement (JVEPA). Strong Vietnam-Japan economic relations certainly provided a counterweight to China and the US in terms of trade.

Others: Vietnam and South Korea inked a "comprehensive partnership" in 2001. The following year South Korean Prime-Minister Lee Han Dong paid a visit to Vietnam where he stressed continued support for Vietnamese industrialisation and modernisation by promoting South Korean businesses to invest in the country.⁹⁹ Indeed, by this time, South Korea had become the fourth largest investor in Vietnam. People to people contacts increased with a 56 per cent jump in South Korean tourists visiting Vietnam.¹⁰⁰ Le Van Khai visited Seoul in 2003 with the purpose of boosting economic ties and fostering greater cooperation in oil refining, power plant construction and development projects. The South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time reported, "the main topics discussed were trade and economic issues."¹⁰¹ By 2005, trade between the two countries was valued \$4.2 billion and Vietnam had become the largest recipient of ODA for South Korea.¹⁰²

Vietnam's relationship with the EU, along with individual countries within the bloc, deepened around economic ties. During 2001, Le Kha Khieu paid visits to the European Commission, Italy, and France as part of its efforts to "strengthen cooperative relations, expand markets and take advantage of capital, investment, science and technology."¹⁰³ Close relations with the EU were essential for Vietnam's push to join the WTO. In May 2003, Vietnam hosted German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder where he praised Vietnam's renovation efforts and

promised to support Vietnam in its WTO accession bid. Additionally, the two countries signed cooperative documents for funds of €25 million. This was to help with funding water treatment projects, flood control projects, and the upgrading of hospitals.¹⁰⁴

October 2004 saw Vietnam host French President Jacques Chirac with both sides expressing delight at the “fruitful cooperation between both countries.”¹⁰⁵ Chirac explained France’s desire to assist in Vietnam’s international economic integration and development by encouraging French companies to expand trade relations and investment in Vietnam. Additionally, he promised to actively support Vietnam-EU relations.¹⁰⁶

Trade relations with the EU had certainly developed. From 1999 to 2004 trade doubled to \$7.5 billion, with 473 foreign investment projects by 2006.¹⁰⁷ The EU’s cooperation projects had focused on poverty-reduction aid and speeding up the country’s integration process. Vietnam recognised the importance of strong relations with the EU and as such it became the first ASEAN country to approve a master plan on the relationship towards 2010 and orientations to 2015, a framework designed to improve relations.¹⁰⁸ With this agreement Vietnam and the EU would set out to set up a Comprehensive Agreement. The degree to which Vietnam-EU relations were primarily trade focused was highlighted when Tran Phuong Hoa, a member of the Institute for European Studies, stated that the “partnership is still lacking when it comes to culture-driven objectives.”¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The period from 2001 to 2006 saw Vietnam plunge into the international political economy with significant trials and tribulations, but substantial progress. The learning process, however, became harsher and the learning curve steeper with Vietnam realising that it must actively evolve to adjust to the standards set out by the international community. In relation to multidirectionalism’s evolution, this time period was marked with three key aspects. Firstly,

economic integration, set out by Resolution 07, was becoming ingrained and positively associated with enhanced legitimacy. What is interesting was that integration and international cooperation were becoming deeply entrenched within Party thinking, and positively associated with enhanced legitimacy. The government's report on 2003 socioeconomic achievements, tasks for 2004, outlines this as such. It stated that:

The political and social situation has been stabilized and the environment of peace and international cooperation has taken shape. These are the most fundamental conditions for national development. The implementation of various bilateral and multilateral economic agreements, efforts to speed up Vietnam's integration into the international economic community, and measures to enhance our economic competitiveness are the factors that will create new potentials for Vietnam to expand markets and attract more foreign direct investments.¹¹⁰

Integration, along with diversification and multilateralism, was a means to ensure economic growth, and therefore greatly influenced the collective memory of the Party in a positive way. These benefits created a mutually reinforcing process in which multidirectionalism contributed significantly to economic development, and as such, legitimacy. The Party therefore, began to deepen and expand multidirectionalism, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

Additionally, Vietnam's outlook on the international system adapted to the highly competitive nature associated with trade-deal negotiation. Resolution 13 displayed this. Its negotiation to join the WTO was testament to this new arena of struggle and cooperation. At the bilateral level, Vietnam began laying the foundations for further cooperation. The

emergence of strategic partnerships would later become a mechanism for promoting multidirectionalism.

Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien outlined how Vietnamese diplomacy had made huge strides since Doi Moi. He noted normalisation and now the expansion of relations with major countries had created multi-faceted areas of cooperation based on equity and mutual benefits. He also noted that Vietnam had strongly implemented economic integration with the region and the world. Yet the following quote encapsulates the largely economic approach to foreign relations:

Foreign affairs have made great contributions to national development by maintaining a peaceful and stable environment. By direct and specific actions, external activities have served the purpose of making economic policies, especially research, advisory, information, mobilization of aid, investment attraction, expanding markets of trade, labor and tourism. We have taken an active part in settling problems in economic relations between Vietnam and other countries. So far, we have attracted a total of \$45 billion in foreign direct investment. In 2004, the export turnover reached \$26 billion. In the period of 2001-2005, official development assistance was \$13.3 billion.

One can see how stability – both external and internal – was at the forefront of Vietnam's foreign policy initiative. In doing so, Vietnam could attract aid and investment to promote aggregate strength, whilst increasing trade opportunities. 2001-2006 saw advances in this regard. The multidirectionalism learning process was seeing positive results and subsequently, as the foreign minister's quote (above) demonstrates, largely reinforced the strength of such a policy.

It's important to note that Vietnam's relations with China became shaped and intertwined economically. Of course, the South China Sea issue would continue to be a dark cloud over relations during this period, but the lack of assertiveness and tension in the region meant economic relations could flourish. Le Hong Hiep has stated: "Vietnam seeks to exploit conditions conducive to bilateral cooperation, especially in the economic sphere, to promote its domestic development."¹¹¹ This was certainly the case for the period from 2001 to 2006 when China was less assertive in its claims. However, this would change after 2009, when Chinese Foreign Policy became more erratic and cultivated fears within Hanoi. Therefore, the following chapter will look at the structural factors that forced Hanoi's hand in promoting a broader approach to multidirectionalism.

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Chapter 5

Broadening Multidirectionalism: Internal and External Complications

The year 2006 was one of milestones for Vietnam. It successfully hosted the APEC Summit, gained membership in the WTO, and it would soon be nominated as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the first time in its history. At the same time, it considerably deepened its relations with traditional friends and partners at the bi and multilateral level.¹ The previous chapter demonstrated the learning process through which Vietnam went in order to achieve these milestones; how integration became a focal point of multidirectionalism, and how an economically-orientated approach towards cooperation soon developed.

But for the years 2006-2011 the learning process associated with multidirectionalism was that of achieving a balance. Vietnam's explosive trade interdependence with China, along with its more assertive posture in the South China Sea, brought into question the economic-centric approach. It meant Vietnam would have to broaden the scope of cooperation to ensure it could successfully defend its territorial claims to the South China Sea. Yet at the same time ensure the status quo prevailed in order to safeguard the economy. Therefore, Vietnam sought cooperation with other partners to broaden its economic base. Furthermore, broadening the scope of cooperation would provide Vietnam with greater mechanisms for managing the asymmetries in its relations with China.

Ultimately this was a complex time for Vietnam, both internally and externally. Structurally, China's rise, in particular its submission of a map claiming sovereignty over the entire South China Sea, thrust the issue back into the limelight. The failure to develop a binding code-of-conduct showed the limitations of the DOC. Complicating this was Vietnam's burgeoning trade deficit with its northern neighbour along with the 2008 financial crisis. As such, Vietnam began to not only deepen its cooperation at the bi and multilateral level, but also

broaden it. This meant venturing out into other areas of cooperation, namely defensive cooperation.

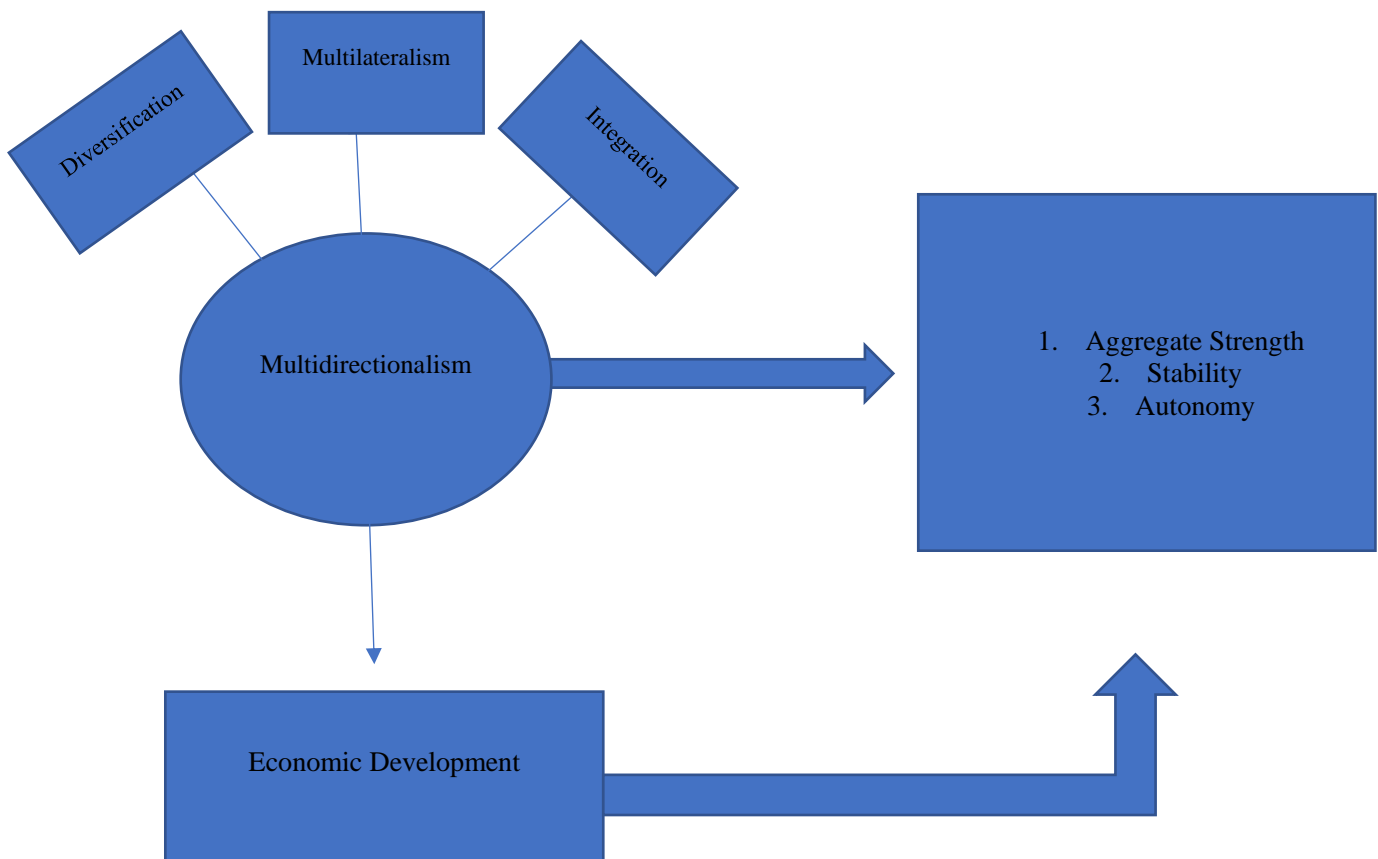
The principle argument in this chapter is that increasing pressures at the structural level necessitated a broadened approach to multidirectionalism, mainly through deepened cooperation at the bilateral level, and a more proactive approach at the multilateral level. At the same time, domestic undercurrents began to emerge because of the double-Chinese dilemma, little political reform, and corruption. These domestic currents, whilst not affecting foreign policy, would widen avenues for these undercurrents to flow and impact foreign policy in the future.

The Tenth Party Congress

The year 2006 marked the twentieth anniversary of Doi Moi. As such, the Tenth Party Congress in 2006 reflected on twenty years of renovation in addition to the previous five years since the last Party Congress. One of the major lessons learnt, according to the Tenth Party Congress Documents, was that Vietnam must “bring into full play international resources while striving to take advantage of external resources and combining the nation’s strength with that of the new era under the new conditions.”² The new conditions referred to here are the interconnected, inter-polar world in which the Party saw areas of cooperation and struggle.

Vietnam’s multidirectional foreign policy is intrinsically linked with its domestic reform agenda, known as Doi Moi. It is clear how intertwined the two had become. Party documents state that Vietnam must “.... take advantage of external resources to promote internal ones, with the aim of creating an aggregate strength to develop the country in a rapid and sustainable way on the basis of firmly maintaining national independence and socialist orientation.”³ Whilst Chapter Three showed that multidirectionalism had been a bottom-up transformation

process, twenty years later, multidirectionalism was seen as a top-down process in which external factors provided opportunities for internal transformation.



Multidirectionalism had become a core component of Doi Moi, which in turn contributed to the state's prioritisation of boosting aggregate strength, fostering domestic and international stability, in addition to creating greater autonomy for the country to act on the international stage. As such, the Party praised the “new phase of development” in external relations. They stated that: “Activities on [sic] the external relations of the Party, the State, and people have developed strongly, contributing to preserving a peaceful environment, boosting socio-economic development, and heightening Vietnam’s prestige in the region and the world.”⁴

International integration was praised for allowing Vietnamese products to become more competitive, exports and imports to increase, and for creating a more conducive atmosphere for ODA and FDI to flow into the country.⁵ Looking forward, the guidelines of the Tenth Party Congress read remarkably similar to the one five years earlier. It again reiterated the state's desire to:

Consistently follow the foreign affairs (policies) of independence, sovereignty, peace, co-operation and development in order to carry out the foreign policy of openness, multilateralization and diversification of international relations. To proactively integrate into the international economy, and, at the same time, expand international co-operation in other domains. To make Vietnam a reliable friend and trusted partners of countries in the international community and actively participates [sic] in the process of international and regional co-operation.⁶

What is different here, however, was the desire to “expand international co-operation into other domains.” The Party wanted to “broaden external relations.” What this broadened approach entailed would unfold over the five-year period, before being expanded at the 2011 Eleventh Party Congress. The previous chapter made note of Vietnam’s concentration on economic affairs, but the desire to broaden cooperation would go hand in hand with the structural changes ongoing at the international level along with domestic currents caused by Doi Moi.

One challenge that emerged out of the Tenth Party Congress, according to Hong Ha, was simultaneously handling relations with superpowers. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officially, wanted to establish frameworks for long-term friendly and cooperative relations with its neighbours and regional countries, to create a peaceful and stable environment, conducive to economic growth.⁷ But such a framework would need to be across a host of major countries. Vietnam of course maintained that it would not use one power to balance against another. Yet

broadening the scope and achieving equity in its superpower relations was key to ensuring Vietnam could achieve a strong sense of autonomy in its international posturing.

Enhanced Multilateralism

Vietnam significantly stepped up its engagement in multilateral institutions, shifting from an active to proactive measures.⁸ Additionally, ASEAN driven initiatives created further space for Vietnam to actively engage. There are four key events that will be analysed in this section in regards to Vietnam's enhanced stance to multilateralism: the ASEAN charter, more ASEAN FTAs, Vietnam becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, and Vietnam's stint as ASEAN Chair in 2010. Certainly, these four things influenced Vietnam's cognitive perceptions of itself as becoming more proactive and a "responsible member" of the international community. This reinforced Vietnam's positive association with multilateralism.

Since it had joined ASEAN in 1995, Vietnam has successfully become a key player. Joining had seen tangible security, political, and economic benefits. In the early 2000s, ASEAN sought to establish a legal and institutional framework for codifying ASEAN norms, rules and values. This would manifest into the ASEAN Charter. The Eleventh ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 2005 set up the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) on the ASEAN Charter. The EPG comprised of "highly distinguished and well-respected citizens from ASEAN member countries" and would provide recommendations on formulating the ASEAN Charter.⁹ As such, the EPG invited civil-society actors, the ASEAN-Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS), and the ASEAN's People Assembly (APA). The EPG published a report in December 2006, with the High-Level Task Force (HLTF) for Drafting the ASEAN Charter forming in January 2007.

Vietnamese Representative to the HLTF, Nguyen Trung Thanh, spoke of Vietnam's consistent desire for a strong ASEAN.¹⁰ The creation of a human rights body within the charter

was an extremely controversial topic particularly from the new members of ASEAN such as Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and of course, Vietnam. Drafters from these countries were not supportive of using the term ‘human security.’ Nevertheless, they still backed the general principle to protect the wellbeing of their citizens.¹¹ Despite this, however, it has been noted that the Vietnamese delegates at ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies meetings with the EPG were surprisingly constructive and open regarding the matter.¹²

Nevertheless, any mention of a ‘human rights body’ was avoided in the first HLTF draft. But in July 2007, approval for a clause on the establishment of a regional human rights body was approved. Key to achieving this was ensuring the human rights body did not have a majority based voting mechanism. Rather it would adopt a traditional consensus-based approach. Speaking on the matter, Nguyen Trung Thanh noted: “Before putting their hands on the issue, the HLTF members had to consult their respective Foreign Ministers for advice, since human rights has mixed implications.” He added: “The HLTF finally came up with a formulation of the enabling provision in the Charter that was considered the best-balanced option.”¹³ Additionally, he stated that the HLTF should be proud of their ability to tackle such a sensitive issue within ASEAN.

This new ‘liberal turn’ of ASEAN has created greater windows of opportunity for two traditional taboo subjects within Vietnam: democracy and human rights.¹⁴ It was widely reported at the time that Indonesia was pushing for the promotion of democracy and human rights in the ASEAN Charter so that ASEAN, at the very least, subscribes to democratic norms. According to interviews with Vietnamese officials by Jorn Dosch, this has at least been successful in requiring Vietnam to conform to the issue of how to deal with the requirement of establishing a human rights committee. However, Dosch also points out that the consensus-based approach, something Vietnam indeed pushed for, will limit the effectiveness of any form of enforcement.¹⁵ Certainly, Prime Minister Nguyen Dan Dung’s comments after the ASEAN

Charter came into force demonstrate this. He proclaimed that the Vietnamese delegation played an active role in the maintenance of the bloc's basic principles - those of consensus and non-intervention. He also noted that the ASEAN Charter would raise cooperation to new heights, and therefore "enhance the association's position, image, and role in the region and in the eyes of friends over the world."¹⁶

Speaking further, Nguyen Tan Dung also praised ASEAN efforts to foster greater cooperation and foster economic ties vis-à-vis free trade agreements. The previous chapter made note of ASEAN's nascent FTAs, but the period from 2006 to 2011 saw further trade liberalisation take place. The ASEAN-China Trade in Services Agreement was signed in 2007, coming into that same year.¹⁷ Similarly, an Investment Agreement was signed in August 2009, coming into force January 1, 2010.¹⁸ An Investment Agreement was also signed in June 2009 between ASEAN-Korea.¹⁹ This came into force on September 1, 2009. Meanwhile, a Second Protocol to Amend the Agreement on Trade in Goods between ASEAN-Korea was signed on November 17, 2011.²⁰ The ASEAN-Japan CEP similarly was signed in April 2008 and came into force December 2008.²¹ ASEAN also set up FTAs with India, Australia and New Zealand. The ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement came into force on January 1, 2010, and the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand FTA came into force on the same date. ASEAN had provided the initial impetus for Vietnam's free trade agenda. Joining ASEAN was equally related to economics, politics and security. Through these FTAs, Vietnam could further liberalise its economy. This was one part of the process and indeed Vietnam would take initiatives to facilitate its bilateral trade agreements as described the following chapter.²²

As part of Vietnam's overall multilateral approach to foreign relations, it had placed a considerable amount of emphasis on being active within the UN to support the principles of international law, promote world peace and security, and create favourable conditions for development. In the nineties Vietnam's active stance was reflected in its signing the

Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996, becoming a member of the UN Chemical Weapons Convention, and contributing to UN Peacekeeping Funds.²³

Vietnam first decided to push for a bid to be on the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 1997. That push became a reality on October 16, 2007 when the United Nations General Assembly voted unanimously in favour of Vietnam joining for the 2008-2009 period. Le Dung proclaimed the large number of votes in favour of Vietnam as signalling the “international trust in Vietnam.”²⁴ Meanwhile, Nguyen Tan Dung proclaimed its nomination as a chance for Vietnam to “further heighten its image and position.”²⁵ Some even noted the event as signifying “a new global presence” for the country.²⁶ Ta Minh Tuan wrote that its membership went beyond symbolism and would give the country diplomatic experience in complex, multi-faceted issues.²⁷ Certainly, Vietnam’s inexperience showed in the lead-up, with a Western diplomat quoted as urging Vietnam to start formulating a position on complex international issues. This came after senior foreign officials reportedly said they did not have a position on Kosovo and Sudan when asked by said Diplomat.²⁸

Nevertheless, Vietnam took steps to rectify this. In the lead up to its membership, Vietnam set up a core group, consisting of (then) Vice-Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh and (then) Director of International Organization Department Le Hoai Trung to liaise with its UN mission and work directly with Nguyen Tan Dung.²⁹ During its membership, it twice assumed the rotating presidency of the UNSC. As such it hosted meetings dealing with a wide range of issues, such as Middle East conflicts, political instability in Honduras, and climate change. Vietnam’s contributions to the UN were widely praised by UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon stating that Vietnam’s “contributions to the UNSC helped increase the strength and efficiency of the Council.”³⁰ Pham Vinh Quang, Deputy Head of the International Organisation Department of the Foreign Ministry, highlighted Vietnam’s international recognition of its presidency. Pham Gia Khiem also highlighted this praise, further noting that President Nguyen

Minh Triet's participation and speeches delivered at the UNSC summits demonstrated the importance Vietnam attributed to the UNSC and the significant contribution his attendance had on Vietnam's success. Undoubtedly, the milestone of the occasion was not lost on the leadership of the VCP.³¹

In 2010, Vietnam took up its role of ASEAN Chairmanship. This served as a focal diplomatic event. For ASEAN it was the year in which it began shifting to a new stage of development - The ASEAN Community. Certainly, Vietnam lived up to its role in facilitating this when it hosted the sixteenth ASEAN summit under the theme "towards the ASEAN Community: From Vision to Action." Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem highlighted Vietnam's proactiveness in this summit. He noted that, at Vietnam's proposals, ASEAN adopted the Declaration on Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development and the Declaration on Cooperation in Reliance to Climate Change. He additionally highlighted the fact that Vietnam had helped strengthen coordination between ASEAN leaders and representatives of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly.³²

In October 2010 Vietnam hosted the inaugural ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM) -Plus Eight meeting with the objectives of enhancing regional peace and stability, promoting mutual trust, and contributing to the realisation of an ASEAN security community. This included Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the United States and went together with Vietnam's recent promotion of defensive cooperation, as discussed below. Nguyen Tan Dung had stated that this was a means to "promote and facilitate deeper engagement in addressing issues related to regional peace and security."³³

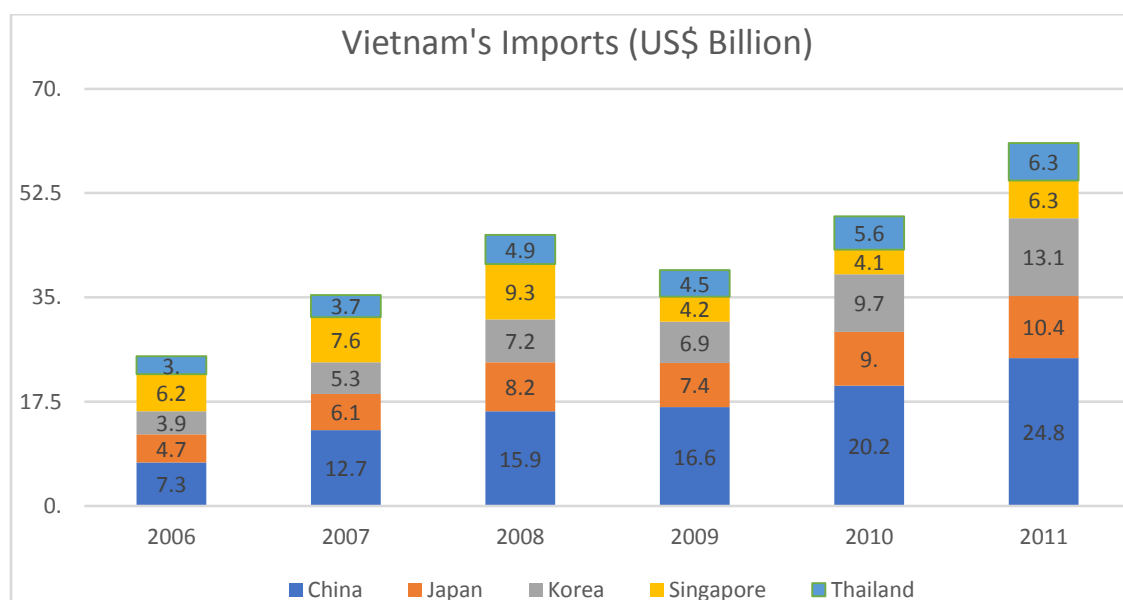
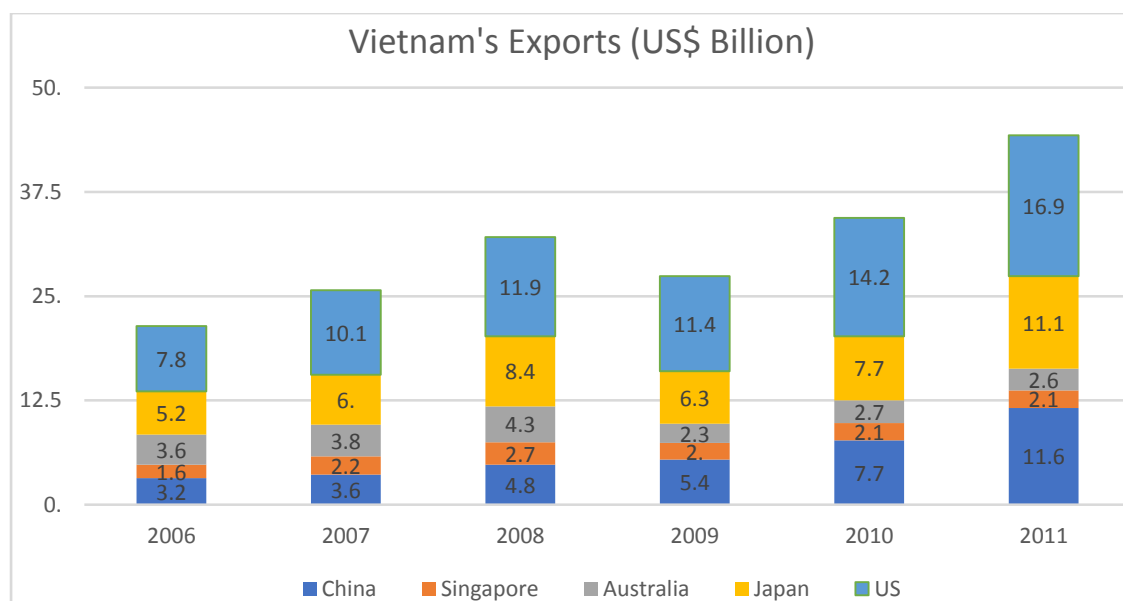
Vietnam's 2010 chairmanship left a positive impression on its Southeast Asian Regional Partners. The Indonesia President stated that Vietnam generated "a new momentum for the grouping to promote solidarity and its role, as well as in the roadmap towards an ASEAN

community.”³⁴ Assistant Minister to the Vietnamese Foreign Minister also played up Vietnam’s achievements by stating that ASEAN Vietnam’s “dynamism and responsibility” had contributed to a successful year and been widely appreciated by fellow ASEAN members.³⁵ It was clear to see that Vietnam had stepped up its proactive approach to multilateralism.

China- Vietnam Relations: A tale of Two-Stories

Vietnam-China relations are a tale of two stories during this period. One of close political and economic cooperation, with a heavy dose of friction from mounting tensions in the South China Sea; the other of the increasing economic dependence on China. Speaking in 2013, Truong Trong Nghia, a Ho Chi Minh City National Assembly Delegation member, stated: “There are many levels of being inferior to others, but economic dependence is the most worrying inferiority.”³⁶ He was of course, referencing China. The economic dependence narrative would also become greater as the first decade of the twenty-first century came to an end. The following chapter will deal with Vietnam’s attempts to diversify its economic integration but for now, this section will examine how Vietnam’s deepened economic involvement with China reached such a depth.

In 2006, four years ahead of schedule, two-way trade between Vietnam and China reached \$10 billion.³⁷ To put this into greater context, Vietnam’s share of trade with China went from 6.1% in 1999, to 14.3% in 2007.³⁸ Similarly, \$2.4 billion of that trade was with Guangxi alone. Yet Vietnam also ran a trade deficit of \$3 Billion with China as a whole. The ratio of exports to imports stood at 41 percent.³⁹ Trade had certainly skyrocketed since the turn of the millennium, and would continue to grow. But extremely worrying was the negative trade balance as shown below. The following two charts demonstrate Vietnam’s increasing reliance on China. Chart one is Vietnam’s imports from the years 2006 to 2011. Chart two is its exports.



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As one can see, Vietnam's imports from China rose significantly, from just \$7.3 billion in 2006 to \$24.8 billion in 2011. Meanwhile, exports saw only a slight increase in that same period. In general, Vietnam's major imports from China consist of industrial and manufacturing products such as machinery, road vehicles, chemical products, textile products, materials and equipment. However, one item that has grown significantly has been products relating to the textile industry. In 2009, the import of input products for the textile industry

stood at \$2.2 billion, a huge increase compared to 2000.⁴¹ The textile industry grew in remarkable significance for the Vietnamese economy. In spite of labour shortages, and the economic recession in 2008, the textile industry in Vietnam continued to flourish, becoming the country's leading export sector and fifth largest exporter worldwide.⁴²

This period was also marked by a host of economic cooperation agreements and trade initiatives.⁴³ At the start of 2006, a 179-kilometre expressway linking Nanning to the Vietnamese border in Lang Son province opened up at a cost of 3.7 billion Yuan.⁴⁴ This was the first expressway to link China to ASEAN, and was further aided when ADB provided \$1.1 billion for Vietnam to build a 244-kilometre road from Hanoi to Vietnam's other major Chinese border province – Lao Cai.⁴⁵ These projects formed part of the Two corridors, One Economic Belt.

Trade-themed conferences were also set up between the two countries, particularly at the border area. The Conference on Economic Cooperation among Yunnan, Lao Cai, Hanoi, and Quanh Ning was set up in 2005. At the third conference in November 2007, Deputy Prime Minister Truong Vinh Trong highlighted the great potential of the economic corridor.⁴⁶ Indeed, at the conference the following year, 200 Chinese FDI investment projects with a total registered capital of \$788.5 million, were signed.⁴⁷ Similarly, the Vietnam-China Trade Fair, set up in 2001 with the aim of promoting business cooperation and tourism, hosted in Lao Cai, saw significant growth in activity. At the 2006 fair contracts worth \$201 million were signed.⁴⁸ At the 2009 fair, numerous incentives, such as tax exemption, allowed Chinese products to be showcased duty-free.⁴⁹

Vietnam's joining the WTO, its enhanced efforts to step up its integration, and the ASEAN-China FTA created a suitable environment for Chinese FDI into Vietnam. As such this period saw a substantial flow of FDI into Vietnam. By 2011 Chinese investors had invested

in 805 FDI projects with a total pledged investment capital of \$3.184 billion.⁵⁰ Le Hong Hiep points out that from 2005 to 2013, Chinese FDI inflows into Vietnam increased eight times more than the fourteen previous years combined.⁵¹ However, he also noted that the flow of FDI into Vietnam is not significant enough to offset the trade deficit. The investment was no way near on a par with the level of trade, and therefore the trading deficit, and the asymmetric realities of China-Vietnam relations.⁵²

The South China Sea

The South China Sea issue has long been an irritant in Sino-Vietnamese relations. Yet in the era of mature asymmetry, the issue had largely been swept under the carpet to promote greater political and economic relations. The DOC, whilst being limited in scope and non-binding, assumed a status-quo result, which would hopefully lead to greater harmony in dealings in the South China Sea. Commentators at the time noted that “tensions on the disputes in the South China Sea have been reducing considerably since 1999 - a trend that has continued into the 2000s.”⁵³ However, the period after the Tenth Party Congress saw this end. China’s actions become more bellicose and worrisome for Hanoi’s leaders. These actions also awakened nationalistic sentiments at home. The following section will examine the escalation in tensions regarding the South China Sea from 2006 to 2011.

The Tenth Party Congress saw significant discussions about Vietnam’s maritime economy. It declared that Vietnam should develop a strong maritime economy, maintain national defence and security in the spirit of international cooperation. Carrying on from this, February 2007 saw the Central Committee adopt Resolution 09-NQ/TW, entitled: “On Vietnam’s Maritime Strategy to 2020.” This report was not publicly released, but it is understood that the plan was designed to integrate economic development with environmental protection and national defence and security.⁵⁴ This report encapsulated the vital importance that the maritime economy held for Vietnam, accounting for 49 percent of GDP in 2007.⁵⁵

At the start of 2006, things were looking up for cooperation in the South China Sea. Nong Duc Manh visited China in August of that year and met with Hu Jintao. The two issued a Joint Communiqué that hailed the progressions made in the demarcation of the Gulf of Tonkin. The Communiqué also stated that they “agreed to abide by the high-level consensus between the two countries, continue to promote maritime talks, and jointly maintain the stability of the South China Sea.”⁵⁶ Certainly, the previous year saw positive developments in maritime cooperation. Vietnam, the Philippines, and China had signed up to a Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking.⁵⁷ Yet this small flame of hope would soon be extinguished.

Events in the South China Sea began to escalate towards the end of 2006. On December 28, 2006 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman, Le Dung, responding to Vietnamese news reports that China was constructing military bases on the South China Sea, proclaimed Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratley Islands citing Vietnam’s historical and legal basis to prove this.⁵⁸

Then, 2007 saw further strains develop in Sino-Vietnamese relations after a series of escalating measures in the South China Sea. PetroVietnam, Vietnam’s state-owned oil company, and BP signed a joint co-operation project in 2000. China, at that time, allegedly registered its disagreement, but BP essentially shrugged this off. Vietnam’s joining the WTO, however, provided the impetus for BP to begin developing gas fields in the South China Sea.⁵⁹ Le Dung proclaimed that the project “was completely within the bounds of Vietnam’s exclusive zones and continental shelf.”⁶⁰ Chinese Foreign Minister spokesman Qin Gang retorted that: “Vietnam’s new actions, which infringe on China’s Sovereignty, sovereignty rights and administrative rights on the Nansha (Spratly) islands, go against the important consensus reached by leaders of the two countries on the maritime issue and are not beneficial to the stability of the South China Sea area”⁶¹

China used its economic leverage to force BP. According to a leaked US cable on Wikileaks, “China warned BP that its activity in the blocks infringed on Chinese sovereignty.” The claim is that China implicitly threatened BP’s holdings in China.⁶² Thus, BP cancelled its planned seismic surveys in June of that year. Other companies were similarly threatened.⁶³ ConocoPhillips, Idemitsu, Nippon Oil, Teikoku Oil, and Chevron all caved to Chinese demands leaving PetroVietnam in the dark.

Compounding this economic leverage was the escalation of tension. In April of that year Vietnamese Coast Guards reported that Chinese naval vessels had arrested Vietnamese fishermen operating in waters near the Spratly Islands. Then in July, sources reported that a group of Vietnamese fishing boats came under Chinese fire. One of the boats sank with, one person killed, and several injured. Vietnamese naval ships raced to the scene but kept their distance as a result of superior Chinese firepower. Colonel Le Phuch Nguyen, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the People’s Army Newspaper responded to the incident by saying: “In the long term, we have to strengthen our navy and upgrade our coast guard.”⁶⁴

In November 2007, the People’s Liberation Army Navy carried out exercises from November 16-23, which provoked protests from Hanoi. To compound this, the Chinese National People’s Congress created an administrative region called Sansha to manage the Paracel and Spratley Islands. Le Dung’s response was to state that the act “violates Vietnam’s sovereignty.”⁶⁵ Vietnamese state media echoed this sentiment by carrying a series of articles that condemned Chinese behaviour. More telling, however, was that these two incidents led to protests erupting in Hanoi. Several hundreds of demonstrators gathered in front of the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi in December to make their feelings heard before dispersing peacefully.⁶⁶ Further protests also erupted in Ho Chi Minh City, yet this time security forces thwarted their attempts to march on the Chinese Consulate. Beijing expressed its concern at the protests and

urged Vietnam to take a “responsible attitude” and to “avoid relations between the two countries from being harmed.”⁶⁷

Going into 2008, the escalation of tensions in the South China Sea became worrisome for Vietnamese leaders, but this did not translate into a deterioration of relations. In fact, a dual narrative typifying the concept of cooperation and struggle began to emerge: cooperating for economic benefit, yet struggle in terms of the ongoing tensions pertaining to the South China Sea. For example, at the China-Vietnam Steering Committee on Cooperation, the two sides agreed to “properly handle their dispute.”⁶⁸ Then, in May 2008, Nong Duc Manh paid a visit to China where the two countries decided to elevate their relationship to that of a “comprehensive and strategic cooperative partnership.” Manh stated that: “Vietnam is ready to work together with China and make an all-out effort to implement the relevant consensus, continue to maintain and increase contact and meetings between the leaders of the two parties and two countries, and to set up appropriate mechanisms to strengthen exchange and cooperation between the two parties.”⁶⁹

Yet shortly after this meeting, China went public with its demand to ExxonMobil to pullout of preliminary oil deals with Vietnam. The Foreign Ministry spokesman’s response was subdued, noting: “We welcome and facilitate foreign partners, including those from China, to co-operate in the field of oil and gas on the continental shelf of Vietnam on the basis of complying with Vietnamese laws.” According to Carl Thayer, China had obtained a classified document that noted Vietnam’s plans and used this to apply pressure on oil firms.⁷⁰ He also claimed, at the time, that:

We are now in a time where Chinese hard power is coming back into the equations. And as while the Vietnamese government doesn’t quite know how to react at the moment.... they seem to be hoping that by shutting down

criticism and negative publicity they can somehow secure a special relationship with China that can limit the damage. Certainly, the military is hopping mad. Hanoi must also cope with criticism from dissidents and exiles that see weakness in the face of China as a great nationalistic rallying point.⁷¹

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung travelled to China in a bid to alleviate tensions. He succeeded. During his meeting with Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao, the two countries promised to step up delineation of the Gulf of Tonkin Border. Regarding the South China Sea, they also agreed to “refrain from taking action that would complicate or magnify disputes.”⁷² Interestingly too, PetroVietnam signed a series of energy deals with Chinese partners.⁷³

China and Vietnam lived up to the promise to demarcate the border, completing it in January 2009. But in May of that year events begin to hot up again. As part of its attempts to internationalise the dispute, Vietnam and Malaysia put forward a boundary demarcation case to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. Vietnam submitted its case where it claimed sovereignty over both the Paracel and Spratly Islands.⁷⁴ However, eyebrows were raised when China submitted a note that included a map with its infamous nine-dash line. China claimed that it had “indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea.”⁷⁵ Then, later that month, China indirectly reasserted its claims when it announced its plan to impose fishing bans in parts of the South China Sea. Le Dung spoke out again, calling China’s ban a “violation of Vietnam’s territory.”⁷⁶

Subsequently, Vietnamese Defence Minister General Phung Quang, giving rare public comments, called for a peaceful settlement based on international law. He also refused to rule out reports that Vietnam was about to spend \$1.8 billion on Six Kilo-class submarines from

Russia, a deal that would be completed in December of that year. He went on to say that: “We are still in the process of researching, studying and exploring possible partners.”⁷⁷

Yet talks throughout the Summer and Fall between both parties continued, with Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Wu Dawei and his Vietnamese counterpart Ho Xuan Son having talks in August.⁷⁸ Then in October, Chinese Vice Premier Li Keqiang and Deputy Vietnamese Prime Minister, Nguyen Sinh Hung met on the sidelines of the China-ASEAN Expo where they stated their hope for “continued cooperation in trade, investment and infrastructure, and properly settle the South China Sea issues as to promote the stable development of bilateral ties.”⁷⁹ However, that very same month the ASEAN summit in Thailand saw the South China Sea issue omitted from the agenda. China, instead, pointed to the DOC and stated: “China is willing to begin talking with the countries (bilaterally is implicit here) under the framework of the declaration.”⁸⁰

China in November announced that it had decided to establish local governing bodies on Woody Island, the largest of the Paracels. Vietnam naturally responded with protestation. It also attempted to internationalise the issue when the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam set up a two-day workshop in which experts could come and debate the topic in Hanoi. Vietnam also appeared to be posturing for internal balancing when President Nguyen Ming Triet called for the modernisation of the military. He claimed: “It is necessary to modernise the army by quickly developing military industries to upgrade technologies, weaponry and the army’s qualification.”⁸¹

In March 2010, Vietnam protested to China after Chinese naval patrol boats seized Vietnamese fishing boats near the Paracel Islands. Then the following month Beijing sent two patrol ships to patrol the disputed waters.⁸² Vietnam lodged further protests in the summer after China announced a plan for tourism development. The plan incorporated the Spratly and

Paracel islands into the Chinese territory of Hainan and would promote air and sea tourism. A Vietnamese government spokeswoman was quoted as saying the “dispute goes against the spirit” of the DOC.⁸³ In September, Chinese naval ships arrested nine Vietnamese fishermen. China demanded the boat owner pay a fine. A Vietnamese foreign ministry official claimed that the arrest and settlement were “irrational”.

China’s growing assertiveness in the South China Sea was a cause for deep concern within Hanoi on three, intertwined, fronts. First, it served as an irritant in their economic relations. Vietnam’s rapid interdependence with China economically meant it served a vital part of Vietnam’s economic equation. Secondly, China’s assertiveness stoked domestic nationalism as discussed below. Lastly, China’s assertiveness not only threatened Vietnam’s physical sovereignty and territorial integrity, but also raised awkward questions regarding the leadership legitimacy, both from outside and from within.

As the above analysis shows, a dual narrative began to emerge. On the one hand, bellicose statements reaffirming Vietnam’s sovereignty and promoting a strengthening of its naval and military capabilities while on the other Vietnam did, not want to provoke hostilities with China. Due to asymmetry, Hanoi tried to de-emphasise the South China Sea issue during bilateral meetings with China, and emphasise their cooperation rather the challenges.

In terms of the collective memory of the Party, there was becoming an awareness that too much focus on economic cooperation would mean leaving itself exposed to China. This in turn would stoke domestic criticisms and facilitate a narrative of Vietnam not standing up to China. Additionally, too much interdependence with China meant that a broader approach to cooperation was, needed – both in terms of stepping up cooperation with different partners as well as broadening that cooperation to include defensive, political, and cultural cooperation in

addition to economic. Certainly, the events taking place in the South China Sea would be a key factor in the decision making at the Eleventh Party Congress.

Deepening Defence Cooperation

The previous chapter made note of Vietnam's cautious approach to fostering deeper security relations. This was particularly the case with the United States. However, that does not mean to say defensive cooperation did not exist. According to Carl Thayer, 'defence diplomacy' is largely a product of the Minister of National Defense. Indeed, for analysis this paper adopts Thayer's definition of Defence Diplomacy in that military defence relations refer to official defence relations between Vietnam's Ministry of National Defense and its overseas counterpart. Furthermore, "Military diplomacy is conducted by means of the exchange of delegations, accrediting of defence attachés, defence cooperation programs, and equipment and arms sales and servicing agreements."⁸⁴

Thayer notes that from the period 1990-2004, Vietnam hosted thirty-four ministerial delegations and made over 40 trips abroad. These delegation exchanges were largely made up of three countries: Laos, Cambodia, and China. The concentration of defensive cooperation with these three countries is obvious for geostrategic reasons. Vietnam had also bilaterally engaged in defensive cooperation with Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia.⁸⁵ At the multilateral level cooperative military activities were put into motion at the 2003 Bali Accords with the ASEAN Security Plan of Action set up to promote political development, a shaping and sharing of norms, conflict prevention, conflict, post-conflict peace-building and implementing mechanisms. Additionally, the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting was set up to foster greater confidence-building amongst ASEAN countries. Yet Vietnam engaged in enhanced defensive dialogues with regional and global powers alike - in particular, the USA, India, Russia, Korea, and Japan.

The US: In June 2006, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Vietnam. The two sides agreed to increase military contacts and broaden their military cooperation at “all levels of the military.”⁸⁶ The broadened, multifaceted approach to cooperation with the US was seen on Nguyen Tan Dung’s visit in June 2008. During his visit, he met George W. Bush where the two endorsed the establishment of a new political-defence and policy dialogue to deepen understanding of strategic and security issues between the two sides. Dung also met Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, where they exchanged views on the two sides defence cooperation.⁸⁷

However, evidence of the Chinese exerting pressure on Vietnam’s growing defensive, cooperative relationship with the US was seen in January 2008. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte was due to visit Hanoi. However, the trip was cancelled allegedly due to bad weather. But a Vietnamese Official, speaking off the record, mentioned that it was a result of Chinese diplomatic pressure. The Chinese did not want Vietnam asking for US assistance in dealing with the South China Sea – an issue it strictly viewed as a bilateral one.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, the US-Vietnam Political, Security and Defense Dialogue held its inaugural meeting in Hanoi in 2008. This annual dialogue would become a staple of Vietnam-US defence cooperation. At the 2009 dialogue, held in Washington DC on June 8, the two sides focused on peacekeeping operations and training, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security and counterterrorism amongst other issues.⁸⁹ The dialogue was described as a “natural byproduct of the two countries growing political, economic, cultural and social ties” with the overall aim of guaranteeing economic prosperity.

Vietnamese Defense Minister General Phung Quang Thanh visited the US in December 2009. Here he outlined that both sides had cooperated effectively in resolving long-standing issues from the Vietnam War. Thanh additionally stated that promoting mechanisms for dialogue would help develop greater cooperation on both sides. Yet, Thanh also noted the sharp

difference in perceptions of human rights. He met with Senators Jim Webb and John McCain where he urged them to stop a Vietnamese Human Rights Senate Bill from passing.⁹⁰

The following year, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates paid a reciprocal visit to the US where the two sides reached a consensus to not only address remnants of the war, but also to engage in joint training of military officers and marine security, army medicine and disaster rescue.⁹¹ Shortly before Gates' visit, US Assistant Secretary of State Andrew Shapiro and Admiral Robert Willard, head of the US Pacific Command, had visited Vietnam as part of the US-Vietnam Political, Security and Defense Dialogue where Willard stated that the "US Navy would continue to play a role in the security of the region"⁹²

The increase in 'defence diplomacy' resulted in tangible exercises between the US and Vietnam. In August 2010 the USS John McCain patrolled the South China Sea with Vietnamese officials being flown out before making a port call to Da Nang. Naval officials received a warm welcome from their Vietnamese counterparts in what was labelled a "cultural visit." The following day the Vietnamese and US navies took part in a four-day training exercise in defence, emergency maintenance and repair, and fire prevention.⁹³

India: Yogendra Singh, writing in 2007, noted that Vietnam and India signed a fifteen-point Defense Assistance Agreement in October 2000. However, he also noted that defence cooperation failed to materialise as a result of Vietnam's focus on economic matters and "limited budgetary allocation for defence expenditure."⁹⁴ Indeed little had materialised since that signing. However, in 2007 this changed. First, Prime Minister Dung and his Indian counterpart, Manmohan Singh, inked a Strategic Partnership in July 2007. This Strategic Partnership provided the framework and impetus for greater cooperation at the political, economic, defensive, cultural, and technological level.⁹⁵ Subsequently, Indian Defence Minister, A.K. Anthony travelled to Hanoi where he met with Dung. The two sides announced

the setting up of a joint committee to draw up a comprehensive memorandum of understanding (MOU) on defence cooperation.⁹⁶ Additionally, the visit coincided with India agreeing to transfer 5,000 naval spare parts to Vietnam to help in the renovation of its naval fleet.⁹⁷

The MOU came to fruition when Minister Antony and Vietnam's Minister of Defense, General Phung Quang Thanh signed the agreement in November 2009.⁹⁸ Indian Army Chief General K Singh became the first Indian Army Chief to visit Vietnam in 16 years during a July 2010, four-day visit. During the visit, the two nations stressed that Vietnam and India share a "special and important relationship."⁹⁹ After the first ASEAN Plus Eight Defence Ministers' meeting in October 2010, Indian Defence Minister Antony announced a host of measures to improve defence cooperation with Vietnam. This included providing support to Vietnam for enhancing its Armed Forces, training Army personnel in English and information technology. The two armies also agreed to conduct a joint jungle training warfare exercise in India.¹⁰⁰ In May 2011, Indian Finance Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, noted that whilst economic cooperation had room for improvement, defence cooperation between the two sides was "robust" and "growing satisfactorily" and that India would continue to assist Vietnam in modernising its armed forces and boosting its technological capabilities.¹⁰¹

Russia: Russia has historically been a strategic partner for Vietnam when it comes to defensive cooperation.¹⁰² Russia is Vietnam's main source of military weapons and equipment. The two countries had set up an inter-governmental agreement on military cooperation back in 1998. However, 2008 witnessed marked developments. Speaking in September, 2008, on the occasion of Vietnamese Defence Minister Phung Quang Thanh's visit, Russian Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov spoke of a "growing trend" in Vietnam-Russia defence relations. He stated that: "Russia attaches great importance to broadening and strengthening friendly ties with Vietnam." He also added that Russia remains committed to helping "equip the Vietnamese national armed forces with armaments and military hardware, to upgrade the weapons and

military hardware available, and to train Vietnamese military personnel at Russian military academies and at military training centres.”¹⁰³ This resulted in tangible developments as the two sides reached an agreement to enhance defence training for Vietnamese students. This involved providing scholarships for Vietnamese students to study at military and civil academies.¹⁰⁴

Defensive relations developed further when President Nguyen Minh Triet visited Moscow the following month and the two countries set up a strategy of military and technical cooperation until 2020, by signing an inter-governmental memorandum.¹⁰⁵ Minister Serdyukov paid a visit to Vietnam in March 2010. On this occasion, he noted that 14 joint events were due to take place both on Russian and Vietnamese territory. Furthermore, he proclaimed that Russia would help Vietnam build a submarine base and provide other military assistance.¹⁰⁶ He also hailed the growth in arms sales from Russia to Vietnam. In fact, Vietnam became one of Russia’s biggest arms clients during this period. In 2007 Vietnam purchased two K-300P Bastion-P coastal defence systems, 40 Yakhont/SS-N-26 anti-ship missiles, and six Projects 10412/Svetlya patrol crafts.¹⁰⁷ Then Vietnam momentarily signed a \$2 billion contract to purchase five Kilo-class submarines from Russia. Furthermore, it also agreed to buy 12 Sukhoi Su 30MK2 fighter jets for \$600 million.¹⁰⁸

Others: Deepening defensive cooperation also took place with numerous regional partners. South Korea Defence Minister Yoon Kwang-Ung and his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Van Tra met in Vietnam in May 2006 where they agreed to expand cooperation in the military-industrial sector and the exchange of personnel. This paved the way for a Vietnam People's Army and Naval delegation to visit South Korea in January 2008. The two sides agreed to explore setting up a military cooperation pact.¹⁰⁹ Vietnam and Singapore set-up a Defence Policy Dialogue, with the inaugural meeting being held in December 2008.¹¹⁰ Defence relations with Japan did not bloom when compared to others, however, during Nong Duc

Manh's visit to Japan in April, 2009. The two countries agreed to promote security and defensive exchanges at a high-level.¹¹¹ Tellingly, just two years later the two countries inked an MOU to deepen defensive ties – part of which includes exchanges of military delegations, naval goodwill visits, an annual defence-policy dialogue, and cooperation in military aviation and air defence.¹¹²

As one can see, the plethora of exchanges, MOUs, its arms deals, and defence-orientated cooperation mechanisms put in place broadened Vietnam's active participation at the international level. Of course, economic measures had significant priority over defensive ones, but Vietnam recognised the need to lay stronger foundations for cooperation, strategically designed to hedge against China due to its increased activities in the South China Sea along with the enhanced economic influence it was exerting over Vietnam. At the same time, this broad-based cooperation was designed to be non-aligned in nature and to fit into Vietnam's 'three nos' policy.

Domestic Currents

Vietnamese foreign policy has been conducted to promote economic growth and development so as to enhance the VCP's legitimacy. However, it cannot be said that problems did not emerge with such an economically-oriented agenda. Writing in 2006, Carl Thayer noted that "Vietnam's accomplishments after 20 years of Doi Moi are undeniable. If current trends continue, Vietnam is destined to emerge as a major regional power. Vietnam's success, however, has stirred up cross currents that operate beneath the surface."¹¹³ The currents he is referring to are calls for a more pluralistic, engaging form of democracy, corruption, and nationalistic responses to Chinese assertiveness. All of these issues have become intrinsically linked, and are creating fertile ground for greater domestic considerations for Vietnamese foreign policy and indeed their analysis is highly relevant for understanding future Vietnamese foreign policymaking.

Even in the lead up to the Tenth Party Congress, Vietnam became engulfed in its largest democratic movement to date. The Bloc 8404 movement emerged in early 2006, after 118 people issued a Manifesto on Freedom and Democracy for Vietnam. This was a broad, diverse network of dissidents that would go on to publish a fortnightly publication both in hard and soft copy format. By May of that same year the manifesto had 424 followers and would go on to reach over 2,000. With the eyes of the world upon Hanoi in the lead up to the 2006 APEC Summit, the VCP's response was initially subdued, but shortly before the summit began, leading members were placed under house arrests. These members were eventually put on trial, including Nguyen Van Ly. They were convicted around the time of the one-year anniversary of the start of the movement.¹¹⁴ Whilst the movement was short-lived, it was the most significant democratic movement to take place in modern Vietnam, asking significant questions about the VCP's handling of corruption.

Occurring at roughly the same time was a massive corruption scandal known as the PMU18 affair. In December, 2005, a traffic-police officer - Bui Quang Hung - was arrested in connection with illegal betting on European football matches. This was linked to Bui Tien Dong, the boss of Project Management Unit 18, a unit of the Ministry of Transport that handled projects, often funded by the World Bank, Japan, and European countries., Former PMU18 boss, Nguyen Viet Tien had subsequently become Deputy Transport Minister. The affair cost Dong's boss, Dao Dinh Binh his job, and indeed Tien was arrested and accused of causing \$2 million cost overruns on a bridge project.¹¹⁵

The affair was extremely embarrassing for the VCP, particularly as it wanted to be seen as taking a tough line on corruption. But things began to get worse. Vietnamese media alleged that the Head of the Prime Minister's Office, his deputy, and Chief Investigator at the Ministry of Public Security, Cao Ngoc Oanh, were involved in the PMU 18 affair. The affair even touched the upper echelon of the VCP. Dang Hoang Hai, the son-in-law of Party General

Secretary Nong Duc Manh, was alleged to be an ally of Nguyen Viet Tien. This was never published in the Vietnamese press, but according to author Bill Hayton, common knowledge at the time.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, the Tenth Party Congress saw all those involved in the scandal missing out on promotion. Bui Tien Dung was sentenced to thirteen years for gambling and seven for bribery. Others, such as Cao Ngoc Oanh, were cleared of any wrongdoing. The Party even restored Deputy Transport Minister Nguyen Viet Tien's Party Membership. The VCP also pushed back against journalists who had reported on the case with two prolific journalists convicted for "abusing free and democratic rights to breach the interest of the state and legal rights of organisations and citizens."¹¹⁷

Certainly, the Tenth Party Congress dedicated a significant amount of attention to "resolutely preventing and fighting corruption and wastefulness."¹¹⁸ Prime Minister Dung echoed these sentiments at a National Assembly Session when he noted that the fight against corruption "remains serious".¹¹⁹ He again stressed this dogged approach to fighting corruption in February, 2007 when he stated: "It is a danger threatening the existence of a regime. Therefore, preventing and pushing back corruption is a special task of the Party and Government."¹²⁰ Corruption on the service may seem like a domestic factor, but it can affect investor confidence and irk governments who contribute ODA to Vietnam, thus threatening the development of the nation. In 2006 investor circles and relevant ministry officials claimed that corruption remained a "great challenge to Vietnam's development process."¹²¹

The VCP was taking the issue of corruption seriously, and recognised the potential impact it could have on aid donors. The Consultative Group (CG), set up in 1993, was a platform for discussion between government and donor agencies on development policies and donor pledges. At its mid-term meeting in June, 2007 a large proportion of its agenda was

dedicated to discussing corruption.¹²² The Government informed leading donors to Vietnam of the measures the State had introduced to combat corruption. This included the establishment of a judicial committee to monitor anti-corruption and to integrate greater involvement from mass media and social organisations.¹²³ Government inspectors were keen to stress the successes in their fight against corruption, highlighting the PMU-18 case.

Yet the fight against corruption took a major international hit in 2008 when Japan's Pacific Consultants International (PCI) fell subject to prosecution in Japan for corruption charges. Japan and Vietnam set up a joint committee in September 2008 to prevent corruption in relation to Japanese ODA. However, during the Japanese based trial, employees of Japan PCI revealed that they had given Huynh Ngoc Sy bribes. Sy was the former director of the East-West Highway Project, a VND9.9 Trillion project that drew 65 percent of its funds from Japanese ODA. Sy was subsequently suspended during an investigation. Tokyo acted swiftly to suspend aid to Vietnam, launching an investigation into the matter.¹²⁴ Prime Minister Dung ordered Vietnamese agencies to work closely with Japanese officials working on the case.

Japan agreed to resume aid in April 2009 after Deputy Chairman of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Arai Izumi proclaimed that Vietnam had taken seriously the anti-corruption fighting measures initiated by JICA. In a meeting with Izumi, Nguyen Tan Dung stated: "Vietnam is fully determined to co-operate with Japan to take measures for the prevention of corruption in projects founded with Japanese official development assistance."¹²⁵ Dr Le Dang Doanh, former chief of the Central Institute for Economic Management and speaking after another Japan-Vietnam ODA related corruption scandal in 2014, noted that such incidents make it harder for Vietnam to borrow ODA and therefore affects Vietnamese development as well as eroding public trust in the government further.¹²⁶

Certainly, the event brought a reality check to the VCP in that corruption can seriously hinder development efforts. Soon after the PCI scandal, President Nguyen Minh Triet approved the ascendance to the UN Convention Against Corruption on June 30, 2009. Government General Inspector Tran Van Truyen, speaking, shortly after Vietnam ascendance, said: “Vietnam considers the fight against corruption a national policy and a matter of survival for the count” He proclaimed that Vietnam is “doing all it can” to combat corruption.¹²⁷ The following December at the CG meeting, Nguyen Tan Dung again highlighted the importance of ODA, stating that it “treasures every cent of it.” Indeed, he pointed out that anti-corruption measures needed to be accelerated in order to effectively use this resource.¹²⁸

As already mentioned, China’s assertive actions in the South China Sea provoked domestic outrage and stoked nationalistic outbursts within Vietnam. An interesting component of the anti-Chinese conundrum and the impacts it has on the legitimacy of the Party can be seen in the Bauxite Mining Crisis. The VCP placed Bauxite mining as a key component of Vietnamese economic development, following the Tenth Party Congress. Bauxite undergoes a transformation process before it is converted into aluminium. However, the conversion process produces two harmful side effects, such as red dust and red mud. Shortly after the Tenth Party Congress, the Vietnamese National Coal-Mineral Industries Group signed an agreement with the China Aluminium Company to build two alumina plants at an estimated investment of \$1.6 billion.

In 2008, environmentalists and scientists voiced their discontent at the environmental impact of such an agreement. These voices largely went unheard, but the government was forced to take notice after the legendary general Vo Nguyen Giap wrote a letter asking the government to re-evaluate its stance. He claimed that it would displace ethnic minorities in the region, negatively affect the environment, and provide China with greater economic leverage over Vietnam. In addition, he asserted that it could threaten Vietnam’s national security due to

the influx of Chinese workers stemming from the project. Indeed, the national security dimension of Giap's assertions was worrying for the VCP.¹²⁹

Criticism from such an elite member of the VCP could not go ignored and the government responded by hosting a seminar on the environmental impacts of bauxite mining. By this point, however, the opposition had spread to a broad coalition of factions. The "Chinese threat" galvanised the debates.¹³⁰ These factions subsequently filed a petition, one initially containing 135 signatures but would later rise to 2,746. Vo Nguyen Giap continued unabated with his opposition to the project. In response, and in a conciliatory manner, the government authorised the National Assembly, ministries, and local authorities to conduct regular reviews of the bauxite mining progress. Nevertheless, Nguyen Tan Dung re-affirmed that bauxite mining was still a fundamental policy of the Party.¹³¹ Still, the movement had asked awkward questions of Vietnam's growing economic relationship with China.

This event was unique given its ability to weave various themes together – ones of environmentalism, national security and corruption. All of this stemmed from the VCP's alleged collusion with China. In combination with Vietnam's problems with corruption, this issue certainly led to a questioning of legitimacy by a vast sector of society, and therefore will have affected the regime's collective memory. The domestic currents would continue to grow, but it is evident that a purely economically driven approach to development was 'double-edged sword'. This would have very little direct effect on foreign policy in the meantime, but the currents would continue to grow.

Conclusion

Twenty years after Doi Moi had been implemented, the future looked bright for Vietnam. It successfully hosted the APEC summit, was about to join the WTO, and was playing a more prominent role in ASEAN. Five years later, however, the structural changes caused by Chinese

assertiveness and the 2008 financial crisis, along with the domestic undercurrents indirectly caused by twenty years of economic - but no political - reform meant that the VCP was in a more precarious situation than five years prior.

Adding to this complexity was the growing trade imbalance with China, reawakening the memories for Vietnamese policymakers of the country's previous dependency on the Soviet Union. The asymmetries in the relationship only complicated this further. Indeed from 2012 onwards, a plethora of articles, journals, and periodicals began speaking of Vietnam's dependency on China.¹³² This had both international and domestic implications.

Internationally it meant Vietnam would need to seek alternative trade networks to, at the very least, alleviate the rapid deficit it was creating with China. Furthermore, it would need to broaden defensive cooperation, making it clear that it was not aligning against China. This required a subtle but firm approach. Similarly, Chinese actions provoked nationalistic tendencies and provoked worrying protests.

The domestic undercurrents would grow stronger, and therefore a foreign policy that incorporated a broadened approach would lead to a greater sense of autonomy and balance amongst Vietnamese foreign relations. Jorn Dosch proclaimed that: "Vietnam's foreign policy is becoming affected by the input and demands from newly emerging groups and shifting structures of influences within the state-party apparatus."¹³³ Certainly, the collective memory of the Party will have been shaken by the fact that its legitimacy was being called into question - both in terms of its internal and external posturing.

Therefore, the Eleventh Party Congress would see Vietnam attempt to step its integration and broaden its cooperation even further. Furthermore, it would begin to implement a stronger framework to facilitate multidirectional foreign policy, promoting autonomy within the

international arena, whilst maintaining its commitment to integration and trade liberalisation.

These mechanisms will be explored in the following chapter.

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Chapter 6

Mechanisms of Vietnamese Multidirectional Foreign Policy

By 2011, multidirectionalism had gone from strength-to-strength, leading to improved bilateral ties, enhanced engagement within international organizations, and greater integration into the international political economy. As a result, economic development had continued to develop rapidly. By 2010, Vietnam's GDP stood at \$101.6 billion, 3.26 times higher than that of 2000.¹ It was labelled as a hallmark of how economic liberalisation can lift a country out of poverty. Yet as the previous chapter outlined, the 2006-2011 period saw a complicated internal and external situation develop. As a result, greater efforts were needed to bolster the VCP's ability to defend its national interests – continued stability to ensure economic development, protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and promoting laws – whilst implicitly maintaining the VCP's grip on power.

As such, the Eleventh Party Congress again re-affirmed Vietnam's commitment to multidirectionalism but stressed broader, extensive, and proactive measures to continue to diversify, multilateralise, and integrate into the international political economy. As such stronger framework for carrying this out were necessary. But what framework and mechanism would be put in place to fully broaden Vietnam's multidirectional approach? This is the question this culminating chapter seeks to ask. First it briefly outlines the developments at the Eleventh Party Congress and beyond, then examines Vietnam's proliferation of strategic partnerships, FTAs and proactive multilateralism as the key mechanisms for broadening its multidirectional approach.

The Eleventh Party Congress and Beyond

The Eleventh Party Congress Documents, speaking on foreign policy, marked a theme of continuation. It states that Vietnam wishes to:

Implement a foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, peace, cooperation and development; diversify relations, and be proactive about international integration' be a reliable friend, parent and a responsible member of the international community.... The tasks off foreign relation work are to maintain a peaceful environment and create favourable conditions for speeding up industrialization and modernization while defending independence sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity; to raise the country's status.²

However, two important points are to be noted. First a strong emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity was seen as a result of the complex nature of the world situation. Secondly, a strong emphasis on proactive integration meant that Vietnam needed work harder to improve the quality and depth of integration. The previous chapter demonstrated how complex the international and domestic situation had become for Vietnam. Rising tensions in the South China Sea, yet close, and certainly necessary, political and economic cooperation with China, exemplified this complexity. The anti-Chinese sentiment arising from discontent was also of considerable worry for the VCP. These things certainly asked questions about the VCP's ability to protect Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Carl Thayer has noted that the spread of anti-China sentiment had added a degree of complications to the legitimacy of the VCP.³

The Eleventh Party Congress made note of the "complicated and unpredictable developments."⁴ The same report also made not of "hostile forces" that stirred up "subversive unreserest" and "intensified peaceful evolution." These hostile could be interpreted as a signal to those rallying around the anti-Chinese narrative to pursue a pro-democracy based movement. Nevertheless, a subtle debate regarding the China issue from taking place. The Eleventh Party Congress also stated that:

The objectives of national defense and security are to firmly safeguard the Fatherland's independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, protect the Party, the State, the people and the socialist regime, maintain peace and political stability, ensure national security, social order and safety; proactively prevent and defeat all schemes of hostile forces against the revolutionary cause of our people.⁵

As such, a large portion of the congress highlighted the need to modernize the People's Army and People's Public Security forces and strengthen technology, industry, and infrastructure. Yet the Eleventh Party Congress also recognised the significant achievements of Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy claiming that it had "created a new position for the country," something that had brought about challenges in terms of economic development and protecting national independence.⁶ It had significantly broadened and strengthened external relations proactively engaged with the international community.

In recognition of Vietnam's proactive measures, the Eleventh Party Congress elevated integration to "proactive and positive international integration," with a key focus on diversity. In 2013 the politburo issued Resolution 22 which significantly broadened the scope of "proactive and positive" integration, focusing not only on the economy, but also areas of politics, defence, security, cultural, and social fields. Subsequently, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung issued Directive No. 15/CT-TTg which led to the establishment of a National Steering Committee on International Integration. This included two inter-agency steering committees, one dealing with integration in politics, security, and national defence. The other dealt with culture and society, science and technology, and education and training. Ultimately, Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy serves its national interest of maintaining a peaceful and stable environment, protecting national independence, sovereignty, and boosting Vietnam's position to bolster national construction and defence.

Strategic Partnerships

Strategic partnerships have proliferated since the turn of the millennium and like multidirectionalism, a multipolar world is conducive towards their formation. Strategic partnerships are goal driven rather than threat driven.⁷ They are comprehensive agreements that signify a long-lasting commitment by two actors to establish a close working relationship across a significant number of policy areas and do not invoke the need for an identified threat.⁸ Similarly, they are a bilateral means of deepening cooperation to tackle global problems stemming from non-traditional security threats and, to neutralise potential conflict areas. Vietnam targets strategic/comprehensive partnerships as a means to elevate Vietnam's relations and its standing in the international system, while taking advantage of cooperation to bolster national defence and construction, maintain peace, stability, and development in the world.⁹ These efforts are also not antagonising and represent Vietnam's commitment to peaceful solutions and cooperation as well as reflecting Vietnam's hedging strategy.

Within the Vietnamese foreign policy lexicon there exist several terms to denote the level and the amount of mechanisms to implement their partnerships. They are, in rising order of depth: comprehensive partnerships, strategic partnerships, extensive strategic partnerships, strategic-comprehensive partnerships and comprehensive-strategic cooperative partnerships.¹⁰ The difference in meaning between partnerships is rather blurred and Vietnamese foreign policy makers themselves have yet to come up with a clear definition.¹¹ The contents of each partnership varies from partnership to partnership, with comprehensive partnerships generally being less dense in nature. In coordination with its diverse, integrated, and more proactive foreign policy, Vietnam, since 2001, has established strategic/comprehensive partnerships with sixteen different countries and upgraded three existing strategic partnerships to extensive strategic partnerships or strategic-comprehensive partnerships. These agreements are broad,

comprehensive agreements that facilitate cooperation across a wide array of areas such as economic, political, diplomatic, defence and security, scientific, and cultural.

Table 1 Vietnam's Strategic Partners¹²

| Country | Partnership Status | Date Agreed |
|----------------|---|---|
| China | Comprehensive-strategic cooperative partnership | 2008 (renamed in 2013) |
| Russia | Strategic-comprehensive partnership | 2001 (initially a strategic partnership) 2012 |
| India | Strategic-comprehensive partnership | 2007 (initially a strategic partnership) 2016 |
| Japan | Extensive strategic partnership | 2006 (initially a strategic partnership) 2014 |
| Spain | Strategic partnership | 2009 |
| South Korea | Strategic partnership | 2009 |
| The UK | Strategic partnership | 2010 |
| Germany | Strategic partnership | 2011 |
| Italy | Strategic partnership | 2013 |
| France | Strategic partnership | 2013 |
| Thailand | Strategic partnership | 2013 |
| Indonesia | Strategic partnership | 2013 |

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--|
| Singapore | Strategic partnership | 2013 |
| The Philippines | Strategic partnership | 2015 |
| Australia | Strategic Partnership | 2009 (initially a comprehensive partnership) 2018 |
| The US | Comprehensive partnership | 2013 |

Vietnam currently maintains comprehensive partnerships with eleven countries, most notably the United States and Australia. Australia initially committed to a comprehensive strategic partnership, rejecting the term strategic, in 2009. In 2010 a plan of action was agreed upon to provide a framework within which cooperation could be identified.¹³ Vietnam-Australia relations failed to take-off after this period until March 2015 when Nguyen Tan Dung, on a visit to Australia, witnessed the signing of a Declaration of Enhancing Australia-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership. They also expressed their view to establishing a strategic partnership sometime in the future. This came to fruition in March 2018. The agreement contained five areas of cooperation: political cooperation, economic and development cooperation, defensive and legal, cultural and technological, and regional and international cooperation.¹⁴

The landmark US-Vietnam comprehensive partnership was agreed in 2013. The partnership outlines five areas of cooperation: maritime capacity building, economic engagement, climate change and environmental issues, education cooperation, and promoting respect for human rights. This partnership confirms Vietnam as a geostrategic player in the region. Although the partnership also contains a clause on human rights, a traditional sticking

point of Vietnam-US relations, there was no mention of human rights abuses during Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc's meeting with Trump in May 2017.¹⁵

Vietnam has entered into strategic partnerships with five different European countries. In 2009, after President Nguyen Minh Triet's visit, Spain and Vietnam reached an agreement to cooperate in politics, economics, culture, and education. Although Vietnam-Spain bilateral trade reached \$2.5 billion in 2014, Spanish State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Ignacio Ybanez Rubio admits that their partnership is yet to reach its full potential.¹⁶ In 2011, Vietnam established a strategic partnership with Germany, designed to strengthen political, economic and cultural relations, and development cooperation. Since 2013 there has been a narrower focus on education and training, energy, and the environment.¹⁷ Vietnam also signed a strategic partnership with Italy in 2013 in which they strengthened cooperation in areas of politics, global and regional issues, economic relations, development assistance, cultural, education, and scientific and technological cooperation, and defence and security.¹⁸

Arguably the two most dense and important European strategic partnerships are with the United Kingdom and France. Vietnam and the United Kingdom agreed a strategic partnership in 2010 to cooperate in seven key areas: political, global, and regional issues, trade and investment, sustainable socio-economic development, education and training, science and technology, security and defence, and people-to-people links.¹⁹ The year 2015 also saw the first visit of a British Prime Minister to Vietnam and in April 2016, British Foreign Minister Phillip Hammond met with his Vietnamese counterpart to discuss greater cooperation in education including the establishment of a Vietnam-UK Institute in Da Nang. In June 2016, Minister of Defence Earl Howe met with Deputy Defence Minister Nguyen Chi Vinh to discuss future defence cooperation.²⁰ Furthermore, on a visit to Paris in 2013, Nguyen Tan Dung signed a joint statement on a Vietnam-France strategic partnership that aimed to cooperate in the fields of politics, national defence-security, economics and trade, investment, development,

culture, education, scientific research, and law.²¹ A state visit by French President Francois Hollande in September 2016 reaffirmed the two countries' commitment to strengthen relations and cooperation.

Vietnam has signed strategic partnerships with four ASEAN partners: Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines. The first was Thailand in 2013 after Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong established a strategic partnership with five main pillars: political relations, defence and security cooperation, economic cooperation, social-cultural cooperation, and regional and international cooperation.²² Almost simultaneously, President Truong Tan Sang visited Indonesia to establish a strategic partnership. As well as improving cooperation in the fields of water, food, and energy security, the partnership aimed to create regular opportunities for dialogue exchanges regarding regional security issues, namely territorial disputes in the South China Sea.²³ Given that Indonesia is not a claimant state, although it has been embroiled in disputes with China regarding excursions into its exclusive economic zone, Vietnam's support for a peaceful resolution to the issue was bolstered. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties, Singapore and Vietnam signed a strategic partnership in September 2013. This strategic partnership strengthened cooperation in five key areas: political, economic cooperation, security and defence cooperation, bilateral cooperation, and cooperation in bilateral forums.²⁴ Vietnam's latest strategic partnership is with the Philippines, which it signed in November 2015. This strategic partnership agreed to enhance political, economic, defence and security, maritime and ocean affairs, scientific and technical, socio-cultural, and multilateral cooperation.²⁵

In 2009 Vietnam began a strategic partnership with South Korea after then President Truong Tan Sang's visit to Seoul. The two countries expanded cooperation in politics, science and technology, judicial, economics, trade, and security.²⁶ These relations were further strengthened economically when Vietnam and South Korea signed a free trade agreement that

was put into place in December 2015. The two countries also established a ministerial-level joint committee and subcommittees on goods trades, customs, trade defence, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and technical barriers to trade.²⁷ Japan became the first country to enhance its strategic partnership to an extensive strategic partnership. The declaration contains sixty-nine points and seven areas of cooperation that reflect the two countries' political trust and deep development of bilateral relations. Building on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Vietnamese and Japanese defence ministers in 2011, this strategic partnership created enhanced areas of exchanges for military and defence personnel.²⁸

Russia was Vietnam's first strategic partner back in 2001 and in 2012 the two countries upgraded their relations to that of a comprehensive strategic partnership, focusing on seven areas: oil and gas cooperation, energy cooperation for hydro and nuclear power, military equipment and technology, trade and investment, science and technology, education and training, as well as culture and tourism. Since Russia is Vietnam's biggest provider of military equipment and technology, this helps Vietnam modernise and upgrade its navy and military. Vietnam's first planned Nuclear Power Plant, Ninh Thuan-1, was largely Russian financed and over 300 students studied in Russia in preparation for this project. However, the National Assembly ultimately cancelled this plan in November 2016, citing economic reasons.²⁹ But the close cooperation between Vietnam and Russia signalled the depth and degree of cooperative measures in place between the two countries. On a brief visit to Hanoi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc and announced the upgrading of the India-Vietnam strategic partnership to that of a comprehensive strategic partnership, a title previously only held with Russia.³⁰ The visit of Modi also involved a \$500 million line of credit for defence cooperation, providing a boost to Vietnam's physical military capabilities.³¹

Given the historical and geopolitical significance of China, a strong friendship is of paramount importance. Therefore, its partnership is labelled as a comprehensive-strategic cooperative partnership. This partnership was established in 2008 (originally as a strategic partnership that was subsequently upgraded a year later to a strategic cooperative partnership and then renamed to its current title in 2013). This partnership is a “dense network of party, state, defence, and multilateral measures” to support this highly valuable, yet at times strained, relationship.³² The Joint Steering Committee, set up by the partnership, has met nine times since its inception. This committee contributes to healthy relations by acting as a platform for consensus on a range of subjects. Similarly, Vietnam and China have conducted an annual Border Defense Friendly Exchange since 2014. Deputy Defence Minister Nguyen Chi Vinh hailed the program on its third border exchange in March 2016, noting its ability to “strengthen mutual political trust.”³³

However, the fourth exchange was abruptly cancelled after territorial issues pertaining to the South China Sea were allegedly raised. According to Carl Thayer, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, General Fan Changlong asked Vietnamese officials to cease drilling in several areas of the South China Sea to which a Vietnamese official strongly defended Vietnam’s sovereignty.³⁴ As a result, Fan left Hanoi and cancelled the meeting. The event led to a highly charged diplomatic spat in which China, allegedly, threatened the Vietnamese ambassador with military force if Vietnam did not stop drilling. Vietnam, wary of its economic dependence on China as well as uncertainty regarding Trump’s commitment to the region, appeared to back down.³⁵ This event not only undermined political trust between the two countries but yet again exposed the contradictions that exist in Vietnam’s relations with China.

Ideological loyalty means a close relationship with China is inevitable and falls firmly in line with ensuring the regime’s protected values are secured.³⁶ Economic dependence also

means disputes are best resolved peacefully. Yet as demonstrated, China is Vietnam's principle threat towards its sovereignty. Vietnam's strategic objectives are fostering cooperation, economic development, and a peaceful environment while at the same time maintaining its territorial integrity. Recent events bring home the importance of a multidirectional foreign policy and Vietnam no doubt wishes to cooperate with China as much as possible, yet at the same time emphasise its friendly relations with all so that its objectives are maintained.

Ultimately strategic partnerships are multi-faceted agreements that deepen bilateral relations. Similarly, they offer a wide range of benefits for Vietnam and its partners, all the way from economic development, to greater investment opportunities, to enhanced security. It is important to note that strategic partnerships incorporate defence aspects, defence agreements, and areas of security cooperation. These offer Vietnam opportunities to boost its capabilities in a non-threatening way; something that allows Vietnam to strive towards its objective of ensuring the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity without jeopardizing its relations with China. In fact, since the Twelfth Party Congress in January 2016 Vietnam has identified acceleration of its defensive and security cooperation as part of its strategy for integration by 2020.³⁷

The diverse array of strategic partnerships means that Vietnam is not over-reliant on one particular partner. Carl Thayer states that: "The purpose of strategic partnerships is to promote comprehensive cooperation across a number of areas and to give each major power equity in Vietnam's stability and development in order to ensure Vietnam's non-alignment and strategic autonomy."³⁸ The diversity in its relations also dampens, or at the very least cushions, potential uncertainties and potential areas of conflict. Although Donald Trump's election in 2016 cast uncertainty as to America's commitment to the region, Vietnamese Prime-Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc will have been re-assured by his May, 2017 visit to the White House. The two countries issued a joint statement for enhancing the comprehensive partnership in which

they pledged to: “Continue high-level contacts and exchanges of delegations, including through regular dialogue between the US Secretary of State and Vietnam’s Minister for Foreign Affairs to discuss measures to enhance the bilateral Comprehensive Partnership.”³⁹ The statement also re-affirmed the importance of freedom of navigation partols in addition to both countries commitment to resolving territorial disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law. Given the ability of strategic partnerships to elevate and diversify Vietnam’s bilateral relations, providing more autonomy in the process, strategic partnerships thus represent a mechanism of a multidirectional foreign policy.

Trade Agreements

Since Doi Moi Vietnam has no longer defined security solely as defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity but has expanded this concept to that of comprehensive security, one that incorporates economic, political, and social factors as well.⁴⁰ Boosting these factors also creates social and political stability. Since the 2000’s Vietnam has had impressive growth rates with its GDP usually hovering around 6 percent.⁴¹ This has also led to a significant drop in poverty with Vietnam often touted as a success story for poverty alleviation.⁴² In 2009, Vietnam became a middle-income country with a per capita GDP over \$1,200.⁴³ Economic development is a core strategic interest for Vietnam and a multidirectional foreign policy helps Vietnam to achieve this through trade agreements. Vietnam is also keen to avoid becoming economically dependent on one country, as it had done during the Cold War when more than 90 percent of its trade was conducted with the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries.⁴⁴ The Ministry of Industry and Trade has outlined trade agreements as a “platform to further open to the outside, speed up domestic reforms, and serve as an effective approach to integrate into the global economy and strengthen economic cooperation.”⁴⁵ Trade deals are a key component of fostering integration, cooperation, and promoting economic growth. They have

had and will continue to have, a significant impact on Vietnam's development, which will, in turn, contribute towards Vietnamese strategic goals.⁴⁶

In recent years, Vietnam has put into place numerous trade agreements at the bi and multilateral level. What this demonstrates is that Vietnam has actively, and consistently pursued trade agreements, deals that reap a lot of economic benefits and act as a mechanism for pursuing a multidirectional foreign policy. Vietnam's current biggest trading partner is China with trade in 2015 valued roughly around \$95 billion.⁴⁷ China is also Vietnam's most important trading partner, given its geostrategic location and pure economic size. Since the ASEAN-China free trade agreement was signed in 2000, imports from China have risen from 7.3 per cent to 30 per cent of total imports, and exports have risen from 7.4 per cent to 11 per cent of total exports.⁴⁸ Vietnam relies heavily on China for the import of cheap raw materials that contribute towards Vietnam's vibrant textile industries. Worryingly, as the vast gap in growth between exports and imports to China shows, is that Vietnam's trade deficit with China has grown remarkably in recent years. For example, it reached \$32.3 billion in 2015.⁴⁹

The lop-sided nature of Vietnam-China trade relations opens Vietnam to potential unfair trading practices as well as giving China considerable economic influence over Vietnam.⁵⁰ Vietnam does not want to repeat the mistake it made during the Cold War of becoming economically over dependent on one power. In line with its multidirectional foreign policy Vietnam is developing trade agreements with other countries to reduce its dependence on China, most notably the US, Japan, South Korea, the EU, Russia, and Central Asian states among others.

Table 2 Vietnam's current bilateral trade agreements (Sally 2013).⁵¹

| Trading Partners | Nature of Agreement | Status of Agreement as of December 2016 |
|--|--------------------------------|--|
| Chile | Free Trade Agreement | Signed and in effect |
| Japan | Economic Partnership Agreement | Signed and in effect |
| South Korea | Free Trade Agreement | Signed and in effect |
| The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (12 members) | Regional Trade Agreement | Signed but not in effect |
| The Eurasian Customs Union (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia) | Free Trade Agreement | Signed and in effect |
| EU | Free Trade Agreement | Signed but not in effect |
| Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (16 members) | Regional Trade Agreement | Negotiations ongoing |
| The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) | Free Trade Agreement | Negotiations ongoing |

| | | |
|--------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Israel | Free Trade Agreement | Negotiations ongoing |
|--------|----------------------|----------------------|

During the 2000's, Vietnam's most significant trade agreement was the US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement which came into force in 2001.⁵² After five years, the amount of trade between the two countries increased significantly, diversified Vietnam's exports, and helped pave the way for complete integration when it joined the WTO in 2007. Unfortunately for Vietnam, the recently concluded Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is essentially a dead deal given Donald Trump's withdrawal shortly after his inauguration. Vietnam was potentially one of the biggest winners from the TPP. This twelve-block trade deal would have offered a host of benefits for Vietnam, such as significantly boosting exports, in particular for the clothing industry and would have helped enforce much needed structural changes to state-owned enterprises while boosting Vietnam-US trade relations.⁵³ In September 2016 Vietnamese Minister for Planning and Investment Nguyen Chi Dung urged outgoing President Obama to ratify the agreement, showing how important a deal it was to Vietnam.⁵⁴

Currently Vietnam has a trade surplus with the US in excess of \$32 billion.⁵⁵ Even after Trump's election, however, Vietnam took the diplomatic initiative to negate any potential backlash from Trump's bellicose statements on countries holding a large trade surplus with the US. They utilised a Washington lobbying firm to seek numerous pathways to Trump, setting up a phone call between Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Trump a month before the US President took office and sending the Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh on a trip to Washington in April 2017 where he met with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.⁵⁶ Similarly, trade featured heavily on Nguyen Xuan Phuc's May visit to Washington with the two countries affirming their commitment to promoting bilateral trade.

Nguyen Xuan Phuc has indicated that TPP or not, Vietnam will continue on its path towards increased economic integration and that other trade agreements remain strategically in place.⁵⁷ Tellingly, a revived TPP deal without the US has subsequently risen from the ashes of the original TPP; the Comprehensive Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The deal, despite some degree of hesitation from Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, was agreed in principle at the 2017 APEC summit in Da Nang. Although a watered down version of the TPP (22 provisions of the original TPP provision have been suspended), it was formally agreed upon by all 11 countries at a meeting in Tokyo the following month. Then in March 2018 all members met in Santiago to formally sign this historic agreement.⁵⁸

The CPTPP has been labelled as progressive so to push back against the rising anti-free trade narrative developed in the Trumponian era. Certainly this is in Vietnam's interests given its commitment to trade liberalisation. The agreement has been touted to lead to better business opportunities, and access to wider markets. A World Bank report claimed that the CPTPP would, even by conservative estimates, boost Vietnamese GDP by 1.1% by 2030.⁵⁹ The CPTPP also enhanced opportunities for bilateral engagement. It is telling that shortly after the agreement both Vietnam and Australia agreed to up their comprehensive partnership to a strategic partnership.

Regardless, Vietnam has various trade agreements in place that will supplement any failure of TPP. In fact, Vietnam is a member of the sixteen country Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). RCEP member states account for roughly 3.4 billion people and has a combined GDP of \$21.4 trillion.⁶⁰ Negotiations are ongoing and likely to carry on for the foreseeable future, leading to greater regional integration.

The EU and Vietnam have pushed ahead with their efforts to put together a FTA, which was achieved in December 2015. Ratification is due in 2017 and implementation scheduled for

2018. The EU is Vietnam's second largest export market with exports increasing from 5.59 percent in 2005 to 29.9 percent of total exports in 2015.⁶¹ The trade agreement will eliminate 99% of all tariffs along with containing strict rules of origins to allay fears of China using Vietnam as a conduit. In tandem with this, Vietnam and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) have been holding negotiations to establish an FTA with the thirteenth round of negotiations taking place in October 2015. The EFTA has indicated its willingness to recognise Vietnam's market economy status. Currently, WTO members are not required to recognise Vietnam as a market economy, and therefore reserve the right to subject Vietnam to temporary trade barriers.⁶² The conferring of market economy status onto Vietnam would bring about significant trade benefits as well as prestige.

The Vietnam EU-FTA does include a clause on human rights. However, with Vietnamese leaders being hostile to accusations of human rights abuses from the EU and generally dismissive of the EU normative power to influence this, there is little perceived threat to domestic interference.⁶³ It is also worth mentioning that this is not the first time the EU has included a human rights clause in a trade deal with Vietnam. Despite much reluctance from Hanoi, the 1995 EU-Vietnam Comprehensive Framework Agreement contained Vietnam's first bilateral treaty to include human rights. The inclusion came about largely due to its political clout, much of which is on the wane in recent years given the Euro Crises, Brexit, and the rise of Eurosceptic parties across Europe.⁶⁴ This does not mean to say that human rights could not be a sticking point. In fact, Vietnam's heavy handed response to political dissidents since the Twelfth Party Congress in 2016 has raised the eyebrows of the EU parliament, and human rights groups who lobby to reject the deal.⁶⁵

Similarly, diplomatic relations with Germany, arguably the most influential member of the EU, took a turn for the worse in August 2017. Germany accused the Vietnamese Secret Service of abducting Trinh Xuan Thanh, a former Petro Vietnam Official who fled to Germany

after being charged in connection with causing \$150 million in losses at the state owned enterprise. Thanh later appeared on Vietnamese TV proclaiming he had come back by his own will but Germany still demanded his return.⁶⁶ In March 2018, Thanh was sentenced to life imprisonment for embezzlement and economic mismanagement.⁶⁷ Regardless of whether or not the event occurred the way German authorities say it did, certainly the event significantly impacted German-Vietnam relations. It led to the suspension of the German-Vietnam Strategic Partnership. It has also led to a strengthening of the anti-human rights discourse within EU member states.⁶⁸

Still, multidirectionalism is designed to increase autonomy through diversity, therefore, much like the TPP, the EU-Vietnam agreement is not the be-all and end-all trade deal. Japan and Vietnam agreed on an Economic Partnership Agreement in December 2008 with the implementation coming into force in October 2009.⁶⁹ This Economic Partnership boosted cooperation in goods, services, investment, business climate improvement, and technical transfer. This agreement also agreed to exempt taxes on 92% of the goods exchanged between the two countries after coming into force. Since the partnership was signed, the amount of Japanese investment into Vietnam has steadily increased with transportation equipment and electric machinery for the manufacturing centre being two of the largest areas of investment. Vietnamese garment industries have also benefited immensely from access to the Japanese market, contributing to Vietnam's rising trade surplus with Japan. The 2013 trade surplus stood at \$1.8 billion.⁷⁰ Certain technical barriers to trade, along with Vietnamese products not satisfying Japanese safety requirements, do exist. Despite these barriers, however, Vietnam-Japan trade relations have benefited immensely from their Economic Partnership Agreement. With further tariffs scheduled to be cut during the period 2015-2019, more benefits will ensue; benefits that greatly contribute to Vietnam's economic development and its economic vitality.

South Korea and Vietnam signed an FTA in May 2015 with the treaty being ratified by both countries domestic legislatures and coming into force in December of the same year. This trade agreement will boost trade and cooperation between the two countries. Trade between them stood at \$28 billion in 2014.⁷¹ The FTA will increase the competitiveness of Vietnamese exports to South Korea significantly. The trade deal will also work towards cooperation in the following areas: tariff elimination and reduction, investment, intellectual property, customs facilitation, trade safeguards, technical barriers to trade, e-commerce, competition, and institutional and economic cooperation.⁷² Given that South Korea is constantly ranked amongst the top three investors in Vietnam, the liberalising of trade between the two countries will assist Vietnam's economic development to a considerable degree.

After eight years of negotiation, the Vietnam-Eurasia Economic Union FTA (EEU) was signed on May 29, 2015.⁷³ This trade agreement sets out a \$10 billion trade target and will significantly bolster Vietnam's nascent automobile industry, increase cooperation in the oil sector, and stimulate Russian investment into the country. Much has changed since Vietnam relied almost entirely on Soviet assistance during the Cold War. By 1996 Russian investment into Vietnam had fallen to one-tenth of what it used to be. Trade gradually picked up during the 2000s and hit the \$1 billion mark in 2005.⁷⁴ Still, trade between Vietnam and Russia in 2015 represented \$4 billion, a meagre amount when compared to Vietnam's larger trading partners outlined above.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, this trade agreement will seek to rectify the lack of Russian investment in Vietnam and ASEAN in general. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has even touted the Vietnam EEU as a "pilot project for Russian trade liberalisation between Russia and ASEAN and adds that Vietnam can act as a "bridge to ASEAN."⁷⁶ Vietnam-Russian trade relations, in addition to relations in general, look set to grow and given Russia's "pivot to the East," Vietnam can be a leading facilitator in boosting further integration.

Global and regional powers are not the only countries that Vietnam has sought trade agreements with. The Vietnam-Chile FTA came into force in January 2014. Vietnam's first FTA with a Latin American country entails provisions on facilitating market access, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers, etc. Vietnam's textile industry, which represented an export revenue of \$18 billion in 2015, received an immediate boost from this agreement after textile exports to Chile received an instant tariff removal.⁷⁷ Other areas that received a tariff cut include seafood, coffee, tea, computers, and computer components. Chile could potentially be the first point of access for Vietnam into a much wider Latin-American market.⁷⁸ Vietnam is also currently in negotiations with Israel to sign an FTA.⁷⁹ The first round of negotiations was held in March 2016. Trade between the two countries stood at \$1.7 billion in 2015.

Since Vietnam monumentally became a WTO member in January 2007, trade deals have become a prominent part of Vietnam's proactive integration effort. Trade deals bring a host of economic benefits for Vietnam and help it achieve its development goals, provide boosts to its nascent industries, and increase investment into the country. Trade deals similarly help offset the large trade deficit that Vietnam has accumulated with China during the past century. Importantly, however, they complement Vietnam's strong economic relationship with China rather than supplement it. Trade deals significantly diversify Vietnam's economic outlook, helping it develop further and also prevent it from being too over reliant on any one particular economy for its development. Furthermore, a diverse approach to trade agreements can alleviate the potential problems of normative pressure stemming from trade deals associated with the US and EU. Given the enhanced diversity, vast amounts of economic benefits, and ability to prevent Vietnam from being subject to unfair trading practices, trade deals play a prominent role in Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy.

Multilateralism

Foreign and Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam, Pham Binh Minh has stated that multilateralism deserves to "have a higher place" among Vietnamese foreign policy. He adds, "growing globalisation and the emergence of challenges on a global scale has fostered a greater need for countries, both large and small, to put into place multilateral framework."⁸⁰ Multilateralism bolsters Vietnam's voice in international affairs, wins it vital political support, and contributes to the peaceful management of disputes, and brings various economic benefits that contribute to the development of the country. Vietnam's multilateral approach extends into participation in various multilateral organisations, this article will focus on Vietnam's role in ASEAN, its enhanced contributions to the UN, its role as APEC Chair, and its participation in the Shangri-La Dialogue. Multilateralism is, therefore, a key mechanism of a multidirectional foreign policy.

For Vietnam, it is clear that enhanced participation within ASEAN allows it to gain strength in numbers and that it enhances its capabilities to hedge against China, yet also strengthen its proactive and diverse approach to multilateralization. As the previous Chapter noted, Vietnam hosted the sixteenth ASEAN summit meeting entitled "Towards the ASEAN community: From Vision to Action," which signalled ASEAN's intent to forge a close-knit political-security, economic, and socio-cultural community. This plan of action came to fruition in 2015 with the launch of the ASEAN Community in December 2015. This strengthens solidarity amongst members, deepens Vietnam's continued successful integration into the organisation, and gives both ASEAN and Vietnam a stronger voice particularly in its dealings with China.⁸¹ For example, Vietnam has been an active member of the annual ASEAN Chiefs of Navy Meetings, which focuses on fostering cooperation amongst interoperability among ASEAN Navies

At the heart of the ASEAN community are an ASEAN Free Trade Area. The economic importance of ASEAN is vital for Vietnam as it attempts to reduce its dependence on China and seek diversification in its economic partnerships. ASEAN represents around 15 per cent of both imports and exports for the Vietnamese economy.⁸² Additionally, with predictions that ASEAN GDP will surpass that of Japan in 2030, there are certainly a plethora of economic benefits in addition to the political and security ones.⁸³ On November 22, 2015 ASEAN formally established the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) as part of its ASEAN Community initiative, focused around four pillars:

1. A single market and production base
2. A highly competitive economic region
3. A region of equitable economic development
4. A region fully integrated into the global economy.⁸⁴

An ADB report assessing the progress prior to the formations of the AEC stipulated that that ASEAN has enjoyed successes in lowering tariffs, liberalising investment and capital flows through signing the Comprehensive Investment Agreement in 2012, strengthening intellectual property rights via the ASEAN Intellectual Property Rights Action Plan 2011-2015, and signing a number of FTAs that signalled ASEAN's further integration into the global economy. However, the report noted that considerable room for improvement exists, namely in reducing non-tariff barriers, promoting migrant workers' rights and reducing their labour movement restrictions, fostering greater cooperation amongst members, and reducing the development gap that has constantly plagued ASEAN throughout its history.⁸⁵ In general, an ASEAN economic community has the potential to create a deeply integrated and highly cohesive ASEAN economy that could support sustained high economic growth and resilience even in the face of global economic shocks and volatilities. It would bring considerable

economic benefits to Vietnam and provide additional alleviation to the lop-sided nature of Vietnam-China trade.

Vietnam remains committed to the peaceful management of disputes in the South China Sea. It is active in its commitment to solving the issue in compliance with UNCLOS, utilizing bilateral channels when a dispute is between two parties, and multilateral channels when disputes involve a third party. ASEAN has provided Vietnam with greater collective diplomatic power in managing the issue, both with China and with claimant states within ASEAN.⁸⁶ Vietnam became a member of the inaugural ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994 before monumentally joining ASEAN in 1995. Despite its latecomer status, however, Vietnam quickly integrated into the ASEAN community and has evolved to be a dynamic member. Its membership is considered a “turning point” in Vietnam’s perception of the region and how it viewed the world.⁸⁷

In November 2002, ASEAN and China agreed the DOC which strategically committed both ASEAN and China towards a peaceful solution that incorporates the principles of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.⁸⁸ However, calls to establish a more binding commitment that restrains and binds China from taking unilateral action in the South China Sea have largely been ignored by China. The need for a binding code of conduct has intensified since 2009 with Chinese assertiveness becoming bolder.

Nevertheless, throughout the 2000s ASEAN successfully implemented a series of “dominance denial acts” that prevented a rising China from asserting its dominance over the organisation with the added aim of hedging against Chinese behaviour.⁸⁹ These acts included the inclusion of India, Australia, and New Zealand into the East Asian Summit that began in 2005 with the blessings of Japan. The summit was enlarged to include Russia and the US from

the sixth summit in 2011 with the US and Russia first participating as guests when Vietnam hosted the fifth Summit in October 2010.

Additionally, China had long been pushing for a China-ADMM but ASEAN resisted such overtures and instead created the ADMM Plus Eight, which included Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the United States. Vietnam hosted the inaugural ADMM-Plus Eight meeting in October 2010 with the objectives of enhancing regional peace and stability, promoting mutual trust, and contributing to the realisation of an ASEAN security community. Still, the China-ADMM has been held informally on the sidelines of the ADMM Plus Eight since 2011.⁹⁰ Additionally, the US has hosted two Defence Forums with ASEAN Defence Ministers. The inaugural U.S.-ASEAN Defense Forum was held in April 2014 in Honolulu after then U.S. Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel extended an invitation at the 2013 Shangri-La Dialogue. China certainly made note of this; it hosted, for the first time in China, a China-ASEAN Informal Defense Ministers' Meeting in October 2015. At this meeting, China put forth a five-point proposal to boost security and defence cooperation between the two sides.⁹¹ October 2016 also saw a US-ASEAN Defense Ministers' Informal Meeting held in Honolulu.⁹² The simultaneity of these events is worth noting as ASEAN attempts to deepen security cooperation with major powers.

The hedging strategy of ASEAN has led to small breakthroughs in the organisation's attempts to peacefully manage the South China Sea dispute and establish a code of conduct there. The ASEAN Regional Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) – China meeting in Tianjin in July 2015 saw the establishment of a hotline between their respective foreign ministers in order to quickly and smoothly handle disputes. More recently, progress has been made in setting up a code of conduct (COC) in the South China Sea with China indicating its willingness to negotiate one since mid-2016.⁹³ Following this, China set a deadline for mid-2017 for drafting a framework COC, something that was completed ahead of schedule. In August, China and

ASEAN agreed to adopt the framework at the ASEAN Plus 1 meeting in Manila.⁹⁴ Despite question marks surrounding whether the COC will be legally binding or not, the framework will serve as the basis for formal discussions, expected in November 2017 after the ASEAN Plus China Summit meeting.

As part of its efforts to be a more proactive member of the UN, Vietnam set up a Peacekeeping Centre in February 2014 to coordinate, train, and evaluate peacekeeping missions. Shortly after the centre's foundation, and for the first time in its history, Vietnam sent officials to participate in a UN internal peacekeeping mission in South Sudan.⁹⁵ In March 2015, Deputy Minister of National Defence General Nguyen Chi Vinh led a Vietnamese delegation to the first ever United Nations Chiefs of Defence Conference at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Hervé Ladsous, UN Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, noted Vietnam's determination to join peacekeeping operations.⁹⁶ At the same event, Vietnam's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Nguyen Phuong Nga, registered Vietnam for UNSAS, a two-way information sharing system that better educates member states and the UN on the resources, information, and financial situations in order to smoothly facilitate peacekeeping operations.

By 2017 the number of officers sent on peacekeeping missions had grown to twelve with Vietnam eager to increase the number to nineteen by 2018. In fact, the UN has allocated two new positions for Vietnam, allowing one intelligence analyst officer and one military observer to join operations in the Central African Republic as part of Vietnam's attempts to deepen its involvement in peacekeeping operations.⁹⁷ Vietnam hopes to set up a field hospital in South Sudan by early 2018. Vietnam has also worked closely with bilateral partners to organise workshops and training for its officers to bolster their skills and preparation for future engagement in peacekeeping operations. In November 2015 Vietnam and France organised a two-day conference to share their experiences in the UN Peacekeeping Operations. In addition,

the British Council has been providing English training to Vietnamese peacekeeping officers as part of the Defence Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding between Vietnam and the UK.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, Vietnam and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Peacekeeping Cooperation in April 2015 aimed at stimulating further collaboration between the two armies with numerous meetings on peacekeeping cooperation being held since.⁹⁹

Vietnam has ultimately shown its willingness to proactively engage in UN peacekeeping missions. Its intentions have been backed up by concrete measures with further deepened cooperation likely to continue. Additionally, Vietnam was also elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Economic and Social Council for the second time in its history, the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, serves as a member of the UNESCO Executive Board (2015-2019), and seeking to become a member of the UN Security Council in 2020-2021.¹⁰⁰

The APEC region represents a vast amount of Vietnam's foreign trade, 80 percent of FDI comes from APEC countries and Vietnam's trade with APEC countries totalled around \$146 billion in 2016.¹⁰¹ After joining APEC in 1998, Vietnam has achieved substantial economic growth and since 2006 began to be a more active member of the organisation. In 2006 Vietnam was, for the first time, the APEC chair in which it successfully hosted the APEC Ministers' Meeting. Since then it has hosted various committee chairmanship positions, such as the chairman of the budget and management committee in 2007, vice chairman of the health working group from 2009 to 2010 and chairman of the working group on emergency preparedness from 2012 to 2013.

Vietnam successfully hosted APEC leaders meeting in November 2017. As chair of the 2017 APEC Summit, Pham Binh Minh attended the 2017 G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Bonn, Germany. He used the opportunity to call for the adherence to international law and

the promotion of multilateralism. He emphasised the need for cooperation in a complex world full of complex problems. He stated that despite Vietnam's modest resources it has tried to positively contribute towards international organisations, notably the UN peacekeeping missions and ASEAN, all of which is key to peacefully resolving disputes, he added.¹⁰² Minh believes that economic growth has put Vietnam in a better position to contribute more to APEC and its contributions thus far certainly demonstrate Vietnam's commitment to multilateralism. Being the host of the APEC Summit allows for Vietnam to demonstrate its commitment to multilateralism and gives it a platform for pursuing its political goals.¹⁰³

Certainly, the APEC allowed Vietnam to demonstrate its cooperative approach to foreign relations. Notable events included the CPTPP agreement, Donald Trump and President Tran Dai Quang reaffirming the Comprehensive Partnerships between the two countries, along with Vietnam welcoming world leaders such as Xi Jinping, Shinzo Abe, and Vladimir Putin. Despite the contrasting nature of speeches given by Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, Vietnam proclaimed that it brought a balanced approach to the summit to ensure diplomacy and its national interests prevailed.¹⁰⁴

Proactive engagement in regard to security has taken place via the Shangri-La Dialogue. This is an inter-governmental security think tank forum held annually. Defence ministers of over 28 states attend it each year. Vietnam obtained full ministerial status in 2009 and since then has been proactively engaged in the organisation. Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung gave a keynote address at the opening session of the conference on May 31, 2013 in which he called for the need for "strategic trust for the sake of peace, cooperation, and prosperity in the Asian region." He added that countries, big or small, must "build their relations on the basis of equality and mutual respect and, at a higher level."¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, strategic trust can be fostered through multilateral forums and adherence to international laws and ASEAN's core principle of consensus.

Exactly one year on from Dung's Speech, and whilst the HS-981 incident was on-going, Defence Minister General Phung Quang Thanh addressed the conference by stating that China must "immediately withdraw its drilling rig" and "join talks with Vietnam to maintain peace, stability and friendship between the two countries."¹⁰⁶ On the sidelines of the meeting, Thanh also held bilateral meetings with counterparts from the UK, France, and the US. The involved parties called for restraint and respect for international law to ease the on-going tensions. At the 2017 forum, Deputy Defence Minister Nguyen Chi Vinh called on nations to "increase cooperation to settle differences and prevent conflicts."¹⁰⁷ Tran Viet Thai of the Vietnam Diplomatic Academy claimed that this sends a message that Vietnam conforms to the norms of international law.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile on the sidelines of the 2017 forum, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis held a meeting with representatives of ASEAN in which they called for greater commitment to the block, particularly through the ADMM Plus framework.¹⁰⁹

Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy seeks greater engagement with the international community whilst at the same time safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity in order to foster national construction. In line with this, Vietnam has sought broader and deeper cooperation at the multilateral level and has taken proactive steps to do this. ASEAN provides Vietnam with a greater political voice vis-a-vis China. Meanwhile, it has also taken steps to enhance its engagement with the UN, APEC, and the Shangri-La Dialogue to help it achieve its national interests. Doing so brings Vietnam political support, economic benefits, and eases security concerns.

Conclusion

Vietnam implements its multidirectional foreign policy through three key mechanisms: strategic/comprehensive partnerships, trade deals, and multilateralism. The strategic/comprehensive partnerships enhance cooperation bilaterally across a wide array of areas with pivotal partners, providing economic, political, and security benefits. While not

always being defence orientated, a large number of the strategic partnerships include defence arrangements that can counter an assertive China. The merits of cooperation are reaped and the risks are managed. Trade deals contribute to Vietnam's economic development, by bolstering national construction, support development goals, increase exports abroad, and attract investment into Vietnam. Maintaining a diverse portfolio of trade agreements also reduces dependence and lessens the economic leverage that China maintains over Vietnam. Meanwhile, multilateralism enhances Vietnam's bargaining power, particularly in relation to China, creates greater cohesion amongst ASEAN members, and brings immense economic benefits. Being proactive in ASEAN also allows Vietnam to safeguard the policy of non-intervention: which provides comfort to the regime.

Vietnam remains committed to ensuring a peaceful international environment that allows for cooperation in dealing with today's highly complex, integrated problems, further economic development, and the peaceful management disputes. China's recent assertiveness has injected greater importance into Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy given the asymmetries that exist in Vietnam-China relations. A multidirectional foreign policy offsets problems associated with such a relationship. Given Vietnam's strong determination not to be over-reliant on any one power, nor be drawn into a bipolar conflict, it is easy to see why Vietnam continues to pursue a multidirectional foreign policy.

Ultimately, Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy has developed significantly over the past thirty years. Since 2011, Vietnam has significantly deepened and broadened the scope of its cooperation via the three-key mechanisms outlined above. It has greatly contributed to the VCP's stated and implicit interests. Whilst it is still an evolving process it is easy to see that the benefits are continually being reinforced and that the collective memory of the Party as a whole will continue to be positively influenced by this policy.

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Chapter 7

Conclusion

This thesis sets out to answer the question ‘*Why does Vietnam continue to emphasize a multidirectional foreign policy and how does it implement it?*’ In doing so it adopted a constructivist outlook to complement previous studies that adopted a realist perspective.

Ultimately, a multidirectional foreign policy has given Vietnam a strong sense of international presence. The intertwining of domestic and structural benefits material furthered the countries national interests, and indeed contributed to the regime’s own self-interests. As such it has reinforced the Party’s legitimacy. It is therefore, easy to understand why Vietnam has continued to pursue such a policy. By tracing the evolution and learning involved with multidirectionalism, one can also see the impacts it has had on the collective memory of the Party. Memories such as reverting the crises it faced and becoming an economic success story, reversing diplomatic isolation, and boosting its international profile have all become associated with multidirectionalism. These in turn have reinforced the Party’s legitimacy and therefore we can answer why it continues to strengthen, emphasise, and implement such a policy.

In regards to the ‘how’ part of the question, it is clear that in recent years strategic partnerships, FTAs, and enhanced activities at the multi-lateral level have become a typical framework for Vietnam’s multidirectional foreign policy. A member of the Diplomatic Academy told the author that Vietnam’s multidirectional approach to foreign relations has been a case of incremental development. He noted that in order to pour a glass of water, you must first build the structure, then you can gradually fill it with liquid. Essentially Vietnam’s period throughout the nineties and early twenty-first century was building the glass. Since 2006, however, they have gradually poured more and more liquid into that glass.¹

Whilst a realist interpretation of Vietnam's multidirectional foreign policy origin boasts a strong degree of explanatory power, the continued adherence to multidirectionalism can lend itself to different interpretations. Certainly, this thesis set out to examine the thirty-year period since its inception by taking a holistic approach. Yet the time frame also examined the beginnings of multidirectionalism. The post-reunification period represented a failed attempt to implement a multidirectional foreign policy. Miscalculations led to missed opportunities to restore relations with the US. Meanwhile, the worsening of relations with China essentially drove the Vietnamese into the arms of the Soviet Union, losing a substantial amount of autonomy. This, along with a host of economic mismanagement ushered in the decade of disaster.

Politburo Resolution 13 in 1988 marked the start of multidirectionalism. Vietnam quickly turned around its fortunes. It quickly restored relations with countries across the globe, achieving the feat of having relations restored with all five permanent members of the Security Council in 1995. That same year, it joined ASEAN, well and truly diversifying and multilateralising its relations. This laid solid foundations for multidirectionalism to continue to develop.

Debates still wrangled within the VCP, however, about the scope and scale of domestic reforms and the degree to which Vietnam was integrating itself into the international political economy. The Thai Binh protests and 1997 Asian Financial Crisis exposed the VCP to the pitfalls of losing control and threatened the much-coveted domestic stability.

Yet internationally, things had never been more peaceful and prosperous. Therefore The Party accepted the inevitable, and adopted international integration as a key component of multidirectionalism. However, integration, as pointed out throughout chapter three and four, required Vietnam changing itself based on externally determined factors. It was not just a

simple calculation based on national or Party interests. Certainly, the learning period taking place after multidirectionalism, the greater prestige on the international arena, and of course the abatement of the legitimacy crisis the regime had faced meant that integration was the only way forward.

As such, the 2001 Ninth Party Congress incorporated integration as a key aspect of multidirectionalism and indeed elevated the strategic importance of such a policy. The VCP began to tout itself as being a “friend and reliable partner” vis-à-vis promoting diversity, multilateralism, and integration, to boost aggregate economic strength. Yet taking the plunge into the international political economy saw Vietnam exposed to the harsh demands of renovating oneself internally.

This exposition, however, did not go without some significant policy adjustments. Vietnam codified its national interests in its white papers, outlining “lagging behind” and the ‘three no’s as cornerstones of its national interests. Subsequently, Resolution 08 in 2003 significantly adjusted how Vietnam viewed the external environment. The cooperation and struggle shifted it away from a black and white approach to relations and this was clearly demonstrated in negotiations to join the WTO. Vietnam achieved this monumental feat in 2006. Nevertheless, relations with China began to become more intertwined, particularly at the economic level. Very little prioritization was given to cooperation areas other than economic ones.

The years 2006-2011 saw a significant trade imbalance grow with China. Additionally, China’s more assertive posture in the South China Sea presented Hanoi with some pressing problems. An emergent focus on defence relations emerged and deepening ties with major powers such as the US, Russia, India and Japan. Nevertheless, Vietnam was required to walk a fine line given China’s growing clout over the country. At the same time, domestic

undercurrents began stirring. They touched on issues relating to democracy, corruption, the environment and Vietnam's mute responses to China. Both domestic and international stability became threatened.

Therefore, the period after the Eleventh Party Congress necessitated greater mechanisms for the VCP to manage its asymmetrical relations with China – whilst at the same time adhering to the 'three nos,' promoting friendly relations with China, and ensuring stability in order to foster economic growth. As such, Vietnam employed a host of strategic partnership agreements with regional and global powers alike, ratified and entered into negotiations for a host of FTAs, and deepened its multilateral engagement – both within ASEAN and other organisations. Notably, this deepened cooperation was not centred solely on economic issues, but incorporated, defensive, and cultural elements too. Whilst this deepened, diversified approach to cooperation is ongoing it is fair to say that enhanced autonomy and strong set of hedging mechanisms have been put into place. Mistakes of the past have been learnt.

One can see how Vietnam's foreign policy has evolved into a core-component in the Doi Moi process. The VCP sees itself as the keeper of stability, the promoter of economic growth, and protector against threats from China. On the international front, it also sees itself as a promoter of multi-lateral forums, international law, and a seeker of mutually beneficial partnerships. Certainly, the learning process undergone re-affirms the positive benefits of multidirectionalism. At the same time it achieves the country's national interests along with internal ones – ensuring the legitimacy of the VCP.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how the VCP promotes itself as a friend and reliable partner to the international community, along with, in recent years, a commitment to multilateralism, international law, and economic liberalism. Another interesting development that is ongoing is how Vietnam is touting itself as an example to other countries looking to

implement economic reforms without ceding political ground. North Korea and Cuba are an ongoing case in point. After Kim Jong-Un momentarily send shock-waves around the world when he became the first North Korea leader to cross the demilitarised zone and meet with South Korean President Moon Jae. The Vietnamese media was keen to point out that Un allegedly mentioned Vietnam as an example for his own countries reforms. He even went so far as to say that the Vietnam-model was more favourable since it had successfully maintained a “great relationship with the US.”²

In a visit to Cuba in March 2018, Nguyen Phu Trong told Vietnam’s long standing ally of the numerous benefits of market-oriented reforms. In a speech at Havana University Trong remarked that “the market economy of its own cannot destroy socialism.” He added: “to build socialism with success it is necessary to develop a market economy in an adequate and correct way.” Therefore, the Vietnam-model may be an interesting development to observe in the future but for the time being, it certainly demonstrates the degree to which Vietnam has able to fuse its socialist image with seemingly contradictory notion of market-reform. It is testament to the uniqueness of Vietnamese market reforms, and certainly multidirectionalism has played its part in aiding the process.³

This thesis will now turn to a brief discussion of future issues that will continue to influence Vietnamese foreign policy-thinking going forward. Whilst this is speculative, it is based on ongoing trends. The conclusion will look at three aspects that may be of prominence in the future: growing domestic undercurrents, the diminishing role of ASEAN, and relations with China.

Constraining Factors:

Ning Liao states, in reference to China’s collective memory, that:

Social norms embedded in the collective memory both enable and constrain the state's action on the foreign relations front. With regards to the state-society relationship, these ideational codes, as the normative underpinnings of the purposive action of the Chinese state, serve as the scripts for the regime's performance and the criteria for the domestic audience to assess the legitimacy of the state's behaviour on the diplomatic stage.⁴

Vietnam, as a geostrategic yet arguably, small state, is becoming more subject to domestic audiences, which have the potential to constrain its foreign policymaking. Chapter five made note of the domestic currents, such as corruption, nationalistic outbursts and environmental issues that place added pressure on the VCP. Whilst the analysis of these factors is beyond the scope of this thesis it is certainly worth noting the growth of these currents since 2016. They are opening up new channels of influence in Vietnamese foreign policy, most notably through the current crackdown on corruption and dissent.

The 2016 Twelfth Party Congress was notable for the high-profile tussle for leadership between Nguyen Tan Dung and Nguyen Phu Trong. Dung, noted for his pro-US stance, yet highly corrupt in nature - including the mismanagement of a large state-owned enterprise - lost out to the latter. Prior to the Congress, Trong talked extensively about corruption. Notably, he compared combating corruption to catching mice in that you must be careful not to break the vase the mouse is in. This vase was obviously referring to the VCP itself. Trong, after his successful re-election, vowed to reform the Party in the right direction and significantly address crony-capitalism.⁵

Corruption had become even more endemic. In the 2017 Transparency International report, it ranked Vietnam as one of the worst countries in the Asia-Pacific

region in terms of corruption. Trong's promise to get rid of corruption was demonstrated in numerous high-profile cases. Dinh La Thang became the highest politician to be expelled from the Party since General Tran Do, who was expelled in 1999 for calling for democratic reforms. Thang had been a member of the Politburo and was eventually sentenced on two separate charges. First, he received a 13-year sentence for economic mismanagement of a coal-fired power plant overseen by PetroVietnam in January 2018. Then in March that same year, he was handed an 18 years sentence for "deliberate violation of state regulations on economic management."⁶

In late 2017 the VCP sacked Nguyen Xuan Anh, Party Secretary of Da Nang and also a member of the Party Central Committee for misleading the public regarding his educational record, along with receiving a car from a company.⁷ The battle against corruption also extended into the business realm. Nguyen Xuan Son, former Director General of Vietnam's Ocean Bank, was handed down a death sentence for embezzlement. The bank's former board chairman also received a life sentence.⁸ The Party's recent heavy crackdown on corruption is both political and strategic. It is political in the sense that Trong is purging those formerly close to Dung, and strategic in the sense that it shows the Party as being proactive in the fight against corruption – both to its domestic and its international audiences (more of the former of course). However, the willingness of the Party to fight corruption also impacts its foreign relations, as demonstrated in the alleged kidnapping of Trinh Xuan Thanh.

Thanh's case was detailed in Chapter Six. But what is incredibly telling about this event were the lengths to which Vietnam went to bring Thang to justice and be seen as being tough on corruption. Certainly, it was a calculated decision that meant damaging relations with a strategic partner. In fact, Nguyen Xuan Phuc had met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany the month before Thanh's kidnapping. Here he

stated that “Vietnam attaches special importance to developing relations with Germany.”⁹ Vietnamese specialist Anton Tsvetov echoed the “surprising” nature in which Vietnam was willing to take a blow to its relationship with Germany.¹⁰ The event was a major embarrassment for the VCP, in particular for the Ministry of Public Security, which allegedly carried out the kidnapping. Certainly, this demonstrates that domestic issues are becoming a bigger factor, and even in this case, a hindrance to international relations and, as Carl Thayer notes, “portrays Vietnam as a quasi-police state that does not respect the rule of law.”¹¹ This goes against Vietnam’s attempts to promote an international-law based solution to the South China Sea.

This “quasi-police” state can be seen in the VCP’s clamp-down on dissent as well. The outbreak of protests in response to the HYSY-81 incident was a hot potato for the VCP. On the one hand, the VCP’s nationalist narrative is keen to be portrayed as standing up to China, and therefore the protests were justified. However, the VCP is also eager to uphold its principle of stability, and given the fact that anti-Chinese protests can sometimes turn into anti-regime protests, this is all the more pressing. Nevertheless, the regime has ramped up its clampdown on dissent.

The year 2017 and early 2018 saw a wave of dissidents detained or imprisoned. Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, otherwise known as Me Nam or Mother Mushroom, saw herself imprisoned and sentenced under Vietnam’s notoriously vague Article 88, which prohibits “conducting propaganda against the state.” She was sentenced to 10 years in prison in June 2017, a sentence that was upheld in November of the same year.¹² Her imprisonment saw a wave of international condemnation. But Mother Mushroom is just one of the many dissidents detained by the authorities. Tran Hoang Phuc, Tran Thi Nga, Truong Minh Duc, and Vu Quang Thuan, are just some of the prominent activists arrested.¹³ In fact, in June 2017 the National Assembly criminalised actions preparing to

perform activities that threatened national security. The law also holds lawyers criminally responsible for failing to report their clients if they have committed violations. This gave the Vietnamese security forces greater pre-emptive measure to quell dissidents.¹⁴

Whilst Vietnam, at the international level, continues to promote international norms, its domestic situation is worsening. Still, however, the future looks to be a reduction of international pressure on the issue. On his visit to Vietnam during the APEC summit US President Donald Trump mentioned little about human rights. Additionally, a diplomat told the Author that in reality the EU has very little ability to influence the Vietnamese government stance on human rights. Yes, criticisms are noted, but that is as far as it goes. He even pointed out that after the EU-Vietnam Trade Agreement comes into force, ‘the carrot will have essentially been eaten,’ meaning that ‘the stick is the only remaining way, which given the EU’s own domestic woes, would be difficult to enforce.’¹⁵

The managing of dissidents and continued socio-economic performance means that Hanoi will avoid any potential knee-jerk reactions to Chinese assertiveness and international pressure. Also, it demonstrates the degree to which stability plays into the collective memory of the Party. It will even jeopardise its image as a “friend and reliable partner of the international community” in the name of fighting corruption. Therefore, we can see that the normative underpinnings of the Vietnamese state will continue to be stability and economic performance. As a result, foreign policy drivers will be designed to achieve these aims and to preserve the VCP’s legitimacy. However, avenues are emerging for greater domestic influences – and therefore future studies may involve further consideration of this issue.

The Diminishing Importance of ASEAN

Since its inception in 1967, people have often murmured the question of ASEAN's relevance. The ASEAN way is often criticised as limiting ASEAN's ability to solve crises and take meaningful action. The concept of non-interference, consensus, and its informal approach have shown that, in times of crisis, ASEAN is limited in its ability to resolve issues. Lee Jones has noted that scholarship surrounding ASEAN is centred around a "boring consensus," for its refusal to intervene in each other's internal affairs. Yet Jones also notes that non-intervention has been violated in attempts to revise this concept and is a result of the organisation's attempts to defend its international image.¹⁶

Nevertheless, ASEAN has evolved and expanded significantly since its initial formation and despite its criticisms. The very fact that the organization continues to exist fifty years after its creation deserves recognition.¹⁷ Vietnam's joining of ASEAN in 1995 was a pivotal moment in its diplomatic history. Subsequently, and as this thesis has noted, Vietnam has played a prominent role within ASEAN, most notably with the ASEAN Charter and ASEAN Community initiatives. Yet looking forward, there may be a case to argue that for Vietnam, ASEAN will play a diminished strategic role. In fact, a diplomat, reflecting on Vietnam's membership of ASEAN, stated that ASEAN will play a diminishing role of importance for Vietnam in the coming years. He argued that the complexity of threats facing the region combined with ASEAN's immobilisation means ASEAN's perceived strategic significance will wane.¹⁸ ASEAN's "liberal-turn" too would see ASEAN's role diminish given Vietnam falling into the ASEAN way promoter camp. In other words, Vietnam promotes the concept of non-intervention and consensus based decision making. Therefore, it will likely continue back the very things that prevent ASEAN from becoming effective.

Two issues have certainly demonstrated this. The much-publicised failure to issue a joint communique on the South China Sea in 2012 and again in 2016. In 2012, Cambodia refused to issue a statement brought forth by the Philippines and Vietnam to reference Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. Reports even indicated that Cambodia was consulting with Beijing during negotiations.¹⁹ Whilst, a Six-Point-Plan was subsequently issued, the failure to issue a joint communique for the first time in its history meant a diplomatic win for Beijing and reaffirmed the immobilisation of ASEAN's attempts to present a united front on the issue. This event was replayed in 2016. The Permanent Court of Arbitration issued a legal victory to the Philippines in its case brought against Beijing. In the first meeting since that ruling, however, Cambodia again blocked any mention of the ruling.²⁰

Additionally, ASEAN's lack of support for the Philippines in its court of arbitration ruling will have been duly noted by Hanoi.²¹ Ultimately, no consensus regarding the South-China Sea will be realised so long as ASEAN adheres to the non-consensus approach. This may lead to further states being sucked into Beijing's gravitational pull – as has been recently seen with Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte. Since his election, Duterte has firmly aligned himself with Beijing stating: “I need China more than anybody else at this time of our national life.”²² Based on this, the author agrees with Christopher Roberts when he states that “recourse to any form of protection and/or enforcement provided under international law will be the more reliable option.”²³

Despite the diminishing role of ASEAN in settling disputes and protecting Vietnam from aggression, there is no doubt that ASEAN will provide two potential areas of growth: economic benefits and enhanced visibility. One of the main criticisms aimed at ASEAN has been its emphasis on rhetoric and lack of actual action to tackle issues such as the South China Sea and human rights. However, one area that cannot be included in

this is ASEAN's its Economic Initiatives. The AFTA, proliferation in FTAs, and recently formed ASEAN Economic Community demonstrate one area of deepened, meaningful cohesion.

For Vietnam itself, ASEAN has become Vietnam's second largest trading partner after China. Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, Nguyen Cam Tu noted that continued integration with the AEC will lead to more opportunities for FDI, improve the development of Vietnam's local service markets, improve opportunities for infrastructure development, and strengthen the status of Vietnam in relation to other countries. He stresses, that despite challenges, the AEC will no doubt create better capacities and incentives for reform.²⁴ The author agrees with Munir Majid in that there is "one true ASEAN Centrality, the promise of its economy."²⁵

Similarly, ASEAN has given Vietnam enhanced visibility. The plethora of mechanisms put into place has certainly acted as a forum for bringing countries and stakeholders to discuss issues, at the very least. Adrienne Woltersdorf stated "Other than ASEAN, there is no other organization in Asia that can bring so many countries, including Japan, China, and South Korea, to one table."²⁶ Certainly this has been demonstrated with the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asian Summit, the ASEAN + 3 initiative, to name just some.

So while on the one-hand, ASEAN's effectiveness of shielding Vietnam from Chinese assertiveness will likely continue to wane because of its assertive action and economic clout. Economically speaking, however, ASEAN will rise in importance as it is one of the fastest growing regions. Similarly, its mechanisms will provide a forum for discussing the wide array of issues dominating the region, and indeed the globe, today. Still it is expected that ASEAN members will continue to act based on self-interest.

What this means for multidirectionalism is three things. First, Vietnam will promote international law whilst still cautiously cooperating with China. Secondly, it will prioritise economic-driven initiatives with ASEAN countries. And lastly, it will continue to bolster its participation in other international organisations as well as take steps to foster greater and deeper bi-lateral cooperation with larger powers.

Relations with China

China is Vietnam's largest and arguably most important partner. The asymmetries in their relations have, and will always, exist. In recent years the relationship has become defined by one of economic dependence, coupled with Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. Yet this has not stopped the two sides from riding out storms to foster deepened, enhanced engagement, even if it is at the ire of Vietnamese nationalistic sentiments. Given the interdependent nature of the current international system, managing the trade imbalance will be the most pressing challenge for Vietnam. Therefore, the future trajectory of Vietnam-China relations will likely be one of engagement, and broad-based, non-antagonistic balancing.

Engaging will take place in the form of utilising mechanisms already in place to foster greater cooperation on the political and economic front. Certainly, recent ministerial visits are continuing. In September 2016, Nguyen Xuan Phuc paid a visit to China where he declared that Vietnam "treasures its relations with China." The two countries highlighted the role of the China-Vietnam Steering Committee for Bilateral Cooperation and the role it has in promoting cooperation.²⁷ Indeed, trade and investment is still going strong, with China running 127 new investment projects in Vietnam, generating an increased capital of \$537.6 million.²⁸ Similarly, tourist numbers have improved significantly since the post-HYSY 981 downturn. An estimated 10 million Chinese citizens visited in 2016, and 13 million in 2017.²⁹ Given that tourism accounts

for roughly 10 percent of Vietnamese GDP – this is highly promising and emphasises that cooperation is more conducive to economic benefits.³⁰

Broad-based balancing involves economic and security dimensions. As stated throughout this thesis, economic dependence is a significant threat to Vietnam. Vietnam will continue to promote a liberalist, free-trade, integrated approach to economic relations to gain greater autonomy for its economy and reduce its reliance on China. Over-reliance has a negative connotation in the Party's collective memory and the proliferation of FTAs has demonstrated this. Furthermore, it has been vocal in its rejection of the recent protectionist narrative stemming from countries with low growth rates.

Interestingly, Vietnam and China are allies when it comes to trade liberalisation and resisting the recent spate of protectionism emerging within the global system. In a recent visit to Vietnam, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Li stated that “protectionism harms others without benefiting oneself, it is a one-way street that leads nowhere.”³¹ This narrative suits Vietnam well as it seeks to foster greater integration in the coming years. Although the death of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was met with a strong sense of concern in Hanoi, the subsequent Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) that has emerged in its place has provided cause for reassurance. Donald Trump himself has indicated that he is open to rejoining the revived deal - should it meet US terms, of course.³²

The security element will be in the sense of deepened defensive cooperation. Chapter five and six laid out the wide array of deepened defensive agreements with Russia, the US, India, and Japan amongst others. This is likely to continue. In March 2018, for example, the USS Carl Vinson, became the first US aircraft carrier to visit

Vietnam since the US-Vietnam War. A Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman labelled the visit as a continued effort to “promote bilateral relations within the framework of the two countries’ comprehensive partnership” fostering the maintenance of “peace, stability, and security in the region.”³³ However, the response from China was muted. This is largely down to the fact that China understands the rationale behind Vietnam’s burgeoning defensive relations with the US, and recognises that it will not firmly ally itself with Washington. China realises that Vietnam has the ‘three no’s’ policy in place. Vietnam has certainly demonstrated its resilience in promoting it. In October 2016, after media reports surfaced that Russia was seeking to build a base in Cam Ranh Bay, Hanoi sought to clarify the position by re-affirming that it does not allow foreign countries to have bases on Vietnamese soil.³⁴

The rising tensions in the South China Sea within the past decade has led to a plethora of literature and analysis on the subject. The area is certainly a hotbed of contention and warranting a strong sense of strategic thinking from the VCP. Ha Anh Tuan argues that since 2007, Vietnam has developed three strategies: improving relations with China, building up domestic capabilities, and engaging regional and extra-regional stakeholders to manage disputes.³⁵ He adds, that due to complications arising from Duterte and Trump’s election, Vietnam has tried to avoid public confrontations with China.³⁶ China’s promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, along with its continued militarisation of the South China Sea, fuels Hanoi’s sense of uncertainty. The 2014 Oil Rig Crisis reinforced Hanoi’s perception of Chinese assertiveness.³⁷ Koh Swee Lean Collin’s has gone on to state that Vietnam is changing its strategy in the South China Sea from one of Sea-Denial to one that would raise the cost of Chinese aggression. In other words, Vietnam acknowledges its naval

inferiority and will therefore simply try to raise the cost of any potential Chinese aggression.³⁸

Yet for all this talk of assertiveness and militarisation in the South China Sea, it is important to note that managing economic issues takes precedence. In 2016, Vietnam's trade deficit with China equalled 14 percent of GDP. Many Vietnamese enterprises are becoming reliant on China, and should China choose to disrupt the flow of goods, the economic ramifications would be problematic indeed.³⁹ Surely, Chinese assertive actions in the South China Sea stoke nationalistic sentiments, which threaten the legitimacy of the regime. Yet, as the above analysis on domestic currents shows, the regime is currently stepping up its crackdown on dissenters and demonstrating its commitment to tackling corruption.

Arguably the infamous 2013 outburst of Colonel Tran Dang Thanh, an instructor on the South China Sea issue at the Political Academy of the Vietnamese Ministry of Defence, encapsulates the *repolitikal* outlook on China-Vietnam relations. In that outburst, he lambasted Communist Party Members who were administrators at universities for letting the anti-Chinese protests from getting out of hand. He reminded them “there are 1.3 billion of them (Chinese) and only 90 million of us.” He stated that Vietnam must preserve the peace and stability because, if the VCP goes down, then so do people's living standards.⁴⁰ Bill Hayton similarly points out the South China Sea issue has now become one intertwined with a nationalistic narrative, which “stakes the legitimacy of the ruling elite upon the performance on these tiny islands.”⁴¹

However, as Le Hong Hiep has advocated – the VCP increasingly derives its political legitimacy from its socio-economic performance.⁴² Combined with Chinese economic leverage, it is easy to understand why the VCP walks a fine line when speaking

out against China. Additionally, a diplomat described to the author that outsiders typically view Vietnamese foreign policy from the outside in. That is, they view the China problem as deeply problematic. Yet looking from within, one can see that the state is prioritises socio-economic growth.⁴³ This leads to the “China problem” as being overstated, or overblown. Multidirectionalism is about equity, not traditional forms of balancing and bandwagoning. Therefore, if Vietnam can achieve equity in the economic sense, promote an international rule-based approach, and foster non-antagonistic behaviour, the South China Sea issue will revert to its irritant status, rather than a combative one.

The Future:

Based on the finding of this thesis it is likely that Vietnamese foreign policy will continue on its current trajectory. Multidirectionalism will continue to be implemented; efforts to deepen existing and new relations, a continued promotion of multilateral forums, along with enhanced efforts at integration will all continue to grow. The Eleventh Party Central Committee’s Report on the documents of the 12th National Party Congress dedicated a significant amount of focus on building a clean and strong Party whilst promoting the entire nation’s strength and the goals of a peaceful and stable environment. Regarding its foreign policy, it made note of numerous achievements. But tellingly, it stated that it wanted to do the following:

To further improve the efficiency of foreign activities. Continue deepening our cooperative relations. To enhance the efficiency of international economic integration, fulfil all international commitments and new-generation free trade agreements as part of an overall plan with a rational roadmap, in accordance with our national interests. To strengthen and deepen our relations with partners, particularly the strategic partners and major powers that play important roles toward our country’s development and

security. And substantiate the established framework of relations. To proactively participate in multilateral mechanisms, particularly ASEAN and the United Nations and bring into play our role therein. To participate proactively and energetically in multi-lateral defence and security mechanisms, including in cooperation operations at higher levels, such as U.N. peacekeeping operations, non-traditional security exercises, and other activities. To push ahead international integration in the cultural, social, scientific-technological, education-training and other fields.⁴⁴

When a foreign policy of multidirectionalism was first launched in 1988, the name of the game was to simply reverse the isolation and stimulate economic growth after years of economic hardship. Thirty years later, that growth and stability have certainly been achieved. But during that time, Vietnam has significantly codified and put into place mechanisms for realising that foreign policy.

Vietnam has reaped the international and domestic benefits as such, in a time of growing structural uncertainty and interdependence. The Party's achievements have been significant, and the VCP now very much views itself as a friend and reliable member of the international community. Looking ahead, however, much will depend on two things. First, a continued strong economic performance, and secondly how it manages its relationship with China. As long as these two things remain stable, then the VCP will rest assured. Ultimately, multidirectionalsim and the VCP themselves look here to stay.

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